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## THE QUESTIONS OF LIFE AND DEATH BY CICERO AND MACROBIUS\*

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*Abstract:* To Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* Macrobius prepared a Neoplatonic commentary in Late Antiquity. On the grounds of these two works and Cicero's other political or philosophical writings and letters this study seeks an answer to the question what similarities and differences can be demonstrated between the two authors' way of thinking as regards the nature of the virtues, the issue of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, the meaning of life and the necessity of voluntary death.

*Keywords:* Macrobius, Cicero, virtues, voluntary death

The commentary literature flourishing in the Late Antiquity is usually divided into two categories: the first is the so-called grammatical type that follows and interprets the original text almost line by line, mainly on the grounds of language, religious and literary history, like the commentaries of Donatus and Servius, and the second is the philosophical type that chooses and explains an optional section from any author's any work more freely.<sup>1</sup> Macrobius' commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis* also belongs to the latter category<sup>2</sup> that examines seven sections from Cicero's work in two books each. Number seven, the *numerus plenus*<sup>3</sup> is especially favourable for the author and it seems to be justified by the fact that he deals with it through 83 paragraphs in his work:<sup>4</sup> no other topics discussed by him get such great attention.<sup>5</sup> Macrobius starts the first book of *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* with a prologue thus the first

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<sup>1</sup> See more about the philosophical commentary and its adaptation by Macrobius in: Flamant 1977, 148-153; Armisen-Marchetti 2001-2003, I, XX-XXIV.

<sup>2</sup> The latest publication of the Macrobian text used in this paper: Armisen-Marchetti 2001-2003.

<sup>3</sup> *In Somn.* I 6, 1; 5.

<sup>4</sup> *In Somn.* I 6.

<sup>5</sup> His other work, the *Saturnalia* also consists of seven books. On the one hand it refers to the number of days in the feast; on the other it is also significant from the aspect of numerology.

book contains eight units while the second has seven sections, the product of these two numbers is 56, which refers to Scipio Aemilianus' age in the year of his death,<sup>6</sup> and the fact that it is not only a speculation is also supported by Macrobius' lines, who says the following: *...hos duos numeros (octo dico et septem), qui ad multiplicationem annorum perfecti in re publica viri conveniunt, solos idoneos ad efficiendam mundi animam iudicatos, qua nihil post auctorem potest esse perfectius.*<sup>7</sup>

The author selects the sections from Cicero's text that he considers worthy of discussion (*... discutienda sunt nobis ipsius somnii verba, non omnia, sed ut quaequae videbuntur digna quaesitu... In Somn. I 5, 1*), i.e. in connection with these parts he can introduce the essential questions and the most characteristic doctrines of the Neoplatonic philosophy. At the same time, formally he uses the triple division of the Stoic philosophy, so he examines the different questions within the categories of *philosophia moralis, naturalis* and *rationalis*,<sup>8</sup> but in a hierarchic conception peculiar to Neoplatonism,<sup>9</sup> and inasmuch as *Commentarii* is a didactic writing that was intended for his son, Eustathius<sup>10</sup>, the disciplines of *quadrivium (astronomia, aritmetica, geometria* and *musica)* have significant scope in the text. On the whole it can be stated that the author endeavours to present philosophy, the *disciplina disciplinarum*<sup>11</sup> in its entirety while he strives to create the synthesis of the Greek and Roman culture.<sup>12</sup> The latter is most proved by the fact that in the first book of his commentary two pairs of authors are emphasised: Plato and Cicero to represent the way of philosophy, Homer and Vergil to embody the way of poetry. Besides its didactic and summing

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<sup>6</sup> Scipio Aemilianus lived between 185 and 129BC.

<sup>7</sup> *In Somn. I 6, 3*. The same idea also appears at one of Macrobius' sources, Favonius Eulogius: *... ponitque illum (sc. Scipionem) aetatis suae quinquagesimo ac sexto anno, duobus in se coeuntibus numeris <plenis> absolutam caelo animam, unde acceperat, redditurum...* (Holder 1901, I, 18sq.)

