

International Workshop: New Perspectives on Cicero's *De Amicitia*

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University of Crete

Organisers: Georgia Tsouni (University of Crete) and Sean McConnell (University of Otago)

Abstracts

Katharina Volk (Columbia University)

Cicero's *Laelius*

The figure of C. Laelius, main speaker of Cicero's dialogue on friendship, is far more than the author's mouthpiece. Drawn as a well-rounded, amiable character and displaying old-fashioned Roman values while saturated with philosophical wisdom, the second-century *sapiens* is an integral part of Cicero's intellectual project, in *De amicitia* and beyond. Cicero was fascinated with Laelius throughout his life, to the extent of occasionally presenting himself as a Laelius-like figure, and featured him as a participant also in *De re publica* and *De senectute*, creating a continuity across dialogues and contributing to the impression of the existence of a "Scipionic Circle." This paper examines the role of Laelius across Cicero's life and work, following a trajectory that culminates in the character's star turn in *De amicitia*.

Gernot Michael Müller (University Bonn)

The structure of Cicero's *Laelius* and its relation to his former dialogues

The *Laelius*, along with *Cato maior*, is one of Cicero's last dialogues. As in the latter, here Cicero clearly highlights the artifice behind the work's dialogical interaction. In so doing, he places particular emphasis on the potential of the dialogue's staging in terms of aesthetic effect. In addition, Cicero takes up numerous elements in the *Laelius* with which he experimented in his earlier dialogues. These features relate not only to structural aspects but also to the function of his choice of characters and their construction, and this goes beyond his use of the constellation of characters from *De re publica*. Despite its brevity, Cicero's *Laelius* thus proves, on closer inspection, to be a dialogue of considerable complexity. This paper will shed light on this complexity in three steps. In the first section, it will describe the formal aspects of the *Laelius*, paying particular attention, in comparison with *Cato maior*, to Cicero's reflection on the elements of staging of the dialogue that is characteristic of both dialogues. This will provide an opportunity in the second section to reveal the work's complex references to Cicero's previous dialogues and to determine their function. On this basis, the concluding chapter will explain how Cicero takes up the essential cultural objectives of his dialogues once more in the *Laelius* and combines them in a meaningful way. This will reveal that, despite its brevity, the *Laelius* marks a kind of culmination point in Cicero's whole dialogue oeuvre.

Gabriel Evangelou (Ionian University)

Theory and Practice in Cicero's *De amicitia*: friendship, lived experience, and reconciliation

This paper examines the relationship between the normative account of friendship presented in Cicero's *De amicitia* and the practices of friendship visible in his correspondence, with particular attention to moments of political crisis. The dialogue articulates a demanding ethical model grounded in moral integrity and constancy, shaped by an acute awareness of the risks posed by unreliable or opportunistic friends. Cicero's letters, especially those written during and after his exile, provide a valuable point of comparison, revealing how this model was tested by experiences of abandonment, disappointment, and political disagreement.

The correspondence with Atticus stands out as the clearest instance in which the ideals of *De amicitia* appear to be sustained in practice. Long-term trust, restraint in disagreement, and a shared commitment to the preservation of the relationship largely confirm the dialogue's claims about the conditions of true friendship. At the same time, the letters also expose moments of tension, emotional strain, and asymmetry, which complicate the apparent harmony between theory and experience.

Beyond the case of Atticus, Cicero's continued engagement with less reliable friends reveals a more pragmatic approach than the dialogue might suggest. Relationships are often maintained despite ethical discomfort, and reconciliation, where it occurs, is partial and carefully managed rather than complete. The comparison between *De amicitia* and the letters shows that Cicero's theory of friendship is neither detached from experience nor fully realised in it, but emerges from an ongoing negotiation between ethical ideals and the pressures of a divided political world.

Georgia Tsouni, University of Crete

Wisdom, *Exempla* and Friendship in *De Amicitia*

The discussion in *De Amicitia* begins with Fannius invoking the 'wisdom' (*sapientia*) of Laelius. In the course of his account, however, Laelius takes a distance from philosophical, especially, Stoic standards of wisdom as the basis of friendship, thought to be unattainable, and turns, instead, to examples of *real* 'good people' (*virī boni*) who gained a reputation for being excellent friends, invoking Scipio as a primary example. In the paper I shall discuss how the epistemological reservations expressed by Laelius are linked to Cicero's own Academic tendencies, which are expressed throughout the Ciceronian philosophical *oeuvre*. Furthermore, I shall discuss how Laelius' critique of Stoic standards is linked to the prominence assigned to Roman male *exempla* in the treatise and to an account of friendship rooted in Roman traditions, drawing parallels from Cicero's *De Officiis* as well.

Margaret Graver (Dartmouth College)

Doing a Friend a Favor: Cicero and the Greco-Roman Code of Supererogation

For perspective on the central concerns of *De Amicitia*, we need to contextualize the work not only in relation to the Stoic doctrine on appropriate actions (καθήκοντα / officia) but also, more specifically, in relation to the larger philosophical and cultural tradition on supererogatory gifts and services, termed ‘benefactions’ (εὐεργεσία / beneficia) or ‘favors’ (χάριτες / gratiae). These are unforced acts of kindness or giving, performed on the basis of goodwill rather than obligation and inviting but not demanding reciprocation. The most systematic treatment of the dynamic is found in Seneca’s *De Beneficiis*, which provides a full Stoic elaboration; however, the ideology is much older and spans multiple philosophical and pre-philosophical discourses. For Cicero it held both practical significance, as undergirding the regular activities of political alliance, and philosophical significance, as giving substance to favorite claims about the grounding of virtue in nature rather than expediency. In the paper I hope to explicate the key terms of this discourse and to draw out a set of implications from relevant passages in *De Amicitia* and the *Epistulae ad Familiares*.

