CHAPTER 2

The Aims and Argument of the Tusculan Disputations

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Among Cicero's philosophical works, the *Tusculan Disputations* is unique. It does not stage a debate among rival philosophical schools, like *De finibus* or *De natura deorum*; nor does it consistently expound a single preferred doctrine, like *De officiis*. It has no obvious unity of topic or doctrinal allegiance; its own prologue (1.7–8) presents it as primarily a series of formal exercises. Yet when Cicero surveys his achievements in *De divinatione*, it is presented as the culmination of his whole philosophical project. It is the only work to merit a book-by-book description, and in retrospect he attributes to it a clear and ambitious programme:

> The *Tusculan Disputations*, in the same number of books <as *De finibus*>, followed; it revealed the matters which are most necessary for happy living. For the first book is on death, that it is to be despised, the second on pain, that it is to be borne, the third on how suffering [*aegritudo*][1] is to be soothed, the fourth on the other disturbances of the soul; and the fifth embraced that topic which most illuminates the whole of philosophy: for it teaches that virtue itself is by itself sufficient for living happily. (Cic. *De divinatione* 2.2)[2]

My aim in this chapter is to make sense of this paradoxical centrality by disentangling the multiple purposes and strategies at work in the *Tusculans*. First, it is indeed a set of formal exercises, the form being *schola* or *disputatio*: more specifically, each book has the form of an *argumentum contra propositum*, 'refutation of a proposed thesis'.[3] As such, the books are bravura performances in a mode of argument long practised in the Academy – one with, in Cicero's view, particular value

[1] Or 'sorrow'. Cf. White 1995: 226 n. 14. As Graver 2002: xxxviii notes, there is a bit of a shift between Books 3 and 4, with the term being used for distress at bereavement in 3 and more generically in 4.

[2] Translations are my own, with thanks to Gianmarco Bianchini for discussion, and debts to King 1927, Douglas 1985 and 1990, and Graver 2002 for translations of the *Tusculans*.

[3] On Cicero's terminology, see Aubert-Baillot 2018: 256–7 and Blyth 2010: 89 n. 65, with references.

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both to the sceptic and to the rhetorician. The *Tusculans* is also, as has been widely recognised, a work of psychotherapy, aiming to free us from emotional suffering. What is less obvious is that, as I will argue, it is therapy for one emotion in particular: the disputations add up to a progressive, systematic refutation of the possibility that there are evils in human life to which the rational and natural response is *fear*. Put positively and more precisely, what the *Tusculans* reveals is that we have nothing to fear insofar as we progress towards virtue, mastering our emotional inclinations and facing life's challenges courageously. It is thus an important third dimension of the *Tusculans* that Cicero's argument *edifies* the reader: that is, by showing how virtue is essential to a happy life, it strengthens our moral resolve. This makes it a kind of practical complement to *De finibus*, its immediate predecessor and likewise dedicated to Brutus: the former attempts to discover what the end of human life is, the second to propel the reader towards it.

Edification is in turn bound up with a fourth and still more ambitious purpose. In the prologues to Books 1, 2, and 4 of the *Tusculans*, Cicero says that he here undertakes to 'transfer' philosophy from Greece to Rome and to give it its 'birthday' there (1.5–6, 2.5–9, 4.1–7). He seems to have in mind not so much his concrete efforts to create Latin philosophical vocabulary and introduce Greek ideas, but rather his larger aspiration to give Roman readers a full exhibition in Latin of the 'fruits' or benefits of philosophy (*fructus*, 1.119, 2.2). Thus the formal, therapeutic, and edifying dimensions of the work are all geared to serve a further purpose as advertisement for the powers of philosophy itself.[4]

This chapter will offer a 'four-dimensional' reading of the *Tusculans,* setting out in turn these dimensions of *disputatio*, therapy, moral edification, and philosophical exhibition. I will note *en passant* how they work with each other, and how each helps to explain the most distinctive features of Cicero's argument. I have in mind first that the *Tusculans* is notably *eclectic*, in the literal sense of picking and choosing the strongest candidate theories topic by topic: so for instance Stoicism is shunted aside on the question of immortality in Book 1, but emerges as the only viable stance regarding the emotions in Books 3–4. And second, and even more strikingly, it is *ecumenical*. That is, Cicero emphasises common ground

[4] I will not have much to say about the *Tusculans* as rhetoric. But it should be borne in mind throughout that the philosophy Cicero exhibits and advocates here is explicitly philosophy-enriched-by-rhetoric (1.7, 2.9). Thus, while it advertises philosophy to the Romans, the *Tusculans* also advertises rhetoric to the philosophers; and it appeals to Roman pride in suggesting that the Roman gift for rhetoric will produce a kind of philosophy even greater than the Greek original.

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wherever it exists, endorsing (though not always to an equal degree) *all* the arguments and philosophical options which seem capable of doing the job. This is most notable in Book 1, where both Epicureans and Platonists, by very different means, arrive at the conclusion that death is not to be feared. But it is also on display in Book 2, where Cicero is indifferent to the question whether pain is a minor evil or, as the Stoics insist, none at all; and again in Book 5, where the Epicureans again get a surprising pat on the back, here as regards the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. In discussing all four dimensions, I will offer a somewhat traditional alternative to recent interpretations, which focus either on therapy or on the puzzle of how the *Tusculans* can be read as compatible with Cicero's scepticism. I turn briefly at the end to consider how far the *Tusculans* should be seen as a sceptical work, and whether it can help us to identify just what sort of sceptic Cicero was.

Disputation

Disputatio is Cicero's canonical term for the form of the *Tusculans*.[5] It is used for the work at *De divinatione* 2.3 and *De fato* 4, and also in two of the three methodological prologues of the *Tusculans* itself, at 1.7–8 and 5.11. In the first of these Cicero also calls it by the Greek term *schola*, and emphasises its Greek heritage. He further presents it as tantamount to legal *declamatio*, affirming his long-standing aim of infusing philosophical discourse with the richness of rhetoric. (He lays claim to Aristotle as his predecessor in that fusion at 1.7; likewise at 2.9, Aristotle is said to have used the method as at once philosophical and oratorical practice.)[6] All this is unproblematic enough since *schola*, *disputatio*, and *declamatio* all pick out essentially the same form: extended speech (that is, *oratio continua* or *perpetua* as opposed to questioning or dialogue) arguing for or against a thesis.[7] We may also identify a more specific genre appropriate to the

[5] Or, to be more precise, for the form of the discourses uttered by the character M. which make up the bulk of each book of the *Tusculans*. But I will not make much effort to keep distinct the fictional oral discourse and the written text itself, and with them the character and his author (cf. n. 16). For a contrasting reading which teases out some possible gaps between the two, see Raphael Woolf's contribution to this volume (Chapter 3).

[6] As a reader for the press has emphasised to me, this looks like a reference to Aristotle's lost exoteric works, which may well have influenced the *Tusculans* in ways we cannot now hope to recognise.

