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CICERO'S COMPROMISE BETWEEN STOIC AND RHETORICAL *PATHOS*

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ABSTRACT

In the *Tusculan Disputations,* Cicero admires the Stoic theory of emotions. According to this theory, emotions are failures of reason, and a healthy soul must be free of them. Yet, in his rhetorical writings, Cicero holds that an Orator must experience the emotion he seeks to transmit to be truthful. Cicero's Stoic theory and rhetorical theory of emotions are irreconcilable. However, this paper argues that we cannot speak of an inconsistency in Cicero's thought. As a skeptic and rhetorician, Cicero never intended a systematic correspondence between his philosophical and rhetorical doctrines.

Keywords: Cicero, thought, Stoic theory, emotions, rhetorical, writings, *Tusculan Disputations*

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EL COMPROMISO DE CICERÓN ENTRE EL PATHOS ESTOICO Y RETÓRICO

Simón Noriega Olmos

RESUMEN

En *Disputaciones Tusculanas,* Ciceron considera la Teoría estoica de las emociones. De acuerdo a su teoría. Las emociones son fallas de la razón, y un alma saludable debe estar libre de ellas. A pesar de todo, en sus esritos retóricos, Cicerón sostiene que un orador debe experimentar las emociones que él busca transmitir para se veraz. La teoría estoica y la teoría retórica son irreconciliables. Sin embargo, este artículo considera que no podemos hablar de una inconsistencia en el pensamiento de Ciceron. Como un esceptico y retórico, Cicerón nunca destinó una correspondencia sistemática entre sus doctrinas retóricas y filosóficas.

Palabras clave: Cicerón, pensamiento, retórica, estoicismo. *Disputaciones tusculanas*

Even though he considered himself an Academic,[1] judged Stoic discourse to be obscure,[2] and recognized the Stoic ethical ideal as unattainable for a human being,[3] Cicero regarded Stoic ethics as the best moral doctrine.[4] Indeed, we expect a skeptic and Academic philosopher to consider the views of different philosophical schools, for he is ready to suspend judgment. However, it is remarkable to see Cicero condemning emotions (*pathê*) in his philosophical writings while grounding the whole art of oratory on them in his rhetorical works. For Cicero, the Stoic sympathizer, emotions are false judgments on what is good and bad, perturbations of the soul that make us miserable. However, for Cicero the rhetorician, emotions are the key element of persuasion, the instrument the orator uses to move the audience, something he has to experience to be authentic and trustworthy when giving a speech.

This discrepancy in the status of emotions in philosophy and rhetoric raises three questions that deserve clarification: (1) Did Cicero hold two different theories of emotions, one for philosophy and one for

[1] *Off.* III. 20.
[2] *Fin.* IV.2.
[3] Gawlick and Görler (1994) 1123.
[4] *Fin.* III.74-76.

rhetoric? (2) Is there an inconsistency or conflict between Cicero's philosophical and rhetorical writings? (3) Is there some underlying congruency between two apparent incompatible theories?

In what follows, I intend to answer these questions in four steps: (§1) I will provide a minimal account of the Stoic rejection of emotions and the meaning of *pathos* in *Tusculan Disputations* III-IV. From this account, I expect to elucidate why a Stoic rhetorician would not be allowed to experience emotions and why Stoicism taken at its word is incompatible with any rhetoric that emphasizes emotions. (§2) Second, I will describe Cicero's rhetorical theory of emotions. This will show why Cicero considered emotions paramount in the composition and declamation of speeches. (§3) Then, I will present the criteria Cicero uses to judge and criticize Stoicism, Academic Skepticism, and Epicureanism. Such criteria will allow us to find similarities or inconsistencies in Cicero's uses of '*pathos*' in his Rhetorical and Philosophical writings. (§4) I will conclude by suggesting answers to our three starting questions.

