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In Defense of Knowing, In Defense of Doubting: Cicero Engages Totalizing Skepticism, Sensate Materialism, and Pragmatist Realism in *Academica**

Abstract

Whereas contemporary scholars in the social sciences and humanities often envision themselves as exceptionally, if not uniquely, attentive to the problematics of human knowing and acting, the competing philosophies of totalizing skepticism, sensate materialism, divine worldviews, and pragmatist realism have a much more enduring presence in Western social thought.

Plato (c420-348BCE) introduces a broad array of philosophic standpoints (theological, idealist, skepticist, materialist, and pragmatist) in his texts and Aristotle (c384-322BCE) addresses human knowing and acting in more distinctively secular, pluralist terms. Still, more scholarly considerations of human knowing and acting would be comparatively neglected by Cicero's time and even more so after his era.

Although much overlooked by those in the human sciences, Cicero's *Academica* re-engages a number of highly consequential issues pertaining to the matter of human knowing and acting. Likewise, whereas Christian theologians often were hostile to heathen (relativist, materialist, pragmatist) philosophic viewpoints, important residues of these approaches would remain part of the Western intellectual tradition though Augustine's (c354-430 BCE) works.

Academica is centered on the historically sustained skepticist emphases of Plato's Academy (c350-50CE) but Cicero's text also attends to some competing viewpoints that developed along the way. In addition to (1) acknowledging some of *the intellectual shifts in Plato's Academy* over three centuries, this statement also (2) provides a *pragmatist critique* of the totalizing skepticism of the Academicians, and (3) illustrates the ways in which Cicero, as a representative and *defender of Academician skepticism*, deals with critiques pertaining to *the problem of human knowing and acting*.

Thus, whereas Cicero is best known as a rhetorician and his text is presented as an instance of rhetorical interchange, Cicero's *Academica* also may be seen as "a defense of knowing" and "a defense of doubting," two of the most central features of scholarship.

Keywords

Knowledge; Skepticism; Pragmatism; Realism; Relativism; Symbolic interactionism; Postmodernism; Cicero; Plato's Academy

Introduction

Although most social scientists have heard of Cicero, few appear familiar with his texts or are aware of Marcus Tullius Cicero's (c106-43BCE) considerable relevance to the study of human knowing and acting either in conceptual, enabling terms or as valuable transhistorical and transcultural reference points.

Relatedly, whereas contemporary scholars in the humanities and social sciences tend to envision notions of sensate materialism (as in positivism, structuralism), pragmatism (as in American pragmatist philosophy, symbolic interaction), and totalizing skepticism (as in poststructuralism, postmodernism) to be comparatively recent developments, these are matters that Cicero addressed in rather explicit terms. These analytic motifs can be traced back to classical Greek scholarship and especially the texts of Plato and Aristotle (see Prus, 2003, 2004) from whom later Latin scholars would derive much inspiration, but Cicero represents an important source of intellectual continuity in Western social thought.

The material discussed here represents only a small portion of the broader corpus of texts that Cicero developed. Thus, whereas Cicero may be best known as a practitioner of rhetoric (Greek term) or oratory (Latin), he not only made considerable scholarly contributions to rhetoric, religious studies, and philosophy, but also did so ways that display considerable affinity with the sociological pragmatist emphases of symbolic interaction (on Cicero, see Prus, forthcoming).

The argument developed here is not that Cicero is to be seen as a symbolic interactionist of a more consistently Meadian or Blumerian sort (see Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). However, Cicero may be appreciated for his role in perpetuating the study of human knowing and acting in Western social thought through his texts.

Although *Academica* is only a very small part of the great intellectual resources of Western scholarship, this text enables sociologists to better understand the philosophic foundations of our own discipline. Denoting comparative historical and transcultural reference points, *Academica* also helps alert those in the human sciences to some of the limitations (and follies) of disregarding those intellectual predecessors who have addressed the problematics of human knowing and acting in more explicit and sustained terms.

Still, in his "defense of knowing" and "his defense of doubting," Cicero has yet more to offer to contemporary academics. Perhaps, because the matters of knowing and doubting are so fundamental to scholarship, they often seem taken for granted. Nevertheless, since these two emphases are so sharply contested in Cicero's *Academica*, this text also provides contemporary readers with a particularly valuable occasion to reflect on the relative merits of knowing and doubting.

In developing this text, two of Cicero's Roman associates (Varro and Lucullus), in turn, are assigned the task of discussing the philosophy of Antiochus of Ascalon (c130-70BCE; one of Cicero's Greek instructors). Antiochus' philosophy represents the base for championing the defense of knowing. Cicero, himself, will speak on behalf of Academician skepticism. Cicero assumes credit for the victory in end, with skepticism winning over knowing. However, the victory may be a rhetorical rather than a philosophic outcome.

Indeed, for scholars of the human condition, the more consequential intellectual advantage resides in the particular viewpoints that Cicero and his adversaries develop along the way. Likewise, although it may be tempting isolate the debate within Cicero's time, the issues about the nature of human knowing and acting that Cicero addresses in *Academica* not only have characterized the philosophic venture from the classical Greek era to the present time but also are fundamental to the human sciences more generally and the "sociology of knowing" more specifically.

To locate the present project within a contemporary sociological plane, I will first briefly outline the premises of symbolic interactionism. Next, to better enable readers to place Cicero's *Academica* within a broader scholarly context, a highly compacted chronological overview of Western social thought is presented.

To foster greater clarity of "what is there," I have followed the developmental flow of *Academica*, informed readers of transitions and emphases, and provided fairly precise documentation (should readers wish more detail on the matters discussed within). Quite directly, because of the claims I am making, it is Cicero's text rather than my commentary that is to be emphasized in this paper.

In concluding the paper, I ask to what extent the positions assumed by Antiochus and Cicero correspond with the pragmatist sociological emphasis of symbolic interaction and in what ways Cicero's *Academica* may be used to inform, assess, support, refine, or challenge contemporary notions of human knowing and acting.

The Theoretical Frame

Because it is symbolic interaction (and pragmatist social thought that provides the conceptual glue that enables this project to develop in more sustained analytic terms, it is instructive to review the premises that inform interactionist analysis as well as the methodological and conceptual dimensions of this approach.

In developing this project, I have built most fundamentally on the symbolic interactionist tradition associated with George Herbert Mead (1934), Herbert Blumer (1969), and Anselm Strauss (1993).ⁱ Since Mead and Blumer are particularly instrumental in articulating the theoretical and methodological foundations of a social science that attends to people's lived experiences (i.e., the ways that people engage all aspects of their known worlds), their work serves as a consequential reference point throughout.

Because all research and all theory makes claims or assumptions about the world (regardless of whether these are explicitly recognized), eleven premises or assumptions that inform the interactionist paradigm are briefly outlined.

1. *Human group life is intersubjective.* Human group life is accomplished (and made meaningful) through community-based, linguistic interchange.
2. *Human group life is ambiguous (problematic).* It is through symbol-based references that people begin to distinguish realms of "the known" and (later) "the unknown."
3. *Human group life is object-oriented.* Denoting anything that can be referenced (observed, referred to, indicated, acted toward, or otherwise knowingly experienced), objects constitute the contextual and operational essence of the humanly known environment.
4. *Human group life is (multi) perspectival.* As groups of people engage the world on an ongoing basis, they develop viewpoints, conceptual frameworks, or notions of reality that may differ from those of other groups.
5. *Human group life is reflective.* By taking the perspective of the other into account with respect to one's own being people become "objects unto themselves" (and act accordingly).
6. *Human group life is sensory/embodied and (knowingly) materialized.* Within the realms of humanly knowing "what is" and "what is not," people develop an awareness of [the material or physical things] that others in the community recognize. This includes appreciations of the [sensory / body / physiological] essences of human beings (self and other), acknowledging capacities for stimulation

and motion, as well as denoting realms of practical (enacted, embodied) limitation and fragility.

7. *Human group life is activity-based.* The interactionists approach human activity as a meaningful, *formulative*, multifaceted process.
8. *Human group life is negotiable.* Because human activity frequently involves direct interactions with others, people may anticipate and strive to influence others *as well as* acknowledge and/or resist the influences of others.
9. *Human group life is relational.* People do things within group contexts; people act mindfully of, and in conjunction with, specific other people.
10. *Human group life is processual.* Human lived experiences (and activities) are viewed in emergent, ongoing, or temporally developed terms.
11. *Human group life takes place in instances.* Group life is best known through the consideration and study of the particular occasions in which people do things; conceptions of human experience are to be developed mindfully of, and tested against, the particular occasions or instances in which people attend to and otherwise act toward things in the humanly known world.

Western Social Thought

To locate Cicero's *Academica* in a broader context, what follows is a highly abbreviated statement on the development of Western social thought, albeit with particular emphasis on the continuities and disjunctures of pragmatist analysis.