[7] It is worth noting, however, that the Book 1 discourse begins with a proof in the form of question-and-answer refutation of the interlocutor's thesis, in the manner of ancient eristic or dialectic, and shifts to continuous discourse only when A. requests it. This points to the complex history of the *schola* genre in relation to dialectic, in which Aristotle is a key figure; I cannot enter into this here, but see Moraux 1968 at 300–307 and Long 1995.

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sceptic, of 'argument against a proposition' [*contra propositum disputandi*], and *De fato* 4 refers to the *Tusculans* in these terms. However, the broader genre of *schola* was far from being restricted to the Academics, and there is no reason to assume it was always refutative: we learn in the *Tusculans* itself that it was common to the schools, being practised by Dionysius the Stoic, Hegesias, and other Greek teachers (2.26, 1.83).

So far, so good: after an opening argument in dialogue form in Book 1, the *Tusculans* will indeed settle down into the form of a series of *scholae* in the Academic manner, with the fullness and passionate side-taking of a speech in the law courts. But there is still a bit of a puzzle as to exactly how Cicero understands his method here. In the prologue of *De finibus* 2, Cicero sharply distinguished the *schola* form from his usual method of argument on both sides of the question [*in utramque partem*], and disparaged the former as unfit for philosophical inquiry (2.1–3). The basis for this disparagement was not explicit, but the *schola* was associated with the unserious professional display of the sophist, and of the Hellenistic scholarch whose students want to hear him refute positions already rejected by both. In the prologue of *Tusculans* 1, Cicero accordingly, and accurately, presents his adoption of the *schola* form as a novelty, though with no argument to support his change of opinion about it. But in the prologue of Book 2, he affirms his preference for his more usual method:

> Therefore I always preferred the custom [*consuetudo*] of the Peripatetics and the Academy of discussing all matters on both sides [*in contrarias partes*], not only because <I supposed> it is possible to discover what is like the truth [*veri simile*] on each question in no other way, but also on the grounds that it is a very great exercise in oratory [*dicendi*]. (2.9)

And that passage goes on to present this as the method of the *present* work. The Book 5 prologue reiterates the conflation of the two methods, and (*contra* Book 1) blandly describes the present method as having been used by Cicero on many previous occasions (5.11). But it is very hard for the reader to see how the two could be the same – how the *Tusculans* could count as argument on *both* sides of the propositions it refutes, or how its single-sided argument could be as apt for discovering the verisimilar as Cicero's usual method of argument on both sides.[8]

[8] As Raphael Woolf asks in his contribution to this volume, 'how can Cicero suppose that the largely one-sided presentation that he gives as main speaker in Book 1, with far more material against death being an evil than in favour, conduces to a satisfactory assessment of which side better approximates to the truth?' (Chapter 4, p. 39). This is of course particularly a problem for readings of Ciceronian scepticism according to which it excludes any doctrinal side-taking: see the 'Conclusions' section of the present chapter, and cf. also Brittain and Osorio 2021: 31–4.

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Cicero's intermittent conflation of the *schola* form with argument on both sides can, I think, be made more intelligible via a third conception of his method: as 'arguing against everything' or 'arguing against all opinions' (*Acad.* 1.45.13, 1.46, *Nat. D.* 1.11, *De or.* 3.67, and cf. his description of Socratic practice at *Tusc.* 1.8). This Cicero presents as the canonical practice of the sceptic, and as equivalent to arguing on both sides of the question. And one can see why: on any given occasion, the mode of philosophical inquiry best suited to the sceptic (since it avoids even the temporary appearance of positive commitment) is to attempt to refute whatever philosophical option is propounded by someone else. Thus the refutative *schola* associated with the Academic *can* be seen as an instalment in his long-term philosophical search for the verisimilar. Moreover, in *some* cases a single refutative *schola* might seem philosophically sufficient to warrant a sceptical suspension of judgement: this will be so whenever the case in favour of the proposition refuted is antecedently by far the more plausible, or has been argued comprehensively by earlier philosophers. And this clearly applies to the *refutanda* of the *Tusculans*: that death, pain, and emotional turmoil are bad things, and that the good person may be harmed by them, could be legitimately supposed to be the prior, default stance of any reader.

The practice of 'argument against' is also a project for which there is Platonic precedent, and this is probably important to Cicero here. *Tusculans* Book 1 clearly follows in the footsteps of the *Phaedo*;[9] and Book 5, with its impassioned defence of virtue as the key to happiness no matter what, should remind us of the *Republic* (and the *Gorgias* as well, cf. 5.34–5). These dialogues are important models for the *Tusculans* not only because of their content, but because Socrates argues in them, so to speak, by invitation. In each of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, he undertakes to refute a position which his interlocutors would prefer not to accept, namely that death is to be feared and that injustice is better than justice, but which they cannot themselves find the philosophical resources to overturn. And this situation represents the special case in which the kind of *schola* which Cicero disparages in *De finibus*, one in which even the proposer of the thesis to be refuted really takes the other side, might still be of philosophical interest. For in this kind of case the speaker must still overcome genuine resistance, albeit ingrained in the habitual convictions of the audience rather than represented in an opposed philosophical

[9] For Cicero's reception of Plato, I am indebted to Lévy 1992, Long 1995, Schofield 2021a, and Watton 2021 and 2022.

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discourse, and so will need to uncover new lines of argument or more convincing ways to make the desired case.[10]

Therapy

Recent scholarship has added greatly to our understanding of practices of therapy in Hellenistic and Roman philosophy.[11] The surviving and best understood therapeutic works belong specifically to the *consolatio* genre. This is therapy aimed against the emotion of *aegritudo* (Greek *lupē*): suffering, sorrow, grief, or distress. Its aim is to persuade us that what might seem to be evil fortune – the loss of a loved one, say, or exile – is not truly a harm. The practical and persuasive nature of this agenda is encoded in the rhetoric of the genre: a *consolatio* is presented as addressed to a specific person who has recently suffered the loss in question. In addition to Seneca's surviving *consolationes*, we know that Cicero wrote a self-*consolatio* on the death of his daughter not long before the *Tusculans*; the *Tusculans* also alludes, fascinatingly, to a *consolatio* addressed by Clitomachus to his fellow Carthaginians on the destruction of their city. If we can generalise, a work of philosophical therapy as such is a work of persuasive philosophical argument which aims to convince the reader (for whom the addressee stands as proxy) not to give in to the temptation to experience a certain emotion or emotions. In such works, philosophical arguments, however abstract, are all mustered to a quite specific practical, psychagogic end; and to that end the author may also make full use of rhetorical strategies, literary depictions of the passions and their effects, *exempla* from life, and whatever other resources might persuade. The operation is one of curing a disease of the soul – specifically, an

[10] There is a bit of a puzzle, though, about Cicero's associated conception of Socratic method. In *De finibus* Socrates is said to express his own views by way of response to others (2.2). In the *Tusculans*, however, he is taken simply to 'argue against' so as to discover the true or the verisimilar (1.8); and at 5.11 this is said to have involved concealment of his own views. Cicero does show an admirable awareness that Plato depicts Socrates as using many methods of argument (*multiplex ratio disserendi*, 5.11); so, given that any account of 'Socratic method' involves a certain selectivity, his presentation might be expected to vary legitimately according to context. This particular shift remains odd, however, for it is hard to read the *Tusculans* as involving concealment of the speaker's or author's own views (hard, but not impossible; cf. Wynne 2020). It is much more natural to see Cicero as here emulating the Socrates of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, who in arguing against the theses of others displays strong convictions of his own. In other words, the Socrates of *De finibus* makes a better model for the Cicero of the *Tusculans* than the Socrates of the *Tusculans* itself.

