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Rhetoric and Philosophy from Cicero to Adam Smith: Tropes, Dialogue, Self-Division

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Abstract

Building on Cicero's works and on Ernesto Grassi's *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* (1980), my paper traces three elements of the rhetorical tradition through to the eighteenth-century philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith: *sensus communis* and its relation to the metaphoric activity of grasping similarity in dissimilarity; the philosophical-rhetorical use of dialogue in its strict sense; and inner dialogue as a social mode of self-knowledge.

Adam Potkay: *Rhetoric and Philosophy from Cicero to Adam Smith: Tropes, Dialogue, Self-Division*[1]

I. Two Inspirations: Cicero and Grassi

In the Latin tradition, rhetoric and moral philosophy are closely related. When Cicero speaks of oratory he often passes into ethics: for "who can exhort people to virtue more passionately than the orator, and who can call them back from vice more vigorously?" This question is posed by the character Antonius in Cicero's philosophical dialogue, *De Oratore* ("On the Orator").[2] Antonius admits that oratory might not be an art (ars) "in the full sense of the word" because "the whole activity of the orator is based not on knowledge but on opinions."[3] Yet he continues: "although we may not be dealing with an art, yet there is nothing more magnificent than the perfect orator. For, to pass over the practical utility of oratory, which reigns supreme in every peaceful and free community, the faculty of speaking by itself provides such delight that there is nothing that can give a more pleasant impression [iucundius percipi] either to the human ear or to the human mind."[4] For Antonius, oratory is aligned with magnificence, with the politics of freemen, with what we'd now call aesthetics, and, most crucially, with moral insight and suasion.

While Antonius's comments pertain to deliberative and judicial oratory, they appear within a philosophical dialogue, a form that Cicero also thought of as rhetorical. At the outset of the epistolary treatise *De Officiis* ("Of Duties" or "Of Obligations"), Cicero encourages his son "to read not only my speeches, but also the philosophical works," and thus to cultivate his taste for "both forensic oratory and also the other, quieter, sort of debating."[5] Both sorts of debating are relevant to what Cicero identifies as the first principle "of human fellowship and community": "reason and speech, which reconcile men to one another, through teaching, learning, communicating, debating, and making judgments." For Cicero, the arts that bind us – he thinks foremost of ethics, politics, and religion as well as, or as parts of, rhetoric – involve us

[1] This paper was presented at the conference "Registers of Philosophy III.," May 13, 2017, Budapest, organized by the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Pázmány Péter Catholic University.
[2] Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator* (English translation of *De Oratore*), ed. and trans. by James M. May and Jakob Wisse, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 133, 2.35.
[3] *On the Ideal Orator* 132, 2.30, 2.32. Cf. on rhetoric as a dunamis, not a techne – Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.ii.1,. For Aristotle ethics is similarly a practical rather than a theoretical discipline, its purpose being to guide conduct.
[4] *On the Ideal Orator*, 132-33, 2.33. I have consulted Cicero's Latin in the Loeb Classical Library edition.
[5] Cicero: *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 2, 1.3.

more or less in the realm of opinion or uncertain knowledge, and are thus suited to rhetorical argumentation, including arguing both sides of an issue: Cicero's utramque partem dicere.[6] He continues in *De Officiis*: "where other men say that some things are certain and others uncertain, we [as moderate Skeptics] disagree with them and say rather that some things are persuasive and others not […]. We argue against every opinion on the grounds that what is in fact persuasive could not be revealed unless the two competing sides of each case had been heard."[7]

In addition to abiding interest in Cicero, my inspiration for revisiting Latin-rhetorical modes of philosophy has been Ernesto Grassi's *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*, written in English and published in the US (Pennsylvania State University Press) in 1980. Grassi, born 1902 in Milan and died 1991 in Munich, was during the 1930s a colleague of Heidegger's at Freiburg, breaking with him, on his own account, "because of his behavior in regard to his Jewish friends".[8] Grassi's project is partly influenced by Heidegger's, but whereas Heidegger famously looked back to archaic Greek thought, the Italian born and trained Grassi grounded his own project in the Latin rhetorical tradition and in Renaissance Italian Humanism. As Donald Verene writes, for Grassi, "thinking was an act of sensus communis, a communally making sense together," building upon topoi or commonplaces to "think further," and to think not in timeless concepts but rather in the concrete, ongoing metaphoric activity of grasping similarity in dissimilarity.[9]