§1 STOIC PATHOS

Emotions are a matter of concern for Stoic Anthropology, Ethics, Psychology, and Epistemology. According to the Stoics, emotions—like any other matter of philosophical interest—cannot be

restricted to one philosophical discipline. Even more so than Aristotle, the Stoics strived for a system where physics, ontology, epistemology, and ethics are coherently interconnected.[5] This insistence on coherence and interconnection is ultimately grounded on a particular conception of the universe. For the Stoics, the universe is a perfectly coherent structure with a life of its own, an animal[6] whose coherent and stable mode of life is considered both nature (the way things usually are and should be) and reason (a natural mode of perfect organization).[7]

The Stoic interest in emotions is linked to what they thought was the purpose of philosophy, which, in their view, was to find how the end of human life is to be achieved. That end is Happiness, understood as a psychological and mental state of self-control and tranquillity barren of emotions as we commonly know them. Subsequently, emotions, as we commonly know them, are considered soul disturbances that prevent human Happiness. According to the Stoics, the sufficient and necessary condition for wisdom, and our task as humans, is to become wise and happy by purging ourselves of

[5] *Fin*. III 74. For the importance of this inter-connection in the Stoic system, see Brennan T. (1998) 21-22
[6] SVF. I. 537.
[7] This, of course, results in some kind of determinism. However, the possibility of no-organization, failure, and mistake is not excluded: the universe as a whole is perfect, but not its parts. The imperfection of the parts makes possible the world of accidents where humans live and make mistakes.

emotions.[8] Happiness and wisdom, therefore, involve a certain psychological condition of the soul and a certain epistemic condition. Moreover, the Stoics, like Socrates, believed that the sage was necessarily morally good. For all these reasons, emotions, for the stoics, were a subject matter of psychology, epistemology, and ethics.

What exactly are emotions in this Stoic context? Emotions are, of course, phenomena of the soul. But what sort of 'soul' is under discussion? Stoic psychology functions differently than, for instance, Platonic psychology. For the Stoics, the soul is not the sum of a rational and an irrational power. It is a rational unity. Within this kind of soul, there is no irrationality properly speaking. From the Stoic point of view, what is commonly and wrongly called 'irrational'—in the sense of opposite to reason—results from a failure or mistake in the workings of the soul. Emotions (*pathê*) for the Stoics are a subclass among the affections of the soul, the kind of affection that results from an operational failure. [9] In the Stoic sense, emotions are defined as consequences of mistaken judgments that are wrongly taken to be correct. For instance, if we consider money good, we shall be excited

[8] *Fin*. III 35.
[9] Stoics made a difference between '*pathos*', perturbations of the soul, and *eupateia*, actions of a soul that follows right reason. I will not be concerned with the latter.

about money. And if the latter is the case, we will worry about and strive eagerly for money. However, the truth is that money is not good but indifferent, and we have no reason to worry about it. False beliefs produce emotions. That is to say, false beliefs produce an unstable state of mind that results in uncontrollable and morally wrong actions.[10]

For the Stoics, every emotion involves a rational process because a judgment of value precedes the impression that generates it. That process is more or less the following:[11]

> (1) A proposition (*lecton axioma*) is asserted.
> (2) That proposition produces an impression that can be more or less clear.
> (3) The proposition is evaluated according to the impression, taking the object of that impression to be good or evil.
> (4) This produces a reaction that motivates us to reject or accept the object.

[10] Brennan T. (1998) 26.
[11] There is scholarly disagreement concerning some of the stages of this process. Here I am following Frede (1986). For a complete discussion, see Brennan T. (1998) 39 ff.

(5) The object can be 'indifferent' but our reaction may be excessive.

Let us, for instance, claim and believe that (1) ' the Gorgon exists.' (2) Because we have the vague idea that the Gorgon is a monster that kills people, (3) we think of the Gorgon as the worst possible evil. (4) This thought stimulates our souls, putting them into an unstable state, making us believe that we are in danger, and making us react as if the Gorgon existed. (5) However, the truth is that the Gorgon does not exist, and we have no reason to be afraid.

