ABSTRACT

Augustine Against the Academic Doctrine, Way of Life,
and Use of Philosophical Writing

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The recent literature on Augustine's *Contra Academicos* stresses the philosophical, ethical, and literary elements of the text. However, these works neglect the polemical role of the dialogue as a response to Cicero's Academic Skepticism. I offer a reading of the first of Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues, the *Contra Academicos,* that shows how his work can be read as a comprehensive rejection of the Academic philosophical life and doctrine as presented in Cicero's dialogue, the *Academica*.

To accomplish the goal, the work begins with an analysis of the doctrine in, way of life recommended by, and pedagogical function of Cicero's *Academica*. The remaining chapters examine Augustine's response to each of these elements of Cicero's work. In Chapter Three I accentuate the philosophical importance of Augustine's accusation that the Academics practiced a form of esotericism. This accusation, largely neglected, helps underscore Augustine's rhetorical strategies to cultivate in his students an awareness of philosophical ironic discourse. Chapter Four focuses upon Augustine's critique of the Academic way of life and the problems that arise from their insistence that

all must seek wisdom yet be content with the inevitable impossibility of finding wisdom. Chapters Five and Six examine Augustine's positive contributions to philosophical writing. Augustine rejects the Academic emphasis that wisdom must be sought by reason alone, suggesting that reason and authority are the twin means for that pursuit. The dual emphasis disallows Augustine from pedagogical uses of deception in the dialogue form, a subtle but important shift from other philosophical uses of this form of writing. By allowing reason and authority to guide one in the pursuit of wisdom, Augustine's work also steers the reader away from the despair that Academic skepticism can so easily cultivate.

Augustine Against the Academic Doctrine, Way of Life,
and Use of Philosophical Writing

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Augustine, Cicero, and Academic Skepticism

In the Autumn of A. D. 386 Augustine gathered with a small group of family, friends, and students to a villa near Cassiciacum. Out of this retreat the young catechumen and his friend Alypius, created four dialogues: *Contra Academicos, De beata vita, De ordine,* and *Soliloquia*.[1] In the dialogues, Augustine introduces the group, and especially his students Licentius and Trygetius, to philosophy: the rational pursuit of wisdom that can assist in one's journey toward union with the Triune God of Christianity.[2] The participants of the dialogues discuss the limitations of knowledge, the source of the happy life, the problem of evil given God's ordered creation, and the nature of the soul.

I will offer a new reading of the first of these dialogues, the *Contra Academicos,* that shows how Augustine's work can be read as a comprehensive rejection of the Academic philosophical life as presented in Cicero's dialogue, the *Academica*. In his

[1] For evidence of Alypius' hand in these works, see *Confessiones* 9.4.7.

[2] The historicity of the dialogues remains debated. For a survey of the literature, see G. Madec's "L'historicité de Dialogues de Cassiciacum," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 32 (1986): 207-231 and J. Doignon, "État des questions relatives aux premiers Dialogues de saint Augustine," in *Internationales Symposium über den Stand der Augustinus-Forschung: Festschrift für Luc Verheigen,* ed. C. P Mayer and K. H. Chelius (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1989), 42-89. John. J. O'Meara argues for a literary reading of the dialogue in *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to His Conversion* (Staten Island: St. Paul Publications, 1965) and in his introduction to his translation of the *Contra Academicos*. *St. Augustine: Against the Academics,* ACW 12 (Westminster, MD.: Newman Press, 1950). The main textual challenge to O'Meara's claim is the multiple references to a stenographer (*Contra Academicos* 1.5.15, 1.9.25, 2.7.17, 2.9.22, 3.7.15 and *De ordine* 1.2.5, 1.5.14, 1.7.20, 1.9.27, 1.10.29-11.31, 2.20.54). A historical reading need not be antithetical to a literary reading. Augustine's comment that he condensed the conversations at the villa (*Contra Academicos* 2.4.10) suggests that initial editing was done at Cassiciacum. I am supposing that, historical or not, the literary features of the work influence the philosophical arguments.

dialogue, Augustine playfully mocks Academic skeptical doctrine, emphasizes difficulties in the Academic way of life, and revises Academic pedagogical practices. I will first examine, in this chapter, the importance of Augustine's dialogue, moving to a lacuna in recent work on that dialogue, namely, a disregard for the way in which the dialogue acts a response not only to skepticism in general, but to Cicero's *Academica* in particular. Taking the polemical nature of this work seriously can significantly contribute to an understanding of the Cassiciacum literature in general and of the *Contra Academicos* in particular. The chapter ends with the framing device for the dissertation and chapter summaries.

Contra Academicos and Survey of Scholarship

In the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine directly confronts Academic skepticism as presented and defended in Cicero's *Academica*. Though often neglected in favor of Augustine's "mature" later writings, this work merits study for at least three reasons. First, the *Cassiciacum* dialogues are the earliest writings of Augustine, offering the reader a glimpse into the initial philosophical and theological ruminations of the new convert. Some themes, like a strong emphasis upon the liberal arts, are later abandoned or qualified by Augustine; others, like the relation of reason and authority, though inchoate here, are developed but not discarded.[3] A close examination of these initial works can assist a reader in understanding why certain issues are later dropped as well as confirm

[3] For continuity in Augustine's thought, see especially Carol Harrison's *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008). See also Ernest Fortin, "Reflections on the Proper Way to Read Augustine the Theologian," in *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 95-114.

that Christian doctrine definitively shaped Augustine's thought from the time of his conversion.

Augustine's continued fascination with the dialogue's central theme, skepticism, is a second reason for studying the *Contra Academicos*.[4] Though certain aspects of his later arguments differ slightly from his earlier work, Augustine repeatedly supports the outcome of his early confrontation with skepticism. For instance, in the *Enchiridion* he approves of the arguments found in the *Contra Academicos* as "necessary at the very outset to remove this utter despair of reaching truth, which seems to be strengthened by the arguments of these philosophers."[5] In his *Retractationes*, Augustine, commenting upon the *Contra Academicos,* stresses his need to refuse the skeptical philosophers who "instill a despair of finding the truth." He concludes that "with the help of and mercy of the Lord, this has been accomplished."[6] Such endorsements by the mature Augustine warrant a study of this early work.

Finally, the *Contra Academicos* deserves study because, as a dialogue, it represents a peculiar kind of work in the Augustinian corpus. Later works of Augustine take the form of treatises (*De trinitate, Civitate dei, De doctrina Christiana*), sermons, and letters. In the initial period of his life, though, Augustine wrote a series of philosophical dialogues. Like Cicero and Plato, Augustine makes use of the pedagogical benefits of this form of writing, using the form to encourage the reader to the rational

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[4] For an extended examination of Augustine notion of the thinking person and its role in refuting skepticism, see Garreth Matthews' *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). For an examination of Descartes in light of Augustine's thought, see Stephn Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[5] *Enchiridon,* 20.

[6] *Retractiones* 1.1.1. All translations from Augustine's *Retractationes* come from *The Retractions,* trans. Sister Mary Inez Bogan (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968).

pursuit of wisdom. How he follows and diverges from his philosophical predcessors in the use of this form can help reveal Augustine's philosophical importance and his early recognition of the limitations inherent in classical philosophy.

The legitimacy of Augustine's conversion (was it to Platonism or to Christianity?) has been the principle focus of the scholarship regarding these early dialogues.[7] However, given the philosophical nature of the *Contra Academicos*, some authors have focused upon the philosophical arguments found therein. These authors offer what David Mosher calls the "received interpretation" of the dialogue, the view that Augustine's main goal in the dialogue is to offer analytic-style arguments, similar to those found in contemporary philosophical circles, against epistemological skepticism.[8] These authors argue that Augustine legitimately belongs among the great philosophers. However, they tend to focus exclusively on the last third of the dialogue. The remaining portions of the dialogue are little discussed because, as Garreth Matthews writes, "much of the

[7] This debate has been recounted often in the literature. For excellent summaries of the debate see Appendix 2 in Eugene Kevane, *Augustine the Educator: A Study in the Fundamentals of Christian Formation* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1964) and John J. O'Meara, "Neoplatonism in the Conversion of Augustine," in *Studies in Augustine and Eriugena*, ed. Thomas Halton (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 121-131. The debate began with Adolf von Harnack and Gaston Boissier's monographs proposing a theory of "Two Augustines," claiming that the Augustine of the Cassiciacum dialogues was converted to Neoplatonism and had a later conversion experience to Christianity. The thesis was elaborated with Prosper Alfaric's *The Intellectual Evolution of St. Augustine.* The issue was revived with Pierre Courcelle and J.J O'Meara. There has been a recent reaction, which will be examined in the final chapter, that pushes in the other direction, claiming Augustine is completely Christian at this time with little influence from Neoplatonism. See especially Carrol Harrison's *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity.*

[8] David Mosher, "The Argument of the Academics," *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981). Among others, Mosher lists the following as examples of this reading: Prosper Alfaric, *L 'evolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin. I. Du Manicheisme au Neoplatonisme* (Paris, Émile Nourry, 1918), 259-78, 349-58, and 415-28; Vernon J. Bourke, *Augustine's Quest of Wisdom: Life and Philosophy of the Bishop of Hippo* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing 1945), 72-74; Charles Boyer, S.J., *L'idee de verite dans la philosphie de saint Augustin* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1920), 12-46; Bernard J. Diggs, "St. Augustine Against the Academicians," *Traditio* 7 (1949-51): 73-93. For recent representatives of this view see Peter King's introduction to *Against the Academicians: The Teacher* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1995); Christoph Kirwin, *Augustine* (New York: Routledge, 1989)*;* Gareth Matthews, *Augustine* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); and Gerard O'Daly, "The Response to Skepticism and Mechanisms of Cognition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 159-170.

Academicians is rather arcane and difficult to understand." For Matthews, only in the third book does "the work becomes quite lively and philosophically fascinating."[9] Such a truncated approach to the dialogue runs the risk of overlooking important elements of the work and misunderstanding the purpose of Augustine's anti-skeptical arguments.

In reaction to the "received interpretation," a number of recent authors turn to Augustine's eudaimonistic concerns with skepticism. These authors assert that Augustine's main target is the disastrous ethical and political implications of the skeptical way of life.[10] Ragnar Holte, in his magisterial work *Beattitude et Sagesse*, was the first to draw awareness to the way that Augustine situates the discussion not upon the nature of knowledge but upon happiness. Holte argues that Augustine agrees with the Academics' conclusion that wisdom remains unattainable in this life but rejects their inference that knowledge is not constitutive to happiness. The Academics adequately prove the inherent limitations in ancient philosophy for providing the means to happiness. Although human happiness requires that which no one can achieve, the Incarnation offers

[9] Matthews, *Augustine,* 16.

[10] The eudaemonist tradition can be found in the following figures: John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism: The *Contra Academicos*" *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972): 99-116; Ragnar Holte, *Beattitue et Sagesse Saint Augustin et le probleme de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Etudes Augustiniennes, 1962); Alvin Neiman, "The Arguments of Augustine's '*Contra Academicos*,'" *Modern Schoolman* 59 (1982): 255-80; Michael P. Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," *Revue des Études Augustiennes* 45 (1999): 51-77; Brian Harding, "Skepticism, Illumination, and Christianity in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 34(2) (2003): 197-212 and "Epistemology and Eudaimonism in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 37.2 (November 2006): 247-71; Augustine J. Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of Contra Academicos* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996); and Ryan Topping, "The Perils of Skepticism: The Moral and Educational Argument of *Contra Academicos*," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 49(3) (2009): 333-350.

a remedy to the seeming tragic state inherent in ancient philosophy. Only through Christ can one become happy and wise.[11]

Recent authors follow Holte's emphasis upon Augustine's eudaimonistic concerns about skepticism. John Heil, for instance, argues that "it is not so much the content of skeptical discourse which disturbs Augustine, but the effects of such discourse on the minds of men."[12] David Mosher stresses the importance of the sage for the argument of the *Contra Academicos*. The sage, as we will see below, was a real or theoretical figure who attains happiness. The centrality of the sage in the dialogue substantiates Holte's original claim that Augustine subordinates his epistemological concerns to his eudaimonistic ones. These authors do justice to the scope of Augustine's response to skepticism. Philosophy, especially among the Hellenistic and Hellenistic and Imperial philosophers that influenced Augustine, is supposed to offer a peculiar way of life that affords the opportunity of reaching the coveted happy life. Any way of life that does not lead to *eudaimonia* should be abandoned. To suggest that skepticism does not offer the right path to happiness is tantamount to a philosophical refutation.

Authors from the received and eudaemonist interpretations share a common approach to the text, namely, a tendency to read it as a treatise in which Augustine sets forth the argument(s) of skepticism and then offers a series of retorts to convince his readers that the position is untenable. Such a reading is partially correct, for Augustine does offer arguments, epistemological and ethical, in response to Academic Skepticism.

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[11] "L'argumentation est ainsi construite : en deux coups souverains, Augustin oppose d'abord entre elles les différentes écoles philosophiques ; puis, au troisième temps, il introduit le Christ comme seule solution : 1. Les philosophes classiques ont correctement determine le but. 2. Les philosophes sceptiques ont correctement reconnu l'impuissance de l'homme á de l'atteindre. 3. Le but s'atteint par le Christ." Ragnar Holte, *Beattitude et Sagesse,* 93.

[12] Heil, 99.

For both groups, the former teacher of rhetoric avoids his prior tendency of prizing persuasion over truth and offers a well-reasoned critique of Cicero's position. But a well-reasoned critique of skepticism need not be equated with contemporary philosophical argumentation. Both those in the received interpretation and those emphasizing the eudaimonist elements assume as much, however, and thereby insufficiently attend to the literary form of the *Contra Academicos*.

Within the annals of more recent research of the Cassiciacum literature, an important but small group focuses upon the literary elements of the work.[13] Reading the work as a dialogue forces one to consider when Augustine may or may not be joking, why he orders the subjects as he does, and what the different responses of the interlocutors may tell the reader. All of the features of the dialogue converge pedagogically to not only transmit knowledge but also transform the reader to live differently. Concerning the dialogue form, Pierre Hadot writes, "[T]he point is not to set forth a doctrine, but rather to guide the interlocutor towards a determinate mental attitude. It is combat, amicable but real."[14] According to Hadot, ancient dialogues exhibit ambitious pedagogical aims and display complex rhetorical strategies for converting the

[13] The split is reminiscent of what is found in Platonic scholarship between those who emphasize the literary features of the text and those who focus upon the arguments. The best reading takes both aspects into account, which the following authors do: Mark Boone, "The Conversion and Therapy of Desire in Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2010)*;* Michael P. Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues;" Augustine J. Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of Contra Academicos*; Ernest Fortin, introduction to *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* by Augustine J. Curley and "Reflections on the Proper way to Read Augustine." These authors follow what Leo Strauss called the "law of logographic necessity," the hermeneutical principle that nothing in a philosophical dialogue is accidental. See Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[14] Pierre Hadot "Spiritual Exercises" in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*: *Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson , trans. Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 91. See also Allan Bloom's introduction to the *Republic*: "The Platonic dialogues do not present a doctrine; they prepare the way for philosophizing." *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic, 1968), xvii.

reader to a new way of life. Augustine's work, as a dialogue, stands in the literary line of Cicero and Plato. Augustine does offer counter-examples to the universal skepticism of the Academics; however, his arguments always take place within a larger dramatic setting that qualifies these arguments.

There remains a relatively neglected aspect of the dialogue, namely, the extent to which Augustine counters the claims of Cicero's *Academica* and critiques the role of that dialogue in a philosophical pedagogy. Those in the "received" and eudaimonist traditions tend to focus on some logical incoherency in skepticism, often relegating any discussion of Academic skepticism to an early brief footnote. At least one author examines Sextus Empiricus' skepticism as a foil in understanding Augustine's critique.[15] Those in the literary tradition, though rightly examining Augustine's work as a philosophical dialogue, tend to ignore the bearing Cicero's *Academica* has upon a proper interpretation of the *Contra Academicos*. Among recent authors, Michael Foley is the strongest voice urging Cassiciacum scholars to take Augustine's Roman philosophical mentor seriously.[16]

At least three reasons can be given to support the need to read Augustine's and Cicero's works together. First and most obvious, Augustine shows extensive familiarity with Cicero's *Academica*, directly quoting and paraphrasing portions of Cicero's dialogue throughout his work. Harald Hagendahl decisively shows that Augustine offers more than a response to some generic form of skepticism but—in the discussion of skeptical arguments unique to Cicero, summaries of Academic history, and direct quotations from the *Academica*—specifically targets the skepticism of Cicero.

[15] John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism."

[16] Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues."

Augustine's familiarity with the text suggests that Augustine had some version of the Latin orator's work with him at Cassiciacum and, therefore, justifies the need to read the *Contra Academicos* with the *Academica*.[17]

Second, Augustine indicates that he intends the serious student to read Cicero's *Academica* after reading the *Contra Academicos*. At the end of the dialogue Augustine challenges his two students to go back and read Cicero's defense of Academic Skepticism: "Read the Academics, and when you find that Cicero is the victor over those trifles of mine (for what could be easier?), compel Alypius to defend our conversation here against those invincible arguments."[18] The challenge exhibits a philosophical lesson emphasized throughout this dialogue: the true philosopher submits every claim to reason without accepting an authoritative statement, even ones made by Augustine. To read the works together is a means of responding to Augustine's call of the dialogue to turn to philosophy.

Finally, the ordering of the Cassiciacum dialogues suggests that Augustine not only addresses specific arguments in Cicero's work and imitates elements of his style, but critiques the place of the *Academica* in a philosophical program of study. In 46 B.C., Cicero began a series of overtly philosophical works written in an order that resembles philosophical pedagogies among ancient philosophers. Cicero first wrote the *Hortensius,* a protreptic meant to induce the reader to a love of wisdom. He follows that work with

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[17] Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1967).

[18] *Contra Academicos*, 3.20.45. In his *Retractiones*, Augustine will write that he was using irony here when he said that his argument could be easily overturned (Retractions 1.1.4). Nevertheless, he still does challenge the boys to return to Cicero's work. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of *Contra Academicos, De beata vita, De ordine,* and *Soliloquia* are taken from Augustine, *Against the Academics*; *On the Happy Life; On Order;* and *Soliloquies*, trans. Michael P. Foley (University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

the *Academica*, a defense of his philosophical stance. After the *Academica* he wrote two works on ethics, the *Tusculanae disputationes* and the *De finibus.* Finally, the Roman philosopher wrote three works on the relationship of the gods to the world: *De natura deorum, De fato,* and *De divinatione.*

The dialogues at Cassiciacum mirror both the topics of Cicero's philosophical works and the order in which those works were written. Like Cicero, Augustine begins his students' philosophical program with the *Hortensius.*[19] He follows that work with the *Contra Academicos*, a critique, rather than an endorsement, of the skeptical means of approaching philosophy. The *De beata vita*, an ethical work, follows, leading to an examination of fate (*De ordine*). Of course, the ordering may be accidental; however, Augustine's rhetorical skills, which entail attention to the order in which one presents ideas, suggest such ordering should not be ignored.[20]

Contributions

The preceding details sufficiently motivate the need for reading the two works together.[21] Further, by reading Augustine's work in light of Cicero's, I hope to make the following contributions to the literature on the *Contra Academicos* and the Cassiciacum dialogues.

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[19] *Ibid.,* 1.1.4.

[20] Two excellent articles on Augustine's intentional ordering of material within a text are Frederick Crossan's "Book Five: The Disclosure of Hidden Providence," and Robert McMahon's "Book Thirteen: The Creation of the Church as the Paradigm for the *Confessions*." Both articles are found in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. Kim Paffenroth and Robert Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

[21] That the work can be read as a response to Cicero's *Academica* need not entail that it *only* be read as a response to Cicero's *Academica*, though that aspect of the dialogue is important for understanding it. There are other aspects of the text to emphasize, such as an anti-manichean element of the work given the striking parallels between Manichean and Academic rationalism. See Alvin Neiman "The Arguments of Augustine's '*Contra Academicos*,'" *Modern Schoolman* 59 (1982): 255-280.

The Philosophical Dialogue

Following Cicero, Augustine takes advantage of the dialogue form. Reading Augustine's work in light of this philosophical tradition of dialogue writing helps draw attention to the structure, literary elements, and purposes of this style of writing.

First, the structure itself is important to underscore. The structure of the Augustinian dialogue uniquely combines elements from the Ciceronian and Platonic dialogues. Like Cicero, Augustine uses a cover-letter to introduce the dialogue (the *Contra Academicos* actually has two) and ends the work with a lengthy oration. Much of Book Three of the work is exclusively Augustine's own discussion about Academic Skepticism. Like Plato's works, and unlike many of Cicero's, the first two books of the *Contra Academicos* present a play-by-play account of a philosophical discussion. Cicero's works tend to be alternating orations. There are advantages to the rapid discussion of Plato's dialogue and the Ciceronian oration. The back and forth of the Platonic dialogue can more quickly draw the reader into the discussion, helping one view the given topic from a variety of perspectives and become aware of the limitations of those perspectives. The oration at the end allows the author to present an extended reflection on the discussion up to that point. In the *Contra Academicos* it acts as the culmination of the entire discussion.

Beyond the structure of the dialogue, Augustine follows Plato and Cicero by utilizing literary features of this style of writing. For instance, Augustine intentionally includes intellectually and morally diverse characters.[22] Everything said in a dialogue is

[22] See especially *De beata vita*, with interlocutors ranging from Augustine's philosophy students Trygetius and Licentius to the uneducated Lartidianus, Rusticus, and Monica, with Monica playing a key role in the work. For an account of Cicero's use of the dialogue and Augustine's development of it, see Michael Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues."

not necessarily something Augustine the author would endorse. In the Cassiciacum dialogue there are highly educated characters (Augustine and Alypius), moderately educated participants (Licentius and Trygetius), and some with very little education at all (Monica, Lartidianus, and Rusticus). Augustine the author may not agree with what Trygetius or Monica says about some issue given his own superior education. At the same, the character of a character can also be important to take into consideration. Monica's love for wisdom surpasses the love for wisdom in the more educated students. What she says, especially about issues of faith, given her piety, should be weighed carefully.

One must also distinguish between Augustine the character and Augustine the author. As author, Augustine narrates potentially important features about the setting of the discussion. For instance, with the dispute concerning skepticism uncertain and the learned Alypius officially taking over the role as defender of that school, we are told that the weather is gloomy.[23] Only after Augustine offers his argument against skepticism does a small light help stave off the darkness.[24] In the *De beata vita*, the setting is a birthday party and one finds a playful banter among the participants and Augustine the narrator underscores the celebratory nature of the setting through allusions to laughter.[25] The narrative elements must be taken seriously as intentional literary devices meant to guide the readers to philosophical insight. Though Augustine is the narrator and author, one cannot assume that everything that Augustine *qua* character says is something Augustine *qua* author agrees with. Just as Socrates in the dialogues may adopt certain

[23] *Contra Academicos* 3.1.1.

[24] *Contra Academicos* 3.17.40.

[25] *De beata vita,* 2.10; 2.14; 2.15; 2.16; 3.19; 3.21

positions for pedagogical reasons, so Augustine the character may assume a position for similar reasons without actually endorsing said view. This issue leads to another important element of reading a dialogue.

The structure and literary elements combine for specific pedagogical reasons. In the *Phaedrus,* Socrates observes that writing, over against face-to-face teaching, eliminates the advantages of a personal dialogue between a teacher and student. When in the presence of each other, a teacher can intuit the limits of a student's intellectual abilities and exercise prudence by ordering the discussion according to those limits. In contrast, a written work encourages the student to pursue his studies according to his, often faulty, perceived ability and can lead the reader to equate the repetition of an author's thought with understanding. The dialogue form, as authors like Charles Griswold argue, represents Plato's response to the limits of the written form.[26] The dialogue alleviates the potential problems of writing while maintaining the benefits of a classroom discussion. The use of diverse characters, importance of the narrative setting, and even the presentation of intentionally bad arguments, combine to allow the author to cautiously present sensitive material and force the reader to vigilantly evaluate all facets of the text. Augustine's work is no different than the Platonic dialogues in intention. His use of the dialogue form remains neglected, though such an investigation could lead both to the resolution of debates surrounding the development of Augustine's thought and to the establishment of Augustine as a great philosophical, and not just theological, thinker.

One important literary device for the pedagogical nature of the dialogue is the use of irony. Following Charles Griswold's description of this rhetorical device, irony is

[26] Charles Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's* Phaedrus (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

present when a "doubling of meaning occurs, which is made visible by a tension, incongruity, or contradiction between aspects of a discourse, between the context and the discourse (e.g., between the deeds and words) or between different views expressed by the same person."[27] In the Platonic dialogues, irony capitalizes on the gap between what is said and what is meant by Socrates or between the action and message of the dialogue as presented by Plato. Irony is an effective pedagogical tool for drawing the reader's attention to his own ignorance and unreflective biases.

The dialogue offers hints that Augustine the character hides his opinion from his students to encourage reflection by them, and us the reader, upon what he says. Alypius expresses concern that Augustine is hiding something: "Your *bona fides* is needed…for if we must fear that you're hiding something, I imagine that it will be difficult for me to be able to nab him from whom I learned these things (as everyone knows me knows), especially since in uncovering the truth you will be looking out for not so much a victory as your own design."[28] As both character and author, the reader should be aware of ironic statements given by Augustine the character and an ironic use of setting and narrative comments from Augustine the author.

As pedagogical in nature, Augustine weaves together the various elements mentioned above to educate the reader. An attentive reader must be aware of the setting,

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[27] Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature,* 26:1 (2002), 88. Central works on Platonic and Socratic irony include, but are not limited to, Charles Griswold, *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings,* ed. Charles Griswold (University Park, PA; Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Christopher Rowe, "Platonic Irony," in *Nouva Tellus: Anuario del Centro de Estudios Clasicos* 5 (1987): 83-101; Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living*: *Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell Univesity Press, 1991). Other important works on irony include Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Metheuen, 1969); and Anthony Esolen, *Ironies of Faith: The Laughter at the Heart of Christian Literature* (Wilmington, DE; Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2007). Of particular help for this work was Thomas Hibbs' "Irony, Philosophy, and the Christian Life," forthcoming.

[28] *Contra Academicos* 2.4.10.

the soundness of arguments, the character making statements, Augustine's narrations , and even what is being said to test if it contrasts with what has been said. Inadequate consideration of these literary elements has led to serious misinterpretations of the dialogue. For instance, in a passage from the *De ordine* already mentioned, Augustine claims that Monica is a true philosopher worthy of being his philosophical master. The comment is ambiguous, leaving the reader with several interpretive options. Augustine may be lying, the option that Monica herself takes.[29] Augustine may be entirely serious, the option that Marianne Djuth takes. Based upon this comment, she argues that Augustine rejects any role for reason in Christian wisdom.[30] An ironic reading of the passage leads one to understand that something is right and wrong about Augustine's comment. Monica is a philosopher *qua* lover of Wisdom for her desires are aimed singly at the truth, who is Jesus Christ. Yet Monica's exclamation that her son had never lied so much is partly true, for Monica lacks the skill of dialectic, a skill necessary for doing philosophy. Awareness of Cicero's influence upon Augustine, both in the dialogue form and in the use of rhetoric and irony, alerts the reader to the possibility that a literal reading of the text may not always be the best reading of the text.

Philosophical Argumentation

Attention to the influence of Cicero's *Academica* upon the *Contra Academicos* can also offer a means for unifying Augustine's diverse responses to skepticism and

[29] The context shows that Augustine did not lie, though he may have been intentionally deceptive to prove a point. Monica is a philosopher if all that it means to be a philosopher is to love wisdom to such an extent that one does not fear death. If wisdom is Christ, Monica does love wisdom to this extent. But this need not imply that this characterization is all that is meant by philosophy.

[30] Marianne Djuth, "Augustine, Monica, and the Love of Wisdom." *Augustinian Studies* 39.2 (2008), 266. For a more subdued and accurate reading of Monica's role in the dialogue, see Ragnar Holte's, "Monica, 'the Philosopher'." *Augustinus* (1994): 293-316.

specifying one way in which Augustine engages ancient philosophy on its own terms. The recent interpreters who emphasize the eudaemonist elements of the texts agree that Augustine's main concern is to demonstrate the limitations inherent in skepticism for producing a well-lived life. One finds three separable strands of argumentation among the eudaemonist interpreters. Some, like John Heil and Brian Harding, focus upon the self-defeating nature of skepticism.[31] For the skeptics, one must assent to the truth of the skeptic's claims to embrace the skeptical way of life; but skeptical dogma disallows such assent requisite for living a consistently skeptical life. A second strand, represented by David Mosher, focuses upon Augustine's peculiar emphasis upon the wise man or sage. A final group, represented by Augustine Curley and Ryan Topping, accentuate Augustine's critiques against the politically and educationally disastrous implications of the skeptical way of life.[32]

These interpretations are not mutually exclusive and all confirm components that, along with his epistemological critiques, comprise Augustine's case against skepticism. What is absent among these scholars is any unifying element to these ethical critiques, something that a reading of Augustine's work as a comprehensive response to Cicero's *Academica* provides.

Another important insight that arises when reading Augustine's work with Cicero's regards Augustine's method of critiquing his philosophical predecessors. This method of argumentation can be traced to Cicero. In the *Academica*, Cicero recounts the history of the Academic critique of Stoicism. Central to Cicero's work, as to

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[31] John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism: The Contra Academicos;" Brian Harding, "Epistemology and Eudaimonism in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*."

[32] Augustine J. Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of* Contra Academicos; Ryan Topping, "The Perils of Skepticism: The Moral and Educational Argument of *Contra Academicos*."

Augustine's, is the figure of the sage. Stoics, Academics, and Platonists accepted certain formal features of the sage, such as that the sage is happy, that the sage avoids error, and that the sage is perfect.[33] While the teachings of these schools agree upon such formal components, their descriptions of the sage nevertheless vary widely because of their divergent philosophical commitments. Central to the Platonic sage is the knowledge of both intelligible and materiality reality; the Stoic sage relies upon virtue alone for his happiness; the Academic sage, like the Stoic sage, avoids all error, but does so at the cost of refusing to assent to any impression as true. Cicero accepts the formal features of the Stoic sage and the key Stoic account of knowledge that influences their understanding of him. However, given a discrepancy about one issue concerning knowledge, Cicero concludes that the Stoic sage, by Stoic standards, lacks all knowledge. The Academic argument's force derives from its shared assumptions with Stoicism. Augustine, in turn, uses the same method in the *Contra Academicos* against the Academic sage. He accepts the formal components of the sage found in the *Academica* as well as specific Academic doctrines, such as the importance of probable knowledge. Mirroring the means by which Cicero critiques the Stoics, Augustine proceeds from certain shared assumptions and derives problematic implications and inconsistencies within Academic philosophy.

In the *De beata vita* Augustine uses the same method to examine the happy life. The happy person is wise, perfect, satisfied, virtuous, and impervious to fate. The Stoics, Academics, Platonists, and, as Augustine argues, Christians agree about these formal components even though each school's specific account of the happy life differs dramatically. Instead of using this method to show discrepancies in another school's

[33]On the sage, see especially Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy,* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) and Michael Trapp, *Philosophy in the Roman Empire* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 28-62.

position, in this dialogue, Augustine uses it to gain insight into the specific content of the happy life. From the shared formal components, he dialectically argues that Christianity offers the best portrait of the happy life in which each component is fully satisfied.

The same dialectic method can be found in the *De ordine* concerning the meaning of "order." Here, the starting point of the dialogue proper (as opposed to the opening prologue) is specifically Christian. While attempting to become clear on exactly what order is, Augustine and the boys agree to several formal components of order: order is loved by God, order encompasses good and evil, order flows from God, and what is outside order is nothing.[34] Such formal components are not definitions of order yet are ways that help one gain an ever clearer picture of it.

By examining Augustine's work in light of Cicero's, this method of argumentation can become more evident as one that Augustine learned from Cicero and used throughout the dialogues.[35] More importantly, the similar method of argumentation validates Augustine as a formidable thinker in the ancient philosophical tradition, engaging his pagan philosophical predecessors on their terms.

Philosophical Education

A third contribution that this study can make to the Cassiciacum literature regards the unity of the dialogues. One finds four different accounts of what binds together the seemingly disjointed topics of the four dialogues.

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[34] See especially *De ordine*, 1.7.17, 2.1.2. The dialogue also begins with a theological consideration of the impiety of blaming God for evil.

[35] Thanks to Michael Foley for drawing my attention to this method of argumentation found in these dialogues. The three dialogues nicely represent three different uses of philosophy which Augustine throughout his life will use. In *Contra Academicos* he uses philosophy to critique other philosophical schools. In *De beata vita* he shows how a strictly philosophical account of the happy life given by the philosophers is compatible with Christianity. In *De ordine* he starts with theses about God accepted from authority and uses philosophy to understand these claims.

Frederick Van Fleteren argues that the books should be read together as a form of ascent literature.[36] This Neoplatonic-inspired literary form can be traced back to Plato's *Symposium*, in which Socrates outlines the steps from beautiful objects to the form of Beauty. Plotinus' *Ennead* 1.6, "On Beauty," exemplifies this genre of philosophical ascent. Van Fleteren contends that at the time of Cassiciacum, "Augustine thought that he, along with an elite few, could eventually intuit God directly."[37] On this view, the astute reader who grasps the key insight from each subsequent dialogue is led inevitably up the philosophical ladder to a vision of God. The *Contra Academicos* supposedly affirms that such a vision is possible; the *De beata vita* describes the content of that contemplative life; the *De ordine* outlines the method for attaining this goal; and the *Soliloquia* represents the ascent in action. Using the dialogues as a guide, one can intuit God and find a measure of full happiness in this life.

Laura Holt and Euguene Kevane emphasize the pedagogical nature of the dialogues.[38] The setting of the dialogues is a school, and the four works defend the way in which the new Christian school, established by Augustine, should be run in contrast to the contemporary rhetorical school. The school of rhetoric, which Augustine derogatorily refers to as "that school" (*ille scholae*), cultivates the art of persuasion

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[36] Frederick Van Fletereren, "Augustine's Ascent as at Milan : A Reconsideration," *Augustinian Studies* (1993): 29-72; "Augustine's Ascents at Milan and the Cassiciacum Dialogues," *Mediavalia* (1978): 29-41; Review of *L'ordre, Oevres de Saint Augustin*, by J. Doignon, *Augustinian Studies* (1998); "Ascent" in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Ecnycopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 63-67.

[37] Review of *L'ordre, Oevres de Saint Augustin*, 167.

[38] Eugene Kevane, *Augustine the Educator: A Study in the Fundamentals of Christian Formation* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964); Laura Holt, *Tolle Scribe: Augustine at Cassiciacum* (PhD diss. University of Notre Dame, 1999) and "Wisdom's Teacher: Augustine at Cassiciacum," *Augustinian Studies* 29.2 (1998), 47-60.

absent any concern for truth. Augustine's school, which he refers to as "our school" (*schola nostrae*), aims at truth, is grounded in the liberal arts, and guides students by the dual leadership of reason and the authority of the Church.[39] The four dialogues, on this interpretation, offer the inchoate framework definitively developed in the educational program of the *De doctrina christiana*.

Joanne McWilliam argues that the dialogues jointly represent Augustine's *apologia* for his conversion to Christianity.[40] Together, they thematically show the intellectual, moral, and spiritual conversions that one finds later in the *Confessiones*. The key figures in these dialogues, McWilliam suggests, represent the varying outlooks of Augustine's Christian and pre-Christian self. For instance, Trygetius embodies pre-philosophical and Manichaean Augustine, desirous of wisdom independent of all authority yet displaying an emotional, as opposed to a detached and rational, response to truth; Licentius embodies Augustine's attraction to skepticism and continued struggle with sin; and Monica represents Augustine's full conversion to the Catholic Church. In the *Contra Academicos*, on this autobiographical interpretation, Augustine introduces his pre-conversion outlooks, argues for the unattainability of truth apart from authority, and confesses his need to overcome lust before he can obtain wisdom. The *De beata vita* can be read as Augustine's intellectual conversion to Neoplatonism, for in that dialogue Augustine concludes with a triadic account of reality, similar to the Neoplatonic ascent

[39] See also Isletraut Hadot "La naissance du cycle des sept arts libéraux dans néoplatonisime et les conditions de sa réception par le Moyen Àge Chrétien," in *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1984); and Michael Foley, "St. Augustine, the University, and the So-Called Liberal Arts" in *The Idea of the American University*, ed. Bradley Watson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 129-140; and Ryan Topping, *St. Augustine* (Continuum Library of Educational Thought) (New York: Continuum, 2010).

[40] See both "The Cassiciacum Autobiography," *Studia Patristica* 18.2 (1990): 14-43, and her entry "The Cassiciacum Dialogues" in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allen Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2009), 135-143.

found at the end of *Confessiones* VII. The *De ordine* corresponds to the moral conversion, as portrayed by Licentius' overcoming an inordinate love for poetry.

Finally, Michael Foley observes the neglected detail that Augustine's dialogues examine the same topics as specific works of Cicero. In contrast to the prevailing opinion that limits the study of Augustine's sources to Neoplatonism, Foley's research resituates Cicero as one of Augustine's main interlocutors in these dialogues. Foley argues that each work builds upon key philosophical and theological insights from the previous dialogue(s), culminating in the *Soliloquia*.[41]

Textual details beset the various unifying attempts. Van Fleteren fails to adequately account for Augustine's admitted continued moral struggles in the *Soiloquia*, the dialogue that is meant to bring one to the vision of God on Van Fleteren's interpretation. Further, Van Fleteren's repeated insistence upon Augustine's restriction of the happy life to the philosophical elite conflicts with the central role allotted in these works to Monica, one whom Augustine portrays as intellectually inferior to himself yet nevertheless destined for eternal happiness. The educational focus of Holt and Kevane prioritizes the role of the *De ordine,* the dialogue which most thoroughly examines such matters; however, their interpretation cannot adequately explain the introductory placement of the *Contra Academicos*. In that initial work, Augustine repeatedly calls the reader to study philosophy, the subject that naturally follows the liberal arts program outlined in the *De ordine*. Given the culminating nature of philosophy, one wonders why Augustine calls the reader to philosophy before presenting the liberal arts program. McWilliam's account provocatively draws upon parallels between the literature from

[41] See his introductions to each dialogue, especially the introduction to the *Soliloquia* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

Cassiciacum and the *Confessiones*; however, she forces certain details of her interpretation such as when she argues that the *De beata vita* represents Augustine's intellectual conversion or that Monica represents Augustine's complete conversion to Christianity. The former analysis is incompatible with Augustine's insistence that the *De beata vita* is the most religious work of this period; the latter strains credulity because of Monica's general disinterest and inability to pursue Christianity in the intellectual manner so characteristic of her son.[42]

Foley's account has the merit of explaining the form of writing chosen by Augustine and the pedagogical significance of the order of subjects.[43] There remains room to extend Foley's work, as well as draw upon features from the other positions. As mentioned above, the subjects and ordering of Cassiciacum dialogues exactly mirror the subjects and ordering of Cicero's late philosophical works. This convenient arrangement suggests that Augustine, following his Roman mentor, offers a series of works intentionally ordered to introduce and orient his readers to a specific way of life that includes the pursuit of philosophy. The dialogue form allows Cicero and Augustine to present the value of philosophy to a people suspicious of it. Both could hide the more controversial aspects of philosophy by means of the zetetic nature of the dialogue and simultaneously show the benefit of rational inquiry for their respective audiences. As Ernest Fortin writes, "Cicero had employed the dialogue form to bring philosophy down from heaven into a pagan Rome that up to that moment had been profoundly hostile to it.

[42] *De beata vita* 1.5.

[43] See Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," 63-64, 67.

Augustine employed it to introduce philosophy into the Christian fold."[44] The more controversial and theoretical views can be addressed after familiarity with philosophical investigations is gained. By reading Cicero's and Augustine's works together, these philosophically pedagogical elements become apparent, elements easily overlooked if one reads the dialogues apart from their historical context.

Esotericism

Finally, reading these early dialogues with Cicero's works underscores the importance of Augustine's accusation that the Academics practiced a form of esoteric writing. In the last portion of the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine makes the shocking claim that Cicero and the Academic skeptics intentionally hid their true opinions and offered views to the masses significantly different from those privately held. John O'Meara offers perhaps the strongest reaction to Augustine's view when he writes that "the whole tenor of Cicero's writings is against Augustine on this, as he himself knows."[45] Yet he prematurely dismisses Augustine's theory given that many authors such as Ernest Fortin, Pierre Hadot, Frederick Crosson, and Leo Strauss, have marshaled

[44] Introduction to *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of* Contra Academicos, by Augustine Curley, xi.

