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THE FORMATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY:  
CICERO'S ROLE IN *ARTES LIBERALES* EDUCATION TODAY  
PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel discussion was moderated by Prof. Jan Miernowski (Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw/Department of French & Italian, University of Wisconsin-Madison).

1. *Andrea Balbo*

Quando a Varsavia demmo vita a una tavola rotonda molto partecipata e intensa dedicata al ruolo di Cicerone nell'educazione liberale, presentai alcune idee che, in linea di massima, mi sento ancora di condividere. Tuttavia, le vicende intercorse tra la conferenza e la fine del mese di aprile 2020 mi hanno indotto a collegare le mie affermazioni e a pensare a quale possa essere il ruolo di Cicerone nell'educazione nel contesto pandemico. Le due parole chiave di questo periodo sembrano essere divenute la paura e la scienza. La paura si insinua ovunque, contamina le nostre relazioni, ci spinge (soprattutto gli anziani) a temere l'altro come possibile fonte di contagio, condiziona le scelte politiche e determina evidenti limitazioni delle libertà fondamentali. Allo stesso tempo alla scienza si guarda con speranza, con attesa e con una buona dose di disinformazione e di ignoranza, dimenticando che essa procede sperimentalmente, per tentativi e approssimazioni, verso una verità fattuale che non può che passare attraverso le vie della contraddizione, mentre la medicina, in attesa di scoperte veramente efficaci, non può che ricorrere a strumenti antichi come l'isolamento e la separazione, chiamate ora con un pietoso ossimoro *distanziamento sociale*. La scuola e l'università – nella loro funzione formativa – sono state ferite e anche uno studioso come sono io della didattica digitale non può che constatare come le numerose e fantasiose forme di didattica a distanza siano degli ottimi e necessari surrogati di quel rapporto umano diretto che dovrebbe sempre costituire

la base di ogni insegnamento. Di fronte a queste riflessioni mi sono detto che non aveva più senso esprimersi in modo astratto, teorico e mi sono chiesto in che modo Cicerone potrebbe aiutarci oggi, ora e nel futuro.

Prima di tutto mi si sono affacciate alla mente alcune considerazioni: Cicerone ha affrontato un'epidemia? Sì, se dobbiamo credere a *fam.* 14, 1, 3, scritta da Tessalonica nel 58 a.C.: *de loco, nunc quidem iam abiit pestilentia, sed quam diu fuit me non attigit*. Che cosa fosse questa *pestilentia* non è chiaro, ma comunque non lo ha toccato: non possiamo nemmeno sapere se fosse asintomatico, ma è chiaro che i familiari se n'erano preoccupati, se egli sente il bisogno di tranquillizzarli.

Poi alle riflessioni si sono aggiunte le immagini: Cicerone che, di fronte alle proteste e al caos dei Clodiani, cerca di difendere Milone – che lui chiama eroe in *Mil.* 1, 1 (*vir fortissimus*), come noi oggi chiamiamo eroi i medici, gli infermieri, i lavoratori delle case di riposo, i sacerdoti, coloro che lavorano nei supermercati e molti altri – e che si trova perduto, colmo di incertezza e di timore di fronte a quella *novi iudici nova forma* che evoca percependosi come spaesato: ecco Cicerone – questo straordinario “animale da foro” – non si ritrova nel suo contesto, ha perso i suoi punti di riferimento, ma non ha smesso di lottare. E questa è la prima considerazione.

Ne aggiungo una seconda: Cicerone, in *Att.* 3, 5 (e in molte altre lettere), parla della sua infelicità, della solitudine, della separazione dagli affetti: si sente *miserrimus*. È il tempo dell'esilio, è l'aprile del 58, ma quanto le sue parole ci sembrano molto vicine in un momento di separazione; se poi pensiamo che Cicerone si sente come un morto senza sepolcro, sulla scia della famosa sentenza publiliana (*Exsul, ubi ei nusquam domus est, sine sepulcro est mortuus*), non è difficile che ci sentiamo prossimi a lui nella situazione di distanza che viviamo. Cicerone si presenta a noi, in molti momenti della sua vita, nella sua nudità di uomo di fronte agli eventi e alle tragedie personali e pubbliche e rivela a noi il suo volto più umano e più tragico.

Possiamo però anche andare oltre, perché Cicerone non evoca solo immagini di dolore e sconfitta e non ci lascia soli quando dobbiamo pensare a progettare, a credere nel futuro. E allora alla mia mente si affacciano altre immagini e testi: con le meravigliose parole del *Somnium Scipionis* Cicerone ci dona la capacità di intendere il senso di una vita ben spesa, che ha mirato a realizzare il bene comune e a far crescere la *res publica* (che bella parola, proprio pensando alla Polonia, alla *Rzeczpospolita*). Come intellettuali e scienziati delle discipline umanistiche noi non

possiamo lavorare con le provette né curare direttamente i malati. Possiamo però svolgere ugualmente un compito molto importante: prenderci cura degli altri dal punto di vista educativo, concettuale, individuare le domande più corrette e trovare risposte che ci aiutino a pensare in modo efficace, razionale, senza percorrere le scorciatoie della banalità e delle facili soluzioni. Anche per questo Cicerone può essere prezioso, perché tutta la sua opera offre spunti per temi che oggi sono molto dibattuti: la relazione fra oligarchia e democrazia, l'uso della comunicazione politica, il concetto di libertà, i rapporti umani, la tirannia, la schiavitù, il consenso e l'attività degli intellettuali. Se noi siamo convinti che esisterà un ruolo delle arti liberali domani – e dobbiamo esserne convinti, perché il prezzo altrimenti è la de-umanizzazione – Cicerone potrà giocare in esse un ruolo centrale, suggerendo forme e modi di azione che possono derivare dalla sua lettura.

