CIVIC PERSONAE: MACINTYRE, CICERO AND MORAL PERSONALITY*

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Abstract: Alisdair ManIntyre's well-known criticism of modern moral philosophy contrasts what he sees as the moral vacuity of modern culture with a 'classical tradition' in ethical thought depicted as restoring cohesion and coherence to social striving and ethical life. MacIntyre's stress on the culturally specific circumstances within which ethical imperatives derive their force provides a corrective to unworldly tendancies within post-Kantian moral philosophy, yet his 'classical' ethical landscape possesses an equally striking kind of unworldliness. His image of a life lived as an unbroken moral narrative is dependent on a picture of classical social existence viewed as an integrated whole, as opposed to the ethical 'segmentation' of modern social life. Here I question this image of a moral life without boundaries by reference to perhaps the most influential of all classical ethical texts, Cicero's *De Officiis*. I argue that Cicero's discussion of the virtues is marked by a strong sense of the demarcation of ethical spheres and statuses, and that what MacIntyre takes as the appropriate end-product of ethical *ascesis* is instead a highly exceptional heroic limit-case.

I

In his well-known criticism of contemporary moral philosophy, Alasdair MacIntyre contrasts what he sees as the moral vacuity of modern culture with a 'classical tradition' in ethical thought which he sees as restoring cohesion and coherence to social striving and ethical life. In response to a contemporary ethical landscape which 'exalts' the morally neutral exercise of bureaucratic expertise and which 'partitions each human life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms and modes of behaviour', MacIntyre summons up an image of a holistic moral personhood lived in the pursuit of the virtues, those exca-

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vated coins of the ancient *polis* whose currency seemingly crosses every ethical border-post.[1]

For MacIntyre ethical theory is necessarily the outgrowth of a shared pattern of social life dominated by a specific sense of community and its connecting bonds — although on the precise connections between those social forms and the virtues he discerns he is sometimes disconcertingly vague. To critics who suggest that the ethical life of the *polis* is irrecoverable in a modern world of civil societies and nation states (a conclusion which the tenor of his argument might elsewhere appear to support), MacIntyre insists that the fundamental conditions of a moral life based on the virtues are generalizable, even if the specific content of those virtues is not. A revived 'classical tradition' of ethical life would require only a shared *telos* of the 'good life' in which citizens might be trained from childhood, along with a shared pattern of social life in which excellence in the accomplishment of any of a series of key 'practices' in social and cultural life is definable as a form of the exercise of virtue.[2]

At least two aspects of MacIntyre's criticism of modern moral theory ought by now to be uncontroversial. There is no doubt that classical ethical writing is strikingly different in character from the formal analytical disputation which animates moral philosophy today. As Pierre Hadot insisted some time ago, classical ethical thought was above all concerned with 'the art of living': it involved 'a concrete attitude and a determinate life-style, which engages the whole of existence'. Philosophy functioned as 'a therapeutic of the passions', in order to heal and elevate the soul, and its goal was 'a kind of self-formation, or *paideia*, which is to teach us how to live . . . in conformity with the nature of man'.[3] More recently, Michel Foucault's excursions through the interrelationship between classical ethics and ascetics, for all their shortcomings, have focused attention on the classical concern with ethical techniques and practices as means of the creation of special and distinctive kinds of persons.[4] In Jeffrey Minson's phrase, for Foucault 'to make oneself the subject of prescriptive

[1] A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, 1981), pp. 145, 204–5.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 202–3, 187–8; cf. C. Gill, 'Personhood and Personality: The Four-Personae Theory in Cicero, *De Officiis* I', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, VI (1988), p. 172.

[3] P. Hadot, 'Spiritual Exercises', in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 83, 102.

[4] M. Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure*, Vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality* (New York, 1985); M. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, Vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality* (New York, 1986). On the shortcomings, see P. Hadot, 'Reflections on the Notion of "The Cultivation of the Self" ', in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York, 1992).

statements in Western antiquity is a mark of illustriousness and a kind of beauty'.[5]

By the same token, MacIntyre's stress on the culturally specific circumstances within which ethical imperatives derive their force provides a handy corrective to a number of unworldly tendencies within post-Kantian moral philosophy. Since Kant moral philosophy has tended at once to universalize the capacity for moral judgment and responsibility, and at the same time to relegate its guiding impulse to an otherworldly sphere of necessary altruism.[6] Again, the 'free and equal' moral actor of post-Kantian moral philosophy characteristically appears as an already-formed autonomous rational agent apparently set free from the ties of the passions, culture, status or capacity.[7] MacIntyre, like other 'communitarian' critics of post-Kantian moral philosophy, quite rightly objects that virtues are artefacts of particular cultures and styles of life, and that the force of specific ethical precepts requires a sense of participation in a determinate and closely-knit moral community.

Nevertheless, MacIntyre's 'classical' ethical landscape possesses an equally striking kind of unworldliness. His image of holistic moral personality, of a life lived as an unbroken moral narrative, is dependent on a heroically primitive picture of classical social existence viewed as an integrated whole, as opposed to the ethical 'segmentation' of modern social life. It is this image of a moral life without boundaries, of a social existence unriven by ethical division or specialization, which I want to put into question here. As Julia Annas has recently pointed out, the image of classical ethical life as founded upon habituation in a set of uncontroversial conventional virtues is in all likelihood 'a modern fantasy and projection' upon a more complicated social reality.[8] Our image of the Greeks of the fourth century BC is necessarily so dominated by a narrow selection of philosophical sources that it may just be possible to imagine the existence of a unitary Aristotelian moral agent in the Athenian *agora*, albeit somewhat dominated by the shadows of Macedonian *raison d'etat.* Yet we surely know too much about the complex and variegated world of late republican or imperial Roman citizenship to imagine an unproblematic reality there for any unitary ethical personality based upon a narrow repertoire of shared 'practices' (in effect 'artforms') animated by an uncontroversial and brief list of virtues.

