

**The Adventure of the
Human Intellect**

**Self, Society, and the Divine in
Ancient World Cultures**

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WILEY Blackwell

The Thought-World of Ancient Rome: A Delicate Balancing Act

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“Others will hammer out bronze more delicately into breathing forms (I am certain), will coax living expressions out of marble, will plead cases better, will trace the movements of the sky with pointers and foretell the rising constellations; you, Roman, remember to rule nations by your empire (these will be your arts), to impose morality on peace, to spare the conquered and to crush the proud in war” (Virgil *Aeneid* 6.847–53). This is the counsel that the shade of Anchises offers his son Aeneas, the legendary founder of Rome, during Aeneas’ visit to the underworld in Virgil’s patriotic epic. His words no doubt exaggerate the one-sidedness of Rome’s achievement. Romans developed an elaborate code of law (it was to be translated into Greek for the Eastern Empire), were brilliant architects and engineers (witness their aqueducts and roads), created a systematic calendar, and produced some of the world’s finest poetry, among many other intellectual accomplishments. These achievements, some of them highly technical, have been chronicled in specialized studies. For this chapter, we have taken our cue from Anchises and focused on the evolution and rationalization of the moral qualities that, in the Romans’ own view, made their empire possible and were the basis of their political culture.¹

From the time when we first encounter Roman documents, the Romans reveal themselves to have been interested in law (the *Twelve Tables*, published in the mid-fifth century BCE, set forth the earliest written Roman law code) and history. Poetry and what we might consider literature came later: Cicero affirms that “poets were recognized or received among us late, even though it is stated in [Cato’s] *Origins* that guests at feasts used to sing to the flute about the virtues of distinguished men;

The Adventure of the Human Intellect: Self, Society, and the Divine in Ancient World Cultures,
First Edition. Edited by Kurt A. Raaffaub.

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yet a speech of Cato's asserts that there was no honor accorded even to this kind [of poetry]" (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.1.3). But Cato himself (234–149 BCE) published both a history, characteristically concerned with origins, and speeches (as Cicero says, "we quickly embraced oratory," 1.3.5), and these remained the most respectable genres even after poets, almost all non-Romans, began adapting Greek forms such as epic and drama in Latin. We know too that the Romans preserved records of significant events (political and religious) by year (hence "annals"), but these were bare chronicles: it was the facts that mattered. Surrounded by communities (such as the Etruscan city-states to the north and Greek colonies in the south) that had developed literary and artistic traditions, with vivid pictorial representations of their divinities and myths, the Romans seem comparatively strait-laced – or at least this is the image they created of themselves later, in the middle centuries of their Republic (its founding traditionally dated to 509 BCE with the overthrow of the last king). In place of the stories that others, and particularly the Greeks, told about their gods and superhuman heroes, the Romans had edifying legends of human actors, while the gods they worshiped were *numina*, the abstract essence of divine power, as disembodied as the revered Terminus ("Boundary Stone").

The overthrow of the original monarchy was not accompanied by an egalitarian movement, as was the case in Athens; rather, power passed to a patrician caste which, as has happened often with hereditary aristocracies, slowly opened its ranks to include the wealthier plebeians. But the difference between rich and poor remained profound and enshrined in the census and in the institution of clientage (the semi-formal dependency of the poor on wealthy patrons whom they were bound to support, especially in the contest for political office, in exchange for protection and representation, for instance, in court). Despite episodes of intense class struggle, including the secession of the lower classes (one such withdrawal supposedly led to the publication of the *Twelve Tables*), throughout the Republic Rome was an oligarchy, even if legitimate power (*potestas*) under the Republic formally rested with the people as a whole, who vested it in the magistrates they elected each year (only to this limited extent can Rome be regarded as a democracy). The citizen body was distributed hierarchically in a set of "orders," legally defined categories determined by wealth and other markers of status, and keeping the orders united, whether through concessions and reform or violent repression of the poorest strata especially in the capital city, was a major concern of political leaders at all times. The tendency to strict control found expression in the military institution of decimation (killing one soldier in ten in cases of insubordination, rare in practice but always a possibility) and, on a domestic level, in the absolute power of the father (the *patria potestas*) who retained legal authority over his children throughout his life (unless he formally freed them) and even had the right – seldom invoked but powerful in principle – to slay a disobedient son or daughter, even when they were adults.

This was the society that grew from humble foundations – the Romans imagined that their city was created as an asylum for exiles and outlaws from all over Italy, who had to steal their wives from a neighboring town (the "rape of the Sabine

women”) – to the greatest power the western world had known. But even their earliest legend was marked by internal dissension and the fratricide between Romulus and Remus – an ancient example that appeared especially ominous in the age of civil wars at the end of the republic. What is more, the growth of Roman supremacy was due not only to what was evidently a high rate of reproduction but also to the incorporation of former enemies and even slaves. Doubtless, the sharp division of status between the free and servile populations was one factor in maintaining the solidarity of the citizens, but at Rome, as opposed to Greece, slaves who were manumitted acquired citizen status, a custom that had a major demographic impact and was not without cultural significance as well. Rome in time became a true cosmopolis, and there was a delicate balance between this inclusiveness and the effort to create a specific national identity. At some point, probably in the fourth century BCE, the Romans decided to look beyond the story of Rome’s foundation to a still earlier epoch, when they identified their origin as a people with the arrival of Trojan refugees, under the leadership of Aeneas, in Latium; but these Trojans had to abandon their language and most of their customs in the process. When, in the third and second centuries, the cult of Dionysus or Bacchus – another foreign arrival, and one characterized by secrecy – began to spread in Rome (imported from Etruria, we are told), it was brought under control, after the massacre of thousands of devotees who were suspected of obscene, illegal, and treasonous acts, by the imposition of severe restrictions. As Livy reports (39.18):

Those who, as it appeared, had been only initiated..., but who had not themselves committed, or compelled others to commit, any of those acts to which they were bound by the oath – all such they left in prison. But those who had forcibly committed personal defilements or murders, or were stained with the guilt of false evidence, counterfeit seals, forged wills, or other frauds, all these they punished with death. A greater number were executed than thrown into prison; indeed, the multitude of men and women who suffered in both ways, was very considerable.... A charge was then given to demolish all the places where the Bacchanalians had held their meetings.... With regard to the future, the senate passed a decree, “that no Bacchanalian rites should be celebrated in Rome or in Italy.”

