

RESTORING THE ANCIENT ROMAN VIRTUES



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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ROMAN VIRTUES:

The Roman poets of antiquity traditionally describe a time within the mythological mists of prehistory when paradise existed. This was when the god Saturn was to have ruled supreme. This period is romantically described as a time when virtuous conduct was universal. Men were just, pious, cooperative, equal and content with what they possessed. Like many such tales of utopian prehistory this era came to a close and humanity fell from virtue. Unlike similar tales, this fall from grace is not due to original sin, seeking illicit knowledge or other such notions. In antiquity, the fall was regarded as secondary to an epidemic of self-centredness. The noble concepts of virtue, such as moderation, equality, fairness, frugality, justice lost their primacy. Virtue became somewhat of a rarity, something that was not universally adhered to by all.

Virtue, or *virtus* in Latin is a term used to describe the ideal actions and qualities of a Roman. Originally the term was applied to men. The ancient female equivalent was regarded as *prudentia*, or prudence. The ancient Latin literature mentioning the term *virtus* is vast. Despite this, we frustratingly have no dedicated work from any ancient Roman writer specifically focused on or examining *virtus*. We have no detailed ancient definition of the term, and no exhaustive ancient examination of the ideas and behaviours associated with this important concept. We can assume that the term in antiquity was so well understood and ingrained culturally that a formal definition was deemed of little use. Because of the lack of a formal ancient definition of the virtues any “official list” of Roman virtues is a contemporary construct. Such modern lists are loosely based on recent interpretations of ancient works, or the names of deities who were to represent personifications of ideals that could be regarded as virtues. It is important to note that such modern lists of Roman virtues may not be recognizable to the ancient Roman. Because of this the Roman Republic refrains from producing an exhaustive list of virtues.

Despite the difficulties in examining the ancient understanding of the virtues, we do have many useful modern scholarly evaluations of this topic. It is clear is that the term *virtus* characterized the ideal behaviour of a Roman. Universally, the term described the noble and traditional qualities that played a central role in life, be it war, politics, domestic, social and business relationships. The virtues extend to all realms of life, public and private. Those who write about *virtus* during antiquity clearly associate the deeds and actions associated with this term as being responsible for the greatness of Roman accomplishments, and central to the construction of the ancient Roman self-image. The significant importance of *virtus* to Roman cultural identity is eloquently emphasized by Cicero, “Cling fast to (*virtus*), I beg you men of Rome, it is a heritage that your ancestors bequeathed you. All else is false and doubtful, ephemeral and changeable; only *virtus* stands firmly fixed, its roots run deep, it can never be shaken by any violence, never moved from its place.”

In antiquity, the virtues acted as a means of social and moral direction. They acted as a means to prevent or correct moral and ethical offenses. *Virtus* also acted as a tool for self-reflection and a guide towards productive community participation. It was rather unchanging over generations with a strong



historical tradition. Virtus was a social constant, and the core of Roman social expectations. All ethical and moral Romans would be encouraged to strive towards the ideal of possessing the virtues.

The evidence firmly supports that virtus in ancient times encompassed a multitude of behaviours associated with morality and ethics. Together these concepts fashioned a roadmap towards living an honourable, happy, productive, and fulfilling life. Some of the ideas regarded as virtuous are concepts such as, justice, sense of responsibility, liberty, resolve, industriousness, truthfulness, self-discipline, modesty, reliability, piety, health of body and mind, and many more. The Roman Republic strives to return the traditional ancient Roman virtues to the forefront of life. The foundation of the modern Res Publica Romana is based upon the belief that these values form the bedrock upon which Western civilization is constructed. We believe that a return to emphasizing these noble qualities will help rekindle an understanding of the Roman past while resurrecting the best of ancient Roman culture for life in the present-day.

The Roman Republic is dedicated toward living the virtues and making them once again central to one's personal identity as a Roman living in the modern era. Although the qualities regarded as virtuous in antiquity are not clearly laid out in our historical sources, a scholarly approach towards systematically analysing historical sources can shed light on what the virtues were, and what concepts were commonly regarded as fundamental virtues. In developing a firm understanding of the past in this manner, we can better understand virtus and incorporate it into our lives today.

Pliny was wise in writing, "we need example more than we need rule. Fear is an unreliable teacher of what is right. Men learn better from examples, which are particularly good because they prove that what is taught can actually be done." Likewise, the great instructor Quintilian wrote, "could there be better teachers of courage, justice, loyalty, self-control, frugality, or contempt for pain and death than men like Fabricius, Curius, Regulus, Decius, Mucius, and countless others?" This guide will heed the advice of these learned men from the Roman past and attempt to highlight the virtues with examples from antiquity.

Antiquity in many ways was not that different from today. It would also be naive to believe that these virtues were pursued and exhibited by the majority with reliable frequency. The diversity of character found in ancient Rome is described best by the ancient playwright Titus Maccius Plautus. In describing the individuals found in the forum he states, "From virtue down to trash, here is the gods' plenty". Such a spectrum in character is no different today, but the authors of this text do believe most people aspire to be good. The virtues are a guide. We are all imperfect and being virtuous is hard and takes continuous effort. Nevertheless, the qualities in this guide present foundational values which take us a step closer to the great Romans of antiquity and to the perfection to which we all should strive.



UNDERSTANDING THE VIRTUES

Because of the ancient social ubiquity about the term virtue, no ancient author, as far as we are aware, dedicated an entire work towards defining what the ancient virtues were. Hints are presented as different authors gave different descriptions of the virtues that they felt were most important. What is moral and ethical is a topic that is debated today and was debated in antiquity as well. It is very unlikely that any definitive and widely agreed upon list of virtues was agreed upon in antiquity. However, it is clear that the ancients understood what was virtuous based on a strong social tradition. Nevertheless, the gaps in our understanding creates a problem for one who desires to restore ancient Roman virtues for the modern-day and leads us to ask the question, what behaviours and ideas were virtuous to the ancients? What would most Romans from the ancient republic view as fundamental to virtue?

