The Wisdom of Fallibilism in Augustine's *Contra Academicos* and Cicero's *Academica* Compared

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Abstract

According to what Mosher, Curly and Topping call the Received Interpretation of the *CA*, the primary aim of Augustine's dialogue, insofar as it discusses Academic scepticism, is to refute the basic principles of the Academic's dogmatic scepticism. One of the chief interpretive difficulties for this reading is reconciling it to the content of Augustine's *Letter* 1. In the *Letter* 1, Augustine says he actually tried to imitate Cicero's Academic approach to philosophy in his dialogue rather than overcome it, because he believed it was unassailable when it was properly understood. In this thesis, I attempt to reconcile the Received Interpretation of the *CA* to the content of Augustine's *Letter* 1 by establishing an alternative interpretative schema for Cicero's Academic commitments. In the first part of this thesis, I build upon Thorsrud's and Lévy's work to argue that Cicero was committed to a position called fallibilism in the *Acad.* as opposed to what certain proponents of the Received Interpretation describe as dogmatic scepticism. In the second part of this thesis, I argue that Augustine himself appears to have interpreted Cicero as a fallibilist rather than as a dogmatic sceptic. What I think he then proceeds to do in his first Cassiciacum dialogue is imitate Cicero's fallibilism from the *Acad*. in the very act of dismantling his interlocutors' dogmatic interpretations of Cicero's philosophy that he thought were as misguided as they were deleterious to the life of inquiry. To the extent that this argument holds, I believe it should be safe to conclude with the proponents of the Received Interpretation of the *CA* that Augustine refutes dogmatic scepticism, but specifically in a way that actually imitates rather than overcomes Cicero's project in the *Acad*.. Ideally, this conclusion should help us to interpret the *CA* and the *Letter* 1 more compatibly.

List of Abbreviations Used

Augustine

CA	*Contra Academicos Libri Tres*
Civ. Dei	*De Civitate Dei*
Conf.	*Confessionum Libri Tredecim*
Retr.	*Retractations*
Trin.	*De Trinitate Libri Quindecim*

Cicero

Acad.	*Academica*
Nat. D.	*De Natura Deorum*
Hort.	*Hortensius*
Tusc.	*Tusculan Disputations*

Plato

Apol.	*The Apology*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

One of the chief difficulties for interpreting Augustine's *CA*[1] is reconciling his criticism of the New Academy[2] in it to the content of his *Letter* 1. In his epistle to Hermogenianus, Augustine says, "I would never dare, even while joking, to attack the Academicians … were I not to think them to hold a view far distant from what is commonly believed. Accordingly, I've imitated [the Academicians]" in the *CA* "as far as I was able, rather than overcome them, which I'm completely unable to do."[3] Augustine's letter to Hermogenianus poses a significant challenge to the interpreter of the *CA*, because on the "Received Interpretation" of Augustine's first dialogue, "the primary aim of the dialogue, insofar as [it] discusses Academic skepticism, is to refute the basic principles of Academic skepticism."[4] For example, House thinks it is "incorrect" to maintain that "Augustine does not refute Academic Scepticism" in the *CA*.[5] Bolyard says, "Augustine's *CA* ... is undoubtedly *opposed* to Academic skepticism" and constitutes a successful

[1] Augustine, *Contra Academicos Libri Tres*, ed. Pius Knöll (University of Michigan Library, 1922).
[2] Throughout this thesis, I use the terms "Academic philosophy" and "Academic philosopher" to refer to "New Academic philosophy" and to the "New Academic philosopher," respectively. In what follows, I argue that New Academic philosophy as presented by Cicero in the *Acad.* is best defined as a methodology rather than as a set of specific doctrines. This distinguishes the Academic philosophy to which I refer in this thesis from the Platonist philosophy of the Old Academy.
[3] Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 152.
[4] David L. Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's Contra Academicos," in *Augustinian Studies*, vol. 12 (1981), 89.
[5] D.K. House, "A Note on Book III of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos,*" in *Studia Patristica*, vol. XVII, Part III, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Pergamon Press, 1982), 1261.

refutation of it.[6] Foley re-iterates this point of view. He says, "[t]he *Contra Academicos* … constitutes a dismantling of Cicero's infamous adherence to the New Academy."[7] Finally, Wills maintains that "[i]n his dialogue *Contra Academicos* Augustine dramatises the dialectical overcoming of Scepticism through depicting a series of conversations between himself, his friend Alypius, and two of his young students."[8]

In this thesis, I will attempt to reconcile the Received Interpretation of the *CA* to the content of Augustine's *Letter* 1. I believe Thorsrud's and Lévy's work on Cicero's *Acad.*[9] and Topping's work on Augustine's *CA* pave the way for this reconciliation to take place. According to Thorsrud and Lévy, the first step we must take is to avoid as much as possible the assumption that Cicero's articulation of Academic philosophy in the *Acad.* committed him to a form of dogmatic scepticism. For example, Frede and O'Daly claim that Cicero was a dogmatic sceptic, because he maintained that absolutely nothing can be known and that the wise man holds absolutely no opinions.[10] As long as this interpretation of the *Acad.* holds, and to the extent that Cicero's dialogue was one of Augustine's primary sources on the New Academy,[11] Augustine's claim in the *Letter* 1

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[6] Charles Bolyard, "Augustine, Epicurus, and External World Skepticism," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol 44, no. 2 (2006), 168.
[7] Michael P. Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," in *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, vol. 45 (1999), 64.
[8] Bernard Wills, "Ancient Scepticism and The Contra Academicos of Saint Augustine," in *Animus*, 4 (1999), 119.
[9] Cicero, *Academica* 1 & 2, eds. E.H. Warmington, T.E. Page, W.H.D. Rouse, E. Capps and L.A. Post (Harvard University Press, 1967).
[10] Michael Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 218; Gerard O'Daly, "The response to skepticism and the mechanisms of cognition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 160.
[11] Augustine tells his readers to "read the *Academica*!" if they wish to compare the arguments in the *CA* to Cicero's articulation of the Academic position (*Contra Academicos* 3.20.45).

that he wished to imitate the Academics in the *CA* rather than overcome them would seem to be "unintelligible."[12] The *CA* is in fact clearly dedicated to refuting the dogmatic sceptic's tenets.[13]

In order to gain insight, then, into the content of Augustine's *Letter* 1, it is imperative to establish an alternative interpretative schema for Cicero's Academic commitments. I believe Thorsrud and Lévy provide exactly this. In their view, Cicero's Academic philosophy is best defined as a methodology rather than as a set of specific doctrines. In its simplest terms, it is the practice of arguing for and against every side of an issue as rigourously and impartially as possible. The intended effect of this method is to elicit either the truth or what is most truth-like in a manner that liberates our powers of judgement from the fetters of dogmatism.[14] The political and philosophical context in which Cicero lived, however, seemed to him to be characterized more by the pretensions of individuals to infallible knowledge than the actual possession of it. Hence, to

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[12] John Hammond Taylor, "St. Augustine and the 'Hortensius' of Cicero," *Studies in Philology*, vol. 60, no. 3 (1963), pp. 497.

[13] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.13.30.

[14] Cicero, *Academica* 2.3.7-8: "*Nos autem quoniam contra omnes dicere quae videntur solemus, non possumus quin alii a nobis dissentiant recusare: quamquam nostra quidem causa facilis est, qui verum invenire sine ulla contentione volumus idque summa cura studioque conquirimus. Etsi enim omnis cognitio multis est obstructa difficultatibus, eaque est et in ipsis rebus obscuritas et in iudiciis nostris infirmitas ut non sine causa antiquissimi et doctissimi invenire se posse quod cuperent diffisi sint, tamen nec illi defecerunt neque nos studium exquirendi defatigati relinquemus; neque nostrae disputationes quidquam aliud agunt nisi ut in utramque partem dicendo eliciant et tamquam exprimant aliquid quod aut verum sit aut ad id quam proxime accedat. Nec inter nos et eos qui se scire arbitrantur quidquam interest nisi quod illi non dubitant quin ea vera sint quae defendunt, nos probabilia multa habemus, quae sequi facile, adfirmare vix possumus; hoc autem liberiores et solutiores sumus quod integra nobis est iudicandi potestas nec ut omnia quae praesrcipta a quibusdam et quasi imperata sint defendamus necessitate ulla cogimur.*" See also ibid., 2.38.120, 2.41.127; Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (University of California Press, 2009), 99-101; and Carlos Lévy, "Cicero and the New Academy," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 51.

counteract this *consuetudo periculosa*, it is clear that he developed a tendency to emphasize the fallibility of man in the questions that concern him over and against his history of perfect judgement. When we interpret Cicero as a fallibilist in this way based on the *Acad*., I believe we gain the first piece of insight into how the Received Interpretation of the *CA* might conceivably be reconciled to the *Letter* 1. As long as Cicero's articulation of Academic philosophy never dogmatically precludes the possibility of attaining truth and wisdom, and as long as his careful and systematic method actually helps to elicit the truth that is "felt to be hiding in the nature of things and souls,"[15] it should not be surprising if Augustine wished to imitate rather than overcome the Academics.

The second step we must take to reconcile Augustine's *Letter* 1 to the Received Interpretation of the *CA* is to examine the precise ways in which the *CA* could reasonably constitute an imitation of Cicero's fallibilist Academic method. In my view, it is essential to this undertaking to reinterpret the "primary aim of [Augustine's] dialogue, insofar as [it] discusses Academic skepticism." For example, on the Received Interpretation, the "primary aim of the dialogue … is to refute the basic principles of Academic skepticism." However, the proponents of this reading do not always explicitly attribute the scepticism that Augustine attempts to refute to Cicero. This leaves open the distinct possibility that the *CA* could constitute an attempt to refute New Academic philosophy, albeit a version of it that Augustine considered to be as inaccurate as it was deleterious to the life of inquiry.

Interestingly, Topping thinks this turned out to be exactly the case. For instance, two of Augustine's students in the dialogue, Alypius and Licentius, "take the skeptic's

[15] Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 153.

arguments quite literally"[16] to mean, "first, [that] man is not able to have knowledge about those things that pertain to philosophy (*quae ad philosophiam pertinent*); second, [that,] nonetheless, man is able to be wise by seeking (*in conquisitione*) the truth; [and] third … that the wise man will not assent to anything – since assenting to what is uncertain, and potentially false, is shameful (*nefas est*)."[17] Alypius and Licentius were evidently thoroughly persuaded by this pessimistic outlook and Augustine feared that they would begin to resemble the multitude whose despair for the truth causes them to neglect the liberal arts and to renounce the use of their minds.[18] Such an outcome for his students would be obviously unacceptable to Augustine. Topping therefore describes the primary aim of the *CA* as an attempt to "reawaken" his students' "sleepy will[s]" by engaging "in a type of Socratic pedagogy, shocking his interlocutor[s] into sense and thereby goading [them] into reexamining"[19] the sceptical dogmas they have prematurely taken to be truths.

In my view, Topping's interpretation of the *CA* is highly persuasive and equally conducive towards its reconciliation with the *Letter* 1 with which this thesis is principally concerned. The only point over which I disagree with him is that, in his view, Alypius' and Licentius' interpretations of Cicero's Academic commitments were more likely accurate than Augustine's. In light of Thorsrud's and Lévy's work on the *Acad.,* I contend that the Socratic type of pedagogy in the *CA* that Topping describes so favourably amounts to nothing less than Augustine's very attempt to imitate Cicero's Academic method. I believe that Augustine's attempt to "reawaken" his students' will to truth is

[16] Ryan N.S. Topping, *Happiness and Wisdom: Augustine's Early Theology of Education* (Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 110.
[17] Ibid., 105.
[18] Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 153.
[19] Topping, ibid., 117.

fundamentally Academic in spirit, especially to the extent that he seeks to do so by arguing on every side of an issue in a way that appears designed to liberate our powers of judgement from the mind's tendency towards dogmatism. As long as Thorsrud's and Lévy's interpretation of Cicero' *Acad.* holds, then, and to the extent that the *CA* is a refutation of Alypius' and Licentius' interpretations of Cicero rather than Augustine's own, it seems conceivable to me that the Received Interpretation of the *CA* can be reconciled to the content of the *Letter* 1.

In what follows, I will argue for this conclusion in two parts corresponding with the two steps I have laid out here in my Introduction. In the first part, I will argue that Thorsrud's and Lévy's fallibilist interpretation of Cicero's aims in the *Acad.* is indeed the most plausible reading compared to the dogmatic sceptic interpretation. I will argue for this position by situating Cicero's aims in the *Acad*. in the context to which they belonged. By considering this context in a general way first, I believe we should discover that Cicero did not appear to advance the views that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent as an enemy of knowledge. On the contrary, he seems to have insisted on the sceptic's *λόγοι* above all as a way of "putting a protective distance between himself and the *temeritas* which" he felt had come to characterize too much of the discourses of his era.[20] After considering the general *milieu* by which the tenets of Cicero's *Acad.* can be better appreciated, we will then proceed to look at the context of his Academic treatise in a still more specific way. By this means, I believe we should discover what Lévy calls the "extreme importance of the anti-Stoic"[21] dialectical aspect of

[20] Lévy, "Cicero and the New Academy," 51.
[21] Carlos Lévy, "The New Academy and its Rivals," in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, eds. Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin (Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 454.

Cicero's text. In my view, the "anti-Stoic" dialectical aspect of Cicero's writing attests to the likelihood that the Academic "would not be advancing his own view" in "arguing that knowledge is not possible … but rather" he would be leading his Stoic "interlocutors to admit that they themselves [were] unwittingly committed to it."[22] For when he claims in the *Acad*. that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent, he seems to imply that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent on the Stoic's epistemological assumptions. But Cicero does not think the Stoic's epistemology is tenable. In his discourse, he therefore applies a healthful stimulus to his peers from the Stoa to commit themselves once more to philosophy in an ascendingly rigorous kind of way, which is to be guided, first of all, by their shared love of truth; second of all, by clear and unimpeded argument; and finally by aiming at a more delicate balance between epistemic optimism and the humility to confess one's fallibility, even if one should feel totally confident in one's inability to err.

In the second part of this thesis, I will then explain how I think Cicero's fallibilist approach to philosophy from the *Acad.* can be seen to quietly pervade and fortify Augustine's *CA*. This second part of the thesis will be further subdivided into two parts. In the first part, I will examine the main challenges that present themselves against the view that Cicero's fallibilism can be seen to pervade and fortify Augustine's *CA.* For example, I will examine the arguments that Augustine arrays against dogmatic scepticism and the reasons that Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills all think these arguments apply to Cicero's dubitative commitments. These reasons are certainly compelling in a number of key respects, but as I have already stated above, I think they are problematic to the extent

[22] Harald Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 61.

that they render the content of Augustine's *Letter* 1 unintelligible in relation to his first Cassiciacum dialogue. In the second half of Part Two of this thesis, I will then attempt to reconcile Augustine's *CA* to his letter to Hermogenianus by highlighting both the explicit as well as the implicit ways in which Augustine actually appears to distinguish Cicero's fallibilism from dogmatic scepticism whilst applying his fallibilism as an antidote to dogmatic scepticism. This, I hope, should allow us to conclude that the Received Interpretation of the *CA* is in the last analysis compatible with the *Letter* 1, provided it can accommodate the view that Augustine conceivably imitates rather than overcomes Cicero's Academic approach to philosophy from the *Acad.*.