This decree is no fiction: an inscription with a copy of it was discovered in the seventeenth century, and it stipulated, among other things, that no more than five people could meet in worship, and this only with senatorial approval. Mixture was a constant theme in Rome – and a constant threat.

This Rome – stern, patriarchal, and riven by class tensions – was also a warrior culture engaged in almost unremitting hostilities waged against an ever-widening circle of enemies, first in central Italy, then along the length of the Italian peninsula, and finally throughout and beyond the Mediterranean basin. At the same time – at least in the idealizing view of those Romans who left the most extensive written records – it was a culture in which individuals competed, fairly and harmoniously, to do the most to further the collective good of the *civitas* (“civil community”), the collection of *civēs* (“citizens”), willingly bound by the community’s laws and

entitled to its protection. To prosper, the *civitas* required the favor of the gods and, on the human level, an ethic of strict reciprocity: within the civic space cleared and secured by war, each person found a stable place to stand at the center of a large network of reciprocal relations that bound the individual to household, to clan, to class, to community, and to the gods as though in a series of concentric circles. Yet the reality of unequal distributions of power, between wealthy and poor, citizens and non-citizens, free and slave, continually reasserted itself and challenged the idealized image that the Romans (above all, the aristocracy) had created for themselves. Indeed, some ancient historians viewed the succession of foreign wars as a provisional solution to the problem of social unrest, a distraction and at the same time a source of wealth (including slaves) for generals and citizen soldiers alike, and intervals of peace as a time when inner dissension brewed and finally erupted, only to find an outlet in further wars abroad. The vigorous resistance of nearby communities, including the Latins, to Roman domination also posed both military and ideological challenges: how to deny the demand for equal rights on the part of allies so close in origin, language, and customs? Despite earlier enfranchisement especially of long-standing allies, experiments with intermediate levels of citizenship, and a vigorous policy of settling Roman citizens in colonies throughout Italy, the solution, by enfranchisement of all Italian allies, came only in the aftermath of a vicious war in the early first century BCE that appeared to be at once foreign and civil. Such events compelled the Romans to think in new ways about themselves, as their city evolved into a world state.

There was always a tense equilibrium between two spheres of action – *domi militiaeque*, as the Romans said, “at home and on campaign” (the former essentially limited to the city of Rome within its sacred boundary) – and the values that governed them. We concentrate here on Rome of the last two centuries BCE, the period of greatest territorial expansion that saw the transition, first from the “Middle Republic” to “Late Republic,” and then from “Republic” to “Empire.” Because of the general thrust of our sources, we inevitably privilege the experience of the elite adult males who engrossed most of the financial capital – leaving them with the disposable time that political engagement demanded – and most of the cultural capital – providing them with the education that made articulate, written witness and oral performance possible. Even here, where Roman writers excelled in analyzing and defending their constitutional arrangements (we need only cite Cicero’s *Republic* and *Laws*, both modeled on Platonic dialogs but with a decidedly Roman cast), they were careful to privilege action over description and analysis (see, for example, Cicero’s speech *On behalf of Murena* 22–23 and Sallust’s *War against Catiline* 3.1–2, *Jugurthine War* 3–4), and their thought-world remained defined by its inherited value system.

Rome was, as we have said, almost perpetually at war. Under the Republic (509–27 BCE), military campaigns were waged virtually every year by armies levied from the ranks of citizens (contrast Rome’s most redoubtable enemy, Carthage, which relied much more on mercenary soldiers): during most of that period any man who wished to hold office as a civil magistrate was first required to spend 10 campaigning

seasons in military service, and the two chief magistrates elected each year (consuls) spent most of their term at the head of armies in the field – another symptom of the interrelation between domestic politics and war. As time passed, Rome's military involvements radiated ever farther outward from the city. The fifth and early fourth centuries BCE saw wars in Etruria, to the northwest, and in Latium, the territory that extended to the southeast from the river Tiber on which Rome lay – and the home of the Latins. In the middle of the fourth century the rich farmlands of Campania in central Italy became the battleground, where Rome engaged and ultimately overcame the Samnites, a confederation of fierce tribes that had been forced to migrate from farther north on the peninsula. Then, by the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the next, the theater moved farther south yet again: after Tarentum (mod. Taranto), an old Greek foundation that was the region's chief city, fell in 272 BCE, Rome controlled most of Italy south of the Po through a network of city-states that it had made its subordinate allies; here began, moreover, the policy of building networks of relationships between Rome's own ruling class and those of allied towns, producing yet another set of criss-crossed relations between class and ethnic identity.

