



INTRODUCTION

CICERO AND THE PHILOSOPHERS ON EMOTION

To the philosophers of Greece and Rome, it seemed obvious that the emotional experience of humans was a proper topic for philosophy to address. Grief and anger, delight and desire, fear and pity had always belonged to ethical discourse, for formal moral education was first and always foremost the province of poets, and the most respected poetic forms of antiquity were also the most deeply emotional. Emotion, its causes largely mysterious, figures centrally in the narrative strategy of Homeric epic, motivating gods and humans alike to acts of prowess, of cowardice, of caring and deceit. In Athenian tragedy, the unexplained and intensely problematic power of emotion figures large both in the actions on stage and in the critical responses of the viewers. It is not surprising, then, that when the philosophical writers set themselves to provide explanations for the behavior of individuals in social settings, they inquired closely into the emotional dimensions of motivation, asking on the one hand psychological questions about how emotions are generated and how they are related to conscious thought processes, and on the other hand broadly ethical questions about the nature of emotional health, the function of emotional responses in a divinely ordered universe, and the extent to which we can be blamed or praised for the emotions we have. Both Plato and Aristotle developed positions on the subject, and the views of their predecessors and contemporary opponents are often mentioned in their writings. The hedonist philos-

opher Epicurus, a generation later than Aristotle, made questions of fear and desire central to his ethics; his views, too, were widely influential.

By the time Cicero came to study philosophy, however, the most highly developed position was that of the Stoics, a series of scholar-philosophers working primarily at Athens, all of whom were deeply influenced by the thought of Zeno of Citium (335–263 B.C.E.).¹ In modern English, the word “stoic” has come to mean “deliberately unemotional,” and it is quite true that for Zeno and his followers, a reasoned approach to ethics makes necessary a radical overthrow of many of our usual assumptions about emotion. For these thinkers, emotional responses are essentially activities of the mind’s judging faculty (rather than, say, unthinking instincts or drives) and must be counted as voluntary actions: we are accountable for our emotions, although this need not mean that they remain under our conscious control at every given instant. Moreover, while there are in theory several different species of affect, not all of them blameworthy, emotions as we know them are deeply and essentially flawed, logically dependent on certain kinds of judgment which humans operating to their fullest and best potential would not be inclined to make. Real moral and intellectual seriousness requires us to do away with them.

Cicero is not himself a Stoic: he professes allegiance to what he calls the “New Academy,” a skeptical stance which requires of him only that he study the views of others and accede to those which appear most plausible. The Stoic view appears to him extreme, on first view scarcely human. He is well aware that some of his readers will be more attracted to one of the competing views, possibly to that of the Peripatetics, who insist that emotions are natural and serve a useful purpose, or even to that of Epicurus, who frames all questions of value in terms of pleasure and pain. Nonetheless, it is the Stoic position which he recommends to his readers in these books as the best-reasoned view, the one most suitable for statesmen, and the only one which is able to confer real happiness on its adherents. This is in contrast to some of his own earlier writings, for in his earlier work *On the Orator*, as in some of the letters, he tends to favor the Peripatetic view as one well suited to a man in public life.²

His reasons for taking the Stoic line here are of more than one kind. His admiration for its intellectual bases cannot be discounted, for it is clear throughout the work that he respects the Stoic authors for the power and coherence of their reasoning on this as on many other issues. It is these same features of Stoicism which have attracted the attention of some modern philosophers. But Cicero was also faced with considerations of a more personal and political nature which made it expedient

that he should make a public display of Stoic leanings at this time. These we can trace especially through his letters in the spring and summer of 45 to his lifelong friend T. Pomponius Atticus. The letters reveal what the work itself could not make explicit: the extent to which Cicero's own emotional behavior was under scrutiny, at this time of crisis for the Roman Republic, by other members of his own aristocratic circle.³ Concern for this important audience may well have influenced his choice of positions in the work, although this does not make it any less a serious and considered choice.

In mid-February of 45, with his public position more than ever precarious, Cicero suffered a devastating bereavement at home. His only daughter, Tullia, the member of his small family whom he loved most tenderly and unreservedly, died a month after giving birth to his first grandchild. We do not have any letters from the three weeks following her death, since Cicero was then staying in Atticus's house, but in early March they were apart again, and he writes several times of his experience with grief: of his desire to be alone, of long walks in the woods, of uncontrollable fits of weeping.⁴ Over and over he entreats Atticus, who often served as a liaison in business dealings, to assist him in purchasing some suitable piece of land for a memorial, a little shrine which would consecrate her name in the public eye long after he himself was gone.⁵ He speaks also of efforts to find consolation in books, at first primarily in books on grief and in the self-directed *Consolation* which he was himself composing, later in reading and writing on other topics in philosophy. "Reading and writing do not comfort me," he tells Atticus, "but they do distract me."⁶ Indeed, he was not certain that he wished to be comforted. "I try in every way I can to repair my countenance—though not my heart. I think sometimes that I am wrong to do so, at other times that I will be wrong not to."⁷ Not until May 17 could he bear to return to the house at Tusculum, a day's ride from Rome, where Tullia had spent her last hours.⁸

Unable to face the social round at Rome, Cicero had to do what he could from a distance to protect his fragile reputation. Expected to attend a dinner in honor of the quaestor M. Appuleius, who had recently been appointed augur, he instructed Atticus to get him excused on grounds of ill health.⁹ This required a sworn deposition and witnesses, for the obligation was legal as well as social. But it was well worth putting Atticus to this trouble, for although Appuleius himself was understanding, others would be sure to notice an unexplained absence and would draw their own conclusions. Significantly, Cicero felt even on March 7 that he could not afford to draw attention to the anguish he really felt.