Whereas an incredibly wide assortment of structuralist, skepticist, pragmatist, fictional, moralist, and religious themes can be found in the classic Greek (c700-300BCE) literature, Greek scholarship deteriorated dramatically following the death of Alexander the Great (c356-323BCE) and the dissolution of the Greek empire. Subsequent Greek thought became much more focused on moralist, fatalist, and religious matters, with scholarly (and scientific) enterprise sliding into comparative disregard.ⁱⁱ

The Romans took possession of Greece in 146BCE. To their credit, many Romans recognized the value of a Greek education and acknowledged the (already weakened) Greek scholarship of the day. Subsequently, the Romans extended an increasingly Latinized scholarly endeavor to the reaches of their empire, but added comparatively little to the academic venture.

Thus, whereas scholars such as Cicero and Quintilian maintained some philosophic emphases amidst their work on rhetoric and Cicero assigns particular relevance to Varro's scholarship, no classical Latin author whose texts are preserved addresses human knowing and acting in more direct and sustained philosophic terms than does Cicero.ⁱⁱⁱ As well, the overall quality of Western scholarship receded even further as the Roman Empire (c200BCE-500CE) fell into varying states of disarray.

Situated within the Roman Empire for the first few centuries of their existence,^{iv} the Christians subsequently attempted to extend their (Holy) empire across Europe. Although the most consequential Christian scholars were trained in the Latin and Greek traditions of the time, Western scholarship would deteriorate even further under the Christian influence. Nonetheless, it is apparent that Augustine assumed a particularly pivotal role in maintaining an academic emphasis in the Christian world.^v

While the Christian enterprise also became the major integrating political mechanism in Europe during the decline of the Roman Empire and throughout the dark ages (c500-1000), the Christians also struggled for their own survival in a volatile and shifting set of territories and leaders. In the process (somewhat by default and with

limited levels of concern and competence), the Christians carried Latin scholarship through the (Western European) dark ages.^{vi}

Still, this notably weakened intellectual base would provide the foundations on which 13th century Latin-European scholars would begin to appreciate the discovery of some early Greek texts. This came about as a “byproduct” of the crusades in Spain and (Greek) Byzantine. Although much “pagan” material was lost or destroyed, an instructive corpus of texts had been preserved by scholars working within Islamic, Jewish, and Greek Orthodox religious contexts.^{vii}

The discovery of these early Greek texts (theological, poetic, philosophic, scientific), in combination with some lesser quality but still highly enabling Latin texts, would provide the foundations for what would become known as the Renaissance. However, while the more popular or expressive-artistic 16th century European Renaissance first became more evident in Italy (c1400), this was preceded by an *intellectual* renaissance (or philosophical rebirth).

Reflecting a literary and academic base barely maintained over the intervening centuries by the works of Augustine (c354-430), Cassiodorus (490-575), Alcuin (c732-804; and his patron Charlemagne), and others, the intellectual renaissance most singularly may be attributed to the more sustained introduction of secular, pluralist (and pragmatist) *Aristotelian* scholarship into Latin European thought (and theology). While enabled by a somewhat earlier re-emergence of a dialectic scholarly tradition in Catholic theology, this transition largely reflects the scholarship of Albert the Great (c1200-1280) and especially his student Thomas Aquinas (c1225-1274).

Still, the transition was far from smooth, comprehensive, or continuous. Thus, pragmatist thought was only partially acknowledged by subsequent scholars. In addition to those Catholic theologians who criticized Aquinas for attending so closely to Aristotle's naturalist philosophy, Aquinas (and Aristotle) also were subject to much criticism or disregard from scholars hostile to the Catholicism.

Further, amidst a broader revival of Greek scholarship in Western Europe, several of Plato's texts also surfaced shortly after those of Aristotle. Certain of Plato's works (e.g., *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*) had long been incorporated into Judaic, Islamic, and Christian theology, but most of Plato's texts were not known to Western European scholars. Subsequently, Plato's dialogues were used by Renaissance (and "Enlightenment") scholars to champion wide ranges of theological, expressive, moralist, utopian, structuralist, and skepticist viewpoints (perspectives that contrasted with pragmatist scholarship).

Likewise, with the reformation movement (most prominently associated with Luther and Calvin) that would sweep across Northern Europe and the denunciation with most things associated with the Catholic Church, the pragmatist scholarship of Aquinas and Aristotle would experience yet another consequential setback.

As a result of these political, religious, moralist, and expressive emphases, the essential familiarity of a great many scholars (and their students) with Greek thought over the past several centuries has been largely limited by their exposure to the more theological and idealist aspects of Plato's works. Relatedly, too, those of Plato's writings (e.g., *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Protagoras*) that more directly introduce pragmatist themes have received somewhat less attention over the centuries.

As matters would develop, Rene Descartes (1596-1650) would not only assume a substantial role in fostering mathematical formulations of the physical sciences but related structuralist, mechanistic notions would also be applied to considerations of human conduct. Attending to (preAristotelian) classical Greek philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) would resurrect totalizing skepticism. As well, pragmatist social thought which, over the centuries would find some (albeit more transient) expression in

a variety of fields (rhetoric, poetics, religious studies) would be reengaged more directly by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), John Dewey (1859-1952), and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), amongst others.

Cicero occupies only a comparatively small space in the corridors of Western social thought but his texts, directly and indirectly, have had considerable relevance for the scholarship that would follow.

Cicero's *Academica*^{viii}

Focusing on human knowing and skepticism as philosophic endeavors, Cicero's *Academica* is centered on the historically sustained skepticist emphases of the Academy (c350-50BCE) after Plato's death and some competing viewpoints predominately associated with Aristotle and the Stoics. Dealing with the ways in which and extent to which things may be humanly known and doubted, *Academica* is a remarkably sophisticated statement.

Contemporary readers may notice some intriguing parallels between the positions adopted by positivists, postmodernists, and pragmatists with those of the speakers in *Academica*, but readers should approach Cicero's *Academica* with some caution.

As Rackham (1933:399-405) explains, the [extant] statement is not only incomplete but it also is composed of the remains of two separate editions of a broader text that Cicero retitled *Academica*. *Academica* consists of two books, *Catulus* and *Lucullus*. Neither the earlier or later edition has survived intact.

Instead, as it has come down to us, *Academica* is composite of two different editions of this text. Still, we do not have a complete statement. Instead, only the first half of Book I (*Catulus*) of *Academica* remains from Cicero's 2nd or revised edition. We have all of Book II (*Lucullus*) of *Academica* (but that is from his 1st or unrevised edition; and Cicero was not content with that formulation).

To confound matters a bit more, different sets of speakers appear in the two books that constitute the surviving, composite text. The statement presented here will maintain these divisions, while presenting these materials as seamlessly as possible.

Despite these anomalies, *Academica* is an important statement for pragmatist considerations of human knowing and acting. Thus, attention is given to (1) *the intellectual shifts in Plato's Academy* during the 300 years after Plato's death, (2) a *pragmatist critique* of the totalizing skepticism of the Academicians that is developed within the broader, more eclectic philosophy of Antiochus, and (3) the ways in which Cicero, as a representative and *defender of Academician skepticism*, deals with critiques pertaining to *the problem of human knowing and acting*.

Further, while *Academica* is just one of several texts that Cicero wrote that are directly pertinent to scholars in philosophy, theology, and the social sciences,^{ix} it is in *Academica* that Cicero most directly engages the issue of sense-based knowing and Platonist skepticism of human knowing.

In developing and defending the position of the (Platonist) Academicians, Cicero moves some distance from the sorts of positions he assumes with respect to his writings on rhetoric and religion. Oddly enough, too, while Cicero appears on the surface to win the argument for the Academicians, it is apparent (and Cicero would realize) that the claims that Cicero develops as a speaker could be sustained only by *not* attending more directly to certain of the viewpoints that he has Varro and Lucullus present on behalf of Antiochus (who challenges the Academician skepticism).

Whereas readers may judge the outcomes of the debate for themselves, *Academica* is an especially consequential analytic venture as well as a testimony to

the considerable quality of Roman scholarship. Thus, while by no means eclipsing the classic Greek scholars, Cicero should be acknowledged not just for sustaining an interest in philosophic venture in Western European thought, but also for providing some compelling and uniquely valuable and historical comparative analyses of the human condition (also see Cicero's work on rhetoric and religion).

To understand *Academica* and the issues introduced therein, it is helpful to acknowledge some transitions in Platonic thought over the intervening centuries (see MacKendrick, 1989:126-127). To this end, five different Platonist schools or academies may be identified as having existed by Cicero's time.

The *First or Old Academy* (c350-270BCE), associated with Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemo and Crates adopted viewpoints closely approximating those of Socrates and Plato. Here, dialectic reasoning is used to establish skepticism about knowing about the sensate or humanly known world.