Next, Roman military forces became involved in actions beyond Italy for the first time, with the two great wars against Carthage that soon followed (First Punic War 264–241 BCE, Second Punic War 218–202), and the city acquired its first transmarine province, Sicily. In the second century, Rome fought major wars in mainland Greece, Asia Minor, Spain, and North Africa, including the last of the wars against Carthage, and also suffered a series of terrifying losses at the century's end before annihilating German tribes that threatened to pour over the Alps and overwhelm Italy. In the last two generations of the Republic, the military might that was not spent in a series of civil wars was directed mainly against Mithridates of Pontus, in the three wars that eventually brought most of the Near East under Roman control, and to the north, in Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul. By the end of the Republic, Roman power either controlled or was engaged in a contest for all the lands that ringed the Mediterranean.

In view of this record, it is understandable that military service was both the highest duty of every *vir* (adult male citizen) and the theater in which the most prized ethical quality was most conspicuously displayed: *virtus*, the "quality or trait entailed in being a (real) *vir*," or "manliness." But the term itself was inevitably as fraught with ambiguities and tensions as Roman social life generally. On the one hand, it signified courage: if you possessed *virtus*, you had physical courage and so could play the part of the *vir fortis* ("gallant *vir*," or "hero") in battle, the most highly valued role the culture had to offer. *Virtus* in battle could be displayed in two opposed but complementary ways, aggressively and defensively. Defensive *virtus* was the courage of the infantryman on the battle-line waiting to face the enemy's onslaught; aggressive *virtus* was epitomized by the cavalry officer's charge, as he sped to meet his opposite number in single combat. Since mounted officers were drawn from the social and economic elite, infantry from the more common citizen-ranks, there was a rough correlation between one's social class and the form

of *virtus* one had the opportunity to display. But the term also signified great achievements of any sort, whether military or political: thus, the epitaphs inscribed on the tombs of the Scipios, the most distinguished family in the wars with Carthage, celebrated their *virtus* alongside such ideals as honor, fame, glory, and talent (*ingenium*), and included a list of their public offices. The idea of *virtus*, no doubt in part influenced by imported Greek philosophical discussions of virtue as an ethical ideal but also by a gradual internal development, came to represent all the highest moral traits, such as wisdom, moderation or self-control, and justice. In turn, Roman thinkers linked this higher conception to the comportment necessary to maintain social solidarity – the self-control and fairness that ideally limited aggression and self-aggrandizement within the community.

Rome's annual campaigns were launched – at least in Roman view – only upon provocation, when an enemy made off with Roman property, threatened the city directly, or attacked another people whom Rome was obliged to assist. Ideologically, then, all of Rome's warfare was defensive, undertaken to protect the thing that any Roman prized most highly: the *res publica* (“commonwealth,” “republic”), which comprised both the goods and property that the people (*populus*) held in common and all the collective interests of the people more generally – the “people's business.” And just as every *vir* was obliged to display his *virtus* on the field of combat in defense of the *res publica*, so it was his obligation to take a hand in the people's business in an appropriately “manly” way, displaying his beneficence and worthiness in the broader sense of “virtue” (but never wholly losing the military associations of courage, since the highest offices were, as we have seen, consequent upon a military career). In the civic arena the intense competition for honor was modulated by the equally intense communitarian ethos that the *res publica* inspired; this ethos maintained the solidarity of the ruling class precisely through its continual display of controlled rivalry and partisan spirit. “All for all” could have been the watchword: concern for the common well-being in theory took precedence over self-interest or the claims of friends and kin. Indeed, there is more than one edifying legend in which a Roman father puts to death a son who had acted against the *res publica*, thus serving as a vivid symbol of the interrelationship between civic and domestic order and authority even as it displaced social conflict onto the terrain of the family: the *exemplum* (example, model) of an aristocratic parent engaging in so violent an act against his own offspring, which always inspired a kind of revulsion as well as admiration, showed vividly that – contrary to appearances – no one was above the law. This sort of social solidarity, which called for considerable and frequent self-sacrifice in the pursuit of social distinction, was underwritten by two important and converging ideological elements, the principle of equality and the ethic of frugality.

As we have noted, the Roman citizen body was distinguished by a number of hierarchical markers – between “patricians” and “plebeians,” between those who were and were not “notables” (*nobiles*), between rich and poor, free and slave. These distinctions were meant to be muted by the ethical premium placed on thrift and simplicity on the part of the wealthier strata. It was thrift that restrained a

wastrel from squandering his patrimony, a betrayal of family comparable to treason toward the community; what is more, these same qualities restrained the well-to-do from setting themselves above their neighbors – and political rivals – through acts of conspicuous consumption, and that intent was occasionally codified in “sumptuary laws” that limited expenditures on, for example, dinners, displays of fancy jewelry, and lavish funerals. For all citizens were equal before the law and equally entitled to the law’s protection – a rule that would be suspended only later, during the Empire, when punishments for the same crime would differ according to the rank of the offender. This principle of civic equality was epitomized by the rule that no citizen could be deprived of his *caput* (literally, his “head,” and metaphorically, his rights as a citizen) without the express judgment of the *populus*.

As already noted, the Roman people collectively were the source of all political authority – given on temporary loan by the *populus* to the magistrates whom it elected each year – and the source of all legal authority as well. That is what it meant to be a republic instead of a monarchy; indeed, according to one tradition the first collection of Roman laws (the *ius Papirianum*) was made in the very first year of the Republic, after the overthrow of the last of the kings, as a precursor of the *Twelve Tables*, the more permanent and influential legal compilation made two generations later (451–450 BCE). All legislation was produced by the people as a whole meeting in one or another form of voting assembly. Though the senate exerted great influence on both the *populus* and its elected magistrates, it did so only as an authoritative advisory body: it had no legislative function and its decrees did not have the force of law. The rule of law that thus emerged from the *populus*, the Romans believed, distinguished republican equality both from the oppression they once suffered at the hands of their kings and from the arbitrary exercises of power experienced by their slaves.