Luckily, the ancient literature is rich in descriptions of virtuous behaviour. Ancient authors also mention different behaviours and actions which were considered virtuous. To compliment this, we have ancient correspondence alluding to virtue indirectly. From these sources, we can use scholarly and systematic methodology to reconstruct the ancient Roman virtues as the Roman citizens of the ancient republic understood them.

The primary purpose of this text is to define the ancient Roman concept of virtue from the perspective of the primary evidence. It will draw upon examples handed down to us in the sources. It will also describe a novel system of grouping and describing the virtues identified. This work will concentrate on developing an understanding of the ancient Roman virtues which makes sense for the needs of today. To further illustrate the virtues this guide will examine some of the relevant ancient sources for further inspiration towards becoming more virtuous in our everyday lives.

METHODOLOGY AND APPLICATION:

INTEGRITAS AS A GUIDE TOWARDS DISCOVERING THE ROMAN VIRTUES

In many of the works that have come down to us, Romans mention being ethically constant (integer) or possessing ethical consistency (integritas). From this description of “ethical consistency” the English notion of personal integrity is derived. The Romans used the word integritas as a means of describing the procession of an assortment of desirable traits held by a person. These desirable traits reflect those qualities commonly regarded as virtuous. Together these traits formed the system by which one governed themselves and self-regulated their actions. Therefore, the Roman with integrity would analyse a situation in which they were to respond based on what they knew as virtuous. In essence, the ancient Roman with integrity could determine if action XYZ is forbidden (or not) based upon their notion of what virtuous and conveyed integrity. Likewise, they could determine a virtuous response to a situation in a similar manner.



Based on the relationship between *integritas* and the virtuous traits, the modern scholar can deduce what was commonly regarded as a virtuous action or idea. By analyzing ancient descriptions of the traits associated with being ethically consistent, or *integer* a greater understanding of the Roman concept of virtue is acquired. Such a methodology can be applied by systematically evaluating the ancient literature for the words “*integritas*” and “*integer*”. When these terms are found any description of associated virtuous traits can be noted. Fascinatingly, scholar and classicist Robert Kaster evaluated numerous ancient works in this manner and revealed trends in the associated virtues. In conducting this survey, it was found that descriptions of many traits are repeated across authors and time periods. Therefore, in performing this systematic evaluation the range of virtuous qualities essential to the Roman concept of ethical consistency becomes clear. We become a step closer to the actual ancient Roman definition of the virtues and how the concept was understood in antiquity. We free ourselves from the modern construct of “lists” of virtues. Instead a complex series of ideas that overlap and are closely tied together emerges. (See the diagram below)

The modern Roman Republic believes that the results of this scholarly survey best describe the core qualities associated with ancient Roman cultural views on the virtues. Together when exemplified these virtues form the core of what it means to be a role model Roman. We believe this stands as true today as it did when Cato walked the streets of Rome.

Historically, some modern interpretations of the virtues have separated the traits into public and private spheres. For example, virtues applicable to private life versus public office being separate exclusive lists of traits. The Roman Republic argues that this delineation is somewhat artificial at best and confusing and misleading at worst. We believe that thinking of the virtues as strongly context specific does not reflect the views of antiquity. The ancient understanding of the virtues suggests ubiquity across both public and private life, at least in regards to the most fundamental and widely agreed upon virtues.

Interestingly, this systematic review of the ancient literature clearly reveals two different situations in which these virtues are demonstrated. Robert Kaster’s systematic analysis revealed virtuous traits which are of a more personal nature, as well as traits that can only be exemplified in a social setting. Virtues that are of a personal quality are actions and behaviours that do not require the presence of another person in order to embody. These personal virtues could theoretically be demonstrated while stranded alone on an isolated island. For example, such traits would be self-control or being resolute. Conversely, the social virtues can only be demonstrated in the presence of one or more individuals. Some of these traits would be justice or good faith. For one to be a well-rounded individual, they must be proficient within both categories of virtue

The Roman Republic encourages understanding the virtues as these two overlapping and inclusive categories (see diagram below). Not only does this better reflect the ancient Roman understanding of *virtus* as reflected in the sources but it also underlines how the personal and social virtues are very much complimentary to each other. To be proficient in one category requires proficiency in the other. To be an individual with *integritas* requires an awareness of the virtues beyond one limited and narrow category. Conversely, strength in the personal virtues strengthens one’s social virtues and vice versa.