<sup>8</sup> *In Somn. II 17, 15: Sed iam finem somnio cohibita disputatione faciamus, hoc adiecto quod conclusionem decebit, quia cum sint totius philosophiae tres partes, moralis, naturalis et rationalis, et sit moralis quae docet morum elimatam perfectionem, naturalis quae de divinis corporibus disputat, rationalis cum de incorporeis sermo est quae mens sola complectitur, nullam de tribus Tullius hoc somnio praetermisit.*

<sup>9</sup> *etica* (the problem of the individual soul) – *physica* (World Soul) – *logica* (*Logos/The One*)

<sup>10</sup> His full name is probably Flavius Macrobius Plotinus Eustathius, around 462 *praefectus urbi* (cf. Marinone 1977, 20). The two books of the *Commentarii* are offered to him by the author as a loving father, *In Somn. I 1: ...vitae mihi dulcedo pariter et gloria; In Somn. II 1: ...luce mihi dilectior fili...*

<sup>11</sup> *Macr., Sat. I 24, 21*.

<sup>12</sup> As regards the demand of creating synthesis, Cicero's philosophical oeuvre could also have been an example to follow, see the study by László Havas in connection with this: Havas 2004, 273-331.

intention, this writing is a kind of salute to the glorious past and its literary tradition, furthermore, the author is not purely the passive bearer but to some extent the interpreter of Rome's cultural heritage and the creator of its coherent unit.

Macrobius must undoubtedly have been seen as a role model of the renaissance man by the following eras and besides his doctrines this could have been one of the main reasons why his popularity was continual from the Middle Ages to the 16th century. For some time the Late Antique author received less attention, his writings were pushed into the background by the great classic writers but the scientific researches in the recent decades started to rediscover the values of Macrobius' oeuvre and the growing number of the new text editions, translations, thorough analyses could help to restore the shabby prestige of the scholar researcher of the Antiquities.

Dealing with a politico-philosophical work such as Cicero's *De re publica* is timely in every era and every society esteeming the values of civilisation highly can derive from it. Macrobius was interested in Cicero's work not only as a Neoplatonic thinker but as a public figure having an important political carrier and this duality can be observed in his entire commentary. Besides a long discussion about the soul's journey, the hypostasis and other specifically neoplatonic doctrines he devotes great attention and extended sections among others to disputes like the role of justice and other virtues in the state, the topic of *officia*, the question what makes a man *vir bonus* and how a *vir bonus* can become a *rector bonus*.

According to a section of *De re publica* remaining at Saint Augustine Cicero laments over the question what survived in his own age from the ancient morals that provided foundations for Rome once. People do not pursue them, moreover, they have almost forgotten them. The ancient morals are actually destroyed and the reason for this catastrophic situation is that men are missing.<sup>13</sup> Those men, – and here Macrobius followed the train of thought – who do not have a desire for earthly glory like public statues or triumphs as a reward of their deeds due to the divine virtues in them but for a longlasting glory that never fades,<sup>14</sup> that *Scipio ipse vidisset in caelo bonis rerum publicarum servata rectoribus* (*In Somn.* I 4, 3). This is the kind of glory that can never be taken

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<sup>13</sup> August., *De civ. D.* II 21: *Quid enim manet ex antiquis moribus, quibus ille (sc. Ennius) dixit rem stare Romanam, quos ita oblivione obsoletos videmus, ut non modo non colantur, sed iam ignorentur? Nam de viris quid dicam? Mores enim ipsi interierunt virorum penuria...* In connection with Cicero's views about the decline of morals cf. Havas 2010, 109sqq.

<sup>14</sup> *In Somn.* I 4, 2: *...quamquam sapientibus conscientia ipsa factorum egregiorum amplissimum virtutis est praemium, tamen illa divina virtus non statuas plumbo inhaerentes nec triumphos arescentibus laureis sed stabiliora quaedam et viridiora praemiorum genera desiderat.*

away from a person living by the virtues and that was also wished to have by Cicero himself as he wrote down in one of his letters in May of 46 to M. Marius<sup>15</sup>:

*...habeam duas res quibus me sustentem, optimarum artium scientiam et maximarum rerum gloriam; quarum altera mihi vivo numquam eripietur, altera ne mortuo quidem (Fam. VII 3, 4).* That is: "...I have two things to support me – a knowledge of the best branches of learning, and the glory of the highest achievements; of the former I shall never be robbed in my lifetime, of the latter not even when I am dead."<sup>16</sup>

