A Brief Introduction to Marcus Tullius Cicero’s *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis*

By David Rosenblatt

- **De re publica** is a dialogue by Cicero, written in six books between 54 and 51 BC. It is written in the form of a Socratic dialogue and uses Plato’s Republic as his model.
- The dialogue takes place in Scipio’s estate, during three consecutive days.
- Large parts of the text are missing: especially from the 4th and the 5th book only minor fragments survived. All other books have at least some passages missing.
- The largest part of the surviving text was uncovered as a palimpsest in 1822.

**Book one**: Contains a discussion between the protagonists of the political situation of their time. The theme of the work is given and some comments are made about the theory of constitutions.

**Book two**: An outline of Roman history and the development of the constitution.

**Book three**: The role of justice in government is examined, as are the different types of constitutions.

**Book four**: A discourse about education.

**Book five**: The characters converse about the qualities of the ideal citizen in government.

**Book Six**: Little of this book survives except the *Somnium Scipionis*, which functions as the conclusion to the work.

- **De Officiis** (On Duties or On Obligations) is an essay by Marcus Tullius Cicero divided into three books, where Cicero explains his view on the best way to live.
- *De Officiis* was written in the year 44 BC, Cicero’s last year alive, when he was 62 years old, in the form of a letter to his son of the same name, who was studying philosophy in Athens.

Some quotations from *De Officiis*:

WARS ARE TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN ORDER THAT IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO LIVE IN PEACE WITHOUT MOLESTATION.

[Bella suscipienda sunt ob eam causam, ut sine injuria in pace vivatur.]

- *De Officiis* (I, 11)

LET WAR BE SO CARRIED ON THAT NO OTHER OBJECT MAY SEEM TO BE SOUGHT BUT THE ACQUISITION OF PEACE.

[Bellum autem ita suscipiatur, ut nihil aliud, nisi pax, quaesita videatur.]

- *De Officiis* (I, 23)

IN PROSPERITY LET US MOST CAREFULLY AVOID PRIDE, DISDAIN, AND ARROGANCE.

[In rebus prosperis, superbiam, fastidium arrogantiamque magno opere fugiamus.]

- *De Officiis* (I, 26)