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AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL

THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

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Doubt and dogmatism in Cicero's *Academica*

Alexandre Skvirsky [i]
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9508-1023
alexandre.skvirsky@gmail.com

[i] Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro – Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brasil

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Abstract: The objective is to show the peculiar way in which Cicero's philosophical thinking is original and distances itself from the main representatives of the New Academy: the Roman thinker does not practice *epoche*, nor does he assign any special role to it in his thought. Instead, Cicero introduces the concept of doubt to characterize his own way of thinking.

Keywords: Cicero, *epoche*, doubt, skepticism, probabilism.

Cicero's philosophical contributions have often been downplayed, even by himself. His importance as a translator and divulger of philosophy among the Romans frequently overshadows his originality as a philosopher. Our aim is to point to an aspect in which Cicero's account of academic skepticism is original and, until now, as far as I can see, has not received much attention. In Cicero's exposition of the academic skeptical tradition in his *Academica*, a new usage of the term doubt can be found. Cicero not only gives the term philosophical relevance, but it also plays a central role in his own conception of academic skepticism. In the first part, we will look at Cicero's own philosophical stance. As we will see, despite Cicero's claim that he is simply an academic, his position is far removed from the philosophical outlook of the classical academic skeptics, Arcesilaus and Carneades. This is illustrated by the fact that Cicero does not seem to have any place for *epoche* in his philosophy, thus being a notion that has become obsolete in his way of thinking. In the second part, the role of doubt in Cicero is analyzed, along with the importance attributed to this term and some of its implications.

1. Cicero's eclectic probabilism

Cicero (106-44 b.C) studied with various philosophers during his lifetime, both in Athens and in Rome. In *De natura deorum* (1.3) Cicero reveals his "intimacy with those scholars who came to my house and talked daily with me, in particular, Diodorus, Philo, Antiochus and Posidonius". During the period in which he lived in Athens (88-84 b.C) in his youth, Cicero attended both the *Stoa Poikile* and the Academy, at the time under the leadership (c.110-79) of Philo of Larissa. The conception of neo-academic philosophy which Cicero endorses has its inspiration primarily in this philosopher. In his exposition of the academic tradition, Cicero refers twice to a work of Philo (*Acad.* 1.13, 2.11) as well as to two works of Clitomachus, none of which are extant.

Cicero wrote most of his philosophical works late in his life, after his political exile (58 b.C). His proclaimed intention with these works

was to create a "philosophical culture" amongst the Romans. In the *Academica*, Cicero asks Varro why he does not dedicate himself to the dissemination of philosophy. Varro responds that it is impossible to understand philosophy without Greek erudition, and therefore, translating it to Latin would be an entirely useless enterprise; those who knew Greek would study philosophy in Greek, and those who did not know Greek, would not be interested in studying it in Latin either. So, translating Greek philosophy into Latin would constitute "a vain effort" (*Acad.* 1.6). This is Cicero's reply (*Acad.* 1.10):

> The truth rather is that both those who cannot read the Greek books will read these and those who can read the Greek will not overlook the works of their own nation […]. How much more pleasure will they get from philosophers, if these imitate Plato, Aristotle and Theophrastus in the same way as those poets imitated Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides?

In many of his works, Cicero justifies both the effort of translating Greek philosophy to Latin, and the value of philosophy itself and its study. His argument is basically that philosophy is the best or even the only way to seek wisdom. According to Cicero's own evaluation, the merit of his work would be essentially that of transmission: he would only translate to Latin a Greek manual that was available to him, transposing the arguments to the form of dialogues situated in Roman settings and providing them with examples taken from Roman history. However, it may be noted that Cicero's presentation of Greek philosophy does not lack originality. The dislocation of Greek philosophy to Roman culture demands several changes, which can be detected both in the spirit of thinking, in a broad sense, and in its specific details. All of this, as I will try to show, happens to be the case of the tradition of the New Academy that Cicero presents in his *Academica*.

