Chapter 5

CICERO THE PHILOSOPHER AT WORK: THE GENESIS AND EXECUTION OF *DE OFFICIIS* 3

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De officiis has a special place in the Ciceronian corpus. It is Cicero's last, unfinished philosophical work, and so, rightly or wrongly, there is a temptation to read it as his final word on ethics. Furthermore, Cicero boldly abandons his usual dialogue format and speaks in his own voice for the entire treatise. *De officiis* is also a crucial source for the history of Stoicism: it is our sole surviving example of a treatise on the Stoic concept of appropriate action (περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος), a standard topic on which numerous non-extant works are attested to in the book catalogues of Diogenes Laertius and other sources.[1] *De officiis* therefore offers a tantalizing opportunity to see how more abstract Stoic arguments about virtue or happiness were applied to the complexities of everyday life. For this very reason, the work enjoyed a position of extraordinary influence in subsequent European thought, with a rich and varied reception history from antiquity into the early modern period and a robust number of printings in the Renaissance and beyond.[2]

There are good reasons, then, for paying close attention to this work. Unfortunately, it is not an easy text to interpret. Cicero explicitly states that he is following Panaetius's περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος, but then immediately softens his claim by saying that he is not a mere translator and has reserved the right to apply his own judgment, his *iudicium*.[3] These statements have

[1] See e.g. Diog. Laert. 7.4, 7.129, 7.175, 7.178 (Zeno, Posidonius, Cleanthes, and Sphaerus, respectively), along with a general survey of the topic at 7.107–10. See also the fragments of Hierocles preserved by Stobaeus (conveniently available in Konstan and Ramelli (2009)). Seneca notes (*Ep.* 95.45) that Cicero's younger contemporary Brutus also wrote a περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος that was apparently quite detailed ([Brutus] *dat multa praecepta et parentibus et liberis et fratribus*).

[2] On the *Nachleben*, see Dyck (1996) 39–49, with further references.

[3] *Off.* 1.6: *sequimur igitur hoc quidem tempore et hac in quaestione potissimum Stoicos, non ut interpretes, sed, ut solemus, e fontibus eorum iudicio arbitrioque nostro quantum quoque modo videbitur, hauriemus*; cf. *Off.* 2.60: *ut et hic ipse Panaetius, quem multum in his libris secutus sum non interpretatus*. See also *Att*. 16.11.4 = 420 SB,

been the focus of a long-standing and heated debate over how much Cicero and how much loosely adapted Panaetius are present in our text; *De officiis* therefore remains one of the last bastions of *Quellenforschung*, in contrast to many of Cicero's other works, which are now increasingly seen, rightly in my opinion, as strikingly original.

Many of the debates over Ciceronian originality in this work tend to focus somewhat narrowly on books 1–2, and in doing so overlook the philosophically rich but underexplored book 3. For Cicero tells us in the preface to that book that he aims to dissolve any apparent conflict between the *honestum* and *utile*, a topic Panaetius had promised to discuss but failed to deliver. Thus in book 3 Cicero is, as he says at *Off.* 3.34, fighting his own battle and writing *Marte nostro*. Here, then, is an opportunity to observe Cicero as a philosopher breaking new ground. My discussion will pursue two strands of analysis. First, after reviewing the *status quaestionis* for Cicero's use of Panaetius, I will look more broadly at his deep and intelligent engagement with the Stoic tradition, arguing that his real objective in this treatise of his maturity was to further the debate on the topic among earlier and contemporary Stoic thinkers. Second, I will examine Cicero's ongoing epistolary skirmishes with his Roman Epicurean contemporaries in light of a critical argument in *De officiis* 3 in which he redeploys Plato's account of the Ring of Gyges. Both strands crucially rely on using Cicero's correspondence as evidence for the development of his thoughts and arguments. I thus aim to add to recent inter-generic work which has explored how the letters are fertile sources for Cicero's philosophical thought.[4] This paper, then, will show how Cicero engaged in one of his most popular and influential works with both the Greek philosophical tradition and his contemporary Roman context to create an original and exciting philosophical treatise.

1. PANAETIUS OR CICERO?

The general outline of this debate will be a familiar story to those who study Cicero, and I will only dwell on it briefly. There are two broad approaches to the question. The traditional view, which continues to receive support, most recently in a posthumous study by P. A. Brunt, is that a great deal or even the vast majority of our text reflects Panaetius: the structure, individual

discussed below (for Cicero's letters and translations of them, I have followed Shackleton Bailey's Cambridge editions; all other translations are my own unless otherwise noted).

[4] See especially McConnell (2014) and Griffin (1995); and more broadly on the nature of the correspondence see e.g. Hutchinson (1998), White (2010), and Wilcox (2012).

arguments, and even many of the Greek and Roman *exempla* are derived directly from the original Stoic text.[5] These 'Panaetian' scholars will, of course, concede that when a passage mentions Julius Caesar, this was a clear addition by Cicero, and they will accept Cicero's occasional comment that he is filling in an omission by Panaetius. But these passages are, in their view, limited in number: for the most part, Cicero provides a close rendering of Panaetius's ideas. In sharp contrast, several more recent scholars, including Griffin, Atkins and Lefèvre,[6] have argued for substantial or even overwhelming innovation on Cicero's part, to the point where Panaetius is either unrecoverable or plays only a minor part in the text as it stands.

There are good reasons to be sympathetic to both camps, for both sides can marshal concrete evidence in their favor. Brunt, for example, aptly cites a long passage on the obscure Greek politician Aratus of Sicyon as a clear example of pure, largely unadapted Panaetius (*Off.* 2.81–3).[7] Aratus's efforts to court Hellenistic despots to defuse civic *stasis* in his tiny city-state are discussed at surprising length and make very little sense in a Roman context, much less as advice to the young Marcus. The passage, however, does make excellent sense for a Greek writer like Panaetius: the tale of Aratus would offer valuable advice for how Greek statesmen should navigate domestic squabbles and delicately manage relations with greater powers, whether Ptolemaic Egypt or Rome.[8] Furthermore, brief comments at the beginning and end of the anecdote seem to be fairly transparent glosses added by Cicero.[9] Proponents of Ciceronian

[5] This is the traditional view of scholarship on *De officiis* in the early twentieth century; modern 'Panaetians' include Dyck (1996) (who provides thorough discussion of older opinions); Alesse (1997); and above all Brunt (2013).

[6] E. M. Atkins (1990); Griffin and E. M. Atkins (1991) xvii–xxi; Lefèvre (2001) (the boldest advocate for overwhelming originality); and Griffin (2011).

