

Marcus Tullius Cicero, Who Gave Natural Law to the Modern World

by Jim Powell

Marcus Tullius Cicero expressed principles that became the bedrock of liberty in the modern world.

He insisted on the primacy of moral standards over government laws. These standards became known as natural law. Above all, Cicero declared, government is morally obliged to protect human life and private property. When government runs amok, people have a right to rebel—Cicero honored daring individuals who helped overthrow tyrants.

Intellectual historian Murray N. Rothbard praised Cicero as “the great transmitter of Stoic ideas from Greece to Rome. . . . Stoic natural law doctrines heavily influenced the Roman jurists of the second and third centuries A.D., and thus helped shape the great structures of Roman law which became pervasive in Western civilization.”

For centuries, people read Cicero because of his beautiful Latin prose. He transformed Latin from a utilitarian language, which served generals, merchants, and lawyers, into a poetic language. The first century A.D.

Roman author Quintilian remarked that Cicero was “the name not of a man, but of eloquence itself.” As a writer, Thomas Jefferson called Cicero “the first master of the world.” Historian Edward Gibbon, who elegantly chronicled Rome’s decline, recalled that when reading Cicero “I tasted the beauties of language, I breathed the spirit of freedom, and I imbibed from his precepts and examples the public and private sense of a man.”

As Rome’s most famous orator, Cicero prosecuted crooked politicians and defended citizens against rapacious officials. On one occasion when Cicero spoke, mighty Julius Caesar reportedly trembled so much that he dropped papers he was holding. Scholar H. Grose Hodge observed that Cicero at his best offered “a sustained interest, a constant variety, a consummate blend of humour and pathos, of narrative and argument, of description and declamation; while every part is subordinated to the purpose of the whole, and combines, despite its intricacy of detail, to form a dramatic and coherent unit.”

Amidst a violent age, Cicero was a man of peace. He refused to build a personal army like other leading Roman politicians, and he spoke out against violence. “A war which is launched without provocation,” he wrote, “cannot possibly be just.” He warned: “violence is more ruinous than anything else.”

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Cicero never challenged Roman slavery, which was among the most brutal in history, but he was more humane than his contemporaries. He preferred to have his farms worked by tenants rather than by slaves.

Cicero lived during an era of great sculpture, but only one bust is marked as his. It has been the basis for identifying others. These sculptures tend to portray Cicero as having a high forehead, large nose, small mouth, and worried expression, as if he were agonizing over the fate of the Roman Republic.

More is known about Cicero than any other ancient personality because hundreds of his candid letters, dispatched by courier throughout the Mediterranean, have survived. Cicero often comes across as intellectually curious, affectionate, charming, and generous. One critic, the pro-Caesar University of Michigan classicist D.R. Shackleton Bailey, belittled Cicero as "a windbag, a wiseacre, a humbug, a spiteful, vain-glorious egotist." But classicist J.A.K. Thomson provided more perspective when he observed: "It is probable that Cicero is the greatest of all letter-writers. The importance of his matter, the range of his public and private interests, the variety of his moods, his facility in expressing every shade of sense and feeling, the aptness of his quotations, above all his spontaneity, have never in combination been excelled or equalled."

When the chips were down, Cicero displayed the courage of his convictions. He opposed Julius Caesar's schemes for one-man rule. After Caesar's assassination, he denounced Mark Antony's bid to become dictator. For that, Cicero was beheaded.

Cicero's Early Years

Marcus Tullius Cicero was born January 6, 106 B.C., on his grandfather's country estate in Arpinum, about 70 miles southeast of Rome. His father, who shared all three names, was a frail aristocrat with literary interests, property in Arpinum, and a house in Rome. His mother, Helvia, was from a socially connected family in Rome. The Cicero family name doesn't suggest much dignity—in Latin, *cicer* means chickpea.

His family moved to Rome so he could get

a better education. He was about eight. He had some Greek teachers who exposed him to Homer, Euripides, and Greek orators. He attended lectures on law, philosophy, and rhetoric. For a while, he studied dialectics under Diodotus, the Stoic.