Strictly speaking, reason does not fail. The failure depends neither on the proposition nor on accepting the proposition. It depends on how we represent that proposition to ourselves and accept that representation. Thus, fear, hate, desire, etc., are simply ways of entertaining propositions.[12] Strikingly enough, emotions for the Stoics, like any other affection of the soul, are rational because they arise from a rational process.[13] Moreover, since they result from failures in the representation of propositions and judgments of value, i.e. since they

[12] Frede (1986) 104.
[13] Frede (1986) 98; Graver (2002) xxiii.

result from a rational process gone wrong, Cicero and the Stoics regarded emotions as illnesses or diseases of the mind or soul.[14]

Now, what is the place of rhetoric within this theoretical environment? Due to (a) the prevalence of reason, (b) its identification with virtue, (c) the coherence of the system, (d) the role of 'wisdom' as the end of human life, and (e) the conviction that emotions are to be avoided, the Stoics had a rather peculiar conception of rhetoric.[15] For the Stoics, the content of rhetoric should be virtue and true propositions represented appropriately and expressing the kind of knowledge the wise man has.[16] As a result, Stoic rhetoric can only be done by the wise and for an audience of wise men. The Stoics detached rhetoric from earthly human life by conflating eloquence, wisdom, and moral perfection.[17]

Among Stoic sages, there is no need for persuasion. Stoic sages, being sages, need not be persuaded because, for them, everything is clear. Moreover, since Stoic sages do not experience emotions, emotions must be useless in this kind of rhetoric.[18] Under these

[14] *Tusc*. IV 25-26.
[15] *Fin.* IV 7. (SVF II 288)
[16] *Orat.* II 15, 34. (SVF II 292). See also: Sextus *Adv. Math.* II 6 (SVF II 294).
[17] *De Or.* III 65 (SVF II 291).
[18] See *Tusc*. IV 55, *Off.* I. 102.

conditions, the rhetoric is devoted to truth and dialectic. Nonetheless, this need not imply that Stoic discourse was dry and barren of any *lepos*.[19] We must consider *eupatheia* and the fact that Stoic philosophers lived in this world, interacted with ordinary people, and had an 'emotional life.'[20]

At a different level, however, although the Stoics believed that most of the things that constitute normal human life are 'indifferent'—i.e. without value, being neither good nor bad—they were not unconcerned with fellow humans, nor did they detach themselves from society.[21] They could, indeed, picture themselves using emotions to persuade fellow citizens to take actions that would help them attain virtue. For this reason, a Stoic may pretend to be affected by *pathos*, although he is never allowed to experience such a thing, for this would imply failure in the pursuit of wisdom and virtue.[22]

[19] See *Off*. I 135-136
[20] Irwing (1998) 226-227; Bett (1998) 209. On eipatheia, see SVF III 378 and 431.
[21] For a complete treatment of this issue, see Irwin T.H. (1998) 234 ff.
[22] See note 18.

§2 PATHOS IN CICERO'S RHETORICAL WRITINGS

In Cicero's eyes, Rhetoric is not only a matter of truth and dialectic. For Cicero, Rhetoric is not primarily concerned with wise people and, secondarily, unwise common human beings. Cicero recognizes both *agrestes* and *docti* as members of his audience.[23] When he writes about rhetoric, he thinks motivated by his professional experience. As a rhetorician and politician, his task is to declaim to fellow politicians in the Senate, a mixed crowd in the *contio*, judges, and all kinds of people in court. In Cicero's view, his job as a rhetorician is not to formulate demonstrations and present arguments and theories to an exclusive audience of highly educated philosophers. Cicero's rhetoric primarily aims at normal human beings, and he considers it his task as a rhetorician to persuade them. For this reason, he believes in adapting his speech to the audience, bearing in mind that *docti* and *indocti* want to hear different things.[24]

[23] non ad veritatem solum, sed etiam ad opinionem eorum qui audiunt accomodata est oratio, hoc primum intellegamus, hominum esse duo genera, alterum indoctum et agreste (…) alterum humanum et politum. *Part. Or.* 90.
[24] sed apud hominess bene institutos plurimun de laude et de honestate dicemus maximeque ea virtutum genera tractabimus quae in communi hominum utilitate tuenda augendaque versatur. Sin apud indoctos imperitosque dicemus, fructus emolumenta, voluptates vitationesque dolorum proferantur; addantur etiam conntumeliae atque ignominiae. *Part. Or.* 92.