[7] See Brunt (2013) 198. The argument is a bit rhetorical—e.g. 'Who can doubt that the Greek "*exempla*" come from Panaetius?'—but his point is nevertheless sound. See also the earlier analysis of Pohlenz (1934) 118–21 on why Panaetius saw in Aratus an important model of effective politician who generated consensus, along with some comments on Cicero's reworking of the passage in light of the more recent example of the Gracchi and agrarian reform in Rome.

[8] This passage may well also reflect Panaetius's own political experiences. He was himself active in his native Rhodes and also in Athens; he also consorted with Roman luminaries like Scipio Aemilianus (basic information in Brunt (2013) 241–2; for details see the *vita* section in Alesse (1997) 15–27, esp. 23–7 (and in the older edition of van Straaten FF1–32).

[9] *Off.* 2.83: *o virum magnum dignumque, qui in re publica nostra natus esset*; the anecdote begins with a contrast to the Gracchi and Lysander *at vero Aratus Sicyonius iure laudatur* (had Panaetius originally paired Lysander and Aratus and has Cicero introduced the Gracchi?). Cf. the gloss following a discussion of Agis IV (*Off.* 2.80): *nostros Gracchos . . . nonne agrariae contentiones perdiderunt*?

innovation, on the other hand, can reasonably stress strong linguistic and thematic resonances between, for example, *De officiis* and the *Philippics*, and underline the importance of the treatment of *gloria* in book 2—a topic of great interest to Cicero, who was after all the author of a now lost *De gloria*. Long, for example, argues that *De officiis* represents a diagnosis of 'what had gone wrong in Roman Republican ideology' and that '*De officiis*, not the *De re publica*, is Cicero's Republic'.[10] Clearly this was not the goal of Panaetius's original composition.

There is, therefore, some truth to both sides of the question of Cicero's originality. The problem is generalizing from these fairly clear-cut cases on either side to reach a holistic verdict about *De officiis*. Any such generalization necessarily relies on bridging the gap between clear cases one way or another with a variety of intelligent but highly speculative inferences about Cicero, Panaetius, and the history of the Stoa. For this reason, other scholars have shied away from the contradictory results of this *Quellenforschung* and have chosen to set aside, often in a footnote, the problem of sources entirely and plunge ahead with their own readings of the work.[11] One can sympathize with this pragmatic decision, but the result is a proliferation of even more varied and contradictory conclusions, with even less attempt to adjudicate between alternative interpretations. When a commentator like Dyck does attempt to adjudicate these issues on a case-by-case basis, the results are indeed significantly more nuanced, but in the lengthy commentary that results, it is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. In what follows, I aim to shift the focus away from these source critical questions by concentrating to a much greater extent on book 3, where, as I will argue, the contours of the problem are quite different.

2. RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT WITH STOIC AUTHORS

This section will examine our evidence for Cicero's research and preparation for writing *De officiis*, particularly book 3.[12] This includes statements in the treatise itself as well as a group of letters written to his long-time friend and correspondent, Atticus. Unlike many other letters

[10] A. A. Long (1995a) 307 and 333. For the importance of the *gloria* theme throughout Cicero's philosophical works, see the contribution by Graver in this volume, together with note 47 below.

[11] See e.g. A. A. Long (1995a); Woolf (2015) 170–200; Schofield (2021) 179–80 nn. 42–3 and, more generally, 186–96.

[12] Cf. Brunt (2013) 220–2; Dyck (1996) 8–10, 484–8; and Edelstein-Kidd (1988–9) ii.ii.185–9. As is often the case with source criticism, these authors reach fairly different conclusions about the depth of Cicero's reading; I will try to allow for alternative views or readings in what follows.

relevant to the *philosophica*—that is, those which address the structure or formal characteristics of a dialogue, its revisions, or the politics of assigning speaking roles—I argue that the *De officiis* correspondence provides a unique view into Cicero's efforts to supplement work on ethics by Stoic philosophers writing in Greek earlier in the first century BCE. In it, our author emerges as a thinker who goes beyond his main source and attempts to make book 3 (at least) of his work a novel contribution to contemporary Stoic debates on ethics.

On November 5th Cicero provided Atticus with a fairly detailed description of the work (*Att*. 16.11.4 = 420 SB), which had been started in late October (*Att*. 15.13a.2 = 417 SB). Cicero had dragooned the Stoic Athenodorus for τὰ κεφάλαια ('chief points' or 'headings'; see below) of a work by Posidonius which he believed dealt with issues raised by Panaetius; he had also sent for the book directly. By mid-November Athenodorus had complied; here Cicero calls his compilation a 'notebook', ὑπόμνημα (*Att*. 16.14.4 = 425 SB), which he is satisfied with. It is strictly speaking unclear whether Cicero ever received Posidonius's work, but it seems probable that he had, since Cicero was aware of a sketchy treatment of an issue by Posidonius.[13] At the very least he had a good idea about his former teacher's views on the subject. Indeed, in a tantalizing passage of book 3 we are told that Posidonius had written in a certain letter (*in quadam epistula*) that P. Rutilius Rufus had once compared Panaetius's incomplete work with the perfect beauty of the unfinished Venus of Cos (*Off.* 3.10). It is tempting and delightful to imagine Posidonius had attached his own volume to the letter while discreetly suggesting to his former pupil that it was foolhardy to try to complete or outdo Panaetius; and that Cicero either missed the irony . . . or plunged onward with even greater determination.[14] However, Dyck is correct that the wording of Cicero's reference makes this quite unlikely: at most he simply had access to a letter of Posidonius, and it is entirely possible and even likely that he had simply heard about it, perhaps from Rufus himself, whom Cicero knew and had visited in Asia.[15] What is clear, then, is that Cicero had at some point, recently or in the past, read Posidonius's views on Panaetius's περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος, or at least had heard about them in some detail. We would furthermore do well to remember that Cicero's studies with Posidonius himself at Rhodes (see e.g. Plut. *Cic.* 4) may have also provided inspiration. Elsewhere, for

[13] Dyck (1996) 487 concurs, citing *Off.* 3.8 (*quem locum miror a Posidonio breviter esse tactum in quibusdam commentariis*); Schofield (2021) 220 n. 17 is more doubtful, but concedes that some knowledge would have come from Athenodorus.

[14] Cf. Posidonius's diplomatic response to Cicero's request to compose a work on the latter's famous consulship: *Att*. 2.1.2 = 21 SB.

