

Not Alone: A Proto-Transformational *Collegium* of Virtuous Friends
in Cicero's *De amicitia*

This presentation proposes a new reading of Cicero's *De amicitia*, both clarifying Cicero's theoretical commitments in his philosophical discussion of friendship while situating it in the broader context of Cicero's thinking on leadership. Cicero's proto-transformational leaders, we see, are not condemned to lonely lives of philosophical sagehood, but rather share in ideal friendships of political action (as suggested by the idealized friends he presents in his dialogues). Moreover, Cicero, far from advocating authoritarian rule of the rector-ideal, seems to suggest that a sort of 'transformational collegium' (borrowing from Julia Mebane's 'collegial governance') is possible. Importantly this then puts Cicero in conversation with contemporary trends in Leadership Studies. Further, Cicero's transformational leaders can be analyzed according to Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, one of the key research areas of the past 40 years of organizational psychology which sheds light on the importance of the leader-follower relationship in determining leadership quality.

The outlines of Cicero's theory of friendship and its importance for leadership consist in this. There is a symmetry to be found in the theory of the *Amic.* between two theories of friendship which, combined, constitute "perfect" friendships: ideal friendship (one that exists both in the theories of the philosophers and, rarely, Cicero's Laelius suggests, among human beings, which is characterized by wide-ranging and total intellectual and ethical agreement among small groups of human individuals) and non-ideal or common friendship (one that exists more commonly between people and is associated with *amor* and *caritas*). Cicero ingeniously suggests that both are necessary but not singly sufficient conditions for perfect friendship in the real world. Deep affection may exist between individuals whose chosen life paths diverge so

significantly that they are not, in the truest sense, best friends; some individuals, conversely, may exhibit near total compatibility in their character and intellectual beliefs but never develop the bonds of affection and love requisite for an actual, realized, human relationship. Interestingly, the *exempla* he then provides of the sorts of individuals who satisfy these two conditions—ideal and common friendship—and so show the possibility of realized ideal friendships are past political leaders who, in addition to being closest of friends, also relied on one another in the functions of their political leadership.

Acutely aware of the dangers of empty theorizing, Cicero takes special pains in the *Amic.* to provide us with examples of individuals who have enjoyed this sort of friendship which combines both idealized and common elements of *amicitia perfecta*. Even more, that we do not become pessimistic about the possibility of such a rare admixture ever coming about, he particularizes it and gives us an instance of it in the dialogue itself in highlighting the friendship of Laelius and Scipio. Thus the Romanized setting, too, of the dialogue is not an empty eulogy to the past serving Cicero's conservatism, but the way in which Cicero tries to show the apotheosis of the very best instances of friendship between people who not only feel great degrees of affection, love, and caring toward another—and happen to live close to one another—but who also share a deep, intellectual sort of kinship as well. Furthermore, some of these best instances of friendship even occurred as mature partnerships among leaders of virtuous character, relationships where honesty and forthrightness supported these friends' service to the commonwealth.

Indeed, I shall then show how the *Amic.* affords fruitful comparison between Cicero's theory and contemporary trends in Relational Leadership, a theoretical approach which shares much with Transformational Leadership but which focuses even more narrowly on the

relationships between leaders and followers and among all members of leadership teams. In particular, I will chart resonances between Graen and Uhl-Bien's famous three-phase model of leadership development in Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995) and Cicero's description of the common bonds of strangers, "vulgar" friendships, and the perfect friendships of good people of high character. These will be compared and contrasted with Graen & Uhl-Bien's demarcation of "stranger – acquaintance – mature partnership" leader-member exchanges in organizations and further developments in LMX research in the past three decades.

In sum, Cicero's discussion of virtuous leader-friendships will help to shed light on one of the most complex areas of leadership—the role of relationships, evidencing careful reflection on the great possibilities and dangers of such partnerships, fraught as they can be with bias, favoritism, and inequity, but nearly universal in their presence among leaders and the teams they assemble.