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CICERO'S CRITICISM OF STOIC RHETORIC

Diogo da Luz

PhD Student - PUCRS

ABSTRACT: My goal with this article is to present the elements involved in Cicero's criticism of Stoic rhetoric. First, I will present the rhetoric of the Stoics based on the testimonies we have left on these philosophers. Soon after, I will expose Cicero's criticisms of the Stoics. Next, I will argue that Cicero's criticisms arise because his proposal with rhetoric is different from the Stoics' proposal. Due to this difference, it is necessary to understand that the Stoics, on the other hand, also had motives to defend their vision of rhetoric in face of Ciceronian criticism.

KEYWORDS: Cicero. Rhetoric. Stoics.

RESUMO: Meu objetivo neste artigo é apresentar os elementos envolvidos na crítica de Cícero à retórica estoica. Inicialmente apresentarei a retórica dos estoicos baseado nos testemunhos que nos restaram sobre esses filósofos. Logo depois, exporei as críticas assinaladas por Cícero aos estoicos. Em seguida, argumentarei que as críticas de Cícero surgem em consequência de que sua proposta com a retórica é diferente da proposta estoica. Em função dessa diferença, é preciso compreender que os estoicos, em contrapartida, também tinham motivos para defender sua visão de retórica perante as críticas ciceronianas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cícero. Retórica. Estoicos.

Initial considerations

The philosopher, orator, and lawyer Marco Tullius Cicero is one of the main references to understand the philosophy of the Hellenistic period. Much of what is known today of the Skeptical, Epicurean, and Stoic schools is due to his books. With expository and critical texts, the Roman analyzes several details of these schools at the same time as he presents his opinions, giving his work an intellectual insight worthy of note. Therefore, Cicero often serves as a reference for those who want to know the philosophy of the time. Given the scarcity of material left from this period, testimonies such as those of Cicero often guide the interpretation of what the philosophical approaches of his time would be.

On the other hand, despite the great relevance of Ciceronian expositions, it is neither necessary nor advisable to analyze the issues of the schools cited *only* by Cicero's testimonies. Although he is cautious and shows great intellectual honesty, he often elaborates criticisms that have no proper counterpoint. In our view, this seems to be the case with our subject, namely, the Stoic rhetoric. While Cicero contextualizes the rhetoric of Stoics with some information and examples, he does not address certain details that can be found in other works and testimonies. In this case, we aim, with this article, to explore Cicero's criticism of Stoics in the light of a greater understanding of what Stoic rhetoric is and what its purpose is.

The Stoic rhetoric

According to Atherton (1988, p. 424), the roots of Stoic rhetoric can be found in Plato's works. Inspired by the dialogues, Stoics defend an orator with knowledge, who is just and who wants only to improve his fellow citizens. In this case, it makes no sense for Stoics to seek ways of persuasion in rhetorical strategies that appeal to something other than good judgment on the issue¹. Their purpose is for the orator to speak well,

¹ It is not my objective, in this text, to deal with rhetorical elements used by later Stoics. It is known, for example, that Seneca reveals his rhetorical education in his texts. For more on Seneca, see REALE, 1994, p. lxxiii-lxxv.

always in view of something correct and just, using rhetoric to adjust speech so as to speak with precision (QUINTILIAN. *Inst. Orat.*, I 15, 34)² and to show the truth. Thus, although there is a Stoic rhetoric, and it is considered a science (*epistḗme*) (DIOGENES LAERTIUS, VII, 42), its aim is not to achieve the mere convincing of the public, but to make good use of *lógos* - this being understood as discourse and reason - in order to encompass all that is necessary to good argumentation.

Stoics do not use discursive adornments in their rhetoric, preferring a cleaner and more frank discourse. To them, there are five virtues in every speech: pure Greek (*hellenismós*), clarity (*saphéneia*), conciseness (*syntomía*), propriety or adaptation to the theme (*prépon*) and distinction (*kataskeuḗ*). Stoics also establish two types of vices, barbarism (*barbarismós*) and solecism (*soloikismós*). Diogenes Laertius describes the meaning of each of them:

Pure Greek is diction that is flawless grammatically and free of vulgar usage. Clarity is a style that presents what is thought in an intelligible way; conciseness a style that encompasses precisely what is necessary for elucidating the subject matter. Propriety lies in a style appropriate to the content; distinction is a style that avoids banality. Among vices of style, barbarism is speech that violates the common usage of distinguished Greeks, while in a solecism what is signified is incongruous (DIOGENES LAERTIUS, VII, 59 [P. Mensch]).

