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Plato with Pillows

Cicero on the Uses of Greek Culture

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Is Everybody Comfortable?

The title of my paper is frivolous, but the frivolity is Cicero's, not mine.[1] At the outset of the conversation portrayed in *de Oratore*, Crassus and his friends are strolling in the grounds of Crassus' Tusculan villa. After two or three turns, the old man Scaevola comments on the plane tree in front of them (1.28): it reminds him of the tree under which Socrates sat in Plato's *Phaedrus*, and it suggests to him that they might imitate Socrates' action and sit down themselves. Even Socrates, who had well-calloused feet, took the opportunity to stretch out on the grass for conversation; and it is only fair that the same concession be granted to Scaevola's feet. 'We can be even more comfortable', replied Crassus, and sent for pillows to place on the

1. My major debt is of course to Peter Wiseman, for the vast amount he has taught me, for his discussions of various Roman ideologies (particularly in Wiseman 1971 and Wiseman 1985, 107–15), for providing the occasion for a very enjoyable conference, and for his comments on that occasion on this paper. I am also grateful for the comments of the other participants; Erich Gruen in particular has helped me with *de Oratore* not only now, but through his writings (cited below) and through conversations dating back to 1966. Susanna Zetzel and Kathy Eden read and commented on an earlier draft; the members of my seminar on *de Oratore* at Columbia in 1999 gave me many ideas; and the staff of Columbia's Core course on Contemporary Civilization commented on the other half of this argument, a lecture on Edmund Burke, in February 2000.

benches (no grass for them) under the tree.[2] Dramatically, the reference to the plane tree is merely an excuse to let the aged Scaevola have a rest; but of course the allusion to Plato leads Crassus to start up a conversation on the subject of the *Phaedrus*, to which, in a final allusion implicitly comparing the young Hortensius to the young Isocrates of Plato's dialogue, Cicero returns in the conclusion of the entire work, a day and a half later. But although the framework of *de Oratore* comes from the *Phaedrus*, the substance of the dialogue is very decidedly not Platonic, and is indeed anti-Platonic in its argument. Here, however, my concern is with the frame rather than the picture, and with the Romanization of the *Phaedrus*. That Hortensius is substituted for Isocrates is a fairly straightforward adaptation. But why pillows under the plane tree?

Although the plane tree is a small detail, it provides a useful starting point not only for Cicero's dialogue, but for an examination of Cicero's views of the uses of Greek culture. As much as any Roman of his generation, Cicero was imbued with Greek learning: he employed it in his speeches; he filled his letters with allusions to it; he bought Greek statues for the Greek-named buildings on his estate; he translated learned and difficult Greek poetry; he adapted Greek philosophy in his dialogues; and, in *de Oratore* and the other Platonic dialogues of the pre-civil-war years, he employed extensive structural and verbal citations of Plato as a framework for his own (and some Greek) ideas about both oratory and government. And yet as we all know, he was, at least in his public roles, uncomfortable with his own extensive and profound Hellenism: he mocked Greek philosophy in *pro Murena* and elsewhere; he viewed the Greeks themselves with distrust and disdain; he claimed, in a few memorable passages to which I will return, vast ignorance of things Greek. This double view of Hellenism is neither unique to Cicero nor unfamiliar to any student of the late Republic; it is often explained in terms of Cicero's audience—that public Hellenism was un-Roman, and that it was necessary in Rome to disguise or dissimulate in public one's knowledge of Greek culture, while spending idle hours reading Dicaearchus or Aratus.[3] That explanation is, in its own way, true enough; but I want to make a stronger argument by looking at three texts in which Cicero demonstrates particularly close engagement with different aspects of Greek culture, and to argue that his attitude to Greek letters and art is genuinely distrustful, that he believed that there were strict limitations to the proper

2. On the allusion to the *Phaedrus*, see Leeman et al. 1981, 65–7; Görler 1988 with reference to earlier discussions. Schütrumpf 1990 sees a larger influence of the *Phaedrus* on the account of pathos in *de Oratore* I. I have not in general made specific references to the invaluable commentary of Leeman et al.; use of it should be assumed throughout.
3. On dissimulation as an explanation of Cicero's public attitudes, see e.g. Narducci 1997, 23–4.

role of Greek culture in Rome. That is not really a new idea either; but I hope to be able to put the argument in somewhat different and more precise terms.[4]

What is the point of cushioning Plato in the opening of *de Oratore*? An obvious reason lies in the Roman decorum of the dialogue: unlike Socrates, a Roman noble will not stain his toga on the grass; the trees and plantings of Crassus' villa are not on the banks of the Ilissus, but in a carefully manicured estate. The benches, like the pillows, are signs of the elegance and civilization of Rome: no grass, no bare feet. Or perhaps, more distantly, it indicates—as may be the case for modern Hellenists looking at Cicero—that the Romans' minds, as well as their feet, were softer than those of Socrates: this is soft philosophy that we are going to get, Plato for dummies. Consonant with such an interpretation is the way in which Scaevola refers to the conversation depicted in the *Phaedrus*. 'What the philosophers *report* was spoken divinely' (*illa quae philosophi diuinitus ferunt esse dicta*): he does not take responsibility for the quality of the philosophy or the language; as an elderly Roman, he keeps his distance.

This interpretation may be far-fetched or oversimplified, but it is unfortunately consistent with traditional views of the Roman reception of Greek culture since the nineteenth century at least: that the Romans needed pillows; that they were not up to the sublimity and sophistication of Greece.[5] There is good ancient precedent for such a view, even among the Romans themselves: one thinks of Anchises' speech in *Aeneid* 6, in which the arts and sciences are conceded to the Greeks, leaving government to Romans; or of Horace's frequently quoted verse about conquered Greece conquering her savage conqueror. But even though statements such as these are frequently accepted at face value, they are scarcely disingenuous utterances.