The *Second (Middle) Academy* (c270BCE-150) was founded by *Arcesilas* who adopted a position of totalizing skepticism coupled with a complete refusal to make judgments on things.

The *Third or New Academy* (c150-110BCE) was founded by *Carneades* who introduced a version of knowing based on probabilistic or plausible inferences. It is Carneades' position that Cicero will most centrally defend.

The *Fourth Academy* (c110-90BCE) was associated with *Philo of Larissa*, who argued against human abilities to distinguish between false and true sensations in theoretical matters but asserted that Academicians could still make practical assessments of things.

The *Fifth Academy* (c68-50BCE) was headed by *Antiochus*. As an Academician, Antiochus earlier had accepted the totalizing skepticism associated with Arcesilas of the Second Academy and likewise refused to make judgments on the matters of knowing. Later, Antiochus *shifted positions* and adopted a viewpoint that is notably eclectic in emphases. Thus Antiochus, who becomes a central figure in Cicero's *Academica*, not only displays affinities with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle but also incorporates more characteristic Stoic notions of religion, ethics, and knowing in articulating a broadly encompassing philosophic stance.

In the reconstituted, composite text, *Academica*, the speakers Varro and Lucullus, in turn, champion Antiochus' criticisms of Academician skepticism. Interestingly, too, Cicero earlier had studied with Antiochus when Antiochus was a member of the Academy. While it is primarily against Antiochus' (essentially pragmatist) position that Cicero attempts to defend Academician skepticism, Cicero also will engage Antiochus' broader philosophy in developing his argument against Antiochus' charges.^x

Academica Book I (the volume entitled *Catulus*) is introduced as a three person exchange (Varro, Anticus, and Cicero), but mainly is developed between Varro (a prominent philosopher of Cicero's time) and Cicero. *Varro (Academica, I: 4-8)* observes that the Romans have developed little appreciation of philosophy and says that he encourages anyone who wishes to engage this subject matter to go to Greece so that they might acquire a more adequate foundation for their studies.

Cicero (*Academica, I: 9-12*) objects to Varro's position and insists on the importance of developing a Latin version of (Greek) philosophy. Cicero also states that the Romans have some very capable philosophers and more specifically encourages Varro to help develop a more adequate Latin philosophy.

The exchange then centers on the Academy and whether there have been consequential shifts in philosophic viewpoints among those defined as Academicians.

The conversation assumes a more dramatic dimension (*Academica*, I: 13-14) when Varro rather abruptly asks Cicero *if it is true*, as he has heard, *that Cicero has embraced the position of the New Academy (with Carneades) and rejected the standpoint of the Old Academy* (following Plato more closely).

In response, Cicero directly makes reference to Antiochus who had headed the Academy but more recently has separated himself from the Academicians. Cicero says that Philo who had headed the Academy before Antiochus (and who also had been Antiochus' instructor) had insisted that there was but one Academician standpoint. Antiochus had challenged Philo's claim, arguing that the Old Academy and New were different in highly consequential respects.

The debate unfolds as Cicero, under the pretext of refreshing his own memory, asks Varro if he will outline both Antiochus' philosophy and his views of the Academy.

Speaking for the deceased philosopher Antiochus (c130-70BCE), Varro (*Academica*, I: 15-18) traces the foundations of the Academy back to Socrates. Socrates, says Varro, first adopted the position that the only thing one could know about the human world was that one could know nothing except one's own ignorance about it. Wisdom, thus, inheres in doubting knowledge of the sensible world. Nevertheless, Varro observes, Socrates also insisted on the pursuit of virtue.

Varro adds that while Plato carried on Socrates' vision of philosophy, he modified it as well by concentrating more extensively or developing a science of human knowing.

While acknowledging that Aristotle approached philosophy as a yet more definite science, it was Antiochus' contention that the (two schools) *Academicians* and *Peripatetics* that followed Plato and Aristotle, respectively, are quite similar in overall emphases.

Varro (19-23) subsequently uses Plato's *division of philosophy* into *ethics* (behavior and morality), *physics* (natural science), and *dialectics* (reasoning) as a base for elaborating on Antiochus' philosophy.

First addressing Antiochus' Ethics [which more closely approximates Aristotelian notions], Varro (*Academica* I: 19) says that nature [vs. divinity] is to be recognized as the starting point of one's philosophy; that the ultimate good is to be sought in nature and that it is to be recognized that all things are enabled by nature and should be pursued in ways that are mindful of nature. In articulating his position, Antiochus subsequently divides "nature" into three components with respect to humans.

To understand the human condition (i.e., human nature), it is necessary to be mindful of (a) people's human physiology and circumstances, (b) people's capacities for mindedness, and (c) the centrality of the human group. First, Antiochus takes cognizance of the human capacities for sensation and behavior, relating these to people's concerns with health and abilities to function effectively.

Still, there is a more consequential overarching concern about human virtue as signified by discerning intellectual capacities and choices. In discussing "mindedness," Antiochus is attentive to the human capacities for apprehension and memory. [Following Aristotle,] Antiochus (*Academica* I: 20) particularly stresses the necessity of attending to variations in people's moral characters as signified in the habits that people develop through repetition, practice, instruction, and reason. [Like Aristotle, as well] Antiochus emphasizes the importance of achieving (moral) excellence in the capacities of the mind (as in knowledge, reason, logic, wisdom).

Yet more is involved, however, and Antiochus (*Academica* I: 21) adopts the [Aristotelian] viewpoint that people are to be understood within "the community" – that people are joined with one another through "the partnership of humanity." It is in the

community that people most fundamentally realize the essence of nature. Other things, such as wealth, fame, and power are to be understood within this context.

Observing that these notions are emphasized by the Peripatetics [Aristotelians], Varro says that the Academicians [Platonists] are not so different on these matters. Both envision happiness as contingent on virtue or excellence of character but both also recognize the importance of human physiology and people's well-being thereof. Relatedly, both place much greater emphases on virtue, duty, friendship, justice, and fairness in the quest for human happiness than sensate pleasures or the accumulation of material goods.

The focus then shifts (*Academica*, I: 24-26) more directly to Antiochus' Physics. The speakers agree on the importance of extending the Latin philosophic vocabulary. However, in attending to Antiochus, they place particular emphasis on the Greek concepts of "matter" as an abstract term for a body of some sort, "force" as an active principle, and quality or "whatness" as properties or features that distinguish instances of matter and force in some way.

Addressing Antiochus' thoughts on physics, Varro (*Academica*, I: 26-29) discusses the notions that matter and space are infinitely divisible. This leads to considerations of space, motion, and interspace relations followed by an argument for God.

For Antiochus, [in more distinctively Stoic terms] God not only is *the source* of all existence and continuity but also of all wisdom and intelligence. Antiochus not only claims that there is a divine, intelligent being that oversees all, but also insists that this divine essence knows all that will happen as well as controls all things that occur. Relatedly, all human endeavors also are fated. [While these Stoic notions of divinity and fatalism are almost entirely removed from Antiochus' criticisms of Academician skepticism, Cicero will use these Stoic theological claims in developing his argument against Antiochus.]

Next, Varro (*Academica*, I: 30-33) addresses Antiochus' Logic. He states that for both the Old Academy and the Peripatetics, *truth is enabled by the senses but is to be judged in the mind*. [Cicero will largely ignore this point in disclaiming sense-based perceptions.] It is in the mind that the ideas or forms of things would be known. Following Plato and Aristotle, thus, both the definitions of things and the terms given to things are products of the mind as achieved by speech, dialectic reasoning, and the persuasive quality of rhetoric.

Varro (*Academica*, I: 33) then comments on the disjuncture of the philosophy of Aristotle from that of Plato, more specifically (but only briefly) acknowledging Aristotle's detachment from Plato's emphasis on "forms" as well as Plato's related notions of "divinely-enabled knowing."^{xi}

By contrast, Varro continues (*Academica*, I: 34-42), the old Academicians maintained loyalty to Plato but began to encounter another noteworthy rival in Zeno of Citium. Zeno had studied with some of the Old Academicians but subsequently articulated a *Stoic* position in which the predominant emphasis was on virtue as the unique and exclusive good.

For Zeno, virtue was to be the supreme good and all actions were to be judged with virtue as the reference point. Relatedly, the wise man would strive for emotional control so as not to violate notions of virtue by intemperance.

Continuing, Zeno claims that *people know things through sensations*; through a "grasping" of the qualities of the particular things one encounters (i.e., has contact of some sort – as in tactile or visual contact]).

Viewing sensations as the essential essences that separate ignorance and knowledge, Zeno argues that sensation constitutes a primary mechanism or first principle that serves as the basis for developing all other modes of knowing.