[11] Cf. Graver 2002 with references, as well as Koch 2006 and Wynne 2020. On the therapeutic orientation of the Hellenistic schools in general, though with disappointingly little reference to Cicero, cf. Nussbaum 1994.

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unhappiness-inducing emotional state or standing proclivity to one – with the philosopher acting as, literally, psychiatrist.[12]

That the agenda of the *Tusculans* is at least in part a therapeutic one is more or less explicit. As Cicero says in concluding Book 1:

> Tomorrow, however, and for as many days as we shall be at my home in Tusculum, let us pursue these questions and especially those which offer alleviation of sufferings, fears, and lusts, which is the richest fruit [*fructus uberrimus*] of the whole of philosophy. (1.119)

This is the necessary negative or purgative operation which will have the positive effect of opening up [*aperuerunt*] the essentials for a happy life, as Cicero boasts in *De divinatione*. It is notable that while *aperio* can simply mean to 'make plain' or 'explain', it is also a powerfully *physical* verb: it is used for opening something (a letter, a window, or the door to a prison), freeing up some capacity (as by restoring sight or hearing), initiating a path, or laying open a place or a people to conquest.[13] The *Tusculans* is not just a series of philosophical arguments and explanations, then, but Cicero's attempt to lay open happiness to us in this practical sense.[14]

Disputatio and therapy are a natural pairing; the refutative *schola* form in particular is an obvious form for an attack on the claims of emotion. That the non-badness of death was a familiar *schola* topic is indicated by Cicero's reference to Hegesias, who overshot the mark by inspiring students to suicide (1.83); likewise suggestive is his remark that 'in *scholae* they customarily present the judgements of the immortal gods regarding death' (1.113). When at 3.81 he elaborates on the standard topics of Greek *scholae*, he notes that they include poverty, exile, blindness, and indeed "every occurrence to which the name 'calamity' is customarily applied".

Illuminating readings of the *Tusculans* along therapeutic lines have been offered in recent decades by a number of scholars.[15] Such readings have considerable explanatory value, not only in relation to the choice of *schola* form, but in relation to Cicero's eclectic and ecumenical mode of argument: the good therapist, in order to treat the disorders of a wide range of patients, must be theoretically resourceful, even doctrinally promiscuous.

[12] See especially the opening of Book 3 for the medicine:body:philosophy:soul analogy, which goes back at least as far as Plato, but may here be drawn primarily from Chrysippus. Cf. especially White 1995, Schofield 2002, and Koch 2006.

[13] Contra Wynne 2020: 207 n. 5.

[14] As Koch 2006: 199 puts it: 'therapy of the soul, which Cicero not only describes but tries to carry out in four steps'.

[15] Including Douglas 1995, White 1995, Graver 2002, and Wynne 2020. For an extended reading emphasising the medical analogy and making the case for a specific debt to Philo, see Koch 2006.

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This therapeutic purpose may also explain the remarkable dramatic barrenness of the *Tusculans*, particularly as regards characterisation. Why, in strong contrast to Cicero's other works of philosophy, are we here faced not with famous friends and contemporaries, or notables of recent history, but with a perfunctory 'M' and 'A'? The 'M' naturally suggests Marcus Tullius Cicero himself, but it does not follow that 'M' is intended to *name* him; and 'A' is at best weakly suggestive of a generic 'Auditor', 'Amicus', 'Adulescens' or the like. This blankness seems unlikely to be mere haste. I would suggest that 'M' is used to match as closely as possible the non-name 'A' while retaining its ties to the first-person; and that the point of the literally anonymous 'A' is precisely to make the interlocutor generic, which ensures that the fears he expresses are as close to being universal as any could be. It is hard not to see 'A' as an everyman figure: a featureless stand-in for the reader, and perhaps even a spokesman for another side of the author himself, who shares our weaknesses and fears.[16]

As therapy, however, the *Tusculans* is somewhat non-standard, not least in this abstraction from individual biography: inasmuch as it is addressed to a generic dialectical partner rather than an unfortunate friend, the *declamatio* genre trumps the therapeutic one. Further, only Book 3 has the focus on a single emotion which is characteristic of *consolatio* (or works like Seneca's *De ira*); elsewhere the focus seems to shift around. Book 4 argues against *all* the emotions; Book 2, in arguing for the insignificance of pain, might also be seen as an attack on suffering; but death, whose claim to harm is attacked by Book 1, must be at least primarily the object of its forward-looking counterpart, fear. Meanwhile Book 5 is not explicitly organised around any emotion in particular, or even all of them collectively, but argues against the idea that *anything* could render the good person unhappy. The point is not just that the *Tusculans* cannot all be read as *consolatio*, but that its unity is highly complex and its targets shift around.

The *Tusculans* can be seen as a unified work of therapy, I would propose, only if we see its books as collectively targeting the emotion of

[16] Scholars have recently attempted to make a more interesting figure out of 'A', but I am unconvinced. It is true that his level of philosophical sophistication fluctuates in the books, and occasionally takes the reader by surprise, particularly in Book 5; but this seems to me to confim that he is merely a functional prompt rather than a fully personal character. (It seems to me very unlikely that Cicero intends us to posit different 'A's from one Book to the next; see however Schofield 2021b and Woolf in Chapter 3.) For the idea that 'A' too in some sense speaks for Cicero, so that the *Tusculans* are a kind of dialogue of self and soul, see Görler 2004: 234–5 with n. 26 and Wynne 2020. As Woolf notes, the intellectual condition of 'A' – receptive to the right ethical views, not uneducated, but unskilled in actually doing philosophy – maps neatly on to the condition of Rome itself, which the exhibition of the *Tusculans* attempts to address.