Still, many people (Hellenists in particular) are firmly convinced both that Roman culture is derivative and secondary, and hence indicative of diminished mental capacity, and that the Romans were unimaginative pragmatists, good for laws but not for letters. As a Latinist, I want to turn that around somewhat, at least in talking about Cicero and *de Oratore*: that Cicero deliberately attempts to put Greek culture in its place—like the Greeks themselves, it should be subordinate to Rome and within Cicero's conception of Roman culture. Only by starting from an *a priori* preference for what is

4. My argument draws on, and is in many respects parallel to, that of Gruen 1992 concerning Roman attitudes to Greece and Greek in the second century BCE, with some significant differences concerning the interpretation of *de Oratore*, on which see below.
5. For a brilliant debunking of the fallacies of Hellenists in talking about Rome, see Feeney 1998, a work to which I owe much. For Cicero's setting as a self-conscious indication of his being a 'latecomer', see Görler 1988, 216–17.

Greek can one easily disparage the Roman position; instead, I want to argue that Cicero is presenting, in various works, a deliberate and reasoned view of how Greek culture should best be used, one that has a long and distinguished (if not currently fashionable) history in discussions of the social contexts of intellectual life.

I return to Scaevola in *de Oratore*. He is tentative about the value of Plato for more than one reason. In the first place, his hesitation accords with Cicero's repeated distrust (and that of Cicero's characters) of Plato's unworldliness and impracticality. Thus the comment at *de Oratore* 1.224 that what Plato wrote about justice 'was totally at odds with normal life and civic customs' (*a uitae consuetudine et a ciuitatum moribus abhorrebant*).[6] That description is followed by the memorable depiction of the trial of Rutilius Rufus, who behaved as a defendant like a Stoic Socrates—and so, indeed, was convicted and sent into exile.[7] Rutilius was not guilty of the extortion from the Greeks of Asia with which he was charged; but he was guilty of disdain for Roman values in favour of Greek ideas. It is not only Plato, of course, that receives such scorn: at *de Oratore* 2.75, Catulus reports the anecdote of the Peripatetic Phormio, who lectured to Hannibal in Ephesus on the duties of a general and on military science. Antonius replies that indeed he has met many such Phormios among the Greeks, and goes on to describe the *doctrina* of the Greeks (in this case, as exemplified by Hermagorean stasis-theory) as utterly absurd, *perridicula*.[8] However great the theoretical learning of the Greeks, when applied, it is often singularly inept.

The second notable feature of Scaevola's remark is that it is, in fact, part of the deliberate representation by Cicero in *de Oratore* of the gradual growth of Roman familiarity with Greece and things Greek. Scaevola, as the oldest person present, is tentative about the evaluation of Greek philosophy. But the next generation, Crassus in particular, is described as engaging in philosophical discussion with the leaders of the Athenian philosophical schools.[9] *De Oratore* supplies a teleological account of Roman Hellenism, leading explicitly to Hortensius and implicitly to Cicero himself, as the consummate connoisseur of Greek rhetoric and Greek culture in general. Crassus and Antonius occupy a middle position (like Laelius in *de Re publica*),

6. So also 1.230, *Rep.* 2.21 with Zetzel 1995 ad loc.
7. On the trial of Rutilius, cf. *de Or.* 1.227–31; Gruen 1968, 205.
8. Hermagoras' work is lost; stasis-theory concerned the determination of the fundamental issue involved in forensic oratory. For a concise explanation of the theory, see now May and Wisse 2001, 32–4; on its place in *de Oratore*, see Barwick 1963, 51–64.
9. Scaevola had heard Panaetius in Rome; he discussed rhetoric with Apollonius Molo in Rhodes (1.75). Crassus read the *Gorgias* in Athens with Charmadas the Academic (1.47), and Antonius attended philosophic debates in Athens 'on the function and method of the orator' (*de officio et de ratione oratoris*, 1.82–93). On these encounters, see Gruen 1992, 264–8.

taking as a motto Neoptolemus' verse in Ennius 'philosophize, but only a little' (*philosophari sed paucis*) (*de Or.* 2.156):[10] the emphasis is on the importance of knowing Greek philosophy—but also of knowing its place.

The Cases of Archias and Verres: Citing Poets, Siting Statues

Before considering the attitudes of *de Oratore* in more detail, it will be useful to look briefly at two other Ciceronian texts. There are many occasions, even setting aside the philosophical works and various letters, on which Cicero demonstrates his knowledge of things Greek, but there are two speeches in particular where he goes out of his way to do so. One of them is the speech in defence of Archias, where the discussion of the value of Greek poetry, as Cicero himself suggests, goes far beyond the legitimate grounds of defence in the speech. The other speech is the fourth part of the second speech against Verres. Verres had indeed made free with vast amounts of Greek art, both publicly and privately owned by the cities and leading citizens of Sicily, and his appropriation of these works was probably actionable; but, given the fact that the speech was never given (since Verres had gone into exile) and that the charges concerning the manipulation of the grain tax in Part III and the execution of a Roman citizen in Part V are far more serious than mere theft (even of artistic masterpieces), it is fairly evident that Cicero had no need to go into such detail on the subject. It is a gratuitous excursus on the proper uses of Greek culture.