[45] O'Meara, Introduction to *St. Augustine: Against the Academics* (Ancient Christian Writers) trans. and ed. John O'Meara (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 159. Concerning O'Meara's claim that Augustine himself knew there was no justification, the first letter we have of Augustine, written around this time, appears to fully confirm that Augustine did think the skeptics were not as skeptical as they appeared. "I would not presume, even in playful discussion, to attack the philosophers of the Academy; for when could the authority of such eminent men fail to move me, if I did not believe their views to be widely different from those commonly ascribed to them?" At the end of the letter, Augustine returns to his theory, apparently hoping for confirmation that his theory is plausible: "I beg you to give more particular attention to one point, and to write me again concerning it – namely, whether you approve of that which, in the end of the third book, I have given as my opinion, in a tone perhaps of hesitation rather than of certainty, but in statements, as I think, more likely to be found useful than to be rejected as incredible." Augustine does observe that he lacks certainty about the theory, but the letter gives no indication that Augustine did not take his theory seriously.

strong evidence that ancient philosophical authors rejected the modern practice of openly stating one's beliefs and, instead, veiled certain beliefs, especially those which were politically hazardous.[46]

This dissertation relies upon the account of esoteric writing given by Frederick Crosson, which in my opinion is the most compelling to understand Augustine's theory. In a general sense, esoteric writing refers to the deeper meaning of a text that only becomes apparent after reflection.[47] Crosson observes that most great works of literature can be called esoteric in this general sense. However, Crosson cites Strauss' technical use of the term that refers to an author's concealment of the deeper meaning of a text behind a surface meaning intentionally constructed to keep certain people from that inner truth. The author obscures the deeper meaning because it contests certain opinions that ground the authority of the *polis*; the surface meaning, in contrast, appears to uphold such popular beliefs. The deeper and surface levels can be found in one work, or each level might be separated into two separate texts.[48] Doubts about the existence or role of the gods are thought to be a common subject of esoteric composition. A philosopher, whose goal is knowledge and not opinion, may have philosophical reasons for contesting such

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[46] Ernest Fortin, "Christian 'Rhetoric,'" in *Ever Ancient, Ever New: Ruminations on the City, the Soul, and the Church*, ed. Michael P. Foley, 47-58; *Dissent and Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, trans. Marc LePain (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2002); Pierre Hadot, "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy" in *Philosophy as a Way of Life;* Frederick J. Crosson, "Esoteric versus Latent Teaching" *The Review of Metaphysics* , 59.1 (2005), 73-93; Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[47] Esotericism in this general sense bears similarity to some descriptions of irony.

[48] Esoteric writing is often contrasted with exoteric writing. Aristotle refers to *exoterikoi logoi* eight times in his writings, and Cicero's familiarity with the word comes from this tradition (*De finibus* V.5.12, Letters to Atticus 1.89). *Exotericos*, from which we get the word "exoteric" refers to that which is outside or external. The assumption is that the *exoterikoi logoi* were more popular writings written for public availability.

publicly held beliefs; to protect himself, as well as his community, he writes in such a way as to appear consistent with the dogma of his political community. While hiding the politically unsettling opinion that questions the gods, thereby avoiding civic unrest, he nevertheless makes available his true opinion to an intellectual elite.

Augustine's theory about the Academics bears resemblance to that found in Strauss' work, but differs in one important way. While Strauss emphasizes the goal of protecting the *polis* by means of a noble lie, Augustine does not express the same concern about the *polis* and he does not condone the use of a lie. And while Strauss imagines that the platonic distinction between a sensible and intelligible reality is part of the exoteric teaching, the distinction, on Augustine's theory, is the core of the esoteric teaching of the Academicos.

Though a main point of the dialogue is Augustine's accusation of Cicero as an esoteric writer, contemporary authors either entirely ignore it or refer to it with embarrassment and amusement. Rarely is Augustine's critique taken seriously.[49] However, Augustine's speech culminates in this indictment of Academic esotericism. The importance that Augustine places on this accusation may play a larger role than many authors acknowledge.

Pierre Hadot: Doctrine, Way of Life, Text

The breadth of the areas explored poses the problem as to how to confine the project to a manageable size. To limit the scope of this project, I am depending upon

[49] Exceptions are Ernest Fortin, "Christian 'Rhetoric," in *Ever Ancient, Ever New: Ruminations on the City, the Soul, and the Church;* Michael Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues"; Augustine Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of* Contra Academicos.

Pierre Hadot's work on philosophy as a way of life and the ancient use of texts in philosophical formation.

Pierre Hadot highlights the distinction between the contemporary understanding of philosophy as one discipline among many and the ancient conception of philosophy as a way of life. According to ancient writers, the philosopher is a peculiar figure, embracing odd practices and dismissing those goods around which the rest of society is built. To become a philosopher entails more than registering for a class at a local school. For the ancients, one becomes a philosopher through a deliberate decision to reorient one's love away from the honor of the city and the pleasures of the body and toward the love of wisdom. The decision normally takes the form of a voluntary commitment to a philosophical school, sometimes found in an actual communal setting as with the Epicureans, or in a regular meeting with teachers who introduce a new student to the central texts, dogmas, and practices of that school. As Hadot emphasizes, "[T]his choice and decision are never made in solitude."[50] To join a philosophical school "corresponds, above all, to the choice of a certain way of life and existential option which demands from the individual a total change of lifestyle, a conversion of one's entire being, and ultimately a certain desire to be and to live in a certain way."[51] Philosophy, for the ancients, bears greater similarity to the modern understanding of religion than to a major in a university.

Central to Hadot's work is the relationship of the theoretical and practical aspects of a philosophical school and the role of what he calls "spiritual practices" in that

[50] *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 3.

[51] *Ibid.*

relationship.[52] The theoretical discourse of a school—by which Hadot means both the distinguishing dogma of a school as well as the very act of discoursing—enables a student to begin to "see" the world in a new way.[53] Though each school stays committed to the goal of justifying beliefs by reason alone, the dogma of a school usually remains closed to discussion: "To philosophize is to choose a school, convert to its way of life, and accept its dogmas."[54] "Spiritual exercises" are means of habituating the student to a school's prescribed way of life. Hadot describes these spiritual exercises as "practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation, or intuitive, as in contemplation, but which are all intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practiced them."[55] He offers an extended list from Philo of Alexandria of such practices: reading, meditations, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, self-mastery, and the accomplishment of duties.[56]

Important for this work is Hadot's contention that ancient philosophers' texts act as a form of spiritual exercise for their readers. While primacy is always given to face-to-face discussion, authoritative philosophical texts play a crucial role for many ancient

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[52] See *What is Ancient Philosophy* and especially "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy," "Spiritual Exercises," and "Philosophy as a way of Life," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life.* Also of importance are the interviews transcribed in *The Present Alone is our Happiness*, in which he corrects a misreading of his work in which practice and theory are conflated.

[53] Hadot emphasizes that discourse and way of life are not exactly parallel to theory and practice because discourse has both a theoretical and practical aspect to it.

[54] "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 60. Hadot does admit that secondary points that flow from the dogma could be corrected. The more advanced that a student became, the more he was allowed to examine both the rational basis for dogma and "hows" and "whys" of the secondary doctrinal questions.

[55] *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 6.

[56] "Spiritual Exercises," 84.

philosophical schools.[57] For the ancient philosophers, a text does not merely relay information but acts as a spiritual exercise, helping present that school's doctrine as well as directly form a student according to the doctrines therein. The text might take the form of a dialogue (Plato), an investigation upon certain received views about philosophical issues (Aristotle), or even resemble a personal journal (Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*). Ancient philosophical texts are "the products of a philosophical school…in which a master forms his disciples, trying to guide them to self-transformation and realization. Thus, the written work is a reflection of pedagogical, psychogogic, and methodological preoccupations."[58] The variety of texts resembles, though in a limited way, the various ways that a student and teacher interact. As such, texts can act as a locus for intellectual and moral development beyond the simple presentation of a school's beliefs.

One style of text used by Cicero and Plotinus – as well as Augustine at Cassiciacum—begins with a specific question. The narrow focus allows the author to fully investigate the presuppositions and implications entailed by said question. Concerning such texts, Hadot writes, "[T]he course of thought consists in going back to general principles that have been accepted in the school and are capable of resolving the problem in question."[59] The examination of the one question by means of other

[57] In addition to Hadot's "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy," and "Spiritual Exercises," see Paul Kolbet's excellent recent work *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). Kolbet's focus is slightly different than mine. He concentrates specifically on the use of rhetoric in texts or orations to help cure one's disordered desires.

[58] "Spiritual Exercises," 104-105.

[59] "Forms of life and Forms of Discourse," 63.

foundational principles helps form the reader's way of understanding that issue according to a specific school.[60]

Using Hadot as a basis, my work is organized around the triptych of dogma, way of life, and text. Cicero's *Academica*, as an ancient dialogue, offers a specific dogma from his philosophical tradition (the Academic skeptical tradition) and that dogma specifies a philosophical way of life, which the text is meant to inculcate. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*, as a response, addresses each of these three aspects found in Cicero's writings.

A few comments about what my work is, and is not, intending to cover bear mentioning. The project is meant to be both historical and conceptual, teasing out the importance of reading Augustine's *Contra Academicos* in light of Cicero's *Academica.* The importance of such an analysis is largely shown by suggesting that such a reading helps make the most sense of textual issues such as Augustine's use of irony and a jocular tone, his emphasis upon the sage, and the importance of subtle shifts within his use of the dialogue. Though historical, some points depend upon conceptual applications since, for instance, Augustine does not tell us that he restructures certain features of his dialogue in contrast to Cicero's. In this way, analyses associated with classics may not be prevalent. I do not seek to prove which passages in the *Academica* Augustine must be considering given the ordering and diction, though I hope to take such questions seriously.

[60] One of Hadot's most helpful works is his book *The Inner Citadel*, which is an object lesson as to how to read an ancient text. He organizes the whole seemingly disparate fragments of Marcus Aurelius' work around key Stoic dogmas such as the views that only virtue is good, that one must consent to fate/destiny, and that the world is like a city and all humans are fellow citizens in that city. The various meditations found throughout the emperor's work were written to conform his personal way of life to the Stoic way of life. The text itself offers the dogma and forms the reader to follow a particular way of life.

The focus of the dissertation is Augustine. Any neglect of Cicero should not be interpreted as a dismissal of the Roman orator's philosophical abilities. Cicero's thought receives extensive examination throughout; however, some nuances peculiar to scholarship concerning the *Academica*, due to the constraints of a comparative work such as this, are of necessity neglected. Further, though my work focuses on Augustine's *Contra Academicos*, the work is not a commentary per se.[61] Observations similar to those found in commentaries are made, such as the importance of literary features of the dialogue like the setting, the characters, and the tone of the work. However, many details of the text are, unfortunately, not examined.

Finally, I do not inspect Augustine's philosophical arguments with an eye to evaluating the adequacy of them in light of contemporary counterparts to those arguments. The reason is two-fold. First, the work is meant to be historical, focusing on Augustine's response to Cicero and not upon Augustine's potential contribution to contemporary critiques of skepticism. Second, I intend to show that Cicero's and Augustine's goal was something like a conversion to a new way of life, with philosophical argumentation being one, but not the only, means of turning people toward a philosophical way of life. To convince others that the philosophic life is best, resources such as the use of irony and the ordering of topics were as crucial as the validity of arguments.

[61] For a commentary on the *Contra Academicos,* see Augustine Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of Contra Academicos.*

Chapter Summaries

Because the overall argument concerns the need to read Augustine's *Contra Academicos* in light Cicero's *Academica*, I begin with an overview of the doctrine, way of life, and form of Cicero's *Academica*. Each aspect of the work is intimately connected in the *Academica.* The dialogue of the *Academica* also plays an important role in a philosophical pedagogy, helping make apparent the enormous challenges of the philosophical life, while at the same time presenting the vast range of topics open to the philosopher's pursuit of wisdom.

The remaining chapters present Augustine's response to the doctrine, way of life, and text of the *Academica*. In Chapter Three I show that the portion of the dialogue considered the most philosophically astute takes place within a larger response of laughter at skepticism. One cannot read Augustine's entire formal oration against skepticism without getting the impression that the recent convert is making fun of the Academy. Far from being philosophically ancillary, this laughter is an intentional part of Augustine's response to Academic skeptical doctrine. Augustine treats the Academicians' skepticism lightly because he thought that they did not take their position seriously.

Chapter Four turns to Augustine's eudaemonist critiques of skepticism. Augustine's main eudaemonist argument targets the presumed benefits of an Academic way of life. A secondary thesis is that Augustine's work is a response to Academic, as opposed to Pyrrhonic, skepticism since Augustine's arguments fail to adequately critique the latter. Taking elements from Chapter Two as a framing device, I show how Augustine contests Cicero's claims that Academic skepticism beneficially forms an

appropriate moral character for pursuing wisdom, exempts one from error, and liberates one to pursue the truth.

The final two chapters differ slightly from the previous two by turning from Augustine's negative critiques to his positive contributions to the use and writing of philosophy. Here, I rely on Frederick Crosson's distinction between esoteric writing and latent teaching. In ancient texts, when one text had both an esoteric and exoteric meaning, the two levels of the work opposed each other or at least the two were often unrelated. Crosson observes another style of writing that he calls "latent teaching," found especially in early Christian authors. In this latter form of writing, the deeper and surface levels are only opposed by degree rather than kind. In Chapter Five I argue that the *Contra Academicos* can be read as a form of latent teaching. The difference that Augustine's eschewal of esoteric writing makes in a philosophical pedagogy is the subject of the final chapter. Augustine's slight modifications avert the reader from the disastrous route that Cicero's text makes possible.

CHAPTER TWO

Doctrine, Way of Life, and Cicero's *Academica*

Because the overall work concerns a reading of Augustine's *Contra Academicos* in light of Cicero's *Academica*, an initial overview of Cicero's work is needed before examining Augustine's. This chapter presents the doctrine articulated in, way of life commended in, and form of writing (or text) of Cicero's *Academica*. These three aspects, for Cicero, are not stand-alone elements of Academic philosophy; instead, Cicero views each element related to the others. The Academic way of life follows from their particular skeptical doctrine while the text of the *Academica* provides more than an encyclopedic account of Academic views but can shape the reader to approach philosophy according to the school's vision. Cicero seeks to make other Academicians by using the text to make apparent the enormous challenges and freedom of the philosophical life, both curbing arrogance and revealing the vast range of topics in the philosophical pursuit of wisdom.[1]

Academic Philosophy as a Way of Life

I begin with a passage from *De natura deorum* that helps frame Cicero's philosophical approach in general before turning to the particular work of the *Academica*. The passage makes clear that for Cicero the philosophical pursuit of wisdom is a way of

[1] The most extensive analysis of Cicero's *Academica* in English can be found in *Assent and Argument,* ed. Brad Inwood and J. Mansfeld (New York/Leiden: Brill, 1997). See also Carlos Levy, *Cicero Academicus: Recherches sur les Acadimiques et sur la Philosophie Ciceronienne* (Rome: Ecole francaise de Rome, Palais farnese, 1992). See also summaries of the Academic debates in *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11 and 2.6.13-15. Below, passages from Augustine's work are cited with passages from the *Academica*, showing the portions discussed are ones familiar to Augustine. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Cicero's *Academica* come from Cicero, *On Academic Skepticism*, trans with introduction and notes, by Charles Brittain (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, Inc., 2006).

life and the skeptical approach to philosophy informs the mode of inquiry by which one should pursue wisdom.

In 46 B.C. Cicero began a series of works more overtly philosophical than his previous works, a collection that piqued the interest of his contemporaries.[2] In *De natura deorum*, Cicero most explicitly addresses his philosophical output:

> I observe however that a great deal of talk has been current about the large number of books that I have produced within a short space of time, and that such comment has not been all of one kind; some people have been curious as to the cause of this sudden outburst of philosophical interest on my part, while others have been eager to learn what positive opinions I hold on the various questions. Many also, as I have noticed, are surprised at my choosing to espouse a philosophy that in their view robs the world of daylight and floods it with a darkness as of night; and they wonder at my coming forward so unexpectedly as the champion of a derelict system and one that has long been given up.[3]

Why Cicero turned to philosophy, what Cicero's own philosophical opinions were, and why Cicero chose to be an Academic philosopher – these three questions require comment.

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[2]See *Academica* 1.5 and 1.11, *De natura deorum* 1.4.7-9. The best sources on the historical framing of the work are Miriam Griffin's "The Composition of the *Academica*: Motive and Versions;" in *Assent and Argument*; Charles Brittain's introduction to *On Academic Scepticism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006); and J. G. Powell's introduction to *Cicero the Philosopher* ed. J. G. F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) Some suggest that Cicero's turn to philosophy indicates a conversion to Academic skepticism around this time. For a summary of this debate, see W. Gorler's "silencing the Troublemaker: *De Legibus* I.39 and the Continuity of Cicero's Scepticism" in *Cicero the Philosopher,* 85-114.

[3] "*Multum autem fluxisse video de libris nostris, quos compluris brevi tempore edidimus, variumque sermonem partim admirantium unde hoc philosophandi nobis subito studium extitisset, partim quid quaque de re certi haberemus scire cupientium; multis etiam sensi mirabile videri eam nobis potissimum probatam esse philosophiam, quae lucem eriperet et quasi noctem quandam rebus offunderet, desertaeque disciplinae et iam pridem relictae patrocinium necopinatum a nobis esse susceptum"(De natura deorum* 1.3.6). All translations of *De natura deorum*, unless otherwise noted, by H. Rackham in *Cicero: De natua deorum, Academica* Loeb Classical Library No. 268 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, revised and reprinted 1951).

Cicero's turn to philosophy caused intrigue among the Romans because "a lot of people thoroughly dislike Greek literature, and more dislike philosophy."[4] Authors such as Michael Foley and Gisela Striker show such distrust of Greek philosophy arose because of its conflict with Roman ideals.[5] The topics of philosophy are often abstract, having little to do with the practices of the city. Worse, the founder of philosophy, Socrates, eschews conventional statesmanship and is even subversive to the city's goals.[6] As a statesman practicing a discipline hostile to the city, Cicero must placate his civic-minded friends with the practical benefit of philosophy, a goal he accomplishes by emphasizing the continuity between the recent philosophical output with his earlier and

[4] For philosophy's avoidance of the multitude, see *Disputationes Tusculanae* 2.1.4: "For philosophy is content with few judges, and of set purposes on her side avoids the multitude and is in her turn an object of suspicion and dislike to them, with the result that if anyone should be disposed to revile all philosophy he could count on popular support, or if he should try to attack the school of which we are in the main adherents, he would have powerful assistance from the other schools of philosophy." (*enim philosophia paucis contenta iudicibus, multitudinem consulto ipsa fugiens eique ipsi et suspecta et invisa, ut, vel si quis universam velit vituperare, secundo id populo facere possit, vel si in eam quam nos maxime sequimur, conetur invadere, magna habere possit auxilia a reliquorum philosophorum disciplinis.*) All translations unless otherwise noted by J. E. King in *Cicero: Tusculan Disputations*, Loeb Classical Library No. 141 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927, Revised 1945).

[5] For the challenges of philosophy in the Roman culture see Michael Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues" *Revue des Études Augustiennes* 45 (1999), 51-77; Miriam Griffin, "Philosophy, Politics, and Politicians at Rome," in *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, ed. Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1-37; Philip Levine "Cicero and the Literary Dialogue," *The Classical Journal,* 53.4 (1958): 146-151; Gisela Striker, "Cicero and Greek Philosophy," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 97 (1995): 53-61.

[6] Foley "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues" and Levine "Cicero and the Literary Dialogue" note Cicero's intentional use of model Roman statesman as philosophers to try to make philosophy appealing. For instance, in the *Academica*, the great Varro is the main interlocutor in the first book.

overt political works. [7] Any political utility of these prior texts, Cicero attests, arises from their philosophical nature.[8]

While Cicero insists that he had always practiced philosophy, he admits a change in focus both for therapeutic and educational reasons.[9] Concerning the former, these philosophical works coincide with the year he experienced extreme grief due to the loss of his daughter, Tulia: "But now that I have been wounded by a very severe blow from fortune, I am looking for a balm for my sorrow from philosophy."[10] Refusing to separate the theoretical from practical aspects of philosophy, Cicero's philosophical turn began with a work of philosophical consolation, written to alleviate his sadness. From his examination of grief in other works, such as the *Disputationes Tusculanae,* we learn that Cicero understood the general practice of philosophy, not simply the writing of that work of consolation, as a source of healing for his sorrow.[11]

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[7] Cicero may have in mind works such as *De republica* and *De legibus*, both written in 51 B.C., or *De oratore*, written in 55 B.C. Cicero had philosophical training from a variety of philosophical schools. He was taught by Phaedrus, an Epicurean; Philo of Larissa, and Academic; Diodotus, a Stoic; Antiochus, an Academic turned Stoic; and Posidonius, a Stoic.

[8] C.f. *Disputationes Tusculanae*, 5.2.6 where Cicero praises philosophy as the very foundation of society: "And yet philosophy is so far from being praised in the way its service to the life of men has deserved, that most men ignore it and many even abuse it….But, as I think, this deception and this mental darkness have overspread the souls of the uninstructed, because they cannot look back far enough into the past and do not consider that the men by whom the means of human life were first provided have been philosophers." (*plerisque neglecta a multis etiam vituperetur. Vituperare quisquam vitae parentem et hoc parricidio se inquinare audet et tam impie ingratus esse, ut eam accuset, quam vereri deberet, etiamsi minus percipere potuisset? Sed, ut opinor, hic error et haec indoctorum animis offusa caligo est, quod tam longe retro respicere non possunt nec eos, a quibus vita hominum instructa primis sit, fuisse philosophos arbitrantur.*)

[9] There is potentially one further reason for turning to philosophical writing, and that is for political reasons. Daniel Hanchey explores Cicero's use of philosophical dialogue in particular as a response to the impending Roman empire. Daniel Hanchey, "Cicero the Dialogician: The Construction of Community at the End of the Empire" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas 2009).

[10] *Academica* 1.11, *De natura deorum* 1.4.7.

[11] See "Cicero and the Therapists" in *Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers*, ed. J. G. F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 219-246. For the understanding of philosophy as a source of healing see especially *Disputationes Tusculanae* book 3: "the need of an art of healing for the soul has not been felt so

Cicero's second stated reason for his sudden shift in emphasis is his desire to introduce philosophy to the Roman people.[12] In the *Academica,* concerning his philosophical endeavors, Cicero writes, "Perhaps it's also true that nothing is as useful for the education of our fellow citizens."[13] While in certain passages this motivation seems partly related to a desire for literary glory,[14] in other passages Cicero clearly discloses an educational goal, intending his works to induce fellow Romans to begin a philosophical life.[15] A preface from another work indicates that his writings had already begun to positively shape some of his readers: "I am the less inclined to repent of my undertaking because I can clearly perceive what a number of my readers have been stimulated not only to study but to become authors themselves."[16] Cicero cites his own life as a guarantee that a philosophical life need not distract one from political duties: "I never let my work stray from the public arena while it was incumbent on me to serve – I

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deeply before its discovery, nor has it been studied so closely after becoming known" (*Disputationes Tusculanae*, 3.3.6); "Assuredly there is an art of healing the soul – I mean philosophy, whose aid must be sought not, as in bodily diseases, outside ourselves, and we must use our utmost endeavor, with all our resources and strength, to have the power to be ourselves our own physicians."

[12] "Philosophy has lain neglected to this day, and Latin literature has thrown no light upon it: it must be illuminated and exalted by us, so that, if in the active business of life I have been of service to my countrymen, I may also, if I can, be of service to them in my leisure." (*Philosophia iacuit usque ad hanc aetatem nec ullum habuit lumen litterarum Latinarum; quae inlustranda et excitanda nobis est, ut, si occupati profuimus aliquid civibus nostris, prosimus etiam, si possumus, otiosi.*) (*Disputationes Tusculanae* 1.3.5).

[13] "*aut etiam ad nostros cives erudiendos nihil utilius."* (*Academica* 1.3.11).

[14]Cf. *Disputationes Tusculanae* 2.1.5; *De natura deorum* 1.4.8.

[15] Cf. especially *De natura deorum* 1.4.7: "I thought that to expound philosophy to my fellow-countrymen was actually my duty in the interests of the commonwealth, since in my judgment it would greatly contribute to the honor and glory of the state to have thoughts so important and so loft enshrined in Latin literature also." See also *De divinatione* 22.4; and *De officiis* 1.1.4. Concerning the educational nature of the pursuit, consider *De finibus* 2.4.10: "it is incumbent upon me also to use my best endeavors, with such zeal, enthusiasm and energy as I possess, to promote the advancement of learning among my fellow-countrymen." All translations of *De finibus bonorum et malorum* by H. Rackham in *Cicero: De finibus bonorum et balorum* Loeb Classical Library No. 17 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

[16] *Disputationes Tusculanae* 1.4.7.

didn't even let myself write anything unconnected with the law. So why should anyone criticize my leisure now when I'm not just trying to avoid idleness or losing my touch, but also striving to benefit as many people as possible?"[17] Beyond an avocation with which to fill one's time, Cicero resolutely proclaims the importance of the pursuit of wisdom for his fellow Roman citizens.

Cicero's answers to the second and third questions asked of him merge together nicely to explain his own predilection for the New Academy. The second question, concerning Cicero's own position about certain philosophical issues, provokes a terse response from the orator, namely, that such inquiry betrays an intellectual immaturity:[18]

> Those however who seek to learn my personal opinion on the various questions show an unreasonable degree of curiosity. In discussion it is not so much weight of authority as force of argument that should be demanded. Indeed the authority of those who profess to teach is often a positive hindrance to those who desire to learn; they cease to employ their own judgment, and take what they perceive to be the verdict of their chosen master as settling the question.[19]

There is a deeper philosophical issue at work here, for the philosopher is called to teach in a way that helps his students become philosophers and not mere parrots of their master's thoughts. Cicero learned from the Academicians the danger that can follow

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[17] "*Quod si, cum fungi munere debebamus, non modo operam nostram numquam a populari coetu removimus, sed ne litteram quidem ullam fecimus nisi forensem, quis reprehendet nostrum otium, qui in eo non modo nosmet ipsos hebescere et languere nolumus, sed etiam ut plurimis prosimus enitimur?*" (*Academica* 2.2.6).

[18] Levine notes the strangeness of Cicero's claim, for he tells the reader in the prologue that they should not be so inquisitive. Yet, in the final line of the work, Cicero gives his own opinion, namely, that Balbus, the Stoic, was probably right. The reader is not quite sure what to make of this last line. Cotta, the representative Academician in the dialogue thoroughly dismantles the Stoic and Epicurean view. One possibility is that Cicero wants to associate himself with the less politically problematic position. "Cicero and the Literary Dialogue," 151.

[19] *"Qui autem requirunt quid quaque de re ipsi sentiamus, curiosius id faciunt quam necesse est; non enim tam auctoritatis in disputando quam rationis momenta quaerenda sunt . Quin etiam obest plerumque iis qui discere volunt auctoritas eorum qui se docere profitentur; desinunt enim suum iudicium adhibere, id habent ratum quod ab eo quem probant iudicatum vident"* (*De natura deorum* 1.5.10).

from an authority figure too readily divulging his opinions. In order to teach his fellow Romans to become philosophers, he must teach them to think for themselves. And an essential element of his instruction is the practice of concealing his own opinions.

The final question concerns why Cicero chooses to associate with the New Academics at all. His response is as follows:

> They who wonder at my being a follower of this sect in particular may find a satisfactory answer in my four books of Academic Questions....This manner of philosophizing, of disputing all things and assuming nothing certainly, was begun by Socrates, revived by Arcesilaus, confirmed by Carneades, and has descended, with all its power, even to the present age.[20]

Cicero is an Academic because the Academics are the true heirs of Socrates. Cicero offers key qualifying description about the Academic school. First, Academic skeptics do not say that nothing is true, contrary to what some believe. Instead, they claim that our perceptions cannot adequately judge when something is true or not. The emphasis is upon man's epistemological limitation, not some inherent unintelligibility of the universe. Second, the Academic position does not leave one without guidance. While one cannot be certain about the truth of any claim, it is possible to be persuaded about which position is most probable.[21]

These passages at the beginning of *De natura deorum* nicely summarize Cicero's assumptions about the philosophical life found throughout these later works. Philosophy is not a hobby pursued merely for pleasure and it is certainly not to be pursued for money. Philosophy is the proper means to pursue wisdom, a way to deal with emotional

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[20] "*Qui autem admirantur nos hanc potissimum disciplinam secutos, his quattuor Academicis libris satis responsum videtur. Nec vero desertarum relictarumque rerum patrocinium suscepimus; non enim hominum interitu sententiae quoque occidunt, sed lucem auctoris fortasse desiderant. ut haec in philosophia ratio contra omnia disserendi nullamque rem aperte iudicandi profecta a Socrate repetita ab Arcesila confirmata a Carneade usque ad nostram viguit aetatem"* (*De natura deorum 1.5.11).*

[21] *Ibid.,* 1.5.11.

disruption, and a method to cultivate virtue in oneself and in others: in sum, how one should live the best life personally and politically. The doctrine of a particular school does not simply convey information to be memorized but is a means of shaping the way one interacts and thinks about life. Further, to be a true philosopher, one must learn to reason for oneself independent of a continual reliance upon authority. Philosophy is the best life, and the Academics offer the surest guidance to that life, a claim which Cicero defends in the *Academica*. To that text we now turn.

The Academica

From Cicero's letters to Atticus, we learn that the Roman philosopher wrote two different editions of the *Academica*.[22] The first edition came in two parts, each named after Cicero's main interlocutors, Catullus and Lucullus. Almost immediately, Cicero began revising this first edition by splitting the two books of the first edition into four.[23] Cicero also became discontent with his choice of interlocutors in the first edition; the figures represented by the dialogue's characters historically lacked the intellectual capability for the high level of philosophical discourse displayed in that work.[24] Unfortunately, what we now have are mere portions of each edition. From the first edition, we have the second of two books, often called the *Lucullus*; from the second

[22] Details of the time frame for the composition can be found in the introduction to the *Academica* by H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Revised Edition 1951), 399-401. The first edition was written by the end of May 45 B.C. The second edition began almost immediately, simultaneous to his work on *De finibus*.

[23] "And from two books I have made it into four. These are longer than the others were, though there are several parts left out.... In truth, if my self-love does not deceive me, these books have come out in such a manner that there is nothing of the same kind like them even in Greek."—Ep. 13.

[24] Ep. 12 and 19.

edition, we have most of the first book, which presents Varro's defense of Antiochus' account of the Old Academy. [25]

While the limitations are unfortunate, they are not necessarily detrimental for piecing together key components of the work. The surviving fragments from Books Three and Four of the second edition largely correspond to Book Two of the first edition, which we still have.[26] Book One of the second edition, which has largely survived, inspects competing historical accounts of the Academy, one defending the views of the rogue Academic-turned-Stoic Antiochus and the other defending the traditional Academic history. Given references to "yesterday" in Book Two of the first edition, it is thought that in Book Two of the second edition, Cicero presents a series of skeptical arguments against the senses. So, we have what probably corresponds to Books Three and Four of the second edition, as well as portions of Book One. The arguments found in the extant manuscripts, which comprise the focal point of the work, are relatively clear. Following Hadot's lead as outlined in Chapter One, the rest of this chapter will examine the specific doctrine defended in the *Academica*, how that doctrine informs the Academic way of life, and, finally, how the text of the *Academica* itself helps form the reader according to Academic standards.

Doctrine

The *Academica* defends the skepticism of the New Academy, a philosophical school that traces its lineage back to Plato's initial philosophical school. Though citing

[25] Though this text is often called *Lucullus* to show the two editions of the text, citations in this dissertation treat the text as a whole. So citations from Lucullus are *Academica* 2.

[26] I am following Charles Brittain's assessment in his excellent introduction. *On Academic Skepticism,* xvii.

Socrates and Plato as a philosophical source, later Academic schools varied greatly from the system-building versions of Platonism. The first important shift came in the 4th century B. C. under Arcesilaus, when the Academy took a marked shift towards skepticism in reaction to Zeno's Stoicism.[27] Arcesilaus' ascendency to leadership marks the beginning of the skeptical period of the Academy and is known as the Middle Academy. Carneades, rising to the head of the Academy somewhere around 155 B.C., continued to develop the skeptical emphasis and solidified the Academy as a philosophical rival to Stoicism. This period marks the beginning of the New Academy, the particular version of skepticism with which Cicero aligns himself.[28] The remaining significant historical event relevant to Cicero's work concerns a quarrel in the first century B.C. between Antiochus and Philo. Antiochus, after leaving the skeptical Academy, at that time directed by Philo, offered several Stoic revisions to Platonic philosophy and insisted that these revisions captured the spirit of Plato's original thought.[29] Considering himself to be Plato's true heir, Antiochus parted from Philo and began the "Old Academy." The almost encyclopedic nature of the presentation of Stoic arguments and Academic responses suggests that Cicero may have written the *Academica* with Antiochus' book *Sosus* at hand, as well as several works of the skeptics Clitomachus

[27] See A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 88, 94.

[28] An excellent summary of Carneades is given in James Allen's "Carneades," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/carneades/ (accessed June 1, 2011).

[29] The definitive work on the relationship of Antiochus and the New and Old Academy is John Glucker's *Antiochus and the Late Academy* Hypomnemata Heft 56 (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Gottingen 1978). Antiochus left the Academy led by Philo and claimed that he was reestablishing the real Academy, though there is some ambiguity concerning whether he thought Platonism and Stoicism were congruent or Stoicism was a correction of Platonism. His particular emphasis was on the similar doctrines of the various dogmatic schools, emphasizing what can be known. Cicero obviously disagrees with Antiochus, continually pointing out the differences between the Stoics and other dogmatic schools through the work (*Academica* 2.69-70, 2.112-13, 2.132-134).

and Philo.[30] His familiarity with these writings went beyond an interest in his school's past, for Cicero was in the advantageous position of receiving philosophical training from those involved in the later debates, both Philo of Larissa and Antiochus.[31]

As opposed to other schools like the Peripatetics, Epicureans, and Stoics, each of which present a specific set of doctrines adhered to by their followers, the Academic tradition appears almost exclusively reactionary. Most of their work focuses upon the incoherent implications of other philosophical schools instead of the development of their own dogma, though there are some exceptions.[32] This way of practicing philosophy is not without precedent, for Cicero acknowledges that the Academics self-consciously follow Socrates' practice of starting from one's opponent's position.

> It was this kind of conversation that Socrates used most of all, because he wished to advance nothing of his own to persuade his disputant, but preferred to establish something from that which his opponent had granted to him; and this the opponent had necessarily to agree to, based on the concessions he had already made.[33]

This Socratic strategy makes it difficult to locate with certainty the New Academy's position. The prevailing view is that the Academics are skeptical philosophers and have no set of dogma save the claim that knowledge is unobtainable. However, even this claim might not technically be considered a doctrine according to

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[30] Clitomachus became head of the skeptical Academy after the important figure Carneades. He put in writing many of Carneades' arguments.

[31] Cicero's philosophical training was unsurpassed during this century. He studied with the Epicurean Phaedrus, the Academic philosopher Philo, Antiochus, and two prominent Stoic philosophers: Diodotus and Posidonius.

[32] I am thinking of Carneades' development of the probable in particular, a more detailed examination of which will be offered below.

[33] "*Hoc modo sermonis plurimum Socrates usus est, propterea quod nihil ipse afferre ad persuadendum volebat, sed ex eo, quod sibi ille dederat, quicum disputabat, aliquid conficere malebat, quod ille ex eo, quod iam concessisset, necessario adprobare deberet*." *De inventione* 1.31.53. Trans. Robert Gorman in *The Socratic Method in the Dialogues of Cicero* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005) See also *Contra Academicos* 3.9.18.

Michael Frede, who makes an important distinction between the classical skeptics (philosophers like Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Pyrrho) and dogmatic skeptics.[34] The dogmatic skeptics insist that certainty is impossible while the classical skeptics, especially Sextus Empiricus, never make such a claim, pointing out that such a position is a dogmatic claim.[35] Sextus Empiricus insists that Academic skeptical philosophy, especially Carneades' thought, is dogmatic about the unattainability of knowledge. Augustine's interpretation of the Academics' skepticism follows Empiricus's dogmatic interpretation of the Academy.[36] However, as we will see later, contemporaries of the Academics, and Augustine, recognize the intentional Socratic method of the Academics and struggle to discern serious Academic claims from mere challenges to a competing school's philosophical consistency. For now it will be assumed that their skepticism was genuine. From the argument of the unattainability of knowledge follows a recommendation to withhold assent. Insofar as there are doctrines in the *Academica*, they are: (1), the claim that certain knowledge is unobtainable; (2), the claim that the best

[34] *Academica* 1.12.44 "That is why Arcesilaus used to deny that anything could be known, not even the residual claim that Socrates had allowed himself, i.e., the knowledge that he did not know anything."

[35] Michael Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent," in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 203.

[36] *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11 :"the Academics were of the opinion that man cannot attain *knowledge* of precisely those things that pertain to philosophy (for Carneades said that he did not care about anything else); and yet that man can be wise and that the whole office of the wise man is on display in the diligent search for the truth…. And they not only said that all things were uncertain, but they also confirmed this with a plethora of reasons." (*Nam et Academicis placuit nec homini scientiam posse contingere earum dumtaxat rerum, quae ad philosophiam pertinent—nam caetera curare se Carneades negabat –et tamen hominem posse esse sapientem sapientisque totum munus, ut abs te quoque…Et omnia incertaesse non dicebant solum uerum etiam copiosissimis rationibus adfirmabant.*) (*Contra Academicos* 2.9.23). Special thanks to David Corey for help concerning the distinction between the Academic and Pyrrhonic Skeptics.

life—the life of happiness and, therefore, the life of the sage—entails withholding assent from all impressions.[37] These doctrines will be examined in turn.

The centrality of skepticism in the Academy, as mentioned above, began with Arcesilaus' ascendency in 268 B. C. to leadership.[38] Zeno's empirically based criterion of truth embedded in his novel account of "apprehension" incited a reaction from the Academy [39] On Zeno's account, while we are constantly barraged by impressions, only some of these impressions do we truly apprehend, i.e. assent to be certainly true. Assent is an acknowledgement or endorsement of a perception as true, a judgment that the impression rightly matches up with reality. Problems arise if one gives assent to an impression that does not actually match up with reality in the way one supposes, like when one assents that the oar in the water is bent though it is actually straight.[40]

What is particularly novel about Zeno's psychology of beliefs is his account of "cataleptic" impressions.[41] These impressions are thought to have some truth-

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[37]Gisela Striker has helpfully characterized the first as the skeptical thesis and the second as the skeptical recommendation that follows from the thesis. Striker "Skeptical Strategies" in *Doubt and Dogmatism*, ed. Malcolm Schofield, Myles Burnyeat, and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 54. There are some nuances within the Academy that this work cannot examine thoroughly. For instance, a debate would rage within the Academic schools concerning whether the wise man could hold opinions. Carneades was thought by some to have allowed the wise man to hold opinions. In the *Academica*, Cicero agrees with the Stoics that the wise man should hold no opinions. For a summary of this debate see Charles Brittain's introduction to the *Academica.*

[38] *Academica* 1.42. Cicero would object that the New Academy was, in fact, no different than the old Academy on the grounds that Plato, like Socrates, affirmed nothing but argued for both sides of a position to find what was most probable.

[39] *Academica* 2.24.75.

[40] See Hagendahl, 56, for a side by side comparison of *Academica* 1.12.43-44 and *Contra Academicos* 2.6.14-15 for strong support that Augustine had at least this portion of the text with him at Cassiciacum.

[41]See Michael Frede "Stoic Epistemology" in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. K. Algra et. all (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also Tad Brennan, "Reasonable Impressions in Stoicism," *Phronesis* 41 (1996): 318-34; *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, & Fate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11.

guaranteeing feature about them. Charles Brittain nicely summarizes Zeno's account of cataleptic impressions as follows: "an impression is cataleptic if (a) it is true, (b) it is caused in the appropriate way for correctly representing the state of affairs that is its object, and (c) its truth is warranted by the inimitable richness and detail of the representation guaranteed by its causal history."[42] Having a cataleptic impression is not sufficient for knowledge, but it is necessary for it, since knowledge, for the Stoics, is a strong assent to a catalepetic impression. For the Stoics, the sage, that ideal perfect person, assents only to these cataleptic impressions and refuses to assent to any other. The Academicians contested portion (c) of the account of cataleptic impressions, arguing that, for any impression, one could describe a set of conditions sufficient to cause a situation's appearance to differ from how that state of affairs occurs in reality. The implication is devastating for Stoic epistemology: if there are no cataleptic impressions, there is no knowledge.

In the *Academica*, while Cicero attacks the Stoic counterexamples to skepticism individually, his critiques against the possibility of cataleptic impressions derive from merely a few principles.[43] Concerning sense impressions, he offers two general strategies for promoting doubt, the first being to draw attention to the problem of indiscernible objects.[44] For many objects of sense, there can be another object exactly the same in appearance. How, the skeptics posit, could someone guarantee that what one judges to be

[42]See also *Academica* 2.18, 2.77, 2.112-113, 1.41. "Stamped and molded from its source in a way that it couldn't be from what wasn't its source" (2.18); "stamped, impressed, and molded just as it is" (2.112).

[43] There have been several articles on the various strategies of skeptics. See, for instance, James Allen's "Carneadean Argument," in *Assent and Argument*; Gisela Striker, "Skeptical Strategies" in *Doubt and Dogmatism*; and especially Malcolm Schofield, "Cicero For and Against Divination" *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986): 47-65.

[44]For an account of the general strategy, see *Academica,* 2.13.40.

the case about some sensible impression is not a case of mistaken identity? One might believe that he is looking at Quintus, though he is actually looking at Publius Servilius Geminus, his twin.[45] To assent to the impression of Geminus as that of Quintus, the twin, would be to assent to a false impression. A second skeptical strategy against the reliability of sense impressions draws upon the problem of altered states, such as when one is drunk or dreaming.[46] Inebriation can cause perceptions that differ from those experienced when sober; dream worlds may represent a reality radically at odds with that in an awakened state; and if perception alone acts as the criterion of truth, there is no way to guarantee which set of perceptions accurately represents reality. The possibility that one is actually dreaming, for instance, eliminates the certainty about some experiences which Zeno's cataleptic impressions requires.