[5] J. Minson, 'Men and Manners: Kantian Humanism, Rhetoric and the History of Ethics', *Economy and Society*, XVIII, 2 (1989), p. 196.

[6] *Ibid*., pp. 195–7.

[7] See, for example, J. Rawls, 'Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory', *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXVII, 9 (1980), pp. 521–2.

[8] J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford, 1993), p. 451.

II

Probably the most plausible textual support for MacIntyre's image of classical ethical and civic life in the late republican Roman world is Cicero's *De Officiis*, the digest of somewhat heterodox later Stoic doctrines that Cicero prepared for the instruction of a wayward son in the twilight of his career. *De Officiis* was after all perhaps the key text in classical ethical thought for the humanists of the early Renaissance — and it is against specific passages in *De Officiis* that Machiavelli ranges his corrosive arguments against a unitary repertoire of all-purpose Christian virtues in *The Prince*. Again, it was *De Officiis* rather than Aristotle's *Politics* which became the *locus classicus* of that post-Renaissance neoclassical current dubbed by John Pocock 'civic humanism' — itself a fertile hunting-ground for the historical enthusiasts of 'communitarianism'.

From MacIntyre's point of view *De Officiis* is perhaps somewhat less 'classical' an account of the virtues than the *Nicomachean Ethics* because of its close association with a particular strand of Greco-Roman Stoicism. In his 1988 *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, a companion volume to the earlier *After Virtue*, MacIntyre locates Cicero within a loosely Stoic current bearing downstream from the Aristotelian *polis* to the Augustinian *Civitas Dei*. The key difference between Aristotle and the Stoics in the realm of ethical theory, according to MacIntyre, is that the latter enlarge the scope of the moral community from the *polis* itself to an imagined cosmos.

Yet this Stoic ethical realm, whatever its claims to cosmopolitan panhumanism, was (according to MacIntyre) still at its heart a communitarian one, invoking 'the justice of the cosmos and the justice of Rome' in one and the same breath. For Cicero, while the care of the self and friends might theoretically lead outwards towards a wider imagined community, in practice '*caritas* does not extend very far'.[9] Its limits are still set by the bounded framework of duty seen as a series of 'hierarchically ordered reciprocities', within 'a determinately structured form of community', 'in which each person owes and is owed in terms of fixed and coordinated expectations'.[10]

De Officiis is thus for MacIntyre's purposes still a characteristic product of the 'classical tradition', albeit one whose ethical framework pays lipservice to a universalized ethical realm only later to acquire real weight in the early Christian church. It is also a considerably more useful example of classical ethical writing than the *Nicomachean Ethics* for my purposes. We have relatively little evidence of the specific socio-political context of Aristotle's work, but we have a wealth of evidence concerning the *De Officiis* ranging from the exact dates of its composition to its influences to its precise location in Cicero's political life. Furthermore, while Aristotle's ethics, like the classical philosophical handbooks of which Hadot writes, is self-consciously directed towards

[9] A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, 1988), pp. 147–8.
[10] *Ibid*., pp. 148, 153.

'conformity with the nature of man, which is none other than reason', rather than with 'human prejudices and social conventions', Cicero's marks an explicit attempt to reconcile this philosophical *telos* with the practical machinery of aristocratic *paideia* in late-republican Rome.[11]

This is not to suggest that *De Officiis* can be read simply either as Cicero's own original thoughts on ethical matters on the one hand, or as a factual description of the ethical life of late republican Rome on the other. Like most writers prior to the later Renaissance Cicero was not an original 'author' in our sense of the word — he was uninterested in demarcating original from unoriginal thoughts, or in firmly distinguishing an authorial persona from that of his various dialogists and narrators. Indeed, perhaps as a result of the irritation of modern scholars with this attitude, *De Officiis* has sometimes been read simply as a literal gloss on a much earlier (now lost) ethical textbook by the Hellenistic Stoic writer Panaetius, whom Cicero specifically acknowledges at various points in the text.

It seems clear that this view mistakes Cicero's purpose in *De Officiis*, which is neither simply a gloss on the one hand nor an original work on the other, but — like very many products of the manuscript culture then and later — an attempt to assimiliate the arguments of carefully selected earlier sources to the needs of a particular moment. Cicero adopts Panaetius' arguments not as rote but 'only because and in so far as he can adopt [them] as his own, and confirm and illustrate them from Roman experience'. Again, he did not choose any Greek ethical textbook, but rather one which focused on the subject from a perspective convenient to late republican Roman life, since Panaetius 'had written not about the duties of the ideal *sapiens*, but about those which should be performed by men who could conventionally be regarded as good in the workaday world'.[12]

More precisely, Cicero's political experience and anxieties in the years preceding the composition of *De Officiis* demonstrated to him the similarity between Panaetius' arguments and the vicissitudes of friendship and duty in Roman political life: in short, Panaetius' arguments were attractive because they 'corresponded to the social morality prevalent at Rome'.[13] Nor was this coincidental: as Andrew Erskine has pointed out, Panaetius' revisions of second-century Stoicism were deliberately designed to reconcile the arduous and recondite precepts of the early Stoa to the requirements of the moral formation of young Roman aristocrats in the Gracchian era.[14]

[11] Hadot, 'Spiritual Exercises', p. 102.