[15] Dyck (1996) 507. The visit is described in *Rep*. 1.13.

example, he cites memories of lectures of the Epicurean Zeno which he had heard in Athens,[16] so reminiscences of school lectures are certainly possible. Finally, we should not completely rule out ideas or thoughts from Cicero's wide range of friends of other philosophical persuasions, like Antiochus or Philo; or the Peripatetic Cratippus, who is named at several points in *De officiis* and was teaching the young Marcus Cicero at the time.[17]

In addition to these traces of correspondence and interaction with Greek philosophers, Athenodorus certainly provided Cicero with further indirect knowledge of Posidonius. But what sort of assistance did he provide? τὰ κεφάλαια can mean either a summary of chief points or, more thinly, a series of chapter headings or topics.[18] The former, more expansive option seems more likely. The fact that Cicero later calls this document a ὑπόμνημα (notebook) suggests something more substantial than a list of headings.[19] Plutarch, for example, describes how he used his notebooks (ὑπομνήματα) of observations on tranquillity of mind, which he claims he had originally composed for himself (ἐμαυτῷ), to aid in his composition of a treatise on that topic.[20] This hypothesis of a more expansive summary is borne out by evidence in the treatise. Cicero's references to Posidonius elsewhere in *De officiis* (1.159, 3.8–10) point to awareness of particulars: for example, he notes that Posidonius had filled his book with ethical problem cases which were *taetra* and *obscena*,[21] and that he had 'in certain commentaries' only 'touched lightly' on Panaetius's omission (*breviter esse tactum in quibusdam commentariis*). So on the whole, I suggest that Athenodorus supplied a review or summary of the major issues, perhaps references to key examples, and possibly glossed with additional comments by Athenodorus himself. It does seem clear that Athenodorus provided substantive information on Posidonius's treatise.[22]

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[16] *Tusc.* 3.38: *me audiente Athenis senex Zeno . . . contendere et magna voce dicere solebat . . .*

[17] Information and references in Dyck (1996) 61–2.

[18] *LSJ s.v.* κεφάλαιος 2, 5, 7. See on the issues in this paragraph the discussion of Edelstein-Kidd (1988–9) ii.ii.185–9.

[19] *LSJ s.v.* ὑπόμνημα goes so far as to gloss the word as 'dissertations or treatises written by philosophers, rhetoricians, and artists'—although in the case of Athenodorus, a complete treatise seems unlikely.

[20] *On Tranquility of Mind*, 464F.

[21] *Off.* 1.159: Posidonius was probably responding to discussions of cannibalism and incest in the Old Stoa. On the so-called 'disturbing theses', see Vogt (2008) 20–64.

[22] Edelstein-Kidd (1988–9) ii.i.188 may be right that for the composition of book 1 Cicero may not have yet had access to Posidonius's work and had to rely on Athenodorus, but they are perhaps overly pessimistic when they assert that this material 'was so exiguous in amount and relevance that it played no part in Cicero's book'. Cicero, at least, was quite satisfied with Athenodorus's notes and told Atticus further effort wasn't needed. As for the later

Cicero mentions three other Stoics in book 3: Hecato of Rhodes (*Off.* 3.63, 3.89), Diogenes of Babylon, and Antipater of Tarsus (*Off.* 3.51–5, 3.91). Hecato was a pupil of Panaetius and active around 100 BCE, while the others were the heads of the Stoa before Panaetius. Cicero's language when talking about Hecato is concrete and suggests that he had direct knowledge of a work περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος: 'I see that Hecato . . . says in his books *De officio* (*Hecatonem . . . video in iis libris, quos de officio scripsit*); at *Off.* 3.89 he cites a specific book number—'The sixth book of Hecato's *De officiis* is filled with questions like the following . . .' (*plenus est sextus liber de officiis Hecatonis talium quaestionum*)—and adds that Hecato 'argued *in utramque partem*' before discussing a few examples from this work. Cicero's introduction to the debate between Diogenes and Antipater, on the other hand, includes only a bare gloss about their eminence as Stoics. Their presence in the text is therefore more likely to be second-hand, drawn perhaps from Hecato.[23] All of this suggests that Cicero had some direct knowledge of Hecato's περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος, though perhaps not all of it; alternatively, it is possible Cicero's knowledge derives from a source (perhaps Posidonius or Athenodorus), but one which took care to provide fairly concrete details of the work and its structure. And somewhere along the line Cicero became aware of a relevant debate between Antipater and Diogenes, whether from Hecato or another source.[24]

This reconstruction of Cicero's engagement with other authors involves a good deal of inference. But even if I am wrong about the exact degree of his knowledge of Antipater, Hecato, Posidonius, or the nature of Athenodorus's summary, our evidence would still show Cicero engaging (or attempting to engage) with a range of philosophers, particularly his near-contemporaries—in any case with more than just Panaetius's source-text. This is all the more striking in light of his activities at the time. He had abandoned a trip to Athens to see young Marcus in the summer (thus the composition of *De officiis* later that year), followed by

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reference at *Off.* 3.8, I agree with Dyck that by this time Cicero probably had had direct access to Posidonius's *Liber* (see note 13 above).

[23] Cicero adds that Hecato had dedicated this work to Q. Aelius Tubero; Cicero had some interest in this Roman (references at Dyck (1996) 574) which may have encouraged him to track down the text (whether for the purposes of writing *De officiis* or at some other time). Schofield (2021) 220 nn. 14 and 16) has recently voiced some doubts about Cicero having direct knowledge of Hecato. Still, if as Schofield instead suggests the examples cited come from Hecato more indirectly, this would still reflect an effort on Cicero's part to go far beyond merely following Panaetius's treatise.

[24] Alternatively, Cicero may himself have composed the exchange, based on reports from other readings of their two positions. See Dyck (1996) 557–9 for this and various other proposals.

increasing, if initially sporadic, opposition to Antonius and the composition of many anxious messages to allies or flattering letters to those whom he hoped to bring over to his side.[25] He was very busy but found time to read or consult beyond Panaetius and to incorporate ideas from several additional Stoic thinkers of relevance to the matter at hand—and, as well will see shortly, engage creatively with Plato's *Republic* in a novel way.[26] This level of research militates against narrow readings of Cicero's sources in other works. Though the tide is turning,[27] one still finds scholars who read, for example, *De finibus* 1–2 as substantially dependent on Philodemus, claim that the work's discussion of Epicurean pleasure derived from a single lost Academic source, or suggest that Cicero had only 'a few short works or extracts plus one or more doxographical writings'.[28] *De officiis* reveals that even during one of the busiest periods of his life he took great care to read and engage with a range of sources. I believe this conclusion can support more positive and nuanced readings of Cicero's intelligent and complex engagement with his philosophical sources in other works.