He emerged as a great author and speaker because he worked at it. "The time which others spend in advancing their own personal affairs," he recalled, "taking holidays and attending Games, indulging in pleasures of various kinds or even enjoying mental relaxation and bodily recreation, the time they spend on protracted parties and gambling and playing ball, proves in my case to have been taken up with returning over and over again to these literary pursuits."

Cicero aimed to be a defense attorney as the best bet for success in politics. While defense attorneys didn't get a formal fee, they often could borrow money, receive legacies, and gain political support from their clients.

There was plenty to keep a defense attorney busy. Murder had been a way of life in Roman politics since at least 133 B.C., when a reformer named Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was clubbed to death by senators he had criticized. Cicero also witnessed the years of bloody struggle between pro-Senate Lucius Cornelius Sulla and allegedly popular leader Gaius Marius.

Amidst the tyranny, Cicero became famous as a brilliant, hard-working attorney who won difficult cases. His methods don't meet today's standards for due process. He focused on the motive for a crime, often ignoring the specifics about how the act was committed. He made claims, such as that his client wasn't near the crime scene, without offering specific proof. He didn't seem to call witnesses. He sometimes resorted to blatant logical fallacies.

Yet Cicero prospered. He acquired villas in Asturae, Puteoli, and Pompeii, an estate near Formiae, and a mansion in Rome's fashionable Palatine district, plus lodges where he could stay while traveling to these properties.

By 79 B.C., he was worn out. As he explained in the *Brutus* (46 B.C.), which includes perhaps the earliest piece of intellectual autobiography: "I was at that time very slender and not strong in body, with a long, thin neck;

and such a constitution and appearance were thought almost to promise danger to life, if combined with hard work and strain on the lungs. Those who loved me were . . . alarmed, that I always spoke without remission or variation, using all the strength of my voice and the effort of my whole body. When my friends and doctors begged me to give up speaking in the courts, I felt I would run any risk rather than abandon my hope of fame as a speaker. I thought that by a more restrained and moderate use of the voice and a different way of speaking I could both avoid the danger and acquire more variety in my style; and the reason for going to Asia was to change my method of speaking. And so, when I had two years' experience of taking cases and my name was already well known in the Forum, I left Rome."

He spent time in Athens and then toured the Peloponnesian islands and Greek cities of Asia Minor. He studied philosophy with the Athenian Antiochus, who reflected Stoic influence, and at Rhodes with the learned Stoic Posidonius. He also studied oratory with Posidonius' teacher, Molon. "I came home after two years," Cicero reported, "not only more experienced, but almost another man; the excessive strain of voice had gone, my style had . . . simmered down, my lungs were stronger and I was not so thin."

Cicero Enters Politics

Cicero first sought political office when he was 30—as *quaestor*, the lowest major office, which involved administrative responsibility for a province. Elections took place every July, after the harvest. They were held in the Field of Mars. Voters scratched the name or initials of their chosen candidate on waxed wooden ballots, then dropped these in baskets for counting. Elected, Cicero was assigned Western Sicily, where he made sure corn supplies were remitted to Rome. His proudest personal achievement during the one-year term seems to have been discovering the grave of Archimedes, the third-century B.C. Greek mathematician. "I noticed a small column projecting a little way from the bushes, on which there was the shape of a sphere and a

cylinder," he recalled. "I at once told the Syracusans I thought that was just what I was looking for."

As *quaestor*, Cicero joined the Senate. This had about 600 members, nearly all of whom were from families who owed their position to military conquest. They were members for life. Although the Senate had a prestigious advisory role in the government, and candidates for higher political office came from the Senate, it lacked its own power base. There weren't any Senate elections or political parties. The Senate didn't command an army. By law, senators were banned from business. Senators looked forward to winning an appointment as governor of a province where they could enrich themselves.

In 70 B.C., Cicero moved his way up the political ladder when he got elected *adile* (responsible for the Roman food supply and games). That year, people from Sicily filed suit against their former governor Gaius Verres, who had done considerable looting during his three years there. Cicero was asked to handle the case. The odds were with Verres because he was defended by Quintus Hortensius Hortalus, the most famous orator of the day, and senators who sat on the jury were, as always, reluctant to return a guilty verdict against an influential politician.

