

Carlos Lévy, *Cicero Academicus. Recherches sur les Académiques et sur la philosophie cicéronienne. Collection de l'École Française de Rome* 162. Rome, 1992.

Cicero's credit as a philosophical writer has risen steadily over the last twenty or thirty years, and nowhere more than in France. Carlos Lévy works in a distinguished tradition, looking back to Pierre Boyancé (who perhaps did more than anyone else to rehabilitate Cicero as an original writer on philosophy, rather than a mere transcriber); his preface includes warm acknowledgements to (among others) Pierre Grimal, Alain Michel and Jacques Brunschwig. His work is an ambitious attempt to make sense of Cicero's philosophical writing as a consistent whole, starting (as any such attempt must do) from the *Academica* and Cicero's professed affiliation to the Academy, and relating this to the earlier (and later) philosophical tradition and to Cicero's own political concerns.

Scholars often approach Cicero's philosophical works either from a background in literature and history or from one in Greek philosophy, and it is seldom that the two perspectives quite meet. L. is doubtless more of a philosopher than of a philologist, but his approach is commendably well balanced between the two. Some may be distrustful of the inclusiveness of his thesis; as for myself, the vein of cautious empiricism in my nature, encouraged by the British tradition in which I was trained, would probably prevent me from ever writing a book such as this, but I regard that as a good reason why I and others should read it. The scholarship of the English-speaking world has arguably been too hostile to generalisation in such matters. When H.A.K. Hunt (*The Humanism of Cicero* [Melbourne 1954]) tried an overarching view of Cicero's philosophical works, admittedly with considerably less subtlety than L., he was either perfunctorily rebutted or ignored. A distinguished contemporary British scholar (M. Schofield, *JRS* 76 [1986] 47-65) has implied that Cicero's professed Academic scepticism was little more than a convenient didactic device. Doubtless a simple practical explanation of this sort is not necessarily to be rejected, but it is at least worth considering the possibility that the reasons for Cicero's attachment to the Academy went deeper than this. L. emphasises, echoing Cicero himself, that when it comes to choosing an intellectual affiliation, philosophy and life cannot and should not be dissociated.

However, unity, of the kind that scholars discern in the works of an author, can sometimes be a mere effect of perspective, and one ought to be clear about what precisely constitutes the unity that one claims to have found. The difficulty arises in Cicero's case because his point of view was one that allowed explicitly for variation. In Cicero's time it was perhaps more distinctive and uncommon than it is in ours to adopt a liberal form of scepticism, admitting, as he does, that the sceptic may legitimately adopt 'probable' beliefs on a provisional basis. But to make this the unifying feature of one's philosophical activities may entail a certain paradox: is it in reality any more than a recipe for vacillation and a refusal to acknowledge any guiding principles whatever? Cicero himself is quite alive to this problem, and in moments of self-deprecating irony he refers to the *inconstantia* of the Academy. One must also consider the fact that Cicero was a practised rhetorician and, as such, quite capable of defending positions which he did not in reality hold, nor expect anyone necessarily to believe that he did: see the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* for a clear example. L. has a

natural sympathy for Cicero's sceptical stance and makes the best case in its favour that he can. He shows that it finds expression above all as an objection to *temeritas*, to rash and ill-considered claims of truth or certainty (a quality Cicero also objected to in the sphere of political action). To defend a controvertible view as though it were certain is unworthy of the *constantia* of a wise man; true *constantia*, therefore, perhaps paradoxically, involves a limitless caution in committing oneself, and readiness to continue the enquiry.

Cicero learnt this sceptical philosophy from his teacher Philo of Larissa. But he also, for a period, sat at the feet of Philo's pupil and rival, Antiochus of Ascalon, who abandoned scepticism in favour of belief in a criterion of truth similar to that of the Stoics. Antiochus claimed that his doctrines represented the true tradition of the Academy, from which the scepticism of Arcesilaus, Carneades, Clitomachus and Philo had been, according to him, a deviation. Cicero was thus presented with two rival views of what it meant to be an Academic, and it is Cicero, in turn, who provides us with most of our evidence concerning the controversy. To arrive at an objective view in this state of affairs is a difficult task indeed; the investigator must exercise that very scepticism which Cicero recommended. The whole question hinges on heavily evaluative concepts, such as the authenticity of a tradition and its importance in the history of philosophy.

The foundations are laid for a reassessment of the history of the Academy in L.'s first chapter, which is largely a review of previous scholarship, but its full implications become more apparent as the book proceeds. Apparently, we have all been taken in by Antiochus' propaganda. Arcesilaus and his successors represent the true tradition of the Academy; it is Antiochus who was the deviant. The latter founded nothing but a short-lived schismatic school at Athens. His apparent importance was due to little more than the accidental fact that his doctrines attracted the attention of some important Romans. Eventually, in the conclusion of the whole book, L. even praises Cicero for remaining faithful to the true Academy of Philo and rejecting the innovations of Antiochus.