In che cosa consisterà questo ruolo? Prima di tutto resto convinto che il futuro richiederà una maggiore chiarezza, precisione, correttezza nel linguaggio. Troppe notizie false, troppi abusi di argomentazioni urlate, troppa distanza tra le *res* e i *verba* si stanno ascoltando e vedendo soprattutto sui *social network*. Anche sulle *fake news* Cicerone potrebbe dire la sua, come quando intervenne sarcasticamente in *fam.* 12, 29, stigmatizzando la prassi di apporre il suo nome a norme (nella fattispecie al *senatusconsultum Sempronianum*) mentre lui era assente da Roma e in nessun caso avrebbe potuto sottoscrivere il provvedimento. Cicerone, come maestro di argomentazione, non potrà che aiutarci a incrementare la qualità della lingua, la consapevolezza della sua forza e della sua potenza, della sua persuasività e della sua efficacia. Usare bene la parola sarà una responsabilità sempre più grande per tutti e Cicerone ci aiuterà a sviluppare tale competenza (*soft skill?*) in modo consapevole.

Un altro tema cardine è costituito dalla cittadinanza. Essere cittadini consapevoli significherà agire insieme con responsabilità per coltivare il bene comune: anche in questo caso Cicerone sarà centrale. Si pensi solo al *De re publica* e al *De legibus*, da cui si evince un modello di equilibrio, di controllo dei poteri e di contrasto alla demagogia, che potranno essere espressioni chiave della politica del futuro. Penso anche a quanto sia stata evocata la concordia, il rispetto per chi governa e deve prendere decisioni difficili: le idee di *concordia ordinum* e di *consensus omnium bonorum* dovrebbero essere riscoperte con intensità, non per costituire una sterile acquiescenza a correnti di pensiero generalizzate, ma per costruire

veramente un'aristocrazia dell'intelletto capace di realizzare – anche attraverso aspri dibattiti – un modello più elevato di vivere comune. Forse anche questo tempo ci farà capire come Cicerone, senza che nessuno ne debba chiedere una sorta di santificazione laica, non debba più in nessun modo esser visto con le lenti deformanti del giudizio di Mommsen, che vedeva in lui un uomo “senza opinioni, senza perspicacia e senza fini”<sup>1</sup>.

Se vogliamo riassumere, perciò, Cicerone mantiene una modernità straordinaria e deve rimanere figura centrale delle arti liberali. Tutta la sua concezione dell'*humanitas* si lega a una *paideia* che dovrà costituire sempre di più un elemento centrale del mondo del futuro.

Mi piace concludere con un omaggio alla terra che ci ha ospitato in modo splendido. Uno studioso polacco, Jan Smereka, particolarmente attivo negli anni fra le due guerre, pubblicò su «Eos» 1938, pp. 504-514, un articolo dal titolo *Cyceron nauczycielem i wychowawcą Rzymian (Cicerone maestro ed educatore dei Romani)*, nel quale raccolse numerose citazioni di passi concernenti il pensiero sull'educazione e sulla gioventù. Due mi paiono degni di essere ricordati qui:

Quaerenti mihi multumque et diu cogitanti, quanam re possem prodesse quam plurimis, ne quando intermitterem consulere rei publicae, nulla maior occurrebat, quam si optimarum artium vias traderem meis civibus; quod conpluribus iam libris me arbitror consecutum (*div.* 2, 1).

Tantum dicam breviter, te neque illos neque ullas omnino litteras nosse; me nec rei publicae nec amicis umquam defuisse, et tamen omni genere monumentorum meorum perfecisse operis subsicivis ut meae vigiliae meaque litterae et iuventuti utilitatis et nomini Romano laudis aliquid adferrent. Sed haec non huius temporis: maiora videamus (*Phil.* 2, 20).

Smereka riassunse il suo articolo in latino nel modo seguente: «M. Tullius Cicero, omnium rerum magnarum atque artium scientiam consecutus, cum domestica mala maxima rei publicae pericula duceret, omnibus scriptis, quae publici iuris fecit, id usque spectavit, ut et cives suos doceret et imprimis iuventutem Romanam meliorem redderet. Ipse praeterea consul se optimum exemplar ad imitandum praebuit. Sub vitae finem rhetoris quoque Latini officio functus est Caesarisque amicis praecepta oratoria explicavit. Auctor totam quaestiunculam multis ipsius

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *infra* p. 537.

Ciceronis verbis illustrat partesque eiusdem tamquam praeceptoris, quas magistratus, orator, rhetor, philosophus suscepit, demonstrat».

Forse l'articolo dello studioso non è uno dei testi più noti e importanti della filologia classica polacca del XX secolo, ma ha un merito: nella limpida chiarezza del latino, il maestro antico ci comunica attraverso le parole dell'esegeta moderno come educare sia stato un tema centrale dell'attività umana e della sua modalità di interagire con la società. Altri contributi su questo aspetto si sono susseguiti<sup>2</sup>, anche se meriterebbe ancora di essere approfondito, ma le semplici parole di Smereka ci richiamano al dovere nostro di umanisti, ovvero rendere, se possibile, migliore la gioventù, come scrisse un altro grande polacco, Jan Zamoyski, nell'atto fondativo della Accademia di Zamość: *Takie będą Rzeczypospolite, jakie ich młodzieży chowanie*. Se lo comprendo bene (e ringrazio Katarzyna per la verifica) credo che potrebbe essere reso in italiano così: «Tali saranno le repubbliche quale sarà l'educazione della loro gioventù». Se è così, forse lo potremo rendere ancora più semplicemente *talis respublica qualis iuventus*. Anche questo, forse, sarebbe piaciuto a Cicerone.

