

Esse Quam Videri: Integrity, Historiographical Practice, and the Ciceronian Imperative in the Scholarship of Dr. Neville Buch

Dr Neville Buch¹



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Abstract

This essay examines the classical philosophical dictum *Esse quam videri* (“To be, rather than to seem”) originally articulated by Marcus Tullius Cicero in *Laelius de Amicitia* (chapter 98) and analyses its operationalization in the historiographical and sociological practice of Dr. Neville Buch [138, 260]. The essay begins by investigating Cicero’s historical practice of *esse quam videri* through his defence of the Roman Republic, his ethical rejection of demagogic flattery, and his

¹ Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) has been fairly used in the production of this work. The tool used is Google NotebookLM (recently rebranded as Gemini Notebook). It is an AI-powered virtual research assistant and thinking partner designed to help a person interact deeply with their own documents. Unlike general chatbots, it is source-grounded, meaning it only generates answers based on the specific PDFs, documents, or links uploaded. The A.I. process in the production of this work has been limited to the attached (prompts) on each of the questions in turn. This ensures an accurate reading of each source. The author then rearranged and re-edited the answers the A.I. provided. The human author publishes this work. A.I. is never an author when used properly. This assistance is not qualitatively different from a human research assistant when that assistance is deemed to have no authorial status but is acknowledged.

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ultimate political martyrdom [101, 103, 105]. It then undertakes a textual and philosophical analysis of Laelius de Amicitia, demonstrating how Cicero grounds true friendship (*amicitia*) and civic virtue in authentic moral character (*esse*) rather than superficial public appearance (*videri*) or transactional utility [258, 260]. Moving to contemporary scholarship, the essay explores how Dr. Buch has embodied this Ciceronian mandate throughout his forty-year intellectual journey (1986-2026), rejecting “invested-political opportunism,” “credential inflation,” and the “techné mindset” of modern neoliberal universities to build an independent, uncompromised practice grounded in the axiom “Understanding history is philosophy in practice”[47, 59, 69, 70, 79]. Utilizing the Management Institute for Contributory Economy (MICE) frameworks including Spiral Historiography, the POLICE model, and the Dynamic of Cognition (DoC) Dr. Buch restores “Human Authorship” and “Senior” social accountability against contemporary denoetization[48, 56, 70, 72]. The essay concludes with an Epilogue in the form of a personal letter to fellow thinkers and friends, calling for a collective commitment to truth, character, and Aristotelian flourishing (*eudaimonia*) [81, 252].

Introduction: The Dilemma of Appearance and Being

In contemporary political, academic, and civic life, modern society is increasingly dominated by what critical sociologists identify as a “techné mindset” and a reliance on deceptive surface appearances [79, 274, 336]. Individuals and institutions routinely prioritize “deceptive clarity” and PR-driven “singular messaging” over the “multi-textured reality” of human experience, substituting short-term organizational self-preservation for genuine moral character [84, 276, 338, 385]. Bernard Stiegler designates this cultural pathology as “denoetization”: the mechanical liquidation of the human capacity to judge and think under the pressure of automated technical and bureaucratic systems [26, 79, 92]. In such a regime, the person is reduced to a “puny human node” or a passive conduit for institutional stimuli, operating under a “Junior” mindset of docile compliance rather than proactive authorship over their life narrative [56, 69, 74, 335].

Against this backdrop of institutional illusion, the classical imperative *Esse quam videri* “To be, rather than to seem” stands as an indispensable diagnostic and ethical corrective [138]. First popularized in Roman philosophical literature by Marcus Tullius Cicero, the phrase asserts the absolute primacy of intrinsic virtue, intellectual honesty, and lived substance over superficial impression management [101, 138, 260]. This essay explores how Cicero practiced this principle in the turbulent final decades of the Roman Republic, how he conceptualized it within his masterwork on friendship (*Laelius de Amicitia*), and how Dr. Neville Buch has reinscribed this

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ancient wisdom into contemporary Australian historiography and cognitive sociology [48, 101, 138, 258].

I. How Cicero Practiced Esse Quam Videri

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) lived and wrote during the existential collapse of the Roman Republic an era marked by violent civil wars, political proscriptions, and the rapid erosion of constitutional norms (*libertas*) [101, 103]. As a *novus homo* ("new man") from *Arpinum* who rose through the *cursus honorum* to achieve the consulship in 63 BC, Cicero's entire public career was defined by the tension between political expediency and moral duty [101, 108].