[12] P.A. Brunt, '*Amicitia* in the Roman Republic', in P.A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford, 1988), p. 353.

[13] P.A. Brunt, 'Cicero's *Officium* in the Civil War', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXVI (1986), pp. 16–17.

[14] A. Erskine, *The Hellenistic Stoa* (Ithaca, 1990), Chs. 7 and 8.

Cicero was attracted to certain features of earlier Stoic thought, but he attempted where possible to separate these features from others which he thought inappropriate or even offensive to conventional Roman aristocratic culture. In *De Oratore* his exemplary dialogist Crassus, while not disapproving of Stoic ethical priorities, deplores the Stoic tendency to deny wisdom (*sapiens*) to the great mass of citizens, and to define good and evil in unconventional ways, as well as resiling from their attraction to a literary style, the 'Attic' mode, inappropriate to oratory and 'jarring on the ear of the public'.[15] The aggressively declassé image of the early Stoic *sapiens* clearly repelled Cicero, for whom the purpose of *De Officiis* could be described without excessive exaggeration, in the words of its most recent modern editors, as 'a handbook for members of the governing class on their duties to their peers in public life and to their fellow-citizens in public life'.[16]

At the same time, as I noted above, *De Officiis* obviously cannot be read as a factual account of late-republican ethical life. Ethical textbooks are clearly never reflections of social practices; and while Hellenistic philosophy in general, and Stoic doctrines in particular, 'became part of the culture' which Roman aristocrats of Cicero's day 'absorbed in their early education', there is limited evidence concerning their impact on practical ethical life.[17] Indeed, Paul Veyne has claimed (surely with some exaggeration) that in his manner of responding to Greek ethical doctrine — as less 'a method for living than an object of intellectual curiosity' — Cicero was an entirely conventional member of the Roman élite: 'philosophy played a considerable role in his intellectual life and almost no role in his personal life'.[18] In any case, what is important for my purposes here is less the demonstrable effect of tracts such as *De Officiis* on Roman social life than the clear belief on Cicero's part that the Panaetian revision of Stoic ethics could be adapted as a description of traditional Roman social values, the *mos maiorum*.[19] It was here that Cicero's avid social conventionality approached the status of an art-form.[20]

[15] M.T. Cicero, *De Oratore* (with *De Fato*, *Paradoxica Stoicorum* and *De Partitione Oratia*) (London, 1952), XVIII.65–6.

[16] *Cicero: On Duties*, ed. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (Cambridge, 1991), p. xxv.

[17] P.A. Brunt, 'Stoicism and the Principate', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, XLV (1975), p. 7.

[18] P. Veyne, 'The Roman Empire', in *A History of Private Life*, Vol. 1: *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. P. Veyne (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. 228. Veyne's claim is presumably based on the much-remarked lack of 'fit' between Cicero's personal vacillation and the Stoic ideal of *constantia*. But this is rather harsh: more serious Stoics than Cicero had difficulty in living up to their principles. In any case, Cicero's musings on his actions in his letters to Atticus clearly focus on similar problems of duty to those outlined in *De Officiis*. See e.g. Brunt, 'Cicero's *Officium*', p. 12.

[19] Brunt, '*Amicitia*', pp. 354–5.

[20] For a recent author like Christopher Gill, this avowed conventionality creates an irresolvable tension at the heart of *De Officiis* seen as a work of ethical theory in the spirit

III

It may be helpful to recall briefly at this point MacIntyre's reading of *De Officiis* as a broadly representative example of the 'classical tradition' in ethical thought. Like the *Nicomachean Ethics* it has at its core the image of the unity of a life lived according to the dictates of virtue. Like Aristotle's work it is animated by a *telos*: 'honourableness' is the proper end of man; in a properly-ordered society what is virtuous will be beneficial, and *vice versa*.[21] Again like Aristotle it invokes a repertoire of social 'practices' in the outstanding exercise of which are deployed those virtues characteristic of classical Greco-Roman culture. More specifically, those virtues are deployed within the framework of a sense of duty exercised within an orderly series of 'hierarchically ordered reciprocities', within 'a determinately structured form of community', 'in which each person owes and is owed in terms of fixed and coordinated expectations'.

In what follows I want to examine this picture of *De Officiis* and its ethical landscape more closely. In doing so I want to avoid placing too much stress on the analytical coherence or otherwise of individual passages in Cicero's text, since it seems to me mistaken to treat texts of this character as if they were modern philosophical textbooks. *De Officiis* was clearly written in a hurry, its primary audience was a small and intimate one, and there is no evidence that Cicero ever intended it to be considered as a full-scale philosophical treatise, but rather as a philosophically-informed volume of exhortation and advice for a wayward son. In any case, my chief interest is not with *De Officiis* as a

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of MacIntyre's 'classical tradition' — 'the problem of reconciling the teleological claims of the work . . . and its overt reliance on the norms and conventions of a specific social milieu'. See Gill, 'Personhood and Personality', p. 173. Gill would appear more recently to have recanted from this criticism: see C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1996), Chs. 1 and 2. Indeed, for Gill this merely highlights a basic flaw in MacIntyre's argument about the 'classical tradition' more broadly — for MacIntyre himself seems to assume that in a neo-Aristotelian culture virtues will be both teleological in orientation and socially conventional in content (see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 187–99 *passim*). It is not clear that this is necessarily true of the arguments advanced by Aristotle and the early Stoics, since they clearly presumed a severe disjunction between the behaviour proper to philosophers and sages and the norms of conventional social life. However, inasmuch as Stoic thought was incorporated progressively within the *paideia* of the Greco-Roman civic élite — as in the case of Panaetius and his successors — such objections become increasingly difficult to ignore. Nevertheless, tracing these kinds of intra-textual contradictions is not my purpose here.