Throughout his philosophical works, Cicero declares himself to be an academic, and thus presents himself and his own thinking as representative of the philosophy of the New Academy. For the Roman philosopher, Arcesilaus rekindled the spirit of Plato's Old Academy, so that, for him, the New Academy, inaugurated by

Arcesilaus, would be in agreement and continuity with the older Academy. It is in this respect that Cicero claims to be simply an "academic": since for him there is only one academic tradition, Cicero sees himself as affiliated to the academic tradition reaching back to Socrates, Plato, and carried on by Arcesilaus and Carneades. In *Acad.* 1.13, when confronted by Varro about having left the Old Academy and to be now following the new one, Cicero states, relying on the authority of Philo, that "there aren't two Academies".

However, the academic thinking defended by Cicero is quite distant from the thought of Arcesilaus and Carneades. Besides espousing the conception of academic thought developed by Philo into a positive doctrine, far distant from the philosophical attitudes of Arcesilaus and Carneades, Cicero's thought is yet marked by his own eclecticism. Cicero reconciles several elements of classical and Hellenistic thinking, Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic in his own intellectual posture. Influenced by his experience as a lawyer, orator, and politician, the natural tendency of Cicero's thought can be considered essentially practical. Cicero's peculiar strand of academic philosophy has been fitly described as a type of "eclectic probabilism".[1] Cicero writes in the *Tusculan Disputations*:

> There is freedom of thought, and each one can sustain what he wants, as for me, I will stick to my principle, and I will always seek in every question the maximum probability, without being bound by the law of any particular school to which shall forcibly follow my speculation.
>
> *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 remaxime probabile, semper requiremus.* (*Tusc. disput.* 4.4.7).

Cicero's principle or method consists in seeking the highest possible or maximum probability, whilst not being bound to the

[1] See Reale (2011).

doctrine of any particular school. Cicero believes that sustaining a specific doctrine would mean to impose limits on his ability to freely investigate and choose that which is most likely or probable. For the Roman thinker, keeping his freedom of thought unimpeded depends directly on not being "bound up with the law of any school," and in such a way it would be possible, in every case, to seek "maximum likelihood". Glucker (1996) points out that Cicero's eclecticism should not be confused with a fixed doctrine. His eclecticism is not a matter of grouping different theories of diverse origins into a systematic doctrine, but of being free to choose, at any given moment, the theory or argument that may seem to him at that time to be the most likely. Cicero's eclecticism, instead of doctrinaire, is "day-to-day" (Glucker, 1996, p. 66). Not only does Cicero not commit himself to the provenance of a theory, but does not commit himself even to his own choices; at another time, in different circumstances, he may set aside what he has previously chosen as the most probable and choose differently. Being free from a fixed doctrine also means to be free to change your mind.

Eclecticism is for Cicero the best way to remain free and unimpeded to seek the most likely, and the most effective method or procedure for doing so is through argumentation *in utramque partem*. In *De officiis* (2.2.8) Cicero writes: "One cannot have a clear vision of what is probable, unless a comparison of the arguments of both sides is made" (*probabile elucere non posset, nisi ex utraque parte causarum facta contentio*). Arguing on both sides is the procedure that must be adopted by probabilism, since it is the best way to "have a clear view of what is probable". Cicero states in the *Academica* (2.7):

> The sole object of our discussion is by arguing on both sides to draw out and give shape to some result that may be either true or the nearest possible approximation to the truth.
>
> *Neque nostrae disputationes quicquam aliud agunt nisi ut in utramque partem dicendo eliciant et tamquam exprimant aliquid, quod aut verum sit aut ad id quam proxime accedat.*

The purpose of arguing on both sides is to find what comes closest to truth, not suspension of judgment. According to Giovanni Reale (2011, p. 200), Cicero's pro and contra argumentation "offers him the possibility of choosing the most probable solution" and, therefore, is "not supposed to lead to the suspension of judgment, but to finding likelihood and the credible". For Cicero, then, *epoche* is not the intended result of the argumentation *in utramque partem*. In discussing the question of the supreme good (if virtue is sufficient for happiness), Cicero concludes (*Acad.* 2.134):

> I'm dragged in different directions – now the latter view seems to me the more probable, now the former. And yet I firmly believe that unless one or other is true, virtue is overthrown.
>
> *Distrahor – tum hoc mihi probabilius tum illud videtur. Et tamen, nisi alterutrum sit, virtutem iacere plane puto.*