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fear. Unlike suffering and the other present-oriented emotions such as anger, fear is with us always, and so naturally lends itself to the decontextualised treatment offered here. And since fear is the reaction to *all* anticipated harms, including both external events and the other emotions themselves, it can stand behind the apparently diverse topics of the work as the ultimate target of the whole. That fear is the organising target, the *skopos*, of the *Tusculans* as a whole is never officially announced; but it emerges as the argument progresses. Fear of death is of course the target of Book 1: this is explicit at 1.23 (where interestingly, as Raphael Woolf notes, it is introduced by the interlocutor 'A'), and implicit *passim* in the whole discussion. A parallel orientation to fear of pain is clear enough in Book 2, so that at the end of that book the interlocutor happily announces the hope that he has now been 'set free in two days from the fear of two things of which I was afraid above all', death and pain (2.67). The explicit focus then shifts in Books 3–4; indeed here fear is, presumably in keeping with Cicero's source material, eventually introduced for brief and separate treatment as an emotion like any other (4.64). But at this point, it is as if its special status for the present work dawns on the author:

> Therefore, whether it has come about by accident or on purpose, it has happened very conveniently that the two things we fear the most, death and pain, were discussed on the first and the second day: if these <discussions?> pass the test [*probata sunt*], we are in great measure relieved of fear. (4.64)

And in Book 5, fear takes centre stage in Cicero's peroration on the 'noble dogma' of the sufficiency of virtue for happiness:

> For whoever is afraid of the loss of any such things cannot be happy. For we want [*volumus*] the happy person to be safe, unassailable, fenced and fortified, not so as to be endowed with a little fear, but with none at all ... the person to be considered fearless is not the one who is a little bit afraid, but the one who is free from any fear at all. For what is fortitude, if not a disposition of the soul which is both enduring when danger approaches, and in toil and pain, and far away from all fear? And these things would certainly not be the case unless all good consisted in rectitude [*honestas*] and that alone. (5.40–1)[17]

[17] This language of what we want or wish [*volumus*] is a recurrent and telling feature of the argument for the noble dogma: 'we wish the good man to be happy always' (5.28, cf. 5.41–2, 5.52, etc.). I do not know of any clear cases in the *Tusculans* or elsewhere in which *volumus* is unambiguously used by Cicero for a purely theoretical desideratum: it does really seem to mean 'we want'. Cf. below on edification.

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Thus, fear and the state by which Cicero hopes to replace it (roughly, courage),[18] gradually emerge hand in hand as the negative and positive organising dyad of the *Tusculans*, as if arising organically from the material itself. (Indeed, given Cicero's rate of philosophical production, this may be just as unplanned as it looks; it seems perfectly possible that the *Tusculans* is a single-draft work, developing by a spontaneous train of thought from the pattern set down by Book 1.) So read, looking back from the end, there is a clear and reasonably systematic progression to be seen, a spine underlying the mass of argument as a whole. Books 1 and 2 examine the two most obvious candidate objects of fear, death and pain, and refute their claims. (It is because this therapeutic upshot is what Cicero cares about that in Book 2 we get the awkwardly indecisive conclusion, wholly unsatisfactory from the standpoint of theory, that pain is *either* no evil or only a small one, that is, no threat to the virtuous person's happiness.) With the principal external objects of fear eliminated, we then move inside the soul: in Books 3 and 4, the emotions habitually roused by apparent evils are *themselves* put under examination. Book 2 serves as a bridge to this second part of the work, for pain is the case which can teach us to disentangle the relative contributions to human misery of external, physical 'harms' and internal, psychological ones, enabling us to see that the real threat is from ourselves. Books 3 and 4 then follow as if responding to a dialectical counterattack: you may have shown that the things we find most frightening and distressing are not life-ruining evils, but in doing so have you not revealed how far the emotions *themselves* have the power to destroy our lives? We may have nothing to fear but fear itself; but is not fear itself really to be feared?[19]

These internal threats require a different kind of argument from that of the first two books. Since death and physical pain are unavoidably part of the human lot, the first phase of Cicero's strategy could only be to argue that they are not evils, or anyway not sufficiently so to be worth fearing. But the emotions *really are* evils: so his strategy in Books 3–4 must be to show that the good person can avoid them. To do so, he focusses on arguing that the emotions are neither necessary nor natural (3.65, 71–4, 82–3, 4.60) nor incumbent upon us (3.25, 61–2, 68, 76). These claims about the natural and necessary help to explain Cicero's diffuse-looking *modus operandi* in the argumentation of the *Tusculans*, and in Books 3–4

[18] As James Warren has pointed out to me, what Cicero most needs here, and seems at some moments to articulate, is the somewhat distinct notion of confidence: 'the state of mind that is sure that whatever life may throw at me I will be able to withstand it, endure, and retain my happiness'.

[19] On the origins of Roosevelt's dictum, cf. https://teachinghistory.org/history-content/ask-a-historian/24468.

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above all. He proceeds by offering not only philosophical argument but also vaguely ethnographic appeals to *consensus gentium*, extended invocations of poetic testimony, and above all a wealth and variety of exempla, ranging from boys in ancient Sparta to Pompey's soldiers. Roman cases are particularly important not only because of his underlying agenda to transfer philosophy to Rome, but because untutored Romans, uncontaminated by Greek intellectual speculation, provide powerful evidence for claims about what really belongs to human nature. Indeed Books 2, 3, and 4 are all dedicated in large part to refutation by counter-example, on the assumption that the theses to be refuted stand or fall on the basis of the evidence about the possibilities of human nature. This is one reason why the *Tusculans*, misleadingly, often seems long-winded and rhetorical in a way that Cicero's other late philosophical works do not. Admittedly Cicero does not theorise his tactics here, and he *might* just be thinking of his storytelling and example-giving as a matter of adding rhetorical 'copiousness' to his Greek sources. But, if so, he is a better philosopher than he realises. For his amplifications amount to empirical argument (putatively empirical, anyway) in areas where we still take it to be highly pertinent, namely on questions about the range of psychological responses open to human beings in extreme situations. Cicero's reliance on historical examples here also clarifies a philosophical point which is crucial to his therapeutic-moralistic mission, though left inexplicit (and in fact rather tricky to theorise). This is that, though the perspective adopted on the emotions in Books 3–4, and likewise on the sufficiency of virtue for happiness in Book 5, is largely Stoic, it is not only that very special person, the Stoic wise person – as rare as the phoenix, according to Seneca (*Letters* 42.1) – who can achieve the insight, courage, and self-mastery required for happiness. The benefits of progress towards virtue kick in at a much lower level: they are, Cicero implies, available to any decent person who makes the effort, especially if they have the good fortune to be raised in the Roman *mos maiorum*, which offers a kind of shortcut to the virtues articulated by the Greek philosophers.