For Cicero, political philosophy was never an abstract, detached academic exercise; it was *gerere rem publicam* the active, practical management of public affairs in the service of justice and the common good [101, 151, 409, 410]. In his consulship, Cicero suppressed the Catilinarian conspiracy to preserve the Republic, an act of civic courage for which he was hailed as *pater patriae* ("father of his country"), but which also exposed him to political prosecution and eventual exile when his enemies manipulated legal forms against him [101, 103].

Cicero's practice of *esse quam videri* most vividly demonstrated in his refusal to submit to autocratic power [101, 111]. When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon and dismantled republican governance, Cicero retreated into philosophical solitude, translating Greek philosophical vocabulary into Latin and composing his greatest ethical treatises including *De Officiis*, *De Republica*, *De Legibus*, and *Laelius de Amicitia* to preserve the intellectual and moral foundations of Roman citizenship for future generations [101, 102, 107, 258]. Following Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, Cicero re-entered the political arena to lead the Roman Senate against Mark Antony, delivering his blistering *Philippicae orations* in defence of republican liberty [103, 105].

Cicero knew that attacking Antony carried a fatal personal cost [103, 105]. Yet, choosing the reality of virtue (*esse*) over the mere appearance of safety or opportunistic compromise (*videri*), he refused to flee or recant [103, 105]. Upon the formation of the Second Triumvirate, Cicero was proscribed and assassinated in late 43 BC [103, 105]. In a brutal display of *triumviral* vengeance, his severed head and hands were nailed to the Rostra in the Roman Forum the very platform from which he had spoken for freedom [103, 105]. As Hannah Arendt notes, Cicero

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chose to align himself with the defeated cause of the Republic rather than the victorious autocrats, embodying Cato's famous maxim: "*Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni*" ("The victorious cause pleased the gods, but the defeated one pleases Cato") [150]. Through his life and death, Cicero proved that true human excellence (*virtus*) consists in being genuinely devoted to justice, even when institutional power aligns entirely with falsehood and tyranny [101, 150, 226].

II. Esse Quam Videri in Laelius de Amicitia

Cicero formally articulated the phrase *Esse quam videri* in his 44 BC philosophical dialogue *Laelius de Amicitia* (On Friendship), specifically in Chapter 98 [138, 258]. Dedicated to his lifelong friend Titus Pomponius Atticus, the dialogue is set in 129 BC following the sudden, suspicious death of Scipio Africanus the Younger [258, 259]. The principal speaker, Gaius Laelius, reflects with his sons-in-law (Gaius Fannius and Quintus Mucius Scaevola) on the nature, laws, and ethical grounds of authentic human connection [258, 259].

In Chapter 98, Cicero writes:

"Virtute enim ipsa non tam multi praediti esse quam videri volunt."

("Few are those who wish to be endowed with virtue rather than to seem so") [138].

Within the architectural argument of *De Amicitia*, this passage serves as a sharp critique of hypocrisy, sycophancy, and social pretence [138, 258, 260]. Cicero lays down the foundational axiom that true friendship (*amicitia*) can only exist between good men (*boni*) individuals whose lives leave no doubt as to their honour, integrity, equity, and liberality, and who possess the courage of their convictions [260].

Cicero contrasts authentic friendship with the corrosive vice of flattery (*assentatio*) and opportunistic courtliness [258, 260]. Those who care only for *videri* (seeming virtuous) seek flatters and manipulators who validate their self-deceptions, reducing human relationships to transactional bargains or ideological alignments [138, 260]. Conversely, those who practice *esse* (being virtuous) demand radical sincerity, truthfulness, and constructive critique within their relationships [260, 263, 297]. In Ciceronian thought, genuine friendship is an intersubjective

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“fusion of minds” that acts as a mirror of virtue; it requires that friends speak the truth to one another without fear or artifice [258, 260].