Despite being "dragged in different directions," Cicero believes that one side must be closest to truth. This passage suggests that *epoche* does not even count as a possible alternative for Cicero. It seems as if suspension does not even cross his mind. In fact, how could one simply suspend judgment about virtue and happiness? That kind of result would seem to amount to the destruction of virtue (and happiness) itself – and, therefore, be absurd and inadmissible for a practical mind like Cicero's. After the examination *in utramque partem*, truth or verisimilitude must be found on one of the sides. Especially in practical and vital matters, such as virtue and happiness, one side or the other must be closest to truth and present itself as more likely or probable. Equipollence, therefore, does not drag Cicero into *epoche*. As Luiz Bicca (2009, p. 82) points out,

> Despite his skeptical preferences, Cicero does not exhibit in his dialogues any argumentative construction that arrives at explicit suspension; at best, one sees an outlined and suggested equipollence, which shows no next step in terms of method.

In Cicero's method, there is no connection between the argumentation *in utramque partem* and *epoche*. Arguing on both sides of a question is not supposed to and in fact does not bring about *epoche* for Cicero. Its purpose is the search for the most probable. Conversely, when confronted with equipollent arguments, Cicero does not understand equipollence as an occasion for *epoche*, but as a threshold situation in which no probability seems possible.

One must remember that the generalization of *epoche* proposed by Arcesilaus is considered to be an innovation brought about by his thinking, which leads to the consideration that Arcesilaus has inaugurated a new phase of the Academy (DL 4.28). The Middle or New Academy is indeed characterized by *epoche*, and its followers are known as *ephektikos*, or "those who suspend judgment about everything".[2] Therefore, it can be seen that the notion of e*poche* plays a central role in the thought of Arcesilaus, characterizing a new way of philosophizing that inaugurates a new phase of the Academy, in which suspension (*epoche*) is taken as an index of wisdom. For Cicero, however, the skeptical notion of *epoche* seems to be entirely dispensable. He discusses it in relation to the academic tradition, but it seems to have become superfluous and obsolete for his own way of thinking. The first reference to *epoche* in the *Academica* (2.59) occurs at the end of Lucullus's speech, the spokesman for Antiochus of Ascalon:

> In the first place, how can you be unhampered when there is no difference between true presentations and false? Next, what criterion is there of a true presentation, if a criterion belongs in common to a true one and a false? These considerations necessarily engendered the doctrine of *epoche,* that is, a 'holding back of assent' (*adsensionis retentio)*, in which Arcesilaus was more consistent, if the opinions that some people hold about Carneades are true.
>
> *Primum qui potestis non impediri, cum a veris falsa non distent? deinde quod iudicium est veri, cum sit commune falsi? Ex his illa necessario nata est εποχη,*

[2] Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1120C. Cf. Long & Sedley, 1987, p. 440.

> *id est adsensionis retentio, in qua melius sibi constitit Arcesilas, si vera sunt quae de Carneade non nulli existimant.*

Cicero offers as a translation for *epoche* the expression "retention of assent"[3] and interprets the difficulties, the consideration of which would lead to suspension as *impediments* to thinking. However, Cicero does not understand that these impediments really restrict the ability to give assent. In Cicero's view, the obstacles or impediments that had led Arcesilaus to *epoche* can be overcome. As we have seen above, in order to resolve the difficulties that would lead to *epoche*, the procedure to be adopted consists of arguments for and against (*utramque partem disserere*). One can therefore ask: does the notion of *epoche* play any role in Cicero's philosophical thought?

Cicero endorses the thesis that truth exists, but is inapprehensible (*Acad.* 2.67-68, 77-78, 110, 141). The most frequent way he makes that point is through the indistinguishibility argument, according to which "there is no mark to distinguish a true presentation from a false one" (*visum quod percipi non posset, quia nulla nota verum distinguebatur a falso, Acad*. 2.84). In *De natura deorum* 1.5.12, Cicero writes:

> Our position is not that we hold that nothing is true, but that we assert that all true sensations are associated with false ones so closely resembling them that they contain no infallible mark to guide our judgement and assent. From this followed the corollary, that many sensations are *probable*, that is, though not amounting to a full perception they are yet possessed of a certain distinctness and clearness, and so can serve to direct the conduct of the wise man.