Second, I would like to see in the letters and book 3 a Cicero who is more assertive in his self-presentation as a philosopher. Book 3 is not a summary of someone else's views with a little bit of *iudicium* thrown in: Cicero has consciously identified an important and unresolved issue in Stoic ethics, tracked down works written by contemporary Stoic authors, and explicitly stated that he was trying to make a contribution to their ethical project. More colloquially, I think we can see Cicero trying to 'fill in a gap' in the scholarly literature, in a way not entirely different from what we as scholars routinely do.[29] And this may also help explain why he does

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[25] White (2010) 137–65 offers a detailed account of Cicero's frenetic political manoeuvrings in this period.

[26] I should hedge a bit here: it is certainly possible that he had encountered Hecato, for example, long before writing *Off.* 3. But I believe his efforts to obtain Posidonius's book and to consult Athenodorus are still noteworthy; and in any case Cicero is venturing far beyond one or two sources, regardless of when he read them.

[27] See e.g. Graver's (2002a) valuable appendices on the wide range of sources used in the *Tusculans*; cf. Badian (1969) and Sumner (1973) 156–8, 166–70 on the detailed preparations for an aborted political dialogue.

[28] See respectively Tsouna (2007a) 345–51, esp. 346 n. 7 (cf. Tsouna (2007b) 14–5, with nn. 3–4); Nikolsky (2001); Stokes (1995) 153. With respect to *De officiis*, cf. the references to 'Cicero or his source' *vel sim.* in Schofield (1995b) 196, 199, 205. Brunt (2013) 203 actually goes so far as to speak Cicero of 'interpolating' (!) Panaetius in *De officiis.*

[29] An anonymous reader points out, rightly, a significant difference: Cicero did not necessarily set out to 'fill a gap in the scholarship' to show off his originality, as modern scholars often aim to do; he only did so *because* there was a gap and would have been quite happy if Panaetius had completed his project. Still, it is clear that Cicero was quite happy to advertise confidently his originality and relevance to Stoic studies, even if he did not necessarily set out to do so.

so in his own voice and at length, something almost unique in the *philosophica* (*De fato*, another late work, being the exception). This increasingly confident self-presentation can in turn be read, I think, in light of his striking claim in the *Tusculan Disputations* that he felt competent to give *scholae* like a Greek—something he had mocked or decried as late as *De finibus* and carefully and emphatically avoided in the works of the 50s[30]—or his praise of the uniqueness of his lost *Consolatio*.[31] My point is certainly *not* that in *De officiis* or the *Tusculan Disputations* Cicero suddenly became a serious philosopher (he was always a serious philosopher), nor that he suddenly started to engage with other authors—*De re publica*'s allusive gestures to Panaetius and Polybius (*Rep.* 1.34, 4.3 [4.1 Powell]), or *De oratore*'s deep engagement with philosophical and rhetorical traditions give the lie to such a claim. My point is rather that Cicero in *De officiis* felt emboldened to state explicitly his direct engagement with Greek philosophical sources and presented himself as a fully-fledged philosopher, mediating disputes and furthering the scholarly debate, without the need for the *dissimulatio doctrinae* or the distancing from stereotypes of disputatious Greeklings in earlier works. It is tempting to conclude that at the end of his life and after all the works of the 50s and 40s Cicero felt more comfortable not only to state clearly what he felt to be plausible or *veri simile*, but also to contribute explicitly to the work of Greek philosophers—and even to correct them.

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[30] *Tusc.* 1.7: *in quam exercitationem ita nos studiose operam dedimus, ut iam etiam scholas Graecorum more habere auderemus*. Contrast the disdain for this practice at *Fin*. 2.1 (*primum inquam deprecor ne me tamquam philosophum putetis scholam vobis aliquam explicaturum, quod ne in ipsis quidem philosophis magnopere umquam probavi*). On the radical connotations of presenting oneself as giving a *schola* for contemporary Roman readers, who were often wary of 'tongue-wagging Greeklings', see Gildenhard (2007) 12–17. Gildenhard prefers to see the use of the term as a 'self-debasement' and thus a form of protest against his political marginalization under Caesar, while I see Cicero's use of it as a reflection of a more assertive self-presentation as a philosopher. I agree with Gildenhard, however, that the term *schola* carries sufficient cultural connotations to represent more than a neutral change of genre or presentation. Relevant here is the detailed analysis of Hine (2016), who establishes quite forcefully that Latin writers such as Cicero and Seneca carefully and consistently avoided calling themselves *philosophi*, which had similarly unpleasant cultural connotations (the first Latin writer to self-declare himself as a philosopher seems to be Apuleius). It was OK to *philosophari*, but not to be a *philosophus*.

[31] *Att.* 12.14.3 = 251 SB: *quin etiam feci quod profecto ante me nemo ut ipse me per litteras consolarer*. Plutarch, *Lucullus* 42 also expressed admiration for the early version of the *Academica*.

3. WRITING *MARTE NOSTRO*: THE RING OF GYGES AND EPICURUS' *K.D.* 5

Thus far, much to do about reading and research. We can now turn to analyze a major argument in book 3, to see how Cicero engages with his contemporary Roman context as well as with the Greek philosophical tradition. Here I will concentrate on a single example, one where Cicero takes inspiration from Plato to combat the popularity of Epicureanism in Italy. I argue that Cicero took to heart criticisms of his attacks on Epicurus from an epistolary debate with the future tyrannicide, C. Cassius Longinus, and offered a more nuanced and rigorous retort to Epicurean readers in book 3.

In *De officiis* 3.34, Cicero declares that he is now writing on his own:

> The part that he [Panaetius] left, therefore, I shall complete without any auxiliaries, but, as the saying goes, fighting my own battle *(Marte nostro).* For there is no treatment of this question since Panaetius, at any rate such that meets with my approval, in the writings that come into my hands.[32] (trans. E. M. Atkins)

Shortly thereafter, in *Off.* 3.38 and following, he sets out to bolster his overall contention in book 3 (i.e. that there is no conflict between the *honestum* and the *utile*) by introducing Plato's story about the Ring of Gyges (*Rep*. 2.359c–360b).[33] After arguing that the possibility of escaping punishment should never enter into moral deliberation, Cicero introduces the Ring in order to trap Epicureans (or other hedonists) into either admitting that the *honestum* is per se valuable or conceding that their efforts to praise justice and the other virtues are incoherent. He had already briefly explored the possibility of how an Epicurean would act in *De finibus,* but the Ring allows him to force Epicureans into a more potent dilemma.[34] The passage is worth quoting at length (*Off.* 3.39):

> If a wise man, then, were to have the same ring, he would think himself no more free to do wrong than if he did not have it. For a good man pursues aims that are not

[32] *hanc igitur partem relictam explebimus nullis adminiculis, sed, ut dicitur, Marte nostro. neque enim quicquam est de hac parte post Panaetium explicatum, quod quidem mihi probaretur, de iis, quae in manus meas venerint.*

[33] Woolf (2013) offers a first-rate analysis of how Cicero has redeployed Plato's argument in the context of Hellenistic philosophy; see also now Schofield (2021) 191–2.