[21] Cicero, *De Officiis*, II.9–22. In the quotations which follow I have relied on the English translation provided in *On Duties*, ed. Griffin and Atkins with occasional modifications. Where the exact words used by Cicero are a matter of some significance I have included the Latin term, or on occasion fragments of the Latin original, in parentheses. For these purposes I have followed the Latin text provided in *Marcus Tullius Cicero: De Officiis*, ed. M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1994).

rendering of philosophical doctrines as such, but rather with its pretensions as a guidebook to practical ethical behaviour, and the manner in which it understands the kinds of ethical actors this kind of philosophical practice is supposed to produce.

The primary goal of *De Officiis* is the maintenance and regulation of human conduct in deference to the dictates of *honestas* — what Cicero's most recent translator renders as 'honourableness'.

> Everything that is honourable arises from one of four parts: it is either involved with the perception of truth and with ingenuity; or with preserving fellowship [*societas*] among men, with assigning to each his own . . . ; or with the greatness and strength of a lofty and unconquered spirit [*animus*]; or with order and limit [*ordine et modo*] in everything that is said and done . . . [22]

Or, as the modern editors gloss the same account, the four principle virtues comprise 'wisdom', 'justice', 'courage' and 'seemliness' (*decorum*), each of which informs a range of practical *officia*, or duties, the fulfilment of which can be recognized as an action of *honestas*.[23] These virtues can be seen as habitual dispositions, or 'habits of mind' (*animi habitus*) — as Cicero's youthful *De Inventione* puts it — the preservation of which are necessary for the proper function of *officia*.[24] Thus far we find ourselves on an ethical landscape familiar from MacIntyre's account: Cicero's *telos* is the society of *honestas*, and the practical correlates of his virtues are an apparently orderly assemblage of *officia*.

Cicero's discussion of the second of these virtues — around the themes of 'fellowship' (*societas*), friendship (*familiaritas*, *amicitia*) and justice (*iustitia*) — is instructive in this connection. Here Cicero outlines the 'several degrees of fellowship between men' — ranging upwards from marriage and the household through wider familial ties to the fellowship of the city, to those of tribe and genus, and ultimately to 'that vast fellowship of the human race' (*immensa societate humani generis*), the Stoic cosmopolis.[25] This is the system of 'hierarchically ordered reciprocities' referred to by MacIntyre. Indeed, a broadly similar reading has been proposed by expert scholars such as Peter Brunt, for whom Cicero's *officia* 'are proportionate to the closeness of . . . kinship or friendship', while nevertheless all others are 'outmatched by the claims of the

[22] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.15.

[23] cf. *On Duties*, ed. Griffin and Atkins, pp. xxii–xxiv.

[24] *Cicero: De Inventione* (with *De Optimo Genere*, *Oratorum*), ed. H.M. Hubble (London, 1960), II.LIII.159.

[25] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.53–4.

[26] Brunt, 'Cicero's *Officium*', p. 14. Brunt repeats this reading on several other occasions during his article, and it becomes an important cog in his wider argument concerning Cicero's political behaviour in relation to Pompey and his family. See *ibid.*,

fatherland'.[26] Such a reading is tempting no doubt because it presents Cicero's account in the most philosophically consistent fashion.

However, a closer examination of Cicero's actual exposition suggests that his 'hierarchical system' is rather less orderly than we might suppose. First, Cicero appears unsure as to where these different ties of *societas* stand in relation to our sense of duty. At first he insists that the most important type of *societas* is that between 'good men of similar conduct bound by familiarity'.[27] Here *societas* becomes *amicitia*, that virtuous affection bound by good faith which, as Cicero's narrator insists in *Laelius de Amicitia*, 'cannot exist except in good men'.[28] Immediately afterwards he decides on the contrary that no fellowship is 'more serious, and none dearer', than 'that of each of us with the republic': here *societas* manifests itself as patriotism. This is immediately modified to exalt the *societas* of 'our country and our parents' as the most important of a series of fellowships, followed in descending order by that of children, household and relations. Finally, by the end of the same passage Cicero is again singing the praises of an *amicitia* between men 'cemented by similarity of conduct'.[29]

In short, there is here on the face of it a hierarchy, but it is far from clear in which direction the hierarchy operates, or indeed if it is unidirectional at all. In *De Amicitia* Cicero implies a reverse hierarchy of fellowship where the most intimate is the most exalted: thus the special distinction of *amicitia* is that out of 'the infinitely large association [*societas*] of the human race' it is the narrowest and most 'concentrated' form.[30] Elsewhere his political writings such as *De Res Publica* might seem to suggest that the bonds of citizenship, or patriotism, carry the greatest ethical weight; and later on in *De Officiis* he appears to propose a different downward hierarchy, this time capped by 'our duties to the immortal gods'.[31] But then the competing bonds of filial and parental loyalty appear to disrupt either of these unidirectional models.