Not content to restrict their attacks against sense experience alone, the Academics offer arguments meant to undermine the certainty of reason and Stoic logic. Against rationality, Cicero uses sorites arguments to accentuate one's uncertainty about concepts. For instance, the difficulty stating the exact conditions for a pile of sand to become a heap indicates the vagueness of our concepts.[47] The liar paradox is employed to question the very stronghold of Stoic logic, a system based upon *modus ponens* (If p, then q. p, therefore q). For any argument form to be valid, it must be impossible to create an argument using that form in which the premises are true but the conclusion is false;

[45] *Academic* 2.26.84.

[46] *Academica* 2.27.88-90. *Contra Academicos* 3.11.25; 3.12.28.

[47] *Academica* 2.29.94.

problematically, the liar paradox offers just such a counter-example, implying that even logic cannot yield certainty.[48]

The denial of cataleptic impressions leads to the second Academic doctrine, a doctrine which might better be considered a recommendation. The changes to the sage play a central role in this recommendation because the sage acts as the model for the ideal way of life. If there are no cataleptic impressions, then one cannot distinguish a true from a false impression. And the only way for even the perfect sage to guarantee an avoidance of error is to refuse to assent to any impression as true.[49] Here Cicero is quite slippery, for at times the argument appears to reveal inconsistencies in the Stoic account; at other places, Cicero appears to offer his own account of the Academic sage. What is clear is that the Stoics maintains a high view of a sage who not only avoid error, but also knows the truths of wisdom. The Academic sage also avoids error, but does so by refusing to assent to any impression as true.

The Stoics offer a *reductio ad absurdum* against the skeptical recommendation. Because any action requires assent of some form, according to the Stoics, the Academic recommendation of withholding assent entails the unacceptable recommendation of a life of complete inactivity. Carneades, the Academic, offers two distinctions to counter the Stoic inactivity argument. First he questioned the Stoic presupposition that all noncataleptic impressions (those without the special truth-guaranteeing feature about them) are indistinguishable in terms of degree of certainty. Such impressions, though lacking any distinguishing mark of certainty, do not strike one as equally probable.

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[48] *Academica* 2.30.96; *Contra Academicos* 3.14.30. For more on these arguments, see Jonathan Barnes, "Logic in *Academica* 1 and the *Lucullus*," in *Assent and Argument*, 140-60.

[49] See especially *Academica* 2.20.66-2.21.67. *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11; 2.6.14.

People are persuaded, for instance, that certain foods are more beneficial for our health than others. Lack of complete certainty does not eliminate a degree of certainty. With his second distinction, between assent and approving, Carneades argues that one can *approve* of some impression as probably true without having to assent to that impression as certainly true.[50] The sage, and everyone else by extension, need not be bereft of any guidance but guide his actions by what reason reveals probably to be true, though reason can never offer certainty.[51]

The interpretation of Carneades' intention behind these distinctions remains debatable. Some, like Empiricus, assume that Carneades seriously proposed them to defend skepticism; others, however, think that they were offered simply to question the Stoic assumption that action requires assent. The main concern for this chapter is how Augustine interprets Carneades' philosophical response. Augustine understood Carneades, and Cicero, to affirm that the wise man guides his actions by what appears probable, or in Cicero's words, verisimilar. This response, according to Augustine, can ultimately be traced to Carneades,[52] though he seems to attribute it to the Academics as a group.[53]

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[50] There is considerable debate about whether Carneades actually accepted this position. See James Allen's "Carneadean Argument in Cicero's Academic Books" in *Assent and Doubt*. The acceptance of some impressions as more probably true marks an important distinction between Academic Skepticism and Pyrrhonic Skepticism. The Pyrrhonic Skeptics denied that appearance of probability had any relevance to the truth of the matter.

[51] Augustine's first mention of the probable or verisimilar is found in *Contra Academicos* 2.7.16.

[52] *Contra Academicos* 2.18.40. Augustine expresses great admiration for Carneades as one "more astute and vigilant" than all other Academicians.

[53] See, for instance, *Contra Academicos* 2.5.12 and 2.10.24 where Augustine simply ascribes the view to the Academics with the latter also ascribing the acceptance of the probable to Cicero. One further problem arises. Neither Cicero nor Augustine appear entirely consistent on the use of "opinion." The issue is a problem because opinion seems to have a technical meaning for both authors. Cicero, for instance, denies that the sage is an opinion holder (*Academica* 2.66, 1.45; *Contra Academicos* 2.6.14) yet seems to

One final note about doctrine, to be developed further in later chapters, must be addressed. Because the Academics intentionally focused on their opponent's views, some philosophers were suspicious about Academic intentions.[54] In the *Academica* the character Lucullus criticizes the Academic practice of refusing to discuss one's own views when he says:

> That leaves their claim that one should argue on either side of every question in order to discover the truth. Well, I'd like to see what they have discovered. It is not our practice, he says, to display our view. What actually are these mysteries? Why do you hide your views as if they were something shameful? So that our students, he says, are guided by reason rather than authority.[55]

More will be made of this apparent practice later. For now it is sufficient to note that Augustine's particular suspicion that the Academic skeptics are not truly skeptics would not have appeared as outlandish to philosophers of his day as it does now, since even Cicero himself acknowledges the accusation in his apologia of the New Academy. It may, therefore, be concluded that the exclusive focus on one's opponent's position and the practice of hiding one's own legitimately opens the possibility that the Academic skeptics held beliefs which they did not always share.

Way of Life

The doctrine of the Academic Skeptics, as with other ancient philosophical schools, informs their recommended way of life. Cicero presents the Academic way of life in

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affirm that one can be guided by what reason leads one to consider to be probably true, a probable belief that seems identical to an opinion. Harald Thorsrud alleviates the problem by suggesting that Cicero is simply using two different senses of "opinion." So, the wise man does not have opinions[1] which are beliefs resulting from assent, but he does have opinions[2] which are approvals of certain impressions as probably true.

[54] Augustine emphasizes this at *Contra Academicos* 3.9.18.

[55] "*Restat illud, quod dicunt, veri inveniendi causa contra omnia dici oportere et pro omnibus. Volo igitur videre quid invenerint. Non solemus, inquit, ostendere. Quae sunt tandem ista mysteria? aut cur celatis, quasi turpe aliquid, sententiam vestram? Ut, qui audient, inquit, ratione potius quam auctoritate ducantur*"(*Academica* 2.18.60).

contrast to other philosophical schools to ground a claim of philosophical superiority. This superiority resides in a lack of arrogance, a guaranteed method for avoiding error, and the encouragement of the unrestricted pursuit of truth.

Freedom from Arrogance

Cicero characterizes his chief philosophical competitors, such as the Stoics, as dogmatic philosophers because these pseudo-philosophers, in Academic eyes, presumed to have answers to all of the fundamental questions of philosophy. A few years after the composition of the *Academica*, while reflecting on his recent philosophical outpouring, Cicero cites the absence of arrogance among the Academics as one component of its pre-eminence: "[it is] the philosophic system which I thought the least arrogant, and at the same time the most consistent."[56] The following passage from the *Academica* captures Cicero's critique of the dogmatic schools:

> This is what I can't bear: you forbid me to assent to anything unknown, claiming that this is shameful and excessively rash, and yet you take it upon yourself to expound a philosophical system expressing wisdom. So you're going to unveil the nature of the universe, shape my character, determine the ethical ends, set out appropriate actions for me, define the kind of life I should adopt – and, you claim, simultaneously teach me the criterion and methods of argument and understanding.[57]

While insisting that one should not be rash, the dogmatists – here the Stoics – also maintain that their philosophical system "expresses wisdom." Such a claim, Cicero thinks, is the height of arrogance: "Or is it rather that our opponents are arrogant in their

[56] *De divinatione*, 2.1.1

[57] "*Illud ferre non possum. Tu cum me incognito adsentiri vetes idque turpissimum esse dicas et plenissimum temeritatis, tantum tibi adroges, ut exponas disciplinam sapientiae, naturam rerum omnium evolvas, mores fingas, finis bonorum malorumque constituas, officia describas, quam vitam ingrediar definias, idemque etiam disputandi et intellegendi iudicium dicas te et artificium traditurum, perficies ut ego ista innumerabilia complectens nusquam labar, nihil opiner?*" (*Academica* 2.36.114)

conviction that they alone have universal knowledge?"[58] Cicero directs his frustration against Stoic dogmatism: "So the point isn't that I must assent to something, but rather to the same doctrines as you? Be careful: what you're asking may turn out to be shameless (as well as arrogant)."[59] The dogmatic philosophers are riddled with false humility.

The Academics, for Cicero, have a distinct philosophical advantage over other schools because they lack arrogance. Ideally, the skeptical philosopher, upon realizing the difficulty—if not the impossibility—of obtaining knowledge, avoids the arrogance of the dogmatists and approaches wisdom with humility. This humility, as a moral virtue, helps rightly orient the character of the philosopher to pursue the truth in a manner befitting his goal. Of course, the same uncertainty could induce despair arising from the realization that knowledge is forever beyond one's grasp; as a result, one might be initially surprised by Cicero's optimism about the Academic way of life. But Cicero's optimism stems from his belief that Academic Skepticism, of all of the ancient philosophical schools, offers the best chance for one to become wise because it can guarantee the avoidance of error and offers the greatest freedom among the philosophical schools to pursue truth wherever it may be found.

Avoidance of Error

Philosophy emerges from a desire for truth, according to the Academics, and the need to avoid error is the corollary of this longing: "But just as I judge this, seeing truths,

[58] *Ibid.,* 2.36.114; See also Augustine, *Epistula* 1.

[59] "*Non ergo id agitur, ut aliquid adsensu meo comprobem; quae tu, vide ne impudenter etiam postules, non solum adroganter, praesertim cum ista tua mihi ne probabilia quidem videantur"* (*Academica* 2.40.126).

to be the best thing, so approving falsehoods in the place of truths is the worst."[60] Elsewhere, Cicero succinctly defines error as the worst of mistakes, the "approving falsehoods in the place of truths."[61] His account of error follows that found in Stoic psychology and epistemology. A true judgment arises when one's belief about some impression of an object matches up with the way that object is in reality and the impression is formed in a way that cannot be wrong. An error occurs when one's judgment about the world does not accurately represent the world as it actually is.

Cicero offers a paradigmatic example showing the importance to avoid error in his discussion of the various philosophical positions about the goal of human life. The ethical end of a given school presents the goal that guides every action of a person, either directly or indirectly. If pleasure is the goal, for instance, then the particular kinds of actions one engages in may differ significantly from one whose goal is honor or virtue. Because there is a correct best way of life, as Cicero appears to accept, the avoidance of error is paramount, for a mistaken judgment about the *telos* of life would cause a misdirection of every action:

> Now I'll ask you to tell me which person I should follow, as long as no one gives the extremely uncultured and ridiculous response 'Anyone you like, as long as it's someone.' No reply could be more ill-considered. I want to follow the Stoics. Do I have the permission, I won't say of Aristotle (a rather outstanding philosopher by my lights), of Antiochus himself? (Though he was called an Academic, he was actually an out-and-out Stoic – or would have been with very few changes.) So now there's a determine question to decide: the wise person is to be either a Stoic or an Old Academic. He can't be both, because their dispute isn't about boundaries but ownership of the whole. Since the order structuring one's whole life is implied by the definition of the highest good, a disagreement about that is a disagreement about the order structuring one's whole life. Hence,

[60] "*Sed, ut hoc pulcherrimum esse iudico, vera videre, sic pro veris probare falsa turpissimum est*"(*Academica* 2.20.66).

[61] *Ibid.*

since the disagreement between these schools is so wide, the wise person can't belong to both of them, but only to one.[62]

Avoiding errors concerning the best way of life helps prevent the abhorrent indiscretion that could follow from ordering one's life by means of the wrong end.

The Academics present a twofold practice to guarantee the evasion of error. First, one should examine every issue from every perspective. Such a task should strike one as daunting because it demands familiarity with every philosophical issue from a variety of positions, as well as objections to those positions. Cicero recognizes the extreme difficulty of undertaking such a comprehensive examination: "Knowledge is always surrounded with difficulties, and the obscurity of the things themselves and weakness of our judgments is such that one can see why the earliest and most learned philosophers lost confidence in their ability to discover what they desired."[63] The practice of arguing on both sides of every issue, while related to the Academic doctrine of probability, to be examined later, is also a means for helping one avoid error. By seeking the truth from every possible perspective, one avoids errors that can arise from a myopic pursuit of wisdom.

Followers of the dogmatic philosophers are more prone to err than Academic philosophers because such philosophers hastily join their school before examining

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[62] "*Ad vos nunc refero quem sequar: modo ne quis illud tam ineruditum absurdumque respondeat: 'Quemlibet, modo aliquem.' Nihil potest dici inconsideratius. Cupio sequi Stoicos. Licetne—omitto per Aristotelem, meo iudicio in philosophia prope singularem—per ipsum Antiochum? qui appellabatur Academicus, erat quidem, si perpauca mutavisset, germanissimus Stoicus. Erit igitur res iam in discrimine. Nam aut Stoicus constituatur sapiens aut veteris Academiae. Utrumque non potest. Est enim inter eos non de terminis, sed de tota possessione contentio. Nam omnis ratio vitae definitione summi boni continetur, de qua qui dissident, de omni vitae ratione dissident. Non potest igitur uterque sapiens esse, quoniam tanto opere dissentiunt, sed alter"* (*Academica* 2.42.131). It is worth noting that Cicero presents the decision in terms of following a specific philosophical leader, not a philosophical system.

[63] "*Etsi enim omnis cognitio multis est obstructa difficultatibus eaque est et in ipsis rebus obscuritas et in iudiciis nostris infirmitas, ut non sine causa antiquissimi et doctissimi invenire se posse quod cuperent diffisi sint*" (*Academica* 2.3.7). See also *De natura deorum* 1.5.11-12.

possible philosophical alternatives. Most followers of the dogmatic schools "make their judgments about subjects they don't know at the weakest point in their lives under pressure from a friend or captivated by a single speech from someone they heard for the first time;" as a result they are, "chained to one spot by bonds formed before they were able to judge what was best."[64] And it does not help the dogmatists, Cicero claims, to say that such choices are based on the wisdom of another because this response assumes that one can recognize who is wise (or can be trusted) and who is not wise (and cannot be trusted); however, only one already wise can see accurately perceive those who are wise. Dogmatic philosophers, in direct opposition to the ideal philosophical life of reason, inappropriately ground their beliefs upon authority and then stubbornly refuse to subject their beliefs to investigation: "I don't know how it is that most people would rather go wrong by defending to the hilt a view they have grown to love than work out without intransigence which view is most consistent."[65] The Academic philosophers avoid any unwarranted acceptance of a philosophical position, thus avoiding the errors of the dogmatists.

Cicero offers a second and better procedure for avoiding error: simply decline to assent to any impression as true. The perfect philosopher, the sage, has developed this particular ability; having the same impressions as others, he is able constantly to refuse to assent to those impressions. Not denying that some impressions might be true, Cicero writes that "even if anything is apprehensible, the very habit of assent is slippery and

[64] *Ibid.,* 2.3.8.

[65] *Ibid.,* 2.3.9.

dangerous."[66] Because the Stoic criterion of truth cannot guarantee an accurate judgment about one's impressions, "it's better to restrain all assent so the wise person doesn't go awry by advancing rashly."[67]

Freedom to Pursue the Truth

Academic philosophers claim superiority not only because their school guarantees the possibility of a life free of error, but because it also offers the best means for discovering what is probably true. Given Academic skeptical arguments, no school can guarantee the comprehensive understanding of reality which all philosophers seek. However, the Academics, Cicero argues, offer the most likely route to wisdom because they offer the greatest freedom to pursue the truth. The particular emphasis upon this Academic license appears to be a uniquely Ciceronian contribution to Academic philosophy. There are two elements to his position: (a) the superiority of this philosophical liberty to dogmatic restriction and (b) the means by which one exercises such liberty. [68]

First, because Academic philosophers are not constrained to defend any set dogma, unlike other dogmatic philosophers, they are at greater liberty to pursue the truth and are thereby the truest philosophers. Whether the issue is the *telos* of life, the nature of the gods, or the value of knowledge, the dogmas of Stoicism and Epicureanism bind their adherents to certain philosophical assumptions. In contrast to the dogmatic schools,

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[66] *Ibid.,* 2.22.68.

[67] "*Nobis autem primum, etiam si quid percipi possit, tamen ipsa consuetudo adsentiendi periculosa esse videtur et lubrica. Quam ob rem cum tam vitiosum esse constet adsentiri quicquam aut falsum aut incognitum, sustinenda est potius omnis adsensio, ne praecipitet, si temere processerit*" (*Academnica* 2.22.68).

[68] See Woldemar Görler, "Cicero's Philosophical Stance in the *Lucullus*," in *Assent and Argument.* B. Inwood and J. Mansfeld (Brill, New York: 1997), 36-57.

the skeptical school encourages its adherents to question all philosophical dogma as well as accept any options as possibly true: "But we are freer and less constrained because our power of judgment is intact and we aren't compelled by any obligation to defend a set of views prescribed and practically imposed on us by someone else."[69] To the degree that binding oneself to a particular set of doctrine increases the probability of error, Cicero argues, the freedom of Academic skepticism increases the probability of finding the truth.[70]

Beyond increasing the likelihood of discovering the truth, the autonomy of the Academic philosopher from all but reason marks him as the truest philosopher. Philosophy, the Academics insisted, is the pursuit of wisdom by means of reason alone.[71] Whatever position an Academic philosopher chooses as probably true should not be based upon mere whim. Because their school frees its adherents from any authority figure, the Academics alone are the rightful heirs of the philosophic tradition.

Though the Academics are unconstrained by any dogma, Cicero does present a proper way to pursue the truth. One does not simply choose a position that is appealing; instead, following their masters Socrates and Plato, the Academics pursue truth by means of arguing for both sides of any position. While Cicero agrees that such a dialectical

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[69] "*Hoc autem liberiores et solutiores sumus, quod integra nobis est iudicandi potestas, nec ut omnia, quae praescripta et quasi imperata sint, defendamus necessitate ulla cogimur*" (*Academica* 2.3.8). See also *De officiis* 3.4.20 "But our New Academy allows us wide liberty, so that it is within my right to defend any theory that presents itself to me as most probable."

[70] See also *Disputationes Tusculanae*. 4.4.7 "But let everyone defend his views, for judgment is free: I shall cling to my rule and without being tied to the laws of any single school of thought which I feel bound to obey, shall always search for the most probable solution in every problem; and as has been my frequent practice on other occasions. So I was careful to act lately in my house at Tusculum." (*Sed defendat, quod quisque sentit; sunt enim iudicia libera: nos institutum tenebimus nullisque unius disciplinae legibus adstricti, quibus in philosophia necessario pareamus, quid sit in quaque re maxime probabile, semper requiremus. Quod cum saepe alias, tum nuper in Tusculano studiose egimus.*)

[71] See especially *De natura deorum* 1.5.10.

method verifies the skeptical conclusion of uncertainty, he also claims that it offers the means for discovering which side is more likely to be true: "Nor do our arguments have any purpose other than to draw out or 'formulate' the truth or its closest possible approximation by means of arguing on either side."[72] Though neither side may have sufficient evidence to warrant assent, the philosopher finds some positions more plausible than others. Cicero creatively unites the dialectical method of argument found in Arcesilaus and Socrates with Carneades' theory of probability to argue for Academy prominence.

It is worth briefly reflecting on the coordination of the doctrine and way of life as presented in the *Academica* before moving to a discussion of the text. The doctrine is the tragic realization that truth will remain beyond our intellectual grasp. This doctrine immediately informs the best way of life, for the recognition that certainty eludes us helps foster humility, an essential virtue for pursuing wisdom. Further, given the proclivity we all have for making wrong judgments about impressions, the Academics offer a guaranteed way for avoiding error: refuse to assent to anything. Yet, since we must guide our actions in some way, the Academic teaching on probability offers sufficient means for rightly directing one's life. Because the Academic is not bound to follow any doctrine, but merely what appears probably true, he is free to seek the opinions of all philosophical schools and only be guided by what reason reveals is most probably true. The Academic teaching on uncertainty, combined with its ideas on probability, allow Academics to be the truest philosophers and the most likely to be living rational, and, therefore, the best lives.

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[72]" *nisi ut in utramque partem dicendo eliciant et tamquam exprimant aliquid, quod aut verum sit aut ad id quam proxime accedat"*(*Academica* 2.3.7).

Philosophical Writing; Dialogue and Pedagogy

There are two aspects to the type of philosophical writing used by Cicero in the *Academica*. Cicero not only writes the *Academica* as a philosophical dialogue, but he also uses it as a logic in a philosophical pedagogy. This last section of the chapter examines both aspects of the *Academica.*

Dialogue

Cicero writes the *Academica* as a philosophical heir of Plato, using the dialogue form to present his ideas.[73] He creatively modifies the Platonic philosophical dialogue by adding a cover letter, providing a setting always in a time and location of political rest and, in compliance with the Roman oratorical tradition, replacing the short, back-and-forth discussions found in a Platonic dialogue with long speeches.[74]

In his defense of the pedagogical benefits of skepticism, Cicero simultaneously presents the benefits of the philosophical dialogue. The skeptical method, and by extension the dialogue form, lets a teacher (1) hide his own opinion, (2) relieve others

[73] Plato's critique of writing can be found in the *Phaedrus*. There Socrates is particularly concerned with difficulties of conveying knowledge by the written word. Part of the problem is particularly tied to the written document becoming authoritative. See Charles Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; reprinted by Penn State University Press, 1996), especially his chapter 6 "Dialogue and Writing." As Griswold writes, the problem with a book is that "it does not know when to speak and when not" and "it cannot defend itself" (208). Griswold, though, suggests the main problem with writing is education: it cannot "induce self-questioning in its readers or authors." (212) Plato performatively responds to Socrates' critique by recounting the problem of the written word in a written document. The suggestion is that the dialogue does not suffer from the deficiencies of a treatise. The dialogues does so, Griswold suggests, by "their unsystematic and noncatechistic character; Platonic anonymity and irony; the presence of several layers of meaning contained within one another, the more difficult lying underneath the simpler; the interplay between drama and argument and so between showing and saying; the mimetic and mirroring nature of the dialogues; and the absence of a dialogue between more mature philosophers."

[74] Remarkably little has been written on Cicero's use of the dialogue form. By far the best work is found in Michael Foley's "The Philosophical Roots of Cassiciacum" and Philip Levine's "Cicero and the Literary Dialogue," *The Classical Journal* , 53.4 (1958), 146-151. See also a recent dissertation by Daniel Hanchey, "Cicero the Dialogician: The Construction of Community at the End of the Empire." Hanchey reflects on the political reasons for using the dialogue, given Cicero's objections to Caesar's ascendency.

from deception, and (3) look for the most probable truth for any question.[75] I will examine each of these benefits in turn.

It has already been mentioned that Academic philosophers claim to be the truest philosophers because reason alone, and not authority, guides them. Cicero supports this claim of philosophic superiority in *De natura deorum* where he contrasts the Academic practice of hiding of one's opinion with the Pythagorean tradition. The followers of Pythagoras, when asked to answer some philosophical question, would simply answer, "The [master] himself said so" (*ipse dixit*). The unfortunate result of such credulity is a number of followers who lack understanding concerning philosophical issues because they never learn the skill of dialectical argumentation.

The dialogue form can be used by a writer to prevent readers from adopting an *ipse dixit* approach. The text presents at least two sides to an issue and is embedded within a narrative, allowing the setting, tone, and characters to influence a proper reading of the work. Concerning the *Academica*, even though Cicero considers it a defense of the Academic position, one should be wary of accepting Academic skepticism *tout court*, for the conclusions are entirely based upon Stoic premises. Instead of an essay or treatise in

[75] "Socrates on the other had was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and set her in the cities of men and bring her also into their homes and compel her to ask questions about life and morality and things good and evil: and his many-sided method of discussion and the varied nature of its subjects and the greatness of his genius, which has been immortalized in Plato's literary masterpieces, have produced many warring philosophic sects of which I have chosen particularly to follow that one which I think agreeable to the practice of Socrates, in trying to conceive my own private opinion, to relieve others from deception and in every discussion look for the most probable solution; and as this was the custom observed by Carneades with all the resources of a keen intelligence, I have endeavored on many other occasions as well as recently in the Tusculan villa to conform to the fashion in our discussions." (*Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in urbibus conlocavit et in domus etiam introduxit et coegit de vita et moribus rebusque bonis et malis quaerere. Cuius multiplex ratio disputandi rerumque varietas et ingeni magnitudo Platonis memoria et litteris consecrata plura genera effecit dissentientium philosophorum, e quibus nos id potissimum consecuti sumus, quo Socratem usum arbitrabamur, ut nostram ipsi sententiam tegeremus, errore alios levaremus et in omni disputatione, quid esset simillimum veri, quaereremus. Quem morem cum Carneades acutissime copiosissimeque tenuisset, fecimus et alias saepe et nuper in Tusculano, ut ad eam consuetudinem disputaremus.*) (*Disputationes Tusculanae* 5.4.10-11).

which some position is clearly defended, the reader of the *Academica* is presented with a series of Stoic arguments against Skepticism followed by Cicero's responses to those objections. The extended presentation of the competing positions affords the reader the opportunity to judge the adequacy of Cicero's responses to Stoic epistemology. That Cicero's responses are presented last does not *ipso facto* mean that they are the best. For instance, in a remarkable, yet often neglected, passage, Cicero writes, "our view, however, is first, that even if anything is apprehensible, the very habit of assent is slippery and dangerous."[76] The statement appears to be at odds with the Academic policy; here, Cicero emphasizes the practice of assenting as suspect instead of insisting upon the impossibility of cataleptic impressions. But, one might think, if that practice can be controlled, then maybe one should assent to certain impressions under the right conditions. While a possible implication, Cicero never tells the reader which impressions these may be.

Hiding one's opinion has a second, political, benefit. Cicero, like Plato, recognized that political leaders, as well as the masses, find philosophy potentially dangerous for the city because of the willingness of philosophers to contest the conventions of a society's morality and the religious beliefs that undergird it. [77] Philosophers since Socrates recognized the need to exercise caution in evincing one's thoughts. An excellent example of Cicero's cautious expression of his own opinion is

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[76] *Academica,* 2.21.68.

[77] *De natura deorum* 3.31.77. See also *Disputationes Tusculanae* 5.2.6. Few have written as clearly and persuasively on this political nature of philosophy than Ernest Fortin. See *Dissent and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Dante and His Precursors*, trans. Marc A. LePain (New York: Lexington Books, 2002); "The Church Fathers and the Transmission of the Christian Message," in *Ever Ancient, Ever New: Ruminations on the City, the Soul, and the Church*, ed. Michael P. Foley, 13-29; "The 'Rhetoric' of the Church Fathers," in *Ever Ancient, Ever New,* 47-58.

found in *De natura deorum*. There, he removes himself from the discussion entirely, using Cotta as the chief Academic spokesman to criticize with devastation the Stoic arguments for the existence of the gods. Cotta first critiques the Epicurean view of the gods, which, he argues, amounts to a form of atheism. The political advantage of critiquing atheism is clear; were people not to fear the judgment of the gods, they may not find sufficient motivation to obey Roman laws. At the same time, the work heavily critiques the politically advantageous Stoic view, a philosophy which affirmed the existence of gods and encouraged civic duty. But the critique comes from Cotta, not Cicero, though Cicero's own appearance comes at the end of the dialogue; there, he says that he found the Stoic view most persuasive. The problem for the reader is reconciling the Academic critiques of the Stoic account, which appear quite devastating, with the ending of the dialogue.[78] Why does Cicero not find Cotta's response persuasive? Should he, as a fellow Academic, accept Cotta's position, or can Academic philosophers disagree with each other about what position appears more probable? Is Cicero intentionally misleading the reader about his own opinion? With the dialogue form, Cicero is able to veil his own opinion while still presenting strong arguments against prevailing customs of Rome.

The second benefit of skepticism, and the dialogue form, is that it helps relieve others from error. The dialogue form can do this by correcting currently held faulty

[78] Levine is quite helpful here regarding Cicero's judicious hiding of his opinion. Cicero's presenting his opinion at the end should ring incongruent with his insistence in the preface that he prefers to hide his opinion. The reader is naturally suspicious of Cicero's siding with the Stoic Balbus, given the preface. Further, Cicero uses Cotta, a pontiff (a priest of the state religion), as his spokesman to critique state religion. Cicero's character choice, Levine surmises, emphasizes the importance of adhering to state religion in action but not necessarily in thought. Cicero's later skepticism of divination, as expressed in *De divinatione*, could only have been so openly expressed because of the prior work in which he presents Cotta also adhering to the requirements of state religion while that not believing in the content of that religion. See also Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," for a discussion of Cicero's creative use of historical Roman statesmen.

beliefs and by helping the reader to learn restraint of judgment. Academic skepticism and the dialogue form are pedagogical by nature, questioning key premises and revealing logical inconsistencies. In the *Academica*, Cicero cross-examines the legitimacy of Stoic claims about the truth-guaranteeing feature of cataleptic impressions. By showing that cataleptic impressions could not have this feature about them, the Skeptics showed, *pace* Stoic dogma, that even the wise man should withhold assent to avoid error. Other Ciceronian dialogues will follow this practice of focusing on the doctrine of other schools to test the adequacy of their position.

Even when Cicero critiques his opponent's views, he does not neglect to present strong arguments in favor of their position as well as strong objections to his own. By doing so, he discourages one from rashly assenting to any particular philosophical view. In the *Academica*, Lucullus, Cicero's interlocutor, presents some of the strongest arguments against philosophical skepticism, such as its self-defeating nature. This suggests that, more than simply informing the reader of the weakness of some specific position, the dialogue ideally forms the reader to practice dialectical reasoning and skeptical argumentation.

Finally, the dialogue form opens the reader to discover what is most probable. This last benefit follows from the previous two. Since the author's own opinion can remain hidden, the student cannot blindly follow the authority of the writer. The reader must begin to form his own opinions concerning the topic at hand. Learning to avoid the clear errors of some school, developing skills of dialectic necessary to reason adequately on one's own, becoming wary of accepting any position too quickly—these are just a few skills which can be strengthened as one becomes immersed in a dialogue.

Philosophical Pedagogy

A separate but related issue to the dialogue form of the *Academica* is the purpose of that work in a philosophical pedagogy. Beginning with Plato's Academy, philosophical education took place within a community of fellow seekers of wisdom who were guided by teachers.[79] A neophyte philosopher would not, though, simply begin studying whatever topic seemed interesting to him. From the *Republic*, as well as Aristotle's works, we learn that a certain order of subjects is necessary to follow in the pursuit of wisdom.[80] The ordering of these subjects should take into account both what someone is capable of learning given one's age and experience as well as what subjects are necessary prerequisites for later studies. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, for instance, Aristotle writes that the young are particularly apt to understand logic and mathematics but not ethics.[81] With ethics, the nature of the subject is such that only someone with extensive experience of the right sort can profitably study it, both because ethics presupposes a life of rightly ordered desires and because an understanding of the contingencies inherent in practical actions requires time. Math and logic, though, are suitable studies for the young. The insufficient experience is balanced by the abstract nature of these topics; however, the mere aptness of the young to study math and logic is not the only reason that a philosophical pedagogy would begin here. Philosophy tries to

[79] See Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy,* trans**.** Michael Chase (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004)

[80] Philosophical pedagogy might be distinguished from a general pedagogy, though the two often overlap. In the *Republic*, Plato focuses on the study of mathematics before one begins philosophical discourse (calculation, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, antistrophe, ending with dialectic). The kind of philosophical pedagogy I have in mind is better found in Aristotle's ordering of subjects within philosophy.

[81] *Nichomachean Ethics* I.3; VI.8

reach conclusions based on reason, and there are certain patterns of reasoning that one must learn to practice philosophy well. Logic and the form of deductive reasoning learned in mathematics are important skills to develop before one can adequately study any other subject, especially philosophy proper. Ethics and political philosophy come much later in life, after a proper study of human nature. The final area of study for Aristotle is metaphysics, the subject of the wise and the branch of philosophy that is comprehensible only to the oldest.

An argument can be made that Cicero also wrote his philosophical works (at least those composed in and after 46 B.C.) with a pedagogical ordering in mind. The strongest proof comes from a passage in *De divinatione* 2.1 where Cicero offers a comprehensive commentary on his writings:

> After serious and long continued reflection as to how I might do good to as many people as possible and thereby prevent any interruption of my service to the State, no better plan occurred to me than to conduct my fellow-citizens in the ways of the noblest learning — and this, I believe, I have already accomplished through my numerous books. For example, in my work entitled *Hortensius*, I appealed as earnestly as I could for the study of philosophy. And in my *Academics*, in four volumes, I set forth the philosophic system which I thought least arrogant, and at the same time most consistent and refined. And, since the foundation of philosophy rests on the distinction between good and evil, I exhaustively treated that subject in five volumes and in such a way that the conflicting views of the different philosophers might be known. Next, and in the same number of volumes, came the *Tusculan Disputations*, which made plain the means most essential to a happy life… After publishing the works mentioned I finished three volumes *On the Nature of the Gods*, which contain a discussion of every question under that head. With a view of simplifying and extending the latter treatise I started to write the present volume *On Divination*, to which I plan to add a work on *Fate*; when that is done every phase of this particular branch of philosophy will be sufficiently discussed.[82]

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[82] *"Quaerenti mihi multumque et diu cogitanti quanam re possem prodesse quam plurimis, ne quando intermitterem consulere rei publicae, nulla maior occurrebat, quam si optimarum artium vias traderem meis civibus; quod compluribus iam libris me arbitror consecutum. Nam et cohortati sumus ut maxime potuimus ad philosophiae studium eo libro qui est inscriptus Hortensius, et, quod genus philosophandi minime adrogans maximeque et constans et elegans arbitraremur, quattuor Academicis*

What is of particular interest in this passage is that these works are governed by Cicero's pedagogical goal "to conduct my fellow-citizens in the ways of the noblest learning" and that the particular ordering of the subjects plays a central role in this education.

As one would expect, the *Hortensius* comes first, a protreptic meant to produce a desire for wisdom. Absent the awareness of wisdom's importance, some might practice philosophy without the gravitas required by its lofty subject. With the importance of wisdom established, the means of pursuing it must be offered. The second work, the *Academica*, fills that role by defending Academic Skepticism as the philosophical school that best avoids the philosophically stunting vice of arrogance and displays the most logical consistency of any other school. Malcolm Schofield suggests that the *Acacdemica* fills the role of logic.[83] After defending Academic Skepticism as the best school, Cicero turns to the "foundation of philosophy," the study of ethics, examined in *De finibus* and *Disputationes Tusculanae*. He ends this period with a series of works on the metaphysical issues of evil, fate, and the gods' relation to the world.[84]

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libris ostendimus. Cumque fundamentum esset philosophiae positum in finibus bonorum et malorum, perpurgatus est is locus a nobis quinque libris, ut quid a quoque et quid contra quemque philosophum diceretur intellegi posset. Totidem, subsecuti libri Tusculanarum disputationum res ad beate vivendum maxime necessarias aperuerunt. Primus enim est de contemnenda morte, secundus de tolerando dolore, de aegritudine lenienda tertius, quartus de reliquis animi perturbationibus, quintus eum locum complexus est, qui totam philosophiam maxime inlustrat: docet enim ad beate vivendum virtutem se ipsa esse contentam. Quibus rebus editis tres libri perfecti sunt de natura deorum, in quibus omnis eius loci quaestio continetur. Quae ut plane esset cumulateque perfecta, de divinatione ingressi sumus his libris scribere; quibus, ut est in animo, de fato si adiunxerimus, erit abunde satisfactum toti huic quaestioni" (*De divinatione* 2.1.1-2.1.3).

[83]Malcolm Schofield, "Cicero For and Against Divination."

[84] Cicero informs the reader at the end of the *Academica* that the topic to be discussed next is ethics: "But next time we think about these questions, let's talk about the remarkable disagreements between the leading thinkers, the obscurity of nature, and the error of so many philosophers about what is good and bad – for since their ethics views are incompatible and at most one of them can be true, a good number of rather famous schools must collapse. Next time, let's do that rather than talking about the illusions of our eyes or other senses and the paradox of the sorites or the liar, which are traps the Stoics have set for themselves." (*Academica* 2.48.147).

Despite the convenient arrangement of works that strongly support an intentional ordering, Miriam Griffin remains skeptical about this interpretation for four reasons.[85] First, she notes such passages as found in *De finibus* 1.2 where Cicero's given reason for his continued philosophical writing stems simply from the success of the *Hortensius*. The reception of that work encouraged Cicero to continue writing philosophically, absent any long-term philosophical goal. Second, she argues that diverse characters across the dialogues sufficiently discredit a pedagogical order to the works, for Cicero would have used recurring participants to unify such a project. Third, the latter works, specifically *De natura deorum* and *De divination*, are not a part of the branch of physics, the branch of philosophy expected to be covered at the end of an education.[86] Fourth, Griffin denies any recognizable role for the *Academica* in a philosophical pedagogy since it acts neither as a work of logic nor a protrpetic but simply defends one philosophical school against another.

Griffin's most important critique regards the role that the *Academica* could play in a philosophical pedagogy. While she expresses doubt that it can be of any significant use, Malcolm Schofield suggests that the *Academica* is clearly meant to play the role of

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[85]Miriam Griffin's article is the best on the motives and various editions of the *Academica*. Griffin, "The Composition of the *Academica:* Motives and Versions', in *Assent and Argument*, 1-27.She proposes three possible motives: intellectual, personal, and political. Concerning intellectual reasons, she proposes that Cicero had only the *Hortensius* and the 2 books of the first edition of the *Academica* in mind. The main goal, she supposes, of the *Academica* was to inform (1) the readers of the *Hortensius* (2) which school he endorsed and (3) reveal his own philosophical acumen. Carlo Levy, suggests that the work was intentionally seditious against the rising power of Caesar. I would simply suggest that these suppositions of motivation need not be exclusive. Cicero may have wanted to make known the philosophical school which he endorsed, offer grounds for thinking citizens to question Caesar's rise, as well as offer a beginning work inducing certain citizens into the philosophical life. Griffin cites two authors who side with my interpretation: K. Bringmann, *Untersuchungen zum späten Cicero* (Göttingen, 1971); R. Philippson, "Tullius Cicero," RE 7A1 (1939), 1104-92.

[86]Griffin, "The Composition of the *Academica*," 7.

logic.[87] Schofield offers a corrective to Griffin by focusing on the ancient sense of this branch of philosophy. The *Academica*, he writes, deals "with epistemology, which the Hellenistic schools included under logic or canonic, and took to be by rights the first subject in the philosophical curriculum, as specifying the yardstick against which a philosophical system must be measured."[88] Schofield does not elaborate past this remark, but there appear to be two aspects to an ancient logic. First, there is a presentation of a yardstick—or criterion of truth—by which some school can evaluate the claims of other philosophical schools. Second, there is the measuring of one's own school by that yardstick. As a defense of the Academic position, the *Academica* is doing both. The yardstick is the same in both the Stoic and Academic schools. Both agree, at least for the sake of argument, that knowledge is assent to a cataleptic impression, those special impressions that have some truth-guaranteeing feature about them. Where the two schools disagree is whether there can ever be a cataleptic impression. The defense of the Academic position, *pace* Griffin, need not discount the text as a work of logic since one would expect it to defend a particular school's approach as the most rational.

A stronger objection to the work's status as a text of logic comes from its reactionary nature. The account of knowledge found in the *Academica* only follows if one accepts the Stoic account of knowledge. Why should the work be considered an epistemology if it simply proposes a view parasitic upon a rival school's position, a position which we have good reason to abandon? The objection is strong, though a two-fold response, undoubtedly unsatisfactory to some, can be offered. First, of the two merits which Cicero attributes to Academic philosophy, one is that it is the most

[87] Schofield, "Cicero for and Against Divination," *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986), 48 .

[88] *Ibid.*

consistent. It is in this consistency that the *Academica* excels as a branch of logic. However, some might think that the lack of an explicit opposing account of knowledge discredits it as a logic text. Here, the unique pedagogical approach of the Academic school can ease such qualms. The work does explicitly examine knowledge, but the lack of a view opposing Stoic epistemology might be exactly what one expects from a school which discourages unthinking acceptance of any philosophical authority. Given the pedagogical aims of the school to encourage autonomous pursuit of wisdom, an examination of potential epistemological views and their deficiencies might be exactly what one would expect to find.

Building on the previous paragraph, and moving beyond Schofield, I would argue that, beyond a logic text, the *Academica* acts additionally as a protreptic for the philosophical life since the text, both in content and in structure, forms the reader to pursue philosophy in the peculiar Academic way. The way it forms the reader corresponds to the three advantages of the Academic way of life: (1) by encouraging the need to pursue truth while inculcating a sense of humility in the pursuit of wisdom, (2) by helping the reader to avoid error, (3) and by opening the reader to pursue truth among all philosophical schools.