Chapter Two: The Fallibilism of Cicero's *Academica*

The precise nature of Cicero's Academic philosophy as articulated in the *Acad.* has proven difficult to define. On the one hand, there are good reasons for adopting Frede's and O'Daly's view that he was a dogmatic sceptic. On the other hand, there are good reasons for adopting Thorsrud's and Lévy's view that he was a fallibilist who deployed scepticism as a method for preserving liberty of thought and for combating dogmatism in all its variety of forms. In this chapter, I will argue that the latter interpretation is the most persuasive. I argue that it is also a necessary interpretation, if we do not wish to consign Cicero to absurdity.[23] For the negative dogmatic view that absolutely nothing can be known and that no beliefs merit assent is clearly self-contradictory. In the first place, if nothing can be known, it cannot be known that nothing can be known. And if the dogmatic sceptic admits that it cannot be known that nothing can be known, then he cannot suspend judgement on the grounds that nothing can be known. In the second place, "[a] person who assents to (USJ)[24] believes, as a result of doing so, that he ought not to assent to anything. [And] if he believes this, then he believes that he ought not to assent to (USJ)."[25]

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[23] Frede does not appear sympathetic to Cicero in "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge" (218), and would likely accept this result. For example, he laments the tradition "[i]n the Latin West" that assumes the ancient sceptics were negative dogmatists. He then puts the blame for this interpretation on Cicero: "In the Latin West, this [tradition is,] no doubt, in good part due to Cicero's influence, who himself was a dogmatic skeptic and who, moreover, would be the only substantial source concerning ancient scepticism available to those who did not read Greek."

[24] Universal Suspension of Judgement.

[25] Casey Perin, "Scepticism and belief," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148.

Fortunately for Cicero, the fallibilist reading of the *Acad.* appears to absolve him from the brunt of this *reductio ad absurdum*. It does so, in my view, by establishing a context as well as an intention relative to which his commitment to the Academic position can be understood. The general context in which Cicero wrote philosophy was defined by the rise of dictatorship at Rome and by the first signs of a cult of the *Divus Iulius*. Seeing that this was the case and that the Republic would be ruled by the plans and interests of one man, Cicero says he retired from politics in 46 B.C.[26] to write philosophy for the education of citizens.[27] What he appears to have thought Rome needed at such a time was neither a leader who boasted in the divinity of his own *ingenium* nor a citizenry that was prone to dogmatic beliefs.[28] Instead, the Republic needed men and women who were keenly aware of the fallibility of their humanity and who were educated to compensate for this weakness by philosophizing in the humble and Academic manner. In Cicero's view, the Republic needed such men and women, because the tendency of people to trust in either their own infallibility or in that of an authority is often a steep and "precipitous

[26] Until after the Ides of March.

[27] Cicero, *Academica* 1.3.11: "*nunc vero et fortunae gravissimo percussus vulnere et administratione rei publicae liberatus doloris medicam a philosophia peto et oti oblectationem hanc honestissimam iudico. Aut enim huic aetati hoc maxime aptum est, aut iis rebus si quas dignas laude gessimus hoc in primis consentaneum, aut etiam ad nostros cives erudiendos nihil utilius*"; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, eds. E.H. Warmington, T.E. Page, W.H.D. Rouse, E. Capps and L.A. Post (Harvard University Press, 1967), 1.4.7: "*Sin autem quis requirit quae causa nos inpulerit ut haec tam sero litteris mandaremus, nihil est quod expedire tam facile possimus. Nam cum otio langueremus et is esset rei publicae status ut eam unius consilio atque cura gubernari necesse esset, primum ipsius rei publicae causa philosophiam nostris hominibus explicandum putavi, magni existimans interesse ad decus et ad laudem civitatis res tam gravis tamque praeclaras Latinis etiam litteris contineri*."

[28] Cicero defines dogmatic beliefs (*δόγματα*; *decreta*) as irrevocable truth claims at *Academica* 2.9.27.

slope"[29]: it imperils the faculty of judgement and seems to return the mind everywhere in chains.[30]

Cicero felt that the Academic method could help remedy this tendency in the public, because he defined it, first and foremost, as the practice of arguing for and against every side of an issue. The intended effect of this method was to elicit either the truth or what is most truth-like while at the same liberating our powers of judgement from the fetters of dogmatism.[31] In theory, this practice might seem intuitive and straightforward. In reality, however, Cicero had found that people were often obstructed from this endeavour either on account of their desires or, conversely, from their lack thereof. For example, he found that they all too often prefer to "pugnaciously defend the thoughts they admire than seek out with perseverance that which may be called most constant."[32] In this, he says, they resemble people who cling to their favoured beliefs "as if to a rock in a storm."[33] In some cases, this habit can prove to be innocuous. For instance, not all beliefs pertain to matters of importance. On the other hand, there are individuals and entire

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[29] Cicero, *Academica* 2.21.68: "*Nobis autem primum, etiam si quid percipi possit, tamen ipsa consuetudo adsentiendi periculosa esse videtur et lubrica, quam ob rem, cum tam vitiosum esse constet adsentiri quicquam aut falsum aut incognitum, sustinenda est potius omnis adsensio, ne praecipitet si temere processerit; ita enim finitima sunt falsa veris eaque quae percipi non possunt eis quae possunt … ut tam in praecipitem locum non debeat se sapiens committere*."

[30] I paraphrase from ibid., 2.3.8-9: "*Nec inter nos et eos qui se scire arbitrantur quidquam interest nisi quod illi non dubitant quin ea vera sint quae defendunt, nos probabilia multa habemus, quae sequi facile, adfirmare vix possumus; hoc autem liberiores et solutiores sumus quod integra nobis est iudicandi potestas nec ut omnia quae praescripta a quibusdam et quasi imperata sint defendamus necessitate ulla cogimur. Nam ceteri primum ante tenentur adstricti quam quid esset optimum iudicare potuerunt, deinde infirmissimo tempore aetatis aut obsecuti amico cuipiam aut una alicuius quem primum audierunt oratione capti de rebus incognitis iudicant, et ad quamcumque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati ad eam tamquam ad saxum adhaerescunt.*

[31] Ibid., *De Natura Deorum* 1.5.11-12; *Academica* 2.3.7-8; 2.38.120; 2.41.127.

[32] Ibid., *Academica* 2.3.9: "*plerique errare malunt eamque sententiam quam adamaverunt pugnacissime defendere quam sine pertinacia quid constantissime dicatur exquirere*."

[33] Ibid., 2.3.8: "*quasi tempestate … tamquam ad saxum adhaerescunt*."

schools of thought who set out complete systems of philosophy. They claim not only to have unravelled the mysteries of physics and to have established the right way to debate and understand things, but also to have discerned the highest goods and what manner of life everyone should follow.[34] According to Cicero, their error in this regard does not always consist in the claims they make. In fact, many such philosophers make assertions that seem probable and could be true.[35] Rather, they err when they begin to presume that they are infallible and that they have exhausted the possibilities of argument *pro* and *contra* with respect to the positions they take. The cost of this presumption is the general deterioration of philosophical discourse, which is made particularly apparent when it is attended by the sentiment that Cicero says he "cannot bear," namely, that merely probable beliefs are contemptuous in comparison to inerrancy.[36]

In an intellectual *milieu* such as this, where the Roman individual was "[f]aced with an all-powerful figure who was as sure of himself in the domain of politics as" the dogmatist was sure of himself "in the realm of philosophy," Lévy thinks it should be unsurprising that Cicero would advocate Academic philosophy as a means of "putting a protective distance between oneself and the *temeritas* which" he felt had come to characterize too much of the discourse of his era.[37] Despite this context and intention, however, Frede reminds us that Cicero's attachment to the New Academy cannot survive scrutiny, if it indiscrimately rules out the possibility of knowledge in favour of an interminable scouring for probabilities *pro* and *contra*. The reason, Frede says, is that the

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[34] Cicero, *Academica* 2.36.114.
[35] Ibid., 2.38.121; 2.38.119.
[36] Ibid., 2.36.114: "*Illud ferre non possum: tu cum me incognito adsentiri vetes idque turpissimum esse dicas et plenissimum temeritatis, tantum tibi adroges ut exponas disciplinam sapientiae,* [*etc*.]"
[37] Lévy, "Cicero and the New Academy," 51.

Academic's inclination to suppose that nothing can be known infallibly may in fact result from "limited experience, experience with the wrong claims, experience with the wrong opponents … etc."[38] In consequence, he must always be aware of "the possibility that one day [philosophers might] make claims which meet [the] standards" for knowledge that cannot turn out to be mistaken.[39] To the extent that the Academic denies this possibility, Frede thinks he will be responsible for perpetuating yet another variety of dogmatism, namely, dogmatic scepticism.

In my view, Frede's assessment on this topic is as accurate as it is important. So far we have only discussed the general setting in which Cicero's insistence on the fallibility of humanity makes sense. For example, his insistence makes sense if we interpret it as a gesture of epistemic humility at a time when this kind of humility was entirely appropriate. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the question Frede poses about whether the fallibilist assumption underlying Cicero's Academic method is actually philosophically defensible and not just dogmatic or otherwise reactionary in nature. Interestingly, Frede seems to think that at least Cicero's predecessors in the New Academy had a strong philosophical basis from which to justify their claims that nothing can be known infallibily and that no beliefs merit assent. What he thinks readers need to understand is that when Academics such as Arcesilaus or Carneades originally asserted these views, they were not making these claims as universal and irrevocable truth

[38] Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," 211.
[39] Ibid., 212.

propositions (*δόγματα*; *decreta*). On the contrary, "Arcesilaus and his followers thought of themselves as just following Socratic practice."[40]

According to Thorsrud, Lévy, Striker and Dutton, this is a compelling theory. In order to understand its implications for Cicero's Academic practice, though, we must first understand what precisely Frede means by the Socratic method of philosophy. Socrates' method of philosophy, he says, was rooted in the awareness of his own ignorance. For example, he knew when he was "in the unfortunate position of lacking the knowledge and expertise in … matters which others claimed to have." In order to compensate for this ignorance, he would then proceed to "ask the person whose qualification he wanted to test a question to which the person would have to know the answer if he were knowledgeable and expert."[41] In the course of this process,

> [H]e would then try to show by an argument drawn from assumptions accepted by his opponent that his opponent also was committed to a belief which was incompatible with his answer to the original question. In case Socrates succeeded, this would have the effect that the opponent would have to admit that by his own standards of rationality he did not have the required qualification … or knowledge Socrates was looking for.[42]

In Thorsrud's view, the essential feature to the Socratic method that Frede helps us recognize is how its practitioners used their interlocutor's premises rather than their own to arrive at the confession of ignorance.[43] The implication is that the Socratic philosopher need never actually commit to any of the views that his interlocutor's premises entail, especially if these turn out to be dogmatic. On the contrary, it is actually a better outcome

[40] Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," 204.
[41] Ibid., 203.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades," 60.

if he can provide a stimulus for all the parties involved in the debate to inquire further into the matters about which they should now seem to themselves to be quite ignorant.[44]

There is good evidence in Cicero to suggest that he and the earlier Academics did, in fact, see "themselves as having revived the practice of Socratic inquiry within the Academy."[45] At *Nat. D.* 1.5.11, for example, he says, "Arcesilaus revived the method of philosophy … that originated with Socrates, that Carneades strengthened," and to which he himself is now an adherent.[46] This testimony, of course, begs the question: if the Academic method is at all Socratic in character, whose epistemological assumptions could have led them to the conclusion that nothing can be known and that no beliefs merit assent? In others words, who were the interlocutors who professed to be wise that the Academics submitted "to the kind of test Socrates would subject them to?"[47] Lévy, Striker, Dutton and Thorsrud all point in the same direction. According to Dutton:

> [T]he Academy [was] known … for its opposition to the dogmatic schools that populated the philosophical landscape of the Hellenistic world … Chief among these[, however,] was Stoicism, whose founder, Zeno of Citium (334 BCE-262 BCE), was roughly contemporary with Arcesilaus and a fellow student at the Academy … [I]t appears that [Zeno]'s ideas, particularly on the possibility of knowledge, were the chief foil for Arcesilaus' dialectical skills[, so much so that … their respective] traditions developed in dialectical relation with one another in such a way that neither can be well understood apart from the other.[48]

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[44] Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," 204.
[45] Blake D. Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 35.
[46] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.5.11: "*haec in philosophia ratio … profecta a Socrate, repetita ab Arcesila, confirmata a Carneade, usque ad nostram viguit aetatem… Cuius rei tantae tamque difficilis facultatem consecutum esse me non profiteor, secutum esse prae me fero*."
[47] Frede, ibid., 203.
[48] Dutton, ibid., 19-20.

Lévy supports this view based on Cicero's testimony as well as Diogenes Laertius'. Cicero says that "Arcesilaus' contention was entirely with Zeno,"[49] and according to Diogenes, Carneades "was in the habit of saying, "If Chrysippus had not existed, I would not exist" (D.L. 4.62), thus parodying the line expressing the importance of Chrysippus in the history of the Stoa" after Zeno. For Lévy, these passages reveal "the extreme importance of the anti-Stoic dialectic" in Academic thought.[50]

In my view, the scholars mentioned above are all fundamentally correct in their judgements on this point. Cicero appears to me to situate the Academic/Stoic contention at the very heart of the *Acad.,* and it seems to be the Stoic "conception of knowledge and wisdom"[51] in particular that entails for Cicero's Academics the views that nothing can be known and that no beliefs merit assent. In what follows, we will therefore consider the Academic/Stoic contention in the *Acad.* closely, starting from the source of their disagreement and proceeding from there to an evaluation of the Academic's dialectic at work. I believe this will reveal that Cicero's Academics in the *Acad.* never actually committed themselves to the negative dogmatic position that their interlocutor's premises seemed to them to entail. On the contrary, their commitment to combating dogmatism in all its variety of forms inevitably brought them into conflict with their Stoic peers. Over the course of this encounter, they vigourously demonstrated that the Stoic's epistemological assumptions were untenable and that they would need to revise them, if

[49] Cicero, *Academica* 1.12.44: "*Cum Zenone … ut accepimus, Arcesilas sibi omne certamen instituit*."
[50] Lévy, "The New Academy and its Rivals," 454.
[51] Gisela Striker, "Academics versus Pyrrhonists, reconsidered," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195.

they were ever going to hope to attain true knowledge and wisdom.[52] Cicero then concludes the debate with a call to pursue such knowledge, albeit with a degree of confidence that is more suitable to our status as human beings who have been shown to frequently err and overestimate our powers.

Thorsrud helpfully attributes the source of the Academic/Stoic contention to Zeno. Zeno, he says, had claimed that opinion would never enter the mind of the wise man, because it is base and extremely rash (*turpissimum et plenissimum temeritatis*) to assent to what is possibly false.[53] As an alternative to mere opinion, then, Zeno said that the Stoic sage relies on a cognitive state called "apprehension (*katalêpsis*, *Acad.* 1.42)"[54] for guidance in the conduct of life and inquiry. Apprehension is unlike opinion, in his account, because it "(i) arises from what is [and cannot arise from what is not], and (ii) is stamped, impressed and molded just as it is, (*Acad*.2.77) not with respect to every property,"[55] but with respect to that quality which it could not have, if it did not faithfully represent that from which it derives.[56] The Stoics considered this definition of apprehension to be entirely correct, because if it were incorrect, so that an appearance (*visum*; *φαντασία*) could have such a quality as could be false, then nothing could be comprehended in such a way that the sage could be wholly confident that something is perceived and cognized.[57] And if no appearances can be comprehended with complete confidence, then wisdom would be impossible, since wisdom forms all her decrees

[52] The epistemological assumptions in question in the *Acad*. are three. The first is that opinion never enters the mind of the wise man. The second is that the sage possesses infallible knowledge instead of uncertain opinion. The third is that all true knowledge depends on the testimony of the senses.
[53] Cicero, *Academica* 2.36.114.
[54] Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades," 63.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Cicero, ibid., 2.6.18.
[57] Ibid.

(*δόγματα*) based on appearances, and these decrees cannot possibly be false or dubious.[58] Arcesilaus' followers in the Academy appear to have denied that any appearance could satisfy Zeno's definition of comprehension, and from this was born "the whole contest for generations"(*Cum Zenone ... omne certamen*; *omnis oratio contra Academiam*).[59]

Cicero recounts the Academic subversion of the Stoic position in the following way. On the one hand, he says, Arcesilaus used to approve Zeno's claim that the wise man would never opine, if he could possess irrefutable knowledge, because knowledge would be preferable to opinion. He also approved his claim that the wise man would never opine, if he did not possess irrefutable knowledge, because it is better to resist ignorance than pretend to knowledge.[60] However, he did not think that the Stoics could consistently claim to possess irrefutable knowledge, because they say that *scientia* is based on sense impressions, and yet their premises about sense perception seem to render this knowledge impossible. Cicero reports that Arcesilaus made this argument against Zeno based upon four points. The first three points he derived from Zeno's own premises about sense perception and the fourth seems to be entailed by the first three.