## 2. Katarzyna Marciniak

I believe that Andrea, in his deeply moving diagnosis of Cicero's importance for the present times, marked by many challenges in regard to the issues of integration, globalization, environmental balance, and mutilated by the pandemic, has focused on the crucial aspect for the contemporary societies' policy – education. On one hand, there is a very practical side of this aspect. Namely, the growing specialization favours an education concentrated on producing experts. But what we also need, are the skills of communication and an ability to conduct dialogue to make the experts, often from distant parts of the world, understand each other. And Cicero is a perfect mentor here. On the other hand, education is much more than practical skills. The rapid development of the natural sciences makes the knowledge gained in this field at school, quickly outdated, but the eternal questions posed by Cicero and his ancient masters

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<sup>2</sup> Penso, solo nel panorama italiano, ad A. Grilli, *L'educazione in Cicerone*, «Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo, Accademia di Scienze e Lettere, Classe di Lettere, Scienze morali e storiche» 130, 1996, pp. 353-364, e a R. Nicolai, *La fortuna del modello educativo di Isocrate: da Cicerone alla tarda antichità*, «Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca» 12, 2009, pp. 289-309.

– who are we? what is our role on Earth? what is the purpose of our existence? – are just as vital as they were two thousand years ago. And as each generation has to face them at a certain stage, the education in the spirit of *artes liberales*, based on Ciceronian ideas, is a precious tool to prepare the young people for this confrontation – not easy, but necessary for the welfare of the societies. The old Polish message quoted by Andrea in Polish, Italian, and Latin – *talis respublica qualis iuventus* – also resonates perfectly with the challenges of our times. This idea of *artes liberales* needs to be disseminated constantly via different actions, like the Cambridge Schools Classics Project managed by Caroline Bristow who is with us today, or via various kinds of collaboration with high schools we all conduct in our countries – with Cicero and because of him<sup>3</sup>.

Thus I wish to refer here to the educational context *per se* and reflect on my own experience as a graduate of the first study programme in Poland, as created by Prof. Jerzy Axer within the framework of *artes liberales*. I will briefly discuss the advantages and the risks of this experiment, and I will explain why I believe that Cicero is a key partner for all who engage in a liberal arts education.

Drawing on my personal experience, I wish to mention **three elements** I find crucial in the *Artes Liberales* Education based on Cicero's ideas; **a tool** that activates them; and **the main risk** of this approach.

To somehow spend my life with the Classics was a decision I made in childhood when I read the Greek myths by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Later I chose a high school with a special course on ancient culture. Every Thursday at 8:00 o'clock in the morning, scholars from the University of Warsaw, as volunteers, visited us to talk about their research. As it was difficult to coordinate the time schedules both for the school and the University, the programme of this course was not always implemented according to plan; in fact, it rarely was – a part of its charm to us<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For the results of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” UW collaboration with four high schools cf. <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/dvm> (10 Dec. 2020) – also here, a presentation on Zamoyski prepared by the participants.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this school cf. K. Marciniak and B. Strycharczyk, *Macte animo! – or, The Polish Experiment with “Classics Profiles” in Secondary School Education: The Warsaw Example*, in L. Maurice (ed.), *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education, 1900–2019*, Warsaw 2020 (in print).

But when we got used to the unexpected, something happened that showed us a completely new scale of "Unexpectedness". Prof. Jerzy Axer attended his first lesson for us, with Vergil's *Aeneid* and Cicero's *De oratore*. A bold idea, to bring Latin texts, with very special settings, to a group of first-year high-schoolers who were only starting to learn Latin and Roman history.

We didn't even notice how that lesson, which was supposed to be a lecture, developed into a vivid conversation. Soon we discovered that the very idea of a lecture was something completely foreign to Prof. Axer. Later I also understood why. He was practicing with us the idea of a **Ciceronian dialogue** based on *artes liberales* – the first and foundational element of this kind of education. Its essence was – as I see it now – to show us new paths that each and every one of us had a chance to explore, on our own terms and with freedom of mind.

At that time Prof. Axer had just established at the University of Warsaw the first experimental study *curriculum* in the spirit of liberal education in Poland<sup>5</sup>. There were no graduates yet, no guarantees, no secure future in a concrete profession. I decided to take this study programme, which then was indeed seen as a strange choice and a risk, all the more so when you could choose whatever traditional faculty you might wish. But from my standpoint, already shaped by the Classics, the real risk was not in my decision, but in the choices Cicero had made during his turbulent life. So in my view the second element of this kind of education is the following: the *artes liberales* give you **the right perspective**.

The programme required you to take at least three different disciplines to learn their methods. The rest depended on your interests. I think that this type of work taught responsibility and persistence (not to say "stubbornness"). And even though there were many obligatory courses in the programme (*artes*), to permit the students the accomplishment of their regular Master Theses (in my case – two Masters: in Classics and in Italian Philology), its core message was not to think of what was expected from us, but what we really wished to do (*liberales*) – a wisely **creative approach** which I see as the third element of the *Artes Liberales* Education.

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<sup>5</sup> The programme was called MISH (Polish abbreviation for Inter-Area Individual Studies in the Humanities). Today it is offered also by other leading Polish Universities. It was implemented also abroad.

The most precious tool, necessary to activate all these three elements, was the idea of **tutorship** that – as I understood later – followed Cicero’s vision, expressed so beautifully in his *De oratore*. That I could discover the ancient times and the *artes liberales* community under the mentorship of Prof. Jerzy Axer for Rome with Cicero and his friends across the ages, Prof. Małgorzata Borowska for Fabulous Greece (to paraphrase Tadeusz Zieliński), and Prof. Piotr Salwa for Italian culture, this was – and is – my great privilege. Today, by developing a collaboration with schools in the programme *Our Mythical Childhood*<sup>6</sup>, I feel – not that I’m paying off a debt – but, for sure, I’m expressing my gratitude for the opportunity I had received. And today these social links gain a completely new importance – in these times when you can get all the facts (or fake news) in a minute from the Internet, you need also someone who helps you to weave them into a coherent tapestry, by means of *artes liberales*. The pandemic circumstances make you aware of this aspect of liberal arts education particularly strongly.