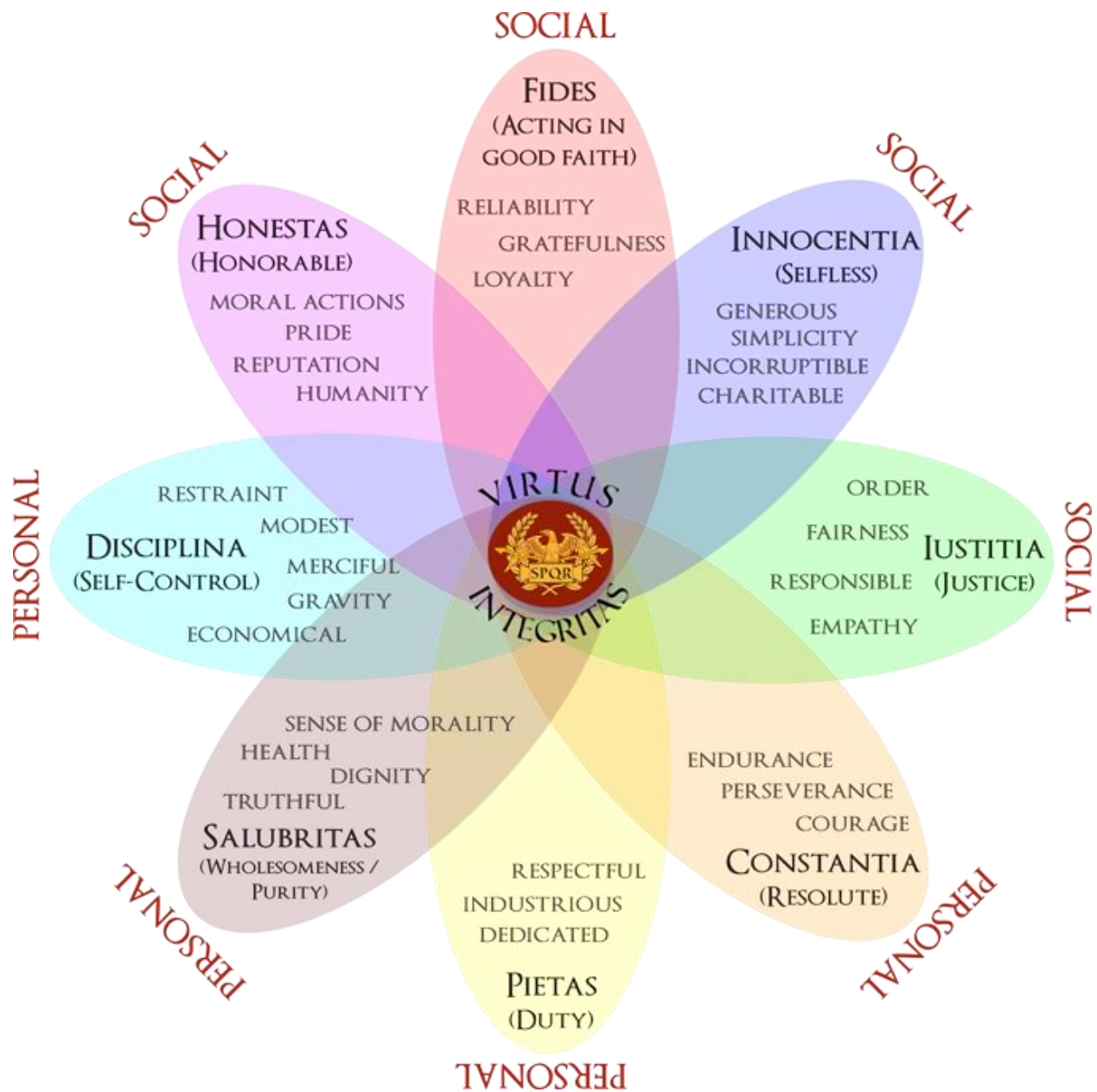
This categorization assists in understanding and teaching the virtues while also acknowledging the inseparability of the categories in practice.

Many of the virtues listed in the survey of the literature by Robert Kaster share commonalities. This is one of the reasons why lists of virtues can be misleading. Using the most frequently stated terms as titles for “themes” allows for the distillation of the virtues into eight core concepts with associated sub-virtues or qualities. These core virtues are: good faith, innocence, resolve, honour, duty, justice, restraint, and purity. Creation of these themes is a modern construct; however, it reflects the most frequent terms referenced in the sources while acknowledging the breadth, and close ties between virtuous concepts listed in the literature. We find this arrangement useful in understanding the virtues and the relationships between the different qualities. It also emphasizes the close-knit relationship between many of the Roman ideas about virtue and highlights how the virtuous individual must master multiple interrelated traits in order to achieve *integritas*. Although distilling the virtues down in this manner is a modern decision, the Roman Republic believes that by doing so we are better reflecting the popularly understood model from antiquity.

It should be noted that the virtues derived from the systematic evaluation by Robert Kaster do not include all possible virtues. Instead, the virtues listed are those most commonly associated with civilian life. For example, some military virtues may exist that would not be easily translatable to civilian life. Furthermore, it is best to view these virtues as the foundation upon which to build one’s own *Romanitas* and moral compass. Like the ancients, these virtues should be viewed as the core qualities of any virtuous Roman. They are constant across generations and all situations but are not exclusive and exhaustive of all possible virtues.



THE CORE ROMAN VIRTUES



VISUAL MODEL OF THE ROMAN CONCEPT OF INTEGRITAS



THE PERSONAL VIRTUES:

I. RESOLUTE | CONSTANTIA

Constantia is the virtue that drives an individual to pursue a purpose and realize a goal. Unsurprisingly this virtue is heavily linked to the virtue of self-control, thus, to realize constantia requires the virtue of disciplina and vice-versa. Constantia is unique from disciplina in that this virtue refers to the personal will, stamina and **perseverance** of an individual. It is the quality that stops one from emotionally giving up when faced with challenges or adversity. Such resilience is important because overcoming challenges is at the core of what it means to be a Roman.

Without constantia an individual is never committed, they roam from task to task and never achieve any goal. Conversely, it is important not to mistake this virtue as stubbornness. Other virtues such as fides and honestas remind one always to remain flexible and open to cooperation. A strong drive towards a goal should remain grounded in reality and keep the greater good in mind.

Endurance, both of mind and body, are essential to constantia. During many centuries of the Roman Republic, a citizen could find themselves defending their community on the battlefield. Physical fitness and therefore endurance were ideals held in high regard. These qualities were essential during the rigors of battle. Today we often neglect physical wellbeing, but we do this at our peril. Being physically healthy helps the mind to be healthy. The stronger the mind and body the better one can face daily challenges both mental and physical. In this respect, the virtue of salubritas and the associated quality of physical health is important to the demonstration of constantia.

The Latin word for virtus can be translated as manliness or excellence. In this capacity, the term can refer to any of the virtues. However, the word virtus can also be viewed as courage. The quality of **courage** falls within the framework of constantia. Without constantia, courage is impossible. Being resolute in goals prevents cowardice, and harmful self-doubt. Standing firm in one's goals also provides self-esteem, it adds to a sense of personal worth. It provides purpose and a meaning to life and allows for unforeseen opportunities. The historians provide numerous examples of stunning courage. Men such as Gaius Mucius Scaevola defying the Etruscan enemy while placing his hand into a flame demonstrates that Romans seized challenges as opportunities to exemplify courage and the best of their personal virtues. Likewise, we can recall the tale of Publius Horatius Cocles, who voluntarily held a bridge against the Etruscan invaders with two of his colleagues. In this feat, he faced an almost certain death in order to protect Rome. Livy tells us that many decades later the survivors of the defeat at Cannae requested the very toughest and most dangerous roles in the next confrontation with the Carthaginians. Livy goes on to explain that this request was made not for glory, but to prove their spirit. Similar to these dramatic examples, we should also strive to embrace challenges as opportunities to prove our resolve.