In the first book of *De re publica* the down-to-earth life of the people being active for the public welfare and the philosophers' contemplative view of life are contrasted. Cicero enumerates several outstanding men – among them also Cato Censorius who reached the highest rank in his political career as a *homo novus* like himself and whose way of life he considered very similar to his own<sup>17</sup> –, who excelled in defending their homeland and he defines virtue as a necessity given by nature that directs man to love their country and to protect public welfare. The writer makes explicit difference between *ars* and *virtus*: it is not enough to possess virtue like an art. *Ars* can still be maintained through *scientia* even it is not exercised, contrarily *virtus* obtains its sense through practical realisation and the highest level of this is governing the state.<sup>18</sup> The ideal values are also listed that have contributed significantly to the formation of the Roman state's character such as *pietas, religio, iustitia, fides, aequitas, pudor, continentia, fortitudo etc.*, thus the difference between Greek philosophy and Roman legislative wisdom is emphasised. So *vita activa* should be preferred to *vita contemplativa*.<sup>19</sup> He also keeps this idea later despite the defeat of the civil war but if there is no possibility to exercise *vita activa*, if as an architect and

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<sup>15</sup> It is not clear from Cicero's letters who could be identified with the above mentioned M. Marius. Shakleton Bailey (2004, 324) reckons that he could be the member of the Marius family from Arpinum with whom Cicero had a good relationship. He is the addressee of the famous letter talking about the games organised in the honour of Pompeius (*Fam.* VII 1), his villa used to be found near the area which is today Castellamare di Stabia in the Bay of Naples. About the letter addressed to Marius *Fam.* VII 3. see more: Beaujeu 1991, 20-21.

<sup>16</sup> The English translation of all the quoted parts of the letters: Glynn Williams 1983.

<sup>17</sup> *Rep.* I 1: *M. vero Catoni homini ignoto et novo, quo omnes qui isdem rebus studemus quasi exemplari ad industriam virtutemque ducimur, certe licuit Tusculi se in otio delectare, salubri et propinquo loco. Sed homo demens ut isti putant, cum cogeret eum necessitas nulla, in his undis et tempestatibus ad summam senectutem maluit iactari, quam in illa tranquillitate atque otio iucundissime vivere.* Cf. *Verr.* II 5, 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Rep.* I 2: *Nec vero habere virtutem satis est quasi artem aliquam nisi utare; etsi ars quidem cum ea non utare scientia tamen ipsa teneri potest, virtus in usu sui tota posita est; usus autem eius est maximus civitatis gubernatio...*

<sup>19</sup> About the Neoplatonic explanation of the two aspects by Macrobius see Tóth 2012, 59-63.

what is more even as a master mason nobody wants to use *vir bonus* to build the state (*Fam.* IX 7, 5: *...non modo ut architectos, verum etiam ut fabros ad aedificandam rem publicam...*), there is nothing else to do except to retire and to choose contemplative life: *Quis enim hoc non dederit nobis ut, cum opera nostra patria sive non possit uti sive nolit, ad eam vitam revertamur quam multi docti homines, fortasse non recte, sed tamen multi etiam rei publicae praepo-nendam putaverunt?* (*Fam.* IX 16, 5) Retirement and contemplative lifestyle can be approved for a Roman person only if external circumstances force him to stay away from public life and Cicero is exactly in a situation like this and dealing with the sciences, which was only *delectatio* earlier, becomes the only *salus* in these hard times.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, it turns out from his letters that the defeat on Pompeius' side resulted in a certain unbalance in Cicero regarding his principles. Since he was not able to make the greatest sacrifice that could be done by a Roman citizen feeling responsible for his state, namely he was not capable of sacrificing himself. Earlier in *De re publica* there is an idea: the most illustrious leaders of the state were escaping because of shame and dishonour; obviously he did not know at the time that his own future was projected ahead. They are not deterred by the fear or the chance of punishment but by the natural shame (*verecundia*) of being found guilty.<sup>21</sup> In the letters written after the defeat against Caesar, Cicero's apologies and explanations show a feeling of remorse and shame about so many comrades perishing while he himself was not killed in the war.