In Cicero's view, what the audience wants to hear is extremely important because rhetoric impels the souls to agree and disagree by appealing to what people need, wish, and dislike.[25] However, according to Cicero, the conditions a speech must fulfill to persuade are not limited to what the audience wants. Even though rhetoric functions by stimulating or repressing desire and hate, what stimulates and represses desire and hate must be transmitted easily and pleasantly.[26] More than that, in *Partitiones Oratoria,* for instance, *spes bonorum*, *metus malorum*, *iram*, *odium dolor iniuriae,* and *cupiditas honoris gloriae imperi pecuniae* are emotions to be aroused in law courts according to the principles of *decorum*, keeping in mind that some emotions are appropriate for a particular kind of speech, occasion, and place, while some are not.[27]

Further, the status Cicero gives to emotions within the art of rhetoric also challenges any notion of Stoic rhetoric. As we see in *Brutus* 276-279, rhetoric aims at *docere*, *delectare*, and *movere*.[28] In the *Orator*, two things make eloquence admirable, *to êthikon* and to

[25] See *Part. Or.* 94-95.
[26] *Part. Or.* 95-96
[27] *Part. Or.* 111-112.
[28] This is precisely what the 'Optimus Orator' does in *De Opt Gen Or*. II 312-313: *decet*, *delectat*, *permovet.*

pathêtikon:[29] that which is consonant with our nature, habits, character, and costumes, and that by which souls are moved and made to agree. Of these two, emotion distinguishes rhetoric because it is the unstoppable power that decides *causae* by producing anger, calm, envy, admiration, hate, love, desire, hope, joy, and pain in the judge's soul.[30]

Emotions are objects of Cicero's rhetorical theory and machinery. There are even technical names for ways and sections of the speech that produce a particular kind of emotion, such as *miseratio*.[31] More specifically, the place of emotion in the technical machinery of the art of rhetoric is in style.[32] Since it is developed after the arguments and topics have been gathered, appeal to emotion is the product of how the arguments are arranged and presented.[33] The *inventio,* for Cicero, is not just a mere gathering of arguments, for it is done to ensure the trust of those who are to be persuaded (*fide faciat*), and that can be done only through emotions (*motum eorum animis afferat*).[34] However, Cicero does not restrict the arousal of emotions in a speech to *loci* or typical situations, composition technique, and the content of the speech itself.[35]

[29] See especially *Or.* 128.
[30] See *Or.* 129, cf. *De Or.* II 186.
[31] *Or.* 130.
[32] See *De Or.* II. 214 with Michel. (1960) 238.
[33] *Part. Or.* I. 9.
[34] *Part. Or.* I. 5.
[35] *Part. Orat.* 96

The arousal of emotions involves acting, facial and bodily expression, and experiencing the emotions one intends to produce to make the speech convincing.[36]

How relevant emotions were in Cicero's rhetorical career is shown by the fact that he boasted of having used all possible ways of exciting and calming the soul.[37] On the other hand, we can understand how significant emotions were for Cicero's conception of rhetoric and politics by appreciating that human civic life involves language shaped by rhetoric. Offices, protecting fellow citizens and the Roman Republic, passing laws, establishing norms, and reproving bad conduct are activities done through language shaped by rhetoric. If civil action depends on rhetoric and persuasion, we must apply emotional input to communicate effectively and successfully practice politics and undertake any civic enterprise. Any activity involving communication, indeed, any human activity, appears to need some dose of emotion.

Contrary to orthodox Stoics, Cicero believes that even the most theoretical matter must be presented with an emotional touch to please the audience. One reason that motivated Cicero to write philosophy in Latin is that some of his predecessors translated Greek books of dubious

[36] *Or.* 131-132. See also: *De Or*. II 189-191; *De Div*. I 80.
[37] *Or.* 132.

quality into poor and lifeless Latin.[38] The communicative function of language for Cicero is fulfilled not only by transmitting cognitive content but also by making that content attractive by moving emotions and persuading the audience and the readers.[39]

For Cicero, making writing and speech emotionally appealing and persuasive is so crucial that to be a good philosopher, one must move emotions to catch the audience's and readers' attention. Cicero assimilates rhetoric to philosophy for at least two reasons. First, to be virtuous and make good use of rhetoric, an orator needs a good education. Second, speech is nothing without content.[40] But he also assimilates philosophy to rhetoric because philosophy without beauty and emotion is ineffective and cannot be transmitted.[41]

[38] *Fin.* I.8.
[39] Gawlick and Görler (1994) 1124.
[40] *De Or.* I. 60-61. See also *Or.* 118.
[41] See *Off.* I. This can be considered an Aristotelian feature. For Aristotle and the Academy, philosophy, and contemplation are not and should not be strange to eloquence, a speaker must satisfy his audience and avoid annoying it (*Rhet.* III 1, 1404a4-11). Philon, the academic whose lectures Cicero attended (*Brut.* 306; *Acad.* I. 13.), favored the unity of philosophy and rhetoric.