The *Academica* embodies a similar foundation for philosophical pursuit that one finds Socrates offering in Plato's dialogues. Beyond its consistency, Cicero grounds his claim of Academic superiority in the school's absence of arrogance, a vice that blinds one from recognizing one's own ignorance. The *Academica* helps curb such arrogance in the reader not only by informing the reader of various reasons for doubting the certainty of our impressions but also by comprehensively examining every impression that the Stoics

claim offer certainty. Cicero examines perception, technical perception, internal sense, conceptions, memory, art, virtue, wisdom, and action as well as five major counterarguments against Academic skepticism. In the second half of *Academica* Book Two, Cicero proceeds to discuss why we should be skeptical about the major philosophical positions in ethics, physics, and logic. The sheer number of arguments would help sufficiently reveal to the reader the extent of his or her own ignorance. By informing the reader of these reasons to be skeptical, the *Academica* is a partial curative, helping heal the disease of dogmatic arrogance.

While the text can form the reader's character towards humility, it also helps form the reader's intellect in a uniquely Academic way, helping the reader to avoid error and pursue the truth. While the number of specific arguments given in support of skepticism is quite large, the general strategies remain few. As will be recalled from above, those strategies involve drawing attention to the indiscernibility of objects, highlighting the feeling of uncertainty one has in an altered state, and revealing the limitations of logic by means of sorites arguments and the liar paradox. The strategies are presented within a context of an ongoing dialectic between Stoics and Academics, inviting the reader not simply to learn stock skeptical arguments but to become a part of the debate and learn the back-and-forth of argumentation.[89] Becoming adept at seeing the philosophical world as a skeptic involves realizing how easy it is to assent to a falsehood and how important it is to avoid such falsehoods.

Finally, the very structure of the *Academica* embodies Cicero's emphasis upon the freedom of inquiry found in any Academic philosophy. That freedom is largely

[89] Here one sees the interconnected role that the dialogue form has with the protreptic aspect of the work.

linked to an absence of Academic dogma. Unlike other schools, the Academician can pursue the truth in every field of study and any school without fear of abandoning some authority, for the Academic's authority is reason. Here one finds an important Ciceronian contribution to Academic Skepticism. A common critique against Cicero is that he simply compiled lists of philosophical arguments while not contributing any unique philosophical insights of his own.

But even if he displays little philosophical ingenuity in his arguments, he nevertheless displays his genius in the way he assembles the material. Gisela Striker argues for Cicero's organizational genius, which also underscores the pedagogical importance of this work.[90] She suggests that many of Cicero's works are meant to be introductory works of philosophy, revealing to his Roman readers the many positions open to philosophical inquiry. The encyclopedic nature of the work does not mean that the work should be used as a mere reference tool; the variety of positions offered helps display the abundant subjects open to philosophical inquiry. Cicero examines particular positions with just enough detail to spark the interest of the reader, providing the reader with the names and texts necessary to continue pursuing questions that interest him or her.

This interpretation of Cicero's philosophical oeuvres is further confirmed by a unique feature of the structure of the *Academica*. Cicero's extended speech in the second half of the *Lucullus* is composed of two parts. In the first part, Cicero examines in detail Academic responses to Stoic critiques of skepticism. Cicero expresses discontent with restricting discussion to the old debates between Stoics and Academics: "My treatment of

[90] Gisela Striker, "Cicero and Greek Philosophy," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 97, *Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance* (1995), 53-61.

the subject still seems too narrow. When there's an open field for my speech to run in, why limit it to the cramped thickets of Stoic arguments?"[91] In the remaining portions of the text, Cicero presents key issues in ethics, physics, and logic. He refuses to let the provincial argument between Stoics and Academic Skeptics dictate his larger goal of opening up philosophy to his reader.[92] The text of the *Academica* reveals that the whole philosophical world is open to the skeptical Academic.

Conclusion

Academic doctrine, the Academic way of life, and the text of the *Academica* are intimately connected. The Academic doctrine that certainty about any truth remains unobtainable directly contributes to Cicero's defense of the superiority of the Academic's philosophical approach to truth. By insisting that truth remains unobtainable, one overcomes the danger of dogmatic arrogance, which typically stems from a simple acceptance of the beliefs of some authority figure. The doctrine also helps offer a way to guarantee the avoidance of error, since by refusing to assent, one can always evade this opprobrium. At the same time, the Academic is not bereft of guidance, for one is at liberty to pursue the truth among all of the philosophical schools, a policy that allows reason alone to guide one's quest for what is most probably true.

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[91] "*Ac mihi videor nimis etiam nunc agere ieiune . Cum sit enim campus in quo exsultare possit oratio, cur eam tantas in angustias et in Stoicorum dumeta compellimus?"* (*Academica* 2.35.112)

[92] The argument nicely complements Walter NicGorski's excellent article "Cicero's Socrates: Assessment of `the Socratic Turn'," in *Law and Philosophy: The Practice of Theory*, ed. J. Murley, R. Stone, and W. Braithwaite (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992) 1:213-33. In contrast to most Ciceronian scholars, NicGorski claims that Cicero did not wholeheartedly affirm the Hellenistic emphasis upon ethics. While agreeing that ethics was important, Cicero nevertheless also emphasizes the good of Plato's philosophical inquiry into metaphysics and logic. The structure of the *Academica,* which opens up a discussion of ethics, physics, and logic, helps confirm this reading of Cicero's response to the Socratic turn.

At the same time, the specific text of the *Academica* offers a foundation for all further philosophical inquiry by forming the reader to pursue philosophy in this particular Academic way. By drawing on the dialogue form, Cicero is able to hide his own opinions about many subjects and force the reader to form his own opinion about what is most probably true. The number of skeptical arguments aids in curbing the arrogance of the reader while offering introductory training in dialectically examining some position, apprenticing the reader to a philosophical life. Finally, the encyclopedic nature of the work, which examines not only the arguments of the Stoic and Academic debate but also major positions in ethics, physics, and logic, helps open the world of philosophy to the reader to freely pursue wisdom in every topic and every school.

The next four chapters examine Augustine's response to the Academic doctrine, its way of life, and its use of the text. While Augustine expresses clear admiration for Cicero's *Academica* on all three accounts, he will also critique each point. The doctrine that grounds Academic skepticism is itself dubious. But worse, it does not guarantee the way of life that Cicero thinks it does. To address the problems of Academic skepticism, Augustine will change his own text to maintain the benefits of the Academic philosophical approach without the hindrances of its skepticism. To his critique of Academic doctrine we now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

Comedic Argumentation: The Laughter of Augustine

Ernest Fortin, in a preface to a work concerning the *Contra Academicos*, writes that if one wants to understand Augustine's early dialogues, then one must read them with his questions, not ours, in mind.[1] The comment is particularly apt when examining Augustine's response to Academic skepticism, for Augustine not only asks the contemporary question "Is the argument for skepticism sound?" but also "How could anyone believe it?" The second question is as central to the dialogue as the first and is necessary to explain Augustine's laughter at skepticism.

Academic Skepticism, as set out in the previous chapter, has two main components: the claim that knowledge remains unobtainable and the recommendation that one refuse to assent to any impression as true. Most work on this dialogue comes from the "received interpretation" strand. To offer counter-examples to skepticism, the presumed goal of the entire dialogue according to these authors, Augustine must show at least one proposition about which one can be certain. Garreth Matthews, Christopher Kirwan, and Gerard O'Daly, authors whose writings fit into this more epistemologically-interested group, offer excellent defenses of Augustine's critiques against skepticism.[2]

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[1] Preface to Augustine J. Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of Contra Academicos* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), x.

[2] Christoph Kirwin, *Augustine,* Arguments of the Philosophers Series (New York: Routledge, 1989)*;* Gareth Matthews, *Augustine*, Blackwell Great Minds Series (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); and Gerard O'Daly, "The Response to Skepticism and Mechanisms of Cognition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 159-170.

At the same time, these authors express bewilderment at much of the *Contra Academicos*. Matthews' comment speaks for the rest when he writes that "much of the *Academicians* is rather arcane and difficult to understand."[3] These authors restrict their attention to one portion of Augustine's oration, largely ignoring the "arcane" portions considered to be ancillary to his more philosophical argumentation. On this approach, the extent of Augustine's response to skepticism is little more than a logical critique of certain Academic arguments.

However, the portions of the dialogue that the received interpretation ignores are germane to Augustine's philosophical critique of skepticism, for the counterexamples to skepticism take place within his larger retort of laughter at Cicero's epistemological position. Augustine's entire formal oration against skepticism, the portion thought to be the most philosophical, contains ironic statements, absurd scenarios, and playful mockery of the Academics. These jocular features of Augustine's dialogue are often dismissed or are considered mere rhetorical flourishing; however, they are an intentional part of Augustine's underlying theory about the Academic skeptical school.[4] Augustine is calling the bluff of the Academics, refusing to take them seriously because he thinks that they did not take their own position seriously.

To understand Augustine's ironic and playful attitude attention will first be given to his account of esotericism, the claim that the Academics deceptively hid their opinion. This feature may be what Matthews had in mind when he called much of the dialogue

[3] Matthews, *Augustine*, 16.

[4] Alvin Neiman, for instance, writes that Augustine is "all too guilty of rhetorical overkill in the manner of his mentor, Cicero. Given a style in which Augustine barrages the reader with "everything but the kitchen sink," it is hard to separate out any single basic train of logical progression." "The Arguments of Augustine's 'Contra Academicos'," *Modern Schoolman* 59 (1982): 257

"arcane." Few of the received interpreters even mention this important feature of the dialogue, while those that do fail to show its relevance to other portions of the work; yet, as Michael Foley observes, Augustine's accusation of esotericism drives the discussion of the entire dialogue.[5] To read the dialogue as Augustine meant it to be read, then, requires taking this indictment seriously. After briefly examining Augustine's justification for this hypothesis, I will suggest that considering Academic esotericism as a form of Socratic irony offers a fruitful way for appreciating both Academic skepticism and Augustine's response to it. The final two sections focus upon Augustine's framing of his philosophical critique and highlight the overtly comedic elements of his argumentation.

The current chapter contributes to the larger project—reading Augustine's *Contra Academicos* in conjunction with Cicero's *Academica*—in at least two important ways. First, Augustine only arrives at his distinctive interpretation of the *Academica* because of his own careful reading of it. For instance, Augustine initially attempts to arouse the suspicions of his interlocutors (Alypius, Trygetius, and Licentius) against the Academicians by drawing attention to their use of the words "verisimilar" and "probable."[6] "Verisimilar," in particular, exposes the Academic chicanery, since the word literally means "similar to the truth," a comparison that one could only know if one

[5] O'Daly mentions this feature of the dialogue without it playing any role in his examination of Augustine's arguments. Matthews does not even mention it. For important exceptions see the following: Ernest Fortin, "The Church Fathers and the Transmission of the Christian Message" and "The 'Rhetoric' of the Church Fathers," in *Ever Ancient, Ever New: Ruminations on the City, the Soul, and the Church* ed. Michael P. Foley (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 13-29 and 47-58; "Reflections on the Proper Way to Read Augustine the Theologian," in *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 95-114; and Michael Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," *Revue des Études Augustiennes* 45 (1999), 51-77.

[6] Licentius and Trygetius are Augustine's students at Cassiciacum. Alypius, we know from the *Confessions*, was a long devoted friend. In the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine has the boys argue against each other. Licentius argues on behalf of the Academic position, that happiness does not require knowledge. Trygetius argues against the Academics.

already knows the truth. Other passages from the *Academica* that substantiate his claim will be discussed more fully below.

Second, Augustine not only presumes some familiarity with Academic doctrine in his reader but encourages the reader to return to their works (and to Cicero's *Academica* in particular) to corroborate his theory: "Read the Academics, and when you find that Cicero is the victor over those trifles of mine (for what could be easier?), compel Alypius to defend our conversation here against those invincible arguments."[7] Despite the ironic claim that his arguments can be countered, it is significant that Augustine ends the dialogue with a call to the boys to read the two works together. His accusation of Academic trickery is, at the very least, a way of encouraging the reader to return to Cicero's works more cautiously. An apt description of this wariness can be found in Book II: "For it ought to be obvious that a deceived man should be taught, a deceitful man should be dealt with cautiously; the first of these men needs a good teacher, the second needs a wary pupil." [8] The accusation of esoteric writing either presumes familiarity with Cicero's *Academica* or encourages a subsequent inspection of the work by a wary pupil.

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[7] "*Legite Academicos et, cum ibi uictorem—quid enim facilius?—istarum nugarum Ciceronem inveneritis, cogatur iste a vobis hunc nostrum sermonem contra illa invicta defendere. Hanc tibi, Alypi, duram mercedem pro mea falsa laude restituo*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.20.45). This passage is an excellent example of Augustinian irony. In his *Retractationes*, Augustine will regret this use of irony, since he really did believe this argument sufficiently destroyed the hindrance of skepticism. All translations of *Against the Academics* are taken from Augustine, *Against the Academics*, trans. Michael P. Foley (University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

[8] "*Homini enim homo falsus docendus, fallax cauendus debet uideri, quorum prius magistrum bonum, posterius discipulum cautum desiderat*" (*Contra Academicos* 2.5.12).

Esotericism

Augustine follows Cicero's transformation of the philosophical dialogue using extended orations at portions of the text, a feature adapted for Roman sensibilities. The extended oration found at the end of Book Three could be considered his official philosophical examination of skepticism. Beginning at 3.7.15 and ending near the final paragraph of the dialogue at 3.20.43, his response consists of two parts: first, an examination and refutation of specific Academic arguments and, second, an exposition of his theory that the skeptics were esoteric philosophers.

Though the first portion of the response continues to receive the greatest interest, the exciting conclusion of the dialogue is that the Academics practiced a form of esotericism.[9] Augustine asks, "Why, therefore, did such men decide to engage in such endless and obstinate controversies, all in order to make it seem that knowledge of the truth could not befall anyone."[10] There are two aspects to Augustine's charge. First, there is the claim that the Academicians hide their true beliefs from others, having formed certain opinions yet refusing to share those opinions with certain individuals. The disguise is in no way obvious to the casual reader, but it is apparent to the careful one.

[9] The nature of esotericism in ancient writings has become quite controversial, especially because of the writings of Leo Strauss. To avoid being dragged into the particular Straussian debate, I am drawing on Frederick Crosson's account of esotericism in distinction from what he calls "latent teaching." Crosson considers the way in which an author intentionally writes a text to have different layers of interpretation. In both forms of writing there is a meaning of the text easily grasped and a deeper meaning more difficult to grasp. However, in esoteric writing, the easy meaning is intentionally deceptive, meant to throw the reader off the scent of the deeper meaning. In latent teaching, the two layers are not at odds, separated simply by a matter of degree. Frederick J. Crosson, "Esoteric versus Latent Teaching" *The Review of Metaphysics* , 59.1 (2005); 73-93; Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[10] "*Quid igitur placuit tantis viris perpetuis et pertinacibus contentionibus agere, ne in quemquam cadere veri scientia videretur?*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.17.37).

Second, beyond the hiding itself, there is the means of concealing their opinion in an intentionally deceitful way.

The *Academica* confirms that the skeptical emphasis of the school began in response to Zeno's increasing philosophical influence.[11] Arcesilaus, the leader of the Academy at this time, judged Zeno to be the kind of person to whom one should not "readily reveal and entrust those almost sacrosanct Platonic decrees before he had first unlearned the things that he had accepted from others and had brought into this school."[12] However, before such unlearning could take place, Zeno developed his own doctrine with a dangerous, in the Academy's eyes, materialist emphasis, describing even the soul and the gods in physical terms.[13] To protect the true teachings of Plato from Zeno's reductionist conception of reality, Arcesilaus adopted a skeptical guise and combative posture against Stoicism. This concealment was not meant to be permanent but with the hope that true Platonism would be "found someday by future generations."[14]

Carneades, the next major figure in the Academy, continued to mask the opinions of the Academy, while at the same time leaving "a certain signpost of their opinion."[15]

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[11] *Academica* 2.24.77.

[12] "*suspectum habitum suspicor nec talem visum, cui Platonica illa velut sacrosancta decreta facile prodi committique deberent, priusquam dedidicisset ea, quae in illam scholam ab aliis accepta detulerat*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.17.38).

[13] Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson offer a nice overview of the materialist physics of the Stoics, writing that the Stoics rejected the view that the soul, god, or formal structures could be incorporeal. See *The Stoics Reader: Writings and Testimony*, ed. Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2008), xiii. See also Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, "The Stoics on Matter and Prime Matter: 'Corporealism' and the Imprint of Plato's *Timaeus*," in *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, ed. Ricardo Salles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 46-70. Gourinat argues that the Stoics might not be materialists in one sense, since they do not affirm that passive matter is all that exists. But neither are they dualists, affirming something incorporeal ordering matter.

[14] *Contra Academicos*., 3.17.38

[15] *Ibid.,* 3.18.40.

Carneades' signpost was a carefully chosen word, verisimilar, selected to indicate the school's true position.[16] Not only did Carneades hide his true opinion under the guise of skepticism, according to Augustine, but he would also mock other philosophers, especially when they questioned his peculiar choice of words. In order to throw them off the scent of latent Platonism, he rightly "prohibited those dialecticians from raising questions about nomenclature by insulting and mocking them."[17]

John O'Meara offers perhaps the strongest condemnation of Augustine's theory when he writes "the whole tenor of Cicero's writings is against Augustine on this, as he himself knows."[18] Yet many authors such as Ernest Fortin, Pierre Hadot, Frederick Crosson, and most (in)famously Leo Strauss, corroborate the basic outline of Augustine's theory.[19] Further, the Academic practice of restricting discourse to their opponent's views certainly does not harm Augustine's accusation. A full justification (or rejection) of Augustine's charge is outside the boundaries of this work, but a brief defense shows at least the reasonableness of his position.

Augustine justifies his theory in two ways, first, by citing specific texts in which Cicero alludes to a practice of refusing to share his own opinion. Toward the end of the *Contra Academicos,* Augustine presents the passage that he finds most telling*:* "but

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[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *illos autem bene dialecticos de verbis mouere quaestionem insultantes inridentesque prohibebant* (*Contra Academicos,* 3.18.40).

[18] John J. O'Meara, Introduction to *St. Augustine: Against the Academics* (Ancient Christian Writers) translated and edited by John O'Meara (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 159.

[19] Ernest Fortin, "Christian 'Rhetoric'"; *Dissent and Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, trams. Marc LePain (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2002); Pierre Hadot, "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy" in *Philosophy as a Way of Life;* Frederick J. Crosson, "Esoteric versus Latent Teaching"; Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing.*

whoever reckons that the Academics did not believe this should listen to Cicero himself. For he says that it was the practice among them of concealing their opinion and that they were not accustomed to revealing it to anyone except to someone who had lived with them into old age."[20] The passage is evocative of one found in Book Two of the *Academica*, where Cicero's interlocutor, Lucullus, questions an apparently well-known Academic practice:

> That leaves their claim that one should argue on either side of every question in order to discover the truth. Well, I'd like to see what they have discovered. *It is not our practice*, he says, *to display our view*. What actually are these mysteries? Why do you hide your views as if they were something shameful? *So that our students,* he says, *are guided by reason rather than authority*.[21]

Cicero's own work, Augustine thought, supports his claim that the skeptics hid some of their opinions.

John Glucker argues that, though there may be evidence that those in the New Academy hid their own doctrines, such veiling does not entail that they were closet Platonic dogmatists.[22] He observes that the New Academicians may have really had opinions about certain philosophical issues while consistently denying they had knowledge about those issues. While certainly right that one cannot give certain evidence that the hidden opinions were Platonic, such an inference on Augustine's part does not seem unreasonable, given the Academic's repeated insistence of being the true

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[20] "*Quisquis autem putat hoc sensisse Academicos, ipsum Ciceronem audiat. Ait enim illis morem fuisse occultandi sententiam suam nec eam cuiquam, nisi qui secum ad senectutem usque uixisset, aperire consuesse"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.20.43).

[21] See also *Acad.* 1.1.1 "I consider it a fool's lot to write something you want to keep hidden."

[22] *Antiochus and the Late Academy* Hypomnemata Heft 56 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 315-322.

heirs of Plato. Further, Glucker admits at least the possibility that the Academic philosophers had definitive opinions which they hid.

Augustine Curley offers further evidence in support of Augustine's position. Consider the following excerpt from a letter to Atticus: "I am sure the country is lost. It is no use dissembling any longer." In the same letter, he again refers to an intentionally obscure way of writing: "some time I will give you a clear account, if I find a very trustworthy messenger or, if I write in an obscure manner, you will manage to understand it. In these letters I will call myself Laelius and you Furius; and convey the rest in riddles."[23] In the next letter to Atticus, Cicero clearly reveals that he practices a veiled way of writing: "if I keep any further correspondence with you, I must veil my meaning in allegories."[24]

More telling, and Augustine's second justification for his theory, is the sheer ludicrousness of the skeptical position, a position that, in Augustine's mind, entails laughable implications and assumptions simply refutable. Skepticism is self-defeating, since the Academic assumes certainty of the unattainability of certainty; the view levels all ways of life as equally philosophical as long as one refuses to judge that life as necessarily good; and embarrassingly, skepticism can be refuted easily: we know that we think.[25] Augustine's use of superlatives indicate his belief that Cicero and the other Academicians were far too intelligent not to see these problems. Concerning the

[23] *Letters to Atticus*, 2.19. Translation by Curley.

[24] *Letters to Atticus,* 2.20.

[25] Augustine offers this simple argument in Book Two of the *Soliloquia* : "Reason: Do you know that you think? Augustine: I do. Reason: Therefore, it's true that you think" (*Soliloquia* 2.1.1.).

problematic ethical implications of Academic skepticism, Augustine asks, "What then? Did the Academics not see this? They saw it with the utmost skill and prudence."[26]

There are features of Augustine's theory of esotericism that resemble the ironic mode of communication often associated with the Platonic corpus, though little addressed in secondary scholarship on Cicero.[27] Irony is one of five different aspects of Socratic philosophy about which Cicero is aware,[28] the other four being the Socratic turn (to ethics), the Socratic method of questioning, Socratic dialectic, and Socratic skepticism.[29] How Cicero follows his philosophical teacher in all five ways reaches beyond the scope of this work; however, a brief survey of his use and definition of irony reveals some similarities to Augustine's theory of esotericism.[30]

H. V. Canter suggests that a form of irony can be found on every other page of Cicero's orations.[31] From the playful and light to the sarcastic and belittling, Canter observes at least four different kinds of irony in Cicero's speeches. There are passages

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[26] "*Quid ergo? haec illi non uiderunt? Immo sollertissime prudentissimeque uiderunt*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.16.36).

[27] Alexander Nehamas and Gregory Vlastos offer quite helpful analyses of Cicero's definition of irony, though leave the ironic nature of his works largely untouched. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living*: *Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell Univesity Press, 1991). One of the best articles on Cicero's use of irony is H. V. Canter's "Irony in the Orations of Cicero." *The American Journal of Philology*, 57.4 (1936): 457-464.

[28] These distinctions come from Walter NicGorski's excellent piece "Cicero's Socrates: Assessment of 'The Socratic Turn'" in *Law and Philosophy: The Practice of Theory*, ed. John Murley (Ohio Press: 1992).

[29] Representative passages of each are *Disputationes Tusculanae* 5.4; *Ibid.,* 1.4.8; *De finibus* 2.17; *Acad*. 2.74; and *De oratore* 2.67.270 respectively.

[30] I am neither trying to prove that Augustine's account of esotericism should be identified with Socratic irony nor that Cicero was definitely a Socratic ironist. What I hope to show is that the similarities between esotericism and irony can explain the particular way in which Augustine engages with Academic doctrine. Because he thought that they were not serious skeptics, the right response is to not take their position seriously.

[31] H. V. Canter "Irony in the Orations of Cicero."

where he pretends to pass over an issue while actually addressing it (as in *Philippicae* VII.15; *In Verrem* v.4); passages of ironic concessions or commands (cf. *In Verrem* I.44; II.19.46); passages of open taunting of his opponents (*Pro Caelio*. 32, 36); finally, and most importantly for this works, passages where Cicero offers self-deprecating comments, a use of irony that is in some works connected specifically with Socrates' insistence upon his ignorance (*Pro Quinctio* 27).

While Canter's work sufficiently reminds the reader of Cicero's mastery of rhetoric, he does not sufficiently address the philosophical and pedagogical uses of irony. Charles Griswold's account of Socratic and Platonic irony adequately serves as the basis for such a discussion. Socratic irony, on Griswold's view, "occurs when the speaker purposely dissimulates his views while in the process of manifesting them either through words or deeds."[32] While Socratic irony takes place between the characters of the dialogues, Platonic irony, also called "dramatic irony" by Griswold, takes place between the action, setting, and characters of the dialogue and the reader. The characters of the dialogue are often never in a position to see the dramatic irony to which the reader is privy, such as the tension between a character's position in the dialogue and later historical events relating to that character. In both Socratic and Platonic irony, there is a "doubling of meaning" that occurs in ironic statements and situations, such as in Socrates' insistence of ignorance and simultaneous exhibition of philosophical understanding. The reader can become aware of the double meaning through "a tension, incongruity, or contradiction between aspects of a discourse, between the context and the

[32] Charles Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature,* 26.1 (2002): 88.

discourse (e.g., between the deeds and words), or between different views expressed by the same person."[33]

After listing particular instances of Socratic and Platonic irony, Griswold offers two potential reasons philosophers use this mode of communication. The first, and more tragic, reason to use irony is to show that "in every philosophical position there is a puzzle, within which there awaits a riddle, one that in turn conceals an enigma, and so forth *ad infinitum*."[34] If used for this reason, irony helps communicate that "the universe is intrinsically unknowable" and "somehow absurd." On the other hand, there is a second reason a philosopher may use irony, namely "to encourage us to become philosophical by rightly appropriating for ourselves the dialogic search for knowledge.[35] This latter use of irony emphasizes the limitations of human reason over the absurdity of the universe and was used by Plato, Griswold argues, for "educating his readers into leading reflective, possibly philosophical, lives."[36]

Griswold's general description of irony complements Augustine's theory of esotericism. In Augustine's theory, as with irony, one finds a tension between what is said and what is done or between what is said at one moment and said at another. As noted above, Augustine thought that Cicero, the self-professed educator of the Roman people, was quite aware of the politically disastrous implications of skepticism and its antipathy to his stated goals. Further, the dissimulation that both irony and esotericism share converges most vividly in the Academic practice of focusing on their opponent's

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[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.,* 99

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.,* 100

views. The very practice makes it possible to hide what one really thinks, since one is not putting forward a positive view. Clitomachus, Carneades' own devoted disciple, expressed his own doubt about what his master actually believed.[37] As contemporary authors have noted, it is unclear if Carneades offered his account of the probable seriously or simply as part of the ongoing debate with the Stoics.[38] Malcolm Schofield notes that some historical accounts portray Arcesilaus' skepticism as a ruse against the Stoics.[39] This interpretation of skepticism implies more than a mere hiding but the additional deceitful aspect of Augustine's theory of esotericism.

Griswold insists that irony in its Socratic and Platonic form, need not entail the intentional deceptiveness, an element implicit in esoteric writing. However, Cicero's definition of irony appears quite consistent with the deceptive component found in Augustine's theory about the Academics. In *De oratore*, Cicero defines irony as an "urbane dissimulation" that occurs "when you understand something other than what is said; not in the way I spoke earlier, when you say the contrary...but when you are mocking when the entire speech itself is serious, when you understand and say diverse things." He goes on to explicitly connect irony with Socrates: "Fannius in his *Annals* says Aemilian Africanus was of this manner, and in Greek he calls him an *eiron*. As

[37] "And it's true that Carneades used to defend Calliphon's view so enthusiastically that he even seemed to approve it – though Clitomachus affirmed that he never could work out which view had Carneades' approval"(*Academica* 2.45.40).

[38] See especially James Allen, "Carneadean Argument in Cicero's *Academic Books,*" in *Assent and Argument,* ed. B. lnwood and J. Mansfeld (NewYork/Leiden: Brill, 1997), 217-56.

[39] Malcolm Schofield argues that the latter is actually the best attested reading of Arcesilaus. See Schofield "Academic Epistemology" in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy,* ed. Keimpe Algra, Jonathan Barnes, Jaap Mansfeld and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 325.

those who know these things better claim, I believe Socrates to have far surpassed all others in wit and humanity in this irony and dissimulation."[40]

While Gregory Vlastos argues that Cicero's account of irony is free from deceitfulness, the content and context of the passage suggest otherwise.[41] A brief survey of Cicero's works reveals that *urbana* has both a positive and negative sense in Cicero's writings. For instance, in a letter (*Epistulae ad Familiares* 3.8.3), in *Brutus* 46.171, and in defense of Marcus Caelius (*Cael*. 15, 36) the word is used to refer either to refined or polished persons or speech. *Dissimulatio*, on the other hand, has a more consistently pejorative connation, as when it is used for the disguising associated with criminal behavior.[42] Cicero uses the word "*dissimulatio*" in a passage preceding his definition of irony, associating it with a way of prudently hiding one's opinions from others.[43] As Alexander Nehamas writes, even if Cicero's definition does not imply deceitfulness, neither does it support full revelation of the author's opinion. In fact, Cicero intentionally disassociates irony from simply saying the opposite of what you believe.[44] In contrast to a mere reverse of what one means, irony is connected with the jocular tone of an entire

[40] *De oratore* 2.67.269-70. Here one can see how the tone and parodying could, depending on one's understanding of irony, simply be considered irony. *De oratore* trans. H Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1959).

[41] Gregory Vlastos, *Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 28.

[42] *De officiis* 3.15.61

[43] *De oratore* 2.35.148. Cicero writes of the necessity of diligently (diligentia) paying attention to one's opponent's speech, in order to understand the opponent's frame of mind. But one must do so without revealing what one has discovered: (*Id tamen dissimulanter facere, ne sibi ille aliquid proficere videatur, prudentia est.*).

[44] It is "not in the way I spoke earlier, when you say the contrary."

speech, "where the whole tenor of your speech shows that you are gravely jesting in speaking differently from what you think."[45]

Augustine even appears to hint at the fact that he considers his theory of esotericism to be similar to Socratic irony. In two passages in the *Contra Academicos* he uses *urbana* or a cognate of it to refer to the Academicians.[46] It is at least possible that Augustine's use of the word reveals his thoughts that this school of philosophy, so often connected to Socrates' skepticism, followed their leader in an ironic mode of speech as well.

The connection of irony with esotericism is at least plausible and serves as a fruitful way for explaining Augustine's response to Academic doctrine. Augustine's understanding of Academic esotericism largely resembles Alcibiades' exclamation about Socrates: "In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game—a game of irony."[47] Appearance and reality come apart with Socrates, as the appearance of skepticism comes apart from the reality of the dogmatic Platonism of the Academics. Because their philosophy is such a game, a philosophical response is not sufficient for Augustine. He also wants to make apparent the Academic charade by joking about their skeptical doctrine, thereby treating their skeptical arguments with the same respect that they do (as a joke) and revealing to the interlocutors and readers the game that the skeptics are playing. But the final unveiling takes time for Augustine to develop.

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[45] Vlastos argues that this second portion of the definition helps support his understanding of irony as free from deceit. But Nehamas rightly corrects Vlastos, whose position largely relies on his (Vlastos') translation of "alia dicuntur ac sentias" as "what you say is *quite* other than what you understand." Nehamas corrects it to simply "speaking differently from what you think." Nehamas, 55.

[46] *Contra Academicos* 3.7.15; 3.15.34.

[47] *Symposium* 216e4–5.

Framing: Previews and Audience

Augustine first arouses his interlocutor's suspicions against Cicero's truthfulness by drawing attention to Cicero's peculiar usage of words for "probable." While the Academics think that one always falls short of knowledge, they still claim one can have probable beliefs. Augustine, though, finds Cicero's synonymous use of probable (*probabile*) and verisimilar (*veri simile*) as problematic.[48] The latter word catches the attention of Augustine because something is verisimilar, as the etymology of the word suggests, if it is similar to the truth (*verum*). Augustine wonders how one could ever know what is similar to the truth if one does not know what is true. He proposes a scenario in order to accentuate the ridiculous nature of their claim: "If someone declared that your (Licentius') brother was similar to your father (Romanianus) and he did not actually know your father, wouldn't he seem to you to be either crazy or idiotic?"[49] Any coherent use of the word "similar" requires some familiarity with that to which the similar thing is similar, here, with Romanianus.

Augustine's interlocutors are initially skeptical of his distrust. They first reconstruct the case, supposing that the man may have heard a rumor that Licentius looked like his father Romanianus. Analogously, the Academic philosopher may have gathered information from other philosophers before making any decision on what is most probable. Augustine quickly retorts that his interlocutors have not yet accurately

[48] *Academica* 2.10.33; 2.11.36; 2.15.46; 2.16.49; 2.33.108; 2.42.147.

[49] "*si quisquam fratrem tuum visum patris tui similem esse affirmet ipsumque tuum patrem non noverit, nonne tibi insanus aut ineptus videbitur*?" (*Contra Academicos* 2.7.16). Licentius is one of two students at Cassiciacum. Romanianus is Licentius' father and, according to the cover letters of Book I and II, the intended recipient of the dialogue. Romanianus was a patron of Augustine and had been persuaded by Augustine to become Manichean.

perceived the analogy with Academic philosophy. A truer analogy with what the Academic philosophers claim is as follows:

> Suppose that some man we are describing (I know not whom) is present, and your brother comes in from somewhere. Then, the man asks, 'Whose son is this boy?" It is answered, 'The son of a certain Romanianus." But here he says, 'How similar he is to his father! How accurately rumor has reported this to me!' Here you or someone else says, 'My good man, do you even know Romanianus?' 'No I don't,' he says, 'but it seems to me that he is similar to him.' Would anyone be able to hold their laughter?[50]

This analogy stresses the incredulity of the man who claims to recognize the reflection without familiarity with that which causes the reflection.

The group remains unconvinced and attempts to salvage the Academic position, arguing that Augustine's position is uncharitable: "It seems to me that the Academics' caution is far different from the idiocy of the man you described. For it is through reasons that they arrive at what they say is verisimilar."[51] Augustine defends his fastidious attention to words by appealing to the acumen and precision of Cicero: "What do you think – that Cicero, whose words these are, was deficient in the Latin language, so that he placed names that were less than suitable on the things he was encountering?"[52] Far from being an amateur wordsmith and philosopher, Augustine respects Cicero and takes seriously every word he uses.

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[50] "*Tum ego: Rem ipsam paulisper consideremus et quasi ante oculos constituamus. Ecce fac illum nescio quem hominem, quem describimus, esse praesentem; advenit alicunde frater tuus. Ibi iste: cuius hic puer filius? Respondetur: cuiusdam Romaniani. At hic: quam patris similis est! quam non temere hoc ad me fama detulerat! Hic tu vel quis alius: nosti enim Romanianum, bone homo? Non novi, inquit; tamen similis eius mihi videtur. Poteritne quisquam risum tenere?"* (*Contra Academicos* 2.7.19)

[51] *Ibid.,* 2.8.20. Alypius, later, will make a similar accusation against Augustine: "I beseech, that during this inquiry (in which I appear to have succeeded those who yielded to you), we not fall into a controversy over a word, which we have often admitted, according to both your own insinuations and the authority of Tully, is most disgraceful" (*Contra Academicos* 2.10.24).

[52] *Ibid.,* 2.11.26.

Augustine then introduces his companions to his opinion about the Academics.

> For I don't imagine they were men who did not know how to put names on things; rather, it seems to me that they chose these terms both in order to hide their opinion from the more sluggish and to reveal it to the more alert. How and why this seems so to me, I shall explain after I first discuss the things which men think have been said by them, as if they were the enemies of human knowledge.[53]

Were they "enemies of human knowledge," Augustine would have no qualms about discrediting the Academics as philosophers worthy of study; however, Augustine is not convinced that they are his enemies.[54] So, to make a path for a better understanding of Cicero, he must discuss first those things that men think were said (*dicta homines putant*) by the Academicians. His stated intention in this discussion is to discredit those who suppose the Academics were skeptical.

> Nevertheless, lest the Academics' arguments seem to be spreading around some kind of fog, or least we seem to some people to be proudly resisting the authority of very learned men (including Tully especially, who cannot not affect us), I shall, if you please, first discuss a few things against those who think that their disputations are opposed to the truth. I shall show, as it seems to me, the reason why the academics concealed their opinion.[55]

Augustine writes against those who think that the Academics were skeptical.

So how will he make the Academic fraud apparent? Augustine gives the answer in Book II when he discusses the example of the man who claims that a son is similar to his father without ever knowing the father. He writes that, "[T]he very thing cries out

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[53] "*Non est ista, inquam, mihi crede, verborum, sed rerum ipsarum magna controversia; non enim eos illos viros fuisse arbitror, qui rebus nescirent nomina imponere, sed mihi haec vocabula uidentur elegisse et ad occultandam tardioribus et ad significandum vigilantioribus sententiam suam*" (*Contra Academicos* 2.10.24).

[54] "And lest you think that I'm scared, I shall not unwillingly take up arms against even these very men if they defended the things which we read in their books." *Ibid.*, 2.10.24.

[55] "T*amen ne aut Academicorum argumenta quasdam nebulas videantur offundere aut doctissimorum virorum auctoritati, inter quos maxime Tullius non movere nos non potest superbe nonnullis resistere videamur, si vobis placet, prius pauca contra eos disseram, quibus videntur disputationes illae adversari veritati, deinde, ut mihi videtur, ostendam, quae causa fuerit Academicis occultandae sententiae suae"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.7.14).

that your Academics should be similarly laughed at, they who tell us to follow verisimilitude in this life when they don't know what the truth itself is."[56] The proper response to such a claim is laughter.

Comedic Argumentation

Second Place

Augustine begins his formal response to Academic doctrine by critiquing a peculiar argument of the Academics that comes from a now lost portion of the *Academica*. He introduces the argument as one thought to be particularly strong by Academic followers: "But first, let's look at what it is that the Academics' devotees are wont to boast about so excessively. For it is in the books of Cicero, which he wrote in defense of their cause, that there is a certain passage which, it seems to me, is seasoned with a wonderful urbanity and which, it seems to many others, is also made strong by a solid [content]."[57] First, note that Augustine does not assume that Cicero believes the argument to be particularly strong; instead, it is the *amatores Academicorum* who think of it is a strong argument in support of skepticism. Second, Augustine lets his audience know how suspicious he is of the argument, contrasting the Academic lover's characterization of the argument as strong with his opinion that the argument is

[56] "*Quidni, inquam, concludam? Ipsa res clamat similiter ridendos esse Academicos tuos, qui se in vita ueri similitudinem sequi dicunt, cum ipsum verum quid sit ignorant*" (*Contra Academicos* 2.7.19).

[57] *Contra Academicos* 3.7.15. The placement of this argument may be significant. In *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, a text many think Augustine would have studied, the author gives two ways one can respond to an opponent's views. One is the direct way in which one's own opinion is forcefully set forth immediately. But there is also a "subtle approach" to be used when the audience has been swayed by one's opponents. In this approach, one should immediately attack one's opponent's strongest argument. Here, Augustine's opponent is not the Academics, but the lovers of the Academics, nicely supporting the thesis that Augustine directs his oration against those who think the Academics were serious in their skepticism.

"seasoned with wonderful urbanity." The use of *urbanitas* may be intentional on Augustine's part, a nod to Cicero's definition of irony.

Augustine then presents the actual argument:

> Second place is given to the Academic wise man by all those of the other schools who think themselves wise, since each one necessarily claims first place for himself. From this it can follow in all probability that he who is second according to the judgment of all the others is rightly first according to his own judgment.[58]

Philosophical schools, such as the Stoics and Epicureans, rank their opponents as philosophically inferior because of their disagreements; in contrast, each school consistently admires the Academics, placing them behind only their own school. The cause of the high regard, Augustine observes, is the Academic decimation of each school's philosophical rival. The Stoics, for instance, take joy in the philosophical ruination of the Epicureans brought about by the skeptics.

Augustine calls the argument a "delightful spectacle," (*iucundissimum spectaculum*) meant to bring accolades to the Academy. While rhetorically provocative, it is philosophically worthless. The proper response to the skeptic should be laughter, not admiration, for, "when it so happens that this somewhat boastful Academic offers himself as a disciple to each of the schools and when none of them are able to persuade him of what they think they know, he will then be laughed at by everyone in great harmony."[59] What is the cause of the laughter? The initial joy at the Academics' disposal of one's

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[58] "*Academico sapienti ab omnibus caeterarum sectarum, fui sibi sapientes uidentur, secundas partes dari, cum primas sibi quemque uindicare necesse sit. Ex quo posse probabiliter confici eum recte primum esse iudicio suo, qui omnium caeterorum iudicio sit secundus*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.7.15). The passage is noted by Hagendahl as one that probably came from a now lost portion of the *Academica*. What follows after this passage in 3.7.16 may also come from the *Academica* or it may be Augustine's summary of the argument. Hagendahl supposes all of 3.7.16 is from the *Academica* while a more conservative approach restricts the Ciceronian passage to the text quoted.

[59] "*Unde fit, ut, cum se ille Academicus iactanticulus quasi discipulum singulis dederit nemoque illi quod se scire putat persuadere potuerit, magna illorum postea consensione rideatur*" *(Contra Academicos* 3.8.17).

rival subsides once each school realizes that the Academics side with no school. Instead of an ally against another school, the Academic becomes a nuisance to all schools, deemed as a man that "cannot learn anything." The accusation resembles Griswold's first account of Socratic irony, exemplified by Socrates' insistence that he wants to be taught by others yet really wants to help others understand their own ignorance. Instead of praising the skeptics, these schools, once they realize the Academics' claim that wisdom cannot be obtained, will chase the skeptics out.

