Cicero on ageing gracefully: a modern reading of Cicero's *De Senectute*

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The phenomenon of ageing naturally affects the individual and the society alike. For a person, the process of ageing could indeed be daunting, with the complications in physical and mental health, financial difficulties, sense of abandonment, helplessness and the fear of death that it brings. Similarly, the ageing population poses numerous socio-economic problems, especially if they are not properly integrated in to the society. This resulted in an extremely negative outlook on old age. It is in such context that the concept of 'ageing gracefully' emerges in the field of gerontology, as a mechanism to help one to come to terms with old age as well as to assist incorporating the elderly into the society in a way that would benefit both the individual and the society.

Though the discourse on old age appears to be a recent one, there are a number of references on the topic found in works of classical authors. One such interesting treatise is Cicero's *De Senectute* (*On Old Age*). Thus, this study looks into Cicero's *De Senectute* in an attempt to delineate ideals pertaining to graceful ageing reflected in it. In the process, works of modern critics and scholars are brought in for the purpose of comparison and analysis.

Upon close scrutiny, it is apparent that Cicero's portrayal of old age is idealistic and romanticised. However, Cicero induces the reader to look at old age from a fresh perspective. At the beginning Cicero does identify, and thereby comes to accept, a number of adversities associated with old age. Next Cicero prompts the reader to think beyond these and focus on the 'benefits' of old age resulting in an attitude change. As the final stage, Cicero encourages one to use these 'benefits' in a way that would serve the society; leading to the efficient incorporation of the old into the society. Together this process helps the individual to age gracefully and by extension assists the society to deal with, at least up to an extent, the numerous problems associated with old age. Accordingly, Cicero's *De Senectute* clearly manifests a number of fundamentals concerning the idea of graceful ageing.