Cicero took seriously this mutual conditioning of philosophy and rhetoric.

In his view, his philosophical works were rhetorical pieces, [42] and his rhetorical treatises were philosophical writings.[43] According to Cicero, the best rhetorician was a philosopher, the best philosopher a rhetorician,[44] and both philosopher and rhetorician were masters of emotions. Cicero regards rhetoric this way because he approaches it as a matter of business, politics, and citizen responsibility, not merely a philosophical issue. In his rhetorical writings, we find the view that a man must persuade effectively to be successful and maintain his reputation. For this reason, far from basing his rhetorical theory on something external to it, as, for instance, an ethical theory, he bases it on the purpose of the art itself. The main concern is to find the necessary techniques for composing a persuasive speech.

Put in a more abstract and modern phraseology, Cicero, in contrast to the Stoics, is driven to pay attention to the problem of communication and the psychology of persuasion. The psychology of persuasion is particularly important for him. He is concerned with an

[42] *Tusc*. I.7. See also: *Off*. I.2 ff.
[43] Gawlick and Görler (1994) 1125; see *Div*. II.4.
[44] *Part Or*. 79.

audience of humans with a particular way of thinking, feeling, and reacting to external stimulation. On the other hand, communication is relevant because rhetoric is about transmitting a message to an audience and moving that audience to undertake specific actions.

Thus far, we can conclude that Cicero's use of emotion in rhetoric is incompatible with any Stoic appraisal of emotions. Two points deserve particular attention:

(a) Cicero's rhetorical theory of emotions is conceived to persuade within the environment of political contest. It is neither conceived as having primarily in mind an audience of sages nor is it adapted to a coherent philosophical system.

(b) A Stoic would never prescribe experiencing emotions such as anger, which is, by definition, a *pathos*. Cicero not only prescribes experiencing such emotions at the time of declamation, but he also considers it fair to feel anger towards the enemies of humanity just as it is fair to fight them.[45] An orthodox Stoic would perhaps fight the enemies of humanity, but he would never feel anger himself.

[45] *Off*. I. 36. and *Phil*. II. 20.

§3 UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES IN CICERO'S RHETORICAL THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY

On the one hand, Cicero constructed his theory of *pathos*, in the rhetorical writings, by borrowing doctrines from different philosophical schools: the Stoa, the Peripatos, Aristotle, the Academy, and Plato,[46] though he maintains the essentials of Stoic terminology.[47] On the other hand, he was well aware that the needs of the human world—where virtue has to be made appealing to people and speech is a weapon—call for emotional rhetoric. Probably inspired by the Aristotelian and Peripatetic traditions, Cicero regards emotions as essential to rhetoric and persuasion because they affect human judgment.[48]

[46] A platonic irrational element is introduced. The mania the speaker has to experience seems to be taken from Plato. Nnevertheless, it would be inappropriate to consider Cicero directly inspired by the *Phaedrus* because mania and furor divinus were commonplace in the ancient world and were particularly popular in the Roman world. *Div.* II 54.110.

[47] Michel (1960) 256.

[48] *Rhet.* II 1, 1378a21-22. However, the direct influence of Aristotle or Theophrastus is nowadays considered uncertain. See Wisse (2001) 39: "The technical rhetorical doctrines of Cicero's own time were so well known and widespread that in this area the notion of "sources" is useless (…) and it is not improbable (but cannot be considered certain) that he actually read Aristotle in the original (his knowledge of Theophrastus is hardly in doubt)."