Grassi traces the phrase sensus communis from Latin literature through to the early eighteenth-century English philosopher, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury.[10] Shaftesbury's essay *Sensus Communis* (1709) posits that all discussion of "Morality and Religion" is dependent on "Common Sense" or common "Opinion and Judgment."[11] Shaftesbury derives the Latin term sensus communis from the Greek koinonoemosunē,[12] but this latter term is a neologism coined much later by the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius writing in Greek his

[6] Variants of the phrase "utramque partem dicere" appear in Cicero's *De Finibus* 5.10 and *Orator ad M. Brutus* 46.
[7] Cicero: *On Duties*, 65, 2.7-8.
[8] Ernesto Grassi: *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition,* University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1980, 3.
[9] Quoted from Donald Verene: "Response to W. David Hall's Essay on Grassi," https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/072010/Verene%20Hall%20Response.pdf
[10] Grassi: *Rhetoric as Philosophy,* 17.
[11] Shaftesbury: *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Philip Ayres, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, volume 1, 46. Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* is a (2 volume) collection that integrates five distinct works, in order, *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm; Sensus Communis; Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author; An Inquiry into Virtue, or Merit*; and *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody*.
[12] Shaftesbury: *Characteristicks,* volume 1, 58-59.

Meditations [Ton Eis Eauton] 1.16. Marcus's koinonoemosunē is a compound of koinos, common + noēma, thought + sunē, ness – that is, "common thought-ed-ness," as distinct from the more common Greek term homonoia. Yet the Latin sensus communis can also be translated, as Shaftesbury's sources note, as "Sense of Publick Weal, and of the Common Interest; Love of the Community or Society."[13] From the Romans to Shaftesbury and finally to Grassi, sensus communis refers to an irreducibly social and potentially disinterested means of knowing, as well as to how we know about sociality and morality. As such, sensus communis is related to the rhetorical tradition, the approximate art of persuading others in concrete social and political contexts.[14]

Grassi concludes *Rhetoric as Philosophy* in two ways: first, by contrasting "rational speech" and rhetorical speech; second, by linking rhetorical language's social meaning-making to a fundamentally metaphoric meaning-making, the discovery of similarities in dissimilarity. Grassi writes:

> Rational speech is that which strictly, "mathematically" explains or "infers" what is implied in the premises. This speech is "monological" in its deepest structure, for it is not bothered by emotion or place and time determinations in its rational process; it follows the ideal of philosophizing that Descartes created for us.
> Rhetorical speech on the other hand is a "dialogue," that is, that which breaks out with vehemence in the urgency of the particular human situation and "here" and "now" begins to form a specifically human order in the confrontation with other human beings. And because the material belonging to language consists in the interpretation of the meaning of sensory appearances – for the main thing is to order and form these – it is laden with figurative expressions, color, sounds, smells, tangibles. It proves in the highest degree to be 'metaphoric' speech […]"[15]

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[13] A. S. L. Farquharson, in his standard edition of and commentary on Marcus Aurelius, writes of koinonoemosunē: "the word is not cited from elsewhere, and may be original. The context shows that M. means sensus communis, considerateness for others" (*The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944, volume 2, 467).
[14] On sensus communis as it extends from Shaftesbury to the rhetoricians Hugh Blair, George Campbell, and Richard Whately, see Lois Peters Agnew: *Outward, Visible Propriety: Stoic Philosophy and Eighteenth-Century British Rhetoric*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008.
[15] Grassi: *Rhetoric as Philosophy*, 113.

Later in this paper, I will address the philosophical-rhetorical use of dialogue in its strict sense, and then inner dialogue as a social mode of self-knowledge. But first I will respond to Grassi's provocation to understand speech, including the speech of philosophy, as fundamentally metaphorical.

II. Tropes of Epistemology

Since classical times, the term trope (Greek, "turn") has been used to describe the grasping of similarity in dissimilarity. Two main types of trope are metaphor and metonymy. A metaphor asserts the identity of two things that are clearly distinct: for example, "love is a rose." A metonymy supposes the identity of a thing and something to which it is more closely related, either by contiguity or by cause and effect: for example, saying "you have my heart" when one literally means "you have my love."