It is true that, in the past, Antiochus has tended to loom rather large in accounts of the development of Hellenistic and Roman thought. This is partly because of his prominence in the pages of Cicero, but also because the return to dogmatism in his philosophy appeared to provide a logical starting-point for the movement called 'Middle Platonism'. A clearer perspective has, however, evolved more recently; it would be difficult to accuse, e.g., J. Glucker in his *Antiochus and the Late Academy* of holding to an unrealistic view of Antiochus' importance in the history of Platonism. Where L. differs from some other recent scholars is in his account of the sceptical Academy and its relationship to Plato. It is customary to regard the turn to scepticism as a radical break with the earlier traditions of the Academy; this indeed is how Antiochus saw it. According to L., not so.

If one is to maintain such a view consistently, one must logically hold either (a) that Arcesilaus and his successors were in some sense Platonists, or (b) that Plato was in reality a sceptic like Arcesilaus, or at least that Plato's use of dialectic to refute others was the most important thing about him. The extreme form of (a) was believed by Augustine and still finds a few adherents: the Academics practised sceptical dialectic as a means of attacking the other schools but preserved Platonic dogmas in secret. L. rejects both this and a recent attempt by H. Tarrant (*Scepticism or Platonism? The*

*philosophy of the Fourth Academy* [Cambridge 1985]) to argue that Philo's Academy was more Platonic than sceptical (and was misrepresented by Cicero). The sceptical Academics themselves appear to have believed (b); at least, Cicero himself views Plato largely as a sceptic, while he takes over some Platonic notions (e.g. the doctrine of the immortality of the soul), presumably on the basis that he regards them as 'probable' (and rhetorically effective in making men behave better), and that Plato also regarded them as such. The Early Academy (Xenocrates, Speusippus and the rest), on the other hand, was according to its successors mistaken in its attempts to abstract a dogmatic system from Plato. It is necessary to distinguish here clearly between the conception of Platonic dogmas, preserved in the dialogues or otherwise, assent to which is regarded as a qualification to be called a Platonist, and that of mere notions derivable from the texts of Plato's dialogues, which can of course be treated as plausible suggestions but belief in which is not of the essence of the philosophy. The latter conception may be supported by a reading of the dialogues themselves; the cosmology of the *Timaeus* is presented as, at the most, probable (since certain knowledge is not possible in the realm of material objects), and the Platonic Socrates presents the immortality of the soul as a view for which there are plausible arguments, not as a matter of dogma that must be believed. The modern student of Plato or Platonism inevitably asks: 'But what has become of the Ideas?' The simple and surprising answer is that at the period we are concerned with, nobody seems to have worried much about them. Antiochus, it seems, had an interpretation of them that did not correspond at all closely with most modern ones.

I think that L. also believes (b), and is not seriously trying to reinstate (a)—if so, this would necessarily be in a weaker form than the form he rejects at the outset. But, in the end, he does not quite seem to make it clear what he is asserting when he says that the sceptical Academy represented the authentic tradition. If he means only that in historical terms, the sceptical Academy is what grew out of the Early Academy, or what was left of it when the Lyceum and the Stoa had established themselves, then not much has been asserted. But he seems to suggest more than this, in that he makes a great deal of the Academy's role as the custodian of Platonic tradition. An attempt could indeed be made to justify the New Academic view of Plato; after all, a similar view may be, and perhaps has sometimes been, achieved today by careful selection of texts. But L. does not go quite as far as this. Perhaps, after all, he is right to stop short of committing himself to a judgement on the true essence of Platonic philosophy; the dangers of such a judgement are obvious enough. Instead, L. concentrates on features of the Academic dialectical manoeuvres against the Stoics that arguably could not have existed without a Platonic inspiration (e.g. the doctrine of the soul's self-movement used as an argument against Stoic determinism), and on a view of the Academy (p. 627) as trying to save an allegedly Platonic (or rather, perhaps, Socratic) conception of what philosophical activity was, at the expense of any particular Platonic doctrines.