And yet, no one doubted that the senate – composed of former magistrates holding their seats for life and, with very few exceptions, coming from families prominent for their political careers and leadership – had an authority at least as great as that of the people who granted it: decrees were published in the name of the *senatus populusque Romanus*, “the Roman senate and people,” a phrase that captured the sense both that the two were of equal weight and yet – note the singular *Romanus* – that they were one and the same. The feat of balancing aristocratic rule with the cohesion of the social whole was evident in the very formula of SPQR. Once again, moreover, we see how a dedication to the abstract equality of the law, which was so deep a part of Roman consciousness, served also to promote harmony among social classes that were anything but equal in reality. The same principle is at work in the idea of the mixed constitution, so admired by the Greek statesman and historian Polybius (second century BCE), whereby monarchy (represented by the consuls), aristocracy (the senate), and democracy (the popular assemblies) were united in a single polity, each type (and class) achieving equal representation, and each depending on the collaboration of the other two to achieve anything at all. (Polybius describes the Roman constitution, and compares it with that of other states, in the sixth book of his history, which begins: “The three

kinds of government, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, were all found united in the commonwealth of Rome.”)

Civic equality was made possible also by the ideal of individual and collective freedom (*libertas*), the foundation of all Roman civic action and civic values. As the counter-term to *servitus* (“slavery”), *libertas* signified that a person was both free from the domination of another’s will, in radical contrast to those in a state of legal servitude, and free to choose his own projects and commitments. At the same time, certainly under the Republic, “freedom from” and “freedom to” were tied closely to “freedom in”: freedom as a person was the precondition for, and was protected by, membership in the civil community (*civitas*: the same word denoted both the community and membership in it, or “citizenship”). Indeed, it was portable: Roman citizenship served to guarantee respectful treatment abroad as well as at home, creating in this way too, by contrast with foreigners, the image of a united and equal community. *Civitas* gave individuals’ projects and commitments much of their positive content and joined them with all others whose rights were guaranteed and regulated by the same laws. Marriage and commerce too depended on civic status: only citizens had the *ius commercii* and the *ius conubii*, the right to participate in relations of economic and familial exchange based on the still more fundamental right to form contracts. Republican freedom was in this respect the state of being, not a wholly autonomous self, but a citizen embedded in a network of civic relations: *communis libertas* – the freedom you shared with all other free Romans – was the opposite both of the slave’s oppression and of his atomization. It is also important to note that the concept of *libertas* was overtly politicized: for the common people, especially early in the Republic’s history, it epitomized the rights and protections that they gained in their dealings with the aristocracy, while for the aristocracy, especially near the end of the Republic, it represented the freedom of action that the political elite claimed as a natural right.

The free Roman’s commitments extended not only to the *res publica* but also to his fellow citizens as individuals, in the form of agreements and ongoing relationships. All the most important civic virtues were dispositions that inclined people to keep their commitments. Of these, the most important was *fides*, a complex concept embracing “trustworthiness,” “good faith,” “honesty,” “sincerity,” “loyalty,” “credibility,” and also, as a thing offered to another, a “promise,” “pledge,” or “assurance.” One made a pledge (*fides*) in good faith and expected a like fidelity in the other: the very breadth of the term served to create a sense of reciprocity that was underwritten by the physical transaction. *Fides* made possible all stable human relations and all virtuous political dealings: it was the basis of the rights of commerce and marital exchange, and magistrates in turn were obliged to act *e re publica fideque sua*, “in accordance with the public interest and their own *fides*.” *Fides*, in turn, was part of a complex of several virtues that mutually constituted a network of social values underwriting the cohesion of the group. Thus, *fides* was closely aligned with *iustitia*, which is not merely the abstract notion of fairness, or “justice” in the legal sense, but also the value that disposes one to give all people exactly what they are due, that is, “justness” as a character trait. This interpenetration of

legal and moral notions is again one of the hallmarks of Roman social thought: as an essential element in the asymmetrical relations between rich and poor, patron and client, this virtue could be expected to reside in the poorest citizen, and even a slave. In Terence's comedy *Andria* or *The Woman from Andros*, the master Simo addresses his former slave Sosia as follows: "After I purchased you, you know full well that, since you were a child, your servitude with me has been fair [*iusta*] and mild. From slave I made of you a freedman [*libertus*], because you served me in a free manner [*liberaliter*]" (35–38). Even freedom had a subjective aspect, reflected in the modern English word "liberal."

The idea of *fides* was also closely connected with *constantia*, or "reliability," which causes one to maintain whatever position one has adopted and act in a way consistent with it. *Constantia*, in turn, was deemed to be impossible without the related virtue of *temperantia* or *continentia*, two names for the sort of self-control that keeps people from surrendering to impulses or appetites that would deflect them from their proper course: the idea embraces marital fidelity (Plautus *Asinaria* 856–59) and resistance to the low pleasures of drinking and sex with prostitutes (Plautus *Mostellaria* 31, in which a slave gives expression to this ideal of liberal conduct). And possessing that sort of self-control virtually requires *magnitudo animi* ("largeness of spirit"), the intellectual and emotional resources that enable one to see what is truly important and act accordingly, especially by avoiding behavior that is pusillanimous, petty, and selfish – or, in a word, servile, even as the possibilities of low conduct were especially available to the well to do, who might require a slave to remind them of the duties of their class.