The trial began August 5, and there were crowds of spectators since people had come to Rome for elections and games. "This one man's brutality and cupidity," Cicero thundered, "were depriving [Sicilians] of the advantages and privileges bestowed on them by the Senate and the Roman people." What we know about the case comes primarily from Cicero's orations, and while they cannot be treated as factual documents—they were partisan briefs—Verres subsequently fled Rome for Marseilles. Cicero's reputation was enhanced.

In 66 B.C., Cicero was elected First Praetor, which meant that he administered the highest civil court in Rome. As soon as Cicero's one-year praetorship was up, he began lobbying to be elected as a consul, the highest office in Rome. Two consuls served at a time, each with the power to veto decisions by the other. Cicero became a consul in 64 B.C.—

remarkably, without resorting to bribery or violence.

One of the unsuccessful contenders, Lucius Sergius Catiline, a wild man who gained support from Julius Caesar, schemed for revenge. He tried to recruit foreign armed forces, assassinate Cicero, and take over the government. During Senate debates, Cicero unleashed powerful orations attacking Catiline. Caesar cited an old law that a death sentence required prior approval by a popular assembly. He advocated seizing the property of conspirators and banishing them. Cicero favored capital punishment. Catiline's top five associates were executed, and Catiline was subsequently killed in battle. For years, Cicero irritated people by boasting how he saved the Republic from Catiline.

Cicero attacked Rome's policy of endless wars. "It is a hard thing to say," he declared, "but we Romans are loathed abroad because of the damage our generals and officials have done in their licentiousness. No temple has been protected by its sanctity, no state by its sworn agreements, no house and home by its locks and bars—in fact there is now a shortage of prosperous cities for us to declare war on so that we can loot them afterwards. Do you think that when we send out an army against an enemy it is to protect our allies, or is it rather to use the war as an excuse for plundering them? Do you know of a single state that we have subdued that is still rich, or a single rich state that our generals have not subdued?"

Choosing Among Evils

If Rome had stopped its conquests, the Republic might have developed. Corrupt and limited though it was, it offered the best chance of averting one-man rule. But the aggression continued, and successful generals eclipsed the power of the Senate and other republican institutions. Cicero found himself in the uncomfortable position of choosing among evils.

The least dangerous, he believed, was Cnaeus Pompeius (Pompey), a highly capable military commander, remarkable administrator, and political opportunist. During his early days, he was known as the "boy executioner." Pompey lacked political principles and re-

portedly changed wives to improve his political prospects. While he skirted constitutional restraints to advance his career, he never tried to overthrow the traditional (unwritten) Roman constitution. He wanted fame rather than political power.

Pompey crushed Rome's adversaries in the Middle East. He wiped out the piracy in the eastern Mediterranean that had disrupted Rome's vital food supplies. He conquered some 1,500 towns and fortresses. He organized four new Roman provinces—Asia, Bithynia, Cilicia, and Syria—which extended Roman frontiers to the Caucasus mountains and the Red Sea. He started or rebuilt 39 cities. He established a network of client rulers who helped Rome guard the eastern frontiers. He boosted Rome's revenue from the region by 70 percent and became the wealthiest Roman.

In December 62 B.C., Pompey returned to Rome and dismissed his army. All he asked for was that the Senate pass a bill rewarding his soldiers with land in the provinces—the traditional way of compensating combatants after a successful military campaign. But the Senate blocked such a bill, and Pompey became convinced he should consider collaborating with his rivals.

The best-financed rival was Marcus Crassus. Crassus had inherited a small fortune—300 talents—and parlayed this into some 7,000 talents largely in the proscriptions, which meant buying cheaply and then reselling the properties of people condemned to death. Until Pompey's lucrative triumph in the Middle East, Crassus had been the wealthiest Roman. He built his own army and crushed the slave revolt led by Spartacus, crucifying some 6,000 slaves on the Appian Way.