Overcoming challenge with **perseverance** was an essential part of Roman life. Seneca sums it up nicely writing, “The greater the torment, the greater the glory”. Similarly Cicero wrote, “The greater the difficulty, the greater the splendour”. At the moment of one of Rome’s greatest disasters, Livy with pride states, “No other nation in the world could have suffered so tremendous a series of disasters and not been overwhelmed. The great soul of the Romans was revealed in their unwillingness to so much mention peace after Cannae.” To the Roman’s overcoming hardship and remaining steadfast and determined was at the heart of their identity. This trait extends to the very origins of the Roman people themselves. One is reminded of this in the description of Aeneas fleeing the burning Troy carrying his elderly father. This great hero of the Roman people at one of his lowest points soon after is said to have founded the descendant peoples who would build the city of Rome. In our lives, we should also remain confident in our abilities and remain resolute and find opportunities that are hidden within hardship.

II. DUTY | PIETAS

In modern times, the term “piety” often inspires connotations to religion. In ancient Rome, the term pietas held a more broad meaning. It is best to think of Roman pietas as **respect** for the order of both mortal and divine. This sense of respect most commonly manifests itself as a sense of **duty** and **dedication** towards others and ourselves. The virtue of pietas calls one to recognize the benefits of a just and virtuous society based on reciprocal duties. With this recognition, one is called to respect those who hold positions of leadership. Such respect can be manifested in various ways, be it respect for one’s parents, employers, role models, and community leaders. This respect should acknowledge the work and virtues demonstrated by these individuals in order to achieve and to carry out their role. In granting this respect, one should receive respect in kind. Furthermore, this recognition of the social order pays homage to other virtues such as fides, honestas, and iustitia.

The sense of respect towards the social order should also extend to oneself. In this capacity, the individual should be able to identify the role they play in the lives of others. One should be able to recognize the duty they have towards family, friends, colleagues, and to the larger community. In recognizing the role to be played one can be cognizant to fulfil the expectations of others. One must be mindful of the impact they have on others and the far-reaching consequences of negligence in fulfilling one’s expected duties. A lack of respect for one’s responsibilities violates the principles of multiple virtues and can only bring dishonour to an individual and hardship to the people they serve. If one fails in being mindful of their duties they are in danger of being regarded as irresponsible, careless, and unreliable. Livy provides a dramatic example of a deficit in pietas. He describes the newly elected consul, Gaius Flaminius, who enters into battle against Hannibal without fulfilling his consular responsibilities prior to departing. The result is a dramatic Roman defeat at Trasimene Lake.

In contrast, an extraordinary example of Roman duty was demonstrated by Publius Decius Mus. Decius Mus was a consul during the Latin Revolt. While leading Rome’s forces in battle, a moment occurred when it appeared the tide was about to turn against Rome. Decius Mus realizing this critical moment summoned a priest, took off his armour and put on his consular toga. He then prayed to the gods and



devoted his life as a sacrifice if the Romans were to win the day. With the prayer compete he charged into the enemy force sword unsheathed. He left his armour behind wearing only his purple trimmed toga of a consul as he urged on and inspired his soldiers. The Roman forces emerged victorious, and Decius Mus survived the battle and became a figure of legend.

In our dedication to others, we should also be mindful of our responsibility towards the greater community in which we belong. As Decius Mus reminds us, it was not uncommon in ancient times for the citizen to defend their community by placing their lives in danger as a citizen soldier. At other times, those Romans who could spare their material possessions would donate financially to the state during times of crisis. Livy explains that the wealthy citizens of Rome were instrumental in funding the rebuilding of the Roman Naval Fleet upon defeat by the Carthaginians. Likewise, we must also play an active role in our communities. One should remember the virtue of *innocentia* and how calls us to be generous and charitable. A sense of duty should compel the virtuous individual to contribute their time, skills, and resources to their larger community whenever able. In other words, *pietas* calls one to participate in public life. In this manner it can be manifested as voting in assemblies, offering expertise when required, and contributing resources when able.

Like many of the other virtues, *pietas* also demands action. As previously mentioned, every individual has a duty towards others. The action involved in fulfilling this duty requires diligent work. Ancient Romans emphasized the positive attribute of **industriousness**. One should be dedicated to completing required tasks. The benefits of this are twofold. Firstly, it benefits those whom we serve. Secondly, it allows the individual to feel fulfilled. The successful completion of challenging tasks gives one's life meaning. The ancients were astutely aware of this. Working itself is not purely utilitarian, is an expression of compassion, dedication, and gratefulness towards others and an outward manifestation of joy for one's life.

Every individual should fight against the vice of idleness. Procrastination and laziness, not only takes one further away from the virtue of *pietas*, but it also makes it nearly impossible to fulfil the other virtues. Likewise, the additional virtues, especially those of *disciplina* and *constantina* can greatly assist the virtuous individual in fulfilling their duties through industrious action.

III. PURITY | SALUBRITAS

The term, “*Salibritas*” can be translated into English as, **wholesome**, healthy or **pure**. The ancient Romans described wholesomeness within two contexts, the first being whole or healthy in relation to one's personal values, ethics, and mental mindset. The second relates to being healthy in regards to one's physical well-being. Uniting these ideas is the concept of overall mental, physical, and spiritual purity and health. In other words, one can only be “whole” if they are fully healthy and have dignity.

The idea of ethical or moral wholeness is strongly attached to the concept of *integritas*. In ancient times, the virtues were fundamental towards being a morally complete individual. Concepts of morality had associations with religious thought. However, these theological associations were flexible and highly



dependent on individual interpretation. There was no central religious codification of what was moral and what was not. Ancients took a sophisticated and complex approach towards ethical reasoning through the use of philosophy, namely stoicism, epicureanism, and cynicism. A detailed analysis of moral and ethical philosophy is beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, fundamental to exhibiting salubritas is having a solid personal **moral and ethical framework**. One must also be able to apply this framework consistently across a multitude of situations while demonstrating the numerous core virtues.