L. gives due attention to the question whether (as Glucker and Steinmetz have recently maintained, following Hirzel and others) Cicero went through an Antiochean period, from his attendance at Antiochus' lectures to just before the period of composition of the major philosophical works of 45-44 BC. If so, the *De Oratore*, *De Republica* and *De Legibus* would fall within the Antiochean period, as would the dramatic dates of some of the later dialogues. L. examines most, if not all, of the

important passages, and his eventual conclusion is a compromise: in broad terms, Cicero was largely faithful to Philonian scepticism but, until 45, played down the split within the Academy itself, showing also some disposition towards the Antiochean view of the fundamental affinity (if not identity) of Academy, Peripatos and Stoa. One might wonder about the consistency of such a position; but from a Roman point of view it could have made some sense. One perhaps had to choose between Philo and Antiochus only when one came to attack the precise question of epistemology; and that is exactly when Cicero came out in unambiguous support of Philo.

After the first two sections on the history of the Academy and Cicero's affiliations, L. proceeds to consider the philosophical corpus itself in some detail. A relatively brief discussion of the genesis of the two editions of the *Academica*, and of the content of the surviving fragment of the first book of the second edition, precedes an analysis of the *Lucullus* (which, as those familiar with the field will know, is the second book of the first edition, the only book from either version that survives complete). There follows a consideration of the sources, beginning with a discussion of the notorious letter *Att.* 12.52, in which the word ἀπόγραφα occurs. L. tries an emendation of the text (*quaedam* for *quae*) which does not seem plausible to me, but this is of minor importance. What is important is that he realises (as scholars on the whole now do) that the letter may not, for all we know, be about the philosophical works at all, or if it is, its tone does not justify a conclusion that Cicero thought of the Academic books strictly and literally as 'transcriptions'.

There is a problem with the presentation of the Antiochean position in the two editions. In the *Lucullus*, the eponymous speaker represents Antiochus as upholding the potential reliability of sense-perception, as did the Stoics, while Varro, representing the Antiochean position in the second version, allows certainty only to the conclusions of the intelligence. L. resolves this problem by postulating that these were two different positions adopted by Antiochus in disputation with different opponents; that is to say, he sees Antiochus as behaving to some extent like a sceptic in that he adjusts his arguments to suit the occasion. Not only that, but the whole of the discussion, even the Philonian parts of it, is hypothesised to be based on the *Sosus* of Antiochus. On p. 199, L. is delightfully Ciceronian in his profession of open-mindedness and his pursuit of 'le plus grand nombre de vraisemblances'; he is suitably tentative about the source-theory, and does not exclude the possibility that Cicero might have improved, from his own knowledge of Philo, on the Antiochean presentation of Philo's views. But in that case, is 'source' the right word? And in any case, is a theory of this sort necessary? Could not Cicero in each case be presenting the views of his authorities in his own words and in his own order? Cicero seems to claim as much for his own dialogues (*nostrum scribendi ordinem adiungimus*, *Fin.* 1.6) and in a letter to Atticus (13.13.1), too infrequently cited in such contexts, he claims that there is nothing in Greek like the *Academica Posteriora* (*libri quidem ita exierunt ... ut in tali genere ne apud Graecos quidem simile quicquam*). As for the supposed difference between Lucullus and Varro, on looking at the text again I find that (a) Lucullus claims to be reproducing Antiochus' arguments against the New Academy, while Varro is presenting a version (presumably Antiochus' version) of the views of Plato; in such a context one would expect at least some difference of emphasis; (b) even in the Stoic view of sense-perception it was never claimed that the evidence of

the senses could be automatically trusted in every circumstance without thinking; the decision to 'assent' to the perception or not to do so was a decision of the intelligence and would only be uniformly correct in the case of the wise man. It is not therefore clear to me that the problem, to solve which all this source-criticism is invoked, is a real one. L. here seems in danger of getting caught in the sort of morass that the older *Quellenforscher* tended to create by their assumptions and methods.

In contrast, the analysis which follows, of Cicero's presentation of the theory of knowledge, seems to allow for a significant Ciceronian input, particularly as regards the decision on how to present the idea of 'probability' in Latin. W. Görler's relevant article 'Ein sprachliches Zufall und seine Folgen. "Wahrscheinliches" bei Carneades und Cicero' (in C.W. Müller and others, ed., *Zum Umgang mit Fremdsprachlichkeit in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, Palingenesia 36, Stuttgart 1991) doubtless appeared too late to be taken into account. There will be more both on Cicero's Academic affiliations (by Görler) and on his concept of *probabile* (by Glucker) in my forthcoming edited collection of papers (*Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers* [Oxford 1995]); these are areas of continuing debate.