As González observes, pure Greek, clarity and distinction are virtues proper to what classical rhetoric describes as *simple or flat style*. According to Cicero, the simple style does not involve speaking things to please the audience or to manipulate their passions, but is a sober speech aimed at establishing a good instructive argumentation (GONZÁLEZ, 2011, p. 172-175). The other two virtues, *propriety* (or adequacy) and *conciseness* are characteristically Stoic. *Propriety* refers to what is appropriate to speech, which is the subject or object in question: it is the subject that establishes what must be said and the way it is to be said (CICERO. *De finibus*, III, 19), not the auditorium and its circumstances. In this, the Stoics *differ from classical rhetoric*, since the latter characterizes *propriety* as adequacy to the public, which in Cicero is linked to the idea of decorum (*decorum*): “Ciceronian decorum undoubtedly has much to do with the

² CRISIPO DE SOLOS, fr. 385.

Sophist concern for *kairos*: the sense of opportunity that makes the orator know what things to say, how to say them, to whom to say them and at what precise moment (GONZÁLEZ, 2011, p. 176).

Conciseness, in turn, is probably the most evident virtue of Stoic discourse. Through conciseness, Stoics reject what others would place as a virtue of speech: ornament (CICERO. *De Oratore*, 24, 79). Concise speech is transparent, without adornment, only adhering to what is necessary. Furthermore, conciseness seems to agree with Zeno's emphasis on brevity in the argument (ATHERTON, 1988, p. 412). In this case, it is worth quoting M. Schofield's interpretation on that brevity³:

(...) if you want an argument to be as safe and strong as possible, then you must keep it as short as possible. Safeness and strength are at least characteristically the sorts of argumentative virtues looked for by philosophers keen to make their arguments probative (SCHOFIELD, 1983, p. 56).

Therefore, Stoics do not consider good speeches that tend to flourishes and digressions that make it long and excessive. They seek to express what is important for the understanding of facts, distancing themselves from strategies that appeal to pompous or argumentative subterfuge.

According to Diogenes Laertius (VII, 42), Stoic rhetoric is established in three formats: deliberative (political), forensic, and encomiastic (solemn speech). This classification is conservative, as Gourinat (2000, p. 45) noted, as is the division of rhetorical speech into invention/discovery (*heúresis*), enunciation (*phrásis*), organization or arrangement (*táxis*), and representation (*hypókrisis*). Still regarding rhetorical speech, equally traditional is the division into preface (*prooímion*), exposition (*diégēsis*), refutation of the opposing parties (*pròs tous antidikous*) and epilogue (*epilogos*) (DIOGENES LAERTIUS, VII, 43).

According to Cicero, Stoics not only consider rhetoric a science, but also a virtue (*De Oratore*, III, XVIII, 65). This last aspect is important because they hold that the virtues are all united, being impossible to possess some virtues and not others

³ Atherton also quotes this passage in his article (cited above). Indeed this seems to show very well what the Stoics had in mind.

(STOBAEUS. *Eclogae*, II, 63, 6-25)⁴. Therefore, they consider that the achievement of good rhetoric is tied to other virtues (QUINTILIAN. *Inst. Orat.*, I, 15, 34)⁵. In this case, not only the study of the forms, distinctions and details of speech is enough, but it is also necessary that the people themselves be virtuous in the other areas of life in order for their rhetoric to be excellent. To understand this, we can rescue the example of the Stoic Cato, whose striking rhetoric is allied to his famous righteousness of intentions and conduct (PLUTARCO. *Vidas Paralelas, Catão, o Jovem*).

Stoicism is a philosophical current that adheres to the improvement of the individual as a whole, which considers the most diverse facets of the human being to be holistically connected (GILL, 2006, p. 33-34). In view of this, they do not see any purpose in a methodology that deals exclusively with the science of rhetoric and ignores improvement in other aspects. Moreover, Chrysippus, for example, does not see clarity and pure Greek as necessarily indispensable to good rhetoric, because they are often of diminished importance in detriment of the good intentions of the orator (PLUTARCH. *De Stoic. Rep.*, 1047A-B)⁶. Besides, the correct appropriation of the subject, namely, its knowledge, provides conditions for a more natural and direct expression. As Cato said, "seize the subject, the words will follow" (IULIUS VICTOR. *Ars Rhetorica*, I, 17).

Cicero's criticism of Stoics

In *De Oratore* (II, 157-160), Cicero criticizes the Stoic style, defining it as obscure, scarce, and without spirit. He does not consider that Stoics can be of any help to those who want to speak well, because they attribute great importance to dialectics which, according to Cicero, does not contribute to the discovery of the truth, but only to test it. By believing in dialectics, Stoics get lost in logical details and even stick themselves in their own splinters, creating difficulties for themselves.

Because they prefer substance over form, Stoics were considered to be less persuasive in assemblies. Cicero combats Stoic austerity and brevity even though, on

⁴ *SIF* III, 280.

⁵ CRISIPO DE SOLOS, fr. 385.

⁶ CRISIPO DE SOLOS, fr. 40.

the other hand, they are attractive to a Roman cultural elite for representing a natural and direct type of expression (STROUP, 2007, p. 27).