Important to any moral framework is the concept of **truthfulness** and honesty. Because of this, the value of truthfulness is an important aspect of salubritas. One cannot be morally whole or pure if they are dishonest and deceitful. The ancients were very much aware that obscuring the truth is often done in an attempt to justify unvirtuous actions and perfect, albeit falsely, one's personal image. Ironically, a lack of truth and honesty only harms the individual conjuring up such deceit. Even if the community is unaware of the deception, an individual can never truly deceive themselves. Thus, only through being truthful can the other virtues be fully realized and can one live a genuinely happy life.

A humble inscription found on the wall of an ancient Roman farm near modern Forlì describes this element of salubritas elegantly and simply, "Take all this as true advice, whoever wants to live really well and freely... Earn others' trust. Don't speak or listen to slander. If you don't harm or betray anyone, you will lead a pleasant life, uprightly and happily, giving no offense."

Mutual honesty is also a fundamental quality of the virtue of fides. In order to develop productive relationships with others, we must be able to expect reciprocal truthfulness in our dealings. Those who tarnish themselves with lies and half-truths diminish our ability to demonstrate good faith (fides). It is clear ancient Romans believed one could not reasonably expect reciprocated truthfulness unless both parties uphold their honesty to each other and themselves. In this respect, the personal purity of character and salubritas is held in great esteem.

A crucial component of mental well-being is a sense of personal **dignity**. In ancient times, the notion of human dignity was only extended to those who were male citizens. Over the centuries, human rights have advanced significantly. Fortunately, today we extend the concept of dignity and human worth to all people irrespective of gender, ethnicity, or beliefs. With this said, the Romans clearly understood the benefits of a collective sense of dignity. It was firmly believed that when personal self-worth was extended to a community that all individuals within the group benefited and virtuous behaviour was correspondingly encouraged. Appreciating a sense of value in one's self, provides inspiration and the means to express the other virtues. It motivates towards a sense of duty, industriousness and responsibility towards others in the community. It also empowers one towards self-control and self-improvement. It facilitates a personal sense of purpose. Like many other traits mentioned, dignity is strongly tied to the other virtuous qualities. One of the most effective ways of increasing one's sense of worth is through the discipline of exhibiting virtuous behaviour in our lives. In all these respects, a sense of dignity is essential towards purity of mind and a prerequisite for receiving the virtue of honour.

The importance of Roman dignity is stressed in the very founding of the ancient republic. The matron Lucretia was raped by a member of the royal family, Lucius Tarquinius. She was so disturbed by this



infringement on her dignity that she commits public suicide. Before doing so, she was to have said, “my body only has been violated. My heart is innocent death will be my witness”. This trauma and gross infringement of one’s dignity so enraged the people of Rome that the monarchy was overthrown and Brutus, one of the first consuls, swore that never again would there be king of Rome.

Related to a sense of dignity is an awareness and appreciation for one’s physical **health**. If one has a sense of personal self-worth, they should also inherently care about their physical body. One should not judge the status of health in others, but they should encourage others to care about their physical well-being. When one is physically fit, they are more industrious, energetic, and active members of their community. Similarly, a physically fit individual tends to be a happier person. The Romans were very aware of the need to live healthily. The Roman ideas about medicine and health were exceptionally advanced for the times, and such an understanding of health would not be surpassed in the Western world until the 19th century. This insight inspired the creation of the field now known as public health. On a public level, the Romans promoted health within communities by providing well-known engineering feats, such as the aqueducts and baths. The ancients clearly recognized the links between health, productivity, and happiness on a community scale. On a personal level, fitness was essential if the Republic was to survive. In no small part, this was because the average male citizen expected also to be a soldier. In the promotion of such fitness, Romans were heavily influenced by the Greeks. Sports such as wrestling, weightlifting, boxing, running, and various ball-related sports assisted in this aim.

In the modern era, we often neglect the importance of physical fitness. We forget the important role health plays in our ability to be happy and productive members of society. In order to be truly whole individuals must also take care of our physical bodies. We must treat our physical being with the respect and dignity it deserves. We should make a conscientious effort to strive towards healthy habits and physical activity. On this topic, Plutarch states, “do not behave will like ship-owners who load their vessel so heavily that they constantly have to bail out the seawater.” In this case, Plutarch is suggesting we not overload our bodies with food and other excesses. Instead, we should care for our body in order to optimize its function. The virtue of discipline and moderation can greatly assist in achieving these aims. Likewise, striving towards health can enhance our self-control over other realms of life and develop excellent habits. Overall, in endeavouring for health, we elevate our sense of dignity and salubritas, and enhance our ability to further other virtuous actions.

IV. SELF-CONTROL | DISCIPLINA

The concept of self-control is at the heart of the Roman model of the virtues. The ability to self-regulate one’s impulses is known as the virtue of disciplina, or **discipline**. Without one having an awareness and eventual mastery of disciplina realizing the other virtues is nearly impossible. In ancient Rome displays of **self-restraint** are fundamental in demonstrating fides, justice, salubritas, and honour. Likewise, stringent self-regulation was critical in preventing lapses when demonstrating the virtues of, innocentia, constantia, and pietas. This virtue was so critical that it became central to the idealized self-identity of the Romans. There are many examples in the ancient literature of displays of self-control being idealized



and romanticized. Thus, it goes without saying that the honourable Roman who was virtuous and possessed integrity also inevitably demonstrated disciplina.

Self-control is critical if we are to embrace the benefits and pleasures of free self-expression. Discipline over our actions, words, and thoughts is the failsafe which protects from personal excess within open societies. A major obstacle preventing virtuous behaviour is the multitude of temptations before us every day. Such temptations are as much a reality of life today as it was during the ancient Roman Republic. Disciplina is the primary defence mechanism against such hurdles. In order to achieve discipline over our lives, we must establish clear goals and patterns of behaviour. Luckily, the foundational virtues described in this work provide just such a roadmap. Once virtuous patterns of behaviour are recognized we can be motivated towards achieving these well-defined objectives. Furthermore, acknowledging the joys in living the virtues can introduce a strong sense of purpose into our lives. This sense of purpose is fundamental in motivating one away from vice and inspiring self-control over our lives.