Logically, the tropes of metaphor and metonymy constitute what is known, in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, as a "category mistake":[16] the error of assigning to something a quality or action that can properly be assigned to things only of another category. Early modern philosophers did not always decry tropes, but when they did, they did so with gusto. John Locke influentially expressed the case against figurative eloquence in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689): "all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are a perfect cheat [… Tropes] are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided."[17] Locke here draws on an anti-rhetorical animus that extends back, ultimately, to Plato's *Gorgias*. David Hume, in turn, complains of eloquence in the learned world: "'Tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining

[16] "Category mistakes" are elaborated in the opening chapters of Gilbert Ryle: *The Concept of Mind,* London: Hutchinson, 1949. Ryle argues that philosophy after Descartes mistakenly takes mind, properly a collection of capacities or dispositions, for an object, soul, and one situated in a place: "the ghost in the machine." Ryle accuses Descartes, in effect, of thinking metaphorically.

[17] John Locke: *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 508. In my quotations from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts I have modernized typographical conventions and orthography.

proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours."[18]

However, as critics have argued over the past forty years, tropes or analogies lie at the heart of empiricist epistemology.[19] These critics tend to be influenced by Nietzsche and by later philosophers who, like Grassi, responded to Heidegger – Jacques Derrida prominent among them. In this Nietzschean line, however, metaphor is inherent in, or constitutive of, language. Grassi, by contrast, returns us to the earlier rhetorical understanding of metaphor as an intentional act connecting speakers to auditors, writers to readers, through links of persuasion and reception, implication and inference.[20]

It has been observed of Locke (as later for Hume) that the way in which, according to classical rhetoric, an orator persuades an audience lies behind the empiricist's description of how we acquire beliefs about the external world more generally. Locke uses the term "persuasion" more or less interchangeably with "belief," and treats words, ideas, and material objects as things that similarly "strike the mind with different amounts of force and which compel or correspond with varying amounts of belief."[21] David Hume develops Locke's analysis of belief in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) where, in describing the impact of impressions or ideas upon the mind, he draws upon metaphors developed in classical rhetoric. For Hume the mind is struck with more or less force and liveliness, and a greater or lesser degree of belief ensues. This epistemological scene harkens back to *On the Sublime*, in which Longinus attributes physical "force" (bia) to sublime oratory;[22] in Latin rhetoric, force (vis) is attributed to effective eloquence more generally (see, e.g., the Loeb editions of Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.44.187, and

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[18] David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, xiv.

[19] Literary critics galvanized by (if often critical of) the work of Paul de Man, particularly his essay "The Epistemology of Metaphor" (*Critical Inquiry* 1978/1: 13-30), have variously explored the rhetoric of classical empiricism, chiefly in the writings of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. See John Richetti: *Philosophical Writing: Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983; Jules David Law: *The Rhetoric of Empiricism: Language and Perception from Locke to I. A. Richards*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993; Adam Potkay: *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994; William Walker: *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

[20] I am indebted for this insight to my "Registers of Philosophy" conference commentator, Zsolt Komáromy.

[21] William Walker: "John Locke," in Michael G. Moran (ed.): *Eighteenth-Century British and American Rhetoric and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994, 161.

[22] Aristotle: *Poetics*; Longinus: *On the Sublime*; Demetrius: *On Style*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, Loeb Classical Library, 208, section 12 (Greek text).

Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* 12.10.23).[23] From Aristotle onward, good eloquence also possesses energeia, a term variously translated into English as "vigor," "animation," "actuality," or "viability."[24] Hume appears to have these rhetorical usages in mind when he grants perceptions the necessary "force" and "vivacity" to persuade the mind. According to Hume, direct sensory impressions always command belief, but ideas, in order to do so, must be vivified, either by our mental principles (e.g., associating causes and effects) or by artificial means such as eloquence. Having stated that "belief must please the imagination by means of the force and vivacity which attends it," Hume conversely argues "that belief not only gives vigor to the imagination, but that a vigorous and strong imagination is of all talents the most proper to secure belief and authority. "Tis difficult for us to withhold our assent from what is painted out to us in all the colours of eloquence; and the vivacity produc'd by the fancy is in many cases greater than that which arises from custom and experience".[25]