His claim was not that sensation provides access to all properties of the objects encountered but that the sensation of things provides a primary, albeit rudimentary, criterion for achieving knowledge of what is credible and trustworthy.

As Varro concluded his comments on Zeno, Cicero (43) affirms a statement that Cicero says Antiochus had made some years earlier. It was to the effect that Zeno's position on sensation might be better viewed as a correction to the Old Academy rather than a distinct philosophy on its own. [This may be Cicero's more immediate attempt to nullify Antiochus' credibility, but this comment from Cicero in this 2nd edition of *Academica* also seems to preclude an important element of the defense of Academician skepticism that he subsequently adopts in his 1st or unrevised edition of Book II - *Lucullus*.]

At this point in the dialogue, Cicero (*Academica*, I: 43) assumes the task of defending Arcesilas of the Second Academy. Although alleging that Arcesilas developed his position largely as a Socratic counter to Zeno's Stoic philosophy, Cicero describes Arcesilas' position [of totalizing skepticism] as even more comprehensive and secular than that of Socrates:

Accordingly Arcesilas said that there is nothing that can be known, not even that residuum of knowledge that Socrates had left himself—the truth of this very dictum...nor is there anything that can be perceived or understood, and for these reasons, he said, no one must make any positive statement or affirmation or give the approval of his assent to any proposition, and a man must always restrain his rashness and hold it back from every slip, as it would be glaring rashness to give assent either to a falsehood or to something not certainly known, and nothing is more disgraceful than for assent and approval to outstrip knowledge and perception. (Cicero, *Academica* [Rackham trans.] I: 45)

While acknowledging Arcesilas' position that “nothing can be known, not even doubt,” Cicero also claims that Carneades, who later headed the third or New Academy (c150BCE), respects Arcesilas' viewpoint as well. [The text breaks off. The last half of Book I is lost]

Academica Book II (*Lucullus*)

[Note the change of speakers in this second book. In place of Varro, Lucullus will assume Antiochus' position. Cicero will champion the Academician position. Two other people, Catulus and Hortensius will assume minor, casual roles as “judges.”]

After introducing Lucullus as a scholar and a statesman, Cicero emphasizes the desirability of people's mutual involvements in philosophic studies and matters of state. Although criticism is sometimes directed toward people who engage philosophy, Cicero argues that this only enhances the reputation of those involved in political and military ventures.

[More centrally for our purposes] Cicero (*Academica*, II: 8-9) then makes a distinction between “the dogmatists” and the Academicians. Whereas the dogmatists claim to know the truth of their standpoints, Cicero states that the Academicians insist on the freedom to judge impartially and in more informed matters [This will be Cicero's primary emphasis in defending Academician skepticism].

Cicero also stresses that those who follow other schools of thought generally began to adopt these viewpoints before they had sufficient wisdom to judge the viability of the positions they subsequently, and often so intensively, advocate. They are blindly trusting in others rather than their own good judgment.

The text unfolds with Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 10-18) speaking throughout for Antiochus [c130-68BCE] who directs a series of charges against Academician skepticism.

Lucullus first contends that the Academicians frequently “argue from authority” (rather than evidence). In asserting their position, the Academicians typically reference a number of prominent philosophers who in one or other ways were highly skeptical of human knowing and matters of sensate experience.

Relatedly, Lucullus observes, the academicians “ignore the knowledge about things” that people have built up over the generations as they engage and investigate particular things. Lucullus takes specific exception to the Academician reliance on Empedocles [c492-432BCE] who says (*Academica*, II: 14) “all things are hidden and that we perceive nothing, discern nothing, are utterly unable to discover the real nature of anything.”

Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 16-18) subsequently criticizes the Academicians, Arcesilas and Philo of Larissa [c147-80BCE], for their rejection of Zeno’s concept of “grasping” things at a cognitive level. Zeno had claimed that people developed [images] of things from encounters with those things and would not have developed those impressions without some contact with or exposure to those particular things. Lucullus argues that one must either accept claims of some sense-based knowing or lapse into totalizing skepticism.

Reiterating Antiochus’ criticism of Academic skepticism, Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 19-21) also observes that the senses are not infallible, as the Epicureans claim them to be. Nevertheless, Lucullus continues, people can develop more reliable versions of sense-based experience through practice and training.

Lucullus also makes distinctions between things experienced through direct contact and the minded impressions that people may develop of things that they witness from a distance. Lucullus states, as well, that all understanding, investigation, and even discussion are impossible without this capacity to anticipate the “whatness” of things from a distance.^{xii}

Lucullus (22) also asks, “if people’s notions of things cannot be distinguished with respect to true and false presentations [of things], how is action possible?” Relatedly without distinctions of more reliable or consistent sorts, how could memory be achieved and how could any science, craft, or specialized area of endeavor be possible?

Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 23-26) continues, if people are unable to distinguish viable from nonviable claims on some consistent basis, how could ethics, wisdom, research, and reasoning be possible?

As well, if people were unable to distinguish between things, there would be “no tendency to act.” In the absence of more particularized images of things, everything would be void of meaning. As a result, there would be no inclination or disposition to act toward anything.

He adds (27-29) that if people were deprived of the means of distinguishing one thing from another, philosophy also would be untenable!

Still speaking for Antiochus, Lucullus stresses the point that philosophers who disregard (a) the base on which knowledge is formed and (b) the goals of people’s impulses to act, lack the two most central features of philosophic wisdom. Likewise, it

is not apparent that those who refuse to take a stand on anything can be said to have a theory of anything

Continuing, Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 30-32) asserts that all animals are endowed with sensate capacities for making distinctions. Envisioning the human mind as the source of sensation as well as sensation in itself, Lucullus says that, it is the mind that connects sensation and subsequent action.

Because people also possess capacities for memory, humans are seen to store sensations until these emerge as patterns as a consequence of similarities (and differences). This, according to Antiochus represents the base on which higher order reasoning and wisdom is built, culminating in the potential for virtue.

To deny or eliminate these capacities (including the ability to “grasp” sensations and attend to differences in sensation), Lucullus emphasizes, would be to deprive humans of the mind that differentiates them from other animals.^{xiii}

Further, Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 33-36) posits, for people to have notions of true and false, right and wrong, there must be some difference between the impressions of particular things. Otherwise, one could not make any claims of any sort regarding anything.

Likewise, to assert (as does the Academician, Carneades) that one can discuss or know things through probabilities still requires that one invoke some notion of differentiation or standard of certainty, of truth and falsity. *If no credence is given to any representation of things* (i.e., things lack discernable reference points), then all considerations of probability or plausibility are unfounded or meaningless (35-36).

Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 37-39) next observes that people distinguish between inanimate and animate objects based on the ability of animals to be active. To deny sensation to animals and still acknowledge activity would require that all animals act voluntarily (with minded assent).

To deny humans of the capacity for either sensation or judgment, Lucullus states, is to deprive people of mindedness. Relatedly, Lucullus adds, without the ability to make choices, human memories and conceptual matters of all sorts become inconsequential, as also would any concerns with vice and virtue (insofar as these reflect expressions of the human will).^{xiv}

Before people can act, Lucullus explains, they not only need to encounter some sensation but also to acknowledge it as something that has meaning. As well, the human mind is such that it cannot help acknowledging the things it knows when those objects are encountered. When one denies either sensation related impressions or the capacity to make distinctions, one renders action impossible.

Next, Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 40-42), still following Antiochus, *attempts to define the Academy’s position on knowing*. He says that while acknowledging that (a) some things are true and some are false, the Academicians claim that (b) no adequate human perceptual base exists for distinguishing false presentations from those that are true. [The argument is based on the recognition that since people may encounter similar kinds of sensations from nearly identical instances of Y1 and Y2 as well as from a notably different X, people cannot on the basis of the sensations alone correctly distinguish the source as Y1, Y2 or X. Thus, people are prone to err in identifying the true source of impressions on the basis of sensation.]

As a result, the Academicians claim that (c) it is impossible to establish that sensations do or do not have authenticity with respect to particular things. Working with this narrow contention, Antiochus charges, the Academicians concentrate on developing highly minute variants of this thesis, thereby reaffirming the conclusion that it is impossible to make viable distinctions on the basis of sensations.

Lucullus (*Academica*, 43-45) then criticizes the Academy from yet another angle. This time, he takes issues with the Academicians' practice of "defining things." While not questioning the importance of definitions, he pointedly asks how people who argue that there are no comprehensible differences between things subsequently can proceed to define two or more things as different in some way?

After noting that a great deal of Academicians discourse is centered on this earlier argument, Lucullus further asks if it is sensible for the Academicians "to claim that some presentations are false" if they have no basis for distinguishing between true and false presentations.

Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 46-63) next addresses a number of Academician claims pertaining to the inabilities of people to distinguish between sensations of things that are true and that are false. Lucullus notes that different things may generate instances of similar sensations, but this acknowledgement does *not* destroy the basis of relevant differences or the possibilities of knowledge.