The first premise in Arcesilaus' argument is that there are false appearances. The second is that these cannot be perceived. The third is that it cannot be the case that some appearances are perceptible and others are not, when there is no difference in the way they appear. The fourth is that there is no true appearance deriving from sensation which cannot possibly be paired (*adpositum*) with another appearance that is not different from it but that cannot be perceived.[61] The Stoics seem to approve the first point[62] when they

[58] Cicero, *Academica* 2.9.27.
[59] Ibid., 1.12.44; 2.6.18; 2.47.145-146.
[60] Ibid., 2.20.66-67.
[61] Ibid., 2.25.83.

define *κατάληψις*. Zeno says that true appearances are impressed and caused by that from which they derive to have special marks revealing their underlying realities (*propriam ... declarationem earum rerum quae viderentur*).[63] Anything that appears to the senses that does not have such a mark he calls credible (*credendum*) but possibly the source of falsehoods. They are credible, he says, because the senses constitute a measuring rod of knowledge (*normam scientiae*). As such, they report everything honestly which falls within their limits.[64] They can also be a source of falsehoods,[65] however, such as when the eye sees double[66] or when dreamers hallucinate.[67] The Stoic's account of sense perception therefore seems to assume that some impressions are perceptible whereas others can be credible and yet beget falsehoods.

The Stoics seem to approve the second point[68] on a similar basis as the first. Either all appearances are kataleptic or only certain ones are. They do not seem to believe that all appearances are kataleptic,[69] since in that case there would be no false impressions. Chrysippus seemed to understand this when he wrote volumes against the testimony of the senses.[70] He believed that only certain impressions could be perceived. In this, he was consistent with Zeno, for whom only certain appearances bear the marks of perception, whereas the rest are credible but can also be the source of falsehoods. Therefore, the Stoics seem to concede that false appearances cannot be perceived based on any special marks.

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[62] "There are false appearances."
[63] Cicero, *Academica* 1.11.41.
[64] Ibid., 1.11.42.
[65] Ibid., 1.11.41.
[66] Ibid., 2.25.80.
[67] Ibid., 2.27.87-88.
[68] "False appearances cannot be perceived."
[69] Ibid., 2.47.145-146.
[70] Ibid., 2.24.75; 2.27.87.

Zeno's correspondence with Arcesilaus suggests that the Stoics also approve the third point.[71] Arcesilaus asked him a series of questions, to which he gave the following answers. He asked him what can be perceived. Zeno answered that appearances (*visa*) can be perceived.[72] These result from impulses affecting the senses from an outside source.[73] Next, he asked him what quality (*quale*) these appearances had. He answered that they have the characterisation (*signatum*) they are supposed to have from their source, which they could not have, if they were not derived from that source. Finally, he asked him if true and false appearances[74] could look the same. Zeno answered that no appearance could be perceived, if it could be established that false appearances could look the same as true ones.[75]

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[71] "It cannot be the case that some appearances are perceptible and others are not, when there is no difference between the appearances in question"; Cicero records Zeno's correspondence with Arcesilaus at *Academica* 2.24.77. I cite the full passage in ft. 75.

[72] Cicero, *Academica* 2.24.77.

[73] Ibid., 1.11.40: "[*Zeno p*]*lurima autem in illa tertia philosophiae parte mutavit: in qua primum de sensibus ipsis quaedam dixit nova, quos iunctos esse censuit e quadam quasi impulsione oblata extrinsecus (quam ille φαντασίαν, nos visum appellemus licet, et teneamus hoc quidem verbum, erit enim utendum in reliquo sermone saepius), – sed ad haec quae visa sunt et quasi accepta sensibus adsensionem adiungit animorum quam esse vult in nobis positam et voluntariam*."

[74] A false or deceptive appearance would seem to have an indistinguishable characterisation compared to a true appearance, but it should not have the same characterisation, because it is not derived from the same source.

[75] Ibid., 2.24.77: "[*Arcesilas q*]*uaesivit de Zenone fortasse quid futurum esset si nec percipere quicquam posset sapiens nec opinari sapientis esset. Ille, credo, nihil opinaturum quoniam esset quod percipi posset. Quid ergo id esset? Visum, credo. Quale igitur visum? Tum illum ita definisse, ex eo quod esset, sicut esset, impressum et signatum et effictum. Post requisitum, etiamne si eiusdem modi esset visum verum quale vel falsum. Hic Zenonem vidisse acute nullem esse visum quod percipi posset, si id tale esset ab eo quod est ut eiusdem modi ab eo quod non est posset esse. Recte consensit Arcesilas ad definitionem additum*."

Arcesilaus then combined Zeno's concession of the first three points to conclude the fourth, which is that nothing can be perceived.[76] Zeno's concession of the first and second points establishes that, in his view, there are false appearances that can be credible and yet not perceived. This suggests that false appearances can look the same as true ones, if credible appearances are credible on the basis that they seem true. The third point establishes that true appearances cannot be perceived, if false appearances can look true and yet not be perceived. The fourth point is simply the culmination of the first three points. As a result, Arcesilaus and his successors in the Academy conclude that nothing can be perceived. This does not entail that the Academics blind themselves to anything that presents itself vividly to the senses or to the mind. That would be contrary to nature (*contra naturam est probabile nihil esse*).[77] Instead, they simply confess what appears to them to be the case. It appears to them that nothing can be perceived by the senses in the way that the Stoics require of their wise man.[78]

At this, Cicero says, the Stoics certainly feel scandalized. They say that the Academic position is totally illogical, and yet they arrive at this conclusion based on the what they think the Stoic's own premises about sense perception entail. The Stoics deny that the Academics share their premises, but the latter insist upon it.[79] Indeed, in the former's view, Arcesilaus' argument sophistically manipulates what they really say. In one respect, they might agree that false appearances cannot be perceived, if they are ever credible. This technicality, however, does not establish that false appearances cannot be

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[76] Perception is impossible, because "there is no true appearance deriving from sensation which cannot conceivably be paired (*adpositum*) with another appearance that is not different from it but that cannot be perceived."
[77] Cicero, *Academica* 2.31.99.
[78] Ibid., 2.31.101; 2.32.103.
[79] Ibid., 2.32.101-102.

detected as false, which is what Arcesilaus' argument truly requires. In fact, the Stoics believe that false appearances can be detected as false. Hence, they deny his conclusion. And although Chrysippus wrote volumes against the senses, the examples of double vision or hallucinations that the Academics cherish so much do nothing to prove that false appearances cannot be detected as false.

If these examples prove anything, the Stoics say, they prove the Stoic's point of view. For instance, Hercules killed his sons under the false impression that they were his enemies. But when his madness subsided and his senses returned to normal, it became obvious to him that he had been mad. Likewise, the false impression of double vision occurs due to an abnormal bodily state, such as when the eye has been pushed in. But the slightest scrutiny reveals that this type of vision is vacuous, because it disappears when the eye returns to normal. Thus, when the conditions of our senses are optimal, and appearances are vivid, consistent and withstand all scrutiny, appearances can be perceived in such a way as to constitute knowledge (*scientia*).[80] When appearances fail to withstand all scrutiny, such as in Hercules' case or that of double vision, we can detect their incredibility. Therefore, Arcesilaus' argument is invalid.

Cicero responds to this rebuttal by suggesting that the Stoics have missed the point. The issue, he says, is not whether we can distinguish between what appears to the eye in one condition or another, or between what appears to us when sane or demented.[81] If this were all perception required, everyone would be a perceiver, because obvious differences are evident to anyone to whom they appear. According to Zeno, however, perception requires more than the observation of what is perspicuous. He says that only

[80] Cicero, *Academica* 1.11.41; 2.16.52.
[81] Ibid., 2.27.88; 2.28.90.

the wise know anything, and he did not seem to think that everyone was wise.[82] Therefore, whatever the Stoic sage perceives may be perspicuous, but what is perspicuous in this account is not necessarily perceived. The issue at hand, then, Cicero continues, is whether any one person can justify complete confidence in the evidence of his senses as the *normam scientiae*. If our senses constitute the standard for knowledge, they should not only detect obvious or generic differences between impressions, such as the differences between elephants and sharks or between vigilance and dreams, but they should also discern between true and false appearances with the precision that the Stoics demand of their sage. The Stoics say that everything exists in a class of its own and that nothing is identical with anything else.[83] If this is the case, then true appearances must be characterised by special marks from their sources that could not be replicated by any other appearance that is not from the same source. For instance, no grain of sand could appear to the senses to be identical with another grain of sand, because the appearances derive from different grains as their particular sources. Likewise, no stamp could appear identical to another stamp, because no appearance should appear identical to an appearance from a separate source, even if their sources are instances of the same type of thing. Any such replication would constitute false or deceptive impressions.[84]

According to Cicero, the Academics maintain that all sense presentations are susceptible to replication in the way that grains of sand seem to be, and so they deny that anything can be perceived in such a way that mistakes are categorically impossible.[85] Indeed, according to the Stoics, *κατάληψις* cannot possibly be false. Hence, the

[82] Cicero, *Academica* 2.47.145.
[83] Ibid., 2.26.85.
[84] Ibid., 2.26.85-27.86.
[85] Ibid., 2.26.84.

Academics conclude that this kind of perception is impossible, unless the Stoic can prove that any given sense presentation cannot appear to be replicated. The proof that *κατάληψις* is possible therefore depends on proving that this kind of deception is impossible among sense presentations in general, including in the cases of sand, hair, stamps and so on. If the Stoics should consider the Academics insane for trying to shift the burden of proof in this way, as if the possibility of perception required that deception could be proven to be impossible,[86] then Cicero says the Academics would compare their position to that of a madman, as well.

Tuditanus, for instance, is convinced that he possesses the *normam scientiae* as much as any Stoic sage. To be sure, he does not think he can be deceived, because what he considers to be true is perspicuous to him. Tuditanus, however, appears to be irremediably out of his mind (*insanis*). Therefore, it seems inadmissible for the Academic to equate mental certitude with the fact that what seems evident is perceived to be certain. Indeed, Cicero says, false appearances cannot be perceived in proportion to our self-assurance.[87] But even if the Academics felt reassured that perception was possible on the basis that certain things are obvious, they still could not be confident in their senses in the way that the Stoics require of their wise man; they can never claim to possess the standard for knowledge that cannot possibly result in false judgements. Consequently, they believe that perception is either impossible, or if it is possible, they can never be completely certain that they possess it. But even if they felt certain that they could possess it, they

[86] Cicero asks his interlocutor to prove the impossibility of deception when he asks him, for instance, at *Academica* 2.26.85, what proof he has (*quid habes explorati*) for why someone who is not Cotta cannot conceivably appear to him to be Cotta, if something can seem to be that is not.
[87] Cicero, *Academica* 2.28.89-90.

would still not profess this fact,[88] because they have seen how detrimental this claim can be to philosophical discourse.

The Stoics, for example, set out an entire system of philosophy (*disciplina sapientiae*). They claim not only to have unravelled the mysteries of physics and to have established the right way to debate and understand things, but also to have discerned the highest goods and what manner of life everyone should follow.[89] Next, they declare that their wise man holds no opinions, because these are extremely base, rash, and possibly false. As an alternative to mere belief, then, their sage maintains that every idea expounded upon in his system is perceived as clearly as the fact that it is day or that vipers and rat snakes are different species.[90] The Epicureans certainly trust their senses as much as any Stoic, if not more so, but they totally dismiss many Stoic notions in physics. For instance, they laugh at the Stoics for speculating that the earth is antipodal and that people live with their feet towards us on the opposite side of the planet. The Stoics reciprocate by deriding the Epicureans equally and in a similar fashion.[91] Stoic disagreements, however, do not end with the Epicureans. Zeno maintains that the mind (*mens*; *animus*) and senses are constituted from fire, one of the four bodily elements, on the basis that what is not bodily can neither bring anything about nor be affected by anything.[92] In this, he departed from Aristotle and his predecessors, for whom the mind was constituted by a fifth element that was not bodily.[93] The Stoic also asserts that the world is possessed of a mind that created both itself and all things that it governs. He is

[88] Cicero, *Academica* 2.21.68.
[89] Ibid., 2.36.114.
[90] Ibid., 2.37.119; 2.41.128.
[91] Ibid., 2.39.123.
[92] Ibid., 1.11.39.
[93] Ibid., 1.7.26; 1.11.39.

equally convinced that the sun, moon, stars, earth and sea are gods, because the living intelligence (*animalis intellegentia*) courses through them. Nevertheless, he says, the world will dissipate one day.[94] Plato and Aristotle, on the other hand, each maintain that the world is so glorious an operation (*praeclarus opus*) that it can never fail.[95]

In Cicero's view, the Stoics should not consider the Academics to be their opponents in any of these debates.[96] They believe the Stoics should defend their ideas, since many of them seem probable[97] and could be true.[98] What Cicero says the Academics do not think the Stoics should retain is their confidence that they could not possibly be proven wrong or that an alternative theory could not render an issue undecidable by seeming equally likely. The Stoics should remember that they share their confidence in common with those Epicureans who accuse them of being insane and their own confidence would condemn Plato and Aristotle as unwise for having held untrue theories. For they are obliged to repudiate them as if their life and reputation depended on it,[99] because if contradictory positions are possibly true, then theirs is possibly false,[100] which it would be extremely base and rash to hold.

As an alternative, then, to this degree of presumption in philosophy, Cicero's Academics propose that in all investigations we should seek what is most probable, clear and unimpeded. Some say this proposal belonged to Carneades as opposed to Arcesilaus and that this introduced inconsistency into their school. However, it seems to Cicero to be the only option that remains for the Academics who choose not to flatter themselves by

[94] Cicero, *Academica* 2.37.119.
[95] Ibid., 2.37.118; 2.38.119.
[96] Ibid., 2.39.123.
[97] Ibid., 2.38.121.
[98] Ibid., 2.38.119.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 2.36.115; 2.48.147.

considering themselves to be irrefutably wise.[101] Even if Arcesilaus himself had thought that the sage possessed irrefutable knowledge, and would therefore refrain from all opinions, he did not necessarily consider himself to be wise. And if he did not consider himself to be wise, since he thought the Stoic's premises about sense perception precluded him from sagehood, it would still have been necessary for him to yield to non-kataleptic impressions for the purposes of life and inquiry.[102]

As a matter of fact, Cicero says, the Academics behold with their senses the same sky and earth and sea as any Stoic sage, and can describe all things under them with equal precision and detail. Their observations, in turn, enable them to make voyages, sow crops, or tell snakes apart as reliably as if they perceived them – and perhaps more so, if *κατάληψις* does not exist[103] – since their decisions are informed by what appears to them in an unhampered and scrutinized sort of way.[104] Their judgements in more difficult questions are similarly informed, such as when they inquire into what the mind is, and whether it is bodily or incorporeal, or mortal or eternal.[105] The only difference[106] between the Academics and Stoics, Cicero concludes, is that the Stoic's dignity as a wise man is at stake if he appears to hold a merely probable opinion. The Academics, in contrast, do not profess to be wise, unless it is wise to resist error, frivolity and rashness.[107] They resist these vices by yielding to what seems probable on every side of an issue and by saying

[101] Cicero, *Academica* 2.32.104; 2.39.110.
[102] Ibid., 2.21.68; 2.31.99-101.
[103] Ibid., 2.47.146: "*tollere nos quod nusquam esset*."
[104] Ibid., 2.33.105; 2.47.146.
[105] Ibid., 2.39.124.
[106] The only difference that Cicero seems to want to emphasize at this point and at ibid., 2.3.7-8.
[107] Ibid., 2.20.66; 2.34.108; 2.41.128.

nothing of certainty,[108] especially when a question appears undecidable.[109] This approach to philosophy lends their thought its liberty,[110] and they believe this liberty is needed to redress that tendency of the mind towards dogmatic bondage. When it is attained, it is its own pleasure. For inquiry itself, Cicero says, is a kind of natural sustenance of minds (*animorum ingeniorumque ... pabulum*). Indeed, when we contemplate such high matters as the mind itself or the operations and sinews of nature, we become elevated, and can look down on how small and tiny our human affairs are.[111] Truly, from this vantage point, all arguments for and against the Academics are in their favour.