L. then moves to an extended consideration of Cicero's ethics (*De Finibus*, *Tusculans*, with a less detailed section on *De Republica*, *De Legibus*, *De Officiis* and 'physics' (*De Natura Deorum*, *De Fato*, *Timaeus*, with some attention to *De Divinatione*), attempting to show at each stage how Cicero's presentation of the rival doctrines was informed by his New Academic background. Clearly, we can happily admit this in general terms: doxography and the recognition of disagreement was a New Academic tradition (e.g. the *Carneadea divisio* of ethical doctrines about the *summum bonum*) and the successive refutations of rival schools recall New Academic methods of disputation. Yet the positive doctrine put forward in the last book of the *De Finibus* is that of the Old Academy and Peripatos as mediated by Antiochus. L.'s treatment of the *Tusculans* emphasises the debt to Plato, especially the mind-body dualism of the *First Alcibiades* in *Tusculans* 1 (but is *Alc. I* by Plato, and if not, who inserted it into the canon and when?). The Stoic content of books 2-5 is, by contrast, played down; it is asserted that the defining feature of Stoicism is the interconnection of the various doctrines, whereas what we have in the *Tusculans* is a dismembered Stoicism incorporated, purely for argumentative purposes, into an exposition that is more consistently Academic than has been supposed. This approach to the *Tusculans* has much plausibility, particularly in view of Cicero's initial claim (*Tusc.* 1.8) to follow the *vetus et Socratica ratio contra alterius opinionem disserendi* as a means of finding what is most *veri simile*, and in view of the very explicit references to Academic procedures in the fifth book.

The section on physics is perhaps the least convincing overall. In the *De Natura Deorum* there is no positive Platonic or Academic thesis on offer (the god of the *Timaeus* overtly provides only a convenient object of refutation for the Epicurean speaker) and Cicero in his own person expresses a preference for the Stoic view, expounded in the dialogue by Lucilius Balbus, over the merely negative Academic arguments of Cotta. This fits reasonably enough into a New Academic framework; Cicero finds the Stoic view to be *ad veritatis similitudinem ... propensior* despite the attacks made on it. But L. tries to go further and link Cotta's arguments closely with the *Timaeus*. I did not find it altogether easy to follow the argument here: certainly, the attitude of Timaeus in that dialogue is probabilistic, but is that enough to establish a

connection? On the other hand, in the *De Divinatione* Cicero himself plays the destructive sceptic. This dialogue could be thought the most faithful of all to the methods of the New Academy, ending as it does on a purely sceptical note. In view of this I must confess to being puzzled by the emphasis of L.'s conclusion on the *De Divinatione*, 'ce dialogue ne rompt pas l'unité profonde de l'oeuvre philosophique de Cicéron'. We seem to have moved from a unifying scepticism and opposition to dogma to some other unifying factor—what? Moral idealism, or the *mos maiorum*? Whatever the answer may be, it seems that by this stage in L.'s argument, when genuine scepticism occurs, we have to be assured that it does not detract from the unity.

There are many other questions that could be examined in more detail, but space forbids me to pursue them. I move to the end of the book, where L. makes explicit a message that has been adumbrated throughout: the relationship between Cicero's philosophy and his politics. Essentially, L. sees Cicero's scepticism as a stand against tyranny in politics no less than against dogmatism in philosophy. It is a nice idea, but one has one's doubts. Opposition to Caesar could be carried on by Cato, a Stoic; by Cassius, an Epicurean; and by Brutus, an Antiochean Academic. What did Cicero's scepticism add that the other three did not have? There were plenty of arguments against tyranny in Plato, of which Cicero made free use in the *De Republica*, but this had nothing to do with scepticism. Cicero himself explicitly saw philosophical writing as an alternative to political activity at a time when the latter was impossible. To depart too far from this carries a danger of taking a view too subtle for those harsh times. The idea that reading the philosophical works in a political light makes them more interesting (implied, I think, at p. 634) is purely subjective. L. seems to me much nearer the semblance of truth when he postulates an instinctive, personal attraction on Cicero's part towards the approach of the New Academy as represented in the person of Philo.

The institution of the *thèse d'état* is, I am told, soon to disappear, and L.'s is one of the last of its kind. It has to be said that works belonging to this genre are not always the most user-friendly of publications. With the best will in the world, one cannot help from time to time wishing for a more compact format, in which less space would be given to reviews of secondary literature, leaving more room for the significant deployment of ancient texts. But L.'s work on the whole does not suffer overmuch from the disadvantages of the genre. The length of the work is commensurate with the complexity of the subject, and the detailed exposition is clear. The trouble from the user's point of view is that because of its complexity, the work does not lend itself to casual consultation. In many places, a reader who had not read the whole context could easily conclude that L. is lending his support to a thesis when in fact he is only giving it a run for its money (in good Academic style). On the other hand, few except dedicated specialists will read it all the way through. But even in its less plausible moments, this is a rich and thought-provoking work, constituting a major re-assertion of Cicero's importance in the history of philosophy.