There are, in fact, two attitudes to Greek culture—or indeed to aesthetic knowledge in general—expressed in these speeches, and they are not always carefully distinguished. In the *Verrines*, Cicero's pretended ignorance of the names of Praxiteles and Polyclitus (4.3, 5) is well known; so too his statement that it is connoisseurs, and not Cicero himself, who regard such works of art as valuable (4.13). But it is also worth noting that these passages occur at the very opening of the speech, and the philistine attitude disappears very rapidly. Certainly neither the imaginary jury nor the actual readers of the *Verrines* would believe Cicero's mock-ignorance here ('What's the name of that Dutch painter? Rembrandt? Thank you very much; I never pay attention to that sort of thing.') Rather, Cicero is parodying an attitude to Greek culture that may perhaps have been employed for public consumption by some senators—but, given the amount of Greek statuary in Rome by this time, I very much doubt whether anyone in the ruling class was quite that

10. For the use of Neoptolemus' motto, cf. *Rep.* 1.30. Note that both dialogues adapt a speech from the *Gorgias*, and clearly prefer the position of Callicles to that of Socrates. Cf. Zetzel 1995 ad loc.

ignorant.[11] Equally peculiar is a story that Cicero tells to illustrate the value of poetry in *pro Archia*. Sulla, he reports, once gave a reward to a bad poet who handed him an epigram, on condition that he never write anything again (*Arch.* 25). The story may be true, but Cicero's description of the poem is distinctly odd: it was an *epigramma* written 'with every other verse just a little too long' (*alternis uersiculis longiusculis*). In the context, the description of the irregular length of the lines is meant to be an indication of the incompetence of the poet; but of course it is a perfectly accurate, if satirical, description of the elegiac couplet in which an epigram would be written. Cicero does not say that this is a Greek poet, but it seems likely: *epigramma* (which appears here for only the second time in Latin) is elsewhere used by Cicero only for Greek epigrams—and for inscribed texts at that. He is deliberately misusing the word, and the odd colloquialism *longiusculis*—a morphological type found elsewhere in Cicero only in his correspondence and only very rarely—draws attention to the self-parody.[12] Cicero claims to know, and to want to know, nothing at all about Greek art or literature. If even relatively un-literary types such as Marius or Lucullus were interested in Archias' poetry (if Cicero can be trusted); and if there was already a long tradition of Hellenism of various sorts in Rome by Sulla's time, then we can be fairly certain that these know-nothing passages are meant to be funny.

Alongside these satirical passages, however, may be placed a different set of passages exemplifying quite another and more serious approach to the problem of Greek culture in Rome. Few people nowadays would read *pro Archia* as it was long read, as a panegyric to the ennobling value of poetry and of Greek poetry in particular, but it is worth reminding ourselves of just how un-panegyrical Cicero's estimation of Greek poetry is. After presenting briefly a narrative of Archias' formal claim to Roman citizenship (4–11),[13] Cicero makes his major argument, which is based on the utility rather than the innocence of his client. In the first place (12–13), poetry (or, more generally, the life of the mind, *doctrina*) provides a method of relaxation: others go to parties or play games; why should Cicero not devote an equal amount of time to letters? That is all the more true because it is useful in his public life (13–14): the edifying tales and images that encourage virtue are contained in books. It is true, he concedes (15–16), that many great Romans

11. On the appearance of Greek statues in Rome, see the collection of material in Pollitt 1978.
12. The earlier occurrence of *epigramma* is at 2 *Verr.* 4.127 (the statue of Sappho, discussed below). Other formations of the type *longiusculus* are *putidiusculi* ('just a little more revolting', *Fam.* 7.5.3), *maiuscula* ('just a little bigger', *Fam.* 9.10.3), and *meliuscule* ('just a little better', *Fam.* 16.5.1, *Att.* 4.6.2).
13. The argument is, of course, suspect; and it may well be the case that the elaborate defence of Archias as poet is meant to screen the weakness of the argument for Archias as citizen. For a recent discussion, see Narducci 1997, 3–7.

have not been exactly intellectual giants, but the highest standard of behaviour, 'something glorious and unique' (*nescio quid praeclarum ac singulare*), arises from the combination of nature and *doctrina*; and even the weaker case of the value of letters for relaxation is strong enough. In what is perhaps the most frequently quoted sentence of the speech, Cicero tells us that literature (*litterae*) belongs to all ages and seasons: it delights us in youth and age, prosperity and adversity, at home and abroad. All very well; but what has this to do with Archias, or indeed specifically with Greek poetry? Even if we are not literary souls, we are delighted by the demonstration of mental agility as much as, or even more than, by the physical arts of a Roscius. Archias is astonishingly accomplished in this respect (18): 'How often have I seen Archias extemporize a great number of verses on the affairs of the day; how often have I seen him give an encore on the same subject without repeating himself at all!' A remarkable skill, and one which might well enliven a long dinner party.

This is not, from a modern point of view, the most compelling argument in favour of the study of Greek or the support of Greek poets. And from Archias the after-dinner entertainment we move to a more significant instance of the utility of his poetry (passing over the argument that both Greeks and Romans have always respected poets, even dead ones, 18–19): for a long time, he has devoted his talents to the praise of Roman glory, and even the un-poetic Marius found him pleasant. We all like to be praised; and Archias' epic on the Mithridatic war, although concentrating on Lucullus, necessarily extends the fame and glory of the Roman people (21). Nor should we be dubious because Archias writes in Greek rather than Latin (23): you may be surprised to learn that throughout the world Greek is almost universally known, while Latin has fairly narrow geographical limits.

Indeed, Greek poetry is a wonderful thing—but not on the grounds that we use to encourage our students to study Greek or even to read Aeschylus in translation. It is not its ideas or its beauties that matter; it is certainly not that we have anything to *learn* from a Greek poet. But it has considerable instrumental value: it can be entertaining; it serves to extend the reputation of Rome to the great mass of people who have never been lucky enough to study Latin; and, perhaps more seriously, it provides the orator himself with some of the literary tools that enhance this very speech.[14] Archias should be acquitted because he gives good value for money.