But the rumors could not be controlled so easily. As the weeks drew on and Cicero failed to reappear, Atticus wrote to him repeatedly, urging him to make a show of fortitude. A letter from M. Iunius Brutus was even less gentle.¹⁰ In response, Cicero points to the philosophical writings on which he spent every hour of the day.

You urge me to dissemble, to conceal how deeply I am grieving. Others, you say, are becoming aware of my failure to do this. But am I not doing the most that I can in this regard, when I spend entire days writing? Even if I am not doing it for the sake of concealment, but rather to comfort and heal my mind, still it should serve to make the pretense. It does little else for me.¹¹

When these writings were circulated, they would silence any charge of unmanliness:

So you think I should do something to show my strength of mind. According to your letter, certain people are saying things about me even harsher than what you and Brutus have written. But if those who think my spirit is broken or weakened were to find out how much writing I have done, and what it is like, then (if they are human beings at all) I think they would make a different assessment of me: either I have recovered enough to write with full concentration on these difficult subjects—in which case I am not to be criticized—or I have chosen to distract my mind from grief in the manner most fitting for a person of my class and education. And in that case they ought actually to praise me.¹²

His productivity alone, he felt, should be a sufficient demonstration of equanimity, for by mid-May he had completed not only the *Consolation*, but a first draft of the *Academics* and a political pamphlet addressed to Caesar. Five books *On Ends* and a complete recasting of the *Academics* into four books would be completed before the end of June.¹³ But what mattered even more was that the works themselves should show their author to be as energetic and eloquent as ever, a man of principle and action, dedicated to the public interest. If readers could not get this message from the erudite *Academics* and the fiery *On Ends*, then perhaps they could find it in a work which confronted the reality of death, pain, and emotional disturbance, and argued the superiority of the human spirit to all of these. But that work would have to take the most rigorously intellectual, most selflessly courageous line available. The Stoic position was the only one which would serve.

Between mid-July and mid-August, the time during which the bulk of the *Tusculans* was composed, the letters are again infrequent, and we no longer have such immediate access to Cicero's thoughts about his work. But the work itself speaks clearly enough. It shows the author at his estate in Tuscum, passing his days in intellectual pursuits—the mornings in oratorical practice, the afternoons in philosophical discussion.¹⁴ It alludes pointedly to his earlier period of grieving, and even more pointedly to his conquest of grief.¹⁵ Tullia herself is never named.

THE FORMAT OF THE DISCUSSION

While the five *Tusculan Disputations* are linked to one another by many internal connections of thought, it is to a large extent the formal manner of presentation, rather than continuity of thought, that holds them together as a single work. Here, alone among his major philosophical works, Cicero employs what he calls the “disputation” format or, Latinizing a Greek term, the *schola*.¹⁶ In place of dialectical exchange between named speakers, the *schola* gives the lion's share of the discussion to an unnamed principal speaker whose voice will usually be recognized as that of the author himself. The exceptionally docile interlocutor speaks only at opening and closing and at points of transition. His chief function is to supply the thesis, a one-sentence statement of opinion which is eventually to be proved wrong.¹⁷ Within these formal constraints, the discussion ranges with some freedom over a number of points more and less closely related to the thesis. In the book on grief, for instance, the formal case against the thesis is quickly expanded to take in the causes of distress, its relation to the other emotions, the techniques that have proven effective in treating it, and practical suggestions for the writers of consolatory discourses. This flexibility gives opportunity for a livelier, more accessible treatment and for the incorporation of a greater variety of philosophical views than would have been possible in a more tightly structured assault upon the thesis.

Both books express the thesis as an assertion concerning the experience of the wise person: in book 3, that “the wise person is subject to grief,” and in book 4, that “the wise person cannot be free of every emotion.” Readers unfamiliar with Hellenistic ethics will be puzzled by the importance given these particular assertions. Why not begin with ourselves? In Cicero's philosophical context, though, questions about ordinary humans are regularly approached by asking first what humans would be like if they were

wise—that is, if they were living the best possible human life. For it is assumed that the purpose of studying philosophy, as of any purposive action, is to improve our condition, and improvement can hardly be understood if we cannot say what it is for one condition to be better than another. In both the formal theses, then, Cicero is posing a problem concerning the norm with which ordinary humans are to be compared.