This distinction directly mirrors the modern sociological critique of the “Conventional Person” trapped in a “tourist attitude” toward reality [274, 276, 336, 338]. As Bernard Williams and Jürgen Habermas observe, when individuals prioritize the “appearance of virtue” over its practice, they misdirect ethical attention away from the world and toward their public image, leading to “systematically distorted communication” and institutional cynicism [12, 263, 274, 342]. Cicero’s *Laelius de Amicitia* demonstrates that without the unmovable foundation of intrinsic character (*esse*), human community collapses into empty rhetoric and manipulative power games [258, 260].

III. How Dr. Neville Buch Practices Esse Quam Videri

In contemporary Australian scholarship, Dr. Neville Buch’s forty-year intellectual history (1986-2026) represents a sustained, practical realization of Cicero’s *Esse quam videri* [47, 48, 138]. Grounded in his core axiom, “Understanding history is philosophy in practice,” Dr. Buch has consistently rejected the superficial trappings of academic status to execute the demanding, often unrewarded labour of independent historical and sociological inquiry [47, 48, 70, 83, 87].

1. Reclaiming Independent Authorship over Institutional Opportunism

Dr. Buch’s professional trajectory illustrates a conscious choice of *esse over videri* [47, 59, 92]. After completing his doctorate at the University of Queensland and serving as a high-level higher education policy researcher for three Vice-Chancellors at the University of Melbourne (1998-2008) navigating major policy shifts like the “Melbourne Agenda” and “Growing Esteem”, Dr. Buch observed a systemic decline in academic rigour [47, 57, 59, 60, 67]. He diagnosed a corporate transition from sharp conceptual clarity toward “invested-political opportunism,” “credential inflation,” and the abandonment of critical local history in favour of “job-ready” market metrics [58, 59, 69, 82, 94].

Refusing to participate in this “academic immense regression,” Dr. Buch departed institutional university management to reclaim Human Authorship as an independent scholar and consultancy researcher [59, 61, 92, 94]. Over a decade of unpaid scholarly work and persistent economic

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marginalization, he established the Management Institute for Contributory Economy (MICE) in Brisbane [20, 48, 80, 92]. Operating as a “self-motivated outsider” in the “City of Intellect,” Dr. Buch demonstrated that true scholarship belongs to the public domain of free thought rather than elite corporate silos [61, 71, 92].

2. Methodological Innovation: POLICE, DoC, and Spiral Historiography

To operationalize *esse quam viderias* a rigorous diagnostic method, Dr. Buch developed a suite of applied cognitive tools:

The POLICE Model: Standing for Philosophically Ontology Logic Intersect Compatibility Education, this framework functions as an “intellectual immune system” for “crap detecting” [56, 74, 81]. It trains citizens and scholars to “police their own thoughts,” systematically unmasking “institutional bullshit,” “theological masks,” and manufactured myths like the “Queensland character” [56, 74, 81, 325, 408].

Spiral Historiography: A “post-post-postmodernist” methodology that rejects linear progress in favor of a cyclical re-evaluation of past ideas [1, 38, 71, 326]. It “uncoils” repetitive patterns of intellectual error and “Historical Forgetfulness,” ensuring that contemporary ethical critique remains anchored in “thick” historical reality [37, 38, 340, 347].

The Dynamic of Cognition (DoC): A diagnostic matrix mapping the mind's developmental ascent from unreflective “Prejudice” (the “Junior” state of docile execution) toward “Inclusion,” “Sufficient Comprehension,” and “Senior” social accountability [56, 68, 70, 74, 313, 355].

3. The Synthesis of Being and “Thinking as Caring” (Panser)

At the heart of Dr. Buch’s practice is the Synthesis of the Five Intentions: Self, Mind, Reason, Utility, and Love [65, 69, 72, 77]. In this framework, Reason acts as a “cognitive regulator” ensuring that technical systems serve human ends, while Love is reinvented as “thinking as caring” (panser) [63, 77, 81, 87]. Influenced by Bernard Stiegler and Nel Noddings, panser functions as a procedural shield that protects human particularity from the coldness of pure calculation, transforming history into an active intervention to “tend to social wounds” [38, 49, 63, 77, 86, 87].

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By refusing to reduce education to industrial efficiency or personal branding, Dr. Buch's practice proves that the professional historian's ultimate duty is not to seem credentialed (*videri*), but to be a genuine caretaker of truth, character, and Aristotelian flourishing (*eudaimonia*) [48, 87, 252, 327].