The argument of *pro Archia* is a simple one—or is it? It seems to me that there are at least four ways to understand the significance of Cicero's choice of arguments about the value of Archias:

14. For Archias' help to Cicero as an orator, see *Arch.* 1–2.

1. The traditional account, that Cicero is in fact proclaiming the cultural value of humane letters, and of Greek poetry in particular. This approach can be seen in more than one way, of course—but in any case, as I hope my summary above has made clear, it bears little resemblance to the actual content of the speech.
2. What one might call a Hellenist's (or groundling's) account: that Cicero wants seriously (like any sensible person) to extol the intrinsic importance of Greek culture, but that in front of simple Romans he must necessarily endorse its instrumental, not its absolute value.[15]
3. What might be called the satirical account: that, because (given the make-up of the court and the nature of the case) the result of the trial was a foregone conclusion, Cicero felt free to indulge his whimsy and offer a tongue-in-cheek version of what a practical Roman could be expected to believe about the worth of Greek poetry, despite his (and his audience's) real aesthetic appreciation of Greek literature—that the speech is meant to be as entertaining to the jury as he claims Archias' poetry is to Lucullus' dinner-guests.[16]
4. The approach I want to take here, which I will call (for reasons that will become clear later) the Burkean account, that Cicero genuinely believes that the value of cultural artefacts such as poetry is indeed instrumental, that in the context of Roman values the *only* significant justification for intellectual activity is its social utility. That is not to say that one cannot enjoy Greek poetry for its own sake; but it is to say that the only defence for its presence at Rome rests on the social context in which it is deployed. Perhaps this is too extreme a position; and I am still inclined to believe that, at least in the account of Archias as dinner theatre, there is a significant element of satire in the speech. In order to make my interpretation clearer, I want to look at the parallel account in the *Fourth Verrine* of the value of Greek art.

As noted above, the *Fourth Verrine* begins in a satirical mode, with Cicero's mock-ignorance of the names of the most famous Greek sculptors. But what is most significant in the speech is the way in which he presents Verres' thefts of works of art.[17] The *Fourth Verrine* is divided into two roughly equal parts, the first concerning thefts from individuals (3–71), the second generally those from cities and temples (72–151). Within that, the organization is

15. So Narducci 1997, 3–18.
16. I advanced this interpretation of *pro Archia* (and other speeches) in Zetzel 1993. It has not met with wide approval (see, for example, Riggsby 1999) and I suspect that it was overstated.
17. For what follows, see particularly Vasaly 1993, 104–30, to whose excellent analysis (in the service of a different argument) I owe much.

geographical and deals with thefts of increasing importance: from Messana to Lilybaeum to the theft of the candelabrum destined for the Capitol from the sons of Antiochus; from Segesta and lesser cities to the temple of Ceres at Enna to Syracuse, culminating in Cicero's speech before the Syracusan senate, and ending, with ring-composition, back at Messana. In order to make the thefts more serious, Cicero emphasizes the religious worth, rather than the cash value, of the purloined works of art. What is more, he stresses the Roman connections of various statues: that the candelabrum was destined for dedication at Rome, and that many of the statues taken from Syracuse had been (re-)placed there by Scipio and Marcellus: hence, the thefts are both sacrilegious, and thefts not from Greeks, but from the heritage of the great Roman generals who had adorned the cities of Sicily.

Issues of public and private, religious and secular, the behaviour of Roman magistrates past and present dominate the speech. The opening story, the theft from Heius of Messana—Verres' most favoured Sicilian city—includes within it most of the important elements of Cicero's technique. Heius, indeed, was (like most Greeks) overly fond of art; but the statues Verres coveted most were in fact religious objects, kept in Heius' private shrine, his *sacrarium*. Among them was a Cupid by Praxiteles, the twin of which was at Thespiae. That statue had been left in its place by L. Mummius on religious grounds, despite the fact that he appropriated all the secular art in the city (4).[18] The contrast with Verres is clear, as is the pointed comparison with another previous Roman magistrate, C. Claudius, who had borrowed this very statue from Heius for his aedilician games in 99 BCE—but had returned it to its rightful owner. Here Cicero makes the contrast explicit: it is not long since Roman magistrates decorated the Forum not with stolen art, but with loans from their friends, which they duly returned instead of taking them for the adornment of their own homes (6).[19]

As the speech continues, the comparisons between proper and improper behaviour, and between Romans past and Verres present, become even more pointed. Cicero begins his account of Verres' thefts of public property from the statue of Diana at Segesta (72ff.). It had been taken from its home by the Carthaginians, and returned to Segesta after the Second Punic War by Scipio Africanus. Scipio, as Cicero reports the views of the Segestans, had wanted it to be a memorial of the victory of the Roman people. Despite that, Verres took it—and when the inscription on the empty base of the statue reminded

18. It is perhaps a small indication of Cicero's respect for the aesthetic value of art that he claims that the statue by Praxiteles was the only sensible reason for anyone to go to Thespiae.

19. See Pollitt 1978; Rawson 1985, 193–200. Cicero's strong distinction between public and private display of Greek statues is clearly not the whole story; for a thorough discussion of Greek art in Rome before the first century, see Gruen 1992, 84–130.

everyone of what had been there, and of its Roman connections, Verres removed that too (74). A sacred statue of a virgin goddess, a gift of Scipio and a reminder of Rome's victory over Carthage, was transported to the licentious home of the disgraceful Verres (83). As the list of thefts goes on, it becomes clear that Verres was clever enough to remove the inscribed statue base at Segesta only because the inscription was in Latin: he did not know enough to remove the base of the statue of Sappho at Syracuse, because it was a Greek epigram (127).