A more succinct way of putting the same question might be to ask whether grief, or emotion in general, is natural to human beings. For within the discussion Cicero is now entering, it is common to say that those characteristics, actions, and experiences which make up the best and wisest human life are also natural to humans; and, conversely, that everything which is natural to us is also part of our norm. But, then as now, the use of the term “natural” may tend to cloud the issue. For although its connotations are almost universally positive, the word is rarely defined, and ethical views claiming to defend what is natural may turn out to have widely divergent practical implications. As a point of entry into the ancient debates, it is helpful to note that both the Latin word *natura* and its Greek equivalent *phusis* retain the force of their etymological connection with words for conception and birth. It is for this reason that Cicero’s discussion of grief begins with a description of what tendencies are present already in newborn babies. Of course, not every philosopher need give the same account of what is contained in the minds of infants. But all parties to the Hellenistic debate agree that any tendency which is truly innate in humans must also be retained in a good account of human wisdom.¹⁸

Cicero’s decision to treat grief first and separately from the other emotions is perhaps sufficiently explained by the personal and political considerations mentioned above. But this approach proves convenient in other ways as well. Inasmuch as grief is mental pain, it follows naturally on the discussion of pain of body in book 2. It matters, also, that within Cicero’s literary tradition were many examples of philosophical and semi-philosophical works claiming to provide consolation for distress, the species of composition to which he had himself contributed in writing the *Consolation*. By giving separate treatment to grief, Cicero is able to draw upon the body of shared opinions and experiences recorded in that consolatory tradition, finding in them both practical utility and insight into the causes of emotion.¹⁹

Finally, there is a strictly philosophical consideration. Distress is treated by the philosophers as a response to present circumstances perceived as bad for oneself. But not all schools of philosophy agree that in our best and most natural state we *can* perceive any present circumstance as evil. Stoics in

particular will deny this, for reasons to be considered below. This means that in a work which means to take the Stoic line, arguments concerning grief and distress must develop in a different way from those on the other emotions. In book 3, then, Cicero will concentrate on the experience of ordinary humans, exploring the causes of grief and other emotions in us. He can then proceed in book 4 to the more difficult arguments that contrast the emotions with the “well-reasoned” affective responses of the sage.

ARISTOTLE AND THE PERIPATETICS

Although the position of his principal speaker in each book is in opposition to the thesis, Cicero also lays out, more or less fairly, the views which led some ancient thinkers to support it. These thinkers he generally calls Peripatetics—that is, followers of Aristotle—although he also speaks in this connection of some members of the fourth-century Academy, notably Crantor, and undoubtedly believes that the position he describes was held by Aristotle himself.²⁰ And indeed that position has clear affinities with elements of Aristotle’s thought as known to us from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *On the Soul*. That it is not quite the same as Aristotle’s view should not surprise us, for Cicero had only limited knowledge of the works we now read as Aristotle’s.²¹ His knowledge of Peripatetic thought on this issue comes largely through later and far less distinguished thinkers, men like Lyco (c. 300–c. 226) and Staseas of Naples, whom he had known as a young man.²² The position against which he contends thus emerges as a simplified version of what we have from Aristotle. Yet its deepest motivations are still Aristotelian, and if its claims are attractive, it is in part because Aristotle himself sets out to construct a view which will appeal to the moral intuitions of educated persons generally.

When Aristotle writes of emotion, it is within the context of a much broader investigation into the functioning of all living things. At the heart of this investigation is the observation that while humans and non-human animals have certain life-functions in common with plants (growth and reproduction, for instance), they also share certain other functions which plants do not have, especially perception and purposive self-locomotion. And humans have in addition the faculty of reason, through which we are able to make judgments about what things are good (and not merely pleasant) for ourselves and to plan suitable means of obtaining those things.

Where will the emotions fit into this classification of functions? In Aristotle’s view, it would not make sense to count them among the functions

most characteristic of humans as reasoning beings. For fear, desire, anger, and other emotions often motivate us to act in ways other than what we should choose on a reasoned calculation of what is best for us. They belong rather with the functions which we have in common with animals. In fact, they are essential to our functioning at that level, since it is fear which causes us to avoid some objects, and desire which causes us to pursue them.

Approaching the subject from this direction, we can see why Cicero's Peripatetics lay great emphasis on the claim that emotions are useful, indeed indispensable, to our everyday lives. Emotions, they say, are of a piece with our ability to perceive and respond to our surroundings, so that without them we would be insensate, "numb in body, and in mind scarcely human" (3.12). Moreover, it is emotion that provides the effective energy we need in order to act forcibly for our own self-preservation and the furtherance of our various aims. Anger, for instance, is useful in armed combat and in political oratory; fear enables us to avoid danger; and desire is fundamental to all forms of endeavor, even the endeavors of philosophers (4.38–47). For these reasons, it would hardly be expedient to try to eliminate emotions from ourselves, even if it were possible. And it is by no means clear that it *is* possible, for the level of functioning to which they belong is independent of our choosing, just as it is not a matter of choice for us whether we will digest food we have eaten or see objects that are before our eyes.