While both Marcus Tullius Cicero's Classical Roman conception of *virtus* and Dr. Neville Buch's MICE (Management Institute for Contributory Economy) framework for "Human Authorship" seek to uphold human dignity and moral character against institutional corruption and autocracy^{[1][2]}, they operate from distinctly different historical, ontological, and methodological foundations^{[3][4]}.

1. Cicero's Roman Republican Virtus

In the late Roman Republic, Cicero's concept of *virtus* (civic virtue) was inextricably linked to the survival and active defence of the constitutional body politic (*res publica*)^[1].

- *The Arena of Action (Gerere Rem Publicam)*: For Cicero, human excellence reached its highest peak not in speculative withdrawal, but in founding, preserving, and actively managing public affairs (*gerere rem publicam*)^[4]. Virtue was demonstrated through forensic law, senatorial debate, and civic duty^[1].
- *Moral Standard (Esse Quam Videri)*: In *Laelius de Amicitia* (chapter 98), Cicero famously noted: "*Virtute enim ipsa non tam multi praediti esse quam videri volunt*" ("Few are those who wish to be endowed with virtue rather than to seem so")^{[9][10]}. True virtue required being a "good man" (*boni*)—marked by honour, equity, liberality, freedom from greed, and the courage of one's convictions—rather than managing a superficial public image^[11].
- *The Target Threat*: Cicero's *virtus* was a defence against political tyranny, autocratic overreach (e.g., Julius Caesar and Mark Antony), factional violence, and provincial corruption (e.g., Gaius Verres)^[8].
- *Epistemic Foundation*: Grounded in Greek philosophy (Academic Skepticism and Stoicism) adapted for Roman statecraft, Ciceronian rhetoric, and reverence for ancestral custom (*mos maiorum / maiores*)^[1].

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2. Dr. Buch's MICE Framework for "Human Authorship"

Dr. Neville Buch's framework redefines human agency for the 21st century, moving beyond political statecraft toward an epistemological personalism designed to protect human consciousness itself^[18].

- *Sovereignty of the "Historical Person"*: Human Authorship asserts that individuals must be the proactive creators and operators of their own existence and social narrative^[2]. It rejects the reduction of the human being to a "puny human node," a passive conduit, or a case file within automated systems^[19].
- *The Target Threat (Denoetization & Techné)*: Rather than battling individual tyrants, MICE targets denoetization—the mechanical liquidation of human judgment under automated bureaucratic, AI, and neoliberal systems—and the "techné mindset" that reduces human life to quantifiable metrics and "job-readiness"^[3].
- *The Core Axiom & Goal*: Guided by the motto "Understanding history is philosophy in practice," the framework aims for Aristotelian flourishing (eudaimonia), where societal success is measured by human wisdom, dignity, and character rather than transactional or political profit^[2].
- *Methodological Toolkit*:
 - o *Dynamic of Cognition (DoC)*: Diagnostic mapping the developmental ascent from a "Junior" state of unreflective execution to a "Senior" state of social accountability^[29].
 - o *Spiral Historiography*: A "post-post-postmodernist" lens to "uncoil" repetitive historical errors and unmask manufactured myths^[3].
 - o *POLICE Model*: An "intellectual immune system" for "crap detecting" institutional rhetoric^[21].
 - o *Synthesis of the Five Intentions*: Reintegrating Self (agency), Mind (synoptic vision), Reason (cognitive regulator), Utility (socialized well-being), and Love (*panser* / thinking as caring)^[19].

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3. Key Structural Contrasts

Dimension	Cicero's Roman <i>Virtus</i>	Dr. Buch's "Human Authorship"
Primary Domain	Civic & Political Statecraft: The Senate, forum, legal courts, and constitutional preservation[1].	Cognitive & Meta-Methodological: The internal architecture of the mind and global holistic scholarship[3].
Target Enemy	Political Tyranny & Factionalism: Autocrats, conspirators, and physical destroyers of <i>libertas</i> [5].	Systemic Denoetization & Instrumentalism: The "techné mindset," credential inflation, and algorithmic automation[3].
Operational Core	Esse Quam Videri & Oratory: Genuine character and rhetorical defence of the republic[1].	Synthesis of the Five Intentions: Combining Reason with <i>panser</i> (thinking as caring) as a procedural shield[36][37].
View of Tradition	Mos Maiorum : Authority derived from the re-establishment and veneration of ancestral beginnings (<i>maiores</i>)[4].	Spiral Historiography: Reading tradition inclusively to "uncoil" past errors and break free from unreflective habits[3].
Social Action Mode	Instrumental & Value-Rational Statecraft: Calculated management of the state (<i>Zweckrational / Wertrational</i>)[6].	Communicative Action: Rational-critical dialogue aimed at mutual understanding (<i>Verständigung</i>) over power[42].