Augustine's accusation that the skeptics can learn nothing initially appears unwarranted, for like Socrates, it may be that they simply have difficulty finding a competent teacher. However, Augustine's issue with the Academics is that, unlike Socrates, they "dogmatize" their skepticism, insisting that knowledge is always unobtainable. Insofar as learning requires acquisition of knowledge of some type, the Academics cannot be taught. Literary considerations are also important for evaluating the argument proffered here. In this section, the setting is in the "litigious tribunal" where truth is not what is sought; here, only accolades are pursued.[60] Augustine's target is the Academic claim of superiority, which has no philosophical basis, since the ranking arises from the feuds of other schools, not the judgment of reason. While Augustine's own response relies heavily upon humor, he mixes his rhetoric with philosophical critique and the humor used is a helpful tool for drawing attention to the irrational nature of this Academic rhetorical argument.

[60] *Ibid.,* 3.9.18.

Wisdom and the Sage

In the next argument, Augustine makes an important change of setting, from the courtroom to the Academy: "But let us withdraw now from this litigious tribunal to another place where there is no crowd to trouble us; and would that it were the very school of Plato."[61] The new setting does not mark an end to Augustine's humor. The change of setting to the Academy is more an indication of the different arguments from the Academics. The next pair of arguments that Augustine considers are thought to be Cicero's more serious philosophical claims, namely, that knowledge is unobtainable and that everyone, even the wise man, should therefore withhold assent from all impressions.

Before Augustine offers his critiques, he makes an important observation about Academic argumentation, reminding his readers that the doctrines of the Academics are dependent upon an acceptance of Stoic epistemology.

> The Academics deny that anything can be known. How did you determine this, most studious and learned men? '*Zeno's definition advised us to*,' they say. Why, I beseech? For if it's true, then even he who knows it knows something true; but if it's false, then it shouldn't have upset men of great constancy. But let's see what Zeno says: it is, of course, that 'it seems that that which can be grasped and perceived is such that it has no features in common with what is false.'[62]

[61] "*Sed ab hoc iam litigioso tribunali secedamus in aliquem locum, ubi nobis nulla turba molesta sit, atque utinam in ipsam scholam Platonis"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.9.18). Moving to the school of Plato is important historically and philosophically. Historically, the New Academicians believed they were the true heirs of Plato's Academy. Philosophically, as will become apparent in the next section, Augustine takes their true opinions to be dogmatic Platonism.

[62] *Negant Academici sciri aliquid posse. Unde hoc uobis placuit, studiosissimi homines atque doctissimi? Monuit nos, inquiunt, definitio Zenonis. Cur quaeso? Nam si uera est, nonnihil ueri nouit qui uel ipsam nouit, sin falsa, non debuit constantissimos commouere. Sed uideamus quid ait Zeno: tale scilicet uisum comprehendi et percipi posse, quale cum falso non haberet signa communia*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.9.18).

Augustine's first move is not to provide clear counter-examples to the Skeptics' claims, but to emphasize the parasitical nature of skeptical philosophy upon the Stoic doctrine of knowledge. They derive their claims against knowledge based on a definition from Zeno.

Turning to his philosophical response, one finds Augustine using the same strategy against the Academics that they used against the Stoics. The Academics challenge the consistency of the Stoic account of knowledge and the Stoic description of the sage. If knowledge is as the Stoic account assumes, then the sage cannot have knowledge, for the cataleptic impressions upon which knowledge depends cannot occur. Augustine, in turn, questions the consistency of the skeptical account of knowledge and their account of the sage. Instead of concluding that the wise man lacks all knowledge and refuses to assent to anything, Augustine argues that the Academics should have conceded that there is no wise man: "If such is the case (that knowledge is unobtainable), it should have been said that wisdom cannot befall man rather than that the wise man doesn't know why he is living, not know how he is living, not know whether he is living, and finally (and nothing more queer, delirious, and insane can be said than this), that the wise man exists at the same time that he doesn't know wisdom."[63] Augustine ultimately concludes that the Academics confuse the philosopher with the sage, for it is the philosopher who does not have wisdom. The sage, by definition, has it.[64]

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[63] "*Hoc si ita est, dicendum potius erat non posse in hominem cadere sapientiam quam sapientem nescire, cur uiuat, nescire, quem ad modum uiuat, nescire, utrum uiuat, postremo, quo peruersius magisque delirum et insanum dici nihil potest, simul et sapientem esse et ignorare sapientiam"*(*Contra Academicos* 3.9.19). The list of things that the wise man does not know is worth considering. It seems to move from things less obvious to things more obvious. Given Augustine's claim that the last denial is the most ludicrous, it may be a movement from the least ridiculous to the most ridiculous claims.

[64] This is not the first time that this distinction was made. Earlier in the book (3.3.5), Augustine forces Alypius to make a key distinction between the philosopher and the wise man. The philosopher clearly lacks wisdom; but if the wise man also lacks wisdom, it is unclear what distinguishes the sage from the philosopher.

The argument has baffled some interpreters while others have defended Augustine's response. Gerard O'Daly argues that Augustine simply does not understand the Academic account of wisdom.[65] Wisdom, for the Academics, just is the ability to withhold assent to all impressions. Brian Harding defends Augustine, arguing that the Academics would have to offer some way of differentiating the sage from the philosopher.[66] If it is the skill of refuting all arguments with certainty, then he has some skill that looks like dialectic; consequently, insofar as dialectic is a skill, it seems to be the acquisition of some kind of knowledge.

Another possible way of understanding Augustine's assertion that the wise man must know something is to consider the argument in light of the notion of privation. Augustine's description of evil as a privation of the good, found in *Confessiones* VII, is the most famous application of this concept. Evil can only be understood by means of what it is not or what it lacks. This way of understanding something can also be found in the dialogues from Cassiciacum. For instance, in the *De ordine* and *De beata vita*, "folly" is known by what it is not, namely, by its lack of wisdom.[67] In the Academic account, though, wisdom and folly would share this unique feature of being understood by means of what they are not: both are an absence of knowledge. To Augustine's mind, the very way in which we define "folly" at least suggests that its opposite, which is wisdom, should not share the same definition.

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[65] Gerard O'Daly, "The Response to Skepticism and the Mechanisms of Cognition."

[66] Brian Harding, "Epistemology and Eudaimonism in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*." *Augustinian Studies* 37.2 (2006): 247-71.

[67] *De beata vita* 4.28; *De ordine* 2.3.8-9.

Such defenses of Augustine are admirable, for Augustine does appear to think his argument has merit. Yet the rigid focus upon the arguments continues to ignore Augustine's rhetorical strategies used to draw attention to the farcical nature of the skeptical call to philosophy. If the sage, the ideal at which all philosophers aim, has no knowledge and no wisdom, then the pursuit of wisdom appears to lack motivation. Augustine openly teases the difficulty facing Academic skepticism for drawing people to philosophy, offering a revised and more honest skeptical protreptic: "Come, O mortals, to philosophy! Great is the reward here, for what is more dear to man than wisdom? Come then, that you may be wise and that you may not know wisdom."[68]

Augustine's goal is not only to show the philosophical incoherency of the skeptical position but also to show that the problems besetting skepticism are so egregious that one should not take the Academics seriously. Thinking of Augustine's goal as an unveiling of skeptical irony can be helpful. One form of Socratic irony that Griswold lists concerns the disassociation from how one lives and what one says. If the Academics really are claiming that philosophy cannot offer wisdom, why, one should wonder, do they keep pursuing it? That Cicero's pursuit of Lady Philosophy does not match his words should give an Academic follower pause. Augustine helps the reader become aware of Academic irony: "It so happens that if you say this they will run away as if you were insane; if you bring them to this [opinion] some other way, you will make

[68] "*venite, mortales ad philosophiam! magnus hic fructus est; quid enim homini sapientia carius? venite igitur, ut sapientes sitis et sapientiam nesciatis!"(Contra Academicos* 3.9.20).

them insane."[69] Skepticism deserves one of two responses: either grief over the impossibility of knowledge or laughter at its insanity.[70]

Perception, Senses, Etc.

One might suppose that the previous two passages examined are best considered as preliminary arguments to Augustine's important philosophical refutations. Augustine does offer a smattering of rebuttals to universal skepticism, citing impressions about which we can be certain. These objections directly attack the key Academic doctrine that one cannot have certainty about an impression. For instance, he observes that we can know that either there is one world or not one world.[71] We may not know which prong of the disjunction is true, but we can be certain about the disjunction itself because there is no third option. Certainty can even be found to some extent in one's sense perception. For instance, we know that we are presented with a collection of images to which we apply the name "world." Whether there is such a world, we may never know; we can be certain, though, that we are being appeared to worldly.[72] In fact, our certainty of being appeared to worldly need not waver if we are in a perpetual dream, for "world" may simply be the name applied to the many impressions confronting us and is not necessarily dependent upon an actual independent material universe. Similarly, one can have certainty one's experience of many impressions: "'I *know* that this seems white to me; I

[69] "*Ita fit, ut, si hoc dixeris, fugiant tamquam insanum, si alio modo ad hoc adduxeris, facias insanos"*(*Contra Academicos* 3.9.20)

[70] Augustine continues to draw attention to the Academic practice of focusing on their opponent's position: "If my good man, Zeno's definition forced us to say something that was dangerous to philosophy, should something be said to a man that would make him grieve over himself, or something that would make him laugh at you." *Ibid.*

[71] *Ibid.,* 3.10.23.

[72] *Ibid.,* 3.11.24.

know that this is delightful for me to hear; I *know* that this smells pleasant to me; I *know* that this tastes sweet to me; I *know* that to me this is cold." [73] One can debate the nature of color and never be certain of its essence while maintaining that certain things sometimes, nevertheless, appear white.

Augustine offers strong philosophical arguments against Academic skeptical doctrine, yet his mode of presenting these more philosophically sophisticated arguments is still shaped by his more general response of exposing the risibility of Academic skepticism. Consider the following examples. Even in a dream, I am certain that the images appearing to me appear to be the thing that I call world. Augustine challenges the skeptic to offer a response to his argument: "Teach me how [I could doubt impressions]….by virtue of sleep or madness or the untrustworthiness of the senses and I shall concede defeat – *if I remember them when I awake*."[74] Concerning the certainty that something seems white or pleasant or bitter, Augustine imagines an Academic responding, "tell me instead whether oleaster leaves, which the goat so stubbornly seeks, are bitter in and of themselves."[75] Such a response evades the real claim that one can have certainty that oleaster leaves appear bitter to a human. Augustine's response is brimming with humor:

> O, you naughty man! Is not the goat itself more modest? I do not know what sort of thing oleaster is to a farm animal, but to me it is still bitter. What more do you

[73] *"hoc mihi candidum uideri scio, hoc auditum meum delectari scio, hoc mihi iucunde olere scio, hoc mihi sapere dulciter scio, hoc mihi esse frigidum scio" (Contra Academicos* 3.11.26).

[74] *Ibid.* 3.11.25.

[75] *Ibid.* 3.11.26.

> seek? But perhaps there is something, even to man, for which it is not bitter. Are you persisting for the sake of annoyance?[76]

Augustine refuses to let the Academics rid him "of this knowledge by any Greek sophistry."[77]

The humor in Augustine's response persists through the remaining portion of the oration as he considers a bizarre spectacle in which the Academic wise man is forced to do battle with wisdom itself[78] and in an absurd court case in which a judge can only condemn a young man as probably guilty of an action probably done, and Cicero, as this young man's lawyer, is able to console the condemned young man as only probably being judged guilty.[79]

Conclusion

Augustine fully displays his humor in the *Contra Academicos*. His theory that the Academics hid their true opinions shapes how he responds to their doctrine. He does not treat their view seriously because they did not hold it seriously. Further, his whole refutation is not even directed against the Academics but against their unfortunate followers. Augustine, unlike these followers, gets the Academic joke and wants the rest of us to realize the ridiculousness of skepticism.

It is helpful to return to Griswold's suggestion about the two functions of irony here. Irony may be used to reveal puzzles within riddles within enigmas, suggesting an

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[76] "*O hominem inprobum! nonne est caper ipse modestior? Nescio, quales pecori sint, mihi tamen amarae sunt. Quid quaeris amplius? Sed est fortasse aliquis etiam hominum, cui non sint amarae. Tendisne in molestiam?"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.26).

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] *Ibid.* 3.14.31.

[79] *Ibid.* 3.16.35.

essential absurdity to the universe. But irony could serve another, more positive, function to promote both an awareness of one's lack of knowledge and the need to pursue what one lacks. In this latter function, irony shows a limitation in the human knower, not in the intelligibility of the universe.

Augustine realized that the skeptical position could be interpreted as either of these options. If wisdom is as unobtainable as the skeptics claim, then it is not the skeptics but the universe that has played a cruel trick on us for endowing humans with a desire for wisdom. He reads the Academics as using the second sense of irony, meant to show limitations to knowledge but not an incoherency to the world. Unfortunately, many did not get the joke of Cicero's work because they took his authority so seriously. The result for these was a tragic pursuit of wisdom, a pursuit deterred instead of spurred on.

Augustine's playful tone, then, is not simply mimicking the style in which he thinks the skeptics offered their arguments: it is meant to awaken the interlocutors and reader to the ironies of the skeptical position. Just as the skeptics, according to Augustine, laughed at other philosophical positions deemed dangerous, Augustine makes fun of skepticism not only because it is wrong, but because that way of life leads to despair. Life is in fact a comedy. There can be a happy ending.[80] To the more tragic interpretation of skepticism we now turn.

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[80] Augustine does not suppose, though, that understanding that skepticism is easily refutable is sufficient for having wisdom. At the end of the dialogue, he recognizes that he still lacks wisdom (*Contra Academicos* 3.20.43).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Futile Pursuit: Problems with the Skeptical Life

The previous chapter accentuated the relevance of Augustine's mode of communication within his larger goal of discrediting those who accept the skepticism of the Academics unquestioningly. This larger goal does not suggest, however, that Augustine refuses to philosophically critique skepticism. He makes fun of their position while presenting cogent philosophical reasons for rejecting it. His reasons for rejecting skepticism are twofold: first, there are examples of impressions to which it is reasonable to assent, in spite of Academic claims; second, and our concern in this chapter, the skeptical way of life entails disastrous ethical and political implications.

The eudaimonist interpreters, mentioned in the first chapter, have reoriented the discussion of Augustine's critique of Academic epistemology within its ancient philosophical context.[1] As Alvin Neiman writes concerning Cicero and Augustine, "each is ultimately concerned with happiness and approaches epistemological discussions in terms of the ethics of belief."[2] Epistemological discussions are prevalent among the Platonists, Stoics, and skeptics; nevertheless, one finds these discussions subservient to

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[1] John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism: The *Contra Academicos*" *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972): 99-116; Ragnar Holte, *Beattitue et Sagesse Saint Augustin et le probleme de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Etudes Augustiniennes, 1962); Alvin Neiman "The Arguments of Augustine's '*Contra Academicos*,'" *Modern Schoolman* 59 (1982): 255-80; Michael P. Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," *Revue des Études Augustiennes* 45 (1999): 51-77; Brian Harding, "Skepticism, Illumination, and Christianity in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 34.2 (2003): 197-212 and "Epistemology and Eudaimonism in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 37.2 (November 2006): 247-71; Augustine J. Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of Contra Academicos* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996); and Ryan Topping, "The Perils of Skepticism: The Moral and Educational Argument of *Contra Academicos*," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 49.3 (2009).

[2] Alvin Neiman, "The Arguments of Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *The Modern Schoolman* 4 (1982): 261.

the overarching preoccupation with eudaimonism, human flourishing. Augustine and Cicero's works are no different than other ancient philosophers in this regard. If skepticism leads one away from the happy life, one need not accept it.

Yet despite the helpful turn towards Augustine's eudaemonist critique of skepticism, many of these authors ignore Augustine's basic arguments against the Academic way of life, failing to identify the unifying element of his critiques against that life. Some authors focus almost exclusively on Augustine's theoretical objections to skepticism. John Heil and Gerard O'Daly, for instance, both rely upon an intricate psychology of cognition that may be at work in the *Contra Academicos* but is not readily apparent. Heil's theory in particular relies upon a notion of the faculty of the will more obvious in the *Confessiones* (and maybe most obvious in Aquinas) than one finds in this early dialogue. Others, like David Mosher and Brian Harding, mention the role that the sage plays in the work; however, neither author examines the various uses of the sage in ancient philosophical discourse. Such a discussion helps mitigate their extreme positions: Mosher claiming that Augustine had Plotinus in mind as the true sage and Harding insisting that wisdom, for Augustine, takes the form of divine inspiration.[3] Remarkably, neither suggests that Christ, mentioned at the end of the work, could fulfill the role of the sage for Augustine.[4] Better interpretations cite Augustine's clear concern with the disastrous educational and political implications of Academic skepticism.[5]

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[3] I use the word "inspiration" instead of "illumination" because Harding's account of Augustinian illumination looks more like a divine gift absent understanding. Such an inspiration makes an appearance with Monica in the *De beata vita*, yet Monica's inspiration remains clearly distinct from the understanding of Augustine which is made possible in some way by divine illumination. Harding also makes the controversial claim that Augustine was in full agreement with the skeptical claim that wisdom is unattainable in this life. But Augustine's expressed hope of being near wisdom should at least cause some caution in such a claim.

[4] Eugene Kevane, in his excellent review of the early Augustinian corpus, suggests Christ is the

A common deficiency in most of these interpretations is an insufficient attention to the relation of skeptical theory to the skeptical way of life. The two are integrally connected, for as Cicero suggests, the superior Academic way of life is dependent upon skeptical doctrine. One way this deficiency shows up is through confusion about Augustine's opponent, the Academic skeptics. John Heil, for instance, bases his analysis of the *Contra Academicos* on the Pyrrhonic skeptical account of quietude. Others, while mentioning Cicero, rarely mention the Roman orator or his work past select footnotes.

Augustine's main eudaemonist argument regards the incompatibility of Cicero's claim about the benefits of the Academic way of life with what follows from living such a life: Academic skepticism, in other words, does not make good on its promises. This incompatibility is the central concern underlying Augustine's various ethical and political critiques of skepticism. A secondary thesis for this chapter is that Augustine's arguments are most forceful against the Academic account of skepticism and lack force against Pyrrhonic skepticism, making it important to distinguish the differences between the two forms of skepticism.

Pyrrhonic and Academic Skepticism

Several ways to distinguish the Pyrrhonic from Academic skeptics are to contrast their respective founders, their respective responses to the Stoic inactivity argument, and their respective criteria for action. The Pyrrhonists trace their skeptical heritage to

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sage for Augustine. See, for instance, *De utilitate credendi* 13.28-32. "Christian Philosophy: The Intellectual Side of Augustine's Conversion," *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986): 47-83.

[5] See specially Michael Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues;" Augustine Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of Contra Academicos* , and Ryan Topping, "The Perils of Skepticism: The Moral and Educational Argument of *Contra Academicos*."

Pyrrho, a man about whom little is known, for, like Socrates, he wrote nothing.[6] The earliest source of his skeptical position comes from Aristocles, a philosopher who recounts a summary of his position given by Timon, a student of Pyrrho. Disputes remain concerning how best to interpret the passage – whether he thought that the universe is inherently unintelligible or that human knowledge is perpetually limited—yet the summary presents a position similar to later traditions that would claim Pyrrho as their leader.[7] Most relevant, the main distinction between Pyrrho and Socrates appears to be former's emphasis upon tranquility (*ataraxia*) by means of skeptical argumentation: "Therefore, for this reason we should not put our trust in them (judgments about the world) one bit, but we should be unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering, saying concerning each individual thing that it no more is than is not, or it both is and is not, or it neither is nor is not. The outcome for those who actually adopt this attitude, says Timon, will be first speechlessness, and then freedom from disturbance."[8] Through skeptical argumentation one accepts his noetic limitation and, in the relinquishment of his quest for knowledge, experiences peace.

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[6] The issues concerning Pyrrho, and ancient skepticism, are uncertain, partly due to lack of extant sources and partly due to the difficulty of knowing which, if any arguments were seriously proposed or merely used dialectically. The classic article that proposed that Academic argumentation was merely dialectical is Pierre Couissin's "Le Stoicisme de la Nouvelle Academie," *Revuse d'histoire de la philosophie* 2 (1929), 241-276. Reprinted and translated as "The Stoicism of the New Academy,"in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Miles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 31-64; Malcolm Schofield's "Academic Philosophy" in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy,* ed. Keimpe Algra et. all (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), is of enormous help, as is Gisela Striker's "Academics Versus Pyrrhonists, Reconsidered" and Katja Vogt, "Skepticism and Action," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Skepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[7] The particular debate concerns whether Pyrrho made a metaphysical claim that things in themselves were obscure or an epistemological claim that humans lack the faculties for gaining knowledge. See especially Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents and his Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[8] Aristocles *apud* Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 14.18.1-5, trans. A.A. Long and David Sedley, 1F.

The Academic skeptics, in contrast, claim to be heirs of Socrates.[9] In the *Disputationes Tusculanae*, Cicero associates his own practice of philosophy with Socrates' method of hiding his opinion, correcting others from error, and arguing in order to find what is most probable: Socratic irony, elenchus, and dialectic respectively.[10] While there was some dispute in Hellenistic times concerning how best to interpret Socrates' way of life,[11] the Socrates of such Platonic dialogues as the *Symposium* and *Apology* appears to actively pursue wisdom, understood as some form of intellectual achievement.

Although both the Pyrrhonist and the Academic affirm that one should withhold assent from any impression, their responses to the Stoic argument differ in important ways. Katja Vogt writes that while the former argue for a kind of action, we should not confuse that action with full acting, which she describes as a choice of one option instead of another.[12] For the Pyrrhonists, action remains possible once assent has been withdrawn because the subject can still be passively moved by one's surroundings. Just as a non-human animal acts without assenting to impressions as true, assuming here that assent requires an intellectual ability not shared by these animals, so impressions alone can move a human to act. Insofar as Pyrrhonic Skepticism offers a criterion that guides action, that criterion is appearance alone.

> Thus attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions – for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by

[9] On this connection, see especially *Academica,* 1.12.44-45, 2.5.14, 2.23.74.

[10] *Disputationes Tusculanae* 5.4.10.

[11] A. A. Long, "Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy," *The Classical Quarterly* 38.1 (1988), 150-171.

[12] Vogt, "Skepticism and Action," 171 .

> nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise.[13]

Tranquility occurs when one no longer tries to decide what is true or false but withholds assent and allows the world as it appears to us to guide all actions.[14]

According to Vogt, the skeptical Academy—as represented by Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Cicero—offer a more robust account of action than their Pyrrhonic peers, one which stems from their expressed motivation to find the truth rather than tranquility.[15] Julia Annas nicely summarizes their motivation: "the [Academic] sceptic searches for truth because we all do; and we all do because that is the way humans are. This is not subordinate to a further aim."[16] In the *Academica,* Cicero attests that his motivating desire is the truth: "But our case is straightforward, because we want to discover truth without any contention, and we search for it conscientiously and enthusiastically."[17] Even though Sextus Empiricus claims that the Pyrrhonic skeptics

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[13] *Outlines of Skepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.1123-24. As with Pyrrho, there are debates concerning how best to understand Sextus' claims. Some suggest that he is requiring that all beliefs be eliminated in order to attain *ataraxia*, accepting ordinary non-philosophical beliefs. Others argue that he insists upon the more extreme claim that one should never have any beliefs. See Myles Burnyeat, "Can the sceptic live his scepticism?" in *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*, ed., Malcolm Schofield and Myles Burnyeat and J. Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 20–53; "The sceptic in his place and time," in *Philosophy in History*, ed., Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 225–254. Michael Frede "The Sceptic's Beliefs," in *The Skeptical Tradition,* ed., Burnyeat and Frede (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)1–24. See also Katja Voigt's excellent article "Ancient Skepticism," http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism-ancient/#PyrSke (accessed June 1, 2011).

[14] See Michael Frede, "The Skeptic's Belief," where he suggests that the Pyrrhonic Skeptic has something like meta-beliefs about his ordering beliefs, realizing that his passive acceptance of the appearance of things may ultimately be wrong, though this possibility does not disrupt his tranquility.

[15] *Academica* 2.37; 2.18.60; 2.20.66; 2.24.77.

[16] Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 205.

[17] *Academica* 2.3.7.

maintain a similar pursuit,[18] his declaration remains suspect given the stated goal of tranquility (*ataraxia*), which supervenes upon the realization that the truth cannot be found.[19] Cicero never defends skepticism as a means of bringing quietude. The skeptical search for truth is arduous and difficult but worth the effort because of the importance of truth. Happiness and truth, therefore, have a closer affinity to each other than what one finds with the Pyrrhonists.[20] Reason is meant to be the ultimate guide for our ethical pursuits, not appearance.

How Cicero is able to suggest that one view is more likely true than another sharpens the distinction between the Pyrrhonic and Academic skeptics. While the goal for the Academics is truth, they nevertheless denied that such truth can ever be obtained. Empiricus, in particular, expresses concern over this apparent dogmatic skeptical claim. Augustine also reads the skeptical claims of Cicero and Carneades with this dogmatic emphasis.[21] So, how can one act rightly if one's actions cannot be based upon certain knowledge? Carneades offers the definitive Academic response by means of a distinction between two kinds of assent: dogmatic assent, which should always be withheld, and the approval of something as probable, which is acceptable. By arguing on both sides of an issue one can assess what option is more likely to be true: "Nor do our arguments have any purpose other than to draw out our formulate the truth or its closest possible

[18] *Outlines of Pyrhonnic Skepticism* 1.1.1.

[19] *Ibid.,* 1.12.

[20] As James Allen notes, while one might say the two skepticisms ultimately resemble each other more than they differ in theory, there is something more pessimistic in the Pyrrhonists than the Academics. "Carneadean Argument in Cicero's Academic Work" in *Assent and Argument*, 256.

[21] David Corey has been especially helpful for clarifying the distinction between Academic and Pyrrhonic skepticism. He observed that features about the Academic school, that they dogmatize about skepticism and the need for truth, greatly distinguishes them from the more consistent skeptics like Sextus Empiricus. Some interpretations suggest that where the Academics appear to dogmatize about these two issues they are offering dialectical positions accepted for the sake of argumentation.

approximation by means of arguing on either side."[22] In the *Academica*, Cicero shows how his dialectical method helps him decide what the best way of life is. While never fully giving assent that the end of life, the life of happiness, is found exclusively in virtue, he writes that "[V]irtue calls me back, or rather claps her hand on me."[23] Though argumentation cannot confer certainty, the supremacy of virtue for the happy life appears the most rationally plausible goal. Reason, not custom, determines what is most rationally plausible.

The tension in Academic skepticism should be apparent by now. We are compelled to pursue the truth by means of rational discourse; however, the truth remains unobtainable. The problem perhaps becomes most manifest in the figure of the Academic sage, that figure that helps bring theory and practice together. As Hadot writes, "the figure of the sage was the transcendent norm which determined the philosopher's way of life."[24] In the Academic sage, the tension between the search for the truth and its unobtainability is at its most acute. For while the Academics insist that one was to continue searching for the truth, the ideal life that we long for remains a life without knowledge of what is true. There are, in essence, two opposing ends of life: life lived according to truth and a life, as seen in the sage, necessarily bereft of truth. These contradictory ends are the source of Augustine's critique.

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[22] *Academica* 2.3.7.

[23] For instance, *Academica* 2.65.139."

[24] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* 220. Little noticed is the centrality of the sage both in the *Academica* and the *Contra Academicos*. References to the *sapiens* shows up three times more than references to *sapientia* in Cicero's work.

Academic Despair

Augustine begins the cover letter to Book II of the *Contra Academicos* listing four common hindrances to the philosophical life. First, the pursuit of wisdom can be hindered by misfortune, the particular obstruction for Romanianus, the recipient of this dialogue and father of Augustine's student Licentius. A second hindrance is "a certain stupefaction in mental aptitude or a sluggishness or a slowness in the lethargic."[25] This hindrance is due to some character deficiency such as "sluggishness," a limitation due to a lack of education, or even a lack of mental ability by nature.[26] Third, the despair that truth is beyond our reach can also keep one from pursuing wisdom. Finally, the false assumption that one already has the truth smothers the desire to increase one's wisdom.[27]

Academic skepticism most readily causes the third hindrance of provoking despair at the pursuit of wisdom, a conclusion at odds with Cicero's own assessment of the school's morally salutary effects. We have seen Cicero's argument that Academic skepticism helps form a particular character that avoids the arrogant presumption of wisdom, thereby encouraging the pursuit of what one lacks. While Augustine does not disagree that skepticism helps discourage arrogance, it problematically creates conditions for developing the vices of despair and sloth.

The *Soliloquia* clarifies Augustine's psychology of despair. In this portion of the dialogue, Reason presents three virtues needed for a mind to be healthy: faith, hope, and love. First is faith, a virtue needed for a corrupted mind to gain a glimpse of the truth.

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[25] "*sive ingeniorum quodam stupore uel socordia vel tarditate torpentium siue desperation inveniendi"* (*Contra Academicos* 2.1.1).

[26] Proof that Augustine separates this second hindrance into two parts can be found in the next section of the cover letter where he assures Romanianus that "I'm not apprehensive about any sluggishness in your character or slowness in your mental aptitude" (*Contra Academicos* 2.2.3).

[27] Augustine would write *De vera religione* in response to this last hindrance.

But, Reason notes, one who by faith catches a glimpse of wisdom yet thinks this goal is unattainable will inevitably fall into despair:

> But what if it does indeed believe that the matter stands thus as I have said, and it believes that it would see thusly (if it were capable of seeing), yet it despair of ever being able to be healed? Wouldn't it sell itself out and loathe itself, and wouldn't it disobey the commands of its physician?[28]

Despair arises when a perceived good is deemed unattainable, whether because of sin or some other limitation. Hope, therefore, is needed to overcome the problem of despair. The despair that Academic skepticism can cause originates from the perceived unobtainability of that which is most desirable, namely, wisdom.

Here the importance of reading Augustine's argument as one aimed at Academic as opposed to Pyrrhonic Skepticism becomes apparent, for the despair that skepticism induces arises because the Academic school denies the possibility of attaining something for which they agree we should desire. Pyrrhonic skeptics need not cause such despair because they doubt even their own skepticism. Not so for the Academics who are more avid in their pursuit of the truth.

The *De beata vita* confirms the hypothesis that Augustine traces a cause of despair to the Academic position. At this stage of the dialogue Augustine has led his interlocutors to agree on a formal component of the happy life, that whatever such a life looks like, it must be one in which proper desires are satiated:

> "If it is obvious," I said, "that someone who doesn't have what he wants is not happy, which our reasoning demonstrated a little while ago: but no one seeks what he doesn't want to find, and they [the academics] always seek the truth and therefore they want to find it: Therefore, they want to have a discovery of the

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[28] *"Sed quid, si credat quidem ita se rem habere ut dicitur, atque ita se, si uidere potuerit, esse visuram, sanari se tamen posse desperet; nonne se prorsus abiicit atque contemnit, nec praeceptis medici obtemperat?"* (*Soliloquia* 1.6.12). All translations of the *Soliloquia* are taken from Augustine, *Soliloquies*, trans. Michael P. Foley (University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

> truth, but they don't find it. It thus follow that they don't have what they want, and from this it also follows that they are not happy."[29]

All agree that the happy person not only wants the right things but has these things. Augustine observes that this formal component of happiness renders an unpalatable consequence for the Academic position. The Academics do not deny that the good of the highest part of the soul is wisdom, knowledge of the highest truths; however, while affirming that such knowledge is the good of the soul, they deny that one can ever have it. In the Academic ideal life one lacks happiness because one's most important desire remains dissatisfied; and because of this deficiency, as seen in the *Soliloquies*, one inevitably sinks into despair.[30]

This despair leads to other problems, revealing that, far from their proclaimed opinion that Academic doctrine forms the right character to encourage the pursuit of truth, it can entirely stifle such a quest. Augustine recounts his own experience after accepting skepticism, an experience beginning in despair then leading into laziness and something akin *curiositas*:

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[29] *"Si manifestum est, inquam, beatum non esse, qui quod vult non habet—quod paulo ante ratio demonstrauit—nemo autem quaerit, quod inuenire non uult, et quaerunt illi semper veritatem—volunt ergo inuenire uolunt igitur habere inuentionem veritatis—at non inveniunt, sequitur eos non habere quod uolunt et ex eo sequitur etiam beatos non esse. At nemo sapiens nisi beatus: sapiens igitur Academicus non est"* (*De beata vita* 2.14). All translations of *On the Happy Life* are taken from Augustine, *On the Happy Life*, trans. Michael P. Foley (University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

[30] Augustine offers three responses on behalf of the skeptics. They could argue that one can be happy while lacking a "great good of the mind" such as the truth. Licentius will argue on behalf of this position in the first book of *Contra Academicos*. The pursuit of the truth fulfills one's desires. This response ultimately dissatisfies Augustine since what one wants most remains unobtainable. Such a person cannot be considered happy. A second option for the Academics is to deny that one should want truth. The Pyrrhonic skeptics take this option. Cicero never mentions this option as a possibility. Knowledge of the truth drives him as a philosopher to continue his pursuit, no matter how difficult the pursuit proves to be. A final option is for the Academic to deny that the happy person is wise. Augustine does not fully examine this option, but it appears to follow from the second. If one denies that we should pursue the truth, one can be happy. But, this happy person cannot be considered wise in Augustine's mind. He is more like the pig satisfied with the mud.

> "Don't you know, then, that I still have nothing which I perceive as certain, but that I'm prevented from seeking it by the arguments and disputations of the Academics? For somehow they induced in my mind a certain probability (lest I retreat from their word just yet) that man can't discover the truth. Hence, the effect was that I became lazy and utterly slothful, nor did I dare seek what the most astute and learned men weren't allowed to find"[31]

Accepting skepticism can lead to two related but separable effects: laziness or diversion. While it is unlikely that Augustine had access to the vice tradition of the Desert Fathers, these two subsequent effects resemble the description of *acedia*, the vice that follows sadness. John Cassian describes *acedia* in terms of a flight or dissatisfaction with one's current state.[32] The flight can take two forms. One form of flight is metaphorical, leading one to avoid any necessary task by inactivity such as sleep or idleness. Another form of flight leads one to activities of the wrong sort. Here, the mind distracted from its proper goal turns to other less noble goods.[33]

The quenching effects of the *Academica* are striking given that this dialogue followed Cicero's acclaimed protreptic, the *Hortensius*, a work that set Augustine's heart on fire for wisdom. One is reminded of the passage where Augustine openly teases the Academics, offering an exhortation that better fits their doctrine: "Come, O mortals, to philosophy! Great is the reward here, for what is more dear to man than wisdom? Come then, that you may be wise and that you may not know wisdom."

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[31] "*Tune ergo nescis nihil me certum adhuc habere quod sentiam, sed ab eo quaerendo Academicorum argumentis atque disputationibus impediri? Nescio quo enim modo fecerunt in animo quondam probabilitatem—ut ab eorum uerbo nondum recedam—quod homo uerum inuenire non possit, unde piger et prorsus segnis effectus eram nec quaerere audebam, quod acutissimis ac doctissimis uiris inuenire non licuit"*(*Contra Academicos* 2.9.23).

[32] John Cassian, *Institutes* 10.3.

[33] Licentius' obsession with poetry gives evidence to this psychological decline that can occur when the desire for truth is frustrated. Soon after his initial defense of the Academy and his becoming frustrated with Augustine's questions he turns his attention to the reading and writing of poetry.

The Sage in Discourse and as Icon

Augustine offers other ethical and political critiques against the Academics, especially in the section beginning at 3.15.33 and ending at 3.16.36.[34] In this portion of the dialogue, Augustine presents two stories to uncover the unpalatable implications of Academic doctrine. The underlying source of these critiques is once again the Academic insistence that the truth should be sought and that it is impossible to find. For these critiques, Augustine draws upon uses of the sage in philosophical discourse.

There were at least two related but distinct uses of the figure of the sage in ancient philosophical schools.[35] First, discourse about the sage is used polemically to contrast a particular school's position in opposition to another school or to critique the consistency of another school's account of the best life. Most ancient schools agree on the formal component that the sage alone is happy. Most agree upon other components belonging to the sage such as his perfect virtue, his freedom from error, and his resilience against misfortune. Despite a general consensus about these formal components, the specific account of the sage often differs dramatically from school to school. For instance, the Peripatetics and Epicureans agree with the Stoics that the sage alone is happy, but disagree with the Stoic claim that the sage can be happy while being burned alive in the bull of Phalaris. The disagreement can be traced to differences regarding the Stoic insistence that external events have no bearing on one's happiness. The peculiar nuances

[34] While Augustine's comedic argumentation is fully on display in this section, his argument does become more serious at one point: "But you all think that I'm joking. I hereby degree that I swear by all that is holy that I have utterly no idea how this man of ours sinned if whoever does what seems probable does not sin" (3.16.35).

[35] The distinctions, while present in Hadot, are my own. Hadot mentions the almost total neglect of attention to the function of the sage in ancient philosophical discourse. I am largely relying on Hadot's account of the sage in *What is Ancient Philosophy* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004) 224-231.

of a particular school's account of the formal components of the happy life are displayed in a discussion of the sage.

This heuristic device of the formal features of the sage is sometimes used polemically to discredit another school, a use which one finds in the *Academica*. There, the emphasis is upon a set of formal features that the Stoics claim belong to the sage: the sage never errs, has only certain knowledge, and never holds mere opinions. Cicero accepts these same formal components but, because of a disagreement about the possibility of cataleptic impressions, describes a sage vastly different than that described by the Stoics. The skeptics present strong arguments against the possibility of any impression having an indubitable quality to it, thereby precluding the possibility of knowledge (as understood by the Stoics). While both sides accept the same formal components, each presents a different picture of the sage. Such discussions are more theoretical in nature regarding consistency and the possibility of a school's portrayal of the best life.

Moreover—and this brings us to the second function of the sage—a shared discourse about the sage provides an ever clearer image of the ideal life. As an ideal, the image of the sage acts as an exemplar upon which to base one's life. The sage represents "a mode of being which is different from that of common mortals."[36] The ancient philosophers insisted that this person is not like the rest of us. Discussions about him demonstrate "not only that the sage is the only being who is infallible, impeccable, impassive, happy, free, handsome, and wealthy, but also that he is the only one who can

[36] Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 225.

truly and excellently be a statesmen, legislator, general, poet, and king." [37] The almost divine nature of the sage is found in other traditions as well. For Epicurus, the sage is "a god among men"; in Aristotle, the sage is devoted to contemplation, experiencing "intermittently what the deity lives continuously";[38] Plotinus presents a figure distinct from average humans, one "supremely wise, exempt from faults and errors"; Socrates, especially in Alcibiades' speech at the end of the *Symposium*, displays the divine qualities ascribed earlier in the dialogue to Beauty itself.

While the sage is distinct from the rest of us, this figure nevertheless acts as a model by which one guides one's life. Citing various ancient philosophers such as Aristophanes, Xenophon, Seneca, and Diogenes Laertius, Charles Talbert compares this use of the sage to an icon, a means by which one captures a glimpse of something greater than oneself. He calls this sanctifying aspect of a sage "transformation by vision." [39] The disciples in these cases do not try to imitate the sage, but are "enabled by their association with him" because they see a divine life in action.[40] Of course, being with a sage is an opportunity for only a select few, and if moral transformation requires direct association with a sage, then a happy life remains inaccessible to many. The ancient philosophical tradition overcame this difficulty, Talbert shows, by proposing that stories about an historical sage or a detailed examination of the ideal life can act as a "verbal icon" for those not privy to personal access. Xenophon mentions that thinking of Socrates could

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[37] *Ibid.,* 224.

[38] Hadot, 227 .

[39] Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5-7* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004). 39. Talbert's view requires on caveat. Being in the presence of a sage does not necessarily transform a disciple. Socrates had his Alcibiades and Jesus had his Judas.

[40] *Ibid.*

help one remember how to live and Seneca recommends looking back to ancient writers as models for our own life. Sayings and biographies of sages, then, provide "verbal icons" to remind a follower how to view reality and act wisely.[41]

The image of the sage as icon might not initially be apparent in the *Academica*, but Talbert's account of "verbal icons" explains how even the Academic sage acts as an exemplar. Cicero claims that his affinity for the Academic Skepticism stemmed from their lack of arrogance and philosophical consistency. The portrayal of the Academic sage in the *Academica* as one who refuses to assent to any impressions as true while maintaining an openness to discover truth where it may be found serves as a model by which one can guide all philosophical endeavors.[42]

Augustine follows Cicero by giving the *sapiens* the key role in the discussion. His familiarity with the sage could have come not only from his reading of Cicero but also from Ambrose[43]—especially Epistles 37 and 38 written to the Milanese Christian community and the Patriarchal sermons addressed to catechumens—and potentially from Plotinus (*Ennead* 1.4.7).[44] Ambrose's writings extensively appeal to the notion of the

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[41] Talbert's larger argument is that the sayings of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount are meant to act as verbal icons, offering a picture of the good life. Thanks to Robert Kruschwitz for directing me to Talbert's work.

[42] Cf. *Academica* 2.66, 2.67, 2.77, 2.78, 2.101, 2.113.