Even Hume's famous account of sympathy as a mechanism of emotional sharing has rhetorical antecedents. Hume writes: "When I see the effects of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes [a metonymy], and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself" (Hume, 575-76). Hume's doctrine of sympathy corresponds to rhetorical descriptions of "action" or oratorical delivery. In Cicero's *De Oratore*, Crassus maintains that "delivery [actio], which displays the [… "motion," motum] of the soul, affects everyone, because everyone's soul is stirred by the same feelings, and it is through the same signs that people recognize them in others and reveal them in themselves".[26] Cicero's conception of a sympathetic identification between orator and audience is a commonplace of eighteenth-century rhetoric. According to Thomas Gordon's "Of Eloquence, considered philosophically" (*Cato's Letters* no. 104, 1722), "Nothing is so catching and communicative as the passions. The cast of an angry or a pleasant eye will beget anger, or pleasure: One man's anger, or sorrow, or joy, can make a whole assembly

[23] Cicero: *De Oratore*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, volume 1, 332 (Latin text). Quintilian: *Institutio Oratoria*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922, Loeb Classical Library, volume , 462 (Latin text).

[24] On bia/vis and energeia as rhetorical terms of art that influence Hume's epistemology, see Adam Potkay, *The Ideal of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, 17-53; on the career of energeia from Aristotle to Campbell and beyond, see also Alan G. Gross: "The Rhetorical Tradition," in Richard Graff et al. (eds.): *The Viability of the Rhetorical Tradition*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 36-43.

[25] David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 122-23.

[26] Cicero: *De Oratore*, 295, 3.223.

outrageous, or dejected, or merry."[27] This transmission of passion operates pre-semantically, and the orator's sound and gestures may by themselves stir "the human sympathy in our souls"; but "how vastly prevailing must be their [united] force, when it comes arrayed and heightened by a swelling and irresistible tide of words […]?"[28] It is no far cry from Gordon's to Hume's model of sympathetic exchange.

Empiricist philosophy and rhetoric are, in conclusion, inextricable. Rhetorical tropes and persuasion are not just the "cheat" that Locke calls them, but also, and fundamentally, inform accounts of how we perceive, how we share perceptions, and how we come to believe in their truth or reality. We do the latter two things interpersonally, creating common sense together. It is a short step, in this regard, from the tropes of epistemology to the rhetorical form of the dialogue.

III. Dialogue

Ernesto Grassi, we have seen, defends the rhetorical basis of philosophical writing – as imagistic and effective speech, and as dialogic – over the "monologues" of post-Cartesian philosophy. The primacy of dialogue is historical as well: as Shaftesbury notes in *Soliloquy*, the epic poet Homer and the Attic tragedians "were […] well practiced Dialogists […] before ever Philosophy had adopted" the form.[29] Socrates then made the dialogue central to his philosophical inquiries into the beliefs of others, and in so doing, Shaftesbury maintains, inculcated in his pupils "a peculiar Speculative Habit," the habit of "Self-Inspection".[30] Of course, we know Socrates through Plato's pen, and later scholars have distinguished, as Shaftesbury did not, between Plato's early Socratic dialogues, skeptical and open-ended, and his later works, in which dialectic seeks, after initial divisions, transcendent unity and closure – a feature of dialectic still more prominent in Hegel and his nineteenth-century followers.[31]

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[27] John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon: *Cato's Letters: Or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious*, ed. Ronald Hamowy, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1995, volume 2, 735.
[28] Ibid., 738.
[29] Shaftesbury: *Characteristicks,* volume 1, 105.
[30] Ibid., 104-5.
[31] Michael Prince summarizes current thought on early and late Plato: "As Gadamer [*Dialogue and Dialectic*] and Bakhtin [*Problems of Dostoevky's Poetics*] both observe, the early (aporetic) Platonic dialogues […] differ from later Platonic texts setting forth the theory of knowledge or ideal form. We have, in the first case, dialogue as a basis for potentially interminable inquiry, search, and questioning, and, in the second, dialogue as a means of ascending from error (appearance, division) to truth (reality, synthesis). This latter sense of dialogue is, according to Gadamer, hardened into the dialectical method codified by Aristotle and subsumed within Christian Platonism". Michael