All these qualities oriented people's intentions in the right direction and helped maintain the correct orientation: they did not, however, guarantee that people would actually do anything. In a culture as action-centered as Rome's, that plainly was not sufficient, and so the virtues supporting the intention to honor one's commitments were joined with virtues concerned to translate intention into action: by displaying *industria* one engaged wholeheartedly in meeting one's obligations and so bore the character of an "energetic *vir*" (*vir strenuus*); by displaying *prudentia*, shrewd foresight, one showed oneself to be an experienced man of affairs; by displaying *diligentia* ("scrupulousness") one proved to be as punctilious in fulfilling commitments to others as in looking after one's own affairs. The rich Latin moral vocabulary, predicated on an interlocking set of virtues that associated a sense of communal responsibility with personal freedom, was a constant point of reference even as class struggles, civil wars led by ruthlessly ambitious men of high rank, and the continual losses incurred in battles to acquire and retain an empire pushed society almost to the breaking point.

Virtues are sustained and given life through emotional dispositions, and here too the Romans emphasized those sentiments that were most productive of social awareness and restraint, namely the feelings that fall broadly under the modern umbrella term of shame. Latin had two words that are conventionally rendered as "shame," though they are subtly nuanced: *verecundia* and *pudor*. Each was concerned with monitoring the self in interpersonal dealings, and they did their work

in complementary ways. *Verecundia* can be described as “social worry”: you displayed it by showing, through your behavior, that you knew where you stood relative to other persons in a transaction, and what claim on your respect those others had. If you and the others were all *verecundi* (persons endowed with *verecundia*), you would each gauge your standing relative to the others; you would each present yourself in a way that at least did not give offense – for example, by confrontation or importunity – and that preferably signaled your full awareness of the others’ “face” – the characters they wore in the transaction and the respect that those characters were due; and you stopped short of overtly pressing your full claims, and yet were not excessively self-effacing – you did not obliterate your own face, the character you were wearing and the respect that it was due. As a form of self-consciousness, *verecundia* caused the question “How am I doing?” to form in the back of a Roman’s mind as he walked the tightrope of each transaction. But “face” and respect are closely dependent on status: how you treat an equal or superior differs markedly from the way you treat an inferior, for example a slave; thus, behind *verecundia* there was always the need to recognize the relative social standing of the other. It is remarkable that no surviving Latin text ascribes the sentiment of *verecundia* to a slave: slaves were not expected to engage in the delicate negotiations of status relations that were incumbent on free citizens, and constituted their subjective civic identity.

The complementary disposition of *pudor*, in turn, prompted a complementary question, “What if I fail?”; for it pondered the consequences should you fall from the tightrope. If you were *pudens* (a person endowed with *pudor*), you had what English calls “a sense of shame”: you sensed, or imagined, the consequences of an ethical lapse – of failing to display *fides*, say – and in your mind’s eye you saw your self being seen in discreditable terms (the same term, *pudor*, can also denote the painful emotion experienced when you have actually been “shamed”). The phrase “see your self being seen” suggests the splitting of the self that occurred when *pudor* was at work, as you saw your (potentially) discredited self being discredited at the same time that you were that discredited self (one recalls that Sartre defined the primary scene of shame as being seen while spying through a peephole). This is *pudor*’s theatrical dimension, which involved your being both the protagonist in a play about virtue and the audience of that play at one and the same time; and given that so much of Roman life was played out in public, with both successes and failures given the widest possible notice, we should understand the theatrical dimension quite literally. Taken together, *verecundia* and *pudor* helped to insure that the play came off smoothly, by constraining behavior and prompting displays of the virtues appropriate to the scene.

Our account has so far stressed the value that the Romans attached to making and honoring commitments, both to the community and to other individuals; some of the ethical qualities entailed in keeping one’s commitments; and two emotional dispositions that focused awareness on the self and its standing with respect to others. Following directly from these qualities, and implicit in them, is the value attached to reciprocity. For a Roman would not conceive of any commitment as a

one-sided thing. Every commitment that one kept imposed a new commitment on the other party to make an appropriate return, initiating or continuing a cycle that was in principle without end. That cycle pervaded every aspect of Roman life, and bound citizens together not only across space but across time – even generations – as well, insofar as reciprocity is a matter of a delayed return. At the broadest and most fundamental level, such reciprocity was embedded in the contractual premises of Roman Republican ideology, as in the concept of *fides*, the ideal of trust that was both a personal trait and the basis of legal transactions such as commerce and marriage. An individual's devotion to the public interest, for example, entailed a guarantee, or at least a promise, of an appropriate return: *do ut des*, in the Latin formula, "I give so that you give." Under such a contractual conception, such devotion should be requited, at the highest level, by traditional forms of honor, including public office (the same word, *honor*, denoted both "honor" and "office"), or at the very least by the protections afforded to all citizens by the community's laws. Once again, class relations were mediated by this kind of reciprocity: clients were expected to cast their votes for patrons who campaigned for office, and patrons were in principle committed to protecting their dependents before the law: the word *patronus* came to bear the sense of legal advocate (needless to say, such cases typically involved members of the upper classes). Of course, the *vir bonus* ("good *vir*" or "patriot") must still act for the *res publica* even if the actions of *mali* ("bad men" or "subversives") cause the contract temporarily to break down (break down, that is, in the eyes of the self-styled patriots). Divisions within the society were invariably cast in moral terms, and rebels such as the Gracchi or Catiline, who represented themselves as defending the interests of the oppressed poor, were depicted by their opponents as moral reprobates, lacking the minimal degree of temperance in the personal as well as the political sphere. But the normative expectation maintained by all sides was that manly or "virtuous" deeds on the commonwealth's behalf would spread a person's name, causing peers to judge him excellent and posterity to remember him respectfully, forever.