Of course, it might simply be argued that Cicero is here a sloppy expositor of Panaetius' doctrines — that he got the argument wrong. But it is at least equally likely — following Brunt's earlier-cited view of Cicero's use of Panaetius — that this displaced hierarchy is a reflection of Cicero's own tangled attempts to render Panaetius' doctrines plausible in terms of his understanding of the practical landscape of Roman ethical life; and this landscape is arguably one in which the competing claims of family and genus, of *amicitia*, of

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pp. 17, 24, 25. Cf. P. MacKendrick, *The Philosophical Books of Cicero* (London, 1989), p. 234.

[27] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.55.

[28] Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 18–20; cf. Brunt, '*Amicitia*', p. 352.

[29] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.57–8.

[30] Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 20.

[31] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.160.

patriotism and respect for the gods, are not easily reconcilable according to a single ethical schema.

Our anticipation of an orderly hierarchy of *societas* is further disrupted when Cicero acknowledges, immediately afterwards, that 'the degrees of ties of relationship will not be the same as those of circumstance'. Thus you should help your neighbour before your own brother or *familiaris* should his harvest need gathering, but on the other hand in a lawsuit favour a friend or relative ahead of a neighbour. Hence the relative value of ties of *societas* are dependent not only on circumstances but on a complex and uneven social landscape in which the citizen may be required to match different duties with different inter-personal and legal *personae*. Finally, Cicero insists that these various competing ties, while complex, are ultimately resolvable by some unspecified process of calculation (*ratiocinatio*). Here the process whereby, in MacIntyre's words, 'each person owes and is owed in terms of fixed and coordinated expectations' becomes instead an ever-shifting calculus differentiated by social setting, by 'adding and subtracting' from which one can tell 'how much is owed to each person'. In short, we are enjoined to become ethical *ratiocinatores* — calculators or accountants of our *officia*.[32] It is not clear how this quasi-utilitarian instruction can be reconciled with MacIntyre's picture of the virtues.

Societas is not on the face of it a status-specific virtue, even though it may require a capacity for discrimination between the different significance of specific status in particular situations. Cicero's third virtue — 'courage', or the possession of a 'lofty and magnificent spirit' (*animus excelsus magnificusque*) — on the other hand, *is* decidedly status-specific. It is the special and distinctive characteristic of the active and prominent citizen (be they magistrate, senator or lawyer) both in war and in peace. The fourth virtue — *decorum* or 'seemliness', which is the public face of a personal state of honourableness (*honestas*) — is a more complex case, being both specific in its character within particular statuses, while in principle capable of being exercised across a range of statuses. In short, *decorum* is the attribute of those who behave well in the callings appropriate to their station and personal situation, even though that station may not necessarily be a noble one.[33]

It is true that there are certain occupations entirely unworthy of all free men: any employment which is paid on the basis of labour rather than skill is 'servile', while the workshop is 'demeaning' and handicraft-making merely administers to the passions.[34] Conversely, of course, the most *honestas* employment is that of the landowner, the precursor of the gentleman-citizen of the early-modern Harringtonian tradition. Yet there is also a third category of occupation: those

[32] *Ibid.*, I.59.
[33] *Ibid.*, I.94.
[34] Cicero does not even mention the genuinely *infamus* occupations such as acting or prostitution: see J. Gardner, *Being a Roman Citizen* (London, 1993), pp. 128–40.

vocations, such as medicine, architecture or teaching honourable things, which are 'honourable for those who belong to the class they befit' (*eae sunt iis quorum ordini conveniunt honestae*).[35] Hence honourableness may at times appear to be the distinguishing characteristic of the civic élite, the political class, and at other times the common possession of that broad body of citizens whose occupations may loosely be described as genteel.

Here it is quite clear that for Cicero, as for Panaetius, *honestas* and adherence to social conventions march hand in hand: the criteria for the *honestas* of vocations are not internal to the concept of *honestas* itself. 'We need give no advice about things done in accordance with custom and civil codes of behaviour [*more agentur institutisque civilibus*]', comments Cicero, 'as they themselves constitute pieces of advice'. It is true, he admits, that philosophers such as Socrates and Aristippus flouted 'custom and civil practice'. However, they were *sapientes* who had disciplined themselves to live in accordance with natural reason. We on the other hand (as Cicero observes elsewhere) live with 'those who are doing splendidly if they have in them mere images of virtue', and for us social conventions are the bulwarks of *honestas*.[36]

It is here that the figure of the *persona*, a much-remarked feature of *De Officiis* and of its gloss of Panaetian doctrine, takes the stage. Cicero remarks that 'we have been clothed, as it were, by nature for two roles [*personae*]' (the two rapidly become four), and that these roles engage us at two distinct levels of our corporeal existence, as human beings and as individuals (*singuli*). The first role requires of us that we exercise our share in the universal stock of reason — just as the Stoic *sapiens* was required 'to pass beyond the limits of individuality, to recognize [themselves] as a part of the reason-animated *cosmos*'.[37] The other, it seems, is dependent upon the specific and variable personal characteristics of individuals — of those, in short, who having failed to pass beyond these limits are required to imitate the 'image of virtue' in their individual selves.[38]

It is difficult to read Cicero's account of these personal characteristics — what he describes as 'our own nature' — without imagining that he is summoning up the thoroughly anachronistic imagery of modern 'personality', with its distinctive psychological focus on the ineffable uniqueness of the individual spirit.[39] Yet Cicero's invocation of 'one's own nature' is not so much an observation of 'personality' as an invocation of the ethical notion of 'character' familiar from the Greco-Roman stage, from whence the term *persona* had