While Cicero fought to defend the aristocratic political framework of the Roman Senate against dictatorial seizure^{[1][12]}, Dr. Buch's MICE framework constructs a universal, personalist "intellectual immune system"^{[19][21]}. MICE shifts the primary battleground from military or state governance to the restoration of human discernment, ensuring that the "who" (the human being) remains the proactive master of the "what" (the technical and bureaucratic system)^[19].

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Epilogue: A Letter to My Friends

To my dear colleagues, fellow travellers on the Road, and friends in the intellectual community to Neil, Michael, Arif, Ray, Catherine, Deborah, and all who seek wisdom over appearance:

18 Callendar Street, Sunnybank Hills, Queensland

September 2026

My Dear Friends,

As I write these lines, reflecting on forty years of reading, writing, and navigating the stormy currents of our intellectual landscape, my mind naturally turns to Cicero's quiet villa in *Formiae* and to that sacred dialogue on friendship he dedicated to Atticus. Cicero understood, as few have since, that when the public square is overtaken by noise, propaganda, and the cold calculations of ambitious autocrats, the only true refuge and starting point for civilizational renewal is the authentic communion of good minds.

We live in trying times an age marked by an "immense regression" of thought, where universities function as information mills, where AI systems generate pale facsimiles of humanistic care, and where public discourse has collapsed into "singular messaging" and institutional cynicism. Too many in our modern world have chosen *videri* the comfortable, well-compensated appearance of wisdom, shielded by titles, degrees, and corporate branding while abandoning the hard, quiet labour of *esse*: being true, being honest, and being accountable to the historical ground beneath our feet.

But we have chosen a different path. Together, through the Management Institute for Contributory Economy (MICE), through The Philosophy Café, and through our shared projects in local historiography and social theory, we have insisted that "understanding history is philosophy in practice". We have chosen to "loiter with intent," catching those precious Kairos moments of genuine human connection. We have chosen to practice "Methodological

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Tenderness” using truth-telling not as a weapon of polemic, but as a scalpel and a bandage to tend to the social wounds of our society.

Do not be discouraged by the silence or the arrogance of formal institutions. As our research data now shows, our voice is resounding globally across thousands of university departments, secondary schools, and independent circles reaching minds in Lahore, Athens, Zurich, and beyond who hunger for genuine Human Authorship. The “who” of humanity will always remain the master of the “what” of technical systems, so long as there are those willing to stand firm in character and sincerity.

Let us continue to police our own thoughts, to uncoil the vicious circles of stupidity, and to offer our “pearls” of wisdom with unconditional kindness and rigour. Let us remain, above all else, good men and women bound in authentic friendship choosing always to be, rather than to seem.

May whatever harmonious force guides the cosmos keep you in strength, courage, and peace.

Yours in shared authorship and enduring friendship,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neville Buch', with a stylized, flowing script.