After Socrates and Plato, the master of the philosophical dialogue is Cicero, who uses the form in a more or less open-ended way. Cicero allows each of his speakers to speak at length (their speeches are typically Cicero's translations and redactions from Greek sources); each speech elicits a response, often critical, from a subsequent speaker. Cicero's dialogues retain some of the adversarial structure of the law courts in which Cicero learned to see both sides of a case, and established his own reputation for polished oratory. As Cicero's Crassus claims in *De Oratore*, "the true, the perfect, the one and only orator" would be the person who could "speak on both sides of an issue about all subjects and […] in every case unfold two opposing speeches".[32] As in a law court, the final assessment of opposed points of view lies, finally, with the parties who have heard and must weigh them: that is, in the case of the dialogue, its reader or readers. No one of Cicero's speakers is unequivocally superior to his agonistic fellows, as Socrates is to his interlocutors in Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*. In these works, Plato uses Socrates to question, correct, synthesize and transcend other points of view on love and on justice. By contrast, in Cicero's most effective dialogues – the first book of *De Oratore*; *De Finibu*s; *Tusculan Disputations*; *De Natura Deorum* – no one character overshadows his predecessors.[33] The meaning of these dialogues, then, is an ongoing, interpersonal process, changeable over time.

Within Cicero's philosophical dialogues, as in later dialogues that imitate Cicero's form, a character who hears competing speeches may render a verdict about their relative persuasiveness. This verdict, however, is not authoritative, but rather remains one voice within a multi-voiced dialogue. A verdict internal to a dialogue cannot be deemed authoritative even when it comes from a character, as in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, who shares the name Cicero. This Cicero is a character who takes a minor part in this formal discussion of the nature of the gods: a topic upon which, he writes, "such wide diversity of opinion among men of the greatest learning […] must affect even those who think that they possess certain knowledge with a

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Prince: *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 3.

[32] Cicero: *De Oratore*, 248, 3. 80. Cf. Cicero: *De Officiis,* Book 2, section 8.

[33] The adversarial structure of *De Oratore* Book 1 can be summarized thusly: Crasssus holds forth on the ideal orator who will unite rhetoric with philosophy, or at least wide knowledge (although Crassus vacillates on the morality or sheer power of oratory). Scaevola then objects that the orator has (and needs?) no requisite philosophical knowledge, and may also be harmful to society. Antonius finally attempts a moderating position, noting that Crassus goes too far and that the doctrines of philosophers are often impractical.

feeling of doubt".[34] The main speakers of the dialogue are Velleius, who expounds the practical atheism of the Epicureans; Balbus, the Stoic, who enthusiastically praises the divine harmony of the universe; and Cotta, the moderate or "Academic" Sceptic[35] who, while detecting the weaknesses of theism as well as atheism, has no intention of overturning the traditional institution of Roman religion. Cicero concludes the dialogue by rendering what scholars typically read as his personal verdict on its speakers: "we parted, Velleius thinking Cotta's discourse to be the truer [verior], while I felt that that of Balbus approximated more nearly to a semblance of the truth [mihi Balbi ad veritatis similtudinem videretur esse propensior]".[36] We may note three things about this verdict which, as one editor of the text notes, "has puzzled many writers, who mistakenly assumed that Cicero was a sceptic in religion and that as a professed Academic in philosophy he ought to have sided with Cotta."[37] First, Cicero speaks here as a character in his own fictive dialogue, responding to specific speeches and not to general philosophies. Second, his verdict is double-pronged, involving two ways of responding to the speeches we've just been presented: on this particular occasion, Velleius thinks this, while I felt that. Finally, for Cicero the truth about the gods admits both degree (verior) and approximation (propensior): it is not single and absolute, but a matter, as Grassi would say, of trying to make sense together. In tension with Cicero's ultimate sympathy for the Stoic Balbus, his view of the truth is itself skeptical or Academic. For the Academics (as later for Hume), some impressions can be persuasive, but none are – to use the technical Stoic term – kataleptic, that is, immediately graspable as truth.[38]

After Cicero, philosophical dialogues continue to be written in Latin through the Renaissance,[39] though in the Christian era their model is typically Boethian and thus self-disciplining, rather than Ciceronian and philosophically open-ended. Dialogue resumes its

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[34] Cicero: *De Natura Deorum and Academica*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951, 117, 1.6.14.

[35] Referring to the skeptically-inclined "New Academy" in Athens from c. 150 BC.

[36] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum and Academica*, 382 (Latin) 383 (English), 3.40.95.

[37] J. M. Ross: Introduction, in Cicero: *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. Horace C. P. McGregor, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, 33.