[3] There is a variation of the predicate of retention in the two families of Academicus Primus manuscripts: *retentio assensione* and *retentio assertione* that Hunt (1998) identifies, respectively, with the Italian and French traditions of the work. It is interesting to note that one interpretation of the sceptic phenomenon during the Renaissance linked Pyrrhonism to Heraclitean mobilism. In this reading, as Naya (2009, p. 25) points out, "*epoche* is no longer a suspension of assent, but merely a suspension of enunciation, which is simply indicated by a movement of the head".

> *Non enim sumus ii quibus nihil verum esse videatur, sed ii qui omnibus veris falsa quaedam adiuncta esse dicamus tanta similitudine, ut in iis nulla insit certa iudicandi et adsentiendi nota. Ex quo exsistit et illud multa esse probabilia, quae, quamquam non perciperentur, tamen, quia visum quendam haberent insignem et inlustrem, his sapientis vita regeretur.*

Even though truth cannot be apprehended, Cicero argues that in order to consider something as probable, it is not necessary to "give assent, approve, take the fact for granted, understand, perceive, ratify, establish and fix" (*Acad.* 2.99); an impression (*videatur*) would be enough. In this way, in principle, Cicero accepts the academic arguments for acatalepsy and, consequently, for *epoche*. However, instead of being suspended, Cicero seeks the probable. Affirming the probable does not count as a form of apprehension or assent, but would be the only possible alternative bearing in mind the absence of apprehension. Being truth inapprehensible, one understands probability precisely as the search of that which comes closest to truth or best resembles it. To this extent, Cicero's probabilism is rooted on the affirmation of inapprehensibility, which does not lead to *epoche*, but to the fallibilism of affirming only that something is probable or plausible, but not "apprehended" or endowed with certainty. It is interesting to note that, besides inapprehensibility, Cicero also seems to endorse a type of limitational epistemic theory. In his discussion of inapprehensibility, Cicero does not merely show that truth and falsehood are indiscernible, but is also far more assertive than that with respect to our inherit restriction from truth.

According to Cicero, truth exists, but it is obstructed to us. We cannot fully possess truth, for the intellect is not capable of reaching it, being unable to penetrate to its depths. Consequently, we should limit ourselves to trying to get as close to truth as possible through probability. After presenting the unending divergence of opinions in the philosophical tradition regarding some of its most important themes (such as the question of soul, body, *phúsis*), Cicero states:

> All those things are hidden, closely concealed and enfolded by a thick cloud of darkness, so that no

> human intellect has a sufficiently powerful sight to be able to penetrate the heaven and get inside the earth.
>
> *Latent ista omnia, Luculle, crassis occultata et circumfusa tenebris, ut nulla acies humani ingeni tanta sit, quae penetrare in caelum, terram intrare possit* (*Acad*. 2.122).

Such statement of inapprehensibility does not occur after arguing against dogmatic theses or opposing theses and balancing their arguments. Instead, after a reflection about the disagreement (*discrepantia*, *dissensio*) between the various philosophical schools, Cicero concludes that in light of the inherent difficulty of things, and the weakness of our own intellect we must recognize that the ultimate truth is obstructed to the human intellect. Inapprehensibility, it seems, is what explains the disagreement, being more fundamental: to avoid endless philosophical disagreement, we must maintain for our results the statute of what is credible and probable, but not absolutely true. However, concerning matters of "supreme magnitude and extreme obscurity" (*Acad*. 2.127) – such as the supreme good (*Acad*. 2.134), the "constituents of the universe", the nature of the body and of the soul – it is not even possible to find any probability. Concerning the question of the immortality of the soul, Cicero writes, in response to Lucullus:

> For many arguments are put forward on both sides. Some part of these matters seems to your wise man to be certain, but ours has not a notion even what part is most probable, to such an extent do most of these matters contain equal reasons for contrary theories.
>
> *Nam utramque in partem multa dicuntur. Horum aliquid vestro sapienti certum videtur, nostro ne quid maxime quidem probabile sit occurrit: ita sunt in plerisque contrariarum rationum paria momenta.* (*Acad*. 2.124).