"I determined to convey the same sentiments to you by letter," – he writes to Marius – "so that you might know what to say if ever you fell among my detractors. For there are people who, though my passing away was not likely to be of the slightest benefit to the Republic, look upon it as a sort of scandalous reflection upon me that I am still alive."<sup>22</sup>

In his letter to Varro he expresses his opinion bitterly about the behaviour of the *otiosi*, the people who observe the actions only from outside:

„As to the course we adopted, I should not have thought that we ought to regret it, even if those who did not adopt it had now no reason to regret their decision. For we followed the lead, not of hope, but of a sense of duty; on the other hand, what we turned our backs on was not duty, but a

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<sup>20</sup> *Fam.* IX 2, 5: *... modo nobis stet illud, una vivere in studiis nostris, a quibus antea delectationem modo petebamus, nunc vero etiam salutem...*

<sup>21</sup> *Rep.* V 6: *<civi>tatibus, in quibus expetunt laudem optimi et decus, ignominiam fugiunt ac dedecus. Nec vero tam metu poenae terrentur, quae est constituta legibus, quam verecundia, quam natura homini dedit quasi quendam vituperationis non iniustae timorem.*

<sup>22</sup> *Fam.* VII 3, 6: *Haec ... volui per litteras eadem, ut haberes, quid diceres, si quando in vituperatores meos incidisses; sunt enim, qui, cum meus interitus nihil fuerit rei publicae profuturus, criminis loco putent esse, quod vivam...*

hopeless cause. We, therefore, had a quicker sense of honour than those who never stirred from home, and were less infatuated than those who never returned home when all their resources were exhausted. But there is nothing I resent so much as the harsh criticism of those who did nothing at all; and however the matter stands, I venerate more those who fell in the war than I care for those still with us, who are dissatisfied with us for presuming to live.”<sup>23</sup>

To his friend, Papirius Paetus, with whom he usually has an easy-flowing correspondence,<sup>24</sup> he estimates his own role and activity in the struggle of the civil war as a kind of self-justification:

”... I observe that, in the opinion of those philosophers who alone appear to me to grasp the true meaning of virtue, it is not the part of a wise man to guarantee anything whatever, except as regards wrongdoing; and of that I fancy I am innocent in a double sense, firstly, because my convictions were perfectly correct, and secondly, because, when I saw that we were not sufficiently supported to maintain them, I did not think we should continue to contend with those who are more powerful. As regards the duty of a good citizen therefore I certainly deserve no censure.”<sup>25</sup>

In another letter the following can be read:

”... I withdrew from a war where there was nothing left but either to die in battle, or to fall into some ambush, or pass into the conqueror’s hands, or to take refuge with Juba, or to find a spot for what would be practically exile, or deliberately to die by one’s own hand. At any rate there was no other course open, if you had neither the will nor the courage to throw yourself on the mercy of the conqueror...”<sup>26</sup>

In the same letter he continues:

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<sup>23</sup> *Fam. IX 5, 2: Consilii nostri, ne si eos quidem, qui id secuti non sunt, non poeniteret, nobis poenitendum putarem; secuti enim sumus non spem, sed officium, reliquimus autem non officium, sed desperationem: ita verecundiores fuimus, quam qui se domo non commoverunt, saniores, quam qui amissis opibus domum non reverterunt. Sed nihil minus fero quam severitatem otiosorum et, quoquo modo se res habet, magis illos vereor, qui in bello occiderunt, quam hos curo, quibus non satisfacimus, quia vivimus.*

<sup>24</sup> About the correspondence of Cicero and Paetus see Tabacco 2009, 27-51.