[38] Cicero: *On Academic Scepticism*, edited and translated by Charles Brittain, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006, 58, Book 2, sections 98-99. (This is a translation of the extant parts of *Academica*.) Cicero's Crassus argues in *De Oratore* (245, 3.67) that Academic Skepticism is the philosophy most compatible with rhetoric, and that the Academic Arcesilaus (head of the Academy from 270 BC) was "said to have employed an exceptionally charming manner of speaking, and also to have been the first to establish the practice—although this was very characteristic of Socrates—of not revealing his own view, but of always arguing against any view that anyone else would assert."

[39] For example, Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales*; Boethius's *Philosophiae Consolatio*; Petrarch's *Secretum Meum*: Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.

Ciceronian role in theological and ethical inquiry during the early Enlightenment, and in the English language. As Michael Prince has shown, "between 1650 and 1750 dialogue becomes a central mode of philosophical writing. Dryden, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Berkeley and Hume all composed important works in dialogue form, as did innumerable minor figures; and dialogue became the object of extensive critical reflection."[40] Prince understands this wave of interest in the dialogue form in two ways: first, as a sign of anxiety about differences in morality and religion in the aftermath of the English civil wars or wars of religion (1642-1660); second, as an effort to find a provisional consensus or consolidation of viewpoints (14-20).

However, as in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, in the best-known English dialogues on religion consensus is not reached, at least not fully. The dialogue form reveals the difficulty as well as the possibility of common sense. It was in the eighteenth century that *De Natura Deorum* came to prominence in European intellectual circles, with 20 editions published, including 10 in Britain.[41] It is thus not surprising that this dialogue should thus serve as the model for both Shaftesbury's *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody* (1709) – included as a section of Shaftesbury's multi-part *Characteristicks* – and Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779).

Of these two philosophers, common "Opinion and Judgment" was a more central concern of Shaftesbury's, and at the end of The Moralists we indeed find something like consensus, though recent critics have remarked upon its fragility.[42] *The Moralists* is a dialogue on natural religion between the Academic skeptic Philocles (compare Cicero's Cotta) and the enthusiastic, optimistic theist, Theocles, whose rhapsodies to divine order in the universe echo those of Cicero's Stoic, Balbus.[43] Shaftesbury frames *The Moralists* as Philocles' epistolary account of his dialogue with Theocles, addressed to a third party, the melancholy theist Palemon. Philocles attests that Theocles has converted him to a Stoic sense of the providential order in nature, and by reproducing the rhetorical means of his conversion intends to cheer up his gloomy friend. But how firm is Philocles' conversion to a Stoic theodicy? Philocles' conversion comes in the midst

[40] Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue*, 12-13.
[41] J. M. Ross: Introduction to *The Nature of the Gods*, 56.
[42] Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue,* 49-54; Seth Lobis, *The Virtue of Sympathy: Magic, Philosophy, and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, 243-48.
[43] In both content—praise of the wonders of creation and providential order—and style—including the liberal use of rhetorical questions and exclamations—Shaftesbury borrows from Balbus's speech (*De Natura Deorum*, 2.96-168) in crafting Theocles' central speech in *The Moralists*: see especially *Characteristicks* 2:77-80, 91-100. Yet Shaftesbury variegates his Ciceronian format of long speechifying with short sections of rapid Socratic dialectic, with Theocles in the role of Socrates: see, for example, *Characteristicks* volume 2, 106-8.

of a morning walk with Theocles in the countryside,[44] and Philocles, as they leave rural splendor behind, admits to his friend: “as great a Convert to his Doctrine [as I was], my Danger still, I owned to him, was very great: and I foresaw that when the Charm of these Places and his Company was ceased, I should be apt to relapse”.[45] Philocles’ newfound belief in the order, beauty and enchantment of the cosmos, Seth Lobis maintains, “may be no more than contingent and contextual, specific to ‘these Places’ and to ‘his Company’.”[46] The temporary nature of Philocles’ conversion is further supported by what Lobis calls the “counterfactual force” of his framing epistolary comment to Palemon: on his return from Theocles’ estate, “You would have thought indeed that I had been cured of my Scepticism.”[47]

The main object of Philocles’ skepticism had been the “universal Mind” that, according to Theocles, designs and unites the cosmos. During their dialogue, Philocles never concedes that it is demonstrable, allowing at first only that it is a “bare Probability”.[48] Philocles anticipates the conclusions of another skeptic with regard to natural religion: Hume’s character Philo in *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. In this dialogue, it is Cleanthes who, like Theocles, argues that both God’s existence and His nature can be inferred from the order of the universe, arguing “by all the rule of analogy […] the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties”.[49] Philo’s skeptical objections to and qualifications of this analogy – or metaphor – are famous in the history of philosophy, though few present-day skeptics would agree with his final concession “*That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*”.[50] Yet as in the end of Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, Hume’s model, the dialogue’s last words are in favor of Cleanthes’ more robust theism: “Cleanthes’ [principles] approach still nearer the truth”.[51] This verdict is colored, however, by its source: it comes from a pupil of Cleanthes.