Subsequently, Lucullus enters into an extended discussion (49-54) of the varying states of mind with which people might experience sensations -- as in instances of more routine alertness, sleep, possible divine revelation, intoxication, and insanity.

Alleging noteworthy differences in people's capacities both for attending to sensation and exercising reliability of judgment in these varying states of mind, the question is asked of the Academicians if they treat all of these states alike in their notions of uncertainty.

Elaborating on Antiochus' criticisms of Academician skepticism, Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 54- 58) acknowledges that many sensory resemblances between things may exist but this is not an adequate basis on which to dispense with knowledge.

As well, Antiochus chastizes the Academicians for resorting to the material philosophers, whom they typically disparage, to illustrate the problem of distinguishing between virtually identical objects. Under conditions of these sorts, Antiochus says that it would be foolish for someone to make definite claims to knowledge. Still, Antiochus contends that when people do things with a particular purpose in mind, people may be able to develop methods of distinguishing objects that appear identical in other ways.

However, even more absurd, is the Academician claim (*Academica*, II: 59) that they can make probabilistic judgments of an informed sort when they claim that there are no criteria for judging between true and false sensations. In this sense, the Academician Arcesilas is much more consistent than is Carneades for Arcesilas refused to take a stand on any position (including a probabilistic stance).

Then, shifting emphasis somewhat, Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 60) raises another issue on behalf of Antiochus. He asks, "What have the Academicians accomplished in their skepticism?" What have they learned by arguing both for and against all things?

Then, referring to the typical Academician reluctance to reveal things they may have learned, the question turns to what, if anything, their "secret doctrine" might conceal and why it would be kept secret.^{xv}

Lucullus ends by personally encouraging Cicero to forego the contradictions of the Academician tradition. Hortensius, who has witnessed the exchange, is reported to have indicated his approval to Antiochus' position at many points along the way. Catulus, the other participant in the setting, says that he would like to hear Cicero's response but also says that he can understand that Cicero may be reluctant to defend Academician skepticism.

Likening his task to a contested case in the courtroom, Cicero (*Academica*, II: 64-68) *begins his defense of the Academician tradition* of scholarship by establishing his own reputation as “someone engaged in a passionate quest for truth.” As a result, he wishes to avoid asserting things about which the truth cannot be ascertained.

Not only does Cicero state that nothing can be perceived but even if something could be perceived, it is dangerous and dishonorable to assent to something that is not certain. Still, Cicero (68) insists that *it is on the point that nothing can be perceived that his argument rests*.

Before replying to Lucullus in more direct terms, however, Cicero (*Academica*, II: 69-72) provides readers with some additional information designed to impugn Antiochus’ character. Cicero indicates that Antiochus, on whom Lucullus builds so centrally, had been a dedicated (Platonist) Academician until late in life. Cicero wonders openly about the rationale for this change as well as Antiochus’ apparent reluctance to join the Stoics despite the substantial compatibility of their philosophy with Antiochus’ later position. Cicero also suggests that Antiochus’ shift of position is self-serving.

Cicero (*Academica*, II: 72-76) then makes the case that *all* of the major philosophers adopted skepticist viewpoints on human knowing. More specifically, Cicero cites Anaxagoras [c500-428BCE] and Democritus [c460-357BCE] who deny that truth exists at all. Cicero then quotes Democritus’ student, Metrodorus who says:

I deny that we know whether we know something or know nothing, and even that we know the mere fact that we do not know (or do know), or know at all whether something exists or nothing exists. (Cicero, *Academica* [Rackham trans.], II: 73)

Cicero adds that others, such as Empedocles, Parmenides and Xenophanes, as well as Socrates and Plato, also have attested to the impossibility of knowing things. In response to Antiochus’ charge that the Academicians “argue by authority,” Cicero says that he is not merely citing names but is referencing the philosophers that he takes as models for his own viewpoints.^{xvi}

Extending his argument for skepticism more generally, Cicero next references Chrysippus, a well-known Stoic, who also argued against the validity of sense-based experiences (thereby challenging a traditional Stoic position). Cicero also acknowledges the Cyrenaic school, whose members insist that nothing is perceptible other than the internal sensations that people, in some way, experience.

Continuing, Cicero (76-78) says that Arcesilas (Academician) would have accepted Zeno’s notions of perception except that Zeno could not establish that one could reliably distinguish sensations from a true (particular) object from that of a false (different) object. Cicero will endeavor to prove that *since nothing can be perceived, the wise person will withhold opinion on all claims to knowledge*.

Asserting that sense-knowledge is unwarranted, Cicero (*Academica*, II: 79-90) *identifies four arguments against the senses*: (a) false or misleading presentations [sensations of things] exist; (b) false presentations cannot be detected; (c) people are unable to distinguish particular instances of things from other things that appear alike; and (d) people cannot reliably distinguish between true and false presentations of the same thing. On these bases, Cicero declares that the senses are untrustworthy for knowing things.

Then, moving on to consider the Academician use of the dialectic, Cicero (*Academica*, II: 91-97) states that dialectic reasoning does not generate (dogmatic) certainty, but instead is used to consider the feasibility of things. Then, responding to an earlier criticism of Lucullus (*Academica*, II: 49) who claims that the Academicians

deliberately push matters pertaining to the topics under consideration to increasingly absurd lengths in order to destroy viable notions of knowing, Cicero in turn challenges the Stoic use of syllogistic reasoning as a viable device for ascertaining the truth or falsity of one's conclusions.

Cicero (*Academica*, II: 98-104) then introduces the probabilistic argument of the Academician, Carneades [c219-129BCE]. Carneades' position, Cicero contends, is much more compelling than that of Antiochus and will effectively destroy Antiochus' case.

Referencing Carneades, Cicero explains, these are two classifications of the presentations of things: (a) those that can be perceived and those that cannot; and (b) those that are probable and those that are not.

However, *because the senses are unreliable*, the academicians do *not* recognize this first distinction. As a result, it is appropriate only to approach sensations in probable / improbable terms. Cicero adds that Stoics also make decisions based on plausibility in the absence of particular graspings, perceptions, and judgments because that seems reasonable to do.

According to Carneades, *the wise person will attend only to the comparative likelihood or feasibility of things* and use this as the basis for action and inaction. This viewpoint, Cicero contends, is not contradicted by the Stoics who acknowledge that things often are different from what they appear.

In another (seemingly humorous) attempt to disqualify the position Antiochus has taken, Cicero (101) proposes that the Epicurean position, "that if any sense-perception is false, nothing can be perceived" be combined with Antiochus' position that "there are false sense-presentations" to establish that the conclusion that "nothing can be known." If there are disagreements, Cicero (jestingly) suggests that Antiochus fight these out with the Epicureans.

Cicero then refers to the Academician, Clitomachus [c187-110BCE], who addresses these notions in highly explicit terms amidst a broader defense of the Academician position:

The Academic school holds that there are dissimilarities between things of such a nature that some of them seem probable and others the contrary; but this is not an adequate ground for saying that some things can be perceived and others cannot, because many false objects are probable but nothing false can be perceived and known.' And accordingly he [Clitomachus-RP] asserts that those who say that the Academy robs us of our senses are violently mistaken, as that school never said that colour, taste or sound was non-existent, but their contention was that these presentations do not contain a mark of truth and certainty peculiar to themselves and found nowhere else. (Cicero, *Academica* [Rackham trans.] II: 103)

As Cicero (104) explains, the Academicians give no credence to sensation-based knowing in theoretical terms but, following Carneades, invoke probabilistic reasoning as a guide to *practical decision-making and action*. Things are not perceived as this or that, but are assigned the qualities of *appearing* as this or that relative to notions of probability.

Cicero (*Academica*, II: 105-111) continues, insisting that probability provides a viable base for action, and that this in no way denies people's capacities for memory or other human accomplishments.

Then [in what seems a substantial concession], Cicero (105), says that the things Antiochus describes as “perceived” and “grasped” the Academicians would describe as “appearing” provided they are judged probable.

From there, Cicero (107) fleetingly addresses the topic of science insisting that much science is merely conjecture and that the sciences that Antiochus would defend are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood. This is followed by the (rhetorical) question (107) “does Antiochus refuse people the right or ability to doubt?”

Cicero (108) subsequently addresses the issue of *whether one who assents to nothing can act*. Referring to reason as “the highest form of activity,” Cicero says that he uses this form of activity (i.e., reasoning) to resist notions of sense-perception, mere opinion, hasty reasoning, and the like.

Then, defining assessments of probability or plausibility as central to activity, Cicero notes that people make extensive use of probability more generally. Continuing, Cicero (110) contends that it is on the basis of knowing that choices made on probability are viable for action.