Would this be an occasion for *epoche*? At first sight, this seems like a clear occasion in which the skeptical notion of *epoche* would apply. However, Cicero does not present these cases as occasions for *epoche* – and, in fact, doesn't even mention the term. However, they

do constitute limits for probabilism, since the obscurity of things does not allow for any probability to be found. In these cases, the use of argumentation *in utramque partem* is simply innocuous. As Cicero states: "in uncertain things there is nothing probable *(In incertis enim nihil probabile est*)" (*Acad*. 2.110). Questions of "supreme magnitude and extreme obscurity" offer no path for the search for the most probable.

The search for the probable lies between having an impression and the utter obscurity of things – the human intellect is bound within these two extremes, or rather, two concentric inherent limitations. On the one hand, there is no direct access to truth: it is not apprehensible or within our grasp in ordinary experience. However, even all that we do have, which is having an impression and affirming the most likely and probable, is only possible within narrow limits. If we reach too far, even our impressions and the probable are surrounded by the unsurmountable obscurity of things, where everything is uncertain, and, therefore, opposing theses have the same degree of probability. It is curious that what would constitute a typical occasion in which the classical skeptic suspends judgment, is not, however, indicated by Cicero as an occasion for *retentio assensionis*, but simply as a limit to the assertion of the probable.

Therefore, one could argue that it is Cicero's probabilism that makes *epoche* obsolete in his way of thinking. As regards equipollence and suspension of judgment, or *epoche*, Cicero is in fact far distant from the academic skeptical tradition, to which he asserts his philosophical affiliation, and for which his *Academica* is our main extant source.

Since Cicero does not have a place for *epoche* in his own philosophy, it should not be surprising that he does not take *epoche* to be the distinctive characteristic of the Academics (as it had been since Arcesilaus). However, Cicero does not attempt to present probabilism as the distinctive mark of the Academics either. We learn how Cicero understands academic philosophy when he contrasts it to the dogmatic ways of philosophizing. As I will try to show, for Cicero the distinction between dogmatists and academics concerns,

primarily, different attitudes towards wisdom and truth, and probabilism may be regarded as a *consequence* of the Academic's attitude towards knowledge.

2. The role of doubt in Cicero

The wise man, as a result of the inapprehensibility of things, must suspend judgment about everything, in order to not hold an opinion. This is Arcesilaus's generalization of the Stoic thesis that the wise man does not hold an opinion. Therefore, the skeptical notion of *epoche* arises in the academic tradition in the context of Arcesilaus's discussion over the requirements made on the wise man by the Stoics. The generalization of *epoche* amounts to concluding that, given the requirement set for the wise man that he never holds an opinion which could be false, the wise man would in fact never assert an opinion at all.

Cicero, however, does not endorse the conception of the wise man, thus making it clear to his reader in yet another way how distant he is from the tradition he is transmitting in the *Academica*. With respect to the demand, attributed to Antiochus, of "a true representation of such a sort that there cannot be a false one of the same sort", Cicero affirms:

> I do not encounter any such presentation; and accordingly I shall no doubt assent to something not really known, that is, I shall hold an opinion.
>
> *Nihil eius modo invenio. Itaque incognito nimirum adsentiar, id est, opinabor.* (*Acad*. 2.113).

To the same extent that holding an opinion ceases to be problematic for Cicero, the requirements traditionally set for the wise man do not apply for him. In the beginning of his speech in the *Lucullus* Cicero states:

> But just as I deem it supremely honourable to hold true views, so it is supremely disgraceful to approve falsehoods as true. And nevertheless I myself am not

> the sort of person never to give approval to anything false, never give absolute assent, never hold an opinion; it is the wise man that we are investigating. For my own part however, although I am a great opinion-holder (for I am not a wise man)
>
> *Sed, ut hoc pulcherrimum esse judico, vera videre, sic pro veris probare falsa turpissimum est. Nec tamen ego is sum qui nihil umquam falsi adprobem, qui numquam adsentiar, qui nihil opiner, sed quaerimus de sapiente. Ego vero ipse et magnus quidem sum opinator (non enim sum sapiens)* (*Acad*. 2.66).