<sup>25</sup> *Fam. IX 16, 5: ...sic video philosophis placuisse iis, qui mihi soli videntur vim virtutis tenere, nihil esse sapientis praestare nisi culpam, qua mihi videor dupliciter carere, et quod ea senserim, quae rectissima fuerunt, et quod, cum viderem praesidii non satis esse ad ea obtinenda, viribus certandum cum valentioribus non putarim; ergo in officio boni civis certe non sum reprehendendus.*

<sup>26</sup> *Fam. VII 3, 3: discessi ab eo bello, in quo aut in acie cadendum fuit aut in aliquas insidias incidendum aut deveniendum in victoris manus aut ad lubam confugiendum aut capiendus tamquam exsilio locus aut consciscenda mors voluntaria; certe nihil fuit praeterea, si te victori nolles aut non auderes committere.*

”Why I should contrive my own death there seemed no reason; why I should pray for it there were many.”<sup>27</sup>

In the years prior to Rome’s pernicious time Cicero often discusses in his writings that although practising virtues involves difficulties, the active person must ignore these and for a brave man natural death seems more miserable than devotion for the country. However, only after the civil war he faces the fact how many difficulties practising the virtues of *vita activa* involves and that he cannot deal with it for a while is proved by the fact that in the first half of the year 46 his thoughts were mainly engaged by the question of retiring from public life and by his own safety.

On the grounds of certain lines of letters written at that time it can be stated that the idea of suicide came up to him but why he finally refused this possibility cannot definitely be explained by his weakness. Although sometimes his statements about suicide in general are controversial<sup>28</sup> the deliberate extermination of his life could not have been reconcilable with the philosophical conception that is also mentioned in *Somnium Scipionis* where Scipio is warned by his father: *...et tibi Publi, et piis omnibus retinendus animus est in custodia corporis nec iniussu eius, a quo ille est vobis datus, ex hominum vita migrandum est, ne munus adsignatum a deo diffugisse videamini.* (*Rep.* VI 15) A person must keep his soul in the prison of his body until god sets it free from captivity. This originally Platonic idea can also be found in *Tusculanae disputationes* written in the year of 45 although at this time there is already a concession in the dispute that a rightful reason for death could be given by the deity. The modification of his view could have been forced by the memory of Cato of Utica, his friend committing suicide who was the idol of the virtuous person for him.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Fam.* VII 3, 4: *Mortem mihi cur consciscerem, causa non visa est, cur optarem, multae causae.* One year later he contrasts his own situation with the example of Cato Uticensis who in his opinion gives up life happily as he finds a reason for death (*Tusc.* I 30, 74: *Cato autem sic abiit e vita, ut causam moriendi nactum se esse gauderet*). The same thought appears also in *De officiis* where he explains Cato’s suicide with his character, I 112: *... differentia naturarum tantam habet vim, ut non numquam mortem sibi ipse consciscere alius debeat, alius (in eadem causa) non debeat. Num enim alia in causa M. Cato fuit, alia ceteri, qui se in Africa Caesari tradiderunt? Atqui ceteris forsitan vitio datum esset, si se interemissent, propterea quod lenior eorum vita et mores fuerant faciliores; Catoni cum incredibilem tribuisset natura gravitatem, eamque ipse perpetua constantia roboravisset semperque in proposito susceptoque consilio permanisset, moriendum potius quam tyranni vultus aspiciendus fuit.*

<sup>28</sup> See about it in more details: Hill 2004, 31-72; about the Roman concept of suicide cf. among others: Grisé 1982, *passim*; van Hooff 1990, *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> *Tusc.* I 30, 75: *vetat enim dominans ille in nobis deus iniussu hinc nos suo demigrare; cum vero causam iustam deus ipse dederit, ut tunc Socrati, nunc Catoni, saepe multis, ne ille me Dius Fidius vir sapiens laetus ex his tenebris in lucem illam excesserit, nec tamen ille vincla carceris*

Refusing suicide in *Somnium Scipionis* also calls Macrobius' attention and in his commentary he deals with the question at great length.<sup>30</sup> Cicero's concept expressed by Scipio can be traced back to Plato's *Phaedo* thus the Late Antique interpreter takes sides against voluntary death also with the reference to this.<sup>31</sup> He differentiates two forms of death: one is the physical death following nature's law when the soul gets rid of the body's prison and the other is the philosophical death when the soul although it is still in the body despises the body's desire and passion, moreover, it can totally destroy them.<sup>32</sup> Cicero also discusses the latter, symbolic form of death according to whom the life of philosophers is nothing else than preparing for death.<sup>33</sup> by all means that the philosopher deprives the body of the enjoyment and retires from the practical activities he can lead the soul back to itself. Through getting rid of the body the soul can learn how it is to die and can experience the real happiness of the celestial life after the earthly existence.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly to Cicero the Neoplatonic Macrobius also shares the opinion that this manner of death mentioned for the second time suits the philosophers he aims to reach it on the second grade of his own virtue system, on the grade of the purging virtues (*virtutes purgatoriae*).<sup>35</sup> Practising the purging or cathartic

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*ruperit – leges enim vetant –, sed tamquam a magistratu aut ab aliqua potestate legitima, sic a deo evocatus atque emissus exierit.* Furthermore: *Off.* I 112, see note 27.