How did Cicero use Stoic and Academic material for his purposes? His treatment of Stoic and Academic material in the philosophical writings follows a pattern. In *De Finibus* and the *Tusculanae*, the philosophical schools are put on a scale. The Epicureans are the worst school because they neglect rhetoric and ground all their theories in the senses. The Peripatos and the Academy share a second rank, the former because of its proximity to the truth,[49] the latter because its realism takes rhetoric into account and assimilates it into philosophy. However, the Academy has the drawback of being inconsistent. Skepticism, if not used critically, can be highly misleading, resulting in a sort of nihilism that denies the possibility of any knowledge. Stoicism and Platonism deserve the first place because of their speculative power and the beauty of their ideals. Yet, being unrealistic, their power and beauty do not escape criticism. The best schools are unacceptable, and the second best are useful but insufficient. This is Cicero's ranking of philosophical Schools in two of his philosophical writings. In rhetorical contexts, his choices are different.

The proliferation of competing philosophical schools professing to have the truth in the Hellenistic period resulted in the

[49] Gigon (1973) 246.

conviction that every doctrine is contingent. In this atmosphere, Cicero turned to the school that gave him the most sensible solution to this historical situation and political needs: the Academy and its skepticism. He constructs his rhetorical theory of emotions following academic skeptical doctrine, according to which skepticism operates at two levels: (a) The methodology and (b) the doctrines preferred.

(a) A Skeptic is free from the restrictions of systems and doctrines because, in his view, infallible knowledge is unattainable, and propositions are probable but never absolutely true or false. Thus, Cicero allows himself to consider and adopt ideas from different schools, even if they are philosophically incompatible, such as Stoic ethics and the Peripatetic theory of emotions.

(b) Nevertheless, the Academy offers more than methodology. In a world without infallible truth, truth cannot define wisdom. Consonant with the Academy, Cicero's 'Wise Man' does not possess, nor does he expect to possess the 'truth.' Instead, he is constantly searching for it.[50] Indeed, Cicero's rhetorical writings do not postulate any truth of rhetoric or an ultimate formula of persuasion.

[50] Placit enim Ciceroni nostro beatum esse qui veritatem investigat, etiamsi ad eius inventionem non valeat pervenire… *Hort. Frg.* (Grilli) 107.

Instead, Cicero appeals to notions that cannot be defined: *decorum* and what sounds good to the ear.

In tune with the Academy and despite his admiration for Stoic and Platonic systems, Cicero is not inclined to utopias and ideals. He is concerned with human reality, whose contingent problems and conflicts cannot be reduced to any theory or doctrine. In addition, Cicero prefers to look at politics and daily human life from different points of view. He finds that fixed philosophical doctrine can impede action. For these reasons, the Academy takes precedence over all philosophical schools for Cicero, the Rhetorician. [51] The Academy offered Cicero both doctrinal flexibility and the instruments to construct a theory of rhetoric with a philosophical spirit consonant with his purposes and needs as a politician.

§4 CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, Cicero's Stoic theory of emotions and his rhetorical theory of emotions cannot be philosophically reconciled. They are two completely different theories because the purposes of Stoicism and political rhetoric are diverse. The meaning of the term '*pathos*' is practically different in both cases. The Stoic is to purge his

[51] See note 49.

soul of *pathos*. The rhetorician not only has to infuse *pathos* in his audience, he also has to experience it himself, if he is to be truthful. In Stoic philosophy, *pathos* and *eupatheia* exclude one another. The former is to be avoided, while the latter is acceptable. This distinction is not as critical for Cicero, the rhetorician, for he is open to experiencing both. However, we cannot speak of an inconsistency in Cicero's rhetorical thought. As a rhetorician, he never intended a systematic correspondence between his philosophical and rhetorical doctrine.[52]

Since Cicero was interested in putting Greek philosophy into Latin to satisfy the needs of the curriculum of the Roman rhetorician and inspire his fellow citizens, it would be wrong to say that the theory of *pathos* of *Tusculanae* III and IV is a theory he would have defended both as a philosopher and as a rhetorician. He admired it, but he did not take it for granted. If Cicero takes a personal position concerning *pathos*, it is the one he exposes in his rhetorical writings. In these writings, he developed an original and personal rhetorical theory. This latter theory is the one he defended with emotion and all the power of his eloquence.

[52] *Tusc*. V. 32-33.

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