Developing self-control also allows the demonstration of **gravity**. Gravitas is frequently mentioned in ancient sources. This term refers to recognizing the importance of ongoing matters. On the most basic level, this requires insight into self and others. In utilizing a keen sense of discipline, one can recognize the feelings and concerns of others over their personal emotions and interests. This insight allows one to regulate their responses accordingly. Such a skill is important in any social interaction. It provides the ability to conduct one's self appropriately in various social situations. Furthermore, the insight provided by a sense of gravity also encourages the individual to recognize their social responsibilities and take such obligations seriously and with a sense of gravity.

Another fundamental aspect of disciplina is **frugality** and **modesty**. The ancient Romans idealized modesty and simplicity of lifestyle. Poetically, the ideal Roman was one who was a hard-working agriculturalist of humble origins and means, figures such as Cincinnatus. An extravagant lifestyle was considered a temptation towards vice and took one away from Romanitas. Similarly, a lack of modesty was viewed as a dangerous harbinger of selfishness and moral decay. In interpreting the Roman notion of frugality, we must be careful to not misinterpret this quality as stinginess or poverty. Instead, it speaks to self-control and responsible managing of finances and luxuries. In this manner, Cato the Elder wrote, "want not what you need, but by what you must have ". Conscientious frugality reminds the individual that the purpose of life in-of-itself is not the accumulation of wealth. The generation of riches is alone not a virtue. Wealth is simply a tool, not a means to an end. Wealth misused was recognized as a potential obstacle towards realizing many of the virtues. Riches without careful management could lead to corruption, lack of humility, excessive pride, slothfulness, unhealthiness, selfishness and an overall lack of discipline.

Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, although not always modest, demonstrated profound modesty when it mattered most. During the Second Punic War, Scipio was initially an untested general and young man in his mid-twenties. By the time, he was thirty years old he had succeeded in capturing all of Spain from the Carthaginians. He had many reasons to be proud and ambitious. After the successful battle of Baecula, the Spanish tribes hailed Scipio as a king. The modest young general would have none of such



displays of praise. He called the Spanish leaders together and told them, “I am happy to be spoken of as kingly, and to act in a kingly manner, but I do not want to be a king or receive this title from anyone.”

Another quality associated with disciplina is **mercy**. Granting mercy requires significant self-control. One must overcome anger and bitterness in order to facilitate the greater good. It is easy to act out of spite and spontaneous emotion, especially when wronged or harmed. However, decisions made under such conditions rarely result in virtuous outcomes. More often than not, demonstrating a lack of mercy leads to injustice, dishonourable actions, and diminishing of good faith. Without mercy, one becomes cold, cruel and prone to prejudice. Conversely, demonstrating or accepting mercy provides many potential benefits. It is the ultimate display of fides. In this capacity, it can create alliances and enhance friendships. Merciful actions also prevent the growth of long-term bitterness and grudges.

Demonstrations of mercy are honourable acts. Such goodwill is a powerful demonstration of one’s appreciation of humanity, and one’s respect and dignity towards others. Just such dignity was afforded to the city of Carthago Nova during the Second Punic War. When Scipio Africanus successfully captured the city of New Carthage he forbid the population of the city from being harmed. The Roman forces obeyed and showed great restraint. This degree of mercy was unusual for this period of history and especially for this particular conflict. The result of such mercy was the Spanish tribes praising Scipio and switching sides in the struggle and embracing Rome.

THE SOCIAL VIRTUES:

I. ACTING IN GOOD FAITH | FIDES

The term fides has evolved significantly from the republican period to the modern day. With the rise of Christianity the Latin term, “fides” became regarded as the equivalent of the modern English term “faith”. The Christian understanding and use of the word faith is very different from the original term used during the Roman Republic. The original term was much broader. Fides originally was used to define the character of an individual in their social affairs. In this manner, the closest English equivalent can be regarded as “**acting in good faith**”. To demonstrate fides one must demonstrate **reliability**, trust and loyalty. It requires a mutual sense of obligation between both parties in any partnership. Cicero described fides as truth and reliability in words and actions. In other words, an individual is only as good as their word.

The virtue of fides was fundamental to the manner in which Romans conducted international affairs. On a grand scale, the concept of good faith is demonstrated by the manner in which the Romans incorporated conquered peoples into the Roman social system. To be Roman was never a concept linked to ethnicity. Rome as a nation was always a collaborative project that thrived on incorporating former enemies into law abiding and proud Romans. Such a system was incredibly successful and benefited both those who traced their family histories back to the seven hills and also those who never laid foot in



the eternal city. This arrangement was only possible because of the mutual appreciation of fides. Fides allowed the vanquished to thrive and conquer to become allies and friends. It reestablished a social harmony. Conversely, the ancients sarcastically referenced the “fides of a Carthaginian”. Such a statement demonstrates the Roman understanding of a lack of fides. It implies treachery and an inability to develop trust or a mutually beneficial relationship.

Relationships that demonstrate fides are not one sided. Acts demonstrating fides should be met with **gratefulness** and a return in good faith. The demonstration of fides should have all parties demonstrating this virtue. Fides describes relationships that are implied to be reciprocal, mutual and transparent. Importantly, **loyalty** is implied if the other party is ethical in their actions. In this light, fides requires selflessness, it means putting the needs of others and the community before self and striving for the ethical wellbeing of all.

Fides can also be viewed as a guarantee of action. Be this fulfilling an agreement or following through with a course of promised action. Those with a reputation of exemplifying this virtue will find that their word carries significant weight, as their verbal promises guarantee the fulfillment of an action. Fides is not exclusive to public, private or religious life. Instead, it encompasses all elements of one's relationship with others. For example, it can be shown between the state and the citizen, business owner and patron, the father and son, two friends or between worshiper and the divine.

Demonstrating fides strengthens relationships, builds the confidence of others, and promotes mutually beneficial actions. It is essential for all healthy relationships both in relation to family and community life.

When we view fides in this manner, it is clear that it describes the very social adhesive that binds society together. Without a certain degree of fides existing within a community civilization would cease to function; furthermore, many of the other virtues such as honour and justice would be impossible to demonstrate without a strong sense of fides.