In Thorsrud's view, Cicero's articulation of the Academic position in the *Acad*. is praiseworthy for its dialectical tidiness. The Academic initially faced a *reductio ad absurdum* that he could not escape: it seemed absurd for him to claim that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent. But when Cicero's Academics maintain that knowledge is impossible or that no beliefs merits assent, they do not appear to assert these views in logically absolute terms. On the contrary, they are trying to show that these views are the natural conclusion to their Stoic interlocutor's own epistemological assumptions. They then demonstrate this by arguing from Zeno's own premises "that there are no kataleptic impressions." As long as this argument is valid, then:

> [E]ither the Stoic sage suspends judgement … or he assents to a non-kataleptic impression and thereby holds a mere opinion (*Acad.* 2.67) … Since the Stoics believe that ... the sage would not assent in the absence of kataleptic impressions, they would be left with an inactive sage. So, in order for the sage to be active, he must assent. In that case[, however,] he will assent to non-kataleptic appearances, i.e. he will form a mere opinion. But since the Stoics held that having a mere

[108] Cicero, *Academica* 2.3.8.
[109] Ibid., 2.39.124.
[110] Ibid., 2.38.120.
[111] Ibid., 2.41.127.

> opinion is a[n …] epistemic failing … they would be left with[a fallible ...] sage.[112]

"Neither of these options is acceptable to the Stoics,"[113] and so they have no choice but to join with the Academics in philosophy with a renewed sense of urgency.

Frede certainly acknowledges that there is a dialectical component to Cicero's articulation of the Academic position in the *Acad.*, but there is a key difference between his interpretation of it and Thorsrud's. While they can both agree that Cicero subverts the Stoic position, Frede thinks Cicero ultimately shares – and therefore succumbs to – the same convictions. Thus, unaware or unwilling to consider alternative epistemologies, Cicero dogmatically closes himself off to the truth. In this, Frede believes Cicero departed from his Academic predecessors, because they viewed the Academic method of arguing "against any claim and – by implication – for any claim … as a purely ... critical method."[114] For example, Arcesilaus' and Carneades' considerations *pro* and *contra* could "leave [them] with an impression … But it was not assumed that this impression gained any epistemological status in virtue of the fact that one was still left with it[.]"[115] Frede thinks Cicero departed from this purely dialectical method based on *Acad.* 2.3.7 and 2.10.32.[116] These passages suggest to him that "[a] certain interpretation of"

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[112] Thorsrud attributes this dialectical strategy to Carneades at "Arcesilaus and Carneades," 75, and to Cicero at *Ancient Scepticism*, 91.
[113] Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism*, 91.
[114] Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," 217.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Cicero, *Academica* 2.3.7: "*neque nostrae disputationes quidquam aliud agunt nisi ut in utramque partem dicendo eliciant et tamquam exprimant aliquid quod aut verum sit aut ad id quam proxime accedat*"; ibid., 2.10.32: "*Nec vero satis constituere possum quod sit eorum consilium aut quid velint. Interdum enim cum adhibemus ad eos orationem eius modi, si ea quae disputentur vera sint, tum omnia fore incerta, respondent: 'Quid ergo istud ad nos? num nostra culpa est? naturam accusa, quae in profundo veritatem, ut ait Democritus, penitus abstruserit.' Alii autem elegantius, qui etiam queruntur quod eos*

Carneades' reliance on the *πιθανόν* emboldened Cicero to "talk of the probable as the canon of truth and falsehood [... and to] talk of the Academic method of arguing pro and con … as a method he pursues in the hope of finding what is true or at least very much like the truth."[117] This misinterpretation of the *πιθανόν* ultimately led to the philosopher's decline into dogmatic scepticism.

Cicero's interpretation of the *πιθανόν* results in dogmatism, Frede says, because "once the skeptic takes the liberty to take positions … he comes to believe in the premises of the arguments the skeptics had formulated to show that the Stoics themselves were committed to the view that nothing is, or can be, known."[118]

> And now these arguments have a pull on him … Now skeptical arguments to the effect that nothing can be known can come to be interpreted as arguments which go some way … to establish the truth of the claim that nothing can be known … The skeptic now, though qualifiedly, himself espouses the dogmatic framework of concepts and assumptions which seem to make knowledge impossible … [And f]inally … the dogmatic skeptic now seems to accept the Stoic view that knowledge has to be certain.[119]

Frede concludes from this consideration that negative dogmatism is the inevitable result of Cicero's claim that the Academic method can elicit either the truth or what is *probabile* and similar to it (*simile veri*). As such, Cicero justly succumbs to the criticisms of dogmatic scepticism. The safer route for him to take, then, would have been to totally

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insimulemus omnia incerta dicere, quantumque intersit inter incertum et id quod percipi non possit docere constantur eaque dinstinguere. Cum his igitur agamus qui haec distinguunt, illos qui omnia sic incerta dicunt ut stellarum numerus par an impar sit quasi desperatos aliquos relinquamus. Volunt enim (et hoc quidem vel maxime vos animadvertebam moveri) probabile aliquid esse et quasi veri simile, eaque se uti regula et in agenda vita et in quaerendo ac disserendo."

[117] Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," 216.

[118] Ibid., 217.

[119] Ibid., 217-218.

dissociate the truth and what is truth-like from any conceivable impression that the sceptic can arrive at as a result of dialectic.

According to Frede and Striker, Arcesilaus and Carneades happily achieved this result. They saw "no reason to think that there might be a link between persuasiveness and truth (cp. DL 9.94)."[120] Instead, they went along with impressions in a manner that was "entirely passive and unquestioning, not based on any reasons at all"[121] and that does not "discriminate between impressions in any way."[122] For instance, if they were to receive the impression of a cliff's edge, they could "accept that this is the impression [they were] left with, without … thinking the further thought that the impression is true[… I]t may [just] be the case that human beings work in such a way that impressions are more or less evident to us."[123] If only Cicero had adopted this radically dialectical scepticism with its total dissociation of the truth from the truth-like, he might have avoided the ignominy of negative dogmatism.

In my view, following Thorsrud, and Lévy, however, Cicero's desire to elicit the *veri simile* through the Academic method is a much more positive than lamentable development for the New Academy. It does not need to entail dogmatic scepticism. On the contrary, it seems to involve what Thorsrud calls "epistemic optimism"[124] tempered by epistemic humility, so that "the subjective plausibility of an impression [for Cicero may act as] … a fallible indicator of truth."[125] As such, Cicero may earnestly seek the truth as the *pabulum animorum ingeniorumque*, not just as part of a refutative strategy

[120] Striker, "Academics versus Pyrrhonists, reconsidered," 205.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 204.
[123] Ibid., 208.
[124] Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism*, 98-99.
[125] Ibid., 75.

against the Stoics, but as part of a humble, deliberate and active process of discernment in the broader questions of life and philosophy. In this, the philosopher appears to have struck a happy balance between radical dialectical scepticism and the generally dogmatizing tendency.

I believe it is unlikely that Cicero's position in the *Acad.* entails dogmatism, principally because he concludes the dialogue with *ἐποχή* on the question of the possibility or impossibility of knowledge.[126] When Cicero's Hortensius first heard the Stoic's arguments against the Academy, he was exceedingly impressed, so much so that he would often raise his hands in wonder while encouraging Cicero to abandon the Academics.[127] By the end of the dialogue, however, he appears to be either unsure about which side of the debate he should prefer or else unwilling to say which side he favours. When Cicero asks him for his verdict, he simply says: *Tollendum*![128] Presumably, he felt indecisive after hearing the Academic arguments and thought that the Stoics as well as the Academics had given plausible arguments for their respective positions. Cicero responds to Hortensius' verdict by calling it the *propriam sententiam Academiae*. If Cicero were a negative dogmatist, as Frede and O'Daly claim, it seems unlikely he would describe Hortensius' position in these highly favourable terms. For if he were truly closed off to

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[126] Cicero, *Academica* 2.48.148: "*inquam, "sed quid Catulus sentit? quid Hortensius?" Tum Catulus: "Egone?"inquit: "ad patris revolvor sententiam, quam quidem ille Carneadeam esse dicebat, ut percipi nihil putem posse, adsensurum autem non percepto, id est opinaturum, sapientem existumem, sed ita ut intellegat se opinari sciatque nihil esse quod comprehendi et percipi possit; quare ἐποχήν illam omnium rerum comprobans illi alteri sententiae, nihil esse quod percipi possit, vehementer adsentior." Habeo," inquam, "sententiam tuam nec eam admodum aspernor; sed tibi quid tandem videtur, Hortensi?" Tum ille ridens: "Tollendum!" "Teneo te," inquam, "nam ista Academiae est propria sententia.*"
[127] Ibid., 2.19.63.
[128] Ibid., 2.48.148.

the possibility of truth, one would expect the proper Academic sentiment to require that he deny all plausibility to the Stoic's point of view.

Another important indication that Cicero was a non-dogmatic philosopher comes from *Acad.* 2.20.66 and 2.21.68. In the first passage, Cicero describes himself as unwise and as a "great opinion holder," because he is not able to resist what seems most probable on every side of an issue.[129] In the second passage, he says that even if he thought he were a sage and that perception was possible, he would still not claim to perceive anything, as if his judgements could not possibly prove false, because the habit of that kind of assent is a steep and dangerous slope (*consuetudo periculosa et lubrica*; *praecipitem locum*).[130] These two passages suggest that the proper Academic mentality is to avoid claiming certainty, even if one feels certain about one's impressions. As an alternative to self-certainty, then, the Academic can only yield to his impressions in such a way as to know that he is an opinion holder or in such a way that he considers himself to be an opinion holder. If this reading of the *Acad.* is accurate, it seems unlikely that Cicero's attachment to the New Academy entails unambiguous and irrevocable assertions (*decreta*; *δόγματα*) of either the truth or the impossibility of truth in either ordinary or philosophical matters. On the contrary, the *Acad.* contains an exhortation to seek the truth always and in all

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[129] Cicero, *Academica* 2.20.66: "*Nec tamen ego is sum qui nihil umquam falsi adprobem, qui numquam adsentiar, qui nihil opiner, sed quaerimus de sapiente. Ego vero ipse et magnus quidem sum opinator (non enim sum sapiens)… Visa enim ista cum acriter mentem sensumve pepulerunt accipio, iisque interdum etiam adsentior (nec percipio tamen, nihil enim arbitror posse percipi) – non sum sapiens, itaque visis cedo neque possum resistere*."

[130] Ibid., 2.21.68: "*Nobis autem primum, etiam si quid percipi possit, tamen ipsa consuetudo adsentiendi periculosa esse videtur et lubrica, quam ob rem, cum tam vitiosum esse constet adsentiri quicquam aut falsum aut incognitum, sustinenda est potius omnis adsensio, ne praecipitet si temere processerit; ita enim finitima sunt falsa veris eaque quae percipi non possunt eis quae possunt … ut tam in praecipitem locum non debeat se sapiens committere*."

schools in a manner that is characterised by the humility of fallibilism.[131] Until this "tireless quest for truth"[132] can be completed through the balance of arguments *pro* and *contra*, the Academic will consider himself ignorant.

[131] Cicero, *Academica* 2.3.7-9; 2.41.127-128.
[132] Lévy, "Cicero and the New Academy," 51.

Chapter Three: The Fallibilism of Augustine's *Contra Academicos*

In the preceding chapter, I argued that Cicero's Academic philosophy as articulated in the *Acad.* is best defined as the practice of arguing for and against every side of an issue. I also argued that the intended effect of this method was to elicit either the truth or what is most truth-like in a manner that liberates our powers of judgement from the fetters of dogmatism. The context in which Cicero lived, however, seemed to him to be characterized more by the pretensions of individuals to infallible knowledge than the actual possession of it. Hence, to counteract this *consuetudo periculosa*, he developed a clear tendency to underline "the elements of uncertainty"[133] in the things philosophers were asserting. This tendency was particulary suitable as a reaction to the Stoic conception of knowledge and wisdom, but whereas Frede and O'Daly think it leads Cicero to dogmatic scepticism, I believe it culminates in what Thorsrud and Lévy have described as a philosophically rigourous fallibilism. The chief difference between this fallibilism and negative dogmatism is that, although the fallibilist is humble in his expectations to know the truth, he remains optimistic that "the proper application of the Academic method will lead us closer to [it]."[134] The dogmatic sceptic, in contrast, is deeply pessimistic about the possibility of knowledge and in fact seems to rule it out entirely.

On the assumption, then, that Cicero's articulation of the Academic position in the *Acad.* commits him to fallibilism as opposed to dogmatic scepticism, it remains to be seen whether this alternative interpretive schema can help us reconcile the content of

[133] Lévy, "Cicero and the New Academy," 42.
[134] Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism*, 99.

Augustine's *Letter* 1 to the so-called Received Interpretation of the *CA*. According to Dutton, Bolyard, Foley, and Wills, this reconciliation would seem unlikely, since the *CA* constitutes an attempt to refute specifically "Cicero's adherence … to the New Academy."[135] In my view and Starnes', however, this reading of the *CA* is ultimately unsatisfying, since the sceptical position that Augustine attempts to refute in his first Cassiciacum dialogue does not appear to "fit" adequately Cicero's exposition of it in the *Acad.*.[136] The reason for this discrepancy, I contend, was that Augustine's dialogue constituted an attempt to refute his friend Alypius' and his student Licentius' dogmatic interpretations of New Academic scepticism rather than what Augustine thought Cicero actually endorsed. Indeed, it is my view that Augustine's interpretation of Cicero's Academic position in the *CA* actually approximates Thorsrud's and Levy's fallibilist interpretation. This is why he can consistently claim to imitate rather than overcome the Academics in the *Letter* 1 while attempting at the same time to use their philosophical method to dismantle a dogmatic New Academic scepticism in the *CA*.

The evidence in favour of Dutton's, Bolyard's, Foley's, and Wills' view that Augustine attempts to refute specifically Cicero's adherence to the New Academy by revealing its "self contradictory character"[137] is nevertheless not inconsiderable. It spans throughout the *CA* and importantly includes passages from the *Conf.*,[138] the *Trin.*[139] and

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[135] Michael P. Foley, "Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues," 64; Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*; Bolyard, "Augustine, Epicurus, and External World Skepticism," 168; Wills, "Ancient Scepticism and The Contra Academicos of Saint Augustine," 111, note 2.
[136] Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1991), 163, note 29.
[137] Wills, ibid., 119.
[138] Augustine, *Confessionum Libri Tredecim* (1898), ed. Pius Knöll (Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2009).

the *Civ. Dei*.[140] In the first part of this chapter, I will review the evidence in favour of this view to discern what is most plausible about it. The view has, in fact, a great deal going for it and it sheds considerable light on what Augustine's text accomplishes as a whole. As stated above, however, I will ultimately conclude that the evidence for this reading is more unsatisfying than satisfying, since Augustine appears to me to imitate rather than overcome Cicero's Academic position as articulated in the *Acad*.. In the second part of this chapter, I will then proceed to argue for how this can be the case. What Augustine successfully appears to do in his first Cassiciacum dialogue is argue on every side of the issues with which the text is concerned in such a way that not only combats the tendencies of his students' minds towards dogmatism, but also in such a way that simultaneously instills in his interlocutors the faith that philosophy may yet reveal to those who seek for it the truth or its closest approximation.

For Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills, the primary reason Augustine must attempt to refute Cicero's Academic position is rooted in the fact that Augustine "could not conceive of wisdom except as a type of knowledge and saw the possession of this knowledge to be necessary for happiness."[141] Cicero's Academics, on the other hand, appear to Dutton to have conceived of wisdom and the happy life based on an incompatible Socratic model that they likely adapted from the *Apol*..[142] From their adaptation of this model, Dutton thinks the inevitability of Augustine's arguments *contra Academicos* was born. In the *Apol*., we learn, for example, that Socrates' conception of

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[139] Augustine, *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim*, ed. W.J. Mountain (Turnholti: Brepols, 1968).
[140] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, eds. Bernhard Dombart and Alfons Kalb (Turnholti: Brepols, 1955).
[141] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 49.
[142] Plato's *Apology*.

wisdom originated as an attempt to explain why the Oracle of Apollo would have ever pronounced that "he among all persons is wisest." Socrates was "puzzled as to the meaning of" the god's message, since he had never considered himself to be either wise or knowledgeable.[143] He thought that if he knew anything, he knew his own ignorance. In order to make sense of Apollo's pronouncement, he therefore began to investigate among the Athenians the pros and cons of all the variety of positions that the wise men of his day held. In this way, he hoped to learn about what it really meant to possess true knowledge. What appears to have happened, however, is that Socrates' inquiries "more often than not induce[d] deep perplexity in those who participate[d]" in them,[144] since almost everyone whose views he carefully examined turned out to be "either wholly lacking in wisdom, or, if they did possess any wisdom at all, [they …] grossly overestimated its scope."[145] Generalizing from this experience, "[w]hat Socrates seems finally to have concluded" is that Apollo identified him as wisest, not because he possessed anything like the infallible knowledge or wisdom that the gods alone must have, but "because he alone recognized his own ignorance." Hence, when the so-called sages of Athens remained complacent in what were ultimately merely human opinions, Socrates "harbored no such illusions" about how knowledgeable he was. In consequence, he was able dedicate "his life to inquiry with a seriousness" and freedom "not found among his fellow Athenians."[146] This life of free inquiry he believed to be the happy life.

According to Dutton, Cicero's Academic imitation of Socrates' conception of wisdom and of the happy life as articulated in the *Apol*. is well attested by a number of his

[143] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 39.
[144] Ibid., 38.
[145] Ibid., 39.
[146] Ibid., 40.

writings. At *Tusc.*[147] 1.9.17, he expresses the Socratic point of view that "wisdom in its proper sense – which we might characterize as … knowledge that is certain and stable – "[148] belongs to the god Apollo as opposed to any "mere mortals."[149] At *Nat. D.* 1.5.11, Cicero describes the Academic approach to philosophy as the "Socratic" practice of arguing for and against every side of an issue "*contra omnia*." Finally, at *Acad.* 2.20.66, Cicero implicitly denies having ever discovered anything in the course of his investigations that could remotely be considered infallible knowledge. Instead, he appears to have found again and again that everyone whose views he carefully examined turned out to be either wholly lacking in wisdom, or, if they did possess any wisdom at all, they grossly overestimated its scope. This experience, to be sure, did not prevent him from continuing the search for knowledge, since he believed that liberty of thought and "the very investigation of things" brings about the "most humanizing kind of pleasure,"[150] but he did eventually arrive at Socrates' impression from the *Apol*., which was that "the greatest activity" of the wise man is to resist the error, frivolty and rashness of human opinions by knowing one's own ignorance. By extension, this meant practicing the suspension of "slippery assent"(*adsensus lubricos*).[151]

In the *CA,* Licentius and Alypius appear to Dutton to faithfully uphold Cicero's Socratic-Academic conception of wisdom and the happy life, whereas Augustine appears

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[147] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, eds. E.H. Warmington, T.E. Page, W.H.D. Rouse, E. Capps and L.A. Post (Harvard University Press, 1950).
[148] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 40.
[149] Cicero's word for "mere mortal" here is *homunculus*.
[150] Cicero, *Academica* 2.41.127-128: "*Indagatio ipsa rerum cum maximarum tum etiam occultissimarum habet oblectationem; si vero aliquid occurrit quod veri simile videatur, humanissima completur animus voluptate*."
[151] Ibid., 2.34.108: "*Ego enim … maximam actionem puto repugnare visis, obsistere opinionibus, adsensus lubricos sustinere, credoque Clitomacho ita scribenti, Herculi quondam laborem exanclatum a Carneade, quod, ut feram et immanem belvam, sic ex animis nostris adsensionem, id est opinationem et temeritatem, extraxisset*."

to have completely "rejected" it, insofar as he thought "the Academics … could make no claim to be either wise or happy."[152] In the first book of the *CA*, for example, Dutton thinks Augustine makes it clear why, in his view, Cicero's Academics can "make no claim to be either wise or happy" by way of an intellectual exercise he "sets for his students Licentius and Trygetius"[153] based on their recent readings of Cicero's *Hort*..[154] It begins when he asks them, first, what they think wisdom is and, second, whether they think the knowledge that is wisdom is necessary for happiness or if instead the search for truth is sufficient for beatitude. Licentius proceeds to say all the things Dutton thinks an Academic would say, who had been asked these questions. He even cites Cicero as the authority for his position.[155] Trygetius, on the other hand, gives all the answers that Dutton believes Augustine approves.

In answer to the first question, Licentius says that human wisdom seems to him to consist in the search for knowledge rather than the possession of it, since "God alone … knows the truth,"[156] and since the greatest error of the wise man is to claim to know something, when "man is not able to perceive anything."[157] In answer to the second question, he says that the search for truth seems to him to be sufficient for beatitude, since humans are either unhappy or happy, and he does not seem to himself to be unhappy in the search for truth. In fact, he even seems to himself to live in a state of "great mental

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[152] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 49.
[153] Ibid., 50.
[154] Cicero's *Hortensius*.
[155] It should be noted that Licentius implies he has not actually read the "*Academicos*" at *Contra Academicos* 2.7.17.
[156] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 1.3.9: "*veritatem autem illam solum deum nosse arbitror*."
[157] Ibid., 1.3.7: "*nihil ab homine percipi posse.*"

tranquility" to the extent that he lives day by day in the exercise of reason.[158] Trygetius is not sure what to think about whether wisdom can be attained by humans and what exactly it consists in, but all his reasoning tells him that everything Licentius has just said in response to Augustine's line of questioning seems wrong. On the basis of this natural inclination, he proceeds to formulate "a set of objections … directed against Licentius" which Dutton thinks "may easily be taken as directed against the Academics,"[159] since Augustine is going to build upon them in the second and third books of the *CA* as well as in the *Conf.*, the *Trin.* and the *Civ*. *Dei* to explicitly condemn the philosophy of universal doubt.

Trygetius' principal objections to Licentius' articulation of the Academic position are "the Objection from Error"[160] and "the Unsatisfied Desire Objection."[161] According to his first objection, there is no possible world in which the Academic conception of wisdom could seem viable, since there are more types of error than just claiming to know something, when one's claim to knowledge might prove false or potentially false. For example, a person who perpetually searches for the truth but who is also convinced that it cannot be found errs by searching for the truth.[162] Therefore, the Academic philosopher cannot be wise, since he defines the greatest act of the wise man as the avoidance of commiting any errors, and yet he continually commits himself to error, insofar as he keeps searching for the truth that he "vehemently denies"[163] can be found. In Dutton's

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[158] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 1.4.11: "*viximus enim magna mentis tranquilitate*." See also ibid., 1.8.23.
[159] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 51.
[160] Ibid., 121.
[161] Ibid., 54.
[162] Augustine, ibid., 1.3.9; 1.4.10-11.
[163] Ibid., 1.3.7: "*adfirmasse vehementer*."

view, Licentius' response to this objection is "embarassingly weak"[164] and resembles "sophistry"[165] more than a little bit. At the same time, he thinks it provides an interesting insight into how "one person's *modus ponens*" can become "another person's *modus tollens*. Very roughly," he says, "Trygetius argues from the vanity of the search for unknowable truth to the denial that it leads to wisdom … whereas Licentius argues from the … happiness to which the search leads to the denial of its vanity,"[166] since for him as much as for Trygetius, wisdom is not just any knowledge, but specifically the knowledge that makes us happy.[167] In response to Trygetius' first objection, Licentius says that nobody errs by searching for the truth who is happy. The Academic wise man is not unhappy in the search for truth, but in fact possesses great tranquility of mind. Therefore, the Academic who persists in philosophy can be wise, insofar as wisdom and happiness consist in the search for truth and in the avoidance of error.[168]

At this juncture in the debate between Augustine's students, Dutton thinks it is reasonable for "our judgement as to which is the" more defensible position to depend "largely … on our antecedent commitments."[169] For example, if we take a step "back from the details of " Trygetius' "Objection from Error" and look at "the Academics [as] the legitimate heirs of Socrates," and if we regard "the kind of activity in which Socrates" and the Academics "engaged" as philosophers as "ennobling,"[170] such as conversing daily in the *agora* with their peers and fellow citizens "about … matters of philosophical

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[164] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 55.
[165] Ibid., 53.
[166] Ibid., 56-57.
[167] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 1.8.23.
[168] Ibid., 1.4.11.
[169] Dutton, ibid., 57.
[170] Ibid., 74.

interest,"[171] then Trygetius' argument can conceivably come across to us as quite "shallow and dismissive,"[172] even if it is logically valid. His "Unsatisfied Desire Objection," however, might just be enough to tip the scales in favour of his side of the debate. In this objection, he more or less successfully sets out to undermine Licentius' premise that the Academic can be happy who searches for the truth while ruling out the possibility of ever attaining it. A person who either searches for the truth or who searches for it while precluding the possibility of its attainment, he says, suffers from either an unsatisfied or unsatisfiable desire, "since he cannot attain what he greatly desires."[173] A person who suffers from either an unsatisfied or unsatisfiable desire is not happy. Therefore, an Academic who either searches for the truth or who searches for it and rules out its possibility "is not happy."[174]

One can easily imagine the Academics responding to Trygetius' second objection by claiming that "unsatisifed desire does not [necessarily] count against happiness," or that a person can be happy even if he or she "does not possess all that he or she desires,"[175] but what seems most important about Trygetius' argument for the purposes to which Augustine is going to put it is the very real and uncomfortable lived experience to which his syllogism refers. If it were not for this lived experience with which Augustine was so intimately familiar, Augustine would certainly have had a much harder time ruling "in favor of Trygetius and against Licentius[']"[176] representation of the Academics by the end of book one of the *CA*. The reason, Dutton says, is that he can neither "convict"

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[171] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 73.
[172] Ibid., 74.
[173] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 1.3.9: "*cum id quod magno opera concupiscit adsequi nequeat*."
[174] Dutton, ibid., 54; see Augustine, ibid., 1.3.9.
[175] Dutton, ibid., 55.
[176] Ibid., 57.

Licentius' "Academics of unhappiness in their philosophical practice" nor totally "discredit the Socratic ideal that animates them"[177] without it.

Augustine crucially expounds upon the inner turmoil that he thinks inevitably attends the practice of doubting all things and universally suspending assent at *CA* 3.9.19-20 as well as at *Conf.* 6.4.6. At *CA* 3.9.19-20, he censures Cicero's Academics for luring men to philosophy "using the seductive and holy name of wisdom." He censures them for this, because if the people the Academics wish to lure to philosophy should spend a lifetime pursuing the truth for the sake of great benefit, only to be later convinced by the Academics that they have learned nothing more than they knew to begin with – and that the price for this outcome was forsaking many other pleasures in life – then they would rightfully curse the Academics for having seduced them to pursue philosophy in vain. Indeed, they would have been better off, if they had simply come to their senses and not desired the truth.[178] Starnes critically reminds us, however, that for Augustine it is contrary to nature not to desire to know the truth, since the truth is incorruptible, inviolable and immutable by definition,[179] and everyone knows that incorruptible, inviolable and immutable things are infinitely "better" and more "preferable" than things that are corruptible, violable and mutable.[180] It follows for Augustine in the *CA* as much as in the *Conf.* that the practice of doubting all things is intolerable from the perspective of human happiness, since it is human nature to desire the incorruptible, inviolable and

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[177] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 57.
[178] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 1.3.9.
[179] Castagnoli offers a helpful analysis into why the truth for Augustine is incorruptible, inviolable and immutable by definition at Luca Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation*: *The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 121-129.
[180] Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX*, 172; Augustine, *Confessionum Libri Tredecim* 7.1.1.

immutable reward that only philosophy promises to offer by way of access to the truth, and since the consequent of Licentius' articulation of the Academic position is that one ought to either unhappily desist from the search for knowledge or else pursue it unhappily in vain. Due to his own experience living in this intolerable condition of mind, Augustine goes as far as to say at *Conf.* 6.4.6 that the practice of doubting all things and universally suspending assent invariably results in a kind of spiritual death.[181]

As an educator, Augustine's worst fear would be for his students to succumb to the same inner turmoil that he once did in the period during which he "doubted all things."[182] He therefore concludes the exercise he set out for Trygetius and Licentius in book one of the *CA* by praising Trygetius for having "leapt to the pinnacle of freedom"[183] in his arguments against Licentius' interpretation of Cicero's Academic position. From this praise he bestows upon his student, and especially from the supporting arguments he supplies at *CA* 3.9.19-20 and *Conf.* 6.4.6, Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills certainly have strong grounds upon which to conclude that the "set of objections" which Trygetius formulates "against Licentius" may equally "be taken as directed"[184] by Augustine against Cicero's Academic conception of wisdom and of the happy life. The evidence in favour of Dutton's, Bolyard's, Foley's and Wills' conclusion, however, continues from here. It extends into their analyses of books two and three of the *CA* as well as into the *Trin.* and *Civ. Dei*. In books two and three of the *CA*, Augustine and Alypius take over the discussion about the merits of what Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills all identify as Cicero's key Academic tenets. Augustine proceeds to dismantle the views, first, that

[181] Augustine, *Confessionum Libri Tredecim* 6.4.6: "*Tenebam enim cor meum ab omni assensione timens praecipitium et suspendio magis necabar*." See also ibid., 6.1.1.
[182] Ibid., 5.14.25: "*dubitans de omnibus*."
[183] Ibid., *Contra Academicos* 1.9.24: "*in verticem libertatis exsiluit*."
[184] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 51.

"man is not able to have knowledge about those things that pertain to philosophy … [and, second,] that the wise man will not assent to anything – since assenting to what is uncertain, and potentially false, is shameful (*nefas est*)."[185] Alypius, on the other hand, challenges Augustine every step of the way based on what he thought Cicero's Academics persuasively maintained.

Augustine begins his debate with Alypius about the merits of Academic philosophy with an analysis of the genesis of what Alypius as much Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills all take to be Cicero's key tenets. For Augustine and Alypius alike, Cicero arrived at the tenets that nothing can be known and that the wise man witholds his assent to all truth claims compellingly enough. Cicero's tenets are compelling, they can agree, insofar as he arrived at them by exploiting three common epistemological assumptions that the philosophers of his day had been making ever since Zeno's Stoicism first became widespread. The first assumption was that "the truth that can be perceived must be impressed on the soul from that from which it derives in such a way that one cannot possibly be mistaken about it.[186] The second assumption was that there is nothing that can be perceived "*super sensibilem*."[187] The third assumption was that the wise man never assents to opinion, since opinion can be mistaken, and nothing is more shameful than the approval of what is either false or potentially false as if it were infallibly true.[188] Augustine and Alypius agree that the logical conclusion to these three assumptions is that nothing can be known and that the wise man suspends all assent, because if there is nothing that can be perceived *super sensibilem*, then nothing can be perceived in such a

[185] Topping, *Happiness and Wisdom: Augustine's Early Theology of Education*, 105.
[186] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.9.21.
[187] Ibid., 3.17.38.
[188] Ibid., 2.6.14.

way that it cannot possibly turn out to be deceptive, since the senses can always be deceived by such things as madness, dreams and the similarities in appearances.[189] And if there is nothing that can be perceived by means of the senses in such a way that cannot possibly turn out to be false, then no truth claims merit assent, since it is shameful for the wise man to approve of what is either false or potentially false as if it were infallibly true.