If full consensus is not reached in the philosophical dialogues we’ve considered, something like common opinion emerges in the areas of overlap or partial agreement between their principal characters: Cotta and Balbus, Philocles and Theocles, Philo and Cleanthes. Each

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[44] Shaftesbury: *Characteristicks,* volume 2, 104.
[45] Ibid., 117-18.
[46] Seth Lobis: *The Virtue of Sympathy: Magic, Philosophy, and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, 243-44.
[47] Shaftesbury: *Characteristicks,* volume 2, 20. Quoted in Lobis: *The Virtue of Sympathy,* 244.
[48] Shaftesbury: *Characteristicks,* volume 2, 57.
[49] David Hume: *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980, 15.
[50] Ibid., 88. Italics in the original.
[51] Ibid., 89.

dialogue we've surveyed ends with a narrower range of probable knowledge than with which it began, as tertiary characters withdraw or concede defeat: the Epicurean in Cicero; a superstitious Christian (the "elder Gentleman") in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*;[52] an anti-rationalist Christian (Demea) in Hume. The approximation of common thinking achieved in these dialogues may be as close to the truth as we can come with respect to theological questions – at least within the rhetorical tradition. But in ethics this tradition allows us to come closer.

IV. Self-Division

In *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury sees the Delphic inscription as the root of all ethical wisdom: "RECOGNIZE YOUR-SELF: which was as much to say, Divide your-self, or Be TWO. For if the Division were rightly made, all within would of course, they thought, be rightly understood, and prudently managed."[53] Shaftesbury traces this self-division, or dialogue with oneself, to the influence of Socrates, who, we have seen, inspired in others "a peculiar Speculative Habit," the habit of "Self-Inspection".[54] Indeed, for Shaftesbury ethics involves the internalizing of Socrates or of a figure very much like him. Socrates is or is akin to the ideal self who inspects one's empirical self; a character of exemplary virtue, he provides the standard or measure by which we may judge our own conduct and interrogate our desires and beliefs. Shaftesbury views this model of ethical self-doubling as fundamentally rhetorical, a "powerful Figure of inward Rhetorick, [by which] the Mind apostrophizes its own FANCYS," separating those that arise from irrational appetite from those deriving from "REASON and good Sense".[55]

The difference between the open-ended, inter-personal dialogue Shaftesbury used in *The Moralists* and the intra-personal, inner dialogue he champions in *Soliloquy* is that in the latter division is always a means to the end of complete accord. For Shaftesbury, self-division allows for the possibility of integrity: it is not yet the disease of self-alienation it will become for

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[52] Shaftesbury: *Characteristicks,* volume 2, 49-76.
[53] Ibid., volume 1, 93.Cf: "That we had each of us a Patient in our-self, that we were properly our own Subjects of Practice; and that we then became due Practitioners, when by virtue of an intimate Recess we could discover a certain duplicity of Soul, and divide ourselves into two Parties."
[54] Ibid., 104-5.
[55] Ibid., 101-2.

Rousseau and for Dostoevsky.[56] It is, rather, care of the self: a discipline that aims at self-perfection.

This therapeutic self-division is as old as the (now fragmentary) texts of Epicurus quoted by Seneca – a Stoic, in the main, but like all Roman Stoics, eclectic. A major theme of Seneca's Epistles is self-mastery through self-division: seeing and judging oneself as an impartial other would, particularly a figure drawn from the trans-historical society of the virtuous.[57] For Seneca, a philosopher at the court of Nero, the exemplary is not a member of his actual community, but a moral hero of the past: he variously invokes Epicurus, Scipio, Laelius,[58] and Cato. Seneca writes in his 11th Epistle to Lucilius:

> Hear and take to heart this useful and wholesome motto: "Cherish some man of high character, and keep him ever before your eyes, living as if he were watching you, and ordering all of your actions as if he beheld them." Such, my dear Lucilius, is the counsel of Epicurus […]. Choose therefore a Cato; of, if Cato seems too severe a model, choose some Laelius, a gentler spirit. Choose a master whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector or your pattern [vel custodem vel exemplum][59]