At another level, there were the forms of reciprocity involving other persons. The Romans had a rich vocabulary also for friendly relations. At the most intimate was the *amicus*, or "friend." Further out (though there is no strict order or hierarchy) stood *necessarii* (used of relations between equals, for example kin or political allies), *familiares*, *sodales*, *socii* (respectively "intimates," "companions," and "partners"), or simply those referred to as *sui*, "one's own." To succeed, whether at the lowest level at which subsistence itself was often in doubt or in the exalted game of social eminence and political power, one needed friends who could be trusted, in whose *fides* one had full confidence. Underwriting the ideal of friendship or *amicitia* was the sentiment of affection (*amicus* and *amicitia* are built on the same lexical root as *amor*, "love"), which was expected to obtain even though it was understood that friends offered practical advantages and entailed certain bonds of obligation: a friend who failed to provide assistance (assuming he was able) thereby manifested a lack of affection, which would have motivated him to be of help (the modern conception of friendship is no different in this respect). But *amicitia* had

a built-in limitation with respect to the need for social solidarity, for in principle it was assumed to exist between equals. As a sentiment, it might cross class barriers – the relation between Cicero and Tiro, his freedman and secretary is a good example – and there are cases in which a rich man and a poor formed a genuine bond of *amicitia*, even as they acknowledged the difference in status: thus, monuments are occasionally dedicated not just to one's *patronus* but to *patronus et amicus*, “patron and friend.” Then as now, moreover, people might pretend to friendship with their superiors, and those of a higher rank might politely refer to their lessers as friends. But no one was confused or misled by these courtesies, and the institution of patronage, however informal, stood in sharp contrast to that of *amicitia*. Solidarity across class lines was defined as *concordia ordinum*, the “harmony among the orders,” never as *amicitia*. Despite the ostensible legal equality of all citizens, the most personal of relationships revealed, precisely because of the implicit premise of equality, the non-egalitarian character of Roman society as a whole.

Ideally, friends possessed all things in common, and so could scarcely be said to give one another gifts (Seneca was cognizant of the problem, and said a gift between friends was like giving up your seat to someone in the theater: you do not own the seat, but can still perform a favor by relinquishing it [*On Benefits* 7.12]). In reality, of course, friends did services for one another, as did kin and partners and people loosely bound by goodwill and acquaintance. In these cases, gift-giving was part of a system of mutual exchange and obligation. The things exchanged, which could be any sort of material good or personal service, fell under two general rubrics, *beneficium* (plural *beneficia*, “kindness(es), favor(s)”) and *officium* (plural *officia*, “duty/ies, obligation(s)”). *Beneficia* and *officia* were complementary, in the sense that any *beneficium* I did for you imposed on you the *officium* or duty to make some appropriate return at some appropriate time. The kind and the occasion of the return were normally left unspecified, to be defined as the relationship evolved and the need arose. People involved in long-term relationships of this sort did not typically keep a precise accounting of *beneficia* bestowed and *officia* fulfilled but operated with a general sense of how the balance stood.

As with the virtues associated with mutual confidence among citizens, moreover, so too in the matter of interpersonal favors the sense of obligation was subtended by an emotion, namely *gratia* or gratitude; Cicero tells us, for example, that gratitude can be seen to operate even in small children, for it is so fundamental a part of the human psyche: “What a memory they have for those who have deserved well of them, what a passion to pay back a favor!” (*On Ends* 5.22.61). Among those who preferred to see themselves as *amici*, it commonly happened that when one did a good turn for the other, to discharge what was regarded as an *officium*, the other might choose to regard it as a *beneficium*, which would then impose on him the *officium* of making a return. An interesting instance may be found in the discourse of public elections, where, as we learn from an electioneering manual (possibly) composed by Cicero's brother, the term *amicus* had an exceptionally wide connotation: a candidate for office might present himself as one who had “deserved well of the Roman people” (*de populo Romano bene meritus*), that is, had served

them well and put them in his debt; but his subsequent election would be spoken of, not as the repayment of the people's debt and the discharge of an *officium*, but as the *beneficium populi Romani*, "the kindness of the Roman people."