But this is not to say that the choices we make as rational beings can have no influence at all over our emotions. Both Aristotle and his followers hold that the involvement of reason is a definitive feature of emotions in humans, making our emotions quite different, both qualitatively and ethically, from anything that might take place in non-human animals.²³ For Aristotle, the fact that humans have all three classes of function suggests a model in which the emotions are intermediate between our characteristically human rationality and our more plantlike functions such as digestion and growth. They may be functions of a different order from reason and yet "heedful" of reason, responsive in various ways to our reasoned determination of what is best for ourselves. For those of Aristotle's followers whose works are known to Cicero and to Seneca in *On Anger*, the responsiveness of emotions to reason appears primarily as a matter of limitations: reason imposes a "limit" (*modus*) or "moderate amount" (*mediocritas*) which emotion should neither exceed nor fall short of. This is not quite what Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but it is close enough to claim Aristotelian descent.²⁴

Other versions of this approach sometimes speak of the control exercised

by reason as a matter of one *part* of the soul or mind overcoming another.²⁵ On this model, those moments when we feel ourselves to be acting against our better judgment are times when the emotional part of the mind takes control of the person as a whole and causes her to pursue its own objectives, rather than the objectives of the reasoning part. This description, too, has some precedent in Aristotle, though it owes most to Plato's arguments from mental conflict in Books 4 and 10 of the *Republic*.²⁶ Cicero himself, however, has little to say about any such partitioning of the mind. He does speak at one point of a division between rational and irrational parts but does not employ this division to explain mental conflict; in fact, he considers it to be part of the case *against* the thesis.

THE STOIC POSITION

The Stoics share some of the assumptions mentioned above concerning the functioning of living things in general. They, too, hold that humans function at a higher level than either plants or animals; and they, too, attribute that extra level of functioning to our possession of reason, which endows us with the ability to understand what is good for ourselves and to plan and act accordingly.²⁷ Within this broad framework, however, they proceed to very different conclusions about the nature of emotion and its place in human life. They will not condone even the moderate emotions advocated by the Peripatetics. For them, emotions are indeed rational in one sense of that word, but they are not natural to us and have no place in the best possible life.

To understand how these differences come about, we need to devote some attention to the Stoics' unusually careful analysis of what it means for humans to be rational animals. It is important first of all to note that the English word "rational" may have more than one meaning. We sometimes describe a person's behavior as "rational" when what we mean to convey is that that behavior is not undertaken blindly or randomly but has some kind of thought behind it. In this sense, the word is merely descriptive; there is no implication that the speaker approves of the chosen course of action. In some other context, however, we might speak of someone's behaving "rationally" in a normative sense, meaning that the action in question is actually the right and appropriate thing to do. A similar duality can be traced in the Greek word *logikos* as it is used in Stoic texts on rationality. Again, both a descriptive and a normative sense are available, and both are clearly delineated: although the surviving fragments sometimes mingle the two with

more freedom than we might like, a careful reading invariably makes it clear which is intended.²⁸ Let us consider each of these in turn.

The descriptive account of rationality begins from certain fundamental assertions about the world and about our own life processes. In Stoic thought, the universe itself, if viewed from a wide enough perspective, would be revealed as a perfectly orderly and coherent structure. This central postulate is expressed in Stoic texts in many different ways: by talk of a material continuum and of an unbroken causal nexus, by descriptions of the universe as an “animal” or as “god,” and also by mention of an all-pervasive “active principle” or “designing fire” or “seed.”²⁹ But while the system as a whole is orderly, not every smaller portion of it will exhibit the same degree of orderliness within itself. On this point Stoics will say that the “breath” (*pneuma*) which permeates all things, imparting to them the designing fire, may exist at varying levels of “tension.”

This is strange language, but the underlying thought is comprehensible enough. Zeno and his followers are clearly interested in patterning and complexity, both of structure and of function. To say that *pneuma* is present in a starfish at a higher level of tension than in a strand of kelp would be to say that the starfish has a more complicated structure and more elaborate life functions. And if humans occupy a special position on this scale of pneumatic tension, it must be because we exhibit some further kind of complexity, either in our physical structure or in our ways of perceiving and responding to the world.

This additional level of complexity consists in a particular mental capacity, a capacity manifested especially in our use of language. Language and rationality are synonymous in Greek (both *logos*), and the coincidence is important for Stoics. For to use language (as opposed to merely producing the sounds of language, parrot-fashion) is to be aware of the meanings of sentences, what Stoics call *lekta* (“things said”) or propositions.³⁰ It is characteristic of us as rational beings that when we take in and process information about the world, we do so by means of stated or unstated *lekta*. Even our actions can be described propositionally. For just as my believing that something is the case involves a mental commitment or “assent” to the truth of some proposition, so also do my conscious actions imply a commitment to propositions of which I myself am the subject. Of course there are some things I only happen to do, like blinking at regular intervals or rolling over in sleep, but these are not properly called actions.³¹ These excepted, for me to do a thing means that I believe, at least at the very moment of acting, that this, and not something else, is the thing for me to do.