Having thus eliminated both external and internal objects of fear, by a kind of an inductive survey, Cicero can proceed in Book 5 to give a complementary positive argument for his overall conclusion. The good person can have *nothing* to fear, for his virtues themselves are a sufficient guarantee of happiness. As he says at 5.52 (almost a doublet with 5.41–2 and cf. also 5.15, 75–6):

> For indeed if this is not done <that is, if the supremely happy life is not made to depend solely on the possession of virtue>, the destruction of the virtues will follow. For the person who experiences suffering necessarily also

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> experiences fear of it; for fear is the anxious expectation of future suffering; moreover, whoever experiences fear experiences fright, timidity, terror, cowardice; . . . He will be defeated, as I have said, and not only defeated but moreover enslaved; but we want [*volumus*] virtue to be always free, always undefeated: if it is not, then virtue is done away with. (5.52)

Read as an exercise in the therapy of fear, then, the argument of the *Tusculans* presents a deep unity and a coherent, systematic argument. So far as I know we have, and know of, no other Hellenistic therapeutic texts of quite this character. But there is still a tradition here, and two precursors are worth singling out. One is obvious: as the great attack on fear of death in the Greek tradition, the *Phaedo* is, as already noted, clearly very much on Cicero's mind in Book 1. I suspect we should see the *Tusculans* as a whole as an attempt to build out from the project begun there, as a kind of cantilevered completion of the Platonic project, extending the template provided by the *Phaedo* to any other fear which might weaken our virtue and threaten our happiness.

A second important precursor–and rival–is almost certainly Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. Cicero's work runs parallel to that of Lucretius in its core claims (i) that we need not fear death, (ii) that the torments which really do harm us are self-inflicted and emotional in nature, and (iii) that the special gift of philosophy is to free us from them. And the prologues of the *Tusculans* are frank and emphatic about its ambitions as a work of anti-Epicurean polemic, intended to cancel out the false start of transferring philosophy to Rome made by inadequate Epicurean authors (1.6, 2.7, 4.6–7).[20] Despite Cicero's ecumenism within the argument, at least three interlocking moments confirm forcefully that this polemical aim is sustained, and suggest that Lucretius in particular is in the crosshairs. The first is a move of contemptuous dismissal made early on in Book 1 (1.10–11). Here M. scornfully asks A. whether he is terrified by tales of Cerberus and the like, which A. indignantly denies.

> M. And yet there are thick volumes of philosophers arguing against these very things. A. Indeed, foolishly; for who is so idiotic as to be disturbed by such things? (1.11)

Such arguments are indeed a major topic of *De Rerum Natura* Book 3, and Cicero cleverly turns Lucretius' own rhetoric there against him. Yes, it is

[20] See André 1974: 29–33. For a fuller treatment of the anti-Epicurean dimension of the *Tusculans*, with complementary arguments for Lucretius in particular as a polemical target, see Nathan Gilbert's contribution to this volume (Chapter 4). The echoes have been noted but not emphasised in past studies of the *Tusculans*: *ad* 1.48 both King 1927 and Douglas 1985 cite the closely parallel language of *De rerum natura* 5.8–12.

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childish and silly to be terrified by visions of the underworld – so much so that nobody actually is. (Cicero thereby hops neatly over the weakest point in his own argument: namely, its unargued assumption that if there *is* an afterlife, nothing about it deserves to be feared.) At the pivotal moment of Book 1 when Cicero turns to the immortality of the soul, the point is expanded. Cicero says he is left:

> amazed at the excess of some philosophers, who marvel at the study of natural science, and exulting, give thanks to its discoverer and founder and do reverence to him as a god. For they say that they have been set free by him from oppressive masters, from unending terror and fear by day and night. What terror? What fear? What old woman is so daft as to fear the things which you apparently would, if you had not studied natural science? (1.48)

Here the Epicurean engagement with childish fears, celebration of science, and extravagant founder-worship are presented as a trifecta of silliness; and Lucretius does indeed exemplify all three (see esp. *De rerum natura* 5.1–54, 2.45–2.62, 3.16). The third striking moment is Cicero's correction of, and replacement for, that absurd sectarian Epicurean praise of the founder. This is his remarkable, carefully ring-composed hymn to Philosophy, personified virtually as a goddess, at the start of Book 5, positioned as if to map on to Lucretius' own hymn to Epicurus at *De rerum natura* 5.1–54.[21]

Of course, given that numerous lost works of Roman Epicureanism might well have had similar purposes to Lucretius' poem, and used similar language and ideas, we can never be certain in identifying Lucretius as the unique or special target of Ciceronian scorn.[22] But the polemical shoe could hardly fit any better. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that to oppose the wave of Epicurean enthusiasm at Rome was one of Cicero's most urgent and enduring philosophical aims, and that the *Tusculans* puts that motivation front and centre. The long and elaborate prologues of

[21] Cf. Mackendrick 1989: 164–5.

[22] I am here indebted to Gilbert 2015, and to conversation with him. Gilbert's careful study emphasises that Lucretius' poem was only one of many early Latin expositions of Epicurean thought, and that Cicero's agonistic project is against this enterprise as a whole; but as his contribution to this volume (Chapter 4) makes clear, this does not preclude Lucretius' figuring as a particular target on occasion. (Cicero nowhere in his philosophical works mentions Lucretius by name; but we do know from his letters that he had read Lucretius' work, and admired it very much – as poetry (*Q. Fr.* 2.9).) It is very odd that Cicero says in the middle of the polemical Book 2 prologue that he would never read [*numquam legerim*] the authors whose style he is complaining about (2.7). No doubt this is a contemptuous exaggeration; but it does seem to hint, indirectly, that Cicero's anti-Epicureanism is informed by, and aimed against, Lucretius more than his duller colleagues. On Cicero's curious combination of silence and polemical engagement, cf. also Baraz 2012 with references.

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Books 1 and 2, which lay repeated claim to perform a 'transfer' of philosophy to Rome, repeatedly tie this aim to disparagement of the Roman Epicurean writers who might reasonably have been thought to have done so already. They are criticised more than anything else for being wretched as writers, thus crying out for replacement by a copious and rhetorically skilled author like himself. Cicero's ambitions here are not merely agonistic and polemical but annihilating: his attempt to give philosophy its 'birthday' at Rome can only count as successful insofar as the slate can be wiped clean, his Epicurean predecessors consigned to oblivion. I will discuss this project of exhibition and transfer more fully in the penultimate section; for now, the point is just that the *Tusculans* is not only therapy, offered as an exhibition of philosophy, but more specifically *better-than-Epicurean* therapy, offered as a replacement for Epicurean writings.

Edification

The third project to be distinguished in the *Tusculans* is one of moral *edification*. This obsolescent but useful term used to be common in discussions of Cicero, as in J. E. King's perfectly true claim in his Introduction to the Loeb edition: 'The *Tusculan Disputations* like the *De Officiis* are addressed to the general reader for purposes of edification.'[23] To edify is literally to build up, by being educational or morally improving; and though this is not explicit in the dictionary definitions I have found, the core use of the term seems to have been for projects which are both at once, and the one through the other. That is: edification is argument the acceptance of which will tend not merely to enlighten but to make the reader a better person, by strengthening their antecedent (but weak or unfocussed) aspirations to virtue.[24]

The edifying character of Cicero's work is especially palpable in the grand, argumentatively redundant peroration that is Book 5, with its ringing reaffirmation of the *praeclarum decretum*, the 'noble dogma' of the sufficiency of virtue for happiness (5.84). This self-consciously extreme moralistic position is selected as particularly appropriate to his practical purposes here, as the explicitly invited comparison with the *De finibus* shows (5.32–3). So the therapeutic mission of the *Tusculans*, as discussed above, is morally charged, and the doctrines used to support it – the ones we 'want' – are selected for their suitability to strengthen our moral resolve.