The only **risk** I see in this kind of education is at the same time its **advantage**. Mainly, a programme based on the ideas of freedom and the Unexpected does not fit well within the confines of educational systems as such. Thus, the everyday reality is to work on how to maintain the *artes liberales* in a systematic education – how to both follow and overcome the ever new restrictions of the school programmes, fixed curricula, and top-down guidelines. And this is good because the constant change, this kind of metamorphosis, revives the *artes liberales* for the subsequent generations. That is also why it is so important to come constantly back to Cicero – not to blindly copy the solutions from other times or institutions – but to find within his life and writings new inspirations for a community-building dialogue beyond the borders of countries and generations.

This dialogue is necessary to successfully address the challenges of the Otherness, migrations, inclusiveness, and to raise our awareness of the environmental issues, so pressing in the 21st century. And here, despite so many centuries passed, Cicero, with his thoughts on nature, duties, and moral obligations is a good partner to think with. He is also a

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/> (10 Dec. 2020). The current stage of the programme, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, is being carried out with funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (GA No 681202).



perfect teacher of communication based not on empty words but on a solid content offered by *artes liberales*. We cannot permit ourselves to skip such a lesson – or better: such a chance for both individual and societal development. For the *artes liberales* are with us all the time, to refer to Arch. 16, *haec studia adulescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solacium praebent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur*. The more often we share them the stronger they and we are.

### 3. Jerzy Axer

Correlating the idea of general education with education for leadership in a republican civil society, so important for liberal arts education, goes much further back than the idea of universities. My own life and experience has been such that I have an especially clear perception and a particularly personal outlook on the part of tradition which originates from the teaching and political experience of Marcus Tullius Cicero.

I first came in contact with *De oratore* as a University of Warsaw student with Professor Kazimierz Kumaniecki in the years 1965-1970 – early enough to experience a sense of initiation. This work attempts to organize the reflections of several generations on the nature of human communication in the republican system, and on the importance of that communication for strengthening the freedom of the individual and for organizing a community of free people. If it is a textbook, it is only in the sense that it indicates a road, it investigates the essence of social debate, of conversations that enable people to reach the core of their views, while also getting them accustomed to sharing these views with their fellow citizens as well as recommending them to pass on the records of such conversations to future generations.

It is Cicero's premise that in order to raise free people (*cives reipublicae*), you have to equip them with the broadest possible education, as only this is worthy of citizens.

It will help them with their personal career, but above all it will make them capable of understanding and defending their own freedom. They will not be helpless when faced with anything new; they will not have to fear changes and any challenges unforeseen by their teachers. A sense of drama is added to any reading of *De oratore* when you realize that this is

a *sui generis* memoir written by a citizen of the republic, an artist and intellectual, who lived at a time of major political change: the Roman republic was on the wane, while at the same time Rome was achieving the position of the “sole superpower” imposing a new order throughout the Mediterranean world.

In terms of immediate political success, Cicero failed dismally – he paid with his life for his commitment to defending the republic. On the other hand, though, he managed to process the experience of the aristocratic republic into a new model for educating future generations that would be living in a completely different world.

Cicero’s hand and his tongue were nailed to the speaker’s platform (*rostra*) in the *Forum*, the same one from which he had presented his views, as a sign that new times had arrived. But his essentially revolutionary idea for education reform – opposing Greek rhetoric and its teaching of practical effectiveness in action, and opting for the education in the *artes liberales* (arts worthy of free people) – survived and had a huge impact on European culture. It was the Ciceronian tradition that Quintilian used over a century after the death of *De oratore*’s author to design his new model of education for the *élite*; later, Erasmus of Rotterdam served as a mediator between Cicero and Quintilian on the one hand, and Renaissance humanism, on the other. It is the Ciceronian faith in EDUCATION being superior to INSTRUCTION that lies at the foundation of the idea of a liberal arts education.

For me, the unique opportunity to create the Polish model of education in a spirit of *artes liberales* came after 1990. *Omnes enim artes quae libero sunt dignae habent quoddam commune vinculum et quasi cognatione quadam inter se continentur* – this paraphrase of Cicero’s words became our motto once the communist system in Poland collapsed. Here, in our community – with strong participation of classical scholars – we decided not to transplant various institutional and organizational forms of American liberal education to the very different conditions of Poland and Eastern Europe. You can adopt the spirit, but not the letter.

I very much hope that our *artes liberales* “libero sunt dignae” in the sense that students in the Collegium<sup>7</sup> enjoy the freedom of thinking and the freedom of taking risks.

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<sup>7</sup> Collegium Artes Liberales is a unit of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” UW. It includes the *Artes Liberales* programme – an experimental curriculum for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle studies, designed «to restore awareness of the kindred nature of the humanities, social scienc-

However new dangers and challenges arise. Among others, the digital media revolution, which may diminish the role of the human factor in education and force us to rethink the function as well as the authority of the teacher. What is, therefore, today the meaning of the Ciceronian formula *orator est actor veritatis*?

#### 4. *David Movrin*

The first book I have ever edited, my introduction to the craft, happened to be the Slovenian translation of Cicero's *De oratore*. By that time, I had finished my undergraduate studies; I had even defended my BA thesis and was preparing for the final exam. It was 2001, and my professor Primož Simoniti asked me, during a casual meeting on Slovenska street in the city center, whether I might want to write a study to accompany the translation, and maybe see what could be done regarding the footnotes, the indices, and the like. I met with the translator, Ksenja Geister, over some hot chocolate; we laughed a lot about her translation's unexpected adventures, which involved hard-drive malfunction and botched OCR. Eventually, we decided what we wanted the results to look like, and I plunged into the text. It took months before I emerged on the other side. I loved every moment of it. After the initial bedazzlement by its many-faceted surface, I soon focused on *De oratore* as one of the key texts for the Ciceronian ideal of *artes liberales*, for the nuanced understanding of ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία. There are documents that can make a similar claim – texts by Isocrates, Quintilian, Marcianus Capella, Vergerius, and Erasmus, among others. Nevertheless, for my money, the Ciceronian dialogue with its dramatic exposition, with its very personal tension between Antony and Crassus, two remarkable figures from the generation before Cicero's, takes the crown. It is difficult to beat its sense of urgency. The dialogue is set in 91 BC, and Cicero points out that Crassus died ten days after that conversation – and he was lucky since Antony and the others lost their lives in the civil war between Marius and Sulla that followed. However, perhaps the most fascinating is the over-