[35] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.150–1.
[36] *Ibid.*, I.148, I.46; cf. Brunt, 'Stoicism', p. 14.
[37] Hadot, 'Spiritual Exercises', p. 86.
[38] cf. Gill, 'Personhood and Personality', p. 175.
[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 170–2.
[40] A. Rorty, 'Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals', in her *Mind in Action* (Boston, 1988). See also M. Mauss, 'A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The

emerged into wider usage.[40] The Greek conception of 'character' or *ethos* (often rendered in Latin by the deceptive *natura*, or 'nature') denoted chiefly the primal characteristics by means of which stage-characters responded to the need to make immediate and decisive ethical judgments.[41] This 'ethical' foundation to *ethos* has often been traced by classical Greek scholars to the *Iliad*, where Odysseus and Achilles confront one another in a series of setpiece speeches which test the *ethos* of each against the other.[42] It is hardly coincidental that the chief examples of contrasting *personae* in Cicero's account are Odysseus and Ajax, the most sharply contrasting 'characters' in this Homeric pantheon.[43]

As one might expect, *ethos* was not possessed as an inward quality, nor could it simply be maintained in reputation: rather it had of necessity to be enacted visibly in the practical actions of argument and speechifying, as both Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Cicero's *De Oratore* make clear.[44] Cicero's examples in *De Officiis* are instructive here: Crassus had 'plenty of wit', Laelius was 'jolly', Hannibal was 'crafty', while Lysander was patient.[45] The characteristics are no more 'inward' than those represented in the various mask-types of the Roman stage.

Cicero's point, then, is that while we all have a share of that common humanity towards which the Stoic philosopher always reaches, those of us who lack the ethical 'evenness' of the *sapiens* will have to rely upon some key character trait or *ethos* to animate our public *persona*. In a sense, then, it is only the wise philosopher who possesses something resembling a fully-developed 'personality': as Marcel Mauss observed many decades ago, the *sapiens* is in certain respects the heroic ancestor of the modern 'person' understood as a self-reflexive moral agent.[46] Yet as Hadot points out, the condition of becoming *sapiens* is at the same time a process of the *surpassing* of the characteristics of individual personality, and of a supra-personal reintegration with the cosmos.

As we might expect, Cicero's image of this second *persona* is not that of the interior personality of modern psychological common-sense, an integrated selfhood from which one becomes dissociated by traumatic forces bearing from outside. Rather it is of a finished artefact which has to be deliberately fashioned

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Notion of Self', in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers *et al.* (Cambridge, 1985).

[41] C. Gill, 'The Character–Personality Distinction', in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Christopher Pelling (Oxford, 1990), p. 2.

[42] G. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, 1980), pp. 10–15.

[43] Cicero, *De Officiis.*, I.113.

[44] Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, pp. 68, 100.

[45] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.107–9.

[46] Mauss, 'A Category of the Human Mind', pp. 18–19; cf. T. Engberg-Pederson, 'Stoic Philosophy and the Concept of the Person', in *The Person and the Human Mind: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Christopher Gill (Oxford, 1990), pp. 109–11.

[47] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.111.

out of the uneven raw material of our impulses (*hormē* in the Greek) and capacities.[47] Nothing is more conducive to *decorum*, he tells us, than 'an evenness [*aequabilitas*] both of one's whole life and of one's actions'. This evenness itself is not part of our nature, nor does it come easily: everyone is required 'to weigh the characteristics that are his own, and to regulate them'. The analogy which occurs to Cicero at this point, fittingly, is that of the stage. Like actors, we should choose carefully our parts, and the plays in which we perform, in order to match our existing talents to the most fitting *persona*.[48] This assumes at once that we already have distinctive sets of impulses and capacities, and that those characteristics in themselves are inadequate to the convincing performance of a public *persona*.

The man of Stoic *constantia*, then, is one who moulds his 'nature' into an 'even' public *persona*, and who then follows the ethical precepts which that specific *persona* dictates. Epictetus recounts that Paconius' *persona* forbade him from going to Nero's games, but that he nevertheless encouraged others to do so, and in *De Officiis* Cicero notes that Cato's decision to commit political suicide, while necessary and even inevitable for him, would have been inappropriate for others.[49] Cato's *persona* was in concert with his 'nature' in this respect, but not dependent upon it: nature had 'assigned' to him 'an extraordinary seriousness, which he himself had consolidated by his unfailing constancy [*constantia*]', to the point that it dictated the necessity of certain fateful actions in specified situations.[50]

To his original two types of *personae*, Cicero adds a further two. Some *personae* (such as those dictated by wealth, nobility or political honours), he notes, are imposed by 'chance or circumstance', while still others are a product of our own deliberation — such as the choice of a vocation or a career. Over the former *personae*, obviously, we have little control; and Cicero stresses that even these latter decisions will rarely be really wise, since when we make choices of career we are still at an early stage of adulthood and of our training in rational decision-making, and our capacity for *constantia* is weak and undeveloped. Hence on both counts we may be forced to play parts for which, as we discover, we are ill-suited. Cicero's advice here is salutory: if we have mischosen our 'type of life' we should alter our behaviour and our plans 'gradually and tentatively', so as to 'appear to have done so with good judgement'.[51]

What is really striking about this discussion of *personae* and their duties is not merely that *personae* turn out on closer inspection to be tied to particular social positions, relationships and circumstances. After all, MacIntyre himself

[48] *Ibid.*, I.114.
[49] Brunt, 'Stoicism', p. 15.
[50] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.112.
[51] *Ibid.*, I.115–21.