II. SELFLESS | INNOCENTIA

The Roman notion of innocentia differs from the modern notion of innocence from which the English term derives. Innocence does not imply gullibility or unawareness. Instead, it implies innocence in motivation towards pursuing a course of action. Any action performed should not result in a transgression or guilt. This virtue can be viewed as being motivated by causes that benefit more than one's personal interests, or put simply as being motivated by **selfless** action. **Generosity and charity** are essential components of this virtue.

To demonstrate innocentia requires a desire to strive towards the greater good over self-enrichment or aggrandization. The individual who demonstrates innocentia is altruistic and benevolent. Such kindness may include financial generosity, but is not limited to only monetary donations. Charity of action and thought are essential attributes of this virtue.



The selflessness that is vital in demonstrating innocentia requires the individual to be **repulsed by corruption**. One who is innocentia does not use power or influence to benefit themselves at the expense of others or the community. Those with this virtue have zero tolerance for corruption as it is the anti-thesis of this trait. Unsurprisingly, for this reason, innocentia is a virtue highly valued and expected of those who hold public office or other positions of influence.

The demonstration of this virtue also requires insight into one's character. An individual cannot be selfless if they are not aware of how their actions and behaviours influence those around them. Those who demonstrate innocentia have the ability to reflect on their actions before and after they occur. They are aware of all virtues and strive towards being one who is ethically whole or, in other words, demonstrate integritas. Due to this insight they can act morally and align their motivations toward action accordingly.

Also related to the notion of innocentia is being **transparent and elegantly simple** in demonstrating one's motivations and actions. The virtue of innocentia should be apparent and clear while carrying out these acts. In this regard, the expression of these motivations should also be selfless. An individual with innocentia should not flaunt charity or generosity in carrying out the act. Such demonstrations demean the virtue and refocus attention on the act of giving rather than the beneficial action that is the virtuous purpose of the act. Generosity, charity, and other selfless acts should not be performed with the expectation of recognition or personal gain. These acts should be carried out only for the benefit of the community. The individual performing the act should voluntarily assume a secondary role. The benefits conveyed to others should be the primary focus of any expression of selfless action.

III. JUSTICE | IUSTITIA

The ancient Roman notion of Iustitia was strongly linked to the virtue of fides. Within the Religio Romana, an essential aspect of fides is building a mutual relationship between one's mortal self and the divine. Achieving this balance was regarded as pax deorum, or peace of with the gods. A set of fundamental rules governs this relationship with the divine. Likewise, and regardless of one's religious stance, an essential aspect of keeping **order** and peace on earth between mortals is the virtue of justice. Justice lays the formal rules upon which relationships between mortals are governed. In this way, justice helps preserve and promote fides. The application of these rules in the form of justice forms a key component upon which civilized society is self-regulated.

For justice to be true laws and rules must be applied with **fairness** and equality. The application of justice must be administered in a manner which is **responsible**. Justice should not be unduly harsh. In these circumstances, excessive justice can lead to abuse of power and create tyranny. Likewise, a lack of justice leads to the breakdown of order, unfairness and the perpetuation of corruption. Justice, when applied correctly, should improve and promote virtuous behaviour throughout all of society.

Appius Claudius Caecus was a Roman who demonstrated a great degree of fairness and empathy while exercising justice. During the early republic, the period when Appius Claudius lived, the plebeians were



largely excluded from public life. This proud patrician magistrate used his influence to advance the interests of the poor and landless. He would be one of the first in Roman history to take a special interest in assisting this powerless group. He rearranged the electoral tribes, increased political transparency and attempted other reforms despite strong adversity, and the threat of physical harm from the ruling patricians.

Like many of the other virtues, justice requires a strong sense of personal insight and the ability to self-reflect. This is required because one must be able to reflect on their motivations, to ensure the interests of the greater good are upheld. The application of justice also requires one to rely upon their understanding of morality. In this capacity, justice demands a thorough understanding of the virtues, as this provides the guidelines upon which justice should be applied. Such awareness and understanding is only possible through self-reflection and the continual practice of the virtues.

The application of justice also requires insight into the perspectives of others. The virtues of gravitas and discipline can be useful in this task. **Empathy** should always be a strong element of justice. The just individual cares about the lives of others and does not wish undue harm, pain or inconvenience. In this capacity, the just individual strives to promote virtuous behaviour through example and by maintaining order. Cicero highlighted this quality in noting that the forces that adjust the Roman scales of justice were emotion and honour. In other words, the just individual must balance a sense of empathy versus the need to role model and promote virtuous action within society.

IV. HONORABLE | HONESTAS

Being an honourable person can be summarized as being an individual who is highly regarded based on the virtue of their words and deeds. The English term “honour”, is often associated with notions of arrogance, heightened self-esteem, and an absence of guilt or shame. However, negative connotations associated with this term are a modern construct. The Romans placed greater emphasis on actions that generated social esteem and recognition. For an action to be viewed as truly honourable, it had to be viewed as virtuous. Cicero wisely noted that an honourable person is one who follows the virtues even when no one else does. Thus, honestas cannot be demonstrated without a complete understanding of all the virtues. Honour is granted by one’s social associations as a direct consequence of successfully **practicing the virtues** within one’s life.

To the ancients striving to be honourable was a goal that was socially expected. The degree of attainment was viewed as the moral measure of an individual. Because of this, honestas played a significant role in determining the **reputation** of an individual. The pursuit and achievement of honour, along with the threat of loss of honour was one of the strongest social forces promoting virtuous action. In this sense, Cicero calls honestas the custodian of the virtues. The ramifications of a loss of honour were very real in antiquity. Tiberius Gracchus, who was involved in a scandal in Spain when he assisted in the surrender of Roman troops, had his honour badly diminished. Cicero wrote, “(the scandal) was a constant source of grief and fear for Tiberius Gracchus; this estranged him, brave and famous as he was,



from the wisdom of the Senators.” This loss of honour was a defining event in Tiberius Gracchus’ career and one from which he never fully recovered in the eyes of the Senate.