[43] See Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) for a review of the dispute about the dating of these sermons. Colish expresses uncertainty that Augustine would have attended these sermons. Yet, she readily admits the influence of Stoicism on Ambrose's ethics in particular. Even if Augustine did not attend these exact sermons, it remains likely that he could have heard a Christianization of the Stoic sage from other sermons or writings of Ambrose. For instance, letters 37-38 to Simplicianus, dated 386, also make use of the imagery of the sage.

[44] The exact *Enneads* with which Augustine could have been familiar continues to be debated. The sage is most extensively examined by Plotinus in 1.4 "On True Happiness," an selection some think Augustine read. There, the sage's reaction to misfortune is the focus of discussion. Plotinus characterization of the sage fully exemplifies the association of the sage with the divine.

Christian sage as one who can endure any misfortune with happiness,[45] is led by reason as opposed to pleasure,[46] consoles himself "with faith in the resurrection,"[47] and exhibits a number of virtues.[48] With Ambrose as with Cicero, the sage functions to give clarity about the good life and serves as an icon for how one should live.

In the next two sections, I will suggest that the two examples that Augustine uses to critique Academic skepticism parallel the two uses of the sage just described and that these examples undermine the Academic claims to a superior philosophical way of life.

The Sage and Error

Augustine critiques a particular formal component of Academic happy life, that of the sage's freedom from error. At the end of Book I, following a spirited debate between Licentius, defender of skepticism, and Trygetius, his opposition, Augustine asks, "where did the Academics, whose opinion you're defending, locate their citadel if not in the definition of error?"[49] The question comes on the heels of an ingenious reply by Licentius to Trygetius. Trygetius offers several strong arguments against skepticism, chief among them that the skeptical wise man, lacking knowledge, will lack perfection, an attribute which both participants agree the sage has. After a night's rest, Licentius is only able to continue defending Academic skepticism by recalling their definition of error

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[45] *De Jacob,* 1.7.27.

[46] *Ibid.,* 1.7.27.

[47] *Ibid.,* 1.7.31.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] *"Ubi enim arcem locauerunt Academici, quorum tueris sententiam, nisi in erroris definitione?" (Contra Academicos* 1.9.24).

as the approval of the false instead of the true.[50] The skeptic remains free of error, and is thus perfect, not because he has knowledge but because he never wrongly assents to a falsehood.

It is here that Trygetius should have attacked Licentius, but since he does not, Augustine fills the breach later in the debate with a story that illustrates how one can err not only be assenting to what is false but also by refusing to assent to what is true. Augustine describes two travelers, both seeking to arrive at the same destination. The first assents to the opinion of some shepherd and thus acts unwisely by Academic standards. He is like the Stoic dogmatist, easily swayed by the first account he hears and erring because he believes advice that could prove to be wrong. Instead of believing the shepherd, this traveler should have withheld his assent and taken the shepherd's advice as merely probable. This rash individual is contrasted with a second traveler, wise by Academic standards, who withholds assent from all who give directions. However, given his desire to reach the destination and realizing that some decision must be made, he eventually heeds the advice of a persuasive trickster, accepting the man's directions as probable while judiciously withholding assent. Ironically, the first traveler who acts unwisely (by Academic standards) arrives safely at his desired destination, while the second, though he acted "wisely," does not.

Augustine emphasizes two facets of the story. First, the skeptics may be right that the wise man cannot err, but they are wrong about what it means to be in error, for "not only does he who follow a false path err, but also he who doesn't follow the true one." [51]

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[50] *Contra Academicos* 1.4.11. See also *Academica* 2.20.66.

[51] "*Non solum enim puto eum errare, qui falsam uiam sequitur, sed etiam eum, qui veram non sequitur"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.15.34).

In the example, the Academic traveler never arrives at his desired end, nor does he follow the path that would have led him to it. The conclusion is problematic for the Academics. The Academic clearly errs in some sense because he does not arrive at his desired location. Further, the one who assents too quickly, and is thus in error, is the only one who reaches the goal safely.

Though he tells his readers that many other examples came to his mind in the course of mulling over the Academics' definition of error,[52] Augustine restricts his discussion to that of not assenting to the right directions. Perhaps the most apt application of the difficulty that Augustine's revised definition of error poses for the Academics can be found in Cicero's *Academica.* There, concerning the good life, Cicero writes "since the order structuring one's whole life is implied by the definition of the highest good, a disagreement about that is a disagreement about the order structuring one's whole life."[53] It is all important to find what the ethical end of life is because, as Cicero himself admits, our life will be wrongly structured until we do find it. Cicero offers the various options for the ultimate end: virtue, pleasure, honor, or some combination of these. Cicero uses the importance of the decision to stress the need for caution in assenting to these possible goals of life. Yet not assenting to the right end, as Augustine's example shows, would be equally disastrous since one of these ends dictates how one should order one's life.

The method of Augustine's critique resembles the Academic critique of the Stoic. Both examine the accepted formal components of their opponent's conceptual sage and question the coherency of that conception. Augustine is able to show how the Academic

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Acad.* 2.43.134.

description of error makes possible a sage whose life is not ordered properly according to the highest good while at the same time is considered wise. In other words, the Academic sage can be wise (because he has committed no intellectual errors) and foolish (because his life is ordered wrongly) simultaneously.[54] The argument undermines the Academic claim that their school best helps one avoid error. Because an error can be made by not assenting to what is true, their school promotes error systematically.

As with his first critique of despair, Augustine's critique is directed primarily at the skepticism of the Academicians. According to John Heil, Augustine's main argument is that skepticism denies setting an ethical end while necessarily offering such an end. [55] But Heil wrongly attributes to the Academics the goal of tranquility, for it is wisdom rather than Pyrrhonic *ataraxia* that is the main end for Cicero. Further, it is not clear that Augustine's argument works against Pyrrhonic skeptics since they insist that they are skeptical even of their skepticism and therefore technically do not assent even to the goal of tranquility. Yet against the Academic form of skepticism, the argument has purchase because the skeptics, especially Cicero, talk as if there is a truth of the matter, even though it remains beyond the mind's ability to reach it.

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[54] While potentially anachronistic to read into Augustine's critique, one helpful way of characterizing the problem with skeptical wisdom is that it focuses too much on the faculty of the intellect and not enough on the truth that makes a person wise. The skeptic's wisdom is found in his accurate perception of what he is and is not certain about. He is certain about nothing and uncertain about everything. He is not wise because he has knowledge but only because has something like an understanding of the uncertainty of all fields of knowledge. The language of faculties can be helpful here. For the skeptics, in the best case, the focus of wisdom is upon the faculty of the mind as a steel trap able to assess the adequacy of any theoretical claim. On this account, the faculty of the intellect can still be perfected absent any acquisition of knowledge since the perfected mind is the one adept at spotting faulty logic and inadequate argumentation. Yet, as Augustine's example of the travelers was meant to show, wisdom involves more than mere avoidance of error.

[55] Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism: The *Contra Academicos*," 104.

The Sage and Probable

One might suppose Augustine's first analogy to be easily refutable, for the Academic skeptics could rely on the notion of the probable as a rejoinder to this critique. Perhaps wisdom, as a proposed Academic response, is composed of a set of probable beliefs arrived at by a rational procedure of argument about what is best. These beliefs (which might merely be probable) are sufficient to guide one's life, so the response goes. Cicero's claims about the skeptical approach to life appear to be saved. The skeptics can pursue what is most probable, not bound to the doctrine of any school; in the pursuit, they among all philosophers will be most likely to live according to the truth.

Augustine's second example is capable of addressing this potential Academic response. He begins by observing a distinction between sin and error: "For to be sure, perhaps not everyone who errs sins: still, it must be granted that everyone who sins is either in error or something worse."[56] Augustine is building on his new sense of the word "error." If following the Academic sage's example can justify sin, then it cannot help one avoid error in this new extended sense.

The example of a young man committing adultery sufficiently makes Augustine's case. Augustine imagines a young man who hears an explication from an Academic philosopher concerning how one should live a good life. He hears that

> it is disgraceful to err and consequently we should not give our consent to anything. Yet, nevertheless, when someone does what seems to him to be probable, he is neither remiss nor in error. Let him only remember that he

[56] "*Certe enim non fortasse omnis, qui errat, peccat, omnis tamen, qui peccat, aut errare conceditur aut aliquid peius"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.16.35).

should not approve as true whatever comes to him from either the mind or the senses.[57]

By focusing on the follower, Augustine critiques the adequacy of the exemplar nature that the notion of the sage is meant to have. Following Talbert's suggestion, this iconic nature of a sage need not employ an actual historical person; a description of the sage can sufficiently act as a guide. According to Cicero, that by which the Academic sage orders his life is by what seems probably true.[58] This young man follows the Academic sage's way of life, restricting his own assent from any impression while allowing his actions to be guided by what appears probable to him. The young man, Augustine then supposes, may deem it probable that committing adultery is good, and, as long as this adolescent does not assent to the action as good, he remains blameless by Academic standards.

Augustine is not saying that every Academic follower would make such an error. The problem is the inadequacy of the Academic sage to serve as a verbal icon. To underscore this educational limitation, Augustine directs his attack against Cicero himself: "It is you, you, whose advice I am seeking Marcus Tully: We are considering the morals and lives of the young, the education and fostering of which all of your writings have kept careful watch over."[59] The problem, as Augustine immediately notes, is that Cicero's own opinion should not serve as a final arbiter for an Academic follow; he can

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[57] "*sed tamen, cum agit quisque, quod ei uidetur probabile, nec cessat nec errat, illud tantum meminerit, quidquid occurrit uel animo uel sensibus, non pro uero esse approbandum"*(*Contra Academicos* 3.16.35). That this young man merely "hears" the Academic philosopher but does not perceive what they are saying is important.

[58] This reading is supported by Harald Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Skepticism*, 75. "Insofar as the figure of the sage is a normative ideal, it follows that Carneades thinks we should form fallible opinions in accordance with properly tested, convincing impressions. If the sage acts this way, then it is reasonable for all of us to do the same."

[59] *"Te, te consulo, Marce Tulli; de adulescentium moribus vitaque tractamus, cui educandae atque instituendae omnes illae litterae tuae uigilauerunt"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.26.36).

merely state that it does not appear probable to him (Cicero) that committing adultery is part of the good life.[60] But, what is probable is relative to each person's perspective.

Augustine's argument relies upon a well-accepted proposal in ancient philosophy that what motivates our action is what appears good, but that the appearance of what is good and what is good do not necessarily align.[61] Augustine's later description of such sins as *flagitium* (crimes) is instructive. While *flagitium* can have a general usage referring to crimes, authors such as Cicero would also use it to describe a crime done when overwhelmed by passion.[62] Enflamed passion clouds this young man's reason, making adultery appear to be the probable best way to live one's life. Other atrocities as homicides, parricides, and sacrileges are later noted as actions that can be justified by Academic probabilism. Yet such actions are moral transgressions, and so errors, of some sort. Augustine ends the section emphasizing the relativity inherent in the Academic account:

> But the following is a capital offense, the following is terrifying, the following is to be dreaded by every good man: that if this reasoning of theirs is probable, each man may engage in every wrongdoing every time it seems probable to him that it ought to be done, as long as he assents to nothing as if it were true; and he may do this not only without the blame incurred by sin but even without the blame incurred by reason.[63]

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[60] "What else are you going to say other than that it is not probable to you that the young man should do this? But it is probable to him!" (*Quid aliud dicturus es quam non tibi esse probabile, ut id faciat adulescens?*) (*Contra Academicos* 3.16.35).

[61] See specially Plato's *Meno.*

[62] Cf. *In Verres* 2.4.32 and 2.5.10.

[63] "*Illud est capitale, illud formidolosum, illud optimo cuique metuendum, quod nefas omne, si haec ratio probabilis erit -- cum probabile cuiquam uisum fuerit esse faciendum, tantum nulli quasi uero assentiatur—non solum sine sceleris sed etiam sine erroris vituperatione committat"*(*Contra Academicos* 3.16.36). There is a fascinating parallel between this critique and one found in the *Confessions*. In book I Augustine critiques the poetry of Homer, specifically denouncing its portrayal of a wicked god. Augustine first cites Cicero's critique of the Greek poet, then offers his own: "Cicero, a man trained in their own school, protests: 'Homer invented these stories, ascribing things human to the gods: would that he had

The Academic sage fails as an adequate exemplar by which others can guide their lives because the Academic follower cannot allow any philosopher, even such leaders as Cicero, to serve as a final authority. While an Academic philosopher can offer his own opinion, his opinion offers no definitive guidance. Augustine's critique emphasizes an inherent difficulty with the Academic encouragement to pursue the truth wherever it may be found. The same freedom that liberates the Academic from dogmatism also generates a relativism in which *any* way of life can be justified as probably true, a relativism which Cicero himself opposes.

As with the previous examples, Augustine's use of an imaginary adulterer best makes sense as an argument against Academic skepticism. The Pyrrhonists insist that the laws and customs of our culture should be among the appearances by which we are passively guided. Their skepticism is not open to the same kind of subjectivism that Augustine thinks Academic skepticism can justify. The tragic nature of the Academic way of life becomes manifest here. The earnest Academic follower is deprived of a guide for his actions except his own sense of what seems probably true. Because there is a truth by which he should order his life, he forever remains unsure if that which seems probably true to him is true.

One potential objection to Augustine's critique is that the Academic skeptical follower is not encouraged to follow what is probable to him, but what is actually probable. What is actually probable, in this response, might be certain conclusions that

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brought down things divine to us.' It would have been even truer to say that Homer invited them, attributing divinity to the vilest of men, with the result that crimes (*flagitia*) are held not to be crimes (*flagitia*), and those who do commit them are regarded as acting not like abandoned men but like gods from Olympus." *Confessiones* 1.16.25. (Translation from Frank Sheed). The passage nicely expresses the critique here in *Contra Academicos*. The icon of the sage enables a follower to commit *flagitia* just as the portrayal of the Greek gods might encourage *flagitia*.

the diverse schools of philosophy have agreed upon. There are several responses to this objection. First, Augustine's example does not intend to show that everyone would make the mistake of the young adulterer if Academic skepticism became the new standard. He is showing a plausible abuse of following what is probable by someone with disordered desires. Without reason in control, these disordered souls may misunderstand the nuances of Academic probablism. The skepticism of Cicero is pedagogically deficient on this account. Second, Augustine could draw upon several arguments from the *Academica* to combat the obejection. For instance, in the last portion of the *Lucullus*, Cicero lists the diverse opinions from the history of philosophy about issues in natural philosophy, ethics, and logic. In other words, there is little consenses about major issues in the history of philosophy so each school presents a different account of what they took to be actually probable. Another argument from the *Academica* that Augustine could draw upon regards the necessity of being wise to know who is wise. Cicero imagines a dogmatist saying that he is merely following one wiser than himself and so he can be assured that he is rightly pursuing wisdom. But, Cicero observes, to accurately choose the best leader to follow, one must be a sage. Applied to the objection in discussion, to know what view is actually probable one must have a degree of philosophical ability that many do not have. Absent the ability to follow those who can rightly direct him to what is actually probable, such a follower would rely upon what seems probable. And Augustine's imagined scenario could then arise.

Conclusion

Augustine thoroughly addresses the Academic claims to philosophical superiority. That superiority, grounded in their doctrine of unattainable truth, ideally inculcates

humility, delivers one from error, and encourages the pursuit of truth among all opinions. But, the very doctrine meant to offer such a philosophically advantageous way of life can lead to a way of life catastrophic in each of these areas. Instead of humility, it causes despair; instead of a freedom from error, it promotes a definition of error that is erroneous; and instead of providing the grounds on which one can pursue the truth, it provides a rationale for justifying any way of life, no matter how absurd or immoral.

Augustine does not believe that the Academics are unaware of the implications of their views; on the contrary, he thinks that they are all too aware of them. A cursory reading of the Academics can indeed produce the advantageous way of life, but deeper reflection upon the implications of their insistence to affirm simultaneously a need to pursue the truth and a denial that such truth can be obtained shows the complications of the position.

A temptation arises for those in the eudaemonist tradition to glean from Augustine's critique against the Academic way of life a Platonic remedy to these problems. David Mosher, for instance, supposes that Augustine clearly has in mind a Platonic sage, probably Plotinus in particular.[64] The suggestion has some merit given Augustine's high praise of Plotinus as Plato reborn. Further, the Platonist has the resources to successfully evade the problems of the Academic way of life. Neoplatonism affirms that the life of wisdom is possible, that one errs both by assenting to what is false and not assenting to what is true, and that certain knowledge of the highest principle is necessary to live a virtuous life. However, Augustine's first story of the travelers suggests an alternative sage to Plotinus that better accords with other portions of the dialogue.

[64] David Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," 107.

In that story, it will be recalled, Augustine imagines two travelers seeking directions to a certain destination. The first rash traveler assents to a *rusticus*, a shepherd who directs him rightly. The second traveler, wanting to be Academically wise, refuses to follow these directions, supposing that directions from such a commoner are probably not true. Instead, he follows the directions of a trickster, one whose urbanity convinces him. The description of the two guides is highly suggestive. The *rusticus*, as Augustine J. Curley suggests, probably alludes either to Christ Himself or possibly a bishop or priest who, like the *rusticus*, may appear ignorant though is a reliable guide.[65] Just as Christ and His disciples were common peasants like the *rusticus*, they too can direct one to the right destination. Curley observes a further importance to Augustine's description of the man who followed the *rusticus* and found his way safely. This man, Augustine writes, "has already been refreshing himself in the place to which they were headed."[66] The word used for refreshing (from *refection*) has clear allusions to the Eucharist, the *panis refectionis* which Ambrose speaks of in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke.[67]

Augustine goes on to contrast the *rusticus* with the trickster (*samardocus*), who is described as elegant and *urbanus*. *Urbanus*, it will be remembered, is part of Cicero's definition of irony. The deceptive interpretation of irony fits this man, for while his looks suggest one thing, his thoughts suggest another. He appears trustworthy, but following his directions leads the traveler down the wrong path. Like the trickster, the Academics

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[65] Augustine J. Curley, "Augustine the Christian and Neo-Platonist at Milan." Presented at an unnamed conference.

[66] *Contra Academicos* 3.15.34.

[67] Ambrose, *Gospel of Luke* 7.11.88, cited by Curley, "Augustine the Christian and Neo-Platonist at Milan."

appear trustworthy. Yet, like the trickster, their words are deceptive. What they say leads away from the ultimate end instead of towards it.

As he finishes the story, Augustine notes how he "was now more vigilant around their (the Academics') words, and I began to consider the actions themselves (*ipsa facta*) of men and their mores."[68] The Academics' words and the way they live come apart. Their deeds may encourage the pursuit of wisdom, but their words cause nothing but despair. Towards the end of the dialogue the words and deeds of another are mentioned. There, the Divine Understanding comes "all the way into the human body itself, so that roused up by not only His Precepts but His deeds (*factis*), souls could return to their very selves and even gaze upon their homeland without the bickering of disputations."[69] Unlike the Academic philosophers, whose words lead one astray, Christ's words and deeds are united, rightly pointing to our true destination.

The contrast suggests that Christ, not Plotinus, is the ideal exemplar by which we can model our lives.[70] Following His life cannot lead to the disastrous implications which can happen when one follows the Academic sage. Christ's inner and outer lives do not come apart. The difference between Christ and the Academic sage offers a fitting

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[68] "*Hinc iam aduersum ista verba vigilantior ipsa facta hominum et mores considerare coepi"*(*Contra Academicos* 3.15.34).

[69] "*ad ipsum corpus humanum declinaret atque summitteret, cuius non solum praeceptis sed etiam factis excitatae animae redire in semet ipsas et recipere patriam etiam sine disputationum concertatione potuissent"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.19.42).

[70] So what do we do with Augustine's praise of Plato and Plotinus? David Sedley, in his article "Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World," points out that it was common to have a primary authority with other sages bearing a secondary authority status. For instance, the Platonists still revered Socrates and Pythagoras, while primarily adhering to Plato. Similarly, Augustine at this stage is primarily a follower of Christ, though he still considered Plato and Plotinus (and probably Cicero) as secondary authorities. In *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, ed. Miriam T. Griffin & Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1989).

image for the way that Augustine will change his own text to address the deficiencies that he found with the Academic text.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dialogue and Irony: The Effects of Authority and Reason on Augustine's Writing

Augustine's modifications to the philosophical dialogue and pedagogical text represent his positive contribution to philosophical writing. My discussion in this chapter is restricted to the extent to which each author, Cicero or Augustine, hides his opinion, the manner in which Augustine corrects erroneous opinions, and how Augustine's text—as an epistemology in a philosophical pedagogy—overcomes the educational deficiencies latent in the skepticism of the *Academica*. The theses of Chapter Five and Six follows from the thread that connects each section: the relevant differences between Augustine's and Cicero's use of a philosophical text, both as a dialogue and as an epistemology in a pedagogy, stems from Augustine's affirmation of both reason and authority as appropriate means for pursuing wisdom. This affirmation leads to: (a) Augustine's rejection of an esoteric manner of hiding his opinion; (b) his use of both philosophical and theological means to overcome hindrances to the pursuit of wisdom; and (c) an epistemology that avoids the arrogance of the dogmatists and the despair of the skeptics.

An examination of Augustine's use of the dialogue contributes to early Augustinian studies in two ways. First such an examination underscores the importance of Augustine's theory of esotericism for understanding certain features of the dialogue. By passing over this aspect of the dialogue, interpreters tend to neglect Augustine's restrained, yet important, changes to ancient forms of philosophical writing. Following

the philosophical tradition, Augustine offers a multi-tiered dialogue; distinct from Cicero, the two levels in Augustine's work are not incongruous.[1]

Second, a focus upon the dialogue form makes apparent Augustine's use of philosophical and theological irony. Though some authors mention Augustine's use of irony, such analyses are often restricted to observations about rhetorical devices used by the recent convert.[2] I do not intend to argue that he uses irony in the variety of sophisticated ways found in Plato's dialogues; these early dialogues of Augustine do, however, more closely resemble the elusive and zetetic nature of the Greek dialogues than the more didactic ones of later writers like Anselm.

Reason and Authority

Cicero took pride in the Academic rejection of authority that purportedly distinguishes the Academics as the only true philosophers. Augustine accepts Cicero's description of the philosopher as one who seeks wisdom and bases all understanding on reason alone. Evidence of his approval of the definition is found in his refusal to call any Christian a philosopher with the one exception being Monica. In this scene, found in the *De ordine*, Augustine provides the narrative comment that his mother chastised him for

[1] For exceptions see Frederick Crosson, "Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine's Confessions," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth Mathews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Michael P. Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues." *Revue des Études Augustiennes* 45 (1999): 51-77; Augustine J. Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism: A Study of Contra Academicos* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

[2] While some authors mention Augustine's irony, little work has been done on his pedagogical use of irony. Evidence of insufficient attention to Augustinian irony is found in a lack of an entry on irony in the recent *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). For a helpful exception, see C. Jan Swearingen, *Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Swearingen rightly observes that Augustine intentionally avoids the deceptive aspects of some forms of irony.

this appellation, saying that she had never heard him lie so badly.[3] The comment is ironical. Monica is a lover of wisdom, but she is no philosopher in the tradition of Socrates and Cicero, lacking their intellectual perspicuity.[4]

Augustine shares with Cicero a desire for and rational pursuit of wisdom, but he differs from the Academics most dramatically in his double acceptance of reason and authority in that pursuit. No one now doubts that both Christian authority and reason play a central role for Augustine in these early dialogues,[5] though the exact relationship of reason and authority in the early dialogues remains controversial.[6] The dispute lingers regarding the extent to which Augustine thought that one could understand the truths of

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[3] After calling her his teacher, Augustine observes his mother saying "agreeably and devotedly that never had I lied so much" (*De ordine* 1.11.33).

[4] See for instance Augustine's acknowledgement that his mother may not have interest in the liberal arts program outlined in the *De ordine*: "If perhaps you disdain them (the liberal art disciplines) completely, I advise you—insofar as I dare as your son and insofar as you permit—to guard firmly and cautiously, that faith of yours which you have seized through the venerable mysteries and to remain henceforth in this life and with these mores, consistently and vigilantly" (*De ordine* 2.16.46).

[5] Since Pierre Courcelle's *Recherches sur Les Confessions de Saint Augustin* in 1950, authors no longer suspect that Augustine's conversion was to Neoplatonism and that he held Christianity's emphasis upon authority in contempt. For representative studies on reason and authority in Augustine see, R. Holte, *Beatitude et Sagesse* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1962) 303-328; J. J. O'Meara, "Saint Augustine's View of Authority and Reason in A. D. 386," *Irish Theological Quarterly,* 18 (1951): 338-346; R. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory Of Man, A.D.* 386-391 (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press, 1968), 227-257; Oliver du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en le Trinite selon saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1966), 123 ff.; Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gareth B. Mathews, *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* (Ithaca: Corenell University Press, 1992); Frederick Van Fleteren "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 1973 (4): 29-73; "Augustine and Philosophy," *Augustinian Studies*, 2010, 41 (1): 255-274; John Rist, "Faith and Reason" in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* ed. Eleanore Stump and Norman Kretzman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26-39. Menn offers the most interesting support for Augustine's clear adherence to Christianity by the time of Cassiciacum. Augustine never pursued becoming a philosophical Platonist. Because of the decree by Marcus Aurelius in A. D.173 there were philosophical schools across the empire. Had Augustine been converted to Platonism, one would expect to find an account of his journey to one of these schools.

[6] The issue is initially complicated when one observes the various uses of reason (*ratio*) in these dialogues. Frederick Van Fleteren notes at least six different uses of *ratio*: (1) rational understanding - *Contra Academicos* III.19.42; 3.20.43;*De ordine* 2.5.16;2.9.26; (2) the Holy Spirit - *De ordine* 2.9.26, maybe *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42; (3) principles present in the universe - *De ordine* 2.11.30; (4) hypostasized reason - *De ordine* 2.19.50; (5) a human faculty - *De ordine* 2.11.30; 2.18.48; (6) a gaze of the mind - *Sol*. 1.6.12-1.7.14. Van Fleteren, "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine."

wisdom in this life unaided by authority.[7] Nevertheless, the authority of Christ and reason are not necessarily enemies; rather, reason naturally complements those beliefs based upon Christ's authority. In these early dialogues Augustine offers a detailed examination of the relationship of reason and authority.[8] In the *De ordine*, he distinguishes their role in education: "In order to learn, we are likewise led by necessity in a twofold manner: by authority and by reason. Authority is first according to time; reason, according to the reality."[9] Both the truths of faith and philosophical reason aim at knowledge of God and the soul.[10] While Augustine agrees with ancient philosophical schools that wisdom is necessary for happiness—and he especially agrees with the Platonists that this wisdom culminates in the vision of God (or the Good)—he differs by allowing the "hearing" about these truths as sufficient for eventual happiness. Seeing the truth is a metaphor for direct understanding of some truth while hearing the truth refers to a dependence upon some authority. For most classical philosophical schools, only those

[7] Justification that Augustine at this time thought one could attain wisdom without knowledge of the Incarnation is found both in his high admiration for philosophical figures as Plato and Plotinus and in the references to the few that philosophy sets free (*De beata vita*, 1.1; *De ordine*, 1.11.32). Both Oliver Du Roy and John O'Meara argue for this position. Du Roy's interpretation has recently been contested by Chad Gerber, *The Spirit of Augustine's Early Theology*, (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012). Figures such as John J. O'Meara and Robert O'Connell who openly question the orthodoxy of early Augustine's doctrine do not deny that Augustine was willing to cede to the authority of Christ by 386 A. D. See O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory Of Man, A.D.* 386-391 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) and O'Meara, "Saint Augustine's View of Authority and Reason in A. D. 386."

[8] Given the constraints of the chapter, I cannot adequately examine Augustine's entire account of reason and authority as presented in *De ordine.* One aspect of the discussion neglected is his account of the order of life. While Augustine does say that one pursues education by reason and authority, his account of education presupposes a way of life which all are meant to pursue.

[9] *De ordine* 2.9.26. To repeat, in contrast to some authors, Augustine is not eliminating the distinction between the few and the many, nor degrading reason, for "the authority of good men seems to be more salubrious for the ignorant multitude and reason certainly seems more fitting for the educated."

[10] *Soliloquia* 1.2.7. A later sermon nicely captures the shared goal of philosophy and Christianity: "In common all philosophers strove by dedication, investigation, discussion, by their way of life to lay hold of the blessed life. This was their one reason for philosophizing; but I rather think the philosophers have this in common with us" (*Sermon* 150.4).

who see the truths of wisdom, those few elite philosophers, have the chance to become happy.[11] Augustine holds thatnthe way to wisdom, though still narrow, need not be restricted to these intellectuals.

Depending upon the noncontroversial thesis that Augustine advocates the pursuit of wisdom by authority as well as by reason, I argue that this dual affirmation influences his writing. In the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine directly relates divine authority to the person of Christ, which entails not only the life of Jesus Christ,[12] but also the authority of Scripture[13] and the Church.[14] To help frame that analysis, the following issues will be examined: first, why Augustine accepts authority in a way that Cicero clearly avers; second, why his acceptance of authority does not diminish the importance that he places upon reason; and finally, why we should understand Augustine's use of "philosophy" to refer to a rational understanding of truth.

Why does Augustine reject the Academic insistence that one should refuse to rely upon any authority in the pursuit of wisdom? If we take the *Confessiones* as a reliable guide, one reason he accepts authority stems from his realization of the extent to which

[11] For an excellent discussion of the distinction between Augustine and his philosophical predecessors see Brian Dobell, *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion: The Journey from Platonism to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41. The second half of Dobell's work is quite helpful, though the first half, which argues that Augustine fully adhered to the Photinian heresy until the mid-390's, is not as well substantiated. See Thomas William's excellent review of the book: http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24710-augustine-s-intellectual-conversion-the-journey-from-platonism-to-christianity/ (accessed July 1, 2011).

[12] *Contra Academicos,* 3.19.42.

[13] *Ibid.,* 2.2.5.

[14] I take Augustine's references to the "mysteries" handed down as a reference to the Church's teaching in the liturgy and the Church's authority of rightly interpreting Scripture. See *Contra Academicos* 1.1.1 *De beata vita,* 1.4; *De ordine,* 2.5.15, 2.6.16, 2.9.27, 2.17.46.

we rely upon the testimony of others for much of our knowledge.[15] Our knowledge of basic historical facts depends almost entirely upon the acceptance of other people's testimony. He also expresses discontent with the coherency and consistency of those groups, such as the Manicheans, who are adamant about an exclusive reliance upon reason.[16] The Manicheans' rationalism leads them to make "impossible promises of certain knowledge," while the Academics' insistence upon reason alone leads to disastrous moral and political repercussions. The Catholic Church's trust in authority and reason, for Augustine, offers the most internally coherent position and the position most consistent with daily experience.[17]

Authors like Michael Foley, Carol Harrison, and Ragnar Holte suggest a deeper theological truth is undergirding Augustine's rejection of Academic rationalism: the Incarnation, who is Wisdom.[18] In an often quoted passage at the end of the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine introduces the God-become-man as a change that upsets philosophy's claim to be the only means to wisdom.[19] The passage is worth quoting in full:

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[15] See *Confessiones* 1.6.8, as well as *De utilitate credendi* 25.

[16] The Manicheans, for example, could not reconcile their beliefs with basic astronomical facts (see *Confessiones* 5.7.12).

[17] See *Confessiones* 6.5.7. "From this time on I found myself preferring the Catholic doctrine, realizing that it acted more modestly and honestly in requiring things to be believed which could not be proved—whether they were in themselves provable though not by this or that person, or were not provable at all—than the Manichees who derided credulity and made impossible promises of certain knowledge, and then called upon men to believe so many utterly fabulous and absurd things because they could not be demonstrated."

[18] Michael Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues"; Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000); Ragnar Holte, *Beatitude et Sagesse*.

[19] Robert O'Connell, points to a number of prefigurements of the Incarnation throughout the dialogue: "The Visage of Philosophy at Cassiciacum." *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 65-76.

> For this philosophy is not the philosophy of this world that our sacred [teachings] most rightly detest but of the other, intelligible world to which that most subtle Reason would never call back *souls* blinded by the multiform darkness of error and smeared by the deepest filth from the body had not the Supreme God, out of a certain clemency for people, descended and lowered the authority of Divine Understanding all the way into the human body itself, so that having been roused up by not only His precepts but His deeds, *souls* could return to their very selves and even gaze upon their homeland without the bickering of disputations.[20]

The Divine Understanding descending into a human body clearly refers to the Incarnation, and as Understanding itself, Christ has authority unlike other sages. His authority is recognized by his precepts and his deeds, and both of these lead others to the "homeland" (*patria*), a word Augustine uses to refer to God in at least two other places in the dialogues.[21] The use of "disputations" in the passage is of interest given the association in the prologues to the *De beata vita* and the *De ordine* of *disputatio* with philosophical discussions.[22] That one can reach the homeland—who is God—without these philosophical disputations indicates that one can bypass the pursuit of wisdom by means of philosophy alone, an interpretation confirmed in *De ordine* [23] and represented in

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[20] "*Non enim est ista huius mundi philosophia, quam sacra nostra meritissime detestantur, sed alterius intellegibilis, cui animas multiformibus erroris tenebris caecatas et altissimis a corpore sordibus oblitas numquam ista ratio subtilissima revocaret, nisi summus deus populari quadam clementia diuini intellectus auctoritatem usque ad ipsum corpus humanum declinaret atque summitteret, cuius non solum praeceptis sed etiam factis excitatae animae redire in semet ipsas et recipere patriam etiam sine disputationum concertatione potuissent*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.19.42).

[21] *De beata vita* 1.2; *Sol,* 1.1.4.

[22] *De beata vita* 1.5. *De ordine*, 1.2.5; 1.7.20; 1.8.25.

[23] See especially the discussion in *De ordine*: 2.9.26: "However, those who are content with authority alone, who constantly apply themselves only to good *mores* and upright desires while either disdaining the excellent liberal disciplines or not having the capacity to be educated in them - I don't know how I can call them happy, at least while they are living among men. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that as soon as they leave this body behind, they are liberated with more or less difficulty depending on the degree to which they lived more or less well."

the person of Monica, one who clearly lacks the philosophical training of her son but whose ultimate happiness Augustine never questions.[24]

While those dependent upon authority lack a full understanding of the highest truths of God, they nevertheless have true beliefs by which they can order their lives rightly. He writes that "if they are either lazy or preoccupied with other business or already hardened to learning, let them provide themselves with the protection of faith, so that He who permits no one who rightly believes in Him through the mysteries to perish mar by this chain draw them to Himself and free them from these horrible and much entangled evils."[25] These mysteries, such as the triune nature of God and the dual nature of Christ in the Incarnation, help guide believers toward their right end and act as boundaries within which reason and philosophy can work. If reason leads one to some conclusion that differs from the authority of Christ, then some error was made in one's reasoning.[26]

One finds this boundary aspect of authority in the second prologue of the *Contra Academicos* where Augustine describes his first interaction with Platonic texts. After recounting the moving experience of reading the Platonists, he tells Romanianus how he checked their teachings against those of St. Paul.[27] For Augustine, the Christian faith complements philosophy. Augustine affirms this general approach at the end of *Contra*

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[24] *De ordine*, 2.17.45; 2.20.52.

[25] "*Si autem aut pigriores sunt aut aliis negotiis praeoccupati aut iam duri ad discendum, fidei sibi praesidia parent, quo illos vinculo ad sese trahat atque ab his horrendis et involutissimis malis liberet ille, qui neminem sibi per mysteria bene credentem perire permittit.*" *(De ordine*, 2.5.15).

[26] *Contra Academicos* 1.1.1 *De beata vita* 1.4; *De ordine* 2.5.15,2.6.16,2.9.27,2.17.46.

[27] *Contra Academicos*, 2.2.5; *De beata vita* 1.4.

Academicos, stating that he believes he will gain understanding by means of Platonism, though the authority of Christ constrains his philosophical endeavors.[28]

While reason must operate within the limits of certain Christian doctrine, Augustine still places a priority upon an understanding of the highest truths of wisdom. The argument of the *Contra Academicos* not only affirms the importance of authority in one's pursuit of wisdom but also confirms its limitation. The *De beata vita* makes this facet of the argument even clearer. The sage, the happy person whose appropriate desires are all satisfied, rightly desires truth, and if this desire is left unsatisfied, he cannot be happy. Reliance upon authority cannot satiate the desire for knowledge that humans *qua* rational animals naturally have. Thus, Augustine, while content that Christ's authority directs him to happiness, expresses dissatisfaction accepting the truths revealed therein while lacking an intellectual grasp of them. True happiness only occurs in the uninhibited vision of God, not in the assent to those truths absent understanding.[29]

Carol Harrions and Marianne Djuth, have recently questioned what Augustine means by "philosophy."[30] These authors argue that Augustine equates philosophy with Christianity, thus limiting any need for reason and fortifying the need to rely upon authority. Harrison's main support comes from a passage in the *Contra Academicos* where Augustine writes of "this philosophy" that he associates with the Incarnation and

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[28] *Contra Academicos* 3.20.43.

[29] Augustine also has an apologetic basis for continuing to pursue wisdom by means of reason. He continually interacts with classical philosophers on their terms, accepting some of their conclusions and rejecting others – skepticism included in this mix – based on philosophical reasons. Philosophy remains important because it confirms Christianity (insofar as it can) and rationally discredits the other options.

[30] *Contra Academicos* 1.1.4 (Augustine tells Romanianus he is giving him a taste of philosophy); 1.3.9 (Trygetius admitting the call to philosophy) 1.9.25 (Augustine writes that he is steering Romanianus to philosophy); 2.2.3 ("Approach philosophy with me"); 2.3.8 (But let us return to ourselves, Romanianus: let us, I say, philosophize.").

contrasts with a philosophy that "our sacred teachings most rightly detests." The context reveals, however, that "this philosophy" also refers to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle:

> there is, in my opinion, a single discipline of philosophy most true which—because there has been no dearth of extremely astute and alert men who have taught in their disputations that Aristotle and Plato harmonize with each other in such a way that to the ignorant and inattentive they seem to be in conflict has nevertheless been refined over many centuries and by many arguments.[31]

Aristotle and Plato's philosophy are, if not entirely consonant, at least allies against the reductive worldview of Stoicism. Materialism, he explains, not the use of reason in one's pursuit of God, is the detestable philosophy to be avoided.

Catherine Conybeare and Marianne Djuth argue that Augustine intentionally discredits a rational pursuit of God.[32] Conybeare summarizes her project as follows: "This book traces Augustine's gradual realization that if he was to commit himself fully to the Christian faith, he would have to begin to detach himself from the primacy of reason, or *ratio*."[33] She creatively supports her thesis by arguing that the *Soliloquia*, which consists of a prolonged discussion between Augustine and Reason, evinces Augustine's suspicions of reason. On her view, Augustine's willingness to interrogate reason betrays his mistrust of it.

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[31] "*Quod autem ad eruditionem doctrinamque attinet et mores quibus consulitur animae, quia non defuerunt acutissimi et sollertissimi uiri, qui docerent disputationibus suis Aristotelem ac Platonem ita sibi concinere, ut imperitis minusque attentis dissentire uideantur, multis quidem saeculis multisque contentionibus*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.19.42).

[32] Catherine Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Marianne Djuth, "Augustine, Monica, and the Love of Wisdom," *Augustinian Studies* 39.2 (2008): 237-52; "Philosophy in a Time of Exile: Vera Philosophia and the Incarnation," *Augustinian Studies* 38.1 (2007): 281-300.

[33] Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine,* 1.

Textual evidence does not support Conybeare and Djuth's interpretation of these dialogues.[34] Though Augustine later refers to Christianity as true philosophy, in these early works, philosophy is the effort to rationally understand the highest truths.[35] The liberal arts education outlined in *De ordine* culminates in the practice of philosophy and philosophy is associated with reason, not authority.[36] The soul yielded to philosophy "leads itself step by step to mores and to the best life, not by faith alone, but by the certainty of reason."[37] The skill necessary for this ascent is not just love, but dialectic, an art created and perfected by Plato.[38] Further confirmation for Augustine's affirmation of the good of reason is found in his continuation of the ancient philosophical distinction between the few and the many, defining the few as those who pursue wisdom by reason

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[34] For a review of Conybeare's work, see Charles Brittain review in, *Rhizai*, 2007 (1): 227-234.

[35] *Civitate dei*, 22.22; *Contra Julian,*. 4.72. Frederick Van Fleteren offers several helpful distinctions in his article "Augustine and Philosophy," *Augustinian Studies* 41:1 (2010) 255–274. He notes that Augustine consistently refers to philosophers (*philosophi*) as individuals who pursued God by reason alone. Philosophy (*philosophia*) can refer to the love of wisdom (*Contra Academicos* 2.7) and the pure philosophy of Plato and Aristotle (*Contra Academicos* 3.42) which can complement Christianity (*De ordine* 2.5.16.

[36] "Therefore, the *soul,* holding to this order and now given over to philosophy, first inspects its very self and, now that its education has persuaded it either that it itself is reason or that reason belongs to it, and that either there is nothing better and more powerful in reason than numbers or that reason is nothing other than number, it will speak to itself thus: 'I, by some interior and hidden motion of mine, can separate and connect the things that are to be learned, and this power of mine is called reason.'" (*Hunc igitur ordinem tenens anima iam philosophiae tradita primo se ipsam inspicit et, cui iam illa eruditio persuasit aut suam aut se ipsam esse rationem, in ratione autem aut nihil esse melius et potentius numeris aut nihil aliud quam numerum esse rationem, ita secum loquetur*.) (*De ordine*, 2.18.48).