acknowledges that the 'unity' of a moral life lived according to the virtues is relative to the specific 'roles' (by which he means vocations) filled by the moral actor.[52] Rather, what is striking is that quite distinct and often incompatible ethical comportments are required both by the responsibilities associated with different occupations and statuses, and by the characteristic ethical postures of those *personae* appropriate to the fulfilment of those functions. Cato's *persona* required that he act courageously and, as it were, sagaciously, in taking his own life. But then, his *persona* was of an unusual *constantia*. Had other 'gentler' individuals behaved in the same manner, the same action 'would perhaps have been counted as a fault [*vitium*]'.[53]

Again, the ethical requirements upon different types of citizens are not only dissimilar, but may actually be opposing. Thus the magistrate, we are told, must always remember 'that he assumes the *persona* of the city [*persona civitatis*]' and must impose his views accordingly, while the 'private person' (*privatus*) is required 'to live on fair and peaceful terms with the other citizens' and 'to want public affairs to be peaceful and honourable' — in short, to *refrain* from acting, where necessary, for the sake of the republic. Foreigners and aliens, of course, must simply keep to themselves.[54]

Finally, there is of course the inescapable sense in Cicero's discussion that *personae* are not in themselves tokens of a unified moral personality, but rather the effect of cultivating an *appearance* of such a personality as a means of approaching towards it. This appearance will be necessary for all those who lack the sagely capacity to develop such a personality through the mastery of impulse by reason — for those, in short, 'who are doing splendidly if they have in them mere images of virtue [*simulcra virtutis*]'. These *simulcra* of virtue are not *personae* as such — yet the words have overlapping meanings, and both share the implication of representation, of acting a part. *Personae* are first and foremost performative: it is above all essential that the citizen should be *seen* to behave in certain ways, and not to behave in others.

It is true that *De Officiis* has very commonly been read, from late antiquity onwards, as insisting that there is no difference between comporting oneself as a virtuous individual and actually being one — thus William of Conches in the twelfth century cited Cicero to the effect that 'the body's movements express the internal movements of the soul'.[55] Later Renaissance students of Cicero such as Erasmus, in his civility writings, insisted that comportment was simply the outward representation of inner virtue. However, as one might expect from the leading Roman theoretical rhetorician, Cicero is quite frank about the fact

[52] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 220.
[53] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.112; cf. Brunt, 'Stoicism', p. 15.
[54] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.124.
[55] J.-C. Schmitt, 'The Ethics of Gesture', in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. M. Feher *et al.* (New York, 1989), Vol. 2, pp. 138–9.

that one's comportment will be calculated and calibrated for its effect. Thus if it 'is necessary to reprove someone' we may need 'to behave so that we seem to be acting in anger'. We should not actually be angry, of course — this would be tantamount to allowing our passions to rule us — but it may be necessary to appear as if we are, for the sake of shock value.[56] Again, as I noted above, when we change our minds we should be careful to 'appear' to do so out of good judgment.

Nor is it correct to imagine that Cicero sees the *persona* as so integral a part of what we would call our 'personality' that once put on, it is unable to be taken off. It is true that like Cato one moulds one's *persona* to one's 'own nature', as discussed above, and that this may lead one to make portentous and irrevocable decisions. Yet it is equally true that one may wear different *personae* at different points in one's life, and these may require one not only to present oneself in different ways, but to subject oneself to quite distinct ethical precepts. A magistrate who returns to being a private citizen, for instance, will be required to modify both his formal oratorical style and the practical temper of his relationships with his fellow-citizens — just as, from the other direction, would an alien who gained citizenship.

A useful parallel here is a conception of personality with which Cicero would have been familiar from his professional life — that embodied in the principles of Roman law. Since at least the time of Locke and his 'forensic' definition of the person our broad conception of legal personality has been based upon the capacity for the exercise of moral responsibility, whether in individuals or in other legal persons such as corporations. It follows that for the purposes of determining guilt and punishment one is either a responsible legal person or not.

By contrast, as Richard Tur has observed, Roman legal personality was a relative fact, based upon one's current position within a formally-defined hierarchy of statuses — the status of freedom (or its lack), the status of citizenship (or its absence), and the status of command over a family (*paterfamilias*) or subordination within it (*filiusfamilias*). Only the *paterfamilias* possessed full legal personality in our sense of the word: other free men possessed what we might call partial personality — more or less so relative to each other's status. Punishment by the law involved the loss of one, two or all three of these statuses — and in each case the individual after this *capitis deminutio* was legally recognized as having become a different person, or else as having ceased to be a person at all. In the course of a lifetime one might shift across the entire range of statuses, and both the degree and the character of one's legal *persona* would alter accordingly.[57]

[56] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.136.

[57] R. Tur, 'The "Person" in Law', in *Persons and Personality: A Contemporary Inquiry*, ed. A. Peacocke and G. Gillett (Oxford, 1987), pp. 116–18.

It is instructive to compare this schema with the ideal of Stoic *constantia* represented by Cato's example. Cato had moulded an exemplary 'even' (*aequabilis*) *persona* out of the raw material of his 'stern' disposition (*gravitas*): this *persona* was sustained through a lifetime of unremitting political activity. Had his civic life been interrupted or terminated in any fashion — as Cicero's own career had been at the time of his banishment, and again in the period leading up to the writing of *De Officiis* — this degree of 'evenness' would have been impossible and in fact inappropriate. His civic *persona*, like those legal *personae* of free men whose statuses had been revised, would have been altered, and with his change in comportment his disposition also would have been changed. Indeed, Cato in a sense died in order to maintain his *persona*, albeit only in death.