Regardless of one’s material possessions or Earthly authority, an individual always has a degree of honour or lack thereof. This virtue calls every person to be aware of their honour and always to work towards honourable action irrespective of their personal circumstances. Cicero describes youth in the pursuit of honour: “How they yearn for praise! What labours will they not undertake to stand fast among their peers! How will they remember those who have shown them kindness and how eager to repay it!” In our actions and dealings, we should strive to be viewed as honourable and free of disgrace, just as the youth is described. We too should harness our desire to achieve honour to inspire ourselves and others towards virtuous action.

Fundamental to the virtue of honour is the concept of achieving this virtue through action, in particular, social action. In ancient Rome demonstrating virtuous behaviour was not something to be done passively. It involved interaction with one’s larger community, be it friends, family, colleagues or the state. Actions demonstrating honour must not be selfish or superficial. To be honourable requires substantial deeds that go beyond self-desires. Cicero summarizes the importance of action in describing the numerous Roman figures throughout history who have demonstrated such honourable exploits in saying these men were, “led by the splendour of honour and without any thought for their own interest”. Because of the importance of honour, one must also choose their actions and words carefully. Roman history is similarly abundant in examples of individuals who rashly chose a course of action resulting in unexpected dishonour. Pliny the Younger, aware of such upsets, writes upon the recommendation of a friend for public office, “My sense of honour, my reputation, my dignity is at stake”. Likewise, action must be continuous. A past deed, even if greatly honourable cannot allow one to simply rest and put aside further attempts at virtuous action. Honour is not something permanently earned; it is tested endlessly and revaluated. Maintaining one’s honour is a lifelong affair.

The fate of the consuls after the defeat at the Caudine Forks outlines the importance and the continual need to maintain one’s honour. These two leaders of the Republic, who were some of the most highly respected men in Rome at the time, were defeated by the Samnites and forced to surrender or face annihilation. A condition of surrender was agreeing to peace with the Samnites. The consuls seeing no other method by which to save their soldiers agreed to the terms. Upon arrival in Rome, the consuls promptly informed the Senate that the peace agreement should not be honoured and that it was not in Rome’s best interests. They explained that such an agreement was made to save the citizen soldiers. They then proposed as a matter of honour that they be sent back to the Samnites to explain the rejection of peace and to offer themselves to their likely violent fate.

The ancients were often aware of their ancestors’ honour and the deeds they performed. This would be highlighted during sacrifices and offerings to the di manes or the spirits of their ancestors. Apart from one’s own spiritual convictions, an awareness of the past and those who came before us can assist in providing role models of virtue and the attainment of honour. In antiquity Sallust highlights this when he wrote, “The glory of one’s ancestors acts as a kind of light”. The depictions of the funerals of Romans from prestigious and honourable families also reveal much about honestas and ancestry. When such a



prestigious Roman died it was not uncommon for the funeral ceremony to involve other family members dressed in costume as ancestors of the deceased. These figures from the past would be dressed in their noble robes of office and the family members would wear masks altering their appearance for they resembled the long dead. The recently deceased would be placed among the representations of their ancestors. In a dramatic way, this was a means of placing the honour of the deceased on trial. It placed them symbolically amongst the other virtuous greats who came before them. It is absolutely clear that in antiquity one's virtuous ancestors were very much extant in the present and serving as constant reminders of honour and virtue.

Today, we can and should look towards the virtuous figures of history. These figures may be within or outside our families. In the examples of the past, we can discover guidance towards the virtues and in carrying out our present tasks with honour. Motivating the individual towards honour should also be the desire to become a positive remodel themselves. We should strive to be remembered as virtuous by the next generation. Being an example of virtue within our community and family can be an overwhelmingly positive force of good. It teaches those around us the virtues, including our sons and daughters. Leaving a legacy of honestas to be remembered is one the most longstanding and profound ways an individual can improve this mortal world in the future.

To the ancient Romans, **pride** was also an important part of honestas. In Rome honour and pride often go hand-in-hand. Upon first impression viewing pride as a positive trait is often surprising to the modern individual. In today's modern cultures, pride is often regarded as a character flaw and, therefore, a negative quality. However, we should remain cognizant of the benefits of pride. Pride can be part of the virtues when it reinforces our other positive traits. It can drive one towards excellence. Being proud of one's work and life can inspire greater achievements and honour while motivating a more virtuous life. To the ancients, the proud person does good for others but is somewhat uncomfortable when others do good towards them due to the virtue of modesty. The proud person should provide better than they receive, and seek approval for their actions. This approval should be self-approval in the form of insight and self-reflection. The virtue of gravity can assist one in gaining this insight. One's sense of worth should not hinge upon the approval of others. However, pride must be demonstrated with self-discipline and motivate one towards the virtues. In doing so, pride can assist in one's awareness of their dignity and honour. In feeling pride and then reflecting upon ourselves, we must always remain cautious to avoid arrogance and a lack of modesty. Losing sight of these things can draw one away from the virtues.

Besides striving to build a reputation for virtuous action, the ancients also explained that honestas is achieved through demonstrating **humanity**. The notion of humanity refers to an appreciation for learning and culture. It is about a developing a love for civilization and intellectual self-improvement. Humanity does not mean acting intellectually superior to others, or believing you are more cultured than your colleagues. Instead, it refers to a personal enjoyment and appreciation for the humanities. This interest allows an individual to understand better and connect with others while living a more productive life. Cornelia, the second daughter of Scipio Africanus, had a strong reputation for loving the humanities. She was fond of both Greek and Latin literature and arts, she likely received an education in both. Her husband died when she was young, and she never remarried. Instead she lived a simple yet socially sophisticated life, frequently discussing topics and exchanging gifts with notable figures of her



day. She was said to have dressed simply yet elegantly. Plutarch notes that when a friend she was entertaining pointed out a fondness for her jewellery she noted that her true jewels were her two sons.

The individual who endeavours towards a love for humanity relishes hearing a diverse array of opinions and takes pleasure from exploring alternative points of view. They appreciate the expertise of others. They also strive to better themselves by developing their own set of skills and talents. The humanities allow an individual to refine themselves and the manner in which they demonstrate and express the virtues and to better understand the world around them. In this way, it greatly assists in developing one's honour through a more detailed understanding of all the virtues.



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