Even though Cicero declares his affiliation to the Academy, he is also very careful to distinguish between the context of Arcesilaus and Carneades, which he proudly documents in his work, and his own philosophy. At the same time that he presents and defends the academic tradition, he makes it clear that the requirements for the wise man shared by Zeno and Arcesilaus do not hold for his own thought. In several passages, Cicero makes the point that, even though it is the concept of the wise man that is being investigated, he himself is not a wise man (cf. *Acad.* 2.115). If Cicero does not endorse the concept of the wise man, and asserts that he can hold opinions, in what way does he understand wisdom?

> As well as other schools maintain that some things are certain, others uncertain, we, deviating from them, say that some things are likely, some improbable. What, therefore, prevents me from accepting what seems to me probable, and rejecting what seems to me improbable, and this way running away, avoiding the presumption of clear affirmations, to rashness, which is very far from wisdom?
>
> *Nos autem, ut ceteri alia certa, alia incerta esse dicunt, sic ab his dissentientes alia probabilia, contra alia dicimus. Quid est igitur, quod me impediat ea, quae probabilia mihi videantur, sequi, quae contra, improbare atque affirmandi arrogantiam vitantem fugere temeritatem, quae a sapientia dissidet plurimum?* (*De officiis* 2.2.7-8).

Presumption and temerity are as far from wisdom as possible. We must hold an opinion, but knowing that it is not the whole truth, only a probable approximation. For Cicero, the academic philosopher has freed himself from the dogmatic requirement of always being in possession of truth and certainty, and observing and being content with probabilities is the way to avoid the presumption of such requirement. Since absolute truth is blocked from us, we must seek the alternative route of likelihood and probability, which treads the middle ground between absolute certainty and total uncertainty. That is how academic philosophy is representative of modesty and intellectual humility, and points to another possible path for philosophy. Below is Cicero's description of the type of philosophy he rejects:

> Philosophy herself must advance by argument – how will she find a way out? And what will happen to Wisdom? It is her duty not to doubt herself or her "decisions", which the philosophers term *dogmata*, any of which it will be a crime to abandon; for the surrender of such a "decision" is the betrayal of the moral law, and that sin is the common source of betrayals of friends and country.
>
> *Ipsa autem philosophia, quae rationibus progredi debet, quem habebit exitum? Sapientiae vero quid futurum est? quae neque de se ipsa dubitare debet neque de suis decretis, quae philosophi vocant δογματα, quorum nullum sine scelere prodi poterit. Cum enim decretum proditur, lex veri rectique proditur, quo e vitio et amicitiarum proditiones et rerum publicarum nasci solent.* (*Acad*. 2.27).

The dogmatic requirement for philosophy, and consequently for wisdom is interpreted by Cicero as the imposition that one does not doubt oneself, along with all accepted precepts and doctrines. In this way, for Cicero the capacity of doubting oneself acts as a type of demarcation principle, being that which distinguishes the Academics from the dogmatic philosophers.

To the extent that the dogmatic conception of wisdom requires that one does not doubt oneself, it also requires giving up one's

freedom to think. Hence Cicero's exhortation in *Acad.* 2.120: "How valuable is the mere freedom of my not being faced by the same obligation as you are!" In other words, how valuable is the freedom of not being subjected to the dogmatic requirement of possessing true and certain knowledge, and of always holding and defending the one doctrine that states such knowledge, never doubting any of it. In this way, Cicero opposes dogmatism to the capacity to doubt oneself, a capacity that represents a type of freedom. Cicero introduces for the first time this particular notion of doubt in *Acad.* 2.7-8, precisely when describing the difference between the dogmatic and his own mode of philosophizing:

> Nor is there any difference between ourselves and those who think that they have positive knowledge, except that they have no doubt that their tenets are true, whereas we hold many doctrines as probable, which we can easily act upon but can scarcely advance as certain; yet we are more free and untrammelled in that we possess our power of judgment uncurtailed, and are bound by no compulsion to support all the dogmas laid down for us almost as edicts by certain masters.
>
> *Nec inter nos et eos, qui se scire arbitrantur, quicquam interest, nisi quod illi non dubitant quin ea vera sint, quae defendunt: nos probabilia multa habemus, quae sequi facile, adfirmare vix possumus. 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.* (*Acad*. 2.8).