It is precisely this dilemma — how to respond to the circumstances of a changed *persona* in terms of the duties appropriate to it — which clearly preoccupied Cicero himself in the years prior to the writing of *De Officiis*, and it may perhaps have had some influence on his choice of source material. It has sometimes been a matter of amusement to historians that a high-minded proponent of *constantia* like Cicero should have been so vacillating in his own personal attitudes and responses — as his correspondence with Atticus in the period of the civil war amply demonstrates.[58] Yet Cicero at this point was a private citizen — and one, moreover, whose legal status and even physical existence was under threat. It was futile to aspire to a *persona* now out of his grasp: his struggle was to develop a creditable one within the limits of his capacities.

In all of these respects Cicero's use of the *persona* concept, and the examples he chooses to illustrate it, loosely resemble the model of the 'presentation of the self' familiar from Erving Goffman's well-known account. In some cases, Goffman insists, this self-presentation may appear to serve as a form of self-deception: the performer, like Cato, 'can be fully taken in by his own act'. In other cases 'cynical' performers (like Cicero's angry citizen) may consciously delude others, whether from ill motives or out of a conviction that it is for their own good. Indeed, there may be a mutually satisfactory theatre involved, such as when doctors accede to the desires of psychosomatics to be seen to be sick.[59] Of course, for Goffman this all amounts to a kind of calculated insincerity, on the presumption that a 'real' personality lurks within. It is far from clear that Cicero would be able to make sense of this kind of distinction.

IV

How does this reading of *De Officiis* square with MacIntyre's image of the 'classical tradition'? In the first place, Cicero's ethical hierarchy is clearly less

[58] Brunt, 'Cicero's *Officium*', p. 13.

[59] E. Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 10–11.

orderly than MacIntyre's and the duties appropriate to particular statuses more fragmented and less neatly equated with the exercise of the virtues. Indeed, as one perceptive observer has noted, this claim on MacIntyre's part to hierarchical completeness in the 'classical' ethical system is perhaps more obviously a feature of post-Kantian than of ancient ethics.[60]

More importantly, though, it is clear that the unitary moral personality which occupies the centre of MacIntyre's stage is in fact for Cicero a special and exemplary figure, produced by a combination of good fortune and exceptional personal capacity. On the other hand, it is clear that for most moral actors in Cicero's account *constantia* is necessarily a fraught and unstable product of a concerted and repetitious 'presentation of the self', one threatened by the diminution of social status or a transference between distinct ethical domains of social life.

None of this is easily explained in terms of MacIntyre's account. For MacIntyre the notion of 'role-playing' as the basis for social interaction is the prerogative of modern liberal societies with their pervasive social atomism and ethical 'emotivism'.[61] The *persona* as a performative model of moral personality has no place in the 'classical tradition', because for MacIntyre it is associated with the abrogation of personal moral responsibility in favour of a succession of passively-viewed emotional states. Indeed, the notion of *ethos* as a kind of performed personality, as in the model of the orator, is deeply upsetting to MacIntyre's image of moral personality seen as a kind of unitary life-narrative, the truth of which is capable of being perceived through the harmony of the different segments.

Remarkably, MacIntyre's image of classical ethics is peculiarly unaffected by an understanding of the significance of the tools of oratory and rhetoric as means towards ethical practice, despite the fact that, as numerous historians have observed, for important figures within classical ethical thought rhetoric *was* the heart of ethical practice seen as a style of behaviour.[62] This is all the more curious given that the *ethos*/*pathos* duality is a crucial element of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, where it surely acts as a practical counterpoint to the discussion of virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Again, MacIntyre's schema allows of no such ethical divisions of existence in the 'classical tradition' — indeed, his commendation of the 'classical tradition' is based on the assumption that it transcends such divisions.[63] Thus the conception of a human life as a succession of distinct ethical episodes each requiring the presentation of a different 'face', and the Roman legal conception

[60] Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, pp. 7–9.
[61] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 115–17.
[62] A.E. Horner, Ancient Values: *Aretē* and *Virtus* (PhD thesis, University of Virginia, 1975), pp. 52–61.
[63] Macintyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 204–21.

of a graded hierarchy of *personae* each of different levels of capacity, are both equally alien to him. For MacIntyre, in the creation of a unitary life-narrative *constantia* is all.

It is difficult to see what useful role in this picture is being played by Cicero's virtuous private citizen, the patient soul whose duty is 'to live on fair and peaceful terms with the other citizens'. The magistrate has all of social life as his province, and he is able to roam about it exerting his ethical prejudices at will. The private citizen, on the other hand, is required to respect the ethical boundaries of other styles of life, other vocations and other *personae* — to behave civilly, as well as civically. Yet this sounds uncomfortably like the kind of 'segmentation' of ethical life MacIntyre so abhors.

In this sense MacIntyre's 'classical' vision is unworldlier even than its post-Kantian rival — which is at least able to draw upon the 'liberal' legacy of religious toleration for its justification of distinct ethical spheres.[64] MacIntyre's image of classical virtue is of an Eden for Catos, each heroically refusing unto death to accept the ethical boundaries others are forced to respect in the name of civil harmony and peace. Cicero the moralist would evidently have been somewhat uncomfortable there; Cicero the private citizen would have had no place — and with Cicero would go most of us.

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[64] See, for example, C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 70–7.