[23] King 1927: xxvi.
[24] This sense of the traditional force of the term is confirmed by Van Riper 1917.

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In the dense, spiralling rhetoric of Book 5, the courage of the virtuous agent who faces down pain is transposed to the sources of his resolve – to the doctrine that he is happy in doing so (5.82), the philosopher who teaches that doctrine (5.82), and the happy life itself, personified as boldly stepping into the bull of Phalaris (5.75, 80).

This purpose of edification, like those of disputation and therapy, helps to explain the richness and argumentative diversity of the *Tusculans*. For an author can edify his readers in any number of ways: by giving new and better theoretical arguments, so as to support their correct but insecurely held views; by exhibiting a consensus of the wise in favour of those views; by noting that their own moral or religious tradition already supports them, and that their own heroes have lived thereby; by showing that lesser and lower people have managed to act well, thus invoking the reader's shame and sense of self-worth; by offering vivid, persuasive eloquence to generate a practically efficacious enthusiasm; or by giving reassurance that virtuous action has beneficial consequences for the agent. Cicero plays every one of these cards. Edification goes naturally with a 'copious' blurring of the philosophical and rhetorical, the dialectical and the psychagogic, for like therapy it aims at persuasion of a diverse audience – more than that, at inspiration. Also like therapy, edification supports ecumenism, for it involves a practical standpoint from which doctrinal disputes within philosophy seem unimportant. For the purposes of theoretical inquiry, there is all the difference in the world between the Epicurean view of death and the Platonist one, given their radically different grounding; and, likewise, between the Stoic claim that pain is not an evil and the Peripatetic view that it is only a minor one. But either will work to strengthen the reader's commitment to virtue, so the choice between them may here be left open.

Projects of edification are always responses to a practical and political context. The *Tusculans* is decontextualised in presentation compared to a standard Hellenistic *consolatio*; but this is somewhat misleading. For Cicero is writing against a backdrop of a lost civil war, and the *Tusculans* is speaking to readers – including himself – for whom, as he clearly foresees, a grim future under dictatorship looms.[25] The most important thing which philosophy can offer at such a moment is a stiffening of the moral backbone. This situation helps to account for Cicero's particular concern to graft Roman exempla from history and politics onto his already adequate Greek empirical resources. It also perhaps helps to explain the

[25] For a reading of the *Tusculans* as an expression of political protest, see Gildenhard 2007.

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urgency behind his preference, here in particular, for the extreme Stoic position on the invulnerability of the virtuous.

It is easy to see why edification would have become a discredited and eventually a forgotten philosophical enterprise in a (*soi-disant*) hard-headed age like our own, dedicated to the hermeneutics of suspicion. For one thing, the enterprise depends on a kind of philosophical complacency about the hardest questions: author and audience must be broadly agreed on what virtue consists in, and that it is valuable and to be pursued. Granted these points, edification then undertakes persuasion, rather than inquiry or proof; and in order to persuade, it often provides incentives to virtue of a kind disdained by the philosophers since Kant.[26] Given all this, nothing is easier than for edification to look like an embarrassing exercise in philosophical shallowness, bad faith, and wishful thinking.

So it is no wonder that Cicero the edificationist has gone missing recently, amidst scholarly rehabilitations of Cicero the serious and disciplined sceptical philosopher. I would nonetheless suggest that projects of philosophical edification, and the *Tusculans* in particular, deserve to be taken seriously. Nothing about such a project *necessitates* intellectual dishonesty: an author may seek out the edifying without compromising on his commitment to the true (or the verisimilar). And I would note an unlikely parallel. So far as I know, the only major twentieth-century philosopher to avow a project of edification was Richard Rorty, whose magnum opus *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is explicitly framed in those terms. Now Rorty claims to mean by 'edification' something like Gadamer's idea of *Bildung*, education;[27] and it might be objected that this Gadamerian ideal has little to do with the undertaking I have attributed to Cicero. But there are still some suggestive resemblances between the project announced in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and pursued in Rorty's later works, and that of Cicero in the *Tusculans*. Rorty, like Cicero, deploys philosophy for a project of a culturally local ('ethnocentric', as he likes to say) kind. He aims to be distinctively American in thought as Cicero aimed to be distinctively Roman, to domesticate foreign

[26] Google N-grams suggest that the term has been in decline since the mid-Victorian era, while 'unedifying' shines brighter than ever; a likely turning point would be Darwin's deeply unedifying *The Origin of Species*. A fascinating attempt to rehabilitate philosophical edification, understood to be already intellectually unrespectable, is Van Riper 1917.

[27] Rorty 1980: 360. I take Rorty's choice of the term 'edification' – something of a false friend for Gadamer's *Bildung* – as a bid to perform an ironic (or pseudo-ironic, in fact perfectly earnest) rehabilitation of just the old-fashioned, deprecated concept used by Van Riper and King. The attempt failed: the term never caught on, and evanesces from the later works in which the project is carried out.

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traditions and enrich them with local resources. Like Cicero here, he musters a fusion of philosophical and rhetorical resources, with no shame about the combination. He takes an eclectic and ecumenical stance towards philosophical arguments, with an underlying avowal of epistemic modesty. And as later works like *Achieving Our Country* make clear, Rorty's aims are ultimately moral, political, and patriotic in quite a Ciceronian way. (In fact the *Sitz im Leben* is startingly close: Rorty too is writing for the elite readers of a beloved empire which he sees as divided to the point of civil war.) Notwithstanding deep differences between the two,[28] this should be enough to show that edification does not have to take the form of the kind of bland pious uplift which died with Victorian Christianity; it can be an intellectually ambitious, innovative, politically urgent enterprise. The parallel can also help us to spot something which I will propose in the concluding section: that the Cicero of the *Tusculans* is, like Rorty, a pragmatist more deeply than he is anything else.