[37]*De ordine* 2.19.50. Concerning Cassiciacum, Eugene Kevane writes, "This context continued to be philosophy as the way of life proper to educated intellectuals, a common life of a group of friends devoted to the love of wisdom, to the study of wisdom, to the search of knowledge and truth, dedicated to the actual acquisition of this abiding wisdom. And this is the happy life. To put this another way, it is a calm and peaceful life withdrawn from ordinary worldly pursuits and distractions, in which discussions of basic and burning questions form lively interludes in the times of private reading and study, and in the academically structured pattern of formal teaching and learning." From "Christian Philosophy: The Intellectual Side of Augustine's Conversion." *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986), 51.

[38] He presents dialectic as a skill of reason: "in it [dialectic], reason itself shows itself and reveals what it is, what it wants, what it can do. It knows how to know, it alone not only wants to produce knowers, but it also can." *De ordine* 2.13.38

alone.[39] Augustine does not rule out the possibility that a Christian disciple can be numbered among the elite (although he does not consider himself one of them).[40] Still, when Augustine states that "Philosophy promises reason but it barely frees a tiny few,"[41] he is distinguishing philosophy from Christianity.

Hiding Opinions

Like Cicero, Augustine begins his dialogues with a cover letter (the *Contra Academicos* has two cover letters), offers a similar setting of leisure for the discussion, and ends the dialogue with a lengthy oration. Like Cicero, Augustine uses the philosophical dialogue with both pedagogical and political intentions. Unlike Cicero, or at least unlike Augustine's understanding of Cicero, Augustine does not condone intentionally deceptive dissimulation.

To be sure, the claim is not that Augustine did not obscure his opinion at times in these dialogues. Alypius expresses concern about his friend's practice of concealment:

> "Your *bona fides* is needed," Alypius said, "For if we must fear that you're hiding something, I imagine that it will be difficult for me to be able to nab him from whom I learned these things (as everyone who knows me knows), especially since in

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[39] *Contra Academicos* 2.1.1, 2.2.6, 3.17.37; *De beata vita* 1.1; *De ordine,* 1.1.1, 2.5.16, 2.9.26, 2.1.30; *Soliloquia* 1.1.2, 1.1.4, 1.13.22.

[40] *De ordine* 1.5.13. "I implore you," I said, "I don't want you to degrade yourself so much or to extol me. For in philosophy I'm a boy and I don't very much care, when I ask questions, through whom He may answer me-He who accepts my daily complaining, of whose future seer I even believe you will some day be (nor perhaps is this 'some day' far off)."

[41] *De ordine* 2.5.16. While he develops his critiques against philosophers (vs. philosophy), inchoate forms of the critiques can be found here. First, philosophers do not adequately grasp the importance of authority in the pursuit of wisdom. Everyone is constrained by authority in some way (*De ordine* 2.9.26, *De trinitate* 4.16.21). Second, the philosophers are filled with pride and this pride is exhibited in their failure to take the Incarnation seriously (*De ordine* 2.9.27, *Confessiones* 7.20.26-27). Third, to obtain happiness, one must live rightly, but the power to live rightly cannot be found in oneself (*Sol*. 1.1.3; 1.14.26, *De civitate dei* 19.4). The philosophers, especially the Platonists, saw the end but failed to realize the means to that end.

> uncovering the truth you will be looking out for not so much a victory as your own design."[42]

The passage gives pause to anyone reading these dialogues. What Augustine says as a philosophical teacher should be weighed carefully.

For instance, Augustine alludes to knowledge of a better definition of "error" that could bring the argument against skepticism quickly to an end. At the end of Book I Augustine observes that the citadel of the Academic position is in this definition, though he does not proffer a revised account at this stage of the dialogue.[43] In fact, Augustine never offers a formal definition of error in the dialogue, simply elucidating ways in which one can err beyond merely assenting to what is false.

One also finds Augustine refusing to answer questions directly, a strategy humorously displayed in one interaction with Alypius. Alypius expresses curiosity to know whether Augustine is not only critiquing the Academics but also defending a view in opposition to Academic Skepticism. Augustine evades the question and avers that a prosecutor need not act as a defender of another view.[44] Alypius cross-examines his witness, repeating his inquiry: "Do you at least have something on which your opinion will stand firm?" [45] Augustine does not answer the question, and instead applauds Alypius for asking such an important question, confessing that he has spent some time

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[42] "*Bona fide tua opus est, inquit Alypius. nam si metuendum est, ne aliquid occultes, a me deprehendi posse difficile arbitror eum, a quo me ista didicisse nullus qui me novit ignorat, praesertim cum in prodendo vero non magis victoriae quam animo tuo consulturus sis."* (*Contra Academicos*, 2.4.10).

[43] *Ibid.,* 1.9.24.

[44] Alypius says, "*Proinde velim mihi exponas, bone accusator Academicorum, officium tuum, id est, in quorum defensione hos oppugnes. Metuo enim, ne Academicos refellens Academicum te probare veils*."(*Contra Academicos.,* 2.9.22).

[45] "*Et ille: saltem habesne tu quidquam, in quo sententia tua iam fundata constiterit?*" (*Contra Academicos* 2.9.22).

thinking about it. But the careful reader recognizes that Augustine does have a definite opinion about skepticism. He even admits that he does in the very first book: "the matter has been treated sufficiently for the business we have undertaken; and it could be finished off altogether after a few more words were it not for the fact that I'd like to exercise you and test your nerve and your dedication, about which I care very much."[46]

The quotation indicates one benefit that Augustine has found in hiding his opinion and by extension a benefit of the dialogue form. Like his Roman mentor, Augustine appreciates the pedagogical benefit of taciturnity. He withholds his opinion to discourage an undue reliance his students may have upon their teacher. A recurring theme of the dialogue is the need to exercise caution with any authority.[47] While Augustine hides his opinion at times for pedagogical reasons, his critique of the Academics and exposure of their rhetorical legerdemain indicates a reticence in imitating the manner and extent to which Cicero practices such concealment.

Three aspects of esotericism are important to review to contrast Augustine's writing with Cicero's. First is Frederick Crosson's description of esoteric writing as having "a level of meaning that is intended by the philosophical author to remain

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[46] "*Tractata enim res est pro suscepto negotio satis; quae post pauca omnino posset verba finiri, nisi exercere vos uellem neruosque vestros et studia, quae mihi magna cura est, explorare*"(*Contra Academicos* 1.9.25).

[47] Before the boys begin questioning each other, Augustine responds in the following way to Licentius' desire to first see what great men say about knowledge: "Don't look…especially in this villa, for something that is difficult to find anywhere on earth (great men). Rather, explain why what you have put forward has not been put forward rashly (as I believe to be the case) and for what reason it seems to you to be true. For when the very greatest of things are sought by little men, it often makes them great" (*Contra Academicos* 1.2.6). Reason, not great men, is to be their guide in the examination of skepticism. Ironically, Licentius immediately begins citing the authority of Carneades and Cicero to support his position. When Augustine's questioning becomes more intense, Licentius exclaims "What on earth!...Have I read the Academics, or have I been educated in the many disciplines as those with which you, who are well-instructed, are approaching me?" Licentius still wants to rely upon some authority, not upon his reasoning, to investigate the question. Such a desire motivates Augustine to cautiously withhold his own opinion before the boys thoroughly investigate the material on their own.

inaccessible to all but a relatively small number."[48] For the Academics, on Augustine's account, there were levels to their view: Platonism, shared and understood only by the philosophically initiated, and skepticism, shared with the masses. While authors wrote some texts exclusively for an inside group and other texts written for the masses, another form of writing had both an esoteric and exoteric dimension to it.[49] The dialogue form exemplifies the latter kind of esoteric writing, written with clues for attentive readers to follow in order to discover the esoteric dimension of the text. Augustine's belief that the *Academica* contained hints for the astute suggests that he considers it a work with such multi-level dimensions.[50]

The second aspect of Augustine's theory regards the relation of these two levels to each other. Academics deceptively hid their Platonism, engaging "in such endless and obstinate controversies, all in order to make it seem that a knowledge of the truth could not befall anyone."[51] They claimed that "nothing in philosophy can be perceived."[52] Augustine calls their method of hiding full of "sophistry or pertinacity or stubbornness."[53] In the *Civitate dei*, Augustine observes how Cicero hides his opinion

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[48] Crosson, "Esoteric versus Latent Teaching," 74.

[49] The dialogue form is presumably the best option for this method of esoteric writing, the option that Plato and Cicero opted for. What Plato and Cicero believed may not be what they have characters saying in their dialogue. What the characters say should not always be taken at face value given the prevalence of their use of irony. Those who are philosophically astute and persistent pick up on clues from the text and grasp the true teaching of the author.

[50] *Contra Academicos*, 3.18.40.

[51] "*Quid igitur placuit tantis uiris perpetuis et pertinacibus contentionibus agere, ne in quemquam cadere ueri scientia uideretur?*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.17.37.)

[52] *Ibid.,* 3.10.23.

[53] "*Si quam necesse est disciplina atque scientia sapientiae vacuum esse non posse sapientem tam eam necesse esset inuenire, dum quaeritur, omnis profecto Academicorum uel calumnia uel pertinacia vel peruicacia uel, ut ego interdum arbitror, congrua illi tempori ratio simul cum ipso tempore et cum ipsius Carneadis Ciceronisque corporibus sepulta foret.*" (*Contra Academicos* 2.1.1). Several passages from the

deceptively in *De natura deorum*. In that Ciceronian work, the academic spokesman, Cotta, presents numerous reasons to reject belief in the gods. But, as Augustine observes, "he [Cicero] did not say it in his own person; he knew that such an assertion would disturb people and incur odium. And so he represents Cotta arguing this point against the Stoics, in the book *De natura deorum.*"[54] But beyond hiding his opinion through the voice of Cotta, Cicero lies at the end of the dialogue where he sides with the Stoic, not the Academic representative. His deception is confirmed in the *De divinatione* where he more readily admits skepticism about the religious beliefs of Rome.[55] A second-century text quoted by Crosson captures the incongruity between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of some ancient philosophical texts: "Viewed from the outside, he seems to be one man, and from the inside another; so if you buy him, be sure to call the one exoteric and the other esoteric."[56]

Finally, Augustine thought that the Academics had two noble motivations for obscuring their philosophy: to protect the truth and to protect the *polis*. Concerning the former, Augustine writes, "our man Tully, who for as long as he lived could not stand to

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Academica sufficiently address a possible objection that Cicero does not claim to be a skeptic but only that skeptical conclusions follow from Stoic epistemology. In the preface to *Lucullus*, Cicero writes "The only difference between us and philosophers who think that they have knowledge is that they have no doubt that the views they defend are true, whereas we hold many views to be persuasive, i.e., ones that we can readily follow but scarcely approve" (*Academica* 2.3.8). As he begins his response to Lucullus' speech, Cicero writes that "since it is extremely vicious to assent to anything false or unknown, it is better to restrain all assent so the wise person doesn't go awry advancing rashly" (*Contra Academicos* 2.21.68). The Academic arguments do follow from Stoic assumptions, but Cicero presents the history of the Academics as if Arcesilaus agreed with Zeno about these assumptions (*Contra Academicos* 2.20.66-2.21.67). Passages as these support that claim that, if the Academics were Platonists, they hid their opinions deceptively. Cicero expresses no qualms in being characterized nor characterizing himself as a skeptic.

[54] *Civitate dei*, 8.4.

[55] See Philip Levine, "Cicero and the Literary Dialogue,"*The Classical Journal* , 53.4 (1958): 146-151.

[56] Lucian Bio, *Prasis* 2.26, trans. A. M. Harmon (New York: Mcmillian,1915).

have anything he loved undermined or contaminated, crushed whatever remained of him (Antiochus)."[57] Those who lack philosophical ability might parrot the teachings of Platonism without understanding; eventually, their lack of understanding could lead to the corruption of that teaching. By hiding the truth from those intellectually inferior, Cicero and the Academics helped keep Platonism from degenerating into some eclectic mass of opinions.

Augustine cites a political reason to hide the truth as well. Platonism contests the conventions of the city by rejecting the notions of the gods accepted by the masses in the Roman Empire. If Caesar is not a god, why would one obey his edicts? The truth of Platonism could prove to be politically dangerous. As noted in the passage above, rejection of the gods, which Platonism entails, could arouse suspicion. Augustine also suggests that the implications of Stoicism could be equally dangerous, for the materialism of Stoicism also undercuts the religion of the city.[58] The Academics, by insisting that nothing can be known, cast doubt upon Stoic materialism and hide their true Platonic views, helping keep in place the conventions of the city and protecting Platonism from corruption.[59]

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[57] *et omnes eius reliquias Tullius noster oppressit se vivo impatiens labefactari vel contaminari quidquid amauisset"* (*Contra Academicos* 3.18.41). The motivation of keeping Platonic doctrine pure is echoed in Augustine's Epistle 1 to Hermogenian: "For it seem to me that it had been quite appropriate to those times that, if anything pure flowed from the Platonic spring, it should wind through sandy and thorny thickets for the nourishment of very few human beings rather than that it should run through open country with cattle rushing in here and there, so that it could not be kept at all clear and pure."

[58] *Contra Academicos* 3.17.38

[59] *Contra Academicos* 3.17.38. In the *Civitate dei* Augustine admits how strange his accusations of esoteric writing and teaching are, but cites cases in which some Roman leaders communicated in this veiled way: "I would rightly be suspected of indulging in conjecture here, if Varro had not openly declared in another place, on the subject of religious rites, that there are many truths which it is not expedient for the general public to know, and further, many falsehoods which it is god for the people to believe true" (4.31). In 6.4-5, Augustine writes that Varro himself writes in a way that allows only the "intelligent reader" to deduce his true opinion.

The *Contra Academicos* displays two of the three aspects of Ciceronian esotericism but importantly differs concerning one. Like Cicero, Augustine offers a multi-layered way of writing, one that Frederick Crosson calls "latent teaching." This form of writing, found in the Church Fathers, mirrors their understanding of Scripture, particularly the relation of the Old to New Testament. The Old Testament contains at least two levels of meaning, a surface historical reading and a deeper reading that fully agrees with the truths made manifest in Christ.[60] In the New Testament one finds Christ offering parables to the masses but explaining them only to an inner group.[61] Crosson argues that Augustine wrote many of his works with at least two-levels, although he does not specifically cite *Contra Academicos* as one of these texts.

Ernest Fortin has conclusively proven that Augustine shares with Cicero the practice of prudently withholding some truths.[62] When discussing the hidden Platonism of the Academicians, Augustine writes that one sins grievously (*graviter peccat)* by too openly sharing some truths;[63] and in the *De ordine,* he reflects upon the need to be cautious concerning the examination of certain topics both to protect the truth and protect

[60] Like the *Academica*, whose outer level helped "weed out" a certain group of readers without harming them, Augustine observes how Scripture's outward appearance misdirected him. However, instead of the outer level weeding out the unphilosophical, it weeded out the prideful. The simplistic style of writing efficiently worked on the young prideful Augustine. *Confessiones* 3.5.9.

[61] Matt 13:10-11, Mark 4:10-13.

[62] See especially, "The Church Fathers and the Transmission of the Christian Message" and "The 'Rhetoric' of the Church Fathers" in *Ever Ancient, Ever New: Ruminations on the City, the Soul, and the Church*, ed. Michael P. Foley (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); "Augustine's *De quantitate animae*" in *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought*, ed. J. Brian Benestad, 61-77 (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996) 41-59.

[63] *Contra Academicos* 3.17.38.

the hearer of that truth.[64] Such questions as to how and when evil arose given God's omnipotence and goodness should only be pursued by those who have followed a liberal arts education.[65] All must believe that God is not the cause of evil but only some ever understand why this is so. There is an order that must be followed to examine the highest questions: "if one dares to rush into knowing these things blindly and without the order of the disciplines, he will become curious instead of studious, credulous instead of learned, incredulous instead of cautious."[66]

Despite writing a multi-layered text with an obscure inner level, Augustine differs in that the inner and outer levels of his writing do not oppose each other. Crosson writes, "Augustine himself certainly writes on two levels and does not simply hint that there is another (latent) level in some of his own works, but he articulates that latent level at some length."[67] The Academics did not worry about their inner and outer levels being discordant because the pursuit of wisdom is, for all intents and purposes, unavailable to the many. The outer meaning not only protects the Academics but throws the many off the scent from truths that would only do them harm. The Christian Gospels, on the other hand, differ from the philosopher's truths because they are meant for all. As Augustine writes at the end of the *Contra Academicos,* the Divine Understanding deigning to

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[64] *De ordine* 2.5.17.

[65] *De ordine* 2.17.46. In these works the different levels appear to be between an understanding of why some of the mysteries are true and the acceptance on the basis of Scripture that some things are true. In the later *De Doctrina Christiania* he makes the additional claim that "there are some things which with their full implications are not understood or are hardly understood, no matter how eloquently they are spoken…these things should never, or only rarely on account of some necessity, be set before a public audience" (4.9.23.).

[66] "*si tempus fuerit, post loquemur. Illud nunc a me accipiatis uolo, si quis temere ac sine ordine disciplinarum in harum rerum cognitionem audet inruere, pro studioso illum curiosum, pro doctor credulum, pro cauto incredulum fiery"* (*De ordine* 2.5.17).

[67] Crosson, "Esoteric versus Latent Teaching," 88.

become man for mankind's sake shows that the life of wisdom is no longer restricted to the philosophical elite. God's self-revelation changes the potential participants in the happy life of wisdom, thereby changing the obligations of truth's messengers. And, since the centerpiece of the Christian message concerns a historical event whose veracity can only be justified by authoritative witnesses, a practice of hiding one's views through deception could permanently damage the credibility of those who bear witness to this historical event.[68] So, even when Augustine hides his opinion, the manner in which he does differs from the Academics.[69]

In the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine keeps some of his opinions from his students but does not ultimately leave the students or reader in doubt about the incoherency of skepticism and its ethically disastrous way of life. Augustine's acceptance of Christianity does not allow him to leave such a hindrance to the life of wisdom as a means of weeding out the many. That is not to say that the difficulty of Augustine's text might encumber some from pursuing a philosophical understanding of wisdom. Philosophy is still for the few, though happiness is open to all without regard to their intellectual abilities and formation.

The inner and outer meanings of the *Contra Academicos* are the philosophical and theological means of rejecting skepticism, respectively. Both levels agree that skepticism

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[68] The importance of avoiding deception was underscored during fourth century by Porphyry's work *Against the Christians*. Porphyry realized that the account of Christ as God was dependent upon the testimony of the Apostles, and so to contest the conclusion, he contested the veracity of the testimony. See Robert Wilkens, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd ed. 2003).

[69] Foley, "Philosophical Roots of Cassiciacum," observes the importance of the references to the stenographers in the Cassiciacum dialogues. Unlike the Ciceronian Dialogues, which are at times intentional fabrications, the repeated references to the stenographers underscores Augustine's commitment to these dialogues being historical. Further evidence of Augustine's aversion to lying can be found in his two separate treatises against lying: *De mendacio* (395 and *Contra mendacium* (420).

should be rejected. For those capable of philosophical work, he offers logical and ethical refutations of skepticism. For those incapable, he offers reasons based on authority, chiefly divine authority, for overcoming the despair that skepticism can cause. This reading is borne out in the prologues. Augustine repeatedly calls Romanianus to philosophy, and Augustine's oration in Book Three offers an extended philosophical critique of universal skepticism.

However, at the end of the second prologue, Augustine's wording suggests that he does not assume Romanianus can have the degree of understanding needed to fully grasp the philosophical reasons for rejecting skepticism. He therefore appeals to an image, found later in the *Confessiones*, of hearing and seeing. "What if at least the voice of philosophy herself could be *heard,*" he asks, "even if her fair countenance can still not be *seen* by you?"[70] Augustine confirms that Romanianus might not "see" how this philosophical discourse refutes skepticism; nevertheless, Romanianus can still have probable knowledge that skepticism need not cause despair:

> For very often you were angry with the Academics: indeed, the less educated you were, the more serious your anger and the more willing [to become angry] on account of the fact that you were enticed by the love of truth. And so with your support I shall argue with Alypius and I shall easily persuade you of what I want, though it will still be only probable; for you will not see the truth itself unless you enter entirely into philosophy.[71]

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[70] "*quid, si saltem uox, si adhuc facies uideri a te non potest, ipsius philosophiae posset audiri?" (Contra Academicos* 2.3.7)

[71] "*Saepius enim suscensuisti Academicis eo quidem grauius, quo minus eruditus esses, eo libentius, quod ueritatis amore inliciebaris. Itaque iam cum Alypio te fautore confligam et tibi facile persuadebo quod uolo, probabiliter tamen; nam ipsum uerum non uidebis, nisi in philosophiam totus intraueris.*" (*Contra Academicos,* 2.3.8). Interestingly, skepticism never poses a problem for Monica. Upon hearing about Academic doctrine she exclaims that they are a bunch of *caducarii*, a colloquialism for epileptics. Augustine does not make it clear if her comment arises from a certainty which she has by faith or, also likely, whether her lack of formal education does not allow her to see the force of their argument.

Romanianus' probable knowledge may come partly from Augustine's authority. Though Romanianus was Augustine's elder, Augustine was Romanianus' educational mentor. But if Romanianus must depend upon an authority for overcoming skepticism, it must be divine authority: "Believe me, both of you, or rather believe Him who says 'seek and ye shall find,' that we must not despair of acquiring knowledge and that it will be more obvious than even those numbers."[72] Such probable knowledge is contrasted with the seeing that philosophy makes possible. At the same time, the hearing can suffice to help Romanianus not despair that the truth is unobtainable. So unlike the incompatible inner and outer levels of the Academics, the dimensions of Augustine's text form a united front against their challenge.

Augustinian Irony

A second function of the dialogue is to relieve others from deception. Augustine follows the spirit of the Academicians here and insists upon the importance of a rational defense of one's opinions as a means for avoiding error. He strives to help the boys become better dialecticians by encouraging them to dispute each other and by directly questioning each boy about issues.[73] But the manner in which he corrects opinions differs from the Academic mandate to withhold judgments from every impression. We saw how Cicero used the dialogue form of the *Academica* to teach various skeptical methods for contesting any claims to truth. The *Academica* helps correct the reader's opinion by showing the reader why he knows nothing.

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[72] "*Nam mihi credite, vel potius illi credite, qui ait: quaerite et invenietis, nec cognitionem desperandam esse et manifestiorem futuram, quam sunt illi numeri*" *(Contra Academicos* 2.3.9.).

[73] *Ibid.,* 1.3.7; 1.9.24; 2.7.16-17.

In contrast, Augustine uses the form of the dialogue to elicit the realization that one can have certainty. In the tradition of the dialogue form, Augustine seeks not only to give the reader new information, but to transform the reader. That transformation occurs upon the awareness that reality is not reducible to the corporeal.[74] Augustine does use irony to help the dialogues' readers come to a philosophical realization of the intelligible as well as sensible; he also uses irony to help them come to a theological understanding that the One who orders reality is personal and cares for individuals.

That Augustine offers both theological and philosophical irony to critique skepticism helps address a divide among commentators of the dialogue. Those in the "received interpretation" focus upon the philosophical components of Augustine's work, especially his analytic counter-examples to the skeptical thesis that we lack knowledge. Others, like Ragnar Holte, emphasize how Augustine helps readers see things from a theological point of view.[75] But, as the last section showed, one need not assume that Augustine uses only one strategy to overcome skepticism.

Philosophical Irony

Augustine thinks that Cicero is far too intelligent not to realize that the claims of skepticism are untenable. He helps the reader see that no one could reasonably be a consistent skeptic. Augustine puts his laughter to use as a means to awaken his reader. The playful mockery is a form of irony. We previously saw Charles Griswold's

[74] Of course there is a tension that must be addressed here. For, on Augustine's esoteric reading of Cicero, the Roman orator is trying to do the very thing that Augustine tries to do: lead readers to the Platonic insight about intelligible and sensible reality. There is a relevant difference between Augustine and Cicero. Augustine does not hide his opinion about this essential Platonic insight.

[75] See also Brian Harding; "Skepticism, Illumination, and Christianity in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 34(2) (2003): 197-212; Ryan Topping, "The Perils of Skepticism: The Moral and Educational Argument of *Contra Academicos*," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 49.3 (2009).

description of two reasons why an author might use irony: (1) irony either directs one to the utter perplexity and tragedy of the human condition, or (2) it can "encourage us to become philosophical by rightly appropriating for ourselves the dialogic search for knowledge."[76] Augustine appropriates irony in this latter sense as a means to incite the reader to begin the pursuit of wisdom. He does so by assisting the reader to the realization that reality is not reducible to matter.[77] This heightened grasp of reality provides examples of certainty for overcoming general skepticism as well as a method for deepening one's understanding of oneself and God.

In these dialogues, and most famously in *Confessiones* book VII, Augustine attests to the influence of the Platonists upon his way of thinking about God and the soul.[78] He summarizes the major insight of the Platonists in book three of the *Contra Academicos:*

> For what I want, it suffices [to note] that Plato sensed that there were two worlds, one intelligible (in which the truth itself dwells), the other sensible (which we obviously sense through sight and touch) and that the former is true while the latter is similar to the true and made in its image and thus from the former the truth can be polished and brightened, as it were, in the *soul* that would know

[76] Charles Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature,* 26.1 (2002), 99.

[77] The discussion of irony in this section was greatly helped by Thomas S. Hibbs' forthcoming work on Pascal. Hibbs argues that Pascal uses philosophical and theological irony to give the reader an increasing and ever deepening understanding of reality.

[78] *Contra Academicos*, 2.2.5, *De beata vita* 1.4; and *Confessiones* VII. The exact relationship of Platonism to Augustine's theology has been hotly contested. Some, such as Robert O'Connell, suggest that Augustine did not realize the significant differences between Platonism and Christianity. Catherine Conybeare represents those on the opposite extreme that Augustine had full recognition of the differences, such that his early and later writings are entirely consonant with his later writings. Ernest Fortin offers a helpful middle position, suggesting that Augustine had reconciled the key differences between Platonism and Christianity by the time of Cassiciacum, though the implications of these key differences took several years to develop.

itself, while from the latter can be produced in the souls of the foolish not *knowledge* but opinion.[79]

The Platonic insight into intelligible reality enabled Augustine to answer the important theological question of the compatibility of the Christian God with the presence of evil. In the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine shows how the same insight helps defeat skepticism, for knowledge about intelligible realities cannot be doubted in the same way that knowledge about corporeal objects can.[80] Given the importance of the Platonic account of reality for Augustine's theological and philosophical development at the time of Cassiciacum, it should not be surprising if one finds evidence that Augustine was trying to elicit the Platonic understanding of reality in his readers.

Michael Foley suggests that Augustine attempts to lead the reader to an awareness of intelligible reality by continually directing the reader inward to the self as knower.[81] Augustine repeatedly calls the reader to turn or return inward to the self in these early

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[79] "*Sat est enim ad id, quod uolo Platonem sensisse duos esse mundos, unum intellegibilem, in quo ipsa ueritas habitaret, istum autem sensibilem, quem manifestum est nos uisu tactuque sentire . itaque illum uerum hunc ueri simile et ad illius imaginem factum, et ideo de illo in ea quae se cognosceret anima uelut expoliri et quasi serenari ueritatem, de hoc autem in stultorum animis non scientiam sed opnionem posse generari*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.17.37)

[80] The parallels between Manichaeanism and Academic Skepticism are striking. Both rejected authority, insisting upon the importance of basing all beliefs upon reason alone. And, since the Academic account of skepticism derives from a Stoic account of comprehension that rests on a materialist psychology, both views accept, either explicitly or implicitly, a form of materialism.

[81] My focus is upon the literary use of this turn inward, not an evaluation of the method. Phillip Cary has recently written three books examining the Platonic elements of Augustine's thought, arguing that Augustine's Platonism is incompatible with Christianity. See especially *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Cary's argument has its critics. See especially Frederick Van Fletteren's lengthy review *Augustinian Studies* 33 (2): 279-286. A helpful review has been offered by John Peter Kenney *The Journal of Religion*, 89.4 (2009), 603-606. Kenney argues, *via* Pierre Hadot, that Cary treats Augustine's works as modern systematic theological texts instead of texts with intentional psychogogical components. How and where Augustine makes a claim is as important for understanding the North African as what he says. Kenney also argues that Cary detrimentally disregards the Christian theological setting of the fourth century. The transcendence of God became a touchstone issue both for Western and Eastern theologians. The turn inward and the Platonic distinction between intelligible and sensible reality helped offer Christians a philosophical defense of God's transcendence.

dialogues.[82] Augustine's prayer for Romanianus is that God "return [him] to [him]self."[83] Augustine's own characterization of philosophical contemplation is one in which he is "returning to [him]self."[84] When recounting his first experience with the books of the Platonists, he writes that they enabled him to "hastily and completely return to [his] whole self."[85] Augustine considers the work of the Incarnation as one that enables individuals "return to their very self."[86] The turn to the self is part of a philosophical method that Augustine learned from the Platonists. The movement begins with outward sensible objects, directing the reader inward to the rational soul and, finally, upward to God above. Each level both increases one's understanding of the preceding level and prepares the mind for an insight into the next. For instance, knowledge about the soul can help one better understand the sensible world and begin to understand the nature of God.[87]

The insight into intelligible reality is crucial for overcoming skepticism because the Stoic materialist account of perception underlies the skeptical critique of knowledge. Stoic psychology mistakenly supposes truth is seen in the same way that a sense object is

[82] *Contra Academicos* 2.2.4, 2.2.5, 2.3.8, 3.19.42 below; *De ordine* 1.2.3, 2.11.30, 2.11.31 (specifically, to one's reason); *Soliloquia* 2.6.9, 2.19.33.

[83] *Contra Academicos*, 1.1.1.

[84] *Ibid.,* 2.2.4.

[85] *Ibid.,* 2.2.5.

[86] *Ibid.,* 3.19.42.

[87]In his *Descartes and Augustine*, Stephen Menn argues that Descartes followed Augustine in this philosophical method. Augustine and Descartes, though, differ in at least four ways. First, Augustine, in this philosophical movement, never discards authority in the manner that Descartes does. Second, when turning inward, Augustine consistently considers his soul as embodied and not primarily as a thinking thing. Third, while Descartes claims to have clear and distinct ideas about the soul and God, Augustine's ongoing search suggests he never claimed full understanding of either. Finally, building off of the previous points, the end goal of each differs. Augustine does not move upward to God for the sake of getting back out to the world. Augustine, never doubting the external world, moves upward and stays there. God is the goal of his philosophical speculation, not certainty about the world.

seen. Sense impressions, though, give data, not truth. Truth is discerned only by the mind. One grasps that the object in front of him is a chair by means of the concept of "chair," a concept that is intelligible. Two chairs are grasped as equal, not by some quality of "equality" that one sees, but by means of an intelligible concept.[88] The mutable nature of corporeal objects makes certainty impossible because the bare perception of some physical object may differ with each subsequent perception of that item. Moreover, how things appear might always be different from how they are if the link between the image and the object is faulty.[89]

Intelligible realities avoid the problems found in sense perceptions. One can have knowledge of logical truths, such as disjunctions, because these insights are not subject to the constraints of time and space as the sensible world is.[90] Further, intelligible truths are not mediated in the same way that corporeal items are. The logical truth that one perceives is imminent in the mind in the way that an object of perception is not.[91]

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[88] In *Civitate dei* 8.5Augustine questions how the Stoics could claim that wisdom is beautiful. Though one might see a wise person, one does not visibly see wisdom. If all conceptions come from sense objects, as they do for the Stoics, this claim about wisdom would be impossible.

[89] As Augustine writes in the *Soliloquia*, "there is, indeed, nothing about them [the senses] capable of deceiving, although there can be something about them that leads to doubt." Sense impressions do not have a truth-guaranteeing feature about them; rather, they are judged by the intellect to be true or not. All that one knows with certainty about sense perceptions occurs at the level of appearance: "assent to no more than the fact that you're convinced that it appears this way to you and there's no deception" (3.11.25).

[90]For the importance of incorporeality for certainty in neo-Platonic thought see Lloyd Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ludger Holscher, *The Reality of the Mind: Augustine's Philosophical Arguments for the Human Soul as a Spiritual Substance* (Routledge, 1986); Dominic O'Meara, "Skepticism and Ineffability in Plotinus," *Phronesis*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Aug., 2000), 240-251.

[91] John Rist, Etienne Gilson, and Frederick Copleston recognize that part of Augustine's refutation of skepticism involves more than offering exceptions to skeptical arguments, but a realization about the nature of those things about which one can be certain. John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67-91; Frederick Copleston, S. J. *A History of Philosophy Volume II: Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Image Books 1962, reprinted 1993. First printed 1950), 51-68. Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine,* trans. L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 66-112.

Augustine uses irony to direct the reader inward to consider the intelligible reality of the soul by repeatedly using words that can refer to activities of the mind directed at sensible or intelligible reality.[92] The ambiguous use of these words invites the reader to think about the nature of his thinking, and by doing so, to consider the different nature of sensible and intelligible reality. In the *Contra Academicos*, he does so through double usage of words related to vision.[93] Augustine is trying to wake his readers up out of the slumber of materialism. To avoid the encumbrance of the Stoic's materialist psychology, Augustine creates conditions for helping the reader perceive what is immaterial, comparing the sudden awareness of an intelligible reality to being awakened. He comments that had Zeno "been woken up" (*expergefactus*) and realized that "something could not be comprehended unless it was the sort of thing that he himself was defining,"

[92] Augustine uses irony in this same way in the other dialogues, using words that can be understood in reference to sensible or intelligible reality. In *De beata vita*, Augustine focuses on the word *habere* (to have) (*De beata vita* 2.11). To have something, in one sense, refers to the ownership of a physical thing. I have a car. But, one does not "have" God in the same way one "has" as car. To understand what it means to "have God" involves not turning to the "mirage of images" (*De beata vita* 4.33). By the end of the dialogue, "having" wisdom becomes important, and this sense of having involves the operation of reason according to measure. In *De ordine,* words associated with "motion" and "presence" are used to direct the readers inward. Licentius, while in the presence of Augustine, is told to "be here" (*De ordine* 1.9.27). Motion also helps direct the reader inward and upward. Licentius arrives at the conclusion that the things of this world are moved, but the things with God are not moved, since God is immovable. But, how, Augustine wonders, can we be with God since we are constantly moving? The solution regards an activity of reason: to be with God, and therefore immovable, is to understand God. (*De ordine* 2.1.3-2.2.7). In the *Soliloquia*, the notion of "illumination" has this double meaning, bother referring to the sun's illumination of the earth and God's illumination which enables understanding (2.8.15).

[93] The most extended comparison of knowledge with sight is found in *Soliloquia.* There Augustine compares the sun and its functions to God's role in helping us understand: "For there earth is visible and so is light, but the earth can't be seen if it's not being illumined by light. Therefore, we should believe that those things which are handed down in the disciplines (and whoever understands these things, admits that without a doubt they are most true) can't be understood unless they are illumined by another sun all their own, so to speak" (*Soliloquia* 1.8.15).

his view would have never fallen to skeptical doubt.[94] The use of the passive is intriguing. Zeno did not need to wake up, but needed someone to wake him up. Augustine offers just such help to his readers.

Consider the following section in which Augustine examines the difference between what is intelligible and sensible by means of an imagined dialogue with Arcesilaus. After Augustine presents Zeno's definition, he has Arcesilaus exclaim, "I *see* (*video*) this [the definition]… and by virtue of the fact that I *see* (*video*) this, I teach that nothing is perceived (*percipi*), for nothing like that can be found." The irony should not be missed. It is only because Arcesilaus "sees" what Zeno's account of comprehension claims and "sees" the implications of that view that he is able to reject the indubitable character of impressions that Stoicism requires. Arcesilaus rightly understood that sense impressions about the corporeal world are incredibly limited because sensible items are constantly changing in size, in location, in age, etc. However, Arcesilaus "knows" or "perceives" something as indubitable, namely, what the Stoics are claiming about knowledge. One can be certain about the perception *qua* understanding of concepts.

Augustine imagines a response in which Arcesilaus, accepting the definition as probable, states: "I'm showing that there's no such thing as that which the definition has articulated which is capable of being comprehended." Augustine again turns the discussion back to an intellectual perception: "Perhaps you're showing this *except* for the definition itself." While Arcesilaus suggests that the Stoic account of apprehension is probably true, he is still implicitly accepting that he understands or perceives with

[94] "*Quodsi Zeno expergefactus esset aliquando et vidisset neque quicquam comprehendi posse nisi quale ipse definiebat neque tale aliquid in corporibus posse inueniri, quibus ille tribuebat omnia, olim prorsus hoc genus disputationum, quod magna necessitate flagrauerat, fuisset extinctum*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.17.39).

certainty what that definition is claiming. Augustine retorts, "even if we are uncertain about it [the definition], knowledge does not abandon us thus. For we know that the definition is either true or false; therefore, we do not know nothing."[95] Not only can one know that one understands what the definition is claiming, one can know that the definition, as a claim about reality, is either true or false. Augustine perceives that two mutually exclusive accounts cannot both be true. The metaphorical use of perception directs the reader inward to the act of knowing in order to elicit awareness of the distinction between sensible and intelligible reality.

Augustine also ironically turns to sense impressions, those impressions most susceptible to skepticism, to direct the reader to an immaterial reality. Augustine claims that he can "*see* (*video*) that many things can be said on behalf of the senses which we don't find the Academics considering reprehensible."[96] One can be certain about how things appear without making any claims about those impressions matching up with some external world. He writes, "For who is so impudent that he would say to me when I'm licking something with delight: 'Perhaps you're not tasting anything but are dreaming'? What on earth—do I oppose him? But it still may delight me, even in dreams."[97] In the example, the claims of certainty refer to the soul doing the perceiving, not the external world that the soul perceives. The discussion of sense perception can turn the reader to

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[95] "*Ostendis fortasse praeter ipsam et uides, ut arbitror, quid sequatur. Quodsi etiam eius incerti sumus, nec ita nos deserit scientia. Scimus enim aut veram esse aut falsam; non igitur nihil scimus. Quamquam numquam efficiet, ut ingratus sim, prorsus ego illam definitionem uerissimam iudico*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.9.21).

[96] "*Quamquam etiam pro ipsis sensibus multa video posse dici, quae ab Academicis reprehensa non invenimus*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.25).

[97] "*Quis enim tam inpudens sit, qui mihi cum delectatione aliquid ligurrienti dicat: fortasse non gustas, sed hoc somnium est? numquidnam resisto? Sed me tamen illud in somnis etiam delectaret*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.26).

see how distinct one's mind is from other material objects. One can be certain about the activities of one's mind in a way that one cannot be certain about sensible objects.

Theological Irony

Augustine's use of irony is not restricted to inciting the philosophical apprehension of the intelligible nature of reality; he also uses it to elicit a theological recognition about a personal God who orders all things well. He does so out of a concern for his friend and benefactor Romanianus, who, due to misfortune, cannot undertake the life of philosophical leisure that Augustine and his companions are enjoying.[98]

A discussion of fortune can be found at the beginning of each book of the *Contra Academicos*. The theme anticipates the extended treatment .found in *De ordine* but plays an important role in the *Contra Academicos* as well. One is confronted with the repeated theme that no one can reach the port of wisdom "unless fortune itself, be it favorable or 'adverse,' leads him there."[99] Augustine laments with his friend Romanianus that such fortune is keeping him from the happy life. However, an examination of references to fortune clearly undermines this initial reading. Fortune is not a set of dark forces that impersonally dictate all events to randomly keep certain souls from happiness. As soon as Augustine laments the need for fortune to help us reach the port of wisdom, he directs

[98] *Contra Academicos* 1.1.2, 2.1.1. The work is written to Romanianus for a number of reasons. First, Romanianus funded much of Augustine's education (*Contra Academicos* 2.2.3). Second, Licentius a major character in this dialogue, is Romanianus' son. Third, Augustine's call to Romanianus to philosophy is not only meant to help his friend overcome problems of skepticism, but wean him away from Manichaeanism, the sect to which Augustine led Romanianus.

[99] See also *Contra Academicos* 2.1.1, 3.2.3; *De beata vita* 1.1-2. Augutine and Alypius engage in an extended analysis of the relationship of fortune to wisdom. Thought fortune is not equated with wisdom, one does need propitious events to guarantee the life of leisure needed to practice philosophy, the discipline essential to wisdom.

Romanianus to "the God who cares about these things."[100] The irony arises in the juxtaposition of two seemingly incompatible views about reality. Both (hostile or capricious) fate and providence cannot be predicated simultaneously of the unfolding events of history.

Augustine develops his revised account of fortune, still leaving it to the reader to piece together the incompatibility of the classical notion of fate with a personal and loving God.

> In fact, perhaps what is commonly called fortune is actually being ruled by a certain hidden order, and what we call chance in human affairs is nothing but something whose reason and cause are concealed. And perhaps nothing, regardless of whether it is advantageous or not, happens in part that does not fit and harmonize with the whole.[101]

Without naming God as the author of fortune, Augustine slowly offers a modified description, one that he examines more fully in *De ordine*. Fortune appears to be disordered, randomly assigning beneficial and destructive events in lives. Fortune's random appearance, however, does not mean that reality is configured that way.