[34] *Fin.* 2.28. The use of the Ring thus represents Cicero returning to and improving the force of his argument.

> secret, but honorable. On this topic some philosophers who are not at all bad men, but not clear-thinking enough, say that Plato has produced a fictional tale, as if indeed he were justifying it either as actually having happened or even as possible. But the force of the ring, and of the example, is as follows: if no one were going to know, if no one were going even to suspect, when you did something for the sake of riches, power, despotism or lust, if it would be always unknown by gods and by men alike—then would you do it? They deny that that could have been possible, although it could indeed happen. But I am in fact asking what they would do if the thing that they deny is possible were possible. They persevere in a boorish manner, they deny that it is possible and insist upon that, failing to see the force of this word ["if"]. For when we ask what they would do if they could conceal it, we are not asking whether they could in fact conceal it. Rather, we are turning the screw, so to speak, so that if they reply that, given the proposed impunity, they would do the advantageous thing, they admit they are iniquitous; if they deny it, they concede that everything dishonorable should on its own account be avoided.[35] (trans. E. M. Atkins)

The argument has merit. Epicurus *did* adopt an uncompromising stance on the importance of justice and the other virtues, summarized by *K.D.* 5 (or the *Letter to Menoeceus* 132): 'It is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, nobly, and justly'. This conclusion, as stated, has *no* exceptions: virtue, though of only instrumental value, is absolutely necessary for the acquisition of the highest form of pleasure.[36] Now, Epicurus had bequeathed to his followers a variety of arguments discounting the supposed long-term benefits of committing injustice, chief among them the argument that one can never be completely sure of getting away

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[35] *hunc igitur ipsum anulum si habeat sapiens, nihil plus sibi licere putet peccare quam si non haberet; honesta enim bonis viris, non occulta quaeruntur. atque hoc loco philosophi quidam minime mali illi quidem, sed non satis acuti, fictam et commenticiam fabulam prolatam dicunt a Platone, quasi vero ille aut factum id esse aut fieri potuisse defendat. haec est vis huius anuli et huius exempli: si nemo sciturus, nemo ne suspicaturus quidem sit, cum aliquid divitiarum, potentiae, dominationis, libidinis causa feceris, si id diis hominibusque futurum sit semper ignotum, sisne facturus? negant id fieri posse. quamquam potest id quidem, sed quaero, quod negant posse, id si posset, quidnam facerent. urgent rustice sane. negant enim posse et in eo perstant, hoc verbum quid valeat non vident. cum enim quaerimus, si celare possint, quid facturi sint, non quaerimus possintne celare, sed tamquam tormenta quaedam adhibemus, ut si responderint se impunitate proposita facturos, quod expediat, facinorosos se esse fateantur, si negent, omnia turpia per se ipsa fugienda esse concedant.*

[36] For some reflections on this point and on Epicurean virtue theory, see e.g. Mitsis (1988) 59–79; A. A. Long (2006); Armstrong (2011).

with it (e.g. *K.D.* 34 and 35). In citing the Gyges narrative, Cicero attempts to bypass those defenses. Since Plato stipulates non-detection, the anecdote forces an Epicurean to explain why virtuous action is correct (for instrumental reasons, of course) even when the threat of detection is no longer applicable.

Cicero then imagines an Epicurean response: 'they say that Plato has produced a fictional tale'. But Cicero argues that this misses the point: 'they . . . fail to see the force of the word "if". For when we ask what they would do if they could conceal it, we are not asking whether they could in fact conceal it'. This response may seem a bit unfair: is it really fatal if Epicurean ethics fails in some alternate reality? But we should remember that *K.D.* 5 and other Epicurean sources are insistent that just action is *always* the right choice: οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν without justice, etc. There is no qualification to this statement; it should always hold true. Of course, the Epicureans could qualify their claim and note that justice and injustice have no per se existence[37] and are liable to change, in which case *K.D.* 5 would only hold for *this* world as it is now. But that move is a concession, and one that Epicurus himself was apparently loath to make, at least according to a testimonium from Plutarch.[38] So Cicero's argument does in fact identify a soft spot in Epicurean ethics and forces a qualification to some of Epicurus's more strident claims about virtue. While the argument may not be fatal, it is at the least a bit embarrassing to force an interlocutor to admit that he or she would, in fact, behave quite badly indeed and give up on justice if the world were just a little different. In contrast, the Ring would pose no problem whatsoever for a Stoic: virtue would in any scenario win out. Cicero's redeployment of a venerable Platonic argument in the context of Hellenistic ethics, then, is just one example of interesting arguments in *De officiis* 3 which reflect his own thinking and engagement with the history of philosophy.

Cicero's correspondence can, I argue, breathe new life into this argument by locating it firmly in his contemporary Roman context. For Cicero had indeed been debating philosophy with his erudite associates for years before *De officiis* 3, and the Ring of Gyges is the

[37] *K.D.* 34 again: ἡ ἀδικία οὐ καθ' ἑαυτὴν κακόν.

[38] Plutarch, *Adv. Col*. 1127D = fr. 18 Us.: '[He] asks himself in the *Disputed Questions* whether the sage who knows that he will not be found out will do certain things that the laws forbid. He answers: "the unqualified predication is not free from difficulty (οὐκ εὔοδον τὸ ἁπλοῦν ἐπικατηγόρημα)"' (trans. Einarson and De Lacy). Plutarch then, probably unfairly, concludes 'that is, "I shall do it, but I do not wish to admit it"'. On this passage and what Epicurus may have meant, see the interesting speculations in Roskam (2012).