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es, and natural sciences, to conjoin thinking with artistic endeavour, and to foster the comprehensive, personal, and civic development of the individual». Cf. *Glossary*, in Katarzyna Marciniak (ed.), *Antiquity and We*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2013, p. 15 (online: [www.al.uw.edu.pl/antiquity\\_and\\_we](http://www.al.uw.edu.pl/antiquity_and_we), 8 Dec. 2020).

arching meta-context. Cicero was writing all this in 55 BC, having returned from his exile in Dyrrachium, during which Clodius and his henchmen tore his house down. His urgent focus on *artes liberales* was his reaction to his private world, as well as the Republic, falling apart. How different from Ljubljana, where I was now reading his texts, a vibrant metropolis of the newly-independent country, enjoying its *fin de siècle*, contemplating Alexandre Kojève, Francis Fukuyama, the end of history and whatnot.

I discovered that the century that has just passed had often shown conspicuous dislike towards the Ciceronian ideal of education. Mommsen, awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1902, famously pronounced Cicero's writing to be expendable and his political talent non-existent. More interestingly, the decades that followed provided textbook examples of what happens when Ciceronian complexity – including *has artes quibus liberales doctrinae atque ingenuae continerentur, geometriam, musicam, litterarum cognitionem et poetarum, atque illa quae de naturis rerum, quae de hominum moribus, quae de rebus publicis dicerentur*, as proclaimed in *De oratore* 3, 127 – gets replaced with ideological orthodoxy in the field of learning. Two cases in point, both attacking European educational tradition, were particularly indicative, I thought. One was German, from the thirties, and another Yugoslav, from the seventies. Both represented symptoms of a political subsystem attempting to take over all others, both attacked the educational system built on the traditions of *artes liberales* – and both ended in collapse.

The national-socialist experiment was exemplified by the so-called Adolf-Hitler-Schulen, which opened in 1937 and were followed by a wider school-reform in 1938. These schools for the Party *élite* were conceived as an outright rejection of previous educational ideas; specialists now describe them as “anti-traditional, anti-knowledge, anti-Gymnasium, and anti-parent.” Lots of research has been done regarding the context of this “ἀγωγή des neuen Menschen.” Scholars from Volker Loseman to Johann Chapoutot have shown how Adolf Hitler's and Alfred Rosenberg's downright eerie view of antiquity, exhibited for instance in Otto Wilhelm von Vacano's *Sparta: Der Lebenskampf nordischen Herrenschicht*, warped traditional educational ideals into subservient and vacuous re-gurgitating of the ruling ideology.

However, as Mike Godwin might remark, making cautionary examples out of Nazis is easy. Admonitory cases were lurking closer to home.

*Mutatis mutandis*, the epithets above might describe somewhat less extreme yet more wide-ranging educational reform implemented in Yugoslavia in the late seventies, during the period of ideological tightening framed by Marshal Tito's autumn years. One of the documents from the period, penned by the National Education Institute in Ljubljana, proclaims teaching of Latin to be "incompatible with the self-governing socialist school and with the basic principles of Marxist pedagogy." No longer interested in *artes liberales*, the system that replaced the ideologically suspect gymnasium was called "directed education." Oddly enough, fundamental studies on this critical period are still lacking; but the scholars in this field, such as Jana Bačević, describe a system interested in the pacification of both the intellectuals and the students who were not willing to think along the same lines as the government. Not surprisingly, "directed education" collapsed together with the Berlin Wall when the Ciceronian ideal of gymnasium made its comeback. To answer the question investigated by this panel – it would seem that societies ignore the Ciceronian ideal at their peril.

Back in 2001, much of my work on Cicero took place in the newly built Slavic Library in Ljubljana. It was opened only months earlier and was at the time mostly undiscovered by students; its sunlit reading room, θαῦμα ιδέσθαι, could always offer you a seat, its computers were brand new and fast, and there was an inviting room for breaks. I do not remember many details from that period, apart from the books, but there was one particular afternoon that I would prefer to forget. A friend, now an editor at a publishing house (that library was indeed an inspiring place), came to my desk and nudged me: «Something is going on». We went to the computers to check CNN's website. It was an odd sight; while we were obviously studying, the page had crashed multiple times due to the onslaught of traffic, so they stripped it down to an all-text bulletin page. However, it was a different crashing that made the news, the date was September 11, the planes were flown into the towers, thousands were trapped. A sentence from that stripped-down bulletin page is still seared onto my retina: «Both towers later collapsed».

I never got the memo, but the end of history was probably cancelled that day. From then on, everything went from bad to worse (money never changed a thing); Afghanistan, Iraq, financial crisis, Syria, Brexit, and now the pandemic during which the Western governments have not exactly covered themselves in glory. It sometimes seems that this part of

the world has become trapped in permanent crisis management while things fall apart. This may be an apt time to remember the year 55 BC when Cicero wrote *De oratore*, contemplating the course of events that was disastrous for him personally while observing the Republic slipping inexorably towards the cliff. He did not write his book on education *despite* all that was happening; he wrote it *because* of it.

### 5. Ermanno Malaspina

When one thinks of Cicero and the *artes liberales*, three things immediately come to mind, in my opinion. The first one is Cicero's embodiment of the ideal of *humanitas*; the second one is his role in the development of the rhetorical, linguistic and stylistic aspects of education; the third one is his invaluable contribution to the intellectual vocabulary of modern languages by the development of concepts and technical words which were absent from Latin before him.