It would serve no purpose to go through the techniques Cicero uses to magnify the enormity of Verres' thefts, and the way in which (for his own political or rhetorical purposes) he portrays himself as the true imitator of Rome's heroes, Scipio and Marcellus, unlike their degenerate descendants.[20] What is worth considering here is not what Verres did wrong—he did, after all, appropriate a great deal of valuable art—but what others did right, and what Cicero considers the proper treatment of the physical remains of Greek culture. In important respects, his view of the use of Greek plastic arts is clearly parallel to his praise of Greek literature in the *pro Archia*. In the first place, most serious art, even when in private hands, has a religious function: the Greeks may value these statues at least in part because of the fame and skill of the artists or the price of the statues, but people visit them above all because of their sacred function. Proper Romans respect and retain that function: even when they appropriate cult statues from Greece or Sicily, they dedicate them in temples in Rome. Second, Romans other than Verres and a few of his friends firmly maintain the distinction between public and private: whatever they have captured is displayed for the adornment of Rome, not locked away in their own homes. [21] Finally, and most important, Roman generals have made use of Greek statues, through the intelligent use of dedicatory inscriptions, to remind their subjects of both Rome's beneficence and its power. They left statues of great value and artistic merit in place among Rome's subjects 'so that people who take delight in things that seem trivial to us, would retain them as a source of pleasure and a consolation for their enslavement' (*ut illi, quibus haec iucunda sunt quae nobis leuia uidentur, haberent haec oblectamenta et solacia seruitutis*, 134).

As in the case of *pro Archia*, more than one interpretation of Cicero's attitude here is possible: in terms of the political circumstances and rhetorical exigencies of the speech, from the point of view of the imagined reader (or even more imaginary hearer) or from the supposed intentions of

20. See Vasaly 1993, 117–20.
21. See Pollitt 1978. It should be noted that the truthfulness of Cicero's account is not at issue here: he is offering a normative view, not an accurate description of Roman practice, and he and his friends clearly violated the norm themselves.

the author. What is clear, however, is that it is a coherent attitude, and one consistent with that displayed in the later speech: neither the aesthetic worth nor the cash value of these objects is as important as their value in use; they are to be deployed in the context of, and in support of, Roman aims and values. That is not to suggest either that these works of art had no aesthetic value or that Cicero was unaware of it; merely that it is not an absolute value, but one that is altogether subordinate to social utility and civic function.

The Perils of Philosophy

At this point we can turn back to *de Oratore* and consider more carefully the particular problems raised by the acceptance of Greek rhetoric and philosophy at Rome. While the speeches for Archias and against Verres offer an implicit theory of how Greek art can best be employed, *de Oratore* both develops a comparable theory more explicitly and simultaneously describes and demonstrates the practical application of such a theory. Perhaps the most explicit descriptive passage of the dialogue in this connection is Cicero's preface to Book II, describing the 'real'—or at least real within the fiction of the dialogue—and the public characters of Crassus and Antonius. Both men, Cicero reports, were extremely well educated in Greek learning; Crassus spoke Greek so well that he seemed not to know any other language, Antonius had heard the lectures of Greek scholars in Athens and Rhodes. Crassus, however, wished to appear to despise what he had learned, and to prefer the practical wisdom (*prudentia*) of the Romans to the Greeks in all areas, while Antonius thought that he would be more successful as a speaker before a Roman audience if he appeared never to have learned it at all (2.2–4). And while Crassus and Antonius are portrayed as differing somewhat about the extent and uses of Greek learning in Roman oratory, for both men familiarity with Greek learning (particularly rhetoric and philosophy) was an important element in their greatness as speakers, as they repeatedly demonstrate in the course of the dialogue. At the same time, Roman circumstances and a Roman audience demanded apparent scorn or ignorance. That in fact one may question the historical accuracy of these descriptions is beside the point: Cicero is not presenting ignorance of Greek learning as a positive ideal; he is raising questions about the contexts in which it is useful to display it. Crassus himself takes up precisely that question in the discussion with Catulus that immediately follows Cicero's introduction, in which Catulus' use of the word 'inept' (*ineptus*) leads Crassus to discourse on the importance of being *aptus*, 'appropriate'. The Greeks, he says, are extraordinarily learned, but they are completely *inepti*, to such an

extent that they do not even recognize the concept of ineptness, or have a word for it (2.17–18), but speak in nit-picking detail on any subject, whatever the context. The previous day's discussion had reduced Crassus to the same level of ineptitude—if not quite as low as the incident of the Peripatetic Phormio lecturing to Hannibal on the duties of a general.

The introduction to Crassus' discussion of rhetoric in Book 1, to which this passage alludes, makes the same point in different and more heated terms. When Sulpicius fatuously asks Crassus whether he thinks that there is such a thing as a 'science' of oratory, *ars dicendi* (1.102), Crassus explodes, and accuses Sulpicius of setting some nit-picking academic question (*quaestiuncula*) as if he were some talkative and lazy Greekling (*Graeculo otioso et loquaci*). He claims that he has always despised the arrogance of people (Gorgias being the first) who claimed to be able to talk about any subject at all; and if Cotta and Sulpicius really wanted such ill-informed speech, they should find a Greek, such as Staseas the house-Peripatetic of Pupius Piso (103–4). The incredible speed with which Crassus runs through the elements of Greek rhetorical theory early in his speech ('commonplace precepts', *communia et contrita praecepta,* as he calls them) reinforces this, as do the repeated discussions of Hermagorean rhetoric, the doctrines of *thesis* and *hypothesis* and of *stasis*: theoretical analysis has its uses, but they are limited, and they verge rapidly on the trivial.[22] All the speakers place greater emphasis on particular cases and historical examples than on abstract theory, and so do the structure and shape of the dialogue itself: both Cicero and his speakers believe that the 'science' of rhetoric (*ars rhetorica*) should be derived from practical experience and that those who simply rely on the *ars* do not produce effective rhetoric.