Cicero next affirms the Academician position that some things are true and other things are false, but insists that this is based on reasoning rather than instances of perception.

Cicero (*Academica*, II: 112-115) indicates that his argument is not so much with the Peripatetics or the Old Academy, but more centrally with Antiochus who insists on the existence of sense-based distinctions between things.

After portraying Antiochus as a minor, isolated thinker, Cicero says that were he to accept Antiochus’ position, Cicero (also) would risk offending the Peripatetics, the Epicureans, and the Stoics.^{xvii}

Then, focusing his attack at Antiochus more directly, Cicero (114) with an apparent air of indignation asks how Antiochus who is so critical of Cicero’s right to avoid assenting to dubious matters not only could propose to develop such a comprehensive philosophy but also presume that the particular versions of physics, ethics, and logic that Antiochus has addressed therein are the ones to which Cicero should adhere. Still, Cicero observes, Antiochus is not alone in making (grandiose) claims of this sort. Many others also insist that their theories alone are to ones to be believed.

To further establish his position on the rightness of suspending judgment, Cicero says that he will consider wisdom as this has been developed in the broader philosophic tradition. [Cicero will locate Antiochus’ position(s) within the apparent contradictions of philosophic wisdom.]

Following Plato’s division of philosophy into physics, ethics, and dialectics, Cicero (*Academica*, II: 116-128) first attends to physics or the natural (and cosmic) sciences. The issue, Cicero says, is how to define wisdom in respect to science.

Going back to Thales [c624-548BCE], Cicero (*Academica*, II: 118-121) first emphasizes the wide base of disagreement among the major Greek scholars regarding the constitution of the cosmos and the nature of the gods.

Cicero (122) also points out the limitations and disparities of scientific knowledge with respect to human bodies, even with the aid of dissection and related inquiry. Cicero then addresses people’s diverse notions of the universe, including the nature and position of the earth. Then Cicero (125) returns to Democritus’ theory of atoms, void spaces, and multiple worlds.

Given the vast array of uncertainties and disputations in physics, Cicero (126) asks why he (or other Academicians) should be viewed with disfavor for refusing to presume that one might know these things with certainty.

Cicero (*Academica*, II: 129-141) next engages the realm of ethics (morality more specifically). Here as well, Cicero acknowledges a wide assortment of esteemed philosophers and the many different viewpoints they have adopted on good and evil as well as the features of, and procedures for achieving, virtue.

As with matters pertaining to physics, Cicero observes, philosophic claims about morality are highly variable in emphases. Indeed, the arguments for pursuing pleasure are no less compelling than those encouraging people to quest for virtue in highly restrained manners.

Recognizing the multiple and conflicting viewpoints that exist in the people's viewpoints and practices, Cicero states that it is inappropriate for anyone to make claims about a true morality.

Cicero (*Academica*, II: 142-145) then turns to Plato's third realm of philosophy, that of dialectics or logic. Cicero begins his consideration of philosophic reasoning by contraposing (a) the relativism of Protagoras [c490-420BCE] with (b) the inward experiential sensations of the Cyrenaics, (c) the emphasis of deliberation that Plato associates with the mind, and (d) the claims about knowing espoused by Antiochus. Cicero further observes that the most capable of dialecticians also disagree amongst themselves on many matters.

Pointing to the wide ranging positions that various philosophers in each of these areas have assumed and the intense but unresolved debates in these fields, Cicero states that it would be unreasonable for someone to adopt a position other than the skepticism of the Academicians.

Still, Cicero (143) is not finished. Why, he asks, are the Academicians to be forced into accepting such dubious positions? Cicero (144-146) then chastises Lucullus for accusing him of irresponsible scholarship.

Continuing, Cicero emphasizes the point that Zeno and Antiochus claim that only the wise man will know things. Who, Cicero asks, could possibly qualify as such a person? Cicero states that Zeno and Antiochus are effectively claiming that none of those present can know anything, even of the most mundane sort. While denouncing Antiochus' position as highly untenable, Cicero immediately stresses that the Academician standpoint also is supported by the longstanding practice of requiring jurors *not* to make judgments until they have heard the evidence and to judge only on what *appears* to have taken place.

As Cicero concludes (147), he reminds the others of the extended differences of opinion among the greatest minds, the obscurities of nature, and the inevitable failings of the many competing systems of thought.

At this point, Lucullus, Catulus, and Hortensius all concur in endorsing the viability of the Academician position. By their acknowledgements, Cicero has won the case!

In Conclusion

While (a) the overarching message and appeal of Cicero's defense of Academician skepticism is the right or obligation to withhold assent until one is justified in taking a stand on matters of knowing and (b) this position has extended appeal in the broader academic community, it is important that scholars return to the more basic question of *how do people know things* or relatedly, how do they deal with the matters of "knowing," "not knowing," and "ambivalence of knowing?"

Thus, rather than concluding by saying that Cicero did *or* did not win the debate with Antiochus, it seems much more productive to consider "what knowing as a

humanly engaged matter” represents beyond the outcome that Cicero has assigned to the debate within his text.

Whereas Cicero invokes a wide array of arguments in his attempts to maintain the integrity of Academician skepticism (including many arguments which he, himself, would recognize as notably problematic if not more directly marginal or irrelevant to the philosophic case), I am going to use the premises of symbolic interaction as a frame of reference for considering the positions that Cicero and Antiochus (as represented, in turn, by Catulus and Lucullus) develop. These premises will be considered point by point in the order they were given earlier.

1. *Human life is intersubjective.* Although neither Cicero nor Antiochus specifically develop a theory of language in the present text, both are acutely aware of the processes and problematics of defining their terms and of the differing meanings that can be achieved through the use of words as well as the use of language in reasoning practices. Likewise, there is much recognition of focused, meaningful linguistic interchange among humans in *Academica* but little explicit theory pertaining to the place of speech and concepts in the (group-based) formulation of knowing.

2. *Human life is ambiguous (problematic).* Both Antiochus and Cicero view knowing as a realm of uncertainty. Cicero centrally insists that knowing is a problematic matter. Thus, he is reluctant to make decisions about knowing, particularly with respect to theoretical matters pertaining to physics, ethics, and logic. Still, recognizing that people need to make decisions in order to act in the practical (human lived) world, Cicero also talks about the way things *appear to be* and, following Carneades, endorses the use of probability (or plausibility) as a reasoned means of making choices.

Antiochus is of two or more minds on the problematics of knowing and opens himself to attack on this basis. Thus, whereas Antiochus acknowledges the problematic nature of sensation, perception and inference, he does not stop there. Instead, he infuses his philosophy with notions of divine knowing, fatalism, and morality (ethics) all of which claim external standards of a more definite (but as Cicero indicates a potentially disputatious) sort.

Nevertheless, Antiochus is highly attentive to the ways that humans and other living organisms selectively engage their environment, a basic point that Cicero fails to acknowledge. As with the activity that Cicero more casually defines as “practical,” Cicero also largely ignores the limitations and resistances that humans may encounter in learning about and questing for knowledge about things. Thus, Cicero’s notions of the problematic are largely limited to the “potentiality for error” in people’s attempts to distinguish between things.

3. *Human life is object-oriented.* Here, the positions that Antiochus develops seems much more compatible with pragmatist thought than does Academician skepticism. Thus, whereas Cicero dwells on the unreliable nature of sense perception, Antiochus envisions matter, qualities, and sensory-based distinctions to be indispensable to organic life. Still, even for Antiochus, objects are not known in direct terms but in the capacities of organisms to engage those things.

For humans, thus, some “grasping” of sensations is fundamental to distinctions (even if some of these are unfounded), combined with capacities for memory, allow people to develop more enduring patterns of distinctions; thereby

providing some semblance of knowing. Sensations of things, thus, represent the physiological-cognitive basis in which other forms of knowing may be developed.

Likewise, Antiochus is especially mindful of the ways that people and some other organisms “engage objects from a distance” and how this is related to both knowing and activity. Cicero’s attention to objects is much less apparent. He insists that people know and act toward things as they “appear to be,” but offers little in the way of a more extended explanation.

4. *Human life is (multi)perspectival.* Whereas both Antiochus and Cicero acknowledge wide diversities in human thought and assessments of activity, Cicero is more consistently pluralist or noncommittal in his standpoint.

Antiochus is not as single-minded as Cicero portrays him to be, but insofar as Antiochus takes more definite stands on religion, virtue, and wisdom, for instance, his notions of theology, morality judgment assume a more singular quality. Still, this should not obscure Antiochus’ more pluralist emphasis on knowing more generally. This clearly is evident in Antiochus’ consideration (and criticism) of Academician skepticism.

5. *Human life is reflective.* Even though Antiochus, as noted earlier, also subscribes to a religious viewpoint that endorses fatalism, the more extended philosophy of knowing and acting that he articulates is not only pluralist in emphasis but clearly acknowledges people’s capacities for interpreting, meaningfully engaging objects, redefining the nature of those objects, and consciously making adjustments to earlier notions of things where these seem appropriate.