Thornton Lockwood (University of Florida)

Cicero on the Duties of Friendship

In *De officiis*, Cicero tells his son that “no part of life, neither public affairs nor private, neither in the forum nor at home, neither when acting on your own nor in dealings with another, can be free from duty” (*Off.* I.4, Atkins trans.). Thus, it stands to reason that Cicero believes that there are duties peculiar to friendship and in the second Book of the treatise, he begins a discussion of the duties of friendship, but pivots to an analysis of glory after noting that “I have already spoken about friendship in another book, which is entitled *Laelius*” (*Off.* II.31). But although this passage establishes an inter-textual connection between *De officiis*, and *Laelius de amicitia*, the latter work seems much more interested in defining friendship and explaining its limits, namely when friendship should be dissolved (for instance, when the friendship is at odds with one’s political community). No doubt, the historical circumstances and timeframe in which Cicero composed *De officiis* hardly allowed for scholarly precision in all details of duty. Nonetheless, it seems worthwhile to flesh out Cicero’s thoughts on the duties of friendship, as they can be extracted both from *De officiis* and *De amicitia*, but also from the substantial discussions of Stoic and Epicurean friendship in *De finibus* (*Fin.* I.65-70, II.78-85, III.70-71, V.69-71). Thus, my paper aims to situate Cicero’s notion of the duties of friendship partially through a restatement of his general notion of duty in *De officiis*, but also by working through the claims he makes specifically about friendship in *De officiis*, *De amicitia*, and *De finibus*. The paper concludes with a contrast between Cicero’s duties of friendships and the neglected “duties of friendship” that Aristotle articulates in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.13-XI.3

Yelena Baraz (Princeton University)

How to Lose Friends and Influence People

In this paper I am interested in broader philosophical underpinnings and implications of Laelius' views on formation and dissolution of friendships. There is a concern in the treatise with the tension between the two major drivers of friendship: affection, akin to love, often instantaneous and instinctual, and judgment, a considered evaluation of the friend's personal qualities arrived at through experience over time. The contribution of immediate affection can result in friendships that, on consideration, turn out to be ill-advised. The problem is at its heart an epistemological one: when encountering a new person and finding them appealing, how is one to know whether the feeling is justified? Such friendships may later need to be dissolved, creating an ethical problem since the existence of the relationship, however grounded, creates obligations. A related issue is raised by the problem of change and growth that can lead to a friendship no longer being appropriate: such is the case with childhood friendships, but also in cases where other sources of change are present, for example, as a result of philosophical education or deterioration of character due to corrupting influence. In addition to similar ethical issues, this scenario raises a further set of questions about the nature of personality and its stability over time. If a true friend is another self (*Amic.* 80) and friendship makes one out of many (*Amic.* 92), what does it mean when one of the friends has undergone change?

Sean McConnell, University of Otago

Inimicitiae and Civil Strife in *De Amicitia*

The conversation reported in the dialogue takes place around a serious moment of civil strife at Rome in 88 BC, and instances of civil strife - such as that involving Tiberius Gracchus - are alluded to at various times in the dialogue. The role played by *amicitia* in civil strife is a pressing concern – Laelius argues strongly and at length that support for friends acting against the interests of the *res publica* is never justified, despite ties of loyalty and affection and the obligations involved in friendship. The risks posed by *inimicitiae* ('enmity'), where such feelings and obligations do not or no longer apply, are also subject to Laelius' attention. In this paper I critically examine what Laelius has to say about *inimicitiae*. Are there appropriate grounds for *inimicitiae*, and, if so, what are they? How should one act (or react) in a relationship that is one of *inimicitiae* – what behaviours are acceptable, and why? How is the collective impact of *inimicitiae* to be managed, when – as Roman history shows – the risk of devastating civil strife resulting from such personal enmity is very real? I argue that, while admitting that *inimicitiae* may be justified and that hostile emotions may understandably run high, Laelius is fixated on the avoidance of behaviour that may cause widespread communal damage, and so condones a pragmatic model of restraint and de-escalation even if at personal cost.

Nathan Gilbert (University of Durham)

Cicero's *De Amicitia* in China

My paper examines the multiple Ciceronian dimensions of the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* (交友論, *On Friendship*, 1595), the first treatise in Chinese written by a European. Scholars have long recognized that Ricci's text draws on both Christian and Classical discourses of friendship, while recent work has shown how astutely Ricci chose a topic of particular importance to a late Ming literati audience already preoccupied with friendship as an ethical and social problem. The work proved remarkably successful and helped establish Ricci's authority as a Western scholar capable of contributing to Chinese intellectual culture. I argue that Cicero is central to this project in several distinct ways. He is by far the dominant Classical authority in Ricci's treatise and is cited more than the work's two other major sources, Aristotle and Plutarch, combined; Laelius *De Amicitia* is by far the single most frequently quoted work. Yet Ricci's *On Friendship* is not a translation of Cicero, nor an attempt to reproduce Ciceronian dialogue. It is a collection of moral maxims, shaped by the excerpting practices of Jesuit humanism and early modern commonplace culture.

This paper argues that Ricci's selective refashioning of Ciceronian moral discourse reflects Cicero's central role in Jesuit rhetorical education and illustrates a broader logic of rhetorical accommodation. By extracting those elements of Western texts he judged most portable across cultures, Ricci produced a virtue-centered, elite, and practical account of friendship suitable for Chinese literati, while discarding much of the specifically Roman civic, dramatic, and historical texture of Cicero's dialogue. *Jiaoyou lun* thus offers a revealing case of Cicero's global afterlife: not simple transmission, but selection, compression and rhetorical adaptation across pagan, Christian and Confucian traditions.