The emphasis on practical experience rather than theoretical study provides the context in which Crassus places what may be the most notorious statement in the entire work—at least for those who believe automatically in the supremacy of Greek philosophy: the assertion that the one little volume of the Twelve Tables surpasses the libraries of all the philosophers both in the weight of its authority and in the wealth of its utility (*et auctoritatis pondere et utilitatis ubertate,* 1.195). That is so, if not in its actual contents, then in the sources of its jurisprudence—a passage that leads directly to the account of

22. For Crassus' abbreviated textbook of rhetoric, see 1.137–47.

the trial of Rutilius Rufus later in the book.[23] There are, of course, two arguments linked in the passage about the Twelve Tables. On the one hand, Cicero is arguing for the primacy of law and the wisdom gained by experience (*prudentia*) over philosophical wisdom (*sapientia*) as the bearer of morality (an argument that is taken up again in the preface of *de Re publica*);[24] on the other hand, he is arguing, within the context of legal *prudentia*, for the superiority of the Roman legislators over their Greek equivalents. The latter argument does not play a large part either in Cicero's argument or my own; that the Romans were better lawgivers than the Greeks was obvious, from the longevity as well as the success of Rome. Only Lycurgan Sparta, in the philosophical tradition at least, had any claim to equivalent success.

It is the argument for social as opposed to philosophical wisdom—for *phronêsis* over *sophia*, for *prudentia* over *sapientia*—that concerns me here, because it also implies a historical argument about the development of Greek thought and its proper place in Rome, one that is elaborated later in *de Oratore*.[25] In beginning his account of stylistic elaboration (*ornate dicere*) under the broader rubric of language (*elocutio*), Crassus (as is his habit) takes a very broad perspective. The true orator, he says, must be familiar with *everything* 'in human life', *in hominum uita*. That is a familiar argument, repeated essentially from the opening of Book 1; but the next step is not so easy: 'For eloquence is one of the highest virtues; and although all virtues are equal, some varieties are more beautiful and glorious than others; and eloquence is one of those' (3.55). Crassus is not here making an equation between virtues and talents: his point is rather (as he goes on to make clear) that true oratory is a moral as well as an intellectual activity, one that requires good character as well as eloquence.[26] The greater the oratorical skill, Crassus says, the more it must be combined with moral excellence (*probitas*) and practical wisdom (*prudentia*); and if we train in oratory people

23. The introductory 'even if everyone howls' (*fremant omnes licet*) and the qualification that Crassus introduces, referring to the sources rather than the text of the Twelve Tables, show that Cicero was well aware of the hyperbole of the claim—which indeed is further complicated by the fact that he also believed (see *Leg.* 2.59) that parts of the Twelve Tables were themselves derived from Solon's laws. It is, however, quite clear from the argument in *Rep.* 4 (see Zetzel 2001) that Cicero did believe in the moral and intellectual superiority of Roman legal and customary institutions to their Greek equivalents. On Crassus' comment on the Twelve Tables (and indeed on Hellenism in *de Oratore* in general) see Gruen 1992, 264–8. Gruen believes more than I do in the reliability of Cicero's account of Crassus and Antonius, but the truth of Cicero's portrait is not relevant to my argument. Where I differ significantly from Gruen is in arguing that Cicero's own attitude is not very different from that which he ascribes to Crassus.
24. See *Rep.* 1.2.
25. For analysis of Crassus' 'excursus' (3.52–143), see Barwick 1963, 34–70.
26. The argument is taken up from *Inv.* 1.1. On the argument about moral eloquence and its later history, see Skinner 1996, 66–110.

who do not have these virtues, 'we will not make them orators, but will give weapons to madmen' (*non eos quidem oratores effecerimus, sed furentibus quaedam arma dederimus*, 3.55). For the early Greeks, he goes on, the name given to moral speech was 'philosophy' *sapientia*,[27] and it is as applicable to the early Roman statesmen (Coruncanius, Fabricius, Cato, Scipio) as to the early Greek sages (Lycurgus, Pittacus, Solon).

What follows is a complex account of the development of Greek 'philosophy' (in the broadest sense) that considers simultaneously two different, but related questions: one is the issue of what kind of philosophical training, in the present state of the philosophical schools (early first century BCE), is most useful for an orator. To that, the answer is easy—either the sceptical Academy, with its habit of arguing against all positions, or the Peripatos, with its habit of developing arguments on either side of a question (3.67–71). The other, which I believe is the underlying and more important issue, is that of the relationship of 'philosophy' in general to the public world, and here Crassus has a story to tell in which the undoubted villain is Socrates. Although even before Socrates' time, there were idle sorts who devoted themselves (as some others do to dice and other games—see *pro Archia*) to speculative philosophy or to the arts and sciences, there were nevertheless until the end of the fifth century significant numbers of people (Themistocles, Pericles and Theramenes) who practised 'philosophy' in the old sense as applied to the Seven Sages. It was Socrates, and relying on him Plato and others, who separated the study of public language from the study of ideas; it was, as he says, 'a sort of separation of tongue from heart' (*discidium . . . quasi linguae et cordis*, 3.61). From that point on, rhetoric became trivial and technical—and philosophy, with the two exceptions noted above, became irresponsible or incomprehensible. Any orator now who devotes himself purely to the study of rhetoric will be a mere technician, devoid of greatness and thought; hence, it is necessary for the true orator to try to reunite the tongue and the heart, to practise a philosophical rhetoric.