The only difference between academics and dogmatists is that the latter do not doubt their principles and assert them as unquestionably true, whereas the former advance their opinions as only probable. The capacity to doubt oneself amounts to freedom of thought to the extent that it leaves the intellect clear of precepts and doctrines, being able to fully dispose of its capacity to search for and judge the truth.

In this regard, it can be argued that this notion of doubt plays a dual role in Cicero's thought, being related to both eclecticism and

probabilism. Being able to doubt means being free from doctrinal endorsement to a particular school, and, therefore, "unimpeded" to think. Also, by being able to doubt themselves, Academics are comfortable in arguing that one cannot know for sure *(adfirmare vix possumus*); and also that they do not deny knowledge, but seek to be as close to truth as possible through probability. In this way, the concept of doubt is related to both freedom and humility. According to this view, academic "intellectual integrity" would consist of the ability to doubt your own opinions and avoid adopting them as doctrines or as peremptory statements of truth.

Therefore, Cicero's use of the notion of doubt stands in close connection with his "eclectic probabilism". Such a notion of doubt seems to represent a basic attitude, a fundamental ability or capacity, through which one is able to give up the standards of certainty and infallibility. Therefore, as an ability that characterizes a fundamental attitude or frame of mind, doubt could be, loosely speaking, regarded as more basic or in a way "prior" to probabilism. Doubt as an ability would be at the root of Cicero's "eclectic probabilism". In other words, the ability to doubt oneself can be regarded as the distinctive characteristic of Cicero's academic philosophy. The capacity to doubt oneself is that which first makes thought humble, unimpeded and free, then also being able to become satisfied with probabilities and, in that sense, avoid temerity and presumption.

If I am right in assigning such a central role to doubt as a capacity to Cicero's own take on academic philosophy, then it would be also fair to say that this concept performs in Cicero's thought what in Arcesilaus and Carneades was performed by *epoche*. Being able to doubt oneself, and not properly suspension of judgment (*epoche*) is ultimately the concept through which Cicero displays the qualities that characterize his own way of thinking, and that represent the modesty, humility, freedom and integrity of his intellectual affiliation. Given Cicero's historical and cultural distance from Arcesilaus and Carneades, such a difference is not problematic at all. In itself, it is simply a different way of understanding what academic skepticism is all about, or, to put it another way, it is a different

conception of its basic features. According to Arcesilaus, the academic skeptic suspends judgment on all matters, while, for Cicero, he is able to doubt himself and therefore is freer, more humble and more honest than the dogmatist. The distinction between academics and dogmatists is maintained, but it is grounded on entirely different reasons, offering a very different picture of who the academic skeptic is, what he does and why he does it. Therefore, in itself there is nothing problematic about Cicero having introduced the term doubt into his philosophical discourse, and in making use of it to express his own philosophical conviction. Cicero is careful about language when presenting the thoughts of Arcesilaus and Carneades, using their own term to express their philosophies, while at the same time distancing himself and his own philosophy from those terms and their implications. However, Cicero is not always consistent. In the case of the term doubt, there are some big slips.

At the beginning of the *Academica Posteriora*, Cicero had already interpreted socratic maieutics through the notion of doubt. After stating that both the Peripatetics and the academic tradition had drawn ample resources from Plato's source, Varro comments that, nevertheless,

> [They abandoned] the famous Socratic custom of discussing everything in a doubting manner and without the admission of any positive statement.
>
> *illam autem Socraticam dubitationem de omnibus rebus et nulla adfirmatione adhibita consuetudinem disserendi reliquerunt*. (*Acad*. 1.17).