<sup>30</sup> *In Somn.* I 13.

<sup>31</sup> *In Somn.* I 13, 5: *Haec secta et praeceptio Platonis est, qui in Phaedone definit homini non esse sua sponte moriendum.* Cf. *Phaedo* 62c.

<sup>32</sup> *In Somn.* I 13, 5-6: *Nam Plato ... hominis duas adserit mortes, quarum unam natura, virtutes alteram praestant. Homo enim moritur cum anima corpus relinquit solutum lege naturae: mori etiam dicitur cum anima adhuc in corpore constituta corporeas inlecebras philosophia docente contemnit et cupiditatum dulces insidias reliquasque omnes exiit passionibus.*

<sup>33</sup> The same by Macrobius: *In Somn.* I 13, 5: *Sed in eodem tamen dialogo idem (sc. Plato) dicit mortem philosophantibus adpetendam et ipsam philosophiam meditationem esse moriendi.*

<sup>34</sup> *Tusc.* I 31, 75: *Nam quid aliud agimus, cum a voluptate, id est a corpore, cum a re familiarum, quae est ministra et famula corporis, cum a re publica, cum a negotio omni sevocamus animum, quid, inquam, tum agimus nisi animum ad se ipsum advocamus, secum esse cogimus maximeque a corpore abducimus? Secernere autem a corpore animum, nec quicquam aliud, est mori discere. Quare hoc commentemur, mihi crede, disiungamusque nos a corporibus, id est consuescamus mori. Hoc, et dum erimus in terris, erit illi caelesti vitae simile, et cum illuc ex his vinculis emissi feremur, minus tardabitur cursus animorum. Nam qui in compedibus corporis semper fuerunt, etiam cum soluti sunt, tardius ingrediuntur, ut ii qui ferro vincti multos annos fuerunt. Quo cum venerimus, tum denique vivemus. nam haec quidem vita mors est, quam lamentari possem, si liberet.*

<sup>35</sup> *In Somn.* I 13, 6: *hoc est quod superius ex secundo virtutum ordine, quae solis philosophantibus aptae sunt, evenire signavimus.* He describes the purging virtues at another part of text in the following way, *In Somn.* I 8, 8: *secundae, quas purgatorias vocant, hominis sunt qui divini capax est, solumque animum eius expediunt qui decrevit se a corporis contagione purgare et quadam humanorum fuga solis se inserere divinis.* Macrobius also introduces the four virtues

virtues is characteristic of the *otiosi*, the people keeping themselves away from public activities. (*Hae sunt otiosorum, qui a rerum publicarum actibus se sequestrant. In Somn. I 8, 8*) Referring to Plotinus Macrobius explains that suicide should be avoided because somebody who tears the soul out of the body by force before he reaches the natural time of death lets passion prevail that he wanted to get rid of,<sup>36</sup> on the other hand takes the chance from the soul to return to the divine origin and forces it to roam around the grave that holds the body.<sup>37</sup> The soul, even if it was clear previously, necessarily became dirty in consequence of this act and needs a very long time to purge again.<sup>38</sup> From the voluntary manners of death only the philosophical one is praiseworthy when the soul gets rid of the living body and gets to heaven to the stars, not by sword or poison, but by the strength of wisdom. Macrobius tries to reconcile Cicero's thoughts with the Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines: the rhetor-politician's main reason against suicide is to accomplish the duty to the deity, that is why people – so to say – have to suffer in the prison of the body. His Late Antique interpreter enriches this concept with Neoplatonic meanings such as the impurity of the soul, its attachment to the body or its grave, etc.