The sordid history of the divorce of rhetoric from philosophy can be read, quite simply, as an unfortunate by-product of human nature (either laziness or the effects of power) in the context of increasing prosperity and the division of labour; that is also how the rise of oratory at Rome seems to be treated in the very brief introductory account at 1.13–15. In that sense, it is not a peculiarly Greek phenomenon and can be paralleled, for instance, in Adam Smith's introduction of 'philosophy' as an example of the division of

27. In other words, the term later used for 'philosophy'; Cicero is here following Dicaearchus. See *Rep.* 1.12 with Zetzel 1995 ad loc.

labour.[28] On the other hand, Cicero in the introduction and Crassus in Book 3 both view it as having happened both earlier and more thoroughly in Greece, and they are both aware of its actual and potential effects in Rome. In Book 3, Crassus begins from the unity of 'philosophy', and gives examples from both Greece and Rome; but the account of the divorce omits Rome, and is clearly intended to leave the impression that the same thing did not happen there so early (because of the differences between Greek and Roman morality, character and government). As he says at the end of his discussion (3.137), 'just as we should take examples of morality from Romans, so we take examples of learning from Greeks'—and repeats his admiration for the Seven Sages, the first and most perfect examples of true *sapientia*. *All* Romans, albeit without the level of theoretical sophistication of their Greek counterparts, maintained the unity of moral and intellectual virtues unreflectively, up to a point; and that point was, precisely, the encounter of Rome with the later, and less homogeneous, culture of Greece in the second century. Crassus is adamantly opposed to technical rhetorical training, in the narrow sense, in Latin: whatever the real reason, that is how Cicero understands Crassus' expulsion of the Latin rhetors in 92.[29] For Crassus, if not for Cicero himself (a question I will turn to in a moment), the rise of *Greek* learning in Rome is accompanied by the decline of *Roman* morality: in the very last paragraph of the dialogue before the concluding praise of Hortensius, he remarks of the Gracchi that as things are now (in 91), we long to have citizens similar to those whom our parents could not endure (3.226).

Cicero's historical pessimism in *de Oratore*, though important for the interpretation of the dialogue, is not my immediate concern here so much as the part played in that pessimistic account by the increasing presence of Greek culture in Rome. The true Roman orator, in Cicero's view (and it is worth remembering that the dialogue is not about rhetoric but about the orator himself) is not simply, as Greek rhetorical theory would have it, a master of technique, but, in Cato's famous phrase, 'a good man who has skill in speaking' (*uir bonus dicendi peritus*); and above all, he is a statesman. Antonius, early in Book 2, says that the orator must be placed 'in the public assembly, before the eyes of his fellow-citizens' (*in foro atque in oculis ciuium*, 2.41); near the end (2.337) he emphasizes the orator's role as a public statesman, who must know the commonwealth, the *res publica*. Crassus, in the course of his discussion of the Greek philosophical schools, says that the subject of his inquiry is the man 'whom we want to be the source of public counsel, the leader in the direction of the state, and the first in opinions and

28. Smith 1976, 14. On the Peripatetic background to Cicero's account, see Schütrumpf 1990, 318–20.
29. See Gruen 1992, 265.

oratory in the senate, before the people, and in public trials' (3.63). The orator is someone who can use rhetoric for the public good: to separate the heart from the tongue, in the manner of Socrates, is monstrous—and distinctly Greek.

When I Hear the Word 'Culture' . . .

The moral qualities of the orator may seem to be a long way from the problem of where to locate Greek statues in Rome or how best to employ Greek poets, and indeed they are: my three cases are drawn from different contexts and Cicero's arguments have different purposes. Nevertheless, the attitudes represented by all three texts are consistent, and what they represent is, to give it perhaps too grand or too modern a name, a sociology of culture. Anthropologies of culture are not uncommon in antiquity: Dicaearchus, Varro, and Book 5 of Lucretius all provide examples.[30] Sociology of culture is, I think, rather rarer: indeed, I can think of no one other than Cicero who asks, and attempts to answer, the question of what work cultural artefacts perform and should perform in Roman society. Cicero's approach is both comparative—Greek compared to Roman—and normative: a view that cultural activity, unless produced by and consonant with the social and ethical values of society, is not only meaningless, but dangerous. In this, perhaps, he shows an Aristotelian bias in favor of the civic and moral contexts of intellectual activity: anyone who does not live in a polis is, as we know, either a god or a beast, and the purpose of the polis is to foster the acquisition of both moral and intellectual virtues.[31] In Greece, according to Cicero, the development of intellectual activity as a self-contained and self-justifying discourse led on the one hand either to excessive aestheticism or technical obscurantism, on the other to the undermining of social values. There is nothing wrong with poetry or art or rhetorical theory in themselves—as long as it is recognized that they must, to be acceptable, contribute to the reinforcement of societal values: to enhance the public spaces (or temples) of Rome; to celebrate the values and presence of Roman rule; to supply the technique by which a statesman can support Roman values. Ultimately, it is not the *source* of such things that matters, but the context which they serve. Cicero is said by Seneca to have claimed that, if he had another lifetime, he would still not have time to read Greek lyric

30. See Cole 1990.
31. The clearest statement of this is in the last chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a33–1181b23.

poetry:[32] that is not because he did not like poetry (he obviously did) but because it has no possible social context in his world. That is perhaps also the underlying reason for his rejection of Alexandrian influences in Roman poetry: the attempt to separate poetry from society is, quite simply, pernicious, and leads to a devaluation of *both* poetry *and* society. Cicero's own procedure in *de Oratore* illustrates his view: although it is thoroughly imbued with Greek philosophy and rhetorical theory, the dialogue deliberately and insistently subordinates its models and sources to the practical purposes of Roman statesmen. We have not rhetoric but the Roman orator; not Socrates (or even worse, Hermagoras of Temnos) but Crassus; a textbook of rhetoric (*ars rhetorica*) that is both formally included within the dialogue and constantly distorted and deferred in favour of Roman law and Roman exempla. Cicero's pillows cushion Rome from the naked irrelevance of Greek theorists—or perhaps they somehow protect the Greeks from the scorn and contempt which their theorizing deserves. There is, of course, also a distinct and perhaps deliberate irony in Cicero's choice of Platonic form: to disparage Socrates he pays homage to Plato's own consummate combination of rhetoric and ethics.