Cicero’s position of deliberately suspending judgment, likewise, is highly reflective as, relatedly, are the manners in which these two principal combatants engage one another in this dialogue. Still, because Cicero is the author of this text as well, one might argue that he provides yet further evidence (in his writing) of his appreciation of the reflective nature of human life.

6. *Human life is sensory/embodyed.* Here, Antiochus (who adopts a more characteristic Aristotelian approach) to human physiology is much more consistent with a pragmatist viewpoint than is Cicero. Assuming an Academician viewpoint, Cicero tends to distance himself from such matters and concentrates more on the problematic features of sensation rather than acknowledging the existence of sensation.^{xviii}

7. *Human life is activity-based.* Although Cicero describes himself as making central use of reason and views reasoning as the most noble of human activities, it is evident, as with the matter of one’s physiological being (and related ecosystem), that the Academician position is substantially deficient with respect to considerations of activity “as activity.”

Thus, Cicero glibly dodges Antiochus’ charges that “those who do not assent to things cannot act” by saying that “not assenting is still a form of activity.” Cicero will also counter by saying that he will act mindfully of probable or plausible evidence and that he (like Carneades) is really addressing theoretical rather than practical matters in his refusal to assent. Cicero does not deny either the capacity to act or the relevance of purposive activity. Still, unlike Antiochus who emphasizes the importance of activity and seems much more intent on examining how this takes place, the Academicians appear not to have given much attention to activity as a

humanly engaged process. [By contrast, Cicero's own work on rhetoric is acutely focused on oratory as a realm of activity!]

However, perhaps a particularly telling point is Antiochus' question of "what Academician skepticism allows one to do," what it has discovered and (presumably) what one might do with this information.

Insofar as he provides a direct answer, Cicero's response would be one of having the opportunity to consider all sides and to avoid making judgments that are poorly informed. Still, this does little more than reiterate the Academician rationale for invoking this practice.

8. *Human life is negotiable.* Interestingly, although Cicero (a) is highly attentive to persuasive endeavor in both his practice and scholarly analysis of rhetoric and (b) envisions the development of *Academica* as an instance of rhetorical as well as philosophical interchange, Cicero (c) only minimally discusses rhetoric or influence work with respect to Academician skepticism.

Thus, whereas Cicero pointedly chastises Lucullus (and Antiochus) both for attempting to convert him to Antiochus' philosophy and for denying the right of the Academicians to withhold assent on the matters of knowing, Cicero does not address negotiation as a significant analytic process in Academician views on knowing. [Elsewhere, in his writings on rhetoric, Cicero (see *Brutus*) explicitly condemns Socrates and Plato for disregarding rhetoric in their considerations of philosophy — as if one could separate thought from speech!]

Antiochus makes only passing reference to rhetoric (still, he does so as something to be encompassed in philosophy). Nevertheless, like Cicero, Antiochus is highly cognizant of the influence (and resistance) process. Thus, Antiochus explicitly intends not only to challenge the Academicians but also deems it necessary to advise others on how to protect themselves from the arguments of the Academicians.

9. *Human life is relational.* Although both Cicero and Antiochus are mindful of the tendency of philosophers to establish schools and, likewise, are attentive to the lineages and alignments as well as the disjunctures that develop in these contexts, neither speaker gives much sustained attention to the ways that people's associations enter into their notions of knowing in more general terms.

10. *Human life is processual.* As with the matter of relationships, comparatively little consideration is given to the ongoing or emergent features of knowing. Antiochus seems more attentive to the developmental flow of knowing than is Cicero in *Academica*. Cicero seems more insistent on maintaining the rights of Academicians to "assess all standpoints without assenting to any particular viewpoint or theory" rather than addressing the processes of knowing in more direct terms.^{xix}

11. *Human life takes place in instances.* Although Cicero presents *Academica* as a specific set of interchanges, this seems to be done for dramatic impact rather than encouraging a focus on the ways that people know and act in particular instances. Relatedly, whereas Antiochus argues for the necessity of examining the things that people do in trying to know or make sense of things, Cicero's Academicians operate at more abstract levels of analysis and seem more intent on establishing contradictions in people's notions of things than examining the ways in which people actually do things as in dealing with known, unknown, and more ambivalent or ambiguous instances of things. Indeed, *it is this reluctance to examine actual*

instances in the making that reveals the central weakness of dialectic analysis and the associated skepticism Cicero tries to defend.^{xx}

Although Cicero defends Academician skepticism with considerable intensity and ingenuity, one may still ask if he accepted the Academician skepticism as a philosophic viewpoint to be followed in a more sustained manner or whether he accepted Academician skepticism more centrally as a rhetorical challenge in which he had an opportunity to display some of the broader parameters of philosophic thought pertaining to human knowing and acting.^{xxi} Either way, we can be particularly grateful to Marcus Tullius Cicero (c106-43 BCE) for the extremely thoughtful manner in which he helped sustain scholarly intrigues in some highly instructive philosophic issues.^{xxii}

Postscript

Are there yet broader lessons for contemporary scholars? One lesson might be that “the study of human knowing” is much too important to be left to the philosophers alone. While many philosophers emphasize the value of looking at things from all sides and withholding assent in more typical Academician fashions, few philosophers actually examine the very things about which they speak.

Like the Academicians that Cicero defends, philosophers generally pay comparatively little attention to the physiologically-enabled features of human knowing and acting. Perhaps even more centrally and consequentially given their subject matter, they also ignore knowing as “activity in the making,” and seem inclined to dispense with influence (rhetoric) work as a central feature of the human condition. Most philosophers also give little attention to the human group (and human interchange within) wherein all instances of knowing take place. As a result, they tend to ignore knowing as a humanly enacted/ collectively accomplished (social) process.

Still, there are important things for sociologists and other social scientists to learn from the philosophers, with Cicero and Antiochus serving as exemplars of sorts. More attention could be given to dialectic analysis wherein one examines things in more sustained, comparative conceptual terms asking in more precise terms not only where things are similar and where they are different but also how they might be best understood in analytic terms.

Likewise, it is most important that social scientists to be mindful of the matters of relative certainty or plausibility in developing their studies and analysis. This means giving greater consideration to plausibility or the relative viability of both the claims they make and the grounds on which they make these inferences. In this sense, it seems most advisable to examine things carefully, openly, and in more sustained terms in the instances in which these things actually take place.^{xxiii}

Beyond more routine scholarship, an attentiveness to skepticism, knowing, and plausibility seems especially important for those “social scientists” who propose to set policy for others. It is important that both policy makers and the social scientists who advise them on such matters not assume that attitudes, opinions, and moralities represent substitutes for scholarship and the associated wisdom that accompanies it.

As well, if scholars in the social sciences are to be more productive in the longer term, it also is important that they strive to avoid mixing morality, religion, and political agendas with scholarly analyses and instead concentrate on developing more generic, pluralist inquiries and analyses of human group life.

In this way, by attending to knowing and doubting *within the context of generating wisdom of a more pluralist, secular sort*, we may make more viable and enduring contributions to the intellectual legacy that others such as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero have so consequentially generated.

Endnotes

- i More extended discussions of the interactionist tradition (theory, methods, literature, concepts) can be found in Prus (1996, 1997, 1999) and Prus and Grills (2003).
- ii For an instructive but compact review of the history of Greek philosophy, see R. G. Bury's introduction to *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.
- iii Among the preserved Greek texts of the Roman era, it is Sextus Empiricus (c200CE) who, in articulating the skeptic position of Pyrrhonism, most extensively addresses the matters of human knowing and acting in philosophic terms.
- iv Christianity was formally recognized as a legitimate religion in Rome in 313CE, following the conversion of Constantine. Christianity was declared the official religion of Rome in 391CE.
- v We know little about the reception of Cicero's *Academica* in the intervening centuries. However, the debate Cicero engages was resumed four centuries later by one of the most consequential of all Christian philosophers. Augustine (c354-430CE) had his own agenda, but in developing *Against the Academicians*, this "rhetorician / philosopher – turned – theologian" became instrumental in maintaining attention on a number of issues about knowing that Cicero (of whom Augustine was particularly critical) had addressed in *Academica*.
- vi Readers may appreciate that although East Rome (Greek-speaking; first established 286CE) did not experience the many disruptions and losses associated with the Western European dark ages, secular scholarship stagnated in the east (under the Greek Orthodox church).
- vii Following a military conquest of the eastern and southern territories of the Mediterranean, Islamic scholars acquired access to various Greek texts (most likely in Egypt). After the Arabs invaded Spain (crossing the Straits of Gibraltar from North Africa), some Islamic and Jewish scholars moved to Spain bringing various Greek texts and other materials with them.
- viii This statement is centrally based on H. Rackham's (1933) English translation of *Academica*. However, it also has benefited from MacKendrick's (1989:114-130) synoptical statement on Cicero's *Academica* as well as Augustine's *Against the Academicians* (King trans.) and Sextus Empiricus (c200CE) *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Bury trans.).
- ix In addition to Cicero's remarkable works on rhetoric (especially *De Inventione*, *Topica*, *Brutus*, *De Oratore*, *Orator*), readers also are referred to Cicero's more philosophic *On the Nature of the Gods*, *On Fate*, *On Divination*, *On Ends*, and *Tusculan Disputations*.
- x Readers might appreciate at the outset that Cicero is a rhetorician as well as a philosopher. As a rhetorician, his objective is to "win the case" – and he appears to blend the two roles at times.

