



Study Guide on Cicero's *On Friendship*

QUESTIONS ON THE WHOLE WORK

1. How would you describe the *ethos* or character of Laelius? Is he wise? (If yes, through experience or through books or through both?) Is he philosophical? Do you trust what he says? Why?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the claim at section 25 that Laelius' explanation of friendship is "easier to grasp" than others', such as Plato's or Aristotle's? Explain.
3. What is Laelius' understanding of friendship as it relates to the whole republic? Consider especially Cicero's *On Duties* 1.42, 50, 55-56, 58; 2.30-32; 3.19-28, 43-46 in relation to his *On Friendship*, sections 82-85.
4. Is Laelius' view of "common friendship" actually possible?
5. What roles do duty and obligation have in a friendship?
6. What is the overall rhetorical strategy of the work? What appeals to you most and why?
7. How do you tell the difference between a flatterer and a friend?
8. For Laelius, is virtue a cause or an effect of true friendship, or is it both a cause and an effect?
9. Are friends necessary for happiness? Consider Laelius' claim that virtuous people are self-sufficient.

QUESTIONS ON THE OUTLINED PARTS

- 1) Cicero's Prologue (1-5)
 - a) **Cicero's Setting** (1-2): *How does Cicero grow in wisdom?*
 - b) **Dialogue's introduction** (3-4): orders dialogue so that "the whole conversation will seem to be taking place right in the reader's presence": *Why write a dialogue rather than a treatise on friendship?*
 - c) **Dialogue's setting** (5): *What is the political context of the dialogue and why is that important?*
- 2) Introductory Conversation (6-15)
 - a) **Ways of being wise** (6-8): expertise in law, experience in many things, natural disposition, virtue, studies, and learning, "measure all human events by virtue", bear grief "with moderation": *How do you grow in wisdom?*
 - b) **Cato's virtue** (9-10): *What is Cato praised for that "Apollo's wisest" (Socrates) is not? Why is that important?*
 - c) **Scipio's virtue, immortality, and friendship with Laelius** (11-15): *What virtues does Scipio embody? Are those virtues public or private, stoic or emotive? Why does Laelius believe that a soul is immortal? What is the "real power of friendship"?*



- 3) Exordium (16-24)
 - a) **Fannius' threefold request** (16): to discuss the senses, origins, and laws of friendship.
 - b) **Laelius' purpose** (17): Different treatment from Plato and Aristotle; "all I would urge is that you put friendship above all other human affairs": *What is Laelius' purpose in discussing friendship?*

- 4) *Sentias*: Senses of friendship (18-32): *What are the different senses of the word 'friendship'?*
 - a) **Definition of good men** (18): not perfect, but are constant in "reliability, integrity, justice and generosity": *What is attractive about explicitly discussing, not an ideal of friendship, but a real friendship?*
 - b) **Definition of friendship in society** (19): goodwill: *What quality makes civic friendship possible?*
 - c) **Definition of friendship in itself** (20-21): "a deeply-felt agreement in all things divine and human, established in goodwill and love" *Is this friendship possible?*
 - d) **Advantages of friendship** (22-24): mutual goodwill, another self, compassion, "makes good times yet more splendid", good hope about the future, civic stability: *What are the advantages of true friendship?*

- 5) *Existimes*: Origins of true friendship (25-32): *What is the origin of true friendship?*
 - a) **From a love?** (26-29): Yes, because permanent (although needs are fulfilled, friendship continues): *What gives birth to the true love between friends?*
 - b) **From a lack?** (29-32) No, because temporary (once needs are fulfilled, then friendship ends); "love is confirmed by favors...common interests...and regularly doing things together": *Do true friends fulfill each other's needs?*

- 6) *Praecepta*: Laws for love to grow in friendship (33-99): *How does love grow in friendships?*
 - a) **The "Holy Law of Friendship"** (33-44): "we neither ask for shameful things nor do them if asked"; "ask our friends to do noble things, and do noble things for our friend": *How do friendships break and grow?*
 - i) **2 Objections** (45-46): cannot enjoy "peace of mind" with many friends; friendship should be sought for assistance, not affection.
 - ii) **2 Refutations** (47-55): "the mark of a well-constituted soul" "rejoices over good things and sorrows over the opposite"; "it is not friendship that follows favors, but favors that follow upon friendship": *Does Laelius adequately respond to the objections? Why can a tyrant have no friends?*
 - b) **4 False Laws of friendship** (56-61): *What is wrong with each of these four definitions of friendship?*
 - c) **Law of Testing Friends** (62-64): "A certain friend is found in an uncertain situation"; "serious, constant, and stable" in prosperous and evil times: *How do you test if a friend is true?*
 - d) **Law of Choosing Friends** (65-73): choose people who are *fides* (constant, simple, on the same plane, and agreeable), good (wise, sincere, and unsuspecting), and pleasant (sweetness of speech and behavior, easy-going, open, and sweet, and inclined to companionship and availability); prefer old friends to newer ones; superior friends should raise up inferior friends: *How should you choose good friends?*



- e) **Law of Releasing Friends** (74-81): “should be unstitched rather than torn away”; “should appear to just die away, rather than to be snuffed out”; “a true friend is like another self.”
 - f) **Law of Building Friendships** (82-88): “first, be a good man, and second, seek out someone like yourself”; results in joy, service, justice, and respect; society of good friends is “the best and most blessed company there is, leading the ultimate good of nature”: *What is the best kind of society?*
 - g) **Law of Correcting Friends** (88-99): “first...make sure that the advice lacks any harshness, and second...make sure that the correction lacks any trace of insult”; if corrected, “feel bad about the misdeed, and be glad about the correction”; flatters “say all things for the sake of pleasure, and nothing for the sake of truth”; “truth can still win the day, provided it is brought into the open and explained”: *What is the relationship between friendship and the truth? Why is flattery so dangerous? How does Scipio uphold the truth and defeat Gaius Papirius’ flattery?*
- 7) Peroratio (100-104)
- a) **Summary** (100-102): virtue “creates friendships and keeps them” in affection.
 - b) **Amplification** (102-104): friendship between Laelius and Scipio: *What is the role of study in friendship?*

Suggested use: This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Cicero’s *On Friendship*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.