A being whose mental processes were not propositional could not act

on the basis of assent and thus in Stoic usage is not properly said to *act* at all. A rational being, however, cannot act in any other way. One thing this means is that all the actions of adult humans are attributable to their agents, in a way that the behaviors of animals or young children are not. This is true even of what we do in moments of strong emotion. Even when we feel ourselves “carried away” by desire or anger to act against our perceived best interests—for Stoics do not deny that we have this experience—our impulses are still generated in this characteristically rational way, through the workings of assent. Thus emotions, considered as impulses to act, belong to us as (descriptively) rational agents, and we have to accept responsibility for them.³²

But rationality also opens to humans an exciting possibility. If all our actions imply beliefs, and if all our beliefs take the form of propositions, then there can be patterns of logical coherence among our beliefs and actions, and we as rational beings can become aware of these. In fact, we have a natural liking for such patterns. After all, the statements that seem to us to be correct are normally those which cohere with the beliefs we already have; and if we become aware of some flat contradiction between two beliefs, we do tend to reject one or the other of them. In theory, it should be possible—though perhaps only rarely—for some particularly reflective human to bring *all* of her beliefs into line with each other and with the larger natural order.³³ One who exhibited this perfect coherence in belief would be rational in the further sense of right or sound reasoning—the normative sense mentioned above. Her thoughts and actions would be fully consonant with universal reason and would also resemble universal reason in working together as a perfectly orderly system. This, for Stoics, is what it means to be wise or to have knowledge, and also what it is to be virtuous.

This ambitious notion of human potential now serves to ground a system of value which applies to all circumstances in our lives. For Stoics assert that virtue as defined above is the only good for a human. Goodness is defined not by what appeals to some individual, but with reference to the internal coherence of some system. Just as in the universe it is good that everything fits into a providential order, so in a human life, given that humans are capable of their own comprehensive order, what is good ought to be that which fits into some pattern which is orderly and complete relative to that person. But only my own actions, sayings, and affective responses can be meaningfully compared with that particular pattern which is *my* life. So if something I do, say, or feel is part of a fully coherent pattern extending throughout my life, it should be called good for me; if it does not, it should be called bad.

Other kinds of objects—maintaining one’s health, earning money, or winning an election—are not, properly speaking, either good or bad. Stoics refer to them as “indifferents,” meaning that such things make no difference in our condition: we need not possess any of them in order to attain the human good. It does not follow, however, that we ourselves should be indifferent to this class of objects; indeed, it is entirely proper that we should spend most of our time trying to obtain or avoid them. From birth, say the Stoics, we have preferences for many things: material resources, good health, the well-being of friends and family, life itself. And these are in fact the kinds of things it is usually appropriate for us to pursue. But we also, and in quite a different way, value certain things about ourselves, certain traits of character and ways of believing and acting. If I am a doctor, for instance, I may regard it as very important that my patients should get well, and I may also regard it as very important that I myself should do everything in my power to make them well. Both kinds of objects matter: if the first were not important to me, the second would hardly be possible. But only the second counts as part of my good.³⁴

We can see, then, why Stoics deny that emotions can ever be rational in the normative sense. They reason that emotions as we know them are always dependent on a belief which is inconsistent with the value-system just described. Most of us do think that good health, for instance, is not only something which it is usually appropriate for us to pursue, but is actually good for us; and that death, pain, bereavement, and the like are actually bad. If I did not believe that financial ruin is bad for me, I would not fear it nor be distressed when it occurs, though I might still try to avoid it. But if I do believe this, I believe what is false: such ruin cannot be bad for me, properly speaking, since it is not really up to me to determine whether it occurs. And a similar account could be given for every one of the emotions with which we are familiar, showing its dependence on false attributions of value or disvalue to things outside our own control. Therefore, since what depends on a false belief cannot be part of the wise person’s coherent pattern of human functioning, emotions as we know them cannot be part of the human norm, and anyone who wishes to live the best possible human life should seek to eliminate them.

But can humans live without emotion? The Peripatetics have asserted that we cannot: without desire and fear, we could neither pursue nor avoid anything, and the existence that would be left to us could hardly be called a human life. But Stoic psychology does not make emotions the sole motivators of pursuit and avoidance. Rather than distinguishing the reasoning function (or part) of the mind from its motivating and emotional function,

they give all our functions simply to the mind itself, that is, to a single “directive faculty” (*hēgemonikon*). And while this mind, with its integrated functioning, may sometimes misevaluate its surroundings, producing in us those sensations we recognize as fear, anger, delight, and so on, it may also move us to action without having made any error of this particularly powerful kind, indeed without necessarily having made any error at all. For the impression to which it assents when it produces an impulse does not necessarily imply an evaluation in terms of good or evil, but only a belief that some possible action is appropriate (*kathēkon*).