The Influence of Burke on Cicero

We—particularly Hellenists, but to a certain extent all of us—are inclined to reject Cicero's moralizing of cultural values as somehow boorish or reactionary, or indeed as representative of a general Roman disdain for and incomprehension of art and literature and the free play of the intellect. We believe in such things as artistic freedom and free speech. Such beliefs are important to us; but it is worth remembering that they too are contingent and very modern: they depend on a Romantic notion of art, an Enlightenment emphasis on reason, and a Liberal (in the nineteenth-century sense) definition of freedom as negative liberty—and none of these is particularly applicable in Cicero's Rome.[33]

To illustrate this, I want to draw a parallel between Cicero and that most Ciceronian writer of English prose, Edmund Burke, who in 1790 in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* offered an analysis of the difference between British and French societies which is curiously similar to Cicero's

32. Seneca *Epist.* 49.5 = *de Re publica* 4.9b. This attitude towards deracinated poetry is also apparent in his views of Lucretius; cf. Zetzel 1998.

33. For a recent account of Roman (and neo-Roman) liberty, see Skinner 1998.

understanding of the differences between Rome and Greece. Drawing on the common-law tradition of the Ancient Constitution, he elevates habit and experience over reason and British common sense over French cleverness.[34] He views society as a contract not in Rousseau's sense, but as a partnership extending over time and created by a common experience and shared history, a community which, among other things, animates and is animated by the cultural, religious and moral values which it defines and which define it (85). Letters, in particular, are a product of the aristocratic and religious heritage which gives them meaning:

> 'Learning paid back what it received to nobility and to priesthood, and paid it with usury, by enlarging their ideas and furnishing their minds. Happy if they had all continued to know their indissoluble union and their proper place! Happy if learning, not debauched by ambition, had been satisfied to continue the instructor, and not aspired to be the master!' (69)

For Burke, an important cause of the improvement of British government and institutions over time is 'our not despising the patrimony of knowledge which was left us by our forefathers' (88). Some of his most scathing passages are devoted to attacks on the French Enlightenment and the *Encyclopédie* in particular—a 'barbarous philosophy' (68) produced by a literary cabal, detached from the established order of society and devoted to the elevation of individual reason over common sense, decency and tradition.

Burke, of course, though a Ciceronian, is not Cicero,[35] and the political concerns of the Rockingham Whigs are clearly not the same as those of first-century Romans. But in certain respects, I believe, the comparison is valid. The values of civic republicanism—the politics of virtue and property, the responsibilities of positive liberty, the subordination of independent reason to communal goals and historical experience—are as important for Cicero as they are for Machiavelli or Harrington or Montesquieu or Burke, even though the particular mechanisms and goals of each are clearly contingent on the particular circumstances of their societies.[36] In terms of culture, moreover, Cicero and Burke have precisely the same idea: that art, like philosophy, is a part of the society which produces it and gives it meaning, and that intellect divorced from social responsibility is pernicious: free radicals have no place in the world of either one. This is not an endorsement

34. For the interpretation of Burke given here, I rely on Pocock 1989, 202–32 and Pocock 1987. All page references to Burke are to Pocock 1987.
35. It should be noted, however, that in the *Reflections* he quotes several Ciceronian texts, including the *Somnium Scipionis*, *pro Sestio*, *de Legibus* and *de Senectute*.
36. For my understanding of civic republicanism, I am greatly indebted to Pocock 1975.

of mindless jingoism or propaganda; it is simply the recognition that one cannot undermine one's own foundations and still have a place to stand. Burke did not reject French culture (other than the Enlightenment) as a part of French society, nor did Cicero reject Greek culture in its own proper context: the Roman L. Gellius Publicola, who attempted to resolve the disputes of the Hellenistic schools by offering to arbitrate among them as a Roman magistrate (*Leg.* 1.53), is just as inept as Phormio the Peripatetic advising Hannibal on military matters. The point is rather that Greek or Roman culture—*any* culture—is a social phenomenon, and achieves meaning and significance only in and for a social context. How then, to accommodate the obviously increasing presence of Greek art and letters in Rome, other than somehow to make it Roman, or at the very least to employ it usefully in the service of Rome? In *de Oratore*, as later in *de Re publica*, Cicero gave a considered argument for the position that is demonstrated in his earlier speeches: that Greek learning, which had been deracinated by excessive cleverness from its own society, could only be rescued, or even understood, by anchoring it once more in a social and moral context—in the service of Roman tradition and Roman values. It embodies the proud claim that Romans can use Greek traditions better than the Greeks can themselves; and in certain respects, it is hard to disagree with Cicero in this. If Cicero's political and personal difficulties in the 40s turned him to a closer study of more technical aspects of Greek philosophy and rhetoric, he still explained it as a form of public service. It is notable that at those moments (not only in the 50s, but after the Ides of March) when he thought that he could have greater public influence, his philosophy has a far more evident Roman application than in the intervening works. Cicero's approach is obviously not that of some of his contemporaries; but it is one that dominates Augustan literature and remained influential for a very long time. In *The Assayer*, Galileo showed (in A.E. Housman's paraphrase) that 'in order to boil eggs by whirling them around your head, as the Babylonians did, it is necessary to be a Babylonian';[37] Cicero argues that in order to be a clever Greek intellectual, you must first be a Greek.

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37. Galileo in Drake 1957, 272; Housman 1926, xvii n.

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