In Wills' assessment, Augustine's disagreement with Alypius and Cicero is nevertheless unavoidable, since the latter philosophers are not able to rest content with what Bouton-Touboulic describes as a scepticism that concerns only "*une vérité empirique atteignable par les sens*."[190] Instead, they make the case for a philosophy of universal doubt and of suspension of assent based on an argument that Augustine attributes to Cicero at *CA* 3.7.15-16. According to the argument that Augustine attributes to Cicero, universal doubt and the suspension of assent appear to be the wisest activities of the philosopher, precisely because their practitioner does not declare himself to be a sage. People who declare themselves to be sages, Augustine's Cicero suggests, are affected by "confirmation bias," which can manifest in at least two ways. First, it inhibits the individual's capacity to critically reflect upon his or her own views.[191] For instance, the individual might "seek evidence that supports" his or her own views to the neglect of "thoroughly survey[ing] and … compar[ing] all of the plausible options."[192] Second, it actively distorts competing views. For instance, the individual might use selective evidence to dismiss alternative beliefs as opposed to "master[ing] all the arguments for

[189] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11-12
[190] Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic, "Deux Interprétations du Scepticisme: Marius Victorinus et Augustin," in *Les Études philosophiques*, no. 2 (2002), 224.
[191] Scott F. Aikin, "Ciceronian Academic Skepticism, Augustinian Anti-Skepticism, and the Argument from Second Place," in *Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 37 (2017), 388.
[192] Ibid.

each view."[193] The result is always the same: the self-declared sage cannot be reasonably confident that his judgements are "the correct or best" ones,[194] because his confidence is not a reliable indicator of the fact that his judgements are the correct or best ones from an unbiased point of view. The alternative to the self-declared sage, then, can only be the philosopher whose claim to wisdom is the most non-partisan possible. According to Augustine's Cicero, this is the sceptical philosopher.

To illustrate this point, Augustine's Cicero paints a scene in which the Stoics and Epicureans are involved in their usual debate. Zeno insists that the Epicurean wise man is like a brute animal, because wisdom for him consists chiefly in enjoying oneself. Epicurus, in turn, chastises the Stoics, because they say that virtue is the chief good, and yet that it should be pursued even if it brings no pleasure. In this manner, the heads of every school incur the odium of every other, insofar as the others must be wrong for them to be right. But when the Academic is faced with these important questions, he listens carefully to each side of the argument. If the Stoics or Epicureans should ask him for his conclusion, he would say that he is uncertain. For it is possible that one side speaks the truth, but it is necessary to keep searching diligently, since neither side of the debate can trust in their own confidence as a reliable indicator of the fact that their judgements are the correct or best ones. Thus, all of the schools will logically favour the Academic's approach to philosophy to that of all of their opponents, because the sceptic does not antagonise them, and he seems moderate, sympathetic and unassuming. Once he has gained second place in the eyes of all schools, the Academic would then seem to be

[193] Aikin, "Ciceronian Academic Skepticism, Augustinian Anti-Skepticism, and the Argument from Second Place," 389.
[194] Ibid., 390.

wisest of all, because each school naturally lends itself the pride of first place, whereas the sceptic is the most highly ranked in the most non-partisan way possible.[195]

In Wills' view, Augustine rebuts Cicero's so-called "Argument from Second Place"[196] and the whole concept of wisdom that Alypius thinks attends it decisively. The first way he rebuts Cicero's argument and the concept of wisdom that Alypius thinks it assumes is by actually using the argument from *CA* 3.7.15-16 to his own advantage. He says:

> Behold! Suppose the Academic and I enter the same contest … I am uncertain where the truth about wisdom lies, despite having heard the doctrines of countless schools, for the reason that I [am not yet wise and I] do not know who among them is a sage … Yet, for all it is worth, I will surpass the Academic in this contest.[197]

Augustine thinks he surpasses the Academics in the Argument from Second Place, because their conception of sagehood is "self contradictory,"[198] whereas his remains viable. To understand why their conception of sagehood defeats itself, Augustine says "we need only imagine a scene in which there were some kind of conflict between the wise man and wisdom."[199] In this scenario, wisdom would declare itself to be wisdom, since, as Wills says, "it is of necessity self-knowing."[200] Alypius' Academic sage,

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[195] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.7.16.
[196] Aikin aptly entitles the argument we have reviewed from *CA* 3.7.15-16 as the "Argument from Second Place" at "Ciceronian Academic Skepticism, Augustinian Anti-Skepticism, and the Argument from Second Place," 387.
[197] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.8.17: "*ecce enim faciamus me atque Academicum in illas lites philosophorum inruisse … nam mihi incertum est quidem, quamvis audierim decreta vestra, ubi sit verum, sed ideo, quod qui sit in vobis sapiens ignoro …* [*autem*] *quis non videat, palma illa cuius sit? … vincam gloria*."
[198] Wills, "Ancient Scepticism and The Contra Academicos of Saint Augustine," 119.
[199] Augustine, ibid., 3.14.31: "*paululum quasi ante oculos tale spectaculum constituamus, si possumus, rixam quandam sapientis et sapientiae*."
[200] Wills, ibid., 121.

however, assents to nothing,[201] since he denies that anything can be known and it is a tremendous error to assent to potential falsehoods. It follows for Augustine that Alypius' Academics cannot be wise, since they permit themselves neither to know nor assent to any knowledge "by reason of which they could be called sages in the first place."[202] Indeed, there is no possible world in which Alypius' sceptical conception of wisdom based on Cicero's Argument from Second Place could seem wise at all, because if the sceptic knew and assented to something true, he would violate the principles of his universal scepticism. The only viable alternative to the sceptic's concept of sagehood, then, is the concept of wisdom as the actual possession of the knowledge that infallibly declares itself to be wisdom.

At this point in the debate, Alypius offers a notable counter-argument in defence of his interpretation of Cicero's Academic position, albeit one that Dutton, Wills, Foley and Bolyard all think ultimately fails. On the one hand, Alypius can readily agree with Augustine that true wisdom would appear to consist in the actual possession of the knowledge that unmistakeably declares itself to be wisdom. On the other hand, like Licentius in book one of the *CA*, he does not necessarily think this kind of infallible knowledge is accessible to humans. In consequence, the Academic still appears to him to be relatively wise, insofar as it is wise not to ignorantly claim to know what one does not know with certainty. Moreover, Augustine himself denies knowing anything that could be called wisdom repeatedly and emphatically throughout the *CA*.[203] Alypius therefore asks him at *CA* 2.13.29 what the whole point of his argument against Cicero's conception of

[201] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.13.30.
[202] Ibid., 3.8.17: "*iste autem etiam ipsum sapientem negat aliquid scire, ne ipsam quidem unde sapiens dicitur sapientiam*."; See also Wills, "Ancient Scepticism and The Contra Academicos of Saint Augustine," 120-121.
[203] Augustine, ibid., 2.2.4; 3.5.12; 3.8.17; 3.10.23.

wisdom is.[204] We can presume that Alypius asks him this question, because even if Augustine is correct that the Academic conception of sagehood is self contradictory, it does not follow from this fact that people will have a better conception of sagehood upon which to rely in philosophy that is realistically attainable. And if people do not have a better conception of sagehood upon which to rely in philosophy that is realistically attainable, then Augustine's argument against what Alypius takes to be Cicero's Academic position runs the risk of having some serious, unintended consequences. For example, his arguments could have an apotreptic effect on philosophers generally, insofar as he does nothing to replace the scepticism he refutes with a positive content, but only shows how self-contradictory it is for Cicero's Academics to believe that there is wisdom in the search for truth, even if the search for truth should only humble their pretensions to the knowledge that belongs to the gods.

According to Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills, Augustine is keenly aware of the need to replace Alypius' and Cicero's Academic conception of sagehood with an attainable ideal of the wise man, and so this is just what they think he proceeds to do – he introduces the concept of what Aikin calls the "Genuine Student." The so-called Genuine Student "outperforms the Academic skeptic"[205] in the contest for wisdom, they say, "given his *teachability* contrast," which consists chiefly in his "openness to truth"[206] and in his willingness to assent to beliefs. The difference that teachability makes for Augustine is entirely critical for a few reasons. The first reason that Augustine thinks the Genuine Student outperforms Alypius' Academic sceptic in the contest for wisdom is

[204] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.13.29: "*velim explices utilitatem ... huius inquisitionis suae*."
[205] Aikin, "Ciceronian Academic Skepticism, Augustinian Anti-Skepticism, and the Argument from Second Place," 400.
[206] Ibid., 399.

given at *CA* 3.13.33. Augustine says, "a life without knowledge and, more fundamentally, a life without" assent to beliefs, "is not possible,"[207] since human life continuously requires actions from us that presuppose either knowledge or assent to beliefs. In Bolyard's view, a good example of an action that presupposes either knowledge or assent to belief for Augustine could be as simple as avoiding walking off of a cliff based on the belief that "Walking off of that cliff [would be] dangerous." It could equally be as simple as drinking water on a hot day based on the belief that water "should be [consumed] regularly" on a hot day to avoid heat stroke.[208] To the extent that the Academic truly denies knowing anything, and to the extent that he thinks opinion does not enter the mind of wise man, Augustine concludes that he cannot so much as avoid "walking off of a cliff" or avoid getting heat stroke in an intellectually honest way. The only way he thinks the Academic's life can be consistent with his scepticism is if he "does nothing."[209]

Dutton recognizes that some readers of Augustine will find his argument at *CA* 3.13.33 to be "boilerplate,"[210] but what he thinks matters most for Augustine's attempt to distinguish the genuine philosopher from Alypius' and Cicero's Academic sceptic is the principle underlying his argument. House explains it well. It goes back to a point Trygetius made against Licentius in book one of the *CA*. According to House's explanation, there are more types of error for Augustine than just assenting to what is either false or potentially false. It is just as serious an error to withhold assent to what is true.[211] Therefore, since it is true for Augustine that humans must take action in life, and since taking action in life presupposes either knowledge or assent to belief, Augustine

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[207] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 75.
[208] Bolyard, "Augustine, Epicurus, and External World Skepticism," 159.
[209] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.15.33: "*qui nihil approbat, nihil agit*."
[210] Dutton, ibid., 76.
[211] House, "A Note on Book III of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos,*" 1262.

believes that it is not only not an error to assent to belief and to remain open to the possibility of knowledge, but in fact he thinks any human who is wise necessarily does so in virtue of the fact that the wise man is human.[212] In consequence, Augustine thinks Alypius' and Cicero's Academic sceptic cannot conceivably attain sagehood, but the genuine philosopher at least retains the potential.

Dutton, Bolyard and Wills are all quick to remind us, however, that Augustine's attempt to replace Alypius' and Cicero's Academic conception of sagehood in the *CA* with the concept of the Genuine Student cannot end here. The reason is that his Inaction Objection was already familiar to Cicero in the *Acad.* and Alypius appears to have known this. Indeed, Alypius provides a defence of his interpretation of Cicero's Academic conception of sagehood along very similar lines that Cicero does against Lucullus' *oratio contra Academiam* in the *Acad*.. He says, human actions such as avoiding "Walking off of that cliff" presuppose neither knowledge nor assent to any belief. For example, the action of avoiding "Walking off of that cliff" need only presuppose that one avoids walking off of what appears to be a cliff, but which is not infallibly known to be a cliff. Moreover, one does not even need to assent to the belief that one is approaching a cliff in order to avoid walking off of it, since it is superfluous to speak about assenting to beliefs in cases where one has no choice about how matters appear. Alypius therefore concludes that Augustine's Inaction Objection is as ineffective as it appears to be verbal, since the Academic philosopher can get by just fine while claiming not to know anything or while withholding his assent to all beliefs. All he needs to do to get by in life is acquiesce to what appears clear, unimpeded and truth-like.[213]

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[212] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.10.23.
[213] Ibid., 2.11.26-13.29.

Alypius' defence of Cicero's Academic position based on the Academic's ability to rely on the *probabile*, or truth-like, is startlingly powerful. It is effective, given the fact that Augustine already conceded the soundness of Cicero's scepticism concerning the truths that can be perceived by the senses. It follows from this concession that Augustine's Inaction Objection undermines itself, insofar as his own ability to act for the purposes of life and inquiry necessarily depends on the information he derives from the testimony of the senses. On this basis, Alypius can conclude that if the Academic sceptic is condemned to inaction on the basis of his sceptical commitments, so is Augustine. But Augustine thinks he can perform the prerequisite actions of life and inquiry despite his scepticism concerning the testimony of the senses. In consequence, his Inaction Objection against Cicero's Academic position is both hypocritical and unpersuasive.

In Dutton's view, the way Augustine gets out of the dilemma in which Alypius places him is a testament to his "originality" and to the ingenuity of his closing arguments against the Academics. Augustine's most forceful arguments against Alypius' and Cicero's conception of sagehood, he says, actually consist in the manoeuvres he takes to block "the Academic response to the Inaction Objection," rather than in the Inaction Objection itself. For although Augustine "did not consider persuasiveness to be unsuitable as a basis of action," Dutton says, he "thought that the Academics, having disavowed all knowledge, were not entitled to appeal to it."[214] The reason they were not entitled to appeal to the truth-like, or "persuasive," for guidance in the conduct of life and inquiry is quite simple. To the extent that Cicero's Academics claim not to know any truth whatsoever, they divorce the concepts of truth and plausibility. But for Augustine the concepts of truth and truth-likeness cannot be divorced, because, as Fuhrer puts it, "*dieses*

[214] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 76.

'Glaubhafte' (probabile) *von den Akademikern … – auch das 'Wahrscheinliche'* (veri simile) *genannt wird – gibt … Anlass zur Frage, wie man von einem* veri simile *überhaupt sprechen könne, ohne das* verum *zu kennen*."[215] To illustrate the significance of this problem, Augustine draws an analogy between the truth and its likeness to a father's relation to his son:

> [A] man asks: 'Whose son is this boy?' Someone answers: 'a certain Romanianus.' The man: 'How similar to his father he is! Rumour has reported this to me without rashness!' At this, you or someone else asks: 'Do you even know Romanianus, good man?' 'I do not,' he replies, 'but to me his son seems similar.' Will anyone keep from ridicule? … Therefore, you see what follows.[216]

It follows that if either Alypius or Cicero rely on the probable because it is like the truth, they will be absurd in denying that at least some truth is evident. They must therefore admit that something can be perceived.