Suppose for instance that I have an opportunity to pursue a particular deal in business. I may pursue this on the false assumption that wealth is a genuine good for me, and if I do so, my pursuit is an instance of desire, an “ill-reasoned reaching.” But I may also pursue the same deal merely on the assumption that it is appropriate for me to do so at this time; and this assumption, while not necessarily true, at least *might* be true. Reaching after things on this basis is an instance of what Stoics call “selection” and is how those of us who are not sages perform any appropriate actions we do perform.³⁵

Moreover, the theory has not by any means asserted that a good human life must be devoid of *all* affective response. Ordinary emotions were excluded not because of the way they feel to us, but because of their dependence on false belief. If a person can have strong feelings on the basis of correct ascriptions of value, there is no reason these feelings must be denied. Thus a wise and good person who is considering some feature of his own conduct or condition might, in theory, respond to that object with a strong feeling which would be analogous, in some ways, to the feelings we identify as emotions. Such a feeling would necessarily be very different from any ordinary emotion: it could not be fear, for instance, as we know fear, but rather a strong inhibition from doing wrong; not desire, but a strong inclination to behave well; not pleasure, but joy in doing good and being good. A different terminology is called for, and Stoics will provide this.³⁶ For now, though, the point of importance is that the human capacity to feel strongly toward what we see as good or bad for ourselves remains a natural capacity, in Stoicism as in other ancient systems. It is not in having feelings that we go astray, but in our judgments of value.

THE ANTIOCHAN SYNTHESIS

Not everyone who studied these questions was convinced that Stoic and Peripatetic views were irreconcilable. Respect for Plato and Aristotle, and a

sense that the controversy surrounding the Stoic view was somehow misguided, had led more than one philosopher to seek an intermediate position. Thus Panaetius of Rhodes (185–109) had softened Stoic claims about value and rejected outright their central claim about impassivity (*apatheia*), and Posidonius, the most influential Stoic of the early first century, had retained the claim about impassivity while rejecting some of his predecessors' more counterintuitive psychological premises.³⁷ More important for Cicero's contemporaries, however, was the Academic philosopher Antiochus of Ascalon (130–68). Like Posidonius and the Stoics, Antiochus insisted that the wise person will not experience emotion. His position was unusual, however, in that he regarded this Stoic doctrine as fully compatible with early Academic and Peripatetic views. Indeed, he claimed that those supposedly conflicting positions were in fact the same position, distinguished only by trivial differences in terminology. If Cicero in *Tusculans* 3–4 appears absorbed in the controversies of the past, mentioning Antiochus only once (and then only in passing, at 3.59), it is not for lack of knowledge about this recent development in ethics. For the evidence of his other works of the same period—the *On Ends*, the *Academics*, and also the fifth of the *Tusculans*—shows that he was deeply interested in Antiochus's ethical views. One possible reading of his project in the emotion books is that he here calls into question the synthesis which Antiochus had attempted, reopening the debate between the major schools as one which makes a substantive difference in ethics.

The name of Antiochus is now usually mentioned in connection with a reversion to dogmatism within the Academy. Reacting against the skeptical stance that had prevailed in that school since Arcesilaus assumed its direction in the early third century, Antiochus had adopted what was essentially a Stoic epistemology, maintaining the possibility of knowledge through the “grasp” of impressions (*katalēpsis*), and insisting that such dogmatism was fully in harmony with the views of Plato and Aristotle. His position in ethics was similarly synthetic. Like his Academic forebears, he recognized the traditional “three classes of goods” (goods of the body, of the mind, and of life), but at the same time he insisted that virtue is preeminent among these goods to such an extent that it is still possible to say, with the Stoics, that the possession of virtue suffices to make one happy.³⁸ Not supremely happy, for the presence or absence of the other goods must still make some difference, and yet still happy as philosophers count happiness. And it must have been for this reason that he also considered emotion incompatible with wisdom. The Antiochan sage must know that while health,

reputation, financial resources, and the like are indeed good things, and the loss of them indeed a misfortune, such things cannot make any real difference in his happiness.

Antiochus's views were influential at Rome. Cicero had studied with him in person (see on 3.59), as had others among his acquaintance. Two of Cicero's most respected contemporaries considered themselves Antiochans: Varro, the dedicatee and principal speaker of the *Academics*; and Brutus, the dedicatee of the present work and of several other Ciceronian works.³⁹ Brutus's own treatise *On Virtue* will have taken the Antiochan position. Yet Cicero himself has many reservations about Antiochus's ethics. In *On Ends* 5.77–86, and again at greater length in *Tusculans* 5.21–82, he argues that Antiochus's position on value is not viable. If Antiochus wishes to maintain the Stoic claim that virtue suffices for happiness, he cannot consistently maintain that there are other goods which the virtuous person might lack.