Seneca's precepts were well known in early eighteenth-century Britain, popularized by Joseph Addison in his widely read *Spectator* papers (1711-1712): "when we are by ourselves," Addison writes, "and in our greatest Solitudes, we should fancy that Cato stands before us, and sees everything we do" (*The Spectator* no. 231).[60]

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[56] Self-division, the fall from primal innocence in Rousseau's second Discourse, becomes the problem of permanent moral paralysis in Dostoyevsky's *Golyadkin (The Double)* and *Underground Man (Notes from Underground*, especially Part 1, section 1).
[57] Stoic self-dialogue in ancient Rome, particularly with regard to Seneca, is examined in Shadi Bartsch: *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006, 183-281.
[58] Friend of Scipio Aemilianus and hero of the third Punic War (149-46 BC), Gaius Laelius was given the epithet "Sapiens" for his learning and philosophy.
[59] Seneca: *Epistles*, 3 volumes (volumes numbered 3-5 in the Seneca series), ed. and trans. Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917, 3:63-65. Cf. *Epistle* 25: "Do everything as if Epicurus were watching you" (volume 3, 185).
[60] In Addison and Richard Steele: *The Spectator*, 5 volumes, ed. Donald F. Bond, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, volume 2, 400.

Self-discipline through self-division reaches its full flowering in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759, 6th rev. ed. 1790), which gives central place to the impartial spectator first sketched by Epicurus and Seneca. Smith writes:

> We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct. If in this view it pleases us, we are tolerably satisfied.[61]

Smith's philosophical debt to Seneca is doubtless, although Smith chooses not to acknowledge it – or does so, coyly, by noting "Seneca, though a Stoic, the sect most opposite to that of Epicurus, yet quotes this philosopher more frequently than any other".[62] Yet Smith builds upon the classical topoi of the impartial spectator, as Grassi would say, to "think further."

Embedding his ideal spectator in the society of his own day, Smith conceives of a more truly social ethics than the ancients could imagine. For Smith, we are creatures who by nature sympathize with one another's joys and sorrows, but only within limits that ought to be respected. Smith argues that one ought to display – and, ideally, feel – no more of an emotion (particularly fear, anger, or distress) than an impartial spectator might readily sympathize with, and this, it turns out, is not very much. "We are generally most disposed to sympathize with small joys and great sorrows".[63] These, then, are the only emotions it is prudent to display, though the magnanimous man will not even feel great sorrows. In Stoic fashion, he will rise above "sudden changes of fortune," impervious to all that lies outside his benevolent intentions or designs.[64] For Smith, spectatorial aloofness from one's own circumstances, especially one's own joys and sorrows, is a precondition for proper sympathy with others, and thus the cornerstone of ethics:

[61] Adam Smith: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, 112, 3.1.5. On Smith's ethics, see Ryan Hanley: *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
[62] Smith: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 307, 7.2.4.
[63] Ibid., 40., 1.2.5.
[64] Ibid., 41, 1.2.5.

> And hence it is, that to feel much for others and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish, and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature […] As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us.[65]

What Smith asks us, in sum, is to take account of both the feelings and opinions of others in our proper understanding and presentation of the self. Metaphorically, he asks us to see the similarities between ourselves and dissimilar others whose point of view is valuable not for its grandeur, as in Seneca, but for its very ordinariness. Grounded in the long tradition of Latin rhetoric and philosophy, Smith takes to a new level the ethical ideal of sensus communis, of koinonoemosunē, as thinking together, or common thought-ed-ness.[66]

[65] Ibid., 25., 1.1.5.

[66] As I was finishing this paper, I received the copy that Professor Hörcher kindly sent me of his 2014 book, *Of the Usefulness of the Humanities* (Budapest: L'Harmattan), and was struck by the convergence of our interests. Working back from the philosophers Oakeshott, Gadamer, and Charles Taylor, Hörcher appeals to "the on-going dialogue of what was [in the Socratic tradition] regarded as a never-ending learning process" (22.); Hörcher endorses "a dialogical self, with an Aristotelian, communal component to it" (59). I offer as my own humble contribution to our ongoing discussion of trope, dialogue and self-division, in philosophy as in rhetoric, a reminder of their Latin, Stoic, and Enlightenment roots.