To strengthen his position against Pompey, Crassus bought the political support of Gaius Julius Caesar, who was an ambitious, spendthrift demagogue. He had been elected a *quaestor* in 68 B.C. and assigned to administer Further Spain, where he discovered his genius as a military commander. Equally important, he acquired loot for expanding his power. He gained a popular following by sponsoring lavish "free" games and banquets whose astonishing cost—19 million *sesterces*, almost a

tenth of government revenues—were underwritten by Crassus.

Cicero led successful opposition to a Senate bill promoted by Caesar and Crassus, which would have empowered them to sell overseas Roman territory, and use the proceeds to acquire land in Italy for redistribution to their political supporters. Cicero spoke against the bill three times, and he displayed considerable skill defeating it without alienating ordinary people who hoped for free land.

The First Triumvirate

In 60 B.C., Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar were frustrated by Senate efforts to thwart their ambitions, so they formed a dictatorship known as the First Triumvirate. During the next decade, they controlled candidates for office, and they parceled out provincial loot among themselves. Crassus got the East. Pompey, Spain. Caesar, Cisalpine Gaul (northern Italy) and Illyricum (eastern Adriatic coast). Cicero declined an invitation to join them.

Despite their friendly overtures, Crassus, Pompey, and Caesar didn't defend Cicero when, in 58 B.C., the gangster-senator Publius Clodius Pulcher (an ally of Caesar's known as Clodius) proposed a law banishing Cicero from Rome. Clodius also plundered three of Cicero's homes. Cicero was exiled for 16 miserable months, which he spent at a friend's home in Salonika (northeastern Greece). "Your pleas have prevented me from committing suicide," he wrote Titus Pomponius Atticus, his banker, publisher, and friend, who helped cover his expenses in exile. Cicero returned to Rome when Pompey decided he needed an ally against Clodius.

But the triumvirs wouldn't tolerate the free expression of Cicero's views. "I who if I speak as I ought on public matters am thought mad," he wrote Atticus, "if I say what expediency demands, appear a slave, and if I am silent, seem oppressed and crushed. . . . What if I choose to give up and take refuge in a life of leisure? Impossible. I have to take part in the fight." He added: "I am sustained and strengthened by literature, and prefer to sit in your little chair under the bust of Aristotle, than in our consuls' chairs of office."

Meanwhile, Crassus pursued more wealth and military glory, and he led his army against the Parthians, a nomadic people based in western Persia. Their territory sat astride the great Silk Road that connected China with the Mediterranean. Crassus' forces were routed by Parthian bowmen, and he was slain in May 53 B.C.

The Rise of Caesar

Caesar had been busy building his personal empire in Gaul, which included territory now in France, Belgium, part of Holland, and Switzerland, plus Germany west of the Rhine. Caesar reportedly sold 53,000 members of the Nervii tribe as slaves. He boasted that he slaughtered 258,000 Helvetii men, women, and children. He went on to slaughter some 430,000 Germans.

Caesar combined his tactical genius—especially surprise attacks—with effective propaganda, something the aloof Pompey neglected. Caesar appealed for popular support by promising peace. Caesar repeatedly sought Cicero's backing because he needed legitimacy. Caesar had always been cordial to Cicero and even lent him money, but Cicero reluctantly sided with Pompey. After a tense meeting with Caesar, Cicero wrote Atticus: "I think Caesar is not pleased with me. But I was pleased with myself, which is more than I have been for a long time."

In January 49 B.C., the Senate ordered Caesar to return from Gaul without his army. But he refused to cooperate in his political destruction. On the evening of January 10, 49 B.C., Caesar led one legion of soldiers across the Rubicon, a small river on the northwestern Italian peninsula, separating Gaul from Rome. This violated Roman law requiring that armies be kept in the provinces, and another civil war was on. Unable to defend himself in Italy, Pompey fled to the East on March 17. Caesar entered Rome on the first of April, 49 B.C.

Whether Caesar or Pompey won, Rome would clearly be ruled by a strongman. In one of his letters, Cicero lamented the "general destruction; so vast are the forces which I see will take part in the conflict on both sides. . . .