In the *Prior Academics*, after summarizing these same points, he had also confronted Antiochus directly on the emotion question:

But at what point, I would like to know, did it become the doctrine of the old Academy to say, as you do, that the mind of the wise person is not stirred by emotion? Their support was given to “moderate amounts,” and they wanted there to be some natural limit in every emotion. We have all read the little work *On Grief* by Crantor of the old Academy, for it is not long (though it is made of gold, and worth learning by heart, as Panaetius told Tubero to do). They indeed used to say that those emotions of which you speak were given to us by nature for a useful purpose—fear to make us cautious, pity and distress to make us merciful; even anger they called “the whetstone of courage.” We shall investigate on some other occasion whether or not they were correct. But this brutishness [i.e. impassivity] you speak of—how *that* got into the old Academy I do not know.⁴⁰

Cicero is careful not to give the impression that he himself supports the Crantoran position: as we shall see, the *Tusculans* will present it as a “very human” way of thinking about emotion (3.12), but will on the whole find it considerably less plausible than its Stoic competitor. About Antiochus, however, he can be direct. The modifications Antiochus has proposed in the Peripatetic system of value can never bring that system into consistency with Stoic ethics. And a synthesis which results in inconsistency is a failed synthesis. The differences between philosophers are sometimes more important than their similarities.

EPICURUS ON EMOTION

Cicero could not claim to offer a balanced review of emotion theories if he did not also give some attention to Epicureanism. For Epicurus, too, recommends that we reconsider and reject those false beliefs which underlie most forms of desire, anger, and fear, with a view toward eliminating those emotions from our lives. But these recommendations come from within an ethical system fundamentally different from either of those which Cicero treats as the philosophic mainstream. For Epicurus's ethics is closely integrated with a physical science which flatly denies that the universe exhibits any overall structure or plan. This means that for an Epicurean, the Aristotelian and Stoic claims about virtue and honor will frequently sound hollow. The best and most natural life for a human cannot be defined in terms of nature's purpose for us, or god's. Rather it will be that life which is most satisfying to us when we set aside all cultural influences and make an honest and comprehensive evaluation of our own sensations. And it is by this standard that emotional disturbances turn out to be incompatible with the good life.

Epicurus is therefore a hedonist: like other Greek hedonists (notably the Cyrenaics mentioned in 3.28–31), he holds that the human norm and all human motivation can be understood in terms of pleasure (*hēdonē*) and pain. In humans, as in non-human animals, it is simply a fact of our nature that we are so constituted as to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Indeed, our sensations of pleasure and pain, both of body and of mind, are one important way we gather information about our surroundings.⁴¹ But humans happen also to have powers of reason sufficient to maximize our pleasure through intelligent management. We can choose slight pains in order to obtain greater pleasures or to avoid other, greater pains; we can experience mental pleasures so great that they overbalance pain of body, and we can direct our attention to some objects rather than others, disregarding pains in favor of present or even remembered pleasures. We can also eliminate many disturbing feelings by examining our beliefs and rejecting those which do not stand up to scrutiny, for some of our most powerful desires and fears are dependent on misconceptions which we have absorbed from literature and from other cultural influences.⁴² Erotic love, for instance, is largely a cultural construct.⁴³

It is the broad ethical foundations of Epicurus's position that Cicero is most concerned to attack here. He recognizes that many who espouse Epicureanism do so believing that the system promotes decent and upright behavior: he claims, in fact, that it is this belief that is responsible for the popularity of Epicurean views at Rome.⁴⁴ For Epicurus insists that a truly intelligent understanding of one's own interests and the means of

obtaining them, freed of all false assumptions about the nature of the universe, will actually motivate us to behave in accordance with conventional standards of courage, justice, and self-control. His ethical system thus formally upholds the conduct most Romans would recognize as moral, even while it questions the use that other philosophers make of terms like “virtue” and “honor.” Cicero can respect individuals who have adopted Epicureanism for this reason. Atticus, foremost among his friends, was an Epicurean, and the choice of views did not come between the two men. But Cicero also feels that despite the merits of individual Epicureans, the system itself remains open to self-indulgent interpretations which are entirely incompatible with a life of public service. So pressing is his concern that he devotes a sizable portion of book 3 (3.36–51) to a full-scale assault on Epicurean ethics, repeating many of the same points he had made in *On Ends*, book 2.