Macrobius' commentary also justifies Cicero's controversies mentioned above i.e. for a Roman person it is not easy to choose between active and contemplative life. As a Neoplatonic thinker, while interpreting the text of *Somnium Scipionis*, he faces the difficulties that the virtues of *vita activa* that can be found on the lowest grade, the grade of *virtutes politicae* in Plotinus' hierarchy of virtues are worth much less than the virtues on higher grades and only through them happiness cannot be reached.<sup>39</sup> This cannot be reconciled with practical Roman thinking since good people take care of the state with the support of these civilian virtues, respect their beloved ones and by practising them they can gain immortality for their name:

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that belong to this grade, *In Somn. I 8, 4: Prudentiae esse mundum istum et omnia quae in mundo insunt divinarum contemplatione despicere omnemque animae cogitationem in sola divina dirigere; temperantiae omnia relinquere, in quantum natura patitur, quae corporis usus requirit; fortitudinis non terreri animam a corpore quodam modo ductu philosophiae recedentem, nec altitudinem perfectae ad superna ascensionis horrere; iustitiae ad unam sibi huius propositi consentire viam unius cuiusque virtutis obsequium.* About the system of four virtues on four levels by Macrobius see more: Di Pasquale Barbanti 1988, 97-112; Flamant 1977, 597-615; Tóth 2012, *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> *In Somn. I 13, 9.*

<sup>37</sup> *In Somn. I 13, 10.*

<sup>38</sup> *In Somn. I 13, 15.*

<sup>39</sup> *In Somn. I 8. 3-4.*

*His (sc. virtutibus) boni viri rei publicae consulunt, urbes tuentur: his parentes venerantur, liberos amant, proximos diligunt: his civium salutem gubernant: his socios circumsperta providentia protegunt, iusta liberalitate devinciunt: hisque „sui memores alios fecere merendo. (In Somm. I 8, 6)*

That is why he still changes the basic idea by Porphyrius a little bit in a way that the conclusion of the whole interpretation of virtues should be the following: the virtuous deeds made all through the earthly life similarly lead to eternal happiness in heaven like the virtues of contemplative life and the former types of *virtus* are not worth less than the philosophers' virtues.<sup>40</sup> In connection with the Macrobian concept of the virtue system some scientists are convinced that the author simply misinterpreted the Neoplatonic idea of *virtus*,<sup>41</sup> others regard it as a rhetoric device<sup>42</sup> but it is more probable that in the modification of the original doctrines the intention to create synthesis that is characteristic of Macrobius could have played a role and by that he tried to create consonance between Cicero's thoughts and the ideas of Neoplatonism.

In *De re publica* Cicero compares the Roman state inherited from the ancestors to a painting. The painting's colours have faded through times and the author blames his own era for neglecting the restoration of this excellent painting: they did not only forget to refresh its colours but also missed to draw the contours.<sup>43</sup> Macrobius tries to place Cicero's painting into a new frame and following his steps all the subsequent generations – thus in our modern times as well – should consider from time to time the values that can raise or treasure a human community and the values that an individual must keep in view while searching for the way to achieve self-perfection that his activity should be a benefit for the others as well and he can provide an example to follow for the subsequent generations.

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<sup>40</sup> In Somm. I 8, 12: *Si ergo hoc est officium et effectus virtutum, beare, constat autem et politicas esse virtutes, igitur et politicis efficiuntur beati. Iure ergo Tullius de rerum publicarum rectoribus dixit: „ubi beati aevo sempiterno fruuntur”; qui ut ostenderet alios otiosis alios negotiosis virtutibus fieri beatos, non dixit absolute nihil esse illi principi deo acceptius quam civitates, sed adiecit: „quod quidem in terris fiat”, ut eos qui ab ipsis caelestibus incipiunt discerneret a rectoribus civitatum, quibus per terrenos actus iter paratur ad caelum.*

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Di Pasquale Barbanti 1988, 111-112.

<sup>42</sup> Flamant 1977, 608-615.

<sup>43</sup> Quotes: August., *De civ. D.* II 21: *Nostra vero aetas cum rem publicam sicut picturam accepisset egregiam, sed evanescentem vetustate, non modo eam coloribus isdem quibus fuerat renovare neglexit, sed ne id quidem curavit, ut formam saltem eius et extrema tamquam linamenta servaret.*

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