Nothing can exceed the misery, ruin and disgrace. . . . The sun seems to me to have disappeared from the universe."

Caesar seized the Roman treasury to finance his military campaigns. He went to Spain, preventing Pompey from rebuilding an army there. Caesar's deputy, Mark Antony, took charge of Italy. Caesar destroyed Marseilles, which had supported Pompey. Then Caesar returned to Italy and defeated Pompey's larger forces at Pharsalus, north of Athens, on August 9, 48 B.C. Cicero was offered command of Pompey's surviving forces, but he wanted no part of the violence. Pompey fled to Egypt, where he was murdered upon landing by local people who had enough of Rome's wars. When Caesar arrived in Egypt, he was presented with Pompey's severed head. He subsequently became a lover of young Queen Cleopatra, who joined him back in Rome. Caesar crushed remnant opposition—some 10,000 people were slaughtered, and their leader Marcus Porcius Cato pulled a sword into his abdomen.

During the bloodbaths, Cicero sought refuge in Brindisi. Victorious Caesar pardoned him, as he pardoned many of his adversaries, and Cicero returned to Rome in 47 B.C. Almost 60, Cicero learned that many of his compatriots and rivals were dead. "I was reconciled with my old friends, I mean my books," he wrote, "though I had not abandoned their companionship because I was angry with them, but because I felt a sense of shame. I thought that I had not obeyed their precepts by plunging into turbulent events with such untrustworthy allies."

Cicero did his best to influence Caesar. He urged that Caesar "restore this city of ours to stability by measures of reorganization and lawgiving." But it was a hopeless task, since Caesar had already planned another campaign of overseas conquest.

Cicero's Personal Woes

While the Roman Republic was collapsing, Cicero's personal life was, too. In 46 B.C., he and his wife, Terentia, were divorced apparently because of financial disputes. He soon remarried a rich young woman named Pub-

lilia, but she couldn't get along with his daughter, Tullia, so they divorced about a year later. Then Tullia died in childbirth. "Next to yourself," he wrote Atticus, "I have no better friend than solitude. In it all my converse is with books. It is interrupted by weeping, against which I struggle as much as I can. . . ."

Cicero turned more to writing about philosophy and secured his immortality. While he didn't construct any new philosophical system, he interpreted his favorite Greek thinkers and made the ideas soar. He drew from his own library, since there weren't any public libraries in Rome. He wrote with a reed pen and ink on papyrus scrolls. The ink was made from lampblack and gum. He worked to expand Latin which, among other things, lacked an equivalent of "the" and had few metaphors or compound words. He adapted words from Greek, which had been a philosophical language for centuries. Cicero introduced such words as *essentia*, *qualitas*, and *moralis* to Latin, which makes him the source of the English words "essence," "quality," and "moral."

Atticus had slaves make copies of Cicero's works, the standard practice. One thousand copies were produced initially. For their trouble, authors like Cicero received prestige and gifts—royalties were unknown.

"The Law of Nature . . ."

Cicero transmitted the Greek Stoic idea of a moral "higher law" to the modern world. In his dialogue *De Legibus* (On the Laws, 52 B.C.), he talked about the "supreme law which existed through the ages, before the mention of any written law or established state." He also referred to it as "the law of nature for the source of right." In *De Republica* (*The Republic*, 51 B.C.) he says "True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting . . . there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing

judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties . . .”

Cicero further distinguished the “higher law” from the laws of governments. He declared it was “quite absurd to call just every article in the decrees and laws of nations. What if those laws were enacted by tyrants? . . . The essential justice that binds human society together and is maintained by one law is right reason, expressed in commands and prohibitions. Whoever disregards this law, whether written or unwritten, is unjust.”

While Cicero derived many ideas from the Greeks, he also contributed some key ideas of his own. Greek philosophers had conceived of society and government as virtually the same, coming together in the *polis* (city-state). Cicero declared that government is like a trustee, morally obliged to serve society—which means society is something larger and separate. Appreciation for the myriad wonders of civil society, where private individuals develop languages, markets, legal customs, and other institutions, didn’t come until the eighteenth century, but it was Cicero who began to see the light.