In a society so conscious of the importance of friends and allies, it was an accepted fact that a person also had enemies or *inimici* (literally "not-*amici*"); the relationship with these people was called *inimicitiae* ("enmity, feud"). People became enemies when one did the other an *iniuria* ("wrong"): enmities, therefore, unlike friendships, were almost always entered into unwillingly and passively, insofar as others were presumed to have wronged you without provocation, whereas of course you hardly ever wronged others yourself. In this respect the ideology of Roman personal relations mirrored Rome's ideological approach to warfare, and might equally provide a moral cover for hostility and aggression: indeed, Julius Caesar offered, as an explicit justification for starting the civil wars of the 40s BCE, the need to defend his personal standing and prestige (*dignitas*) against the attacks of his *inimici*: "Pompey himself, incited by Caesar's enemies, because he was unwilling that anyone should be his equal in *dignitas*, had turned entirely away from Caesar's friendship and returned to favor with their common enemies" (*Civil War* 1.4). In justifying his march on Rome, Caesar exhorted his troops to "defend his reputation (*existimatio*) and *dignitas* against his enemies" (*Civil War*, 1.7; on *dignitas* or "worthiness," see below). Cicero, in turn, was at pains to explain the rupture of his *amicitia* with Marc Antony: "before I answer him on other matters, I shall say a few words on the *amicitia* which he charges me with having violated – a charge I consider to be extremely serious" (*Philippics* 2.3). An *iniuria*, then, could take many forms, ranging from material harm to the sort of insult damaging to a person's reputation. Unless the one who insulted you could plausibly be treated as someone unworthy of notice, the insult, no less than a material harm, obliged you to seek vengeance, which could vary considerably in timing and kind; and because the person who offered the original *iniuria* was likely to believe, or claim, that his act was innocent or justified, he would in turn regard your payback as mere aggression that required a response. This cycle of exchange, like the exchange of *beneficia* and *officia*, was open-ended and could continue from one generation to the next; as long as two *inimici* were alive, it could be ended only by a formal reconciliation (*in gratiam redire*, literally "to return to favor"). In principle, of course, exchange-obligations with enemies and friends alike took second place to one's obligation to the *res publica*: if one had to choose between advancing the common good and helping a friend or harming an enemy, there should be no question what the correct choice was. Yet Cicero felt obliged, in his treatise on *amicitia* (37), to refute the alleged willingness of a Stoic and friend of the Gracchi to burn down the temple of Jupiter should his friend request this of him, dismissing out of hand the man's defense that his friend would never ask him to perform so horrendous a deed. Politics could and did put a strain on relations among *amici*, when they saw each other as serving a cause that was inimical to what they took to be the collective well-being (once again, issues of class conflict come to the fore, since Cicero regarded the Gracchi as social subversives). To be able to advance the

common good while helping a friend and harming an enemy – that was the best circumstance of all, and itself fraught with ambiguity.

Beyond the exchange-relationships that structured dealings with friends, enemies, and the *res publica* as a whole, reciprocity was crucial to a Roman's relations with two other categories of being, one dead, the other incapable of dying: one's ancestors and the gods, toward both of whom one had to display the same attitude – *pietas*, “respect” or “devotion,” due also to parents on the part of children and indeed to children on the part of good parents. The Romans' relations with their gods form a topic that extends beyond the confines of this chapter, but we can stress a few key aspects of those relations here. A concern with the divine pervaded Rome's institutions and culture even more thoroughly than their concern with military affairs; central to that concern – indeed, close to an obsession – was the stress placed on effective communication with the realm of the gods.

As an example, we may take the concept of the *templum* (plural *templa*), the term from which English “temple” is derived, directly if a bit misleadingly. A *templum* was a space intended for the use of human beings, not a sacred structure set aside for the uses of the gods: not every “temple” – in the sense of a shrine consecrated to a deity – was located within a *templum* (the shrine of Vesta, goddess of the hearth, was not), nor was every *templum* associated with a “temple” (the senate house lay within a *templum* but was not a shrine). Rather, a *templum* was an “inaugurated” segment of space, an area defined by an augur's taking of auspices – observations of natural phenomena, especially the flight of birds – that signaled Jupiter's approval of the space's use: once the area was defined, it was thenceforth a space within which auspices could be taken – a space, in other words, where there was a clear, reliable, and approved channel of communication with the divine. But *templa* were not just spaces where auspices could be taken, to determine whether performing a specific action at a specific time and place was permissible from the gods' perspective. They were also the spaces within which all the most consequential acts of the Roman civil community were performed and all its most consequential decisions were made: the senate could not meet save in a *templum*; a magistrate could not address the Roman people save from a *templum* (the Rostra in the Roman Forum was an inaugurated space); a judicial process could not go forward save in a *templum*; ballots in a voting assembly (*comitia*) could not be cast save in a *templum*. In this respect the *civitas* lived out its life within spaces that were in especially close contact with the divine.

As a second example, we may consider the four major priestly “colleges” (*collegia*) of the civil apparatus, each of which fostered communication with the divine in a different way. The augurs, already mentioned, were priests who took the auspices by which places were inaugurated, and who also interpreted, as signs of the gods' will, omens seen in the behavior of birds or in celestial phenomena (especially thunder and lightning). The “Board of Two (later Ten, finally Fifteen) for Performing Religious Ritual” (*duoviri / decemviri / quindecimviri sacris faciundis*), despite its rather broad-sounding title, had a very specific charge: when directed by the senate, typically in response to grim portents or a crisis, they consulted

the Sibylline Books, a collection of oracles (in Greek), to find the divinely inspired clues for a remedy. By contrast, the remit of the “Board of Seven for Sacred Feasts” (*septemviri epulonum*) was exactly what their name implied, including especially responsibility for the great “feast of Jupiter” (*epulum Iovis*) held at the Roman Games every September, when the senate and people literally dined in the company of Juno, Minerva, and Jupiter Best and Greatest (Jupiter Optimus Maximus), whose images were brought down in solemn procession from the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline. The fourth and most important of these groups, the college of pontiffs (*pontifices*), had wide-ranging duties, which included advising the senate, magistrates, and private individuals on matters of sacred law. But their most important role involved the oversight of the civil community’s chief cult-activities, including the sacrifices, games, and other festivals by which the gods were honored and their goodwill retained.

That goodwill was of course crucial. Rome was able to thrive only when it enjoyed the *pax deorum* (“peace of the gods”), a condition possible only when human dealings with the gods were conducted in acceptable ways. These ways had much the same contractual and pragmatic basis as the dealings of one human being with another: *do ut des*, “I give so that you give.” On the human side, the giving took the form of sacrificial offerings and votive dedications, both of which kept alive the exchange between the human and divine realms. Sacrifice was a gift that secured divine goodwill for undertakings that ranged from the humbly personal to the grandly communal. A votive dedication fulfilled a sacred promise made at a moment of crisis or decisive action, a vow (*votum*) that you would make a suitable return if a god or gods saw you through the crisis or helped make your action successful.

