ANTIPATER AND SELF-REFUTATION
ELUSIVE ARGUMENTS IN CICERO'S ACADEMICA

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I. Introduction

The Academica alludes to many arguments which it does not report in full.

For some of these allusions, the missing details would have been supplied in a portion of the text that has not come down to us. But the curious publishing history of the Academica is certainly not the sole cause of its allusiveness. The history of argument is equally important. By Cicero’s day the epistemological debate has gone on so long, the moves and counter-moves on either side are so well rehearsed, that when someone invents a new variation on an old strategy, the participants can all see where the argument is leading. There is little need to spell it out in full; even less when someone else comes up with a variation on that variation.

This complexity is reflected in the rhetorical structure of the work. The climax of the first edition is a refutation of a refutation. In the final speech (Luc. 64-147) Cicero refutes Lucullus’ refutation (memorised from Antiochus) of the Academic refutation of (the Stoic theory of) the possibility of knowledge. The second edition starts the reader off with Varro giving Antiochus’ refutation of Philo’s refutation of a mistaken view (as Philo maintains) of the entire history of philosophy (Ac. I.13-4). No wonder Cicero decided to rewrite the first version with different characters:

The whole Academic treatise I have transferred to Varro. At first it was assigned to Catulus, Lucullus, and Hortensius. But then that seemed inappropriate (παρὰ τὸ πρέπον). They were too well known, not of course for ἀπαίδευσία, but for their ἀτριψία in these matters. (Att. XIII.16)

These ‘Academica’1 were λογικῶτερα than anything those characters would ever have dreamed about. (Att. XIII.19)

1 On the vexed question whether to translate Academica here as the work’s title or not, see Griffin’s contribution to this volume, pp. 1-35—an essay to which I am indebted more generally for the sense her arguments pro and contra convey, viz. that the truth about the writing of the Academica has not yet been definitively established.
Cicero’s Greek is economical but expressive.

The *dramatis personae* of the first edition are supposed to know the philosophical issues well enough. They do not suffer from ἀπαρδευσία, even if they lack the expertise of a professional. They have at least an amateur acquaintance with epistemology, and Lucullus is praised for his great interest in the subject (*Luc. 4*; cf. 10 fin.). If Catulus’ own interest is not sufficiently vouched for by *Luc. 63* and 148 (not to mention his defence of philosophy in Cicero’s *Hortensius*), his function is to speak for his deceased father, whose passionate interest is recorded at *Luc. 18*. As for Hortensius, his role in the *Hortensius*, where he attacked philosophy on behalf of rhetoric, is quite compatible with his being informed enough to expound the most prominent (‘in promptu’, *Luc. 10*) of Antiochus’ arguments against the Academy. Notoriously, Plato’s attacks on rhetoric display all the skills of the enemy.

What the word ἀπαρδευσία suggests these people lacked is a competence that ‘rubs off’ only on those who take a regular, active part in the ongoing controversy. It is one thing to be acquainted with the issues and interested in the outcome, quite another to become familiar enough with the twists and turns of debate to be dexterous at handling them oneself. The word λογικότερα suggests something similar, that the two books of the first edition were too abstractly argumentative and dialectical to suit the original characters.

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2 In contrast to the non-contemporary *dramatis personae* of Cicero’s earlier dialogues, which were accused (so he tells us at *Luc. 7*) of introducing characters who had no knowledge (*scientia*) of the matters discussed.

3 A good introduction to the distinction between παιδεία and ἐπιστήμη is Arist., *P. A*. I.1.639a 1-16; cf. Pl. *Prt*. 315a. Oblivious to the difference, Reid (1885) 32-4 misinterprets the letter as a confession by Cicero that his original characters had no learning at all. Lévy (1992) 139 is aware of the distinction, but at times (e.g. 154, 192 n. 33) writes as if epistemology as such lay beyond παιδεία. For a just estimate of the philosophical level of the original characters see Barnes (1989) 60-61 with n. 42, where the philosophical works in Lucullus’ famous library very properly weigh in to his credit.

4 Reid’s translation of Hortensius’ words at *Ac*. I.10, ‘I merely stated arguments I had ready to hand, while I expect from Lucullus others more abstruse’, denigrates the speaker unnecessarily. Rackham makes better sense of the contrast between *in promptu* and *reconditionis*: ‘... it was the more obvious points that were expounded by me, whereas I look to Lucullus to give us the more abstruse doctrines’. But for ‘doctrines’ read ‘arguments’: n. 7 below.

5 *LSJ* know the word ἀπαρδευσία only from Cicero’s letter; they translate ‘inexperience, amateurishness’. Cicero would be familiar with Plato’s contrast between τρόπη and τέχνη at *Gr*. 463b, *Phdr*. 260e.

6 λογικότερα can hardly mean they were too technical, because λογικός does not mean ‘technical’ and the *Academica* keeps technicalities to a minimum.