- xi It is difficult to understate the importance of these distinctions. Not only does Aristotle contend that the development of primary human conceptions of things are derived from “people’s encounters with the instances of things” (as opposition to applications of pre-existing “form” conceptualization to things to make them intelligible), but Aristotle also insists on the study of knowing as a humanly engaged (secular) process (vs. a divinely informed, inspired, or determined occurrence). Relatedly, Aristotle stresses the centrality of language and instruction for people’s senses of knowing and capacities for thought. On these bases, Aristotle stands in stark contrast to the theological positions of Socrates and Plato as well as the Stoics and Epicureans. It is not apparent that either Antiochus (judging from Cicero) or Cicero has an especially strong awareness of Aristotle’s philosophy. In contrast to their school’s founder (Aristotle), the Peripatetics later adopted (notably diffuse) positions that were more akin to those of the Academicians and the Stoics.
- xii For a more extended, contemporary consideration of the importance of “knowing (and sensing) from a distance see G. H. Mead’s (1932) *The Philosophy of the Present*.
- xiii Readers familiar with Aristotle’s [c384-322BCE] works more generally will recognize that some of the notions introduced here represent part of Aristotle’s conceptualization of the human condition. See Aristotle’s more generic considerations of mindedness in the human condition in *On the Soul*, *Sense and Sensibilia*, and *On Memory*; as well as Aristotle’s more direct discussions of human reflectivity, interchange, and relationships in *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Poetics*, and *Rhetoric*.
- xiv Somewhat parallel arguments are developed by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*.
- xv As indicated in Augustine’s *Against the Academicians*, the notion of a “secret Academician doctrine” seems to have intrigued as well as perplexed many minds. It is odd in this sense, that Cicero who had studied in the Academy would have Antiochus who once headed the Academy (and presumably would know if a “secret doctrine” existed and what it might contain) ask this question.
- xvi Interestingly, even though Cicero (in other texts) sometimes references Aristotle as second only to Plato among all philosophers, Cicero makes no mention of Aristotle in developing this part of his argument.
- xvii Those familiar with other of Cicero’s works will realize that while Cicero maintained particular loyalties to the (Platonist) Academics, he generally was not concerned about offending the Stoics or the Epicureans (see Cicero’s *On the Nature of the Gods*). Cicero’s position here, thus, appears one of tactically neutralizing support for Antiochus.
- xviii Although some of Aristotle’s claims about biology are unfounded, he rather explicitly recognized that people not only exist within a broader “ecosystem,” but have animal capacities for sensation and motion -- for contact dispositions (as an acceptance, tolerance, rejection) and organic adjustments. Rejecting the body-mind dualism of Plato and Socrates, Aristotle was remarkably attentive to the ways that people, as biological beings, integrate creature capacities for sensations and emotions into their notions of knowing and acting (see Spangler, 1998).
- xix Here again, those who know Cicero’s works on rhetoric will note that he is acutely attentive to process not only in reference to (a) the development of rhetoric as an art (technique) and (b) rhetoric as an adjustively enacted

procedure in actual cases, but also to the historical development of Greek as well as Roman rhetoric on a comparative, analytic basis.

xx Those who know Aristotle's work may appreciate that this is where Aristotle parts company with Plato and the Academicians. Thus, when Aristotle says that "nothing has any quality except in reference to what it is compared," he also says that "things can be known only in relative to some reference point." If there are no reference point, no criteria, there is no basis on which to make a judgment on anything.

xxi Although Cicero defends (the totalizing) Academician skepticism associated with dialectic analysis, neither Plato nor Socrates seems able / willing to sustain this viewpoint as illustrated in the following comments on Plato's *Republic* (wherein Socrates is Plato's major spokesperson):
[*Republic*, VI: 513] In the midst of a discussion of students of philosophy, Socrates distinguishes *four capacities of the soul* (i.e., *psyche* [Gk], mind): reasoning, understanding, faith, and perception of sensation. He will use these four capacities (notably including *sensation*) as a base for embarking on a further consideration of scholarship.

[*Republic*, VII: 532-534] Attending to the matter of educating philosophers, Socrates examines the *dialectic* in more direct philosophic terms. Socrates begins by defining the dialectic as the discovery of the absolute on the basis of pure reasoning, without regard for the senses. Subsequently, however, he *readjusts this definition* to refer to people who attain carefully reasoned, abstract conceptions of the essences of things. Accordingly, Socrates argues, dialectic reasoning is *central* to the development of all the sciences.

[*Republic*, VII: 537-540] Whereas Socrates insists that students of philosophy become well acquainted with all realms of scholarship before engaging the study of dialectics in more sustained terms, he explicitly states that the study of dialectic reasoning represents a source of considerable risk. Because of the *extreme relativism* that the dialectic fosters, people who are exposed to dialectic procedures often begin to question all matters of social (and moral) order. As a result, they may become so *intrigued by dialectic skepticism* that they begin, inappropriately in Socrates' viewpoint, to challenge, denigrate, and disregard all manners of thought, convention, religion, and law. For this reason, Socrates insists that *after* they have studied dialectics for five years (and are now about 35 years of age), students of philosophy are to be compelled to assume military or other offices. This is to be done so that they might obtain fuller, more adequate *stocks of experience* with which to appreciate human affairs. Socrates also cautions these people against more immediately trying to assume prominent leadership roles in the community. Only after holding office for fifteen years, Socrates says, would these people (now about 50 years of age) be qualified to *instruct others on philosophy* in a more comprehensive, full-time sense. I have selected only some instances from Plato's *Republic* that pertain more directly to the practice of philosophy. Clearly, there is less room for "totalizing skepticism" on the part of the guardians (philosopher-kings) and others who constitute, maintain, and defend the community amidst the day-to-day challenges of human group life. Those who examine *Laws* will find that Plato displays little appreciation of even milder forms of philosophic skepticism. Thus, whereas Plato (and Socrates) make extensive use of dialectic analyses in more abstract analytic terms, totalizing skepticism [as Antiochus emphasizes in *Academica*,] falls by the wayside when one endeavors to do something, including the pursuit of philosophy.

- xxii In addition to the somewhat more implicit philosophic materials on human knowing and acting that are embedded in Cicero's highly articulate and extended discussions of rhetoric, readers also may attend to the philosophic matters that Cicero engages in *On the Nature of the Gods*, his defense of scholarship in *On Ends*, and his considerations of agency and causation in *On Fate* and *On Divination*.
- xxiii Relatedly, instead of denying the human capacity for knowing, the pragmatist question becomes one of "how do people know things?" That is, how do people engage "knowing, doubting, and not knowing" as socially achieved processes? As suggested in the following extract, some of the issues of "whatness" with which scholars, including Cicero and Antiochus, have grappled regarding the nature of "knowing" may be advanced by distinguishing in more precise terms some of the major realms of knowing that are often discussed in more holistic terms. These and related notions are given more attention in Prus (1996, 1997, 1999, and Prus and Grills, 2003), but are outlined in this quotation:

Assuming some interpretive licence, we wish to suggest that Blumer's phrase 'obdurate character of the empirical world' should be read as referring to four intertwined yet distinguishable features of social life which methodologically constrain and hence guide social research in ways seemingly either not considered or not accepted by postmodernist orientations. The obdurateness of reality exists in the irreducibility of intersubjectivity for the human condition. This is rooted in a pragmatic appreciation of: (1) the most basic resistances to human action experienced daily in the material and the social environments of the human struggle for existence... (2) the objectifying nature of being human [*i.e., the tendencies of humans to assign names and meanings to phenomena, thereby achieving shared senses of 'whatness' - RP*], (3) the resultant phenomenon of 'culturally motivated resistances' stemming from the ongoing and group nature of human life, and (4) the rudimentary and universal social processes undergirding the ongoing accomplishment of human group life. These four modes or realms of experienced intersubjectivity are interrelated, and each depends on the other for a fuller or more holistic appreciation of its significance. (Prus and Dawson, 1996: 246)

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