culmination of a decade of philosophical bickering with his Roman Epicurean friends.[39] A notable example of his repeated attempts to trap and pin down these correspondents is a letter to the jurist Trebatius Testa, written about a decade earlier.[40] We learn in the letter that the prominent Caesarean and general C. Vibius Pansa, the dedicatee of Philodemus's *On Rhetoric* book 4,[41] had informed Cicero that Trebatius 'had become an Epicurean' (*indicavit mihi Pansa meus Epicureum te esse factum*). After expressing surprise and dismay at this conversion, Cicero in this letter launches into a series of pointed questions: how would Trebatius promise to arbitrate legal issues[42] fairly when he does everything for his own sake (*omnia tua causa facias*)? Why would he be a patron of his hometown if Epicureans stay out of politics (*quid fiet porro populo Ulubrano, si tu statueris* πολιτεύεσθαι *non oportere*)? What would an oath to Jupiter mean if he had no fear of a god being angry (*quo modo autem tibi placebit Iovem Lapidem iurare cum scias Iovem iratum esse nemini posse*)?[43] With these questions Cicero is forcing his epistolary interlocutor to justify his actions and lifestyle according to a hedonistic calculus. He tries to argue that his correspondent's doctrine is incompatible with the life of a Roman aristocrat, a tactic that will appear prominently in *De finibus* 1–2 and that finds parallels in a number of Greek philosophical authors.[44]

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[39] For this network of friends, see Castner (1988) and Gilbert (2015) 78–115 (on Epicurean contacts), and Garbarino (2003) (on the other schools). It is worth citing again Griffin (1995) and especially McConnell (2014), who both offer a range of explorations of philosophy in Cicero's letters.

[40] *Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB, written to Trebatius in Feb. 53.

[41] According to the new reading of Dorandi (1996).

[42] It is intriguing that Cicero uses the legal phrase *ut inter bonos bene agier* in this letter and again at *Off.* 3.61 and 3.70 (also *Top*. 66). It seems unlikely that he has in his treatise this much earlier letter in mind, but I do think the reuse of the example reveals how Cicero had been practicing/trying out examples and arguments for many years—indeed, perhaps all the way back to his studies with his old teacher Scaevola, as Dyck (1996) 584 suggests.

[43] Obbink (1996) 425–6 tries to justify Epicurean oaths ('For an Epicurean the swearing of an oath exhibits or even creates a disposition . . . in one's soul to fulfil it—a disposition which according to Epicurean theology is closely connected, if not coextensive, with the gods by which one swears'), but this seems rather desperate and results in an oath that is so far removed from traditional practice as to verge on a deception. For Epicurus's own religiosity and even initiation to the Eleusinian mysteries, see Philodemus, *De pietate* 558–9 and 808–10.

[44] To anticipate a common objection: I do not see this letter as a 'mere' joke, and I am inclined to take the arguments in it seriously—contra e.g. Griffin (1995) 332 ('a series of rather crude jokes'); Armstrong (2011) 118 ('[Cicero's] frequently facile deprecation of Epicureanism'). Parallels to the strategy in this letter, including the staccato barrage of pointed questions, can be found elsewhere in the philosophical tradition, as well as in Cicero: the strategy aims to reveal contradictions between various claims of a school. See e.g. Epictetus, *Disc*. 3.7.19–21, a very close parallel; or Cicero, *Nat. D.* 1.115–17; Plutarch's *Against Colotes* is an extended example of this

With this background in mind, we can turn to the much later correspondence with Cassius, the Epicurean and future tyrannicide. There we find more jabs against Epicurus and his Roman adherents which are even more resonant with the Gyges thought experiment. The letter in question is one of a series of three letters to Cassius, written in late 46/early 45 BCE as both correspondents were brooding in Italy while they awaited news of Caesar's campaign against the sons of Pompey in Spain. The series touches upon political gossip as well as philosophy: one gets the sense that Cicero is trying to establish a rapport with his correspondent. In *Fam.* 15.17 (= 214 SB) Cicero, as in the letter to Trebatius almost a decade earlier, demands from his correspondent a hedonistic explanation for the seemingly altruistic actions of Pansa, who again appears as a proud Epicurean. Pansa, Cicero tells us, had departed from Rome and was treated to widespread acclamation (*Fam.* 15.17 = 214 SB, Jan. 45):

> Our friend Pansa left Rome in military dress on 30 December, an unmistakable illustration of what you have recently begun to question, that moral goodness is to be chosen for its own sake. He has relieved many from their miseries and behaved like a human being in these bad times; as a result he left Rome escorted by the extraordinary goodwill of reputable citizens.[45] (trans. Shakleton Bailey, slightly modified)

The argument in this letter is compressed. Griffin has offered the most detailed analysis of this difficult passage and has done much to unravel its argument.[46] His argument proceeds as follows: Pansa departed from Rome in military uniform;[47] his escort of 'good men' illustrates

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strategy in terms of epistemology. For this and similar sorts of arguments in the philosophical tradition, see Kechagia's (2011) 174–8 discussion of Plutarch's polemical strategies in *Against Colotes* (building on ideas in Westman (1955)). Cf. Burnyeat (1976) 47–8, 57–8 on ancient περιτροπὴ ('self-refutation') arguments; more general comments can be found in Owen (1983) and Kleve (1985).

[45] *Pansa noster paludatus a. d.III Kal. Ian. <ita> profectus est ut quivis intellegere posset, id quod tu nuper dubitare coepisti,* τὸ καλὸν δι᾽ αὑτὸ αἱρετὸν. *nam quod multos miseriis levavit et quod se in his malis hominem praebuit, mirabilis eum virorum bonorum benevolentia prosecuta est.*

[46] Griffin (1995) 343–6, who I follow on most points, though I see Cicero's argument in a somewhat more positive light than she does.

[47] The reasons behind Pansa's departure are unclear. It has been speculated that he left to meet Caesar in Spain, or that his departure was involved with his efforts to provide aid to Romans who had sided with Pompeius and fared poorly after Caesar's victory. As to the first point, Shackleton Bailey (1977) 2.378 has acutely undermined the logistics of a junket to Spain and back before Pansa's governorship of Gaul in March; as to the second, it is not clear why Pansa's informal support of Pompeians would lead to a military command (*paludatus*) or his

the intrinsic value of τὸ καλὸν, or 'the honorable' or 'moral goodness'. The following sentences explain Cicero's point in more detail:

1. Since Pansa aided those in need and acted 'like a man' in troubled times,
2. A wonderful good-will (*mirabilis . . . benevolentia*) arose from the good men (*virorum bonorum*) when he departed from Rome.
3. This reaction undermines Epicurus's denial of the intrinsic value of τὸ καλόν.