Where acts of *pietas* toward the gods were largely intended to secure good things in the future, *pietas* toward your ancestors was plainly oriented toward the past. Here you were in the position of being the perpetual debtor. Your ancestors (indeed, your parents too) had already given you more than you could ever fully repay, both in the sense of being collectively responsible for your very existence and in the sense of being collectively responsible for much of the social standing and respect that you enjoyed. But being unable to repay the debt just meant that you were always aware of it – such awareness was at the heart of *pietas* which again was an emotional disposition as much as a virtue – and were always making the attempt. On the level of formal ritual, the attempt was most conspicuously embodied in the annual rites of the Parentalia, Feralia, and Caristia (13–22 February), days of remembrance on which the living made simple offerings to the friendly spirits of their dead, the *di parentes* (literally, “ancestor gods”). On the level of everyday behavior, one was expected to honor one’s ancestors just by living up to the standards they had set: texts commonly represent Romans, poised on the verge of action, reflecting on the course that would be most worthy of their ancestors. If you succeeded in regulating your life in this way, you could expect that future generations would in their turn fulfill their obligations by honoring you. And yet, here too social differences inflected the nature of one’s relations with the past. At the lowest level, slaves were presumed to have no parents, and hence no ancestors; although

they might remember mothers and fathers from whom they had been torn when captured, for example, they were legally without lineage. At the other extreme, aristocratic families kept wax masks of their prominent ancestors, which they displayed for example at funerals, as though they might assume their character or were marching under their watchful eyes. Such displays were, in turn, a fine opportunity for a competitive show of magnificence among the aristocratic clans.

If a Roman combined in his life all the forms of excellent action we have surveyed – performing manly deeds while serving the community in war and peace, maintaining his freely chosen commitments by displaying *fides* and the other associated virtues, and fulfilling the many obligations of reciprocity that bound him to the living, the dead, and the divine – then he could be said to embody three distinctively Roman qualities. First, he would possess *gravitas* (“weightiness” or “seriousness”) and be spoken of as “weighty *vir*” (*vir gravis*): that is, he had both feet on the ground and was anchored securely in his world, reliably behaving in a consistent and well-balanced way, the opposite of the person whose “lightness” (*levitas*) caused him to behave fecklessly and irresponsibly. He would walk with a measured step, speak in a deep voice, avoid gestures as simple as putting a finger to his temple, which might reveal a certain defect in masculinity. As a person of *gravitas* he would also possess *dignitas* (“worthiness”), an attribute signifying that he enjoyed a certain standing in the community – both his objective status (for example, as a magistrate vs. a private citizen, a free man vs. a slave) and the respect others were willing subjectively to grant him because of his own and his ancestors’ achievements – and that he was judged worthy of that standing. And since he possessed both *gravitas* and *dignitas*, he would also inevitably possess *auctoritas*, the quality that caused others to receive his suggestions as though they were binding injunctions and allowed him to gain his aim just because others were inclined to grant it. But such authority was never indifferent to legally backed power, whether a man manifested it within the household as a *paterfamilias*, with the massive control that this status conferred on him, or within the society as a whole as a respected voice in the senate. Precisely by blurring the boundary between moral suasion and compulsion, *auctoritas* was a concept perfectly suited to sustaining the image of a hierarchical social order that nevertheless rested on a base of personal rectitude, a conception that bestowed a certain legitimacy on the dominance of the Roman elite at home and abroad despite the foreign wars and internecine conflicts that plagued the republic throughout its history.

Rome’s value system was in many respects an intellectual construct, carefully elaborated to express and reinforce an idealized way of life that came under continual challenge and stress in the form of fierce personal competition, violence, and civil war. This very tension was responsible for the flourishing of rhetoric, political theory and law as scientific disciplines. It was the motive force behind Cicero’s political works such as the *Republic*, in which he imagines an ideal state that models what Rome should be. If we have located Rome’s intellectual achievement principally in the domain of values, it is because it is on this that the Romans themselves, like Anchises, most prided themselves, and because this is where they found the principal inspiration for their intellectual life.

Note

- 1 For secondary literature on the topics discussed, see the “Further reading” section at the end of this chapter.

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Further reading

- For a clear and accessible narrative of Roman history, see Mackay 2007; on the basic structures of Republican governance, see Brennan 2004. The extent to which Rome’s acquisition of an empire was the result of intentional policy remains controversial: for two opposing views see Harris 1979 and Gruen 1984.
- In the realm of values, Earl 1967 still offers the best general discussion in English of Rome’s ethical tradition, and Rosenstein 2006 gives an up-to-date survey. McDonnell 2006 is a thorough treatment of *virtus*, valuable for the cumulative picture it presents if unreliable in a

number of details and lines of interpretation. Edwards 1993 is an astute survey of moralizing discourse in Roman public life. Kaster 2005 discusses the normative emotions of *vercundia* and *pudor* in Chapters 1 and 2. A collaborative research project at the Technical University of Dresden has resulted in the publication of four volumes on Roman values and the Roman *mos maiorum*: see Braun *et al.* 2000 and Haltenhoff *et al.* 2003, 2005, and 2011. On “freedom,” see Wirszubski 1950, with the important discussion on “*Libertas* in the Roman Republic” in Brunt 1988: 281–350. The same collection contains Brunt’s equally important discussion of “friendship” (“*Amicitia* in the Roman Republic,” 351–81). For Roman religion, Beard, North, and Price 1998, and Scheid 2003 provide excellent orientations.