Lévy and O'Daly notably dispute this argument, although O'Meara finds it compelling. Lévy and O'Daly challenge Augustine's logic, because the question "How can one follow the likely, or 'truth-like,' while claiming not to know the truth?" "only makes sense in terms of Cicero's concept of *verisimile*… [I]t could not be posed in the same way in terms of the … "probable,""[217] since the notion of probability does not contain any reference to the 'true.'[218] According to O'Meara, however, "This is not a

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[215] Therese Fuhrer, "Das Kriterium der Wahrheit in Augustins "Contra Academicos,"" in *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 46, no. 3 (Brill, 1992), 258.
[216] Augustine, *Contra Academicos,* 2.7.19: "*ibi iste: cuius hic puer filius? Respondetur: cuiusdam Romaniani. At hic: quam patris similis est! quam non temere hoc ad me fama detulerat! Hic tu vel quis alius: nosti enim Romanianum, bone homo? Non novi, inquit; tamen similis eius mihi videtur. Poteritne quisquam risum tenere? … Ergo, inquam, quid sequatur vides*."
[217] Carlos Lévy, "The sceptical Academy: decline and afterlife," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 100.
[218] Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (University of California Press, 1987), 165-166.

controversy about words."[219] On the contrary, he says, Augustine is trying to address the philosophical assumption that underlies Cicero's terminology. In O'Meara's interpretation, this is the assumption that the philosopher must limit "the pertinence of" what seems true to him "to his person and to the moment of his experience to which he gives voice."[220] The Academic limits himself in this way, because he sees no justification to suppose that his personal affections and, through them, his notions of plausibility could ever "go beyond … [his] individual subjectivity, relating as they do to something else of which they are an expression to the extent that this 'something else' is responsible for what [he] experience[s] in [himself]."[221] Augustine carries this position to its logical extremity at *CA* 3.10.22. If the Academic completely severs the connection between his subjective impressions of reality and reality itself, then he will not even be able to determine "*utrum homo si*[*t*] *an formica*[.]" According to Alypius, Cicero's Academics do sever this connection, because they think it is probable that nothing whatsoever can be perceived.[222] It follows for Augustine that Cicero's Academics cannot coherently rely on probability, because if it seems plausible to them that they cannot know anything, it must seem equally plausible to them that they cannot even know whether they are more likely men or ants. And if they cannot trust whether they are more likely men or ants, it is not clear how they can rely on anything probable whatsoever. Therefore, Augustine thinks his Inaction Objection against Alypius' interpretation of Cicero's Academic position obtains, not so much on the grounds that the *probabile* is an unsuitable criterion for guidance in

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[219] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.10.24: "*Non est ista, inquam, mihi crede, verborum, sed rerum ipsarum magna controversia*."
[220] O'Meara, "Scepticism & Ineffability in Plotinus," in *Phronesis*, vol.45, no.3 (2000), 249.
[221] Ibid., 250.
[222] Augustine, ibid., 2.13.30; 3.14.30.

the conduct of life and inquiry – because for Augustine it is, in fact, a suitable criterion for the "necessities of this life"[223] – but because neither Alypius nor Cicero are "entitled to appeal to it" to the extent that they disavow "all knowledge" whatsoever.[224]

Once Augustine has forced Alypius to admit that at least some truth must be perceptible, if anything can be called persuasive, he launches into his final and perhaps most devastating series of arguments against Alypius' interpretation of Cicero's Academic position. He says, even the most sceptical philosopher must concede not only the fact that some truth can be perceived, insofar as anything can be called persuasive, but he must also concede that there are countless "self-evident propositions"[225] "independent of sense perception"[226] that the mind knows through itself.[227] The mind knows through itself, for example, that all either/or propositions are true, and that when one part of a disjunction is removed, the other part is confirmed.[228] The definition of perception is itself proof of this fact. "If it is true, something can be perceived. Likewise, if it is false, something can be perceived."[229] As a result, Zeno's definition of perception demontrates not only "what sort of thing can be perceived" but also that something can be perceived that cannot possibly turn out to be mistaken.[230] For the definition itself is either true or

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[223] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.6.13: "*necessaria huius vitae*."
[224] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 76.
[225] House, "A Note on Book III of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos,*" 1261.
[226] O'Meara, "Scepticism & Ineffability in Plotinus," 242.
[227] Augustine discusses the differences between the things the mind knows through itself, through the bodily senses and through "rumour" at *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim* 15.12.21.
[228] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.13.29.
[229] Augustine, ibid., 3.19.21: "*aut enim vera est aut falsa. si vera, bene teneo; si falsa, potest aliquid percipi*."
[230] Ibid.: "*verissime igitur Zeno definuit nec ei quisquis vel in hoc consensit, erravit. an parvae laudis et sinceritatis definitionem putabimus, quae contra eos, qui errant adversum perceptionem multa dicturi, cum disignaret quale esset quod percipi posset, se ipsam talem esse monstravit? ita comprehendibilibus rebus et definitio est et exemplum*."

false, and we know that we cannot be mistaken about this fact. In physics, too, Augustine says, the mind can readily discern that "if there is only one sun, there are not two suns,"[231] and so on. Finally, in ethics, we can be sure that "the *summum bonum* is either nothing or else it is in the mind or the body or both the mind and body."[232] These truths and others the mind perceives "in such a way that nobody may err or waver about [them] due to any opposing reasons."[233] As soon as we perceive that we can perceive things in this way, Augustine concludes that we can even boast in our capacity to know an infinite number of things, because we know that we know something, and we know that we know that we know something, and so on *ad infinitum*.[234] None of the Academic's sophisms can refute these facts, because the knowledge of them cannot be affected by dreams, madness or any other conditions of the senses.[235]

Augustine's appeal to the things the mind knows through itself is so decisive in his view that he will return to it again and again in his later works to "discredit" universal scepticism and to "vindicate the possibility of knowledge."[236] He will do so, however, in an even more robust kind of way. He will use doubt itself to establish a truth that even the most radical sceptic cannot deny. At *Trin.* 10.10.14, he says, "Who could doubt that he lives … [and] knows …? For even if he doubts, he lives, … [and] if he doubts, he knows

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[231] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.13.29: "*si sol unus est, non sunt duo*."
[232] Ibid., 3.12.27: "*mihi ... licet interim scire boni humani finem, in quo inhabitet beata vita, aut nullum esse aut in animo esse aut in corpore aut in utroque*."
[233] Ibid., 1.7.19: "*ut neque in ea quisquam errare nec quibuslibet adversantibus inpulsus nutare debeat*."
[234] Ibid., *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim*, 15.12.21.
[235] Ibid., *Contra Academicos* 3.11.25; 3.12.28-13.29. For Augustine, the knowledge that the mind possesess through itself cannot be affected by dreams, madness or any other conditions of the senses, because statements such as "if there is only one sun, there are not two suns," are true, regardless of whether or not there appears to be two suns to somebody who is either dreaming, insane, or who even happened to see two suns in the sky.
[236] Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, 165.

that he does not know … Therefore, whoever doubts about anything else, ought not to doubt about these things. If they were not the case, nobody could doubt about anything."[237] At *Civ*. *Dei* 2.26, Augustine then makes a variation on the "*dubito sum*" argument against universal scepticism with equal force. He says, "I do not fear any of the Academic's arguments who say: 'What if you are mistaken?' Even if I am mistaken, I am (*si fallor, sum*), because someone who does not exist cannot be mistaken. For this reason, I am, if I am mistaken … Hence, even if I were mistaken, I could not doubt that I know that I am, and that I am not mistaken about this."[238] Therefore, since I am and know that I am, I possess infallible knowledge of this fact.

In Castagnoli's assessment, the upshot of Augustine's *dubito, sum* and *fallor, sum* arguments is that the "very act of doubting" or even of being mistaken about something provide all the premises Augustine could ever need to "dispel" universal scepticism and to conclude that infallible knowledge is not only accessible to humans, but essential to the life of the mind in virtue of the things it knows through itself.[239] On this basis and on the basis of the countless other truths that the mind knows through itself and that Augustine ennumerates in the *CA*, Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills conclude that Augustine has everything he needs to gain not only the palm of victory in his debate with Alypius about

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[237] Augustine, *De Trinitate Libri Quindecim* 10.10.14: "*Vivere se … et scire … quis dubitet? Quandoquidem etiam si dubitat, vivit, … si dubitat, scit se nescire … Quisquis igitur alicunde dubitat, de his omnibus dubitare non debet; quae si non essent, de ulla re dubitare non posset*."

[238] Ibid., *De Civitate Dei* 2.26: "*Nulla in his veris Academicorum argumenta formido dicentium: Quid si falleris? Si enim fallor, sum. Nam qui non est, utique nec falli potest; ac per hoc sum, si fallor … Quia igitur essem qui fallerer, etiamsi fallerer, procul dubio in eo, quod me novi esse, non fallor.*"

[239] Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation*: *The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine*, 203-204.

the merits of Cicero's Academic scepticism, but the "fulness of his victory."[240] For he has shown that Cicero's Academic conception of wisdom and of the happy life "pav[es] the way" for its own overcoming, insofar as it reveals, "through its very denial of the light of truth, the presence of this light in the form of universal and objective laws of thought."[241]

Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills all agree that Augustine gains the "palm of victory" in his debate with Alypius about Cicero's Academic scepticism, because Augustine has shown that the philosopher cannot really be happy in the long term who desires the truth greatly, but who vehemently denies that it can be found or who thinks that it probably cannot be found. Augustine has also shown that the philosopher cannot be wise, who renounces all assent to belief and who declares that nothing whatsoever can be known, first of all, because that is a self-contradictory proposition and, second of all, because the wise man is human, and the prerequisite to human life is that man must possess either knowledge or at least assent to belief. And although Alypius and Cicero are correct that infallible knowledge and irrevocable assent are not necessary for the conduct of human life in cases where our conduct depends on the testimony of the senses, there is still an inextricable connection between the concept of truth and the concept of truth-likeness upon which the Academics claim to rely. In consequence, neither Alypius nor Cicero can consistently appeal to what they call *probabile*, if they insist on universal scepticism. However, even if they could consistently claim to follow what they call *probabile* for guidance in the conduct of life and inquiry, their universal scepticism would still be false, since infallible knowledge is essential to the life of the mind. This is in fact

[240] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.10.22: "*victoriae satietatem*."
[241] Wills, "Ancient Scepticism and The Contra Academicos of Saint Augustine," 110.

proven by the infinite number of things the mind knows through itself and most certainly through the sceptic's own doubts.

As a positive alternative to Alypius' and Cicero's Academic conception of sagehood and of the happy life, then, Augustine proposes that his students in the *CA* should adopt an inverse relation to the truth compared to the dogmatic universal sceptic. As surely as the philosopher greatly desires the truth that is wisdom, he says, he or she must remain open to the possibility of its attainment. And as surely as the philosopher is human, he or she must know that human life will sometimes demand from us the assent to at least some beliefs. But this is not all that human life demands from us. It equally demands that we recognize our inherent capacity to possess infallible knowledge in virtue of the infinite number of things that the mind knows through itself. Indeed, even if it is necessary for humans to repeatedly and emphatically deny knowing the infallible truth that belongs to the gods, it is equally necessary to affirm the fact that the mind is a knowing thing in its essence, and that therefore the philosopher's search for wisdom and for the happy life that belongs to wisdom is not in vain.

In my view, Dutton's, Bolyard's, Foley's and Wills' reading of the *CA* as an attempt at refuting specifically Cicero's adherence to the New Academy is compelling in light of their analyses of the text as outlined above. These scholars successfully draw strong parallels between Cicero's articulation of the Academic position in the *Acad.,* the *Tusc.,* and the *Nat. D.* to Licentius' and Alypius' interpretations of it. Their citations of the *Conf.*, the *Trin.* and the *Civ. Dei* are equally invaluable in terms of how they elucidate the logic of Augustine's first Cassiciacum dialogue and the role that this logic will continue to play in what may justly be called the post-sceptical period of his philosophical thought. If one were to leave matters here, one could say that Augustine's *CA*

impressively achieves the goals it sets out to achieve. As King states in his introduction to the text, the result of Augustine's argumentation *contra Academicos* is that knowledge is as possible as it is essential to the life of the mind.[242] This simple but powerful observation will propel Augustine into a lifetime of fruitful investigations ranging in topic from the immateriality of the soul to the eternity of its life in God. In all cases, his inquiries will inevitably bring him back to the mind as a *thesaurus*, the riches of which he will never again have cause to despair over.

As compelling and insightful as Dutton's, Bolyard's, Foley's and Wills' reading of the *CA* is, however, there remains the deeply troubling aspect to it that I highlighted at the beginning of this chapter and that generates the very problem this thesis is principally concerned to resolve: to the extent that the Received Interpretation of the *CA* reaches its conclusions by identifying Licentius' and Alypius' intepretations of Cicero's Academic philosophy with the position that Augustine thought Cicero actually endorsed in the *Acad.*, Augustine's *CA* would appear to be incompatible with his *Letter* 1. For example, in the *CA*, Augustine thoroughly repudiates his students' interpretations of Cicero's Academic position and really finds nothing in them that is worthy of imitation. In the *Letter* 1, on the other hand, he says he tried to imitate the Academics rather than overcome them, which he would be completely unable to do. If we do not wish for the meaning of Augustine's *Letter* 1 to remain forever confounding, it is imperative that we resolve this interpretative dilemma. As I stated at the outset of this project, I argue that the surest path to a solution for this problem is to harmonize Augustine's earliest philosophical work with the elements of Cicero's Academic fallibilism that we examined

[242] Peter King, "Introduction," in *Against the Academicians and The Teacher* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), xiii.

in Part One of this thesis and that promise to be so enriching for it. This should in no way detract from Dutton's, Bolyard's, Foley's and Wills' insights into the achievement that is the *CA* – since the dogmatic scepticism that Augustine refutes in his first dialogue is still a position that he and his friends needed to overcome – but through Augustine's harmonization with Cicero's fallibilism from the *Acad.*, I believe we can finally surmount the difficulty that the Received Interpretation of the *CA* faces.

Augustine is unfortunately not as explicit as he could have been about how he imitated rather than overcame the Academics in his first dialogue. In my view, the best way to explain his statement from his *Letter* 1 is twofold. In the first place, we must show that Augustine clearly dissociates Licentius' and Alypius' interpretations of Cicero's Academic position from his own. In the second place, we must show that there are, in fact, strong parallels between Augustine's assessment of Cicero's approach to philosophy in the *Acad.* and Thorsrud's and Lévy's fallibilist interpretation of it. By this means, I believe we will finally be able to understand how Augustine consistently claims to imitate rather than overcome Cicero's Academic fallibilism in the *Letter* 1 while attempting at the same time to use his philosophical method to dismantle a dogmatic New Academic scepticism in the *CA*.

Augustine appears to dissociate Alypius' and Licentius' interpretations of Cicero's New Academic position from his own most forcefully at *CA* 2.3.8, 2.10.24 and 2.13.29-30. In the first passage, he says that we mistakenly blame the Academics for causing us to despair for the truth: "the more severely, in fact, the less knowledgeable we are about them."[243] He then goes on to say that he will "battle with Alypius" to persuade

[243] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.3.8: "*saepius enim suscensuisti Academicis eo quidem gravius, quo minus eruditus esse*."

his readers of the "plausibility" of his views.[244] At *CA* 2.10.24 and 2.13.29-30, Augustine elaborates upon just what he means by this. He asks Alypius "whether the Academics seemed to [him] to have held a fixed view concerning the truth" or if instead they called it into question at a time when it was suitable to question it.[245] His friend responds by telling him that he is uncertain about what the Academics really believed, but he agrees with Licentius that they do seem to have held that no truth whatsoever can be apprehended and that wisdom consists in the universal suspension of assent. Upon hearing this response, Augustine declares that things seem one way to his friends and another way to him[246] and that he will argue against those who think Cicero's Academics advanced "all those arguments which we attribute to them"[247] as the enemies of human knowledge.[248]

On the assumption, then, that Augustine does not share Licentius' and Alypius' interpretations of Cicero's Academic position, it remains to be seen whether his own assessment of Cicero's philosophical commitments from the *Acad.* shares any parallels with Thorsrud's and Lévy's fallibilist interpretation. If it does, this should allow us to finally understand how he can consistently claim to imitate rather than overcome the Academics in the *CA*. We can recall from Part One of this thesis that the term "fallibilism" came to designate for us the practice of arguing for and against every side of an issue with the intention of eliciting either the truth or its closest approximation in a

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[244] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 2.3.8: "*itaque iam cum Alypio te fautore confligam et tibi facile persuadebo quod volo, probabiliter tamen*."
[245] Ibid., 2.13.29: "*utrum tibi videantur Academici habuisse certam de veritate sententiam*."
[246] Ibid., 2.13.29.
[247] Ibid., 3.17.38: "*illa omnia … quae novae Academiae tribuuntur*."
[248] Ibid., 2.10.24: "*si quid est autem, quod nunc disputabimus, adversus eos erit, qui Academicos inventioni veritatis adversos fuisse crediderunt.*"

manner that liberates our powers of judgement from the fetters of dogmatism. While it was true that this practice of philosophy led Cicero's Academics into articulating a conception of wisdom and of the happy life that resembled dogmatic scepticism in certain important respects, Thorsrud and Lévy persuasively argued that Cicero maintained the views that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent as part of an "anti-Stoic" dialectic rather than as universal and irrevocable truth claims.[249] This meant that Cicero "would not be advancing his own view" in "arguing that knowledge is not possible … but rather" he would be "leading his dogmatic interlocutors to admit that they themselves [were] unwittingly committed to it."[250]

According to Thorsrud and Lévy, there are a two primary reasons to prefer the view that Cicero remains optimistic in the *Acad.* that "the proper application of the Academic method will lead us closer to the truth"[251] to the reading that he dogmatically rules out the possibility of ever attaining it. First of all, it would seem uncharitable to accuse him of maintaining that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent in a dogmatic and univeral kind of way, because even if he does maintain these views outside the context of his debate with the Stoics, his views are still qualified by what he says at *Acad.* 2.21.68. He says, even if I thought I could possess infallible knowledge, I would not claim to do so, because infallible knowledge belongs to the gods, and it is a "slippery slope" to claim to possess it. Cicero's commitment to epistemic humility is in some respects very similar to dogmatic scepticism, but it hardly makes him an enemy of knowledge. Instead, Lévy thinks his humility should be praised as a method he used for "putting a protective distance between [him]self and the *temeritas* which" he felt had

[249] Lévy, "The New Academy and its Rivals," 454.
[250] Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades," 61.
[251] Ibid., *Ancient Scepticism*, 99.

come to characterize too much of the discourse of his era.[252] Second of all, and perhaps most revealingly, Cicero insists that Academic philosophy should not rob humans of the criteria by which their inquiries *pro* and *contra* in the pursuit of the truth must necessarily be regulated. In the case of what the mind discerns through the testimony of the senses, this means the Academic would "not disagree very much,"[253] if someone claimed that some truth is perceptible, provided that he or she did not add the Stoic's *magnam accessionem*, namely, that the truth that can be perceived must be impressed upon the senses "in such a way that one could not possibly be mistaken about it."[254] In the case of what the mind discerns through itself, this means the Academic is equally prepared to acknowledge that there are certain objective laws of thought that the human mind must obey. Cicero says, "reason dictates that a person must concede the conclusion to an argument, if he concedes the premise."[255] For example, a person must concede that there are not two suns, if he has conceded the premise that there is only one sun. Likewise, a person must concede that the *summum bonum* is in either the mind or the body or both the mind and body, if he has conceded the premise that the *summum bonum* is in either the mind or the body or both the mind and body. The combination of Cicero's epistemic humility with his concession that there are certain logical and sensible criteria that must guide the philosopher's pursuit of truth indeed constitutes the Academic position from the *Acad.* that Thorsrud and Lévy call "fallibilism."