These aspects run the risk of seeming predictable, almost boring even (although they are everything but!). But I prefer to leave them for my colleagues and friends on this panel who are more qualified to discuss them, and instead focus on two different angles.

In my opinion, Cicero is absolutely modern and central in today's education in at least two other aspects: **politics** and **ethics**.

**Politics** seems like the last field in which Cicero can be presented as a model. We all know that, in the course of his life and in the numerous (and often contradictory) political circumstances in which he acted, he was accused first of backing the *populares*, then of being the spokesman of the oligarchy, then of not having enough political intelligence to face his adversaries (from Caesar to Antony, from Clodius to Octavian), then to be a brash supporter of Caesar's despotism and also, at the same time, to have inspired the Tyrannicides, in the name of the extinct ideal of a paternalistic and oligarchic republic.

As a result, he was slammed as a turncoat and a hypocrite. To this day, a harsh judgment continues to weigh on Cicero as infamously expressed by T. Mommsen in a sentence that is even featured in the Wikipedia page on Cicero:

Als Staatsmann ohne Einsicht, Ansicht und Absicht, hat er nach einander als Demokrat, als Aristokrat und als Werkzeug der Monarchen figurirt und ist nie mehr gewesen als ein kurzsichtiger Egoist<sup>8</sup>.

As a statesman without insight, opinion, and intention, he has figured after each other as a democrat, as an aristocrat and as a tool of the monarchs and has never been more than a short-sighted egoist.

I obviously do not endorse this judgement: in my opinion, Cicero was neither an aristocrat nor a traitor, neither a tyrannicide nor a hypocrite, but a man who sought to serve his Country in different capacities as allowed by different situations. Cicero's motto was the phrase *tempori servire/adsentiri, tempori serviendum/adsentiendum*, "to adapt to the circumstances", which is reiterated time and again throughout his written production, from the *Verrinae* (2, 3, 199) to the *De lege agraria* (2, 83), from the *Tusculans* (3, 66) to the *Letters*, where the allusions to contemporary politics are most prominent (*Att.* 10, 7, 1; *fam.* 9, 7, 2)<sup>9</sup>.

What matters here is not Cicero's political creed (we can approve or disapprove of his idea of an aristocratic republic, we can discuss his position on tyranny, etc., but this is not the point). What matters to me here is rather the method, or the principle, that I see acting as the moral driving force of Cicero's political endeavour, which is the care of the State and the awareness that if you really want to be active in politics, you have to commit and, in a way, "to roll up your sleeves". Today we are seeing that, all across Europe, and especially among young people, the impression is rampant that politics is inherently a dirty matter, and that in order not to get dirty, one has to steer away from it. As such, there is a shared understanding that, if one does choose to participate in politics, spurred by noble principles, this can only result in two possible outcomes, two antithetical images which are also reinforced by mainstream media: one ends up either abandoning politics in order to preserve one's noble principles, or abandoning these principles in order to pursue one's career in politics.

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<sup>8</sup> *Römische Geschichte. Bd. 3: Von Sullas Tode bis zur Schlacht von Thapsus*, Leipzig 1856, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. Manenti, *Temporibus adsentiendum: la necessità di adeguarsi alle circostanze nella teoria e nella prassi politica di Cicerone*, «Paideia» 62, 2007, pp. 459-497; A. Casamento, [Quantum potero voce contendam. La Pro Ligario di Cicerone nel giudizio di Quintiliano](#), «COL» 3, 2019, pp. 291-292.

On the contrary, Cicero's example reveals that such a stance is hypocritical and only serves as a justification to disregard the public affairs (something he criticized so much in the Epicureans). Moreover, the attribution of such a nihilistic and Machiavellian judgment to the Roman is simplistic and misguided: a great book by Michael C. Alexander, *Roman Amoralism Reconsidered: the Political Culture of the Roman Republic and Historians in an Era of Disillusionment*, 2018, reminds us instead that the alleged lack of morality in Rome's politics is rather the result of a historical bias; Cicero embodies the attempt to graft moral values into political action, avoiding the aforementioned two extremes (inaction and immorality)<sup>10</sup>.

I repeat once again that, in my view, the object of educational reflection for the young generations today should not be Cicero's *actions*, but rather his *approach*: following moral principles in politics is like proceeding on a knife-edge, with the risk of falling to one side or the other, either into rejection and disgust (and let us think of Cicero after his exile or after Pharsalus) or, on the contrary, giving in to degrading compromises, to opportunistic agreements, to humiliating choices (and, despite my role as President of the Scientific Council of the SIAC, I certainly cannot deny that even Cicero sometimes fell into such pitfalls!). But what remains is the principle, or at least the good purpose, of acting in order to be useful to the State, keeping our narrow path on the knife-edge, even adapting ourselves to roles imposed by the circumstances, so as to be able to bring our own contribution to the common good.

So much about politics. Let's now move on to **ethics**: a complete illustration of my point would take too long for this occasion<sup>11</sup>, but I am convinced that Cicero's only apparent hesitancy between Stoic dogmatism and Academic scepticism reflects the modern dilemma about "values" and multiculturalism. Cicero was definitely not a radical sceptic, because he believed in the existence of absolute – let's say objective – truth. But he was equally convinced that it was impossible for humans to grasp the truth to an absolute degree of certainty. However, this lack of a *fundamentum certum et inconcussum*, to use Heidegger's famous expression, never prevented him from acting in the ethical dimension, that is in the

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. my [review](#) in «COL» 4, 2020, pp. 218-222.