Cicero was the first to say that government was justified primarily as a means of protecting private property. Both Plato and Aristotle had imagined that government could improve morals. Neither had conceived of private property—an absolute claim to something over everyone else.

Cicero’s *De Officiis* (*On Duties*, 44 B.C.): “the chief purpose in the establishment of states and constitutional orders was that individual property rights might be secured . . . it is the peculiar function of state and city to guarantee to every man the free and undisturbed control of his own property.” Again: “The men who administer public affairs must first of all see that everyone holds onto what is his, and that private men are never deprived of their goods by public men.”

Caesar continued to seek Cicero’s goodwill by praising his work. Caesar dedicated his book *De analogia* (*On Analogy*, 54 B.C.) to Cicero, saying “You have gained a triumph to be preferred to that of the greatest generals.

For it is a nobler thing to enlarge the boundaries of human intelligence than those of the Roman Empire.” The two men had dinner at one of Cicero’s villas—Caesar came with his retinue of about 2,000 soldiers. Later Cicero told Atticus: “my guest was not the sort to whom one says, ‘Do pray come again when you are back.’ Once is enough. We did not talk about serious matters, but a great deal about literature.”

Caesar proceeded to twist the Roman constitution beyond recognition. He packed the Senate with some 400 of his partisans. He rigged the election of a new consul. He became the first living Roman to have his portrait appear on coins. He had himself named *dictator perpetuus*—dictator for life.

As historian John Dickinson observed, Caesar “indulged in a lifetime of double talk, professing slogans of democracy, while debasing and destroying the powers of the electorate, and insisting on constitutional technicalities, while persistently undermining the constitution. In the end, his prescription for government turned out to be a surprisingly simple one: to reduce its mechanism to the simplest and most primitive of all institutional forms, personal absolutism, and to employ it for one of the simplest and most primitive of all purposes, foreign conquest.”

Some influential Romans, however, still cherished republican principles.

Gaius Cassius, who hated Julius Caesar, seems to have hatched the plot against him. He was joined by his intense brother-in-law, Marcus Brutus. Both men had fought with Pompey. Caesar pardoned both and named both praetors. But Brutus felt betrayed after Caesar had promised a new order and pursued one-man rule. Brutus decided he had a historic role to play, because an ancestor had dispatched a tyrant, and he was the nephew of Cato, stalwart foe of Caesar and defender of the Roman Republic. Cassius and Brutus recruited about 60 co-conspirators.

The Ides of March

Caesar planned to leave Rome for another war, against the Parthians, on March 18, 44 B.C. Brutus and Cassius decided that the

assassination must take place on March 15—the Ides of March—during a Senate meeting. It was held in a hall next to the Theatre of Pompey. Apparently Cicero was there, although the conspirators hadn't confided in him because of his age and his tendency to talk.

After Caesar, 63, sat on a gilded chair, a man named Tillius Cimber approached Caesar and requested a pardon for his brother. When Caesar refused, Cimber grabbed Caesar's purple toga, the signal for attack. "The Liberators," as the conspirators called themselves, fell on him with their daggers. Cassius struck Caesar in the face. Brutus cut Caesar in the thigh. Altogether, he was cut 23 times and fell dead before a statue of Pompey. Reportedly, Brutus held high his dagger, shouted Cicero's name and congratulated him on the recovery of freedom.

Brutus and Cassius apparently expected the Republic to revive on its own—they didn't make any plans to exercise power themselves. Cicero, however, recognized that the problems of the republic went beyond one man. "We have only cut down the tree not rooted it up," he told Atticus.

Soon hard-drinking and brawling Mark Antony bid to succeed Caesar as dictator. He got possession of Caesar's papers and personal fortune—some 100 million *sesterces*, about one-seventh as much as was in the entire Roman treasury, which Caesar had intended for his 18-year-old adopted son, Octavian. Antony recruited his own armed forces. He pushed through a law giving him control of north and central Cisalpine Gaul.

