

Comparing Cicero's "De Officiis", Thomas Jefferson's "Social Duties", and Epicurean Philosophy

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 23, 2025 at 11:25 AM

Cassius Admin Edit: Cicero's "De Officiis" is one of his most famous works. From Wikipedia:

The legacy of *De Officiis* is profound. Although not a Christian work, in 390 St. Ambrose declared it legitimate for the Church to use (along with everything else Cicero, and the equally popular Roman philosopher Seneca, had written). It became a moral authority during the Middle Ages. Of the Church Fathers, St. Augustine, St. Jerome and even more so St. Thomas Aquinas, are known to have been familiar with it.^[12] Illustrating its importance, some 700 handwritten copies remain extant in libraries around the world dating back to before the invention of the printing press. Though this does not surpass the Latin grammarian Priscian's 900 extant handwritten copies, it places *De Officiis* far above many classical works. Following the invention of the printing press, *De Officiis* was the third book to be printed—third only to the Gutenberg Bible and Donatus's *Ars Minor*, which was the first printed book.^[a]

, but it has been many years since I read it. I don't see it discussed very frequently in Epicurean commentary because I don't recall that it makes as much specific reference to Epicurus as some of his other works, but no doubt the references are there and just need pulling out.

The Walter Miller translation at Gutenberg is [here](#).

I'll tag this thread with #Morality and we can add to this section some of our general discussions about morality and social duties, and eventually go through this text to pull out what we can find about attitudes toward Epicurean social duties - as referenced in this post by Kalosyni.

[Separation of church and state in the United States - Wikipedia](#)

Excerpt from the Wikipedia article "Separation of church and state":

Quote

The principle is paraphrased from Jefferson's "separation between Church & State". It has been used to express the understanding of the intent and function of this amendment, which allows [freedom of religion](#). It is generally traced to a [January 1, 1802, letter](#) by Jefferson, addressed to the [Danbury Baptist Association](#) in [Connecticut](#), and published in a Massachusetts newspaper.

Jefferson wrote:

Quote

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.^[1]

This: ..."that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions"...

and..."I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties"

So then the question is what are a person's "social duties"?