<sup>11</sup> For a more analytic discussion of this point cf. E. Malaspina, [Cicerone e la verità](#), «Res Publica Litterarum» 2012, pp. 1-13.



real, political, cultural, and human life of his times, with the same certainty, the same commitment, the same confidence as if he had owned this *fundamentum*. He, just like us today, felt in himself as equally strong both the rational commitment to refuse dogmatism and the ethical aspiration towards common laws valid for all ("by nature", I would say). If the passage from the first point to the second (the truth exists, but one cannot reach it) is completely logical, the leap from the second to the third (one cannot reach the truth, however one must identify some "non-negotiable principles" as if the truth could be reached) is more adventurous, but very human.

Cicero chose a difficult position for himself, because he wanted to preserve the rigour of the Academics, without losing the fundamental perspective of the dogmatists: if I am allowed to use a political metaphor, too much of the right to please the left and at the same time too much of the left to please the right. It was faith in what he held as "non-negotiable political principles" (regardless of whether we would now-days share them or not) that brought him to the death he suffered.

My **conclusion**. These two aspects of Cicero that I have just sketched, about politics and philosophy, are certainly divided by differences (and I am not so naive as to think that the distorting lens of my personality as a scholar does not contribute to curving the objective analysis of facts to make it fit into a framework that is more or less consciously appropriate to me and my tenets). However, I do believe that these two aspects converge on one element: in both the fields of politics and ethics, the figure of Cicero emerges as a non-extremist, but as a centrist (the definition is by P. Rousselot)<sup>12</sup>, not as a maximalist, but as a moderate, who recognizes the difficulties, but tries to overcome them, with a realism that avoids the excesses of pessimism and optimism. While being interested in his own self-realization, as a politician and as a man of culture, he could not imagine this self-realization except as part of a project that involved the citizenry and helped citizens to improve. Is this not exactly the portrait of the citizens we should forge (or, more humbly, hope to see) today, to face the challenges that await us tomorrow?

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<sup>12</sup> *Cicero and the Age of Extremes*, «The Journal of Greco-Roman Studies» 42, 2010, p. 76.

## 6. Markus Janka

*Responsum Latinum professori Hermanno Malaspina datum*

*Quia tu lingua Latina adloquens auditores congressum nostrum Ciceronianum Varsoviensem aperuisti, mi collega, nunc brevi ante finem congressus nostri Latinum responsum deliberationi tuae dabo de Ciceronis constantia et rem publicam liberam et philosophiam moralem complectente eiusque ipsius moderatione, quam miro acumine perorans integris fontibus nisis demonstravisti.*

*Secundam partem huius responsi mutuabor a verbis Antonii praeceptoris Ciceronis, cuius personam in primo libro De oratore composito inducit iunioribus et senioribus haec explicantem:*

*Probas mihi [...] ista, Crasse/Hermanne, quae dicis, nec dubito quin multo locupletior in dicendo futurus sit, si quis omnium rerum atque artium rationem naturamque comprehenderit; sed primum id difficile est factu, praesertim in hac nostra vita nostrisque occupationibus; deinde illud etiam verendum est ne abstrahamur ab hac exercitatione et consuetudine dicendi populari et forensi.*

*(Cic. de orat. 1, 80).*

*Nobis civibus Europaeis novi millennii non metuenda est ea difficultas, sed in educandis formandisque iunioribus plures personae Ciceronis oratoris, epistolographi, litterati, philosophi, patroni, senatoris, consulis, consularis sunt quidem considerandae in historia cultuque explicandis indagandisque, imprimis ea ratio dicendi, quam in libris De oratore Platonico more exemploque perpolitit elaboravit, in medium ponenda est.*

*Nam usque ad hunc diem artes liberales toto notae in orbe terrarum susinentur eo nobili inveteratoque fundamento, quod saeculo undevicesimo Gulilelmus ab Humboldt Potsdamensis definivit Ciceronis humanitatem cum Graecorum ingeniis recentiore more coniungens. Is enim et grammaticam et eloquentiam in litteris antiquis utriusque linguae compositis quasi exemplaribus perscrutandis posuit, ut iis artibus et intellectus et sensus bonique aequique pulchrique formentur. Ea officia quamvis stabilia nihilo minus unoquoque aevo reformanda novisque temporibus accommodanda sunt, sicut e.g. saeculo vicesimo Saulus B. Robinsohn Berolinensis, pater ille recentiorum curriculum didacticorum, pro certo habuit et ubicumque propagavit. Quae ars dialectica inter tempora communicans, quae fundamenta antiqua classica cum recentissimis testimoniis et eloquentiae et sa-*

*pietiae et rerum publicarum gubernandarum et epistolographiae et litterarum plurimis mediis expositarum coniungere queat, gignit gignetque artem liberalem didacticam Ciceronianam non facilem, sed vivam et bono communi totius mundi tam utilem quam iucundam dulcemque.*

Marcus Tullius Cicero has turned out to be a (rather unexpected) hero of contemporary popular culture: as Robert Harris (\*1957), writer of the world bestselling trilogy of historical novels on Cicero's life *Imperium*, *Lustrum* and *Dictator* (published in the decade between 2006 and 2015) pointed out on several occasions, documented also via Internet in video clips, Cicero has achieved the status of a universal icon of rhetoric and politics. His education, his career, his juridical and political accomplishments, his real and literary speeches, his writings on oratory and philosophy constitute a corpus of reference (and reverence) with staying power. Thus, it has appealed throughout the centuries to those who get engaged with this tradition, be it in more direct or indirect ways. Harris, himself once a political journalist (and, if we believe in the verdict of severe old Prussian Theodor Mommsen [1817–1903], therefore a kind of late colleague of Cicero's), hits the nail on the head: «I always wanted to write a big political novel, but I've been put off, because I didn't think I could invent characters who are more bizarre and strange than the people in power. And therefore I let it lie. But then reading about Pompey and Cicero and Cato and Caesar and Crassus and Clodius and the other characters that people this trilogy of novels made me think that I perhaps could write a novel about politics that was universal and that would be as much for someone living in Germany or Italy or England or America or anywhere in the world, because certain laws of politics are universal and the Romans established much of what we think about politics»<sup>13</sup>.