On Epicurus’s actual strategy for consolation he has less to say: he doubts that it can be effective but does not pursue the matter in any detail. Nonetheless, even the bare sketch he does provide (at 3.28–35) is of considerable interest, for it preserves some shreds of information about an otherwise very obscure controversy between Epicurus and other fourth-century hedonists on the nature of mental pain.⁴⁵

THE MANNER OF PRESENTATION

Even when most deeply engaged in evaluating the ethical views put forward by the major schools, Cicero is also much interested in comparing the achievements of philosophers as writers and speakers. By this criterion it is the Peripatetics and early Academics who receive his warmest approval.⁴⁶ He writes in *On Ends*:

What a legacy they have given us in oratory, not only instructions in handbooks but also actual examples of speeches! First, they spoke aptly and with elegance even upon subjects requiring subtle argumentation, sometimes offering definitions, at other times classifications. . . . And then on subjects which called for a grander and more ornate style, how wonderfully they spoke! How splendid are their speeches on justice, temperance, and courage, on friendship and the conduct of life, on philosophy, on politics!⁴⁷

He goes on to speak of the superiority of Peripatetic writings on consolation and public policy, and especially of their rhetorical works. For it is the

Peripatetics who provide the practical rhetorical training. Thus the site of declamation-practice at the Tusculan villa is to be designated the “Lyceum,” and when young Marcus Cicero is to be sent abroad for training, it is to the Peripatetic Cratippus, “the principal philosopher of our generation,” that he will go.⁴⁸

On Stoic achievements in this area, Cicero is more equivocal. Their language is certainly less mellifluous:

You address these matters as well, but your manner is unkempt, while theirs, as you see, is highly polished. . . . *Theirs* was not the speech of plucking out the thorns, of laying bare the bones. It is Stoics who speak that way.

Yet this is not the contempt with which he elsewhere dismisses the language of Epicurean writings. Stoics are charged not with bad style but with an overly technical style, a style which concerns itself with rigorous argumentation and precision in terminology, caring little for the approbation of non-specialists.

As directed at serious philosophical writing, this might not seem to be much of a criticism, indeed rather the reverse. But Cicero does find grounds for complaint. In his view, the Stoics’ lack of interest in rhetorical training misses an important opportunity for moral action. To be sure, some early Stoics did write rhetorical handbooks, but those books are a failure—ideal reading, he exclaims, for prospective orators who wish to be struck dumb! And the failure is symptomatic of a deeper problem. There is in Stoic ethics an implied imperative to encourage ethical reflection in *all* persons, not only in professional philosophers. An unrelieved technical idiom is to this extent a fault.

What great things they attempt! To convince a resident of Circeii that his true city is this entire world! A subject to kindle the heart! But would a Stoic speaker set fire to anyone? No, he will rather quench any enthusiasm he finds. . . . For they prick at us with narrow little needles of argumentation. Their hearers, even if they are convinced, find their minds unchanged and when they depart are the same people they were when they came. The views are certainly important, and may even be true, but Stoics do not handle them properly. Their treatments are a good deal too minute.

It is the potential appeal of Stoic thought that makes existing works on Stoicism unsatisfactory.

This is the same complaint Cicero had voiced a year earlier, in the *Stoic Paradoxes* of 46. In that work he had himself attempted to remedy the deficiency in a small way, by arguing the truth of a series of ethical dicta in the manner of popular oratory.⁴⁹ But the program laid out for the *Paradoxes* did not have room for any very serious exposition of Stoic thought. Nor could *On Ends* itself demonstrate the full power that Stoic ideas might have when handled by a skilled orator. For Cicero had set himself the task of responding in his own person to each of the views presented there and could hardly commit his own officially skeptical voice to the service of Stoic ethics. In the *Tusculans*, however, the use of the *schola* format offered a less restrictive form of dialogue and dispensed with the need for refutation. Cicero could maintain his usual skeptical stance in some sections, but in others could let his authorial voice be subsumed by the more dogmatic voice of his principal speaker. Meanwhile, the earnest but unhurried manner of the work allowed him to explicate Stoic thought with some degree of patience.

The structure of books 3 and 4 is designed to illustrate the point about Stoic style with samples of different types of philosophic discourse. Each of the two books is built around a contrast: an initial section presents the Stoic position “in the Stoic manner” (3.13), while the main portion of the book defends the same views in the more expansive manner which Cicero claims for his own. Before a ship can spread its sails, explains the author, it must first be rowed slowly and laboriously out of harbor (4.9). Thus 3.14–21 consists primarily of a string of syllogisms, and 4.11–32 presents a long stretch of definitions and classifications very similar in style and content to surviving handbook material. In each case, the material is followed by a second exposition whose more combative manner and livelier, more accessible style calls to mind the author’s experience in the courtroom. There is some irony in this, in that Cicero’s Stoic speaker triumphs only by adopting the methods of his opponent. But the real victor, we are to understand, is Cicero himself, whose rhetorical skill here demonstrates its enduring worth.

It may be doubted whether the finished product achieves everything its author intended. Concern for his readers’ patience sometimes leads Cicero to abbreviate his arguments to such an extent as to obscure the point being made, and his interest in contrasting modes of discourse sometimes results in excessive repetition. For the most part, however, he has been more than successful in shaping his material into graceful and coherent treatises. His stated intention is to express the ethical thought of

Greece in a way his contemporaries will find compelling, and it is clear that he has made a strenuous effort to do so. The works are spattered with human-interest stories, bits of verse, and an occasional excursus into etymology, a subject Roman intellectuals seem to have found fascinating. Whatever his private feelings may have been, his public presentation was to show him calmly but earnestly engaged in a study which might well appeal to any intelligent person.