

## Serious Play: Re-examining Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*

In the introduction to the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, Cicero tells us that he composed this *parvum opusculum* (*Parad.* 5) while at play (*ludens*, *Parad.* 4). This apparent instruction to read these strange little essays as mere entertainment has been followed by modern scholars, who have tended to characterize the work either as a trivial rhetorical exercise (e.g. Peterson (1920); Philippon (1939); Shackleton Bailey (1971); Bowman (1972)), or as a distraction from the difficult political climate of the mid 40s BCE (e.g. Molager (1971); Kumaniecki (1957)). Those scholars who have read this work more seriously have interpreted the text as a failed attempt to make the paradoxes of the Stoics available for use in Roman oratory. The inadequacy of this text, then, reveals to reader and author alike that “speeches, and parts of pseudo-speeches... were not the best ways to discuss and argue that the Stoic paradoxes were true to a popular audience” (Englert (1990) 139-140; c.f. Price Wallach (1990)), and explains why Cicero later turned to the genres of essay and dialogue for the exposition of philosophical topics.

In this same introduction, however, Cicero argues for the importance of his project and hints at its success. The author claims that he chose to treat the Stoic *paradoxa* because they seemed to be “most Socratic and by far the most true” (*maxime... Socratica longeque verissima*, *Parad.* 5). Meanwhile, in typical Ciceronian fashion, the author employs a false display of modesty to reveal the high estimation in which he asks this text to be held: although, as he tells us, this work is not at the level of Phidias' world famous sculpture of Athena Parthenos, it still shows marks of the same workmanship (*non enim est tale ut in arce poni possit quasi Minerva illa Phidiae, sed tamen ut ex eadem officina exisse appareat*, *Parad.* 5). If, then, we are asked to view this text as neither mere entertainment, nor as a failed experiment, how might we read this

problematic work? This paper will argue that, far from showing that Roman oratory was inappropriate for philosophical argumentation, this text makes the claim that difficult subject matter of Stoic syllogism could be successfully treated in the expansive rhetorical form of the *locus communis*. In doing so, the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* opens the door for Cicero's treatment of these ideas in his later philosophical dialogues, which he characterized as blending Greek philosophy with Roman oratory in the form of competing speeches (*in utramque partem perpetua oratio*, *Fat.* 1).

This paper will firstly consider how Cicero represents his later dialogues as philosophical ideas cast in oratorical style. It will then consider how the author reuses the content of the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* in the *De Finibus* and the *Tusculan Disputations*, showing how the *loci communes* of the earlier text could be successfully employed in the invented speeches of philosophical dialogue. Finally, it will consider how, in spite of the seriousness of the subject matter, Cicero can still cast the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* as play. It will suggest that Cicero here takes Plato's Socrates as his model in tone as well as subject matter, and so adopts the theme of philosophical speech-making as serious play found in the *Phaedrus*, the *Laws*, the *Symposium*, and the *Gorgias*.

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