The issue here is not Pansa's departure from Rome but the *benevolentia* that accompanied it. The *benevolentia* of the 'good citizens', which presumably arose from Pansa's efforts to help Pompeians, is supposed to undermine the coherence of Epicurean social theory. To help make sense of this point, Griffin has collected passages from works of later that year which discuss *gloria* and its proper role in politics. In these passages it is the performance of good actions for their own sake (and not for self-serving motives) that results in spontaneous approval and good will—this is 'true glory'.[48] On the other hand, if these activities had been motivated by a selfish Epicurean hedonistic calculus, the same positive reception by the *boni* would not have occurred. On this reading, then, Pansa's activities were sufficiently altruistic to warrant the spontaneous good will characteristic of true glory. In other words, Pansa's efforts to support downtrodden Pompeians and the spontaneous good will that resulted from his actions simply cannot be justified, according to Cicero, by an elaborate hedonistic calculus: his actions are non-reducible other-oriented actions, and his life and character are therefore better than his beliefs. This does not refute Epicurus per se, but rather it demands, just as in the letter to Trebatius, an answer as to how these Roman Epicureans could justify their actions in purely hedonistic terms. Indeed, in a later letter in the series Cicero poses this very question to Cassius, in which he says that he is 'testing you to see how you take [my criticisms]' (*tempto enim te, quo animo accipias*) in the hope of reversing Cassius's recent conversion to Epicureanism and to gauge his commitment: was he a serious Epicurean who could defend the school's position?[49] In other words, it seems that Cicero was picking a friendly fight with his Epicurean

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departure from Rome. Shackleton Bailey therefore suspends judgment on the matter. However, for reasons that will become clear the precise nature of Pansa's commission is not particularly relevant to Cicero's argument.

[48] Griffin (1995) 343, citing *Fin.* 3.57, 5.62–3; *Off.* 2.32, 2.43. McConnell (2014) 202–3 provides a substantial list of further parallels and a very helpful discussion of Cicero's treatment of *gloria* throughout his *philosophica*.

[49] *Fam.* 15.16 = 215 SB, Jan. 45. It is unclear what sect Cassius followed before his conversion to Epicureanism. Shackleton Bailey (1977) 2.379 entertains the idea that he was a follower of Antiochus of Ascalon (like Brutus),

correspondent and wanted to see how he would respond.[50]

Cassius's response to Cicero's previous letters is rich and worthy of extended analysis, but here I will focus solely on his response to Cicero's sally against Pansa (*Fam.* 15.19 = 216 SB, Jan. 45):

> I am glad that our friend Pansa left Rome in uniform amid general good will, both for his sake and, let me add, for all our sakes. For I hope that people will understand how intense and universal hatred is for cruelty and love for worth and clemency, and that they will see how those things which the wicked seek and covet come in fact to good men. For it is difficult to persuade men that moral goodness is to be chosen for its own sake; but it is both true and probable that pleasure and tranquility are furnished by virtue, justice, and moral goodness. For Epicurus himself, whom all those Catiuses and Amafiniuses (bad translators of his words) take as their starting point, says: 'it is impossible to live pleasantly without living rightly and justly'. And in this way both Pansa, who follows pleasure, retains virtue; and those who are called by you lovers of pleasure are in fact lovers of moral goodness and lovers of justice and they cultivate and retain all the virtues.[51] (trans. Shackleton Bailey, slightly modified)

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but there is no reason he could not have been a Stoic or even a Peripatetic (Griffin (1995) 343–4 appropriately suspends judgment); Benferhat (2005) 261 n. 189 suggests that Pansa may have converted Cassius. Sedley (1997) 41 (cf. Sedley (2013) 44) argues with some plausibility that the reference to Cassius's conversion 'by violence and arms' refers to the Civil War. Much earlier Momigliano (1941) had suggested that the conversion was related to Cassius's decision to assassinate Caesar, but Cicero's reference to 'two or three years' (and *Fam*. 15.16's date of 46–5) is decisive counterevidence (so Shackleton Bailey (1977) 2.378, followed by Griffin (1995) 342).

[50] Unlike their close association after the Ides of March, and later when plotting against Antonius, Cicero and Cassius seem at this time to have had a more distant and cool relationship, so Cicero may not have known what to expect from Cassius. There is no reason in any case to suspect that he really hoped to convince Cassius to abandon his convictions.

[51] *Pansam nostrum secunda voluntate hominum paludatum ex urbe exisse cum ipsius causa gaudeo tum mehercule etiam omnium nostrum. spero enim homines intellecturos quanto sit omnibus odio crudelitas et quanto amori probitas et clementia, atque ea, quae maxime mali petant et concupiscant, ad bonos pervenire; difficile est enim persuadere hominibus* τὸ καλὸν δι' αὑτὸ αἱρετὸν; ἡδονὴν *vero et* ἀταραξίαν *virtute, iustitia,* τῷ καλῷ *parari et verum et probabile est; ipse enim Epicurus, a quo omnes Catii et Amafinii, mali verborum interpretes, proficiscuntur, dicit:* οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ἄνευ τοῦ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ζῆν. *itaque et Pansa, qui* ἡδονὴν *sequitur, virtutem retinet, et ii, qui a vobis* φιλήδονοι *vocantur, sunt* φιλόκαλοι et φιλοδίκαιοι *omnesque virtutes et colunt et retinent.*

Cassius joins Cicero in rejoicing at the goodwill which Pansa's activities had incited. But he thereafter departs from Cicero's analysis and offers a radical reinterpretation of the situation in order to defend Epicurean ethics. His strategy is to challenge Cicero's claim about the incompatibility of hedonism and virtue; he instead argues that justice and the other virtues are necessary prerequisites for a pleasant life. He begins by underlining the dangers of vice and the benefits of virtue: *crudelitas* arouses intense hatred while *probitas* and *clementia* result in *amor*.[52] He further claims that the actions of the wicked are misguided; the goods that they crave are in fact acquired only by good conduct. This comment is compressed, but later in the letter he provides concrete examples of his point: the avariciousness of Publius Sulla and the *crudelitas* of Pompey the Great's son Gnaeus resulted in hatred, while Pansa's virtuous character yielded *benevolentia* and *amor*. In other words, Cassius is claiming that the misguided and empty beliefs of wicked men significantly impede their acquisition of goods productive of happiness (e.g. a wide range of friendships or the goodwill and reputation which might provide security against violence and injustice). His strategy so far has been to argue that being good is in everyone's best interest; his following comment offers a more abstract formulation of his position, which he presents as far more intuitive than Cicero's hopelessly unrealistic ideal of selfless action: 'For it is difficult to persuade men that moral goodness is to be chosen for its own sake; but it is both true and probable[53] that pleasure and tranquillity are furnished by virtue, justice, and moral goodness'.

As befits a good Epicurean, Cassius then cites a maxim of the master (*ipse enim Epicurus . . . dicit*) in Greek to sum up his position: 'It is impossible to live pleasantly without living with moral goodness and justice (οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ἄνευ τοῦ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ζῆν)'. This is a close citation of the first clause of a comment from either Epicurus's *Letter to Menoeceus* (Diog. Laert. 10.132) or *Kuria Doxa* 5.[54] In citing this maxim, Cassius thus

[52] Cf. Armstrong (2011) 113.