Augustine's reoriented version of fortune becomes more apparent as he invites Romanianus to reconsider the nature of misfortune: "For if divine providence extends all the way to us—and this should not be doubted, believe me—it behooves you to be treated

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[100] *"sed quoniam ita comparatum est sive pro meritis nostris siue pro necessitate naturae, ut divinum animum mortalibus inhaerentem nequaquam sapientiae portus accipiat, ubi neque aduersante fortunae flatu neque secundante moueatur, nisi eo illum ipsa uel secunda uel quasi aduersa perducat, nihil pro te nobis aliud quam uota restant, quibus ab illo cui haec curae sunt deo, si possumus, impetremus, ut te tibi reddat*" (*Contra Academicos* 1.1.1).

[101] "*Etenim fortasse quae uulgo fortuna nominatur occulto quodam ordine regitur nihilque aliud in rebus casum uocamus, nisi cuius ratio et causa secreta est, nihilque seu commodi seu incommodi contingit in parte, quod non conueniat et congruat uniuerso*" (*Contra Academicos* 1.1.1).

in the way that you are."[102] The view belies, to an extent, Augustine's empathy for Romanianus' current situation as a situation of real misfortune. For if God cares for individuals and is in control of all events, then misfortune, instead of a source of destruction, may be a means to help bring about a salutary conversion. If this is the case, the "misfortune" which Romanianus experiences is in fact not misfortune at all, and Augustine's empathy should be qualified.[103]

Augustine repeats his ironic use of fortune in the second prologue. The concurrence of fortune with God forces the reader to reconsider the view that fortune could ever keep one from God:

> Consequently, we should resist not only those tides and tempests of fortune with the oars of any kind of virtue whatsoever, but we should especially implore divine assistance with all of our devotion and piety, so that the ever-constant striving of good pursuits may hold its course off of which no mishap may drive it, lest the utterly safe and utterly delightful port of philosophy fail to receive it.[104]

Of course the reason one need not resist the tides of tempests of fortune and the reason that prayer becomes important is because the personal God of Christianity guides all events. Augustine implores Romanianus not to despair that fortune is keeping him from God because God hears prayers.

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[102] "*Nam si divina providentia pertenditur usque ad nos, quod minime dubitandum est, mihi crede, sic tecum agi oportet, ut agitur.* " (*Contra Academicos* 1.1.1).

[103] Augustine repeatedly refers to his apparent misfortune of an ailment that forced him to leaves his profession as a rhetorician. However, that misfortune came to be understood as a fortunate event, enabling Augustine to pursue the life of wisdom more fully. See *Contra Academicos* 1.1.3 and *De beata vita* 1.4; In the *De ordine* 1.2.5 he calls it a "pain in the gullet," and in the *Soliloquia* 1.1.1 he refers to his bad health.

[104] "*Quam ob rem contra illos fluctus procellasque fortunae cum obnitendum remis qualiumcumque uirtutum tum in primis diuinum auxilium omni devotione atque pietate implorandum est, ut intentio constantissima bonorum studiorum teneat cursum suum, a quo eam nullus casus excutiat, quominus illam philosophiae tutissimus iucundissimusque portus accipiat*" *(Contra Academicos* 2.1.1).

Augustine's reflection on the *Contra Academicos* in his *Retratationes* confirms his ironic use of fortune. He laments " how many times I mentioned Fortune (fortuna), although I did not intend for some goddess to be understood by this name but rather a fortuitous occurrence of things (either in our body or in goods or evils outside of us)."[105] Just as the followers of Cicero were not getting the irony of their leader, so followers of Augustine were not realizing the intentional ironic use of "fortune." To keep later readers from being misled by his word choice, he makes clear that he did not mean the goddess fortune. He observes that the context should keep a reader from making the mistake, but he also realizes the potential misreading that could occur.

Augustine's use of philosophical and theological irony helps address the variety of problems facing his intellectually diverse audience. Not all at Cassiciacum are troubled by skepticism. Monica, when presented with the Academic view in *De beata vita*, rejects the skepticism outright. She cannot understand how anyone could be persuaded by their philosophy.[106] Romanianus appears to have a similar outrage and shock that anyone could ever believe that wisdom is unobtainable.[107] Both, despite their dismissal of the Academics, lack the intellectual acumen to show why the skeptical view should be rejected. Augustine knows that, while the philosophical life should be pursued by Monica and Romanianus, the force of the intellectual quagmire of skepticism does not press upon them as it does upon his philosophical mind. Romanianus' problem is not the

[105] *Retractationes* 1.1.2. Translated by Michael Foley in *Against the Academics* (University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

[106] *De beata vita,* 2.16.

[107] *Contra Academicos* 2.3.8.

philosopher's problem. He needs to understand that the misfortune that currently overwhelms him may not be misfortune at all.[108]

Conclusion

These early dialogues are often mined for the potential influences upon Augustine's thought at the time of his conversion. Cicero, Plotinus, Porphyry, Marius Victorinus, Virgil, and Ambrose are just a few common suspects behind the convert's Cassiciacum philosophical worldview. Augustine does draw from an impressive array of sources even at the early period of his life at Cassiciacum.[109] One could just as easily apply the saying to Augustine that Augustine writes of Varro, that he "read so much that we wonder when he had time to write, wrote so much that we can scarcely believe anyone could have read it all."[110] Examining influences can certainly be profitable for opening up Augustine's thought to a contemporary audience. For instance, few have done more than Robert O'Connell in uncovering Augustine's indebtedness to Neoplatonic thought, a possible influence underlying his critiques of skepticism.[111]

Augustine did not only learn ideas from his predecessors, though. He also learned from them a way to communicate philosophical ideas. The ideas take place within a particular mode of communication, the dialogue form, a form Augustine is most familiar with from Cicero. From Cicero and the Academics, Augustine is trained in the art of

[108] It should be noted, though, that the insight to which Augustine's theological irony directs Romanianus, that God is personal, can help one overcome the despair of skepticism as well. Augustine writes, "believe me…or rather believe Him who says 'seek and ye shall find,' that we must not despair of acquiring knowledge and that it will be more obvious than even those numbers" (*Ibid.,* 2.3.9.).

[109] See Michael Foley "A General Introduction to the Cassiciacum Dialogues," (Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).

[110] *Civitate dei* 6.2.

[111] Cf. Dominic O'Meara's "Skepticism and Ineffability in Plotinus," *Phronesis*, 45.3 (2000), 240-251.

concealing one's opinion through the dialogue form. Such concealment helps provoke those able to delve deeper into underlying assumptions of the discussion at hand. Cicero is not the only voice influencing Augustine's method for philosophical communication. From the Platonists, Augustine adopts the triadic movement that begins with sensible impressions, moves inward to the soul, and ascends in thought to God.

Philosophical influence, either through idea or writing, need not entail that Augustine is an uncritical disciple of his mentors. As Ernest Fortin observes of Augustine in these dialogues, "[T]he Protean disguises in which he often appears...do not easily lend themselves to the kind of analysis favored and made possible by the tools of modern historical research. Until the zetetic quality of these dialogues is fully appreciated and explored it is doubtful whether the mystery that they pose can be resolved in a completely satisfactory manner."[112] Fortin's caution can be equally applied to Augustine's mode of communication as to his use of philosophical concepts. In both cases Augustine expresses no feeling of obligation to accept his teachers' thoughts without qualification. Michael Foley compares Augustine's use of his predecessor's ideas, and we might add irony and dialogue form, to a musician "deftly playing on and developing a number of different musical themes in a way that is beholden neither to them nor to their authors' intentions."[113] Like Cicero, Augustine does adopt the dialogue form and practices the art of disguising, initially camouflaging his opinion about skepticism; however, by the end of the dialogue he readily acknowledges the dearth of

[112] Review of *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man* by Robert J. O'Connell, *Theological Studies* 30 (1969), 341-43, reprinted in *the Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought*, 309.

[113] From "A General Introduction to the Cassiciacum Dialogues," forthcoming (Notre Dame Press).

motivation in the skeptical life and unveils what he takes to be their practice of deception. Like the Neoplatonists, he encourages a movement inward and upward, though he departs from these philosophers in the repeated insistence that our movement upward to God is preceded by God's movement downward to us.

The subtle shifts in his use of the dialogue and irony confirm that Augustine's thought at his conversion is indelibly marked by his Christianity. The acceptance of authority and reason in the pursuit of wisdom color both the content and form of his writing even at this early stage.

CHAPTER SIX

Divine Pedagogy

In this final chapter, I argue that the *Contra Academicos* acts as a replacement of Cicero's *Academica* in a pedagogy designed to introduce the reader to a life of wisdom. Cicero's works, begun in 46 B.C., form a comprehensive introduction or pedagogy to a philosophical life. In these works, Cicero covers what he considers the three major fields of philosophy: logic, ethics, and natural philosophy.[1] The *Academica* fulfills the function of logic in that pedagogy both by establishing a criterion of truth and by helping induce the proper manner in which one should pursue wisdom, namely, without arrogance. When Augustine writes his works at Cassiciacum, the dialogues address the same key issues found in these philosophical works of Cicero and follow Cicero's ordering of subjects. In the first section of this chapter I will argue that reading the *Contra Academicos* as a logic text (in the ancient sense) resolves two difficulties that arise from the recent work on the pedagogical nature of the Cassiciacum dialogues: (1) why he emphasizes philosophy and (2) why the text is so difficult. In the second section I argue that Augustine's dialogue fulfills what is expected of a logic text, namely, that it provides a criterion of truth. Augustine's affirmation of both authority and reason are seen to be the distinguishing feature of Augustine's logic in opposition to Cicero's. In the final section, I argue that Augustine's dual standard charts a middle course, helping one avoid the despair-inducing implications of Academic skepticism and the arrogance of dogmatism.

[1] Augustine refers to these as the three major areas of philosophy in the *Civitate dei,* Book 8.

Pedagogy at Cassiciacum

The pedagogical aspects of the dialogue have not gone unnoticed by scholars. Several important works examine Augustine's early interest in the liberal arts, as found especially in the *De Ordine.*[2] Laura Holt, Eugene Kevane, and Ryan Topping have each devoted book-length studies to pedagogy in Augustine's dialogues.[3] Kevane argues that Augustine's early works represent the inchoate Christian education more fully developed in the *De doctrina christiana*. The educational setting of the dialogues underscores Augustine's shift away from classical education by an intentional limitation of the role of philosophy in the Christian life. The goal is a vision of the Triune God, and while philosophy can assist, it remains subservient to Christian authority. Holt, largely in agreement with Kevane, adds that Augustine uses the dialogues to portray himself as a teacher in support of the Church. She also emphasizes the extent to which Augustine replaces philosophy with theology. Ryan Topping alone focuses on the educational aspects of the *Contra Academicos*. He argues that Augustine's main criticism of Academic Skepticism takes aim at the moral and educational failures of their philosophy. Topping helpfully emphasizes the performative aspects of the text, specifically, Augustine's call to Romanianus and the reader to prayer.

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[2] Isletraut Hadot "La naissance du cycle des sept arts libéraux dans néoplatonisime et les conditions de sa réception par le Moyen Àge Chrétien," in *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1984); and Michael Foley, "St. Augustine, the University, and the So-Called Liberal Arts" in *The Idea of the American University*, ed. Bradley Watson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 129-140. Finally, Ryan Topping has examined the role education in Augustine's works: *St. Augustine* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

[3] Laura Holt, *Tolle Scribe: Augustine at Cassiciacum*, (Ph.D. diss. Notre Dame, 1999) and "Wisdom's Teacher: Augustine at Cassiciacum." *Augustinian Studies*, 29.2 (1998): 47-60; Eugene Kevane, *Augustine the Educator: A Study in the Fundamentals of Christian Formation* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1954); Ryan Topping, "The Perils of Skepticism: The Moral and Educational Argument of Contra Academicos," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 49.3 (2009) and *Happiness and Wisdom: Augustine's Early Theology of Education* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

Augustine's plan to write a work on each of the liberal arts does suggest his interest in establishing something like an educational program.[4] While I think that Kevane's analysis is ultimately correct—that Augustine, even at this early stage, saw limitations to the purely philosophical pursuit of wisdom—all three authors, nevertheless, overemphasize the theological aspects over the philosophical aims of these dialogue. Holt argues that Augustine thought that the faith of Christianity alone could overcome the problem of doubt that skepticism creates.[5] Although Topping does acknowledge Augustine's philosophical critique of skepticism, he tends to downplay the response in favor of Augustine's call to prayer as a means for overcoming the despair of doubt.

Absent in these scholars' analyses is the relevance of Augustine's mirroring of Cicero's works. Reading the Cassiciacum tetralogy as a replacement of Cicero's philosophical *oeuvres* helps account for two aspects of the former with which these authors struggle. First, such an account explains Augustine's continual call to philosophy and his restraint regarding theological investigation.[6] If Augustine's main suggestion for overcoming skepticism is faith and prayer, one is not sure what to do with the preponderance of the dialogue that is philosophical in nature and aimed at a philosophical school with which a church layman might be unfamiliar. But, if he is offering a logic text, the extended interaction with another school's epistemology becomes coherent. Just as Cicero critiques aspects of Stoic philosophy to show how Academic philosophy is

[4] Augustine began writing a series of works dedicated to the liberal arts disciplines. *De musica* remains as does portions of *De dialectica*. Both in the *Confessions* and in *Retractationes*, Augustine disparages his early emphasis upon the liberal arts, writing that he made too much of them.

[5] *Tolle Lege*, 263.

[6] Kevane, for instance, attempts to distance the dialogues from their philosophical nature and emphasize the scholastic setting. Though there are philosophical discussions, the dialogues first and foremost emphasize a new order of education. (Kevane, 64)

more consistent and, therefore, more reliable as a guide to wisdom, so Augustine contrasts his thought with Cicero's.

Second, such a reading helps account for the dialogue's level of difficulty. The Cassiciacum works may not be suitable for all readers. Holt and others, like Conybeare, point to the diversity of characters as evidence that these dialogues are meant for those of a wide range of intellectual abilities,[7] but they ignore the fact that not only are the dialogues quite difficult, but also that the philosophical analyses contained therein lose many of the participants.[8] If the dialogue does serve as a part of a philosophical education in accordance with Christian authority, however, the intricate argumentation can be sufficiently explained. Even though any moderately educated person may discover something important from the text, such as that God is personal and that we need not despair over wisdom's unattainability, many portions remain obscure depending on the reader's intellectual ability. The obscurity of the writing, as we have observed in the previous chapter, does not entail a contradiction between an inward and an outward meaning in the text but a judicious reserve in communicating higher truths before those milk-fed readers not ready for meat (I Cor. 3:2).

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[7] See especially Catherine Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine*, 45-48. Connybeare rightly notes that the dialogue was meant for "thinking men" but then assumes that, because the characters of the dialogue represent a wide intellectual demographic, so Augustine presumes that "thinking men" need not be lettered men. Yet the education of the characters should not have a determining effect on the education of the expected audience.

[8] See especially *De ordine* 2.7.24 where Augustine stops his philosophical investigation of order and offers the pedagogical prerequisites for adequately understanding such complex issues. In his "Reflections on the Proper Way to Read Augustine," Ernest Fortin suggests that Augustine intentionally includes characters of such intellectual diversity not to show a leveling that occurs because of a revised account of philosophy but to show "how one discusses the arcane of Christian theology" in the presence of those with such various educational backgrounds. "Reflections on the Proper Way to Read Augustine," in *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity,* 101.

Criterion of Truth

Malcolm Schofield claims that Cicero's *Academica* is a text of logic.[9] Schofield clarifies that a logic for the Hellenistic schools differs from the logic found in contemporary textbooks. In a work of logic, for the Hellenistic philosophers, one presents a criterion of truth, and as such, the text contains much of what contemporary philosophy considers epistemology along with some elements of metaphysics. At the end of the *Academica*, Cicero recounts the history of logic, focusing on where key figures located the criterion for truth: for Protagoras, the individual is the judge, for "that what seems true to each person is true for each person;"[10] for Epicurus, the senses provide the standard of judgment; for Plato, the "criterion of truth and truth itself is detached from opinions and from the senses and belongs to the mere activity of thought and to the mind."[11] The Stoic criterion of truth, the cataleptic impression, is the central topic of the *Academica* and therefore makes the *Academica* a work of logic. The Academics, Cicero writes, argue that there is no criterion for truth.

Given the Cicero's rejection of any adequate criterion for truth, the *Academica* appears to rest uneasily in the category of a logic text. But, the text does offer guidance for one's pursuit of the truth that aligns the work better with logic than any other discipline of philosophy. Though lacking a clear criterion, the Academic school provides the probable act as a substitute measure. Guided by reason, one is to examine the various positions for any philosophical topic, and after such an investigation, one can decide which claims are most probably true. Far from a deficient logic, Cicero thinks that the

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[9] "Cicero For and Against Divination" *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986): 47-65.

[10] *Academica* 2.46.142.

[11] *Ibid.*

absence of a clear criterion can lead to certain beneficial results. First, the Academic can more easily guarantee the avoidance of that which a philosopher most dreads: error. By refusing to assent to anything as true, one can easily evade this opprobrium. Second, without an absolute standard, the Academic skeptic is not bound to any philosophical school's dogma and is thereby free to pursue the truth among all available options.

Augustine's *Contra Academicos* bears remarkable similarity to Cicero's *Academica*. Like the *Academica*, the *Contra Academicos* presents a criterion of truth in opposition to a competing position. Cicero denies any criterion by arguing against the Stoic account of knowledge. Augustine presents his standard by using the skepticism of Cicero's *Academica* as a foil. Like the *Academica*, Augustine's account of knowledge is subservient to a larger goal of happiness.[12] Augustine thinks that Cicero is wrong that Academic skepticism helps one avoid error and wrong that Academic freedom is salubrious. The account that Augustine presents conveniently addresses these two failures of Academic skepticism, further confirming the comprehensive nature of Augustine's rejection of Cicero's philosophy.

So what is the criterion for truth that Augustine offers in the *Contra Academicos*? He offers two, one corresponding to reason and the other to authority. The criterion according to reason he finds in the Platonists. Augustine realizes that Academic skepticism is a natural extension of certain Stoic presuppositions.[13] In the *Civitate dei* Augustine contrasts the logic of the Stoics, which the *Academica* is directed against yet presupposes to an extent, with that of the Platonists, which he accepts.

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[12] *Contra Academicos,* 1.2.5.

[13] *Contra Academicos* 3.9.18.

> Then, again, as far as regards the doctrine which treats of that which they call logic, that is, rational philosophy, far be it from us to compare them with those who attributed to the bodily senses the faculty of discriminating truth, and thought, that all we learn is to be measured by their untrustworthy and fallacious rules. Such were the Epicureans, and all of the same school. Such also were the Stoics, who ascribed to the bodily senses that expertness in disputation which they so ardently love, called by them dialectic, asserting that from the senses the mind conceives the notions of those things which they explicate by definition. And hence is developed the whole plan and connection of their learning and teaching. I often wonder, with respect to this, how they can say that none are beautiful but the wise; for by what bodily sense have they perceived that beauty, by what eyes of the flesh have they seen wisdom's comeliness of form? Those, however, whom we justly rank before all others, have distinguished those things which are conceived by the mind from those which are perceived by the senses, neither taking away from the senses anything to which they are competent, nor attributing to them anything beyond their competency. And the light of our understandings, by which all things are learned by us, they have affirmed to be that selfsame God by whom all things were made.[14]

The problem with the Stoic epistemology is its underlying materialism. Because they insist that certain impressions have some quality about them about which one could not

[14] "*quod autem adtinet ad doctrinam, ubi uersatur pars altera, quae ab eis logica, id est rationalis, uocatur: absit ut his comparandi uideantur, qui posuerunt iudicium ueritatis in sensibus corporis eorumque infidis et fallacibus regulis omnia, quae discuntur, metienda esse censuerunt, ut Epicurei et quicumque alii tales, ut etiam ipsi Stoici, qui cum uehementer amauerint sollertiam disputandi, quam dialecticam nominant, a corporis sensibus eam ducendam putarunt, hinc asseuerantes animum concipere notiones, quas appellant εννοιας, earum rerum scilicet quas definiendo explicant; hinc propagari atque conecti totam discendi docendique rationem. ubi ego multum mirari soleo, cum pulchros dicant non esse nisi sapientes, quibus sensibus corporis istam pulchritudinem uiderint, qualibus oculis carnis formam sapientiae decusque conspexerint. hi uero, quos merito ceteris anteponimus, discreuerunt ea, quae mente conspiciuntur, ab his, quae sensibus adtinguntur, nec sensibus adimentes quod possunt, nec eis dantes ultra quam possunt. lumen autem mentium esse dixerunt ad discenda omnia eundem ipsum deum, a quo facta sunt omnia*" (*Civitate dei* 8.7).

deny, the property of truth for the Stoic must reside in the sensible world.[15] The Platonists, on the other hand, locate truth in intelligible reality.[16]

Here, one treads upon Augustine's complicated and much disputed theory of illumination.[17] The rudiments of the theory can be found in the later Cassiciacum work, the *Soliloquia*. Knowledge entails, though is not reducible to, a grasping or comprehending through the understanding.[18] This grasping through understanding is analogous to the perception of sensible reality. In sense-perception the sense and sensible are in some way united, and this union is made possible by the sun. Augustine distinguishes looking, the mere directing of the faculty of sight outward, to seeing, an understanding of that at which one is looking. Analogously, in intellectual perception, the mind and what is intelligible become united when one grasps or understands by the Truth, who is God, the intelligible object. The key move, as far as this chapter is concerned, is the criterion of truth. Cicero's description of the Platonic logic as one where "truth itself is detached from opinions and from the senses and belongs to the mere

[15] For confirmation that Stoic epistemology is materialist, see Michael Frede's chapter "Stoic Epistemology" in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, 296. Zeno thought that some sensible impressions are infallibly true and that "by a natural process, they give rise to certain conceptions….about objects and which reliably embody certain general truths about those objects."

[16] *Contra Academicos,* 3.17.37.

[17] A standard survey of Augustine's theory of divine illumination is Ronald H. Nash's *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1969; reprinted by Academic Renewal Press, 2003). Of notable mention, see also Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and Ludger Holscher, *The Reality of the Mind: Augustine's Philosophical Arguments for the Human Soul as a Spiritual Substance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

[18] *Soliloquia* 1.4.9. See John H. O'Meara's "Authority and Reason," in *Studies in Augustine and Eurigena,* ed. by Thomas Halton (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 143.

activity of thought and to the mind" captures the essential elements of Augustine's position. By Cicero's standard, Augustine's logic is Platonist.[19]

A potential problem arises for the claim of this chapter, that the *Contra Academicos* serves as a logic text in a pedagogy. If the dialogue is meant to serve in such a capacity, one would expect it to detail Platonic epistemology. But Augustine does not explicate his theory of illumination there. Compounding this predicament, most of Augustine's supposed logic is concerned with defeating the opposing skeptical account.

Several responses to these objections can be considered. First, though Augustine does not expound his theory to the degree that he does in *Soliloquia*, he is open about which philosophical school offers the best account of truth and knowledge.[20] He begins his unveiling of Academic esotericism by referencing the Platonic account of reality: "Plato sensed that there were two worlds, one intelligible (in which the truth itself dwells), the other sensible (which we obviously sense through sight and touch)."[21] Augustine approves of this philosophical approach to reality, with some qualifications, and intentionally distances Platonism from the philosophy that Scripture detests.[22]

Second, Augustine may have both pedagogical and political reasons for not offering an extended account of Platonic epistemology. Concerning the former, a detailed presentation of Platonism does not necessarily evoke the conversion needed to see reality as material and intelligible. The use of irony and the continued assault on

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[19] For other early works that present an account formally similar to Platonism see *De magistro* 2.11.38, *De libero arbitrio* 2.15.39, and his account of his first interaction with Neoplatonic writings in *Confessiones* 7.10.16.

[20] See especially *Contra Academicos* 3.17.43.

[21] *Ibid.,* 3.17.37.

[22] *Ibid.,* 3.19.42.

Academic skepticism, which largely focuses upon skepticism of sensible reality, helps set the appropriate conditions for the conversion necessary for a deepened understanding. The restraint shown in not discussing Platonism, therefore, may be an intentional device used by Augustine to help the reader grasp his criterion of truth. Concerning a political motivation, Augustine, like Cicero before him, may have understood the need to introduce philosophical ideas cautiously to an audience often hostile to Greek sophistry. To avoid unnecessary confrontation with Church leaders, Augustine judiciously withholds elaboration upon some of the more nuanced, yet difficult to understand, aspects of Platonism.

Finally, Augustine may hold theological reasons for not saying more about Platonic epistemology in the *Contra Academicos*. Even in the *Soliloquia*, he refuses to claim that he understands how God illuminates the human mind.[23] He believes that God is the criterion of truth but does not know in which way God acts as this criterion.

While Augustine expresses a general agreement with the Platonic criterion of truth, he also offers the authority of Christ as a second standard of truth. Augustine turns to a discussion of authority at the end of the *Contra Academicos*. He writes that he is "certain not to depart ever, in any way, from the authority of Christ."[24] Despite the help of the Platonists, Augustine still confesses at the end of the dialogue that, "no matter how human wisdom is configured, I realize that I have not yet acquired it."[25] Wisdom is what he wants and the authority of Christ, he believes, can help him achieve this goal.

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[23] *Contra Academicos* 1.8.15.

[24] *Ibid.,* 3.20.43.

[25] *Ibid.*

How one translates this passage at the end of the *Contra Academicos* has much bearing on what one takes to be Augustine's claims about the relationship of authority and reason as dual criteria of truth. John J. O'Meara's translation of this passage suggests that Augustine is certain that Platonism and Christianity are entirely compatible. He interprets the passage in the *Contra Academicos* as follows:

> I, therefore, am resolved in nothing whatever to depart from the authority of Christ—for I do not find a stronger. But as to that which is sought out by subtle reasoning—for I am so disposed as to be impatient in my desire to apprehend truth not only by faith but also by understanding—I feel sure at the moment that I shall find it with the (neo)platonists, nor will it be at variance with our sacred mysteries.[26]

The problem is how to interpret the "*quod*" (which) of the last line. O'Meara interprets it as signifying an equivalence relation between the sacred mysteries and Platonism. However, "quod" as a neuter singular can also be limiting, having the sense of "insofar as." On the revised translation, Augustine accepts the Platonists "insofar as they are not opposed to our sacred [doctrine]."[27] This translation makes Augustine's acceptance of Platonism provisional, depending on its agreement with the authority of Christ.

The distinction between the truth as it is in itself (*quo ad se)* and as it is to us (*qua ad nos*) is helpful for explaining the relationship of Augustine's twin criteria of truth to each other. Platonism offers insight into how God, as the intelligible and immaterial ground of all truth, is the ultimate criterion for any judgment. However, Augustine admits that how God acts as this criterion still eludes him. The authority of Christ helps

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[26] *Quod autem subtilissima ratione persequendum est—ita enim iam sum affectus, ut quid sit verum non credendo solum sed etiam intellegendo apprehendere impatienter desiderem—apud Platonicos me interim, quod sacris nostris non repugnet, reperturum esse confide*" (*Contra Academicos* 3.20.43). John J. O'Meara, *Against the Academics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1951).

[27] Michael Foley follows this interpretation of the passage.

provide a criterion understandable to humans by which one can base one's judgments. That authority is how God appears to us, and is not discordant with God himself, since Jesus Christ in the Incarnation is truly God. However, what is accepted by authority does not necessarily give one total understanding of God as God is in Godself.

If Augustine intentionally ends the dialogue affirming the authority of Christ as the criterion of truth, does it then not change the work from a philosophical to a theological treatise? The answer again lies with Augustine's affirmation of reason and authority. The philosophical criterion of truth can be found with the Platonists: truth is in the intelligible realm and is grasped by means of the mind.[28] Knowledge comes only through comprehending by means of the understanding. Considered in this way, the work is primarily philosophical. However, Augustine's epistemology is subservient to his eudaimonism. The search for wisdom should culminate in happiness, and this ultimate goal is what necessitates the authority of Christ, who directs him to the happy life. Given Augustine's acceptance of divine authority as the supreme guide to happiness, the work is also theological.

Augustine's dual-standard for guidance in the pursuit of wisdom alleviates educational problems inherent in Cicero's skepticism. Despite lacking any clear criterion of truth, the skeptics still offered a way to guide one's life. Led by reason through dialectic argumentation, one can discover what is most probably true. Unburdened by the concern of rash judgment, one then pursues the truth among all philosophical opinions. Augustine is dubious of this alleged superior way of life as evidenced by his stories of the lost travelers and of the young man tempted by adultery. The first story is meant to

[28] I say "formally" to acknowledge that certain details of Augustine's account differ from the platonic account. Augustine agrees with the Platonists that truth is not found by means of the senses and that Truth, be it God or *nous*, is that which makes it possible for humans to understand the truth.

broaden the Academic definition of error so as to encompass not only the approval of falsehood but also the denial of what is true. The effects of the deficient academic definition are shown in the second story about the adulterous young man. Potential relativism follows from the Academic encouragement to follow whatever appears probably true. To avoid the educational disaster of skepticism that permits any way of life as rational, some clear signposts of what is actually true are needed.

Augustine's twin criterion furnishes a way to circumvent what skepticism cannot avoid. One who adheres to the authority of Christ need never lack a sign for directing him rightly to the goal of wisdom. Augustine cannot guarantee the avoidance of the restricted Academic account of error. Followers of Christ may commit the error of assenting to falsehoods; however, Christ's authority helps one avoid assenting to the most detrimental falsehoods and ensures that one is assenting to what is true and most needed in regard to the happy life. Those truths most essential for ultimately fulfilling the desire for happiness are provided in the mysteries. Augustine's model comes at a cost, for it requires that one be a dogmatist of a sort. Everything is up for question except for those truths handed down through the Church. Even here Augustine represents the openness that can still remain in the pursuit of an ever deepening understanding of the Triune God of Christianity. Augustine "plunders the Egyptians" by drawing upon Cicero, the Platonists, Aristotle, Stoicism, Varro, and Virgil to list a few. Though bound never to forsake the truths of Christianity, he nevertheless confirms that all truth is God's truth, wherever it may be found. As such, Augustine's criterion encourages a freedom similar to that found in the *Academica* to pursue what is true among other philosophical schools as long as one holds fast to Christian truths. In the next section we will see how his dual

affirmation addresses the despair of Cicero's skepticism while simultaneously offering the grounds for avoiding dogmatic arrogance.

Avoiding Despair and Arrogance

Cicero and Augustine express concerns over the way that certain moral dispositions can inhibit or encourage the philosophical life. For Cicero, an important advantage of the skeptical school is that they are the "least arrogant."[29] In the *Academica*, the critique against the arrogance of the dogmatists is prominent in the preludes and interludes between speeches.[30] The location is significant because it suggests that the moral denunciation of dogmatism represents Cicero's original contribution to the defense of his school. Augustine excoriates a similar vice: the love of honor. A ground rule for the disputes at Cassiciacum is the allowance for one's opponent to "take back what we gave up rashly."[31] What is conceded at one point can be rescinded later, for the goal of disputation is not "a puerile showing off of talent" but "a passion for finding the truth."[32] In the *De ordine*, Augustine weeps over the boys' childish displays of caring more about winning than understanding.[33]

Academic philosophy can readily address the problem of arrogance; however, it does so at the cost of allowing a different vice inhibitory for philosophy, namely, that of despair. Since one is compelled to pursue the truth because of a desire for knowledge yet

[29] *De divinatione* 2.1.1.

[30] *Academica* 2.2; 2.36.

[31] *Contra Academicos* 1.3.8.

[32] *Contra Academicos* 1.3.8.

[33] *De ordine* 1.10.29-30.

destined to never fulfill that desire, the skeptical position can never satisfy a longing for truth.[34]

Augustine offers a hope for overcoming skeptical despair. In both Augustine and Cicero, one finds a connection between despair and hope.[35] The frustrated desire that is despair arises when an object of hope is judged to be unobtainable.[36] Where Cicero's work induces despair, Augustine's work alleviates such despair by offering hope through reason and authority. Concerning reason's role as a remedy, Augustine offers examples of certainty and a method for increasing one's knowledge. Augustine truly *knows* several logical and mathematical truths as well as his existence and several things pertaining to it.[37] Moreover, Augustine holds that this Platonic method of moving from sensible reality inward to the soul offers an understanding about reality that he lacked before. Michele Malatesta captures Augustine's deepened understanding of reality in her analysis of his use of dialect in the Cassiciacum Dialogues:

> We see here the difference between Augustinian dialectic and the dialectic of antiquity; Augustine's is not only the knowledge of how to define, analyze, and synthesize; it is not only the knowledge of how to ask and answer correctly; it is not only the knowledge of how to argue; it is not only the knowledge of how to draw correct inferences. It is also something unheard of in the world of antiquity; the knowledge of self-knowledge.[38]

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[34] *Contra Academicos* 2.1.1.

[35] *Soliloquia* 1.5.12; *Against Catiline* 2.11.25: "*bona denique spes cum omnium rerum desperatione confligit*."

[36] Cf. *Against Catiline* 2.9.19 – Cicero discusses a group who is glad when the city is in disarray. Despair arises when the city is in peace because what they want, honors, they cannot obtained.

[37] See also *Soliloquia* 2.1.1.

[38] "Dialectic" in *Augustine Through the Ages*, 271.

Augustine puts dialectic to use as a means for gaining knowledge about one's own act of knowing. He does not claim to have wisdom, but the turn inward offers increasing understanding, which in turn offers increasing hope that the life of wisdom is possible.

Nevertheless, as evidenced by his conclusion, Augustine's philosophical hope remains restrained. Examples of real knowledge impervious to Academic doubt and the insight into the two-tiered nature of reality sufficiently convince him that the Academic claims of universal skepticism are wrong: "I no longer think that the truth is incapable of being discovered by man."[39] Still, Augustine lacks the wisdom for which he so longs.[40] He, therefore, also offers the theological means of overcoming despair and of encouraging a pursuit of the truth.[41] At the end of the second prologue, Augustine quotes the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: "Seek and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7). This verse encourages one to "not despair of acquiring knowledge and that it will be more obvious than even those numbers (the certainty of math)."[42] The quotation from Christ becomes significant at the end of the work, where the Divine Understanding, who is Christ, rouses us "by not only His precepts but His deeds," so that "souls can return to their very selves and even gaze upon their homeland without the bickering of disputations."[43] Augustine points to the hope found in Christ: the happy life of wisdom is possible. This hope offers an antidote to skepticism and, remarkably, makes possible the

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[39] *Ibid.,* 3.17.43

[40] Some authors, like Brian Harding and Ragnar Holte, argue that Augustine definitively agrees with the skeptics that wisdom remains beyond human possibility. The chief problem for this interpretation is Augustine's clear admission that reason does free the few. Cf. *Contra Academicos* 2.1.1, 2.2.6, *De beata vita* 1.1; *De ordine* 1.1.1, 1.11.32.

[41] *Contra Academicos,* 1.1.1, 2.1.1.

[42] *Ibid.,* 2.3.9.

[43] *Ibid.,* 3.19.42.

happy life for those previously thought undeserving of it. The bickering disputation of the philosophers is no longer the only means to wisdom.

The question remains as to whether Augustine's acceptance of authority, a form of dogmatism, can avoid the arrogance that Cicero so berated. While Augustine sharpens his critique of the pride of the philosophers later in life, even in these early works one can see the conceptual resources for combating this vice. As mentioned in the last chapter, Augustine leaves open the possibility that some may acquire wisdom, or come very close to it, through reason alone. For the few who have the intellectual wherewithal to pursue wisdom by reason alone, the eventual knowledge of that truth always begins from reliance upon an authority:

> [N]o man becomes experienced unless he has been ignorant and because no one ignorant knows in what manner he should present himself to his teachers and by what sort of life he may become capable of being taught, it so happens that for those desiring to learn the good, the great, and the hidden, nothing except authority opens the door. Once someone has entered into it, without any hesitation he eagerly follows the precepts of an excellent life, precepts through which (only after he has become *docile*) does he then learn.[44]

Knowledge for everyone is conditional upon the acceptance of some authority. The acquisition of the seven liberal arts, which open the door of philosophy, normally comes by means of a teacher. Augustine's use of *docilis* underscores the humility, i.e. lack of arrogance that one needs to be guided by authority.[45]

Those entirely reliant upon the Incarnation for happiness should not be arrogant for at least two reasons. First, their only hope of happiness is the mercy of God. In the

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[44] "*quia nullus hominum nisi ex imperito peritus fit, nullus autem imperitus nouit, qualem se debeat praebere docentibus et quali uita esse docilis possit, euenit, ut omnibus bona magna et occulta discere cupientibus non aperiat nisi auctoritas ianuam"* (*De ordine* 2.9.26).

[45] Cicero uses the word in *De re publica* 2.40 to refer to those animals which are most easily trained.

passage at the end of *Contra Academicos,* Augustine uses the word *clementia* to refer to the mercy of God for humanity in deigning to become man.[46] Cicero defines clemency in *De inventione* as "that by which the violence of the mind, when causelessly excited to entertain hatred against someone else, is restrained by courtesy."[47] The definition displays a broader meaning that resembles mercy from a superior towards those who do not necessarily deserve that mercy.[48] Since happiness for these is entirely dependent upon God's mercy, there is no room for arrogance.

Second, those dependent upon Christ's authority should lacks arrogance because of the incomplete nature of their understanding. Talbot Brewer's notion of dialectial activities helps explain the precarious position of those seeking to understand what they assent to by faith. Without full understanding, one is continually searching to make sense of what is accepted from an authority. Brewer writes that Augustine understood "his own conversion not as the wholesale substitution of one set of desires for another, but as the attainment of a clearer and less adulterated vision of what he really longs for."[49] The

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[46] *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42. See also *De ordine* 2.5.16, 2.9.27, 2.10.29; *Soliloquia* 1.1.5, 1.1.6, 1.14.26, 1.15.30. To give one example, in *Soliloquia* 1.14.26, after Reason questions Augustine regarding the purity of his desires, Augustine responds "Be quiet, I beg you, be quiet! Why do you torment me? Why do you dig so much and go so low? No longer do I hold back my weeping; from now on I promise nothing, I presume nothing, lest you ask me any more questions about those things. At least you say that He whom I'm on fire to see will know when I'm healthy. Let Him do as He please; and when He pleases, may He show himself] I now commit all of myself to His clemency and care." Augustine is entirely dependent upon God to correct his desires, and as such, arrogance has no place.

[47] *De inventione* 2.54.164. trans. C. D. Yonge (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888).

[48] See for instance Seneca, *On Clemency*. Seneca defines clemency in a number of ways concerning the relation between a superior and inferior deserving punishment. It is "self-control by the mind when it has the power to take vengeance" or "leniency on the part of a superior towards an inferior in imposing punishments." Or "tendency of the mind to leniency in exacting a punishment." Or "moderation that remits something of a deserved and due punishment." Or "Stops short of what could deservedly be imposed."

[49] Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50.

ever clearer picture remains obscure and such incomplete knowledge should discourage the arrogance characteristic of the dogmatic philosophers.

In sum, similar to Cicero's work, the *Contra Academicos* helps inculcate a particular moral character conducive to the philosophical pursuit of wisdom. Unlike the *Academica*, though, Augustine's work offers a dual attack against the arrogance associated with the dogmatists and the despair that skepticism can so easily provokes.

Conclusion

Central to both the *Academica* and the *Contra Academicos* is an adequate criterion of truth; each, therefore, acts as a logic within a philosophical pedagogy. But the two authors differ in their conclusions. While Cicero finds all criteria of truth wanting—especially the Stoic criterion—Augustine provides two standards: one based on the criterion offered by the Platonists and the other based on the authority of Christ. The supplementary criterion of authority technically disqualifies Augustine's dual approach to wisdom as philosophical; however, though reliant upon authority, the recent convert does not relinquish the philosophical challenge to pursue wisdom by means of reason. Authority guides Augustine's quest for certainty of the highest truths but never slakes his thirst for understanding.[50]

Augustine's dual criterion offers several benefits in a way that Cicero's logic cannot. Cicero discourages arrogance at the cost of inducing despair. For Augustine, the reliance upon authority acts as a continual reminder of one's own intellectual deficiencies. Without any guidance save one's sense of the probable, Academic

[50] The authority of Christ, far from squelching Augustine's desire to know, increases it: "I have already been so affected that I impatiently long to learn what is true not only through believing but also through understanding." (*Contra Academicos,* 3.20.43).

skepticism affords the opportunity for a form of practical relativism, in that what is probable may differ for each individual. Augustine's twin criteria prevent such ethical anarchy, providing clear boundaries for one's thought and way of life.

These last two chapters contribute to the call of Ernest Fortin and Michael Foley to bear in mind Cicero's influence upon Augustine's thought. Fortin calls Cicero as great a mentor as Plotinus for the teacher at Cassiciacum.[51] From the Platonists Augustine certainly learns a new understanding of reality. From Cicero he receives training in communicating philosophical concepts to an audience of diverse abilities, many of whom express reticence in practicing philosophy. Augustine's *Contra Academicos* replaces the *Academica*, but this replacement shows considerable respect for the one from whom he first learned of the love of philosophy. We know that an alternative title for this work was *De Academicis*, or *Concerning the Academics*.[52] The title alludes to Augustine's eventual esoteric theory of the Academics. He is writing against their skepticism, but he also is adopting, with some modifications, the doctrine and manner of presenting that doctrine as found in the *Academica* of Cicero. The response of the *Contra Academicos* to the *Academica* is not a critique only, but also homage to the Roman orator.

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[51] Fortin, *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity,* 311.

[52] *Retractationes* 1.1.1.

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