On September 2, 44 B.C., Cicero delivered a speech asserting that Antony's actions were unconstitutional, unpopular and contrary to Caesar's intentions. On September 19, Antony countered with a scathing speech that blamed Cicero for the murder of Catiline, the assassination of Clodius, and the split between Caesar and Pompey. Antony made clear that Cicero was a mortal enemy.

Cicero wrote a second blistering speech which, while never delivered, became one of the most famous political pamphlets in history. He blasted Antony for inciting violence and provoking the Civil War. He portrayed Antony as an unscrupulous opportunist.

"I fought for the Republic when I was young," Cicero declared, "I shall not abandon her in my old age. I scorned the daggers of Catiline; I shall not tremble before yours. Rather I would willingly expose my body to them, if by my death the liberty of the nation could be recovered and the agony of the Roman people could at last bring to birth that with which it has been so long in labour." He expressed the wish that "at my death I may leave the Roman people free."

Cicero delivered another dozen attacks on Antony by April 21, 43 B.C. He urged that the Senate brand Antony as a public enemy and recognize the legitimacy of Octavian as the lesser of evils. These speeches became known as the *Philippics*, inspired by Demosthenes' speeches three centuries before, intended to stir Athenians against the invader Philip of Macedon who was the father of Alexander the Great.

Cicero withdrew to his Arpinum estate, away from the turmoil of Rome. He finished his final book, *De Amicitia (On Friendship)*—dedicated to his friend Atticus who, ironically, carried on a cordial correspondence with Antony and Octavian.

The rivals Antony, Octavian, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus concluded that they weren't in a position to crush each other or get cooperation from the Senate. Consequently, they established themselves as Triumvirs for the Restoration of the Republic, and they divided spoils in the western provinces. They also announced rewards for anyone who could produce the heads of their enemies. Antony saw that Cicero's name appeared on the proscription list, and Octavian did nothing about it.

The Murder of Cicero

Cicero fled. He started sailing for Greece, where he had heard that Brutus had some armed forces, but rough winter weather soon forced him ashore. He sought shelter at his house near Formiae, along Italy's west coast. There, on December 7, 43 B.C., assassins caught up with him. A soldier named Herennius cut off his head and hands. Herennius brought these to Antony. Fulvia, Antony's

wife, pushed a hairpin through Cicero's tongue, and Cicero's head and hands were nailed to the Forum Rostra where orators spoke.

This was just the beginning of renewed violence. Antony ordered the murder of some 300 senators and a couple of thousand influential citizens. Antony and Octavian crushed the republican forces of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi (northeastern Greece), October 43 B.C., and both republicans committed suicide. A decade later, Antony and Octavian were at each other's throats. Antony lost three-quarters of his fleet at Actium (western Greece), then fled with Cleopatra to Egypt where they committed suicide in 30 B.C. Octavian, who became known as Augustus, launched the Roman Empire.

According to the first-century A.D. Roman biographer Plutarch, Augustus came upon one of his grandsons reading a book by Cicero. The boy tried to hide it, but Augustus picked it up and remarked: "My child, this was a learned man, and a lover of his country."

Cicero's works generally fell out of favor during the Empire. The fifth-century Catholic philosopher Saint Augustine confessed: "I came in the usual course of study to a work of one Cicero, whose style is admired by almost all, not so his message." By the early Middle Ages, many of Cicero's works were lost.

The Renaissance scholar Petrarch found some of Cicero's speeches (58 were eventually recovered). Then in 1345 at the Verona cathedral library, he discovered a collection of Cicero's letters—864 altogether, 90 to Cicero and the rest by him—which had been published in the first century A.D. Half were written to his friend Atticus, mostly based in Greece. All the letters date from the last 20 years of Cicero's life. Petrarch exulted: "you are the leader whose advice we follow, whose applause is our joy, whose name is our ornament." Cicero was cherished by Erasmus, the Dutch Renaissance man who deplored religious intolerance among both Catholics and Protestants.