[53] Griffin (1995) 346 suggests that Cassius's term *probabile* alludes to Cicero's Academic skepticism. This clever allusion would be in line with the playful Epicurean language Cicero employed when writing to Epicurean correspondents.

[54] So Griffin (1995) 344–5. For the importance of the *Kuriai Doxai*, see *Fin*. 2.20: 'Who of you Epicureans have not learned the *Kuriai Doxai* . . . because they are the most weighty and pithy maxims for living well?' (*quis vestrum non edidicit* Epicuri κύριας δόξας . . . *quia gravissimae sint ad beate vivendum breviter enuntiatae sententiae*?). Might Cicero have had Epicurean correspondents like Cassius in mind when he wrote this? I note also that Cassius omits the adverb φρονίμως. Griffin (1995) 345 suggests this was intentional and Cicero sets up a pun later in the letter, but it seems entirely possible that Cassius is quoting from memory and is citing the content

concludes his defense of Epicurean ethics by drawing out the consequences of the tight relationship between virtue and pleasure. Cicero is simply wrong to insist on their incompatibility; both Pansa and Cassius himself can speak meaningfully about a virtuous life of pleasure: 'And in this way both Pansa, who follows pleasure, retains virtue; and those who are called by you lovers of pleasure are in fact lovers of moral goodness and lovers of justice and they cultivate and retain all the virtues'.[55]

Cassius seems to have won this skirmish: Pansa's activities could be very well justified in Epicurean terms. But Cicero refused to change his tactics. A few months later in *De finibus* 2, he unleashed a barrage of dozens of ethical problem cases, ranging from legends of Roman history to recent court cases, designed to push Epicureans into a corner: in each case he demanded a hedonist explanation for the seemingly altruistic actions.[56] And by this time Cicero had identified *K.D.* 5 as the crux: if he is able to find a *single* exception to this doctrine, Epicurus's defense of virtue will fall apart (*Fin.* 2.70):

> 'But Epicurus denies'—and this is your ace in the hole—'that anyone who does not live morally can live pleasantly.' As if I give a damn what Epicurus says or denies! I'm asking this: what can one who places the highest good in pleasure claim consistently?[57]

One suspects, however, that a committed Epicurean would be prepared to explain away the entire litany of examples supplied in *De finibus* 2. Indeed, even Cicero appears to anticipate that kind of pushback, when he ends book 2 with the palpably contemptuous remark that 'I fear that you would say that Hercules himself undertook all his labors with the greatest exertion on behalf of the common weal—all for the sake of pleasure' (*Fin.* 2.118).[58]

From the letter to Trebatius in 53 to the letter to Cassius in 45, and in the fulminations against the Garden and its Roman adherent Lucius Torquatus in *De finibus* 1–2, Cicero tried

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most relevant to Cicero's critique, namely that regarding the importance of justice. Benferhat (2005) 263 sees Cassius as modifying Epicurean doctrine here, with an eye toward Plato, but I am not convinced.

[55] Cf. Gordon (2012) 131–2 and McConnell (2014) 25–6.

[56] Cf. Inwood (1990).

[57] *'at negat Epicurus (hoc enim vestrum lumen est) quemquam qui honeste non vivat iucunde posse vivere.' quasi ego id curem quid ille aiat aut neget; illud quaero, quid ei qui in voluptate summum bonum ponat consentaneum sit dicere*.

[58] *vererer ne Herculem ipsum ea quae pro salute gentium summa labore gessisset, voluptatis causa gessisse diceres.*

again and again to pin down his Epicurean interlocutors and get them to admit their grand claims of the compatibility of virtue and pleasure just did not make sense. If Cassius's reply is any indication, he was not particularly successful.

4. THE RING REVISITED

We can now return to Cicero's argument in *De officiis* 3. We have seen that a key strategy in Cicero's attacks on Epicureans and their ethics had been to force them to concede a single concrete example for which no hedonistic explanation can be given. But this is not an easy task: a good Epicurean can always find some way to wiggle out of the difficulty. So when Cicero returns to this issue in *De officiis* 3, he changes tactics. Reaching back to Plato for inspiration, he offers a thought experiment which stipulates non-detection and tries to take advantage of the overly strong conclusion of *K.D.* 5. His aim is to force his interlocutors to admit that Epicurean ethics are contingent: if things were a little different, they would toss justice and all morality aside. This argument may or may not convince, but taken in the context of his letters and dialogues, I think we can see a sophisticated, coherent, and nuanced strategy, developed over a decade in his published work and private correspondence, to force Epicurean ethics to collapse upon itself. Epicurus himself, as we have seen, is perhaps not entirely convincing on the critical importance of moral goodness for *eudaimonia*, and Cassius and other Romans seemed to have also been adept at dodging a fully honest statement of their purely instrumental morality. The Ring of Gyges thought experiment makes this clear. Compared to the one-sided polemics of most other critics of the Garden,[59] Cicero emerges as a powerful and intelligent critic.

In this chapter I have not attempted to offer any sweeping judgments about *De officiis* as a whole. Indeed, given the difficulties of source-critical issues, such a generalizing verdict may well be impossible. Instead, I have suggested that focusing on book 3 not only avoids many difficult source-critical debates[60] but also offers a unique opportunity to see Cicero the philosopher in action. We see Cicero refining arguments and tactics developed over years of

[59] Gordon (2012) offers many examples of rather unphilosophical attacks on the Epicureans. Though, for what it is worth, the Epicureans were more than ready to fight fire with fire. See Kleve (1978) (or some of the polemics in e.g. Philodemus's *De pietate*, whose aggressive style Cicero imitated with Velleius in *De natura deorum* book 1).

[60] Though not all such disputes: see e.g. the discussion *Off.* 3.21 at Dyck (1996) 524 (cf. 487–8), suggesting Posidonian provenance. Lefèvre (2001) 151 with n. 77 objects, but without much evidence.

skirmishing with Epicurean rivals, and we see evidence of a bold engagement with Stoic sources with the aim of filling a 'gap in the literature'. And so in this work we see the Greek philosophical tradition and Cicero's Roman context come together. I have only been able to touch on a few points and a few passages, but I hope these examples are nevertheless sufficient to show that book 3 has been underappreciated,[61] and, furthermore, that Cicero's letters can illuminate not only his research methods but also the development of his polemical and argumentative strategies.

[61] Schofield (2021) 186–96 appeared as this paper was being finalized: it provides further fresh readings of *De officiis* 3 and underlines the value of renewed focus on the book.

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