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[252] Lévy, "Cicero and the New Academy," 51.
[253] Cicero, *Academica* 2.35.112: "*Si enim mihi cum Peripatetico res esset, qui id percipi posse diceret 'quod impressum esset e vero,' ... cum simplici homine simpliciter agerem nec magno opere contenderem*."
[254] Ibid.: "*quo modo imprimi non posset e falso*."
[255] Ibid., 2.30.96: "*ipsa enim ratio conexi, cum concesseris superius, cogit inferius concedere*."

In my view, the evidence that Augustine wished to imitate rather than overcome an essentially fallibilist approach to philosophy is sometimes explicit and at other times implicit, but it is always present throughout the *CA*. The evidence that he did not think he could overcome Cicero's Academic position emerges explicitly at *CA* 3.18.41 and 2.10.24. In these passages, Augustine makes almost the same case that Thorsrud and Lévy do for why Cicero's Academic commitments deserve a charitable rather than a damning interpretation when Cicero says, "nothing can be known" and "the greatest act of the wise man is the suspension of slippery assent." The primary reason that Augustine does not think Cicero's Academic position amounts to dogmatic scepticism is that he did not seem to him to maintain his sceptical views "in an unrestricted way"(*directo*). On the contrary, Augustine makes the case that Cicero's Academics usefully advanced their arguments against the possibility of knowledge as "weapons against the Stoics" rather than as universal truth claims.[256] As proof for this theory, Augustine appeals to the same observation that Thorsrud and Lévy are able to do. He says, the Academics were "entirely serious and prudent men"[257] whose discourses were ingenious, subtle and learned.[258] As such, he thinks it could never have been their intention to prove that absolutely "nothing is apparent to humans."[259] In fact, he says, he finds nothing in their discourses to suggest this.[260] For if they had made this claim, then they would not even be able perceive that they seem to themselves to be alive or that they appear to themselves be more likely men than ants. Likewise, they would not even be able to determine that if there is only one

[256] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.18.41: "*contra Stoicos huius modi … arma.*"
[257] Ibid., 2.10.24: "*graves omnino ac prudentes viri*."
[258] Ibid., 3.16.36: "*nec mihi ullo pacto tantum adrogaverim, ut Marcum Tullium aliqua ex parte sequar industria vigilantia ingenio doctrina*."
[259] Ibid., 3.11.24: "*nobis nihil videri*."
[260] Ibid.

sun, then according to reason, there are not two suns, and so on. But since the Academics are not insane, Augustine says, it is inappropriate to interpret them as if they believed that absolutely nothing can be perceived or that no truth claims merit assent. Instead, we must believe that they knew at least some truths which promise to make philosophy fruitful.[261]

After Augustine's explicitly dialectical explanation for why he did not think his *CA* constituted a refutation of Cicero's Academic position from the *Acad.*, Augustine proceeds to make his imitation of the Academic's approach to philosophy clear for those of us who already sympathize with Thorsrud's and Lévy's fallibilist interpretation of it. At *CA* 2.7.17 and 2.13.29-30, Alypius and Licentius each make their appeals to Cicero's *auctoritas* in their final attempts to justify their commitments to universal scepticism. What Augustine says in response appears to me to betray the fundamentally Academic spirit of his discourse. In the first passage, he says to his students, "we have engaged in this dispute [about Academic philosophy] to exercise you and to challenge you to cultivate your mind … Your talents should not be so feeble" that you must appeal to authority to win your case.[262] In the second passage, he says that his *CA* is dedicated to training his students to cast off the *impedimenta* that keep them back from philosophy by arguing on every side of the issues that concern them as carefully as they can.[263] Augustine's imitation of Cicero's Academic philosophy is indeed implicit in these passages, judging from how vigourously and impartially he will argue on every side of the issues that concern his *CA*. His imitation reveals itself again in how systematically he

[261] Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.18.40.
[262] Cicero, *Academica* 2.7.17: "*haec inter nos disputatio suscepta sit exercendi tui causa et ad elimandum animum provocandi… non … ingenium tuum esse debet invalidum, ut nullo facto impetus paucissimis verbis meis rogationibusque succumbas*."
[263] Augustine, ibid., 2.13.30: "*Hoc est, inquam, quod volui. nam verebar, ne, cum tibi quoque id videretur quod mihi, disputatio nostra manca remaneret nullo existente, qui ex altera parte rem venire in manus cogeret, ut diligenter quantum possumus versaretur*."

will disabuse his students of their dogmatism while inculcating in them the value of freedom of thought. Finally, it is perhaps most apparent from the way that Augustine hopes to excite in his students the feeling that the truth is "hiding in the nature of things and souls"[264] for those who are prepared to seek for it carefully and systematically.

In view of the way that Augustine dissociates his interlocutors' interpretations of Cicero's Academic commitments from his own, and as a result of the implicit as well as the explicit parallels between Augustine's positive assessment of Cicero's *Acad.* and Thorsrud's and Lévy's fallibilist interpretation of it, I believe we finally have all the elements we need to arrive at our desired conclusion: Augustine's first Cassiciacum dialogue constitutes a thorough repudiation of Alypius' and Licentius' dogmatic New Academic scepticism, but it can also been seen to veritably imitate rather than overcome Cicero's approach to philosophy from the *Acad.*. As such, the Received Interpretation of the *CA* can conceivably be reconciled to the content of the *Letter* 1, and Augustine's *Letter* 1 is in the last analysis compatible with his *CA*.

[264] Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 153.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

One challenge to the reconciliation of Augustine's *CA* to his *Letter* 1 is that from whatever angle we wish to look at his two texts, Cicero's fallibilism from the *Acad.* will always be linguistically a very close cousin to the scepticism that Alypius and Licentius endorse. The Academic clearly insists that the wise man should never claim to possess infallible knowledge, even if he thought he could possess it. Cicero therefore describes human wisdom in the *Acad.* as the suspension of irrevocable assent and the happy life as the life of free inquiry. For Augustine, "the subtlety" of the Academic's "phrases" on these two topics combined with his reputation for *sagacitas* inevitably cause people to despair for the truth in proportion to how literally and dogmatically they should take them to heart.[265] The arguments of the *CA* will therefore always have a role to play in Augustine's philosophical thought to mitigate this risk, and his attempt to imitate rather than overcome the Academics will always depend on how charitably he thinks it is appropriate to interpret them. In fact, his claim that he was completely unable to overcome the Academics will become a subject of re-evaluation for him by the end of his life. In the *Retr.*,[266] he will say that he regrets having ever praised the Academics to a degree not suitable to men whose many and great errors are incompatible with Christian doctrine. In connection with this, he will say that he refuted Cicero's arguments from the *Acad.* with the most certain reasoning and that anything he ever said to the contrary should be taken ironically.[267]

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[265] Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 152-153.
[266] Augustine, *Retractations: Retractations*, trans. Sister M. Inez Bogan (The Catholic University of America Press, 1968).
[267] Ibid., 10-11.

As tempting as it might be for the proponents of the Received Interpretation of the *CA* to see in the *Retr.* a justification for the view that Augustine always did intend to refute Cicero's adherence to the New Academy from the *Acad.*, I do not believe that the *Retr*. offers the simplest answer to the problem that the *Letter* 1 poses in comparison to the one at which we have already arrived. There are a few reasons I hold this view. The primary reason is that Augustine's most charitable reading of Cicero's Academic commitments is also his fairest. We can recall that Augustine predicates so much of his critique of the Academics in the *CA* on the assumption that their conception of sagehood and of the happy life precluded the possibility of ever attaining knowledge. Augustine therefore proposed to his interlocutors that they should adopt an approach to philosophy that is the inverse of the sceptic's, namely, one that retains hope in the possibility of wisdom and in the happiness that belongs to wisdom. But the way in which Augustine facilitates his friend's conversion from total scepticism towards faith in philosophy hardly seems to me to contradict the fallibilist spirit of Cicero's *Acad*..

Augustine facilitates his friend's conversion from total scepticism towards faith in philosophy by appealing most of all to the things the mind knows through itself and to the things it knows through the senses that it would be contrary to nature to deny. The upshot of these appeals is that the mind is inescapably a knowing thing. To pretend that it is not, or to pretend as if its ability to inquire carefully and systematically into the questions that concern human life is futile, is to squander something that ought not to be squandered. In Part One of this thesis, however, I made the case that Augustine does not actually need to overcome Cicero's project in the *Acad*. to effect the conversion at which he aims in the *CA*. In Part Two of this thesis, I then made the case that Augustine's *CA* can even be seen

to imitate rather than overcome Cicero's *Acad*. in the approach to philosophy that it advocates.

When Cicero claimed in his sceptical treatise that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent, what he really appears to have meant is that nothing can be known and that nothing merits assent based on the Stoic's epistemological assumptions. But for Cicero as much as for Augustine, the Stoic's epistemology is untenable. In its place, the Academic therefore proposed that the Stoic join with him in philosophizing again with a renewed sense of urgency. In no way did this exhortation entail that his interlocutor should abandon his love for the truth or that he should favour unclear and bad arguments over clear and unimpeded ones. On the contrary, the Academic said that the philosopher must never give way to fatigue in the tireless quest for truth, because the truth would be the greatest of all human possessions.[268] For his guides in this endeavour, he said that the philosopher must yield to whatever presents itself to the senses and to the mind that it would be contrary to nature to deny.[269] The Academic only wished for his interlocutor in the *Acad*. to remember that humans frequently err, even when they feel totally confident in their inability to make mistakes. Truly, what Cicero seems to have wished most of all for his interlocutor was that he would cherish liberty of thought more highly than the presumption of infallibility. He thought this would better enable his friend to inquire into every side of the issues with which he is concerned in the most fair-minded way possible.

In light of these considerations from Part One of this thesis, the spirit of Cicero's fallibilism from the *Acad*. appears to me to be so unlike that of Licentius' and Alypius'

[268] Cicero, *Academica* 2.20.66, 2.41.127-128.
[269] Ibid., 2.31.99.

dogmatic scepticism that it even seems to be antagonistic towards it. An injunction in the *Tusc.* captures the spirit of Cicero's outlook in the *Acad.*. Cicero says,

> [I]n the *Acad*., I have tried to say everything that can be said on behalf of the Academy with sufficient accuracy. But I am so far from shunning criticism that I actually desire it most of all, because philosophy would never have attained such great honour … if it had not gained strength from the debates and disagreements of the most learned individuals.[270]

Cicero then exhorts his readers to contend against even the conclusions of the *Acad.*, provided that such a debate could incite people to philosophize again with reason and method. He says,

> I encourage everyone who is able to do so to bring the gift of philosophy to Rome … In times such as these … let us lend philosophy our support by submitting ourselves to contradiction and refutation, which those people can hardly endure with an even temper who are as if bound by necessity to defend pre-ordained views, but which they might not otherwise be inclined to support, if it were not for consistency's sake … Indeed, if we can, let us inspire those individuals who have been liberally educated to philosophize with reason and refinement.[271]

In Part Two of this thesis, I then looked at the way that Augustine appears to fulfill Cicero's injunction from the *Tusc.* in the *CA*. According to Dutton, Bolyard, Foley and Wills, Augustine responded to the *Acad*. by mostly repudiating its fundamental conclusions. In my view, however, Augustine's interpretation of Cicero's text as an anti-Stoic dialectic and his characterization of the Academic as a learned and subtle individual

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[270] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2.4: "*pro Academia autem quae dicenda essent satis accurate in Academicis quattuor libris explicata arbitramur; sed tamen tantum abest ut scribi contra nos nolimus, ut id etiam maxime optemus; in ipsa enim Graecia philosophia tanto in honore numquam fuisset, nisi doctissimorum contentionibus dissensionibusque viguisset*."

[271] Ibid., 2.2.5-6: "*Quam ob rem hortor omnes, qui facere id possunt, ut huius quoque generis laudem iam languenti Graeciae eripiant et transferant in hanc urbem… philosophia nascatur Latinis quidem litteris ex his temporibus eamque nos adiuvemus, nosque ipsos redargui refellique patiamur. Quod ii ferunt animo iniquo, qui certis quibusdam destinatisque sententiis quasi addicti et consecrati sunt eaque necessitate constricti, ut, etiam quae non probare soleant, ea cogantur constantiae causa defendere … Sed eos, si possumus, excitemus, qui liberaliter eruditi adhibita etiam disserendi elegantia ratione et via philosophantur.*"

appears to be as sincere as it is persuasive. It is on account of this characterization that he will consistently maintain in his letter to Hermogenianus that Cicero's careful and systematic approach to philosophy can actually help to elicit for the philosopher of assiduous character the feeling that the truth is yet hiding somewhere in the nature of things and souls for those who seek for it.[272]

To the extent that the Academic method can achieve this much, I believe Augustine's *CA* is best described unironically as a compelling attempt at imitating rather than repudiating Cicero's *Acad*.. Indeed, I believe this imitation belies an affinity between the future bishop and Cicero's fallibilism that would last at least until his re-evaluation of the *CA*. If Brittain is correct, this re-evaluation could have occurred any time after Augustine first wrote his letter to Hermogenianus, but it certainly seems to have taken place by the time he published the *Civ*. *Dei*.. In this latter work, which is not ill-described by Brittain as "overtly polemical against the 'pagans,'"[273] Augustine's patience with the Academic's "errors" in regard to Christian doctrine seems finally to have eroded, and along with it he seems to have lost the desire he once had to highlight what he had found so redemptive about Cicero's fallibilist approach to philosophy. For better or for worse, he will speak no more of the distinctions he once made in the *CA* and the *Conf.* between the popular as opposed to the true understanding of Academic philosophy.[274] Instead, he will excoriate Cicero for atheism.[275] On this basis, he will apparently come to regret having ever praised the Academics.

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[272] Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 153.
[273] Charles Brittain, "Augustine as a Reader of Cicero," in *Tolle Lege*: *Essays on Augustine & on Medieval Philosophy in Honor of Roland J. Teske, SJ*, eds. Richard C. Taylor, David Twetten, and Michael Wreen (Marquette University Press, 2011), 106.
[274] For this distinction in the *Conf.*, see 5.10.19.
[275] For further discussion on this point, see Brittain, ibid., 108-109.

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