And why is Cicero, more than his contemporary politicians mentioned above, the ideal hero of such a universal and exemplary “big political novel”? Harris gives us this key: «Cicero was almost the first professional politician and approached with a deliberate aim to achieve political glory». Harris' interviewer Peter Jones corroborates this impression by reciting, in Latin, one passage of a letter Cicero wrote in April 59 BC to his friend and publisher Atticus, emphasizing the major importance of “longtime glory” in afterlife compared to the gossip and everyday dispute:

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<sup>13</sup> [Classics For All. Championing Classics in Schools: A Cicerone to Cicero: Robert Harris in conversation with Dr. Peter Jones MBE](#) (6 March 2020).

Quid vero historiae de nobis ad annos DC praedicarint? Quas quidem ego multo magis vereor quam eorum hominum, qui hodie vivunt, rumusculos (Cic. *Att.* 2, 5, 1).

What, however, will history books for six centuries report about us? About these I am much more concerned than about these people, who live today, and their tittle tattle.

Cicero was obviously an emblematic professional politician and intellectual with a strong historical conscience, which, due to the amount, the intellectual range and the depth of his literary heritage, remains to be an inspiration and challenge for every generation anew.

Consequently, Cicero is not only particularly inspiring and challenging for *Artes Liberales* Education today and tomorrow, but his concept of *humanitas* stands at the cradle of *artes liberales* in ancient Rome<sup>14</sup>. The history of education teaches us that in the era between Cicero and the younger Seneca, the traditionally Greek *philosophia* (established by Plato and Aristotle and modernized by the Hellenistic “schools”) was refreshed and adapted to the needs of the highly differentiated Roman *élite*. The tuning of (very tiny) specialized or even individualized teaching subjects (such as e.g. philology) and more general and ground-breaking ideas that can bind together this abundance with its centrifugal tendencies became a fundamental issue which until this day has never lost its urgency<sup>15</sup>. On the contrary, if we consider the debates about indispensable and radical educational reforms as responses to the challenges of the “global era and digital age”, Cicero’s response to the dilemma is still worth noticing and reflecting on. In his speech in favour of the right of residence for his teacher and companion Aulus Licinius Archias, in 62 BC Cicero defines a common link of all intellectual arts:

Omnnes artes, quae ad humanitatem pertinent, habent quoddam commune vinculum, et quasi cognatione quadam inter se continentur (Cic. *Arch.* 2).

*All arts, that have to do with humanitas, have a kind of common link and are, so to say, as a kind of blood relatives closely connected to each other.*

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. W. Stroh, *De origine vocum humanitatis et humanismi*, «Gymnasium» 115, 2008, pp. 535-571.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. e.g. M. Fuhrmann, *Latein und Europa. Geschichte des gelehrten Unterrichts in Deutschland von Karl dem Großen bis Wilhelm II.*, Köln 2001.

This means: the human impact, the orientation toward human culture expressed in language, literature, mathematics, technics, music etc., is the bond that keeps together single interests and individual aims. In Cicero's absolutely appropriate view, the touchstone of this *humanitas* are the virtues of mutual respect for the other as a fellow human being and a strong sense for the validity of the principles of law. These standards nurture his unbreakable belief in the need of *constituere rem publicam*, i.e. to use one's physical and intellectual abilities altruistically for the sake of a political rule that combines internal and external stability with a maximum of individual freedom and participation in the common good<sup>16</sup>.

To conclude this statement: these guidelines have to be kept in mind if we consider Cicero's curriculum, governed by the ideal of a *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. In schools, colleges and universities (e.g. in the "Seminar für Allgemeine Rhetorik" at the University of Tübingen)<sup>17</sup>, Cicero's impressive speeches and his masterpieces on rhetorical technics and theory are taught and discussed continually as stable landmarks of didactic *Nachhaltigkeit* (constancy). Eloquence with all its power and impression, its multimedia omnipresence, its ambivalent psychagogy, its danger to degenerate to demagogy, its inescapability, doubtlessly needs the corrective of strong and universal ethical principles. In this sense, Quintilian was right, when he praised Cicero, the "king of courts" during his lifetime (*regnare in iudiciis dictus est*), with regard to his fame in the posterity (*apud posteros*) as:

Non hominis nomen, sed eloquentiae (Quint. 10, 1, 112).

*Not a human being's name, but that of eloquence.*

And just in December 2019, Frederic Rzewski (\*1938), the non-conformist American composer with Polish roots, was interviewed in Austrian television on the "Wien modern" performance of his cyclic pi-

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<sup>16</sup> For the unfolding of this concept in Cicero's late cycle of philosophical literature cf. M. Janka, *Vitae philosophia dux: Ciceros philosophische Schriften zwischen Sitz im Leben und existentieller Fernwirkung*, in R. Kussl (Hrsg.), *Lateinische Lektüre in der Oberstufe*, «Dialog Schule Wissenschaft – Klassische Sprachen und Literaturen» 43, Speyer 2009, pp. 13-58.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.rhetorik.uni-tuebingen.de/> (6 March 2020).

ano composition on a resistance song from Chile, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated* (1975)<sup>18</sup>. He explained the title of his latest composition *Humanitas* by paraphrasing a passage that Cicero wrote in a letter to his brother Quintus coaching him as governor of Asia minor (61 BC): *humanitas* (philanthropy) and *sapientia* (intellectual force) should govern *potestas* (power) and serve the welfare of the people:

Esset humanitatis tuae consulere eorum commodis et utilitati salutique servire (Cic. *ad Q. fr.* 1, 27).

*It would be due to the humanitas you are fond of, to ensure their welfare and serve the benefits and safety of the people you govern.*

And Rzewski notes as a cosmopolitan motto of the globalized world: «This is more important than all modern ideologies».

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<sup>18</sup> In the TV program, *lebensArt*, hosted by Clarissa Stadler, broadcast on the channel 3sat on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019.