

Me, Myself, and I:

Understanding *Der soziative Plural* in the Preface to *De Officiis* III Through Cicero's Letters

Cicero's tendency to use a self-referential plural for the first-person personal or possessive pronoun throughout his speeches and writings—especially the letters—is so promiscuous that even the most meticulous scholars overlook its significance in context. Indeed, to their credit, Hofmann warns in *Lateinische Grammatik* that because these sociative plurals may frequently have fit into conventional formulae, it is often futile to try and uncover exactly what they contribute semantically. All the same, Cicero's use of this device in his preface to *De Officiis* III is remarkable enough to merit exposition (Molinelli 2018); not only does his choice to place a first person singular verb next to such a plural (and, in fact, next to a passage abounding in them) capture the reader's attention, but its occurrence at the beginning of the third book—the only one that explicitly ceases to rely on Panaetius—may provide significant clues for interpreting Cicero's philosophical authority as a whole.

In fact, most other instances of this collocation occur in the letters, apparently as a form of “redressive politeness” for when Cicero is trying to soften the harshness of difficult requests and demands (Hall 2009). By drawing attention to his use of the plural of modesty in such requests, Cicero openly acknowledges inconvenience and indications supplication. In other words, by comparing this kind of sociative plural in the epistolary preface of *De Officiis* III to other instances in his letters (Dickey 2002), one can understand both the basic rhetorical purpose of this striking collocation, and, more profoundly, its further implications on Cicero's Academic-Skeptic ethos overall. The reader will discover, in short, not only an additional dimension to the encomium of Scipio Africanus in *De Officiis* III, but also Cicero's cultivation of *Sokratesbild*

through metaliterary warnings against overly dogmatic interpretation (Kries, 2013; Gorman, 2005).

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