And again, in the speech of Varro in the *Lucullus*, it is stated that "Socrates doubts all things" (*Acad*. 1.17). In the *Academica*, it is possible to trace the use of doubt all the way back to Socrates as the fundamental activity of his philosophical practice.

3. Conclusion

Cicero makes use of the term doubt (*dubitare*), which is characteristic of ordinary, everyday language, and gives it a new

philosophical meaning. In ordinary language, doubt means vacillation, hesitation and indecision, and thus also indicates lack of conviction and the possibility of error. These are the most common meanings of doubt. Cicero, however, does not emphasize doubt in this ordinary sense, but attributes a new meaning to the term. According to Cicero's philosophical use of the concept, the capacity of doubting oneself characterizes a type of freedom of thought, being a basic or fundamental disposition for the search of the highest probability. Instead of designating hesitation, indecision, and of pointing to the possibility of error, in its Ciceronian philosophical sense, doubt attaches itself to freedom and wisdom, to humility and the integrity of the intellect. Being free to doubt seems to be regarded as the fundamental intellectual quality, not necessarily being in doubt or in a state vacillation, hesitation and indecision. Cicero also makes use of the capacity of doubting oneself to define academic philosophy. Having such a capacity is what makes Academics at the same time more free and humble, in opposition to the doctrinal adherence and presumption of dogmatic philosophers. Therefore, Cicero may be one of the first thinkers to use the term doubt and also the binomial doubt and dogmatism in a philosophically meaningful way.

Therefore, a philosophical use of the term *dubitare* can be picked up from Cicero's *Academica,* which makes it a place of reference for a philosophical text in which doubt receives attention and is given importance. This can be considered to be an original contribution of Cicero's philosophy. In ancient Greek philosophy, it is hard to find a philosophical use of the term doubt. One does not find in the works of Plato, Aristotle, or Sextus Empiricus a philosophical use of the various Greek words that express the concept of doubt (such as *distazo*, *endoiazo*, *diakrino*): doubt is not a concept that is analysed or developed philosophically; in classical and hellenistic philosophy, doubt is not a concept from which either theories are built or philosophical consequences are derived.

As we have tried to show, the incorporation of the concept of doubt into philosophical thinking done by Cicero is not restricted to

a vocabulary of doubt. Cicero does not use the term to convey Greek terms at all. Instead, he makes an original use of the concept of doubt and assigns a central role to it in the exposition of his conception of academic philosophy. Therefore, when approaching the Ciceronean text, one is not only exposed to the term doubt in reference to the academic tradition, but to several ways in which the notion of doubt can be made out to be significant in connection to the Academics: Cicero presents doubt as an essential capacity through which the Academics come closest to freedom, integrity and wisdom than any other philosophers, and, on top of that, Cicero affirms that having the capacity to doubt themselves defines the Academics, and is what distinguishes them from the dogmatic philosophers. Therefore, despite going to great pains to distance himself from the classical Academic skeptics, Cicero nevertheless makes use of his own terms to refer not only to his own philosophical outlook, but to the academic tradition as well (which he did, after all, claim to be essentially a unity, despite all historical differences). The term is even anachronistically referred all the way back to Socrates, who is said to have "doubted all things".

Doubt, therefore, appears in the *Academica* not only as a word in the text, but also as a term with philosophical significance. Therefore, if the *Academica* played a part in the introduction of doubt into skepticism during the efforts of understanding and interpreting it in the context of its rediscovery in the late 15th century, Cicero's influence in that process may not have been restricted merely to that of a translator, but be related to content as well.

It is necessary, however, not to confuse the philosophical meaning that Cicero attributes to the notion of doubt with the modern conception of doubt, according to which the skeptic "doubts everything". The notion of a methodological or "active doubt" is absent from the exposition of Cicero, who never makes use of expressions such as "everything must be doubted" or "everything is doubtful". Instead, he might have said something quite different, perhaps something along the lines of "one must be able to doubt himself". Contrary to modern doubt, in the *Academica* the capacity

of doubting oneself does not express any radicalness, but rather has a moderating function, intended to counter dogmatism. It is meant to safeguard humility and freedom of thought from the dangers involved in the doctrinal endorsement of philosophical opinions.[4]

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