Exhibition

A fourth dimension of the *Tusculans* is the exhibition – the ostension and advertisement – of philosophy as such. This project is explicit in the opening pages of the *Tusculans*, where Cicero's plan of action gradually emerges from a vastly general prologue, like an enormous tracking shot at the opening of a movie.[29] In this pro-prologue, Cicero introduces his championing of Roman philosophy by framing it with the panoply of the arts which have been taken over from the Greeks (1.1–7). An extensive survey of the arts and sciences appeals to Roman patriotism with the claim that Rome excels Greece in laws, morality, and warfare, equals it in oratory, and has to learn from it only in the arts which it has neglected or discovered late: literature, geometry, and *philosophia* (1.1–7, cf. 4.1–7). Cicero will present philosophy in a way which will be broadly accessible and attractive to Roman readers, because enriched with rhetorical skill (1.6–7, 2.8–9), thus achieving the 'transfer' of philosophy from Greece to Rome. However, despite this framing, Cicero does not in the *Tusculans* go on to emphasise his achievements as a translator, or any of the other concrete ways in which his work does indeed transfer and resituate

[28] One is that Rorty's conception of edification is explicitly revisionist and progressive, a project of *Aufklärung* (Rorty 1980: 12); Ciceronian edification, with its relentless mustering of the *mos maiorum*, belongs to a rival conservative, tradition-affirming strand.

[29] Cf. Baraz 2012: 103–12.

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Greek ideas. What he prides himself on here is something different: the sheer copiousness and effectiveness of his arguments, which beat the Epicureans at their own therapeutic games. So, if the *Tusculans* is the Ciceronian transfer *par excellence* of philosophy to Rome, it is simply because it is his most comprehensive and inspiring exhibition of its power and value. Where the *Tusculans* as therapy relies on the analogy with medicine, the key image for this performance is the harvest: 'the fruits of philosophy', emphasised on both sides of the transition from Book 1 to 2 (1.119, 2.2). The image is one of completion and a conferral of benefit: Cicero is collecting the rich output of the Greek philosophical tradition as a whole and presenting it for our use at Rome.

The literal priority of this dimension of exhibition in Cicero's presentation suggests that we should see it as the *fundamental* mainspring of the *Tusculans*, with edification, therapy, and the *schola* form chosen as the modes which serve it best. It is in order to exhibit the fruits of philosophy to Rome that Cicero shows off its powers of edification and therapy, and it is because of its suitability to that complex, nested project that the *disputatio* form is (just this once) in order. And, even more than disputation, therapy, or edification, I would suggest that it is this project of exhibition which explains the commitment of the *Tusculans* to philosophical ecumenism. For it involves a totalising conception of philosophy, and a standpoint external to philosophical inquiry itself: a perspective from which differences which loom large theoretically become unimportant. As an analogue, imagine a contemporary self-help book aiming to exhibit the therapeutic and moral utility of 'religion' as such, so as to convince readers of its value. The arguments of such a book would naturally be ecumenical: they would look for what Catholicism, Buddhism, Judaism, etc. have in common, and would tend to present them as variants on a single enterprise, each more effective in some respects and less so in others. The same author might write on other occasions as a Catholic or Buddhist theologian; but those books would be very different, and in them doctrinal differences would loom much larger. So too in the *Tusculans*, Cicero's advocacy for the utility of philosophy as such, viewed as a unified enterprise, involves an authorial standpoint which temporarily suspends the orientation to debate that is characteristic of philosophical inquiry itself. I noted earlier that a disputation *could* be seen as an instalment in a larger ongoing enterprise of philosophical inquiry, particularly by a sceptic whose practice is to 'argue against everything'. But it should by now be clear that this is not what the *Tusculans* is. It is not an attempt to determine by the methods of philosophy the best answer to some question disputed within

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it; instead, like the book of the advocate for religion, it adopts an external or a meta stance towards it, the better to endorse the whole. Cicero here operates as a kind of impresario, hovering beside the philosophical enterprise and ostending its collective results.[30]

Conclusions

Cicero the sceptic has in recent years been the focus of increasingly nuanced and respectful scholarly discussion.[31] On the four-level reading I have offered, is there anything important to be learned about him from the *Tusculans*? To be clear, the interesting question here is not 'Is the *Tusculans* so read *compatible* with Cicero's scepticism?' To this the answer is clearly yes; for any text, however dogmatic-looking, can be read as governed *in toto* by the sceptical operator 'I take it as plausible [*probabile*] – but no more – that . . .'. And Cicero's repeated avowals of scepticism in the *Tusculans* look like a directive to read it as governed in just that way (2.5, 4.7, 5.83). The question is rather whether the *Tusculans* is a sceptical work in some richer sense: whether scepticism actively shapes Cicero's argument here in a detailed way, so as to be explanatory of specific features of the text, or merely lurks in the background as a rider or constraint on the whole.[32]

On the present reading, the answer to this question must be worked out with reference to the four different levels which I have identified. The *schola* form is, as I noted above, well suited to sceptical purposes, particularly in its negative form. And that therapy can be a sceptical form is evident from the evidence of the *Tusculans* itself. For Cicero tells us that he has read the book which Clitomachus – Carneades' student and successor, standard-bearer for the most uncompromising version of Academic

[30] Malcolm Schofield protests that Cicero himself recognises no such internal/external distinction and sees philosophical debate as continuous with its uses and applications in 'guidance' (cf. Schofield 2021). That seems a fair point; but the exhibition of philosophy is, it seems to me, still more clearly external – totalising and instrumentalising – than the guidance offered by therapy and edification.

[31] Including Schofield 2002, Woolf 2015, Brittain 2016, Wynne 2020, Brittain and Osorio 2021, and Allen 2022.

[32] For sceptical readings of the *Tusculans*, see Wynne 2020, Brittain and Osorio 2021, and Woolf (Chapter 3). Note that, in different ways, all depend on distancing Cicero as author from the dogmatic assertions of his character as speaker; and I am unconvinced that Cicero means to invite such a distanced reading. Rather, he seems to use various sleights of hand to blur the two. For instance, the prologue of Book 1 is presented as motivating the speaker's discourses (1.7–8); but the aim it avows of 'transferring' philosophy to Rome better than Epicurean authors surely refers to the written work itself. At the end, the reference to having consoled himself through writing seems not only to fuse speaker and author but to avow the therapeutic function of the speeches in the voice of the writer (5.121).

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scepticism – sent as a *consolatio* to his captive fellow-citizens after the destruction of Carthage. This contained a *disputatio* by Carneades in which he refuted the claim that the wise man would feel suffering at the fall of his country (3.54). This tantalising passage presents Carneades as performing the Academic practice of negative *schola*, apparently along just the lines described in *De finibus* 2.1–3 and emulated in the *Tusculans* itself. We cannot infer from it anything about his real views or deeper intellectual purposes, but *Clitomachus'* purposes seem unambiguous: the speech-act of offering a *consolatio* to one's fellow-citizens surely expresses the intention to relieve them of suffering. And this in turn strongly suggests the philosophical view which in *Tusculans* 3–4 is grounded on Stoicism, that such suffering is neither rational nor natural nor necessary. Yet Clitomachus seems to have seen no contradiction between that stance and his Carneadean scepticism.