Neville Buch

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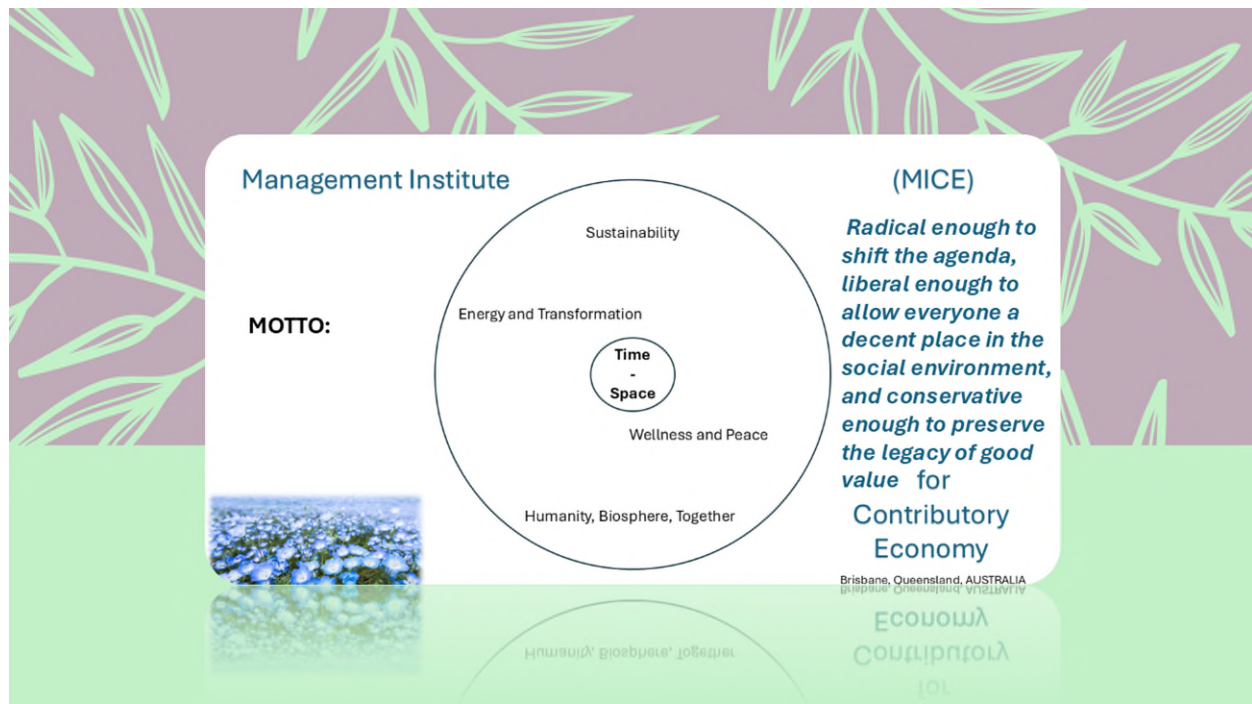
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Take the [MICE Quiz](#)

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CIVIC VIRTUE VS. COGNITIVE SOVEREIGNTY		
Comparative Analysis: Cicero's Roman Virtus & Dr. Neville Buch's MICE Human Authorship		
COMPARISON DIMENSION	MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO (106-43 BC)	DR. NEVILLE BUCH (MICE 2026)
Primary Domain & Focus	Statecraft & Civic Action gerere rem publicam; Senate, Forum, legal courts, and constitutional preservation.	Cognition History & Scholarship Applied sociology, metamethodology, and global holistic scholarship (MICE).
Target Threat & Diagnosis	Political Tyranny & Factionalism Autocratic overreach (Caesar/Antony) and corruption destroying libertas.	Denoetization & Techné Mindset Mechanical liquidation of judgment and reduction of persons to calculable nodes.
Operational Motto & Standard	Esse Quam Videri 'To be, rather than to seem' (Laelius de Amicitia, 98); genuine moral character (boni).	Philosophy in Practice Understanding history as philosophy in practice to ground ethical critique.
Methodological Foundations	Academic Skepticism & Oratory Ciceronian rhetoric, Hellenistic philosophy, and ancestral custom (Mos Maiorum).	Spiral Historiography & POLICE Dynamic of Cognition (DoC), active nihilism, and systematic 'crap detecting'.
Mode of Social Action	Instrumental / Value-Rational Statecraft Calculated management of public affairs (Zweckrational) guided by civic duty.	Communicative Action & Panser Rational-critical dialogue for mutual accord (Verständigung) & thinking as caring.
Ultimate Normative Goal	Preservation of the Republic Conserving the constitutional state, civic harmony (concordia), and liberty.	Aristotelian Flourishing (Eudaimonia) Contributory Economy, human dignity, and proactive Human Authorship over systems.
CORE SYNTHESIS: FROM STATE PRESERVATION TO COGNITIVE EMPOWERMENT		
Cicero defended the aristocratic republic against political autocrats; Buch builds an 'intellectual immune system' restoring human authorship against modern technological and administrative denoetization.		