In seventeenth-century England, according to one observer, it was "the common fashion at schooles" to use Cicero's *De Officiis* [*On*

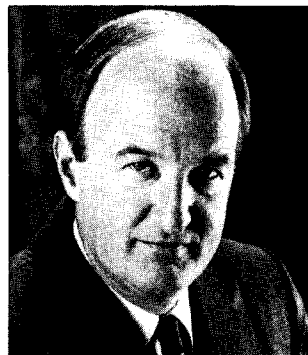
Duties] as an ethics text. Philosopher John Locke recommended Cicero's works. Cicero's vision of natural law influenced such thinkers as Locke, Samuel Pufendorf, and *Cato's Letters'* authors John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon who had the most direct intellectual impact on the American Revolution.

Cicero's defense of the Roman Republic made him a hero to many others. In Germany, he was admired by the libertarian poet and dramatist Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller. French Baron de Montesquieu, who urged the importance of dividing government powers, considered Cicero "one of the greatest spirits." Voltaire wrote that Cicero "taught us how to think." Inspired by Cicero, during the French Revolution, journalist Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvray boldly attacked Maximilien de Robespierre for promoting the Reign of Terror.

Cicero's oratory continued to stir friends of freedom. It helped inspire the libertarian ideals of the great historian Thomas Babington Macaulay. It influenced the dramatic speaking styles of young (libertarian) Edmund Burke, Charles James Fox, William Ewart Gladstone, and Winston Churchill. Cicero's oratory helped convince Frederick Douglass that if he mastered public speaking, he could fight American slavery—and he did.

Cicero's views became unfashionable when imperial Germany emerged as a major power during the late nineteenth century. Nobel Prize-winning historian Theodor Mommsen, for instance, was an ardent admirer of Caesar and sneered at Cicero's republicanism. While Hitler did much to make Caesarism unpopular, far more people today are interested in the conqueror Caesar than in an author and orator like Cicero.

Yet Cicero remains an "absorbingly significant builder of western civilization," as historian Michael Grant put it. Cicero urged people to reason together. He championed decency and peace. He gave the modern world some of the most fundamental ideas of liberty. Back when speaking freely meant risking death, he denounced tyranny. He has helped keep the torch of liberty burning bright for more than 2,000 years. □



Economics in One Page

“What makes it [economics] most fascinating is that its fundamental principles are so simple that they can be written on one page, that anyone can understand them, and yet very few do.”¹

—Milton Friedman

The above statement by Friedman got me thinking: Is it possible to summarize the basic principles of economics in a single page? After all, Henry Hazlitt gave us a masterful summary of sound principles in *Economics in One Lesson*. Could these concepts be reduced to a page?

Friedman himself did not attempt to make a list when he made this statement in a 1986 interview. After completing a preliminary one-page summary of economic principles, I sent him a copy. In his reply, he added a few of his own, but in no way endorses my attempt.

After making this list of basic principles (see the next page), I have to agree with Friedman and Hazlitt. The principles of economics are simple: Supply and demand. Opportunity cost. Comparative advantage. Profit and loss. Competition. Division of labor. And so on.

In fact, one professor even suggested to me that economics can be reduced to one word: “price.” Or maybe, I suggested alternatively,

“cost.” Everything has a price; everything has a cost.

Additionally, sound economic policy is straightforward: Let the market, not the state, set wages and prices. Keep government’s hands off monetary policy. Taxes should be minimized. Government should do only those things private citizens can’t do for themselves. Government should live within its means. Rules and regulations should provide a level playing field. Tariffs and other barriers to trade should be eliminated as much as possible. In short, government governs best which governs least.

Unfortunately, economists sometimes forget these basic principles and often get caught up in the details of esoteric model-building, high theory, academic research, and mathematics. The dismal state of the profession was expressed recently by Arjo Klammer and David Colander, who, after reviewing graduate studies at major economics departments around the country, asked, “Why did we have this gut feeling that much of what went on there was a waste?”²

On the following page is my attempt to summarize the basic principles of economics and sound economic policy. If anyone has any suggested improvements, I look forward to receiving them.

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1. Quoted in interview, *Lives of the Laureates*, William Breit and Roger W. Spencer, eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 91.

2. Arjo Klammer and David Colander, *The Making of an Economist* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), p. xiv. See also David Colander and Reuven Brenner, *Educating Economists* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).