John Wynne has recently offered a fascinating and ingenious argument that we can likewise read the *Tusculans* itself as a work of radical Carneadean scepticism; for we can read its argumentation as aiming throughout *only* at a therapeutic suspension of judgement.[33] Such a reading is counterintuitive given the pervasiveness in the *Tusculans* of what sound like resounding affirmations of doctrine: above all, of the 'noble dogma' central to Book 5, the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. (But not only there: for example, that death is a good for good people is affirmed as 'beyond doubt' in Book 1 (1.73).) However, as Wynne notes, even the most strenuous arguments *can* be read as aiming only at therapeutic critique and an equalising effect: at the removal of belief rather than the installation of any new ones. Just as Sextus Empiricus can argue forcefully and one-sidedly against the criterion or the indicative sign, given that dogmatic philosophers have already presented the other side of the case (*M* 7.443–4, 8.298), so too Cicero can rely on the fact that we all habitually (though we must be careful not to say *naturally*) take death, pain, and suffering to be evils. Given the resilience of emotional beliefs in our souls, he can even lapse into what looks like positive affirmation of the contrary position without any real danger that we will overshoot the mark of *epochē*.[34]

[33] Wynne 2020. I cannot here engage with Wynne's arguments, which deserve to be read in full, but briefly consider what I see as their upshot. Cf. also Brittain and Osorio 2021 and Raphael Woolf's contribution to this volume (Chapter 3).

[34] We should, incidentally, not be tempted to confuse Cicero's ecumenism with sceptical *epochē*, despite a misleading superficial resemblance. To affirm 'P or Q' as the only acceptable views – as for instance Cicero does with the Platonic and Epicurean views of death in Book 1 – is not really any less dogmatic than affirming only 'P' or only 'Q'; it is merely vaguer.

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However, whether we *should* read the *Tusculans* in this sceptical spirit is a further question. When Sextus Empiricus argues forcefully on only one side of the question, he takes pains to assure us (at least some of the time) that he aims only at sceptical suspension of judgement; but Cicero never says anything of the kind. When he reminds us of his sceptical allegiance in the *Tusculans*, it is only to insist on his freedom to change his mind (2.5, 4.7, 5.33, 5.83) – which suggests that Cicero here *does* make his mind up in something like the ordinary manner, rather than being committed to suspension of judgement as his argumentative goal. In fact, if the therapeutic dimension of the work stood alone, it would seem that the *Tusculans* would properly be read as neutral between scepticism and dogmatism; for the therapeutic author should be happy with *any* response in the reader which achieves his end, and these responses might vary greatly. (One reader might conclude that Plato is right about death, another that either Plato or Epicurus must be, still another that the arguments of Book 1 warrant complete suspension of judgement on the matter: all would count as cases of therapeutic success.) But the point is moot, since we have seen that the therapeutic dimension of the *Tusculans* cannot be cleanly separated from its equally important project of moral edification. In Book 5 in particular, Cicero presents the success of his therapy as wrapped up with conviction in the 'noble dogma'; if we do not accept it, apparently, we will remain vulnerable to fear and our moral progress will be hostage to fortune. And Cicero is not here at all concerned, as he should be on Wynne's reading, to distinguish between believing that the noble dogma is true and not believing that it is false. This is not to say that sceptical edification is an impossibility, but only that Cicero's edification, and with it his therapy, in fact involves – and is explicitly said to *require* – the full endorsement of certain philosophical doctrines. Such endorsements are apparently qualified only by two sceptical provisos. First, modelling the good sceptic, Cicero assents to doctrines only as verisimilar, rather than as true (1.8, 2.9); and second, he reserves the right to change his mind (5.33). This looks on the face of it like a much better fit for the moderate or mitigated scepticism of the Philonean sceptic than the Clitomachean; but given the ongoing complex scholarly disagreement about how the difference between the two is to be understood, suspension of judgement seems the best policy.[35]

[35] See Allen 2022.

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Finally, it seems to me that Cicero's project of exhibiting the value of philosophy to Rome cannot be seen as sceptical in any interesting sense. It is not just that the sceptic should not claim to know or be certain of the truth of any of the large array of propositions apparently standing behind that enterprise – that Cicero has a duty to serve Rome, that he can best help Rome by spreading virtue and wisdom among his fellow citizens, that philosophy is our best aid to attaining these, and so forth. A more basic problem is that these commitments seem to take place outside philosophy and to be prior to it, since they are used to vindicate his engagement with philosophy in the first place. At this most basic level, Cicero emerges as, like Richard Rorty, essentially a politically engaged patriotic pragmatist. On occasion, this pragmatism – unlike, so far as I can see, Cicero's background scepticism – reaches through to actively shape his therapeutic and edificationist arguments. For instance, Stoicism is preferred to the alternatives in Books 3–4 because the only *practically* safe course is to tear out the emotions root and branch; and the embrace of the noble dogma is based on the fact that 'we want' the virtuous man to be freed from fear.[36] Indeed Cicero's commitment to scepticism is itself ultimately pragmatic, since only with the open-mindedness and endless commitment to inquiry of the sceptic can we hope to come as close as possible to the truth (1.8). Cicero is of course not a pragmatist in the modern technical sense of *redefining* the true in terms of the useful. Rather, he commends philosophical inquiry itself on the grounds of the moral and political utility of its results, and at times applies that criterion of utility in order to select specific arguments and positions within it. The ultimate arbiter is not philosophy but Rome.[37]

I would suggest, then, that the *Tusculans* does not after all challenge or retract Cicero's claim in *De finibus* that the *schola* form is ill-suited to philosophical inquiry. For it uses that form to perform something very different from inquiry, or rather three such things at once. This makes the *Tusculans* not incompatible with Cicero's scepticism as a philosopher, but orthogonal to it: it is the credo of a patriotic pragmatist, motivated directly by his most powerful pre-philosophical commitments and shaped by purposes and modes of writing which are other than those he adopts within the practice of inquiry itself. That does not mean that we should

[36] *Tusc.* 3.75–6; see White 1995: 233–9.

[37] As Rorty says approvingly of Dewey, 'His pragmatism is an answer to the question "What can philosophy do for the United States?" rather than to the question "How can the United States be philosophically justified?"' (Rorty 1998: 26).

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not count the *Tusculans* as a philosophical work broadly speaking, and even a great one. Every writing of a philosophical work is an action in the world, with ultimately pre-philosophical motivations and a practical, even a political, significance. These features are unusually complex, ambitious, and directly visible in the case of the *Tusculans*; that makes it more remarkable as a work of philosophy, not less.[38]

[38] I am indebted for very helpful and insightful comments and discussion to the editors, the readers for the press, the other participants in the Symposium Hellenisticum, and to James Allen, Gianmarco Bianchini, Nathan Gilbert, Matt Watton, Attila Németh, Raphael Woolf, John Wynne, and above all to Malcolm Schofield, whose writings on Cicero are a paradigm from which I still have much to learn.

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