Cicero, in turn, bets on a more ornate rhetoric, appealing to methodical strategies of persuasion, emotional manipulation, and care for the *ethos* of his listeners. An example of this is the difference between Cicero and Chrysippus when it comes to the final part of the speech, the epilogue: whereas to Chrysippus - as to Plato - the function of the epilogue is to "summarize each aspect in the end to remind those who listen to you of what has been said" (SPENGEL, *Ars Rhetorica I*, 454)⁷, to Cicero (*De Inventione*, I, 98, 52-53), recapitulation is only one of the three parts of the epilogue, being included also indignation (*indignatio*) and compassion. In the last two aspects, absent from the Stoic proposal, occurs, respectively, aggression against the adversary and praise for oneself. In addition, the conclusion is carried out energetically, so as to stir the emotions of the auditorium.

In relation to the invention of arguments, Cicero says that Stoics do not teach how to find out what to say, on the contrary, they even prevent it. Cicero says:

In this connexion then that eminent Stoic is of no help to us, since he does not teach me how to discover what to say; and he actually hinders me, by finding many difficulties which he pronounces quite insoluble, and by introducing a kind of diction that is not lucid, copious and flowing, but meagre, spiritless, cramped and paltry; and, if any man commends this style, it will only be with the qualification that it is unsuitable to an orator. For this oratory of ours must be adapted to the ears of the multitude, for charming or urging their minds to approve of proposals, which are weighed in no goldsmith's balance, but in what I may call common scales (CICERO. *De Oratore*, II, 159 [Sutton]).

To discover what to say in a rhetorical speech, Cicero follows the path trodden by Aristotle, whom he praises, by carrying out a study of every rhetorical *tópos* (*locus*), which is nothing more than the thirst for arguments (*argumentorum sedes*) and the *topica* being the art of finding arguments. The Roman criticizes Stoics in this matter, stating that they have abandoned this art, since they have restricted themselves only to the science of judgment, which they call dialectics. *For Cicero, the topica is more*

⁷ *SVF* II, 286.

important than the analysis of judgment, and should be placed first, being also called the “art of invention” (*inventio*) (CICERO. *Topica*, 6-8).

As Nuñez points out, *inventio* is the “study of the various types of causes and the arguments that must be used on each occasion” (NUÑEZ, 1997, p. 14), “it is the obtaining and preparation of the appropriate arguments to the different types of causes” (NUÑEZ, 1997, p. 24). The cause, in this sense, refers to the *constitutio* (or *status*) of the question under discussion, to the situation in dispute, which in Greek translates as *stasis*⁸. For this reason, *inventio* is the art of finding arguments in the various types of questions, it is what enables the orator to identify the *status* of a cause and extract arguments from appropriate “places” (*loci*). For example: a controversy concerning a murder presents a *conjectural status*, as it refers to a *fact* (CICERO. *De Inventione*, I, 10-11), and an argument for the defense of the accused of committing such a crime can be found in the *locus of enumeration*. As Cicero exemplifies:

The accused must have committed murder by enmity, by fear, by hope, or by favoring some friend; if not for any of these reasons, he was not the murderer, for a crime is not committed without reason. If it is true that there was no enmity between them, nor anything to fear, nor hope to gain any benefit from his death, nor did this death interest any of his friends, we must conclude, therefore, that the accused did not kill him (CICERO. *De Inventione*, I, 45).

As for eloquence, according to Cicero, it comes from other rhetorical strategies, such as the use of arguments at the *right moments*, in the right parts of speech, etc. In this case, the Roman distances himself from Cato's Stoic proposal of being more concerned with the mastery of the subject, with substance over form.

On the other hand, even if Cicero is concerned with the form of speech, it cannot be said that he leaves aside the relevance of the content. The Roman does not criticize Stoics for this aspect, because he recognizes in them a depth of spirit caused by philosophical competence. In fact, what he seeks is precisely the union of two worlds: that of oratory and that of philosophy. Unlike Plato, Cicero considers the combination

⁸ As Atherton says: “The *stasis* (or *status* [or *constitutio*]) of a case, roughly speaking, is the ‘issue’ on which it turns the point which if decided will determine the outcome of the whole case”. (ATHERTON, 1988, p. 393 [note 4]). Or as Cicero reports: “*constitutio* is the first conflict that arises when rejecting the accusation. For example: ‘you did this’, ‘you did not do it’ or ‘I was entitled to do it’” (*De Inventione* I, 10).

of philosophy and rhetoric to be relevant, because in this way it is possible for orators to contribute to the qualification of public affairs, opening space for the insertion of philosophy in political and legal debates as well as other fields relevant to citizenship⁹. Furthermore, philosophy also serves to give content and good training to orators. In doing so, Cicero attaches great importance to the figure of the orator for the formation of the Roman public man (NUÑEZ, 1997, p. 25-26), an attribution that has become famous and certainly remarkable for the history of Rome.

Philosophy (*sapientia*), as noted, is an important component for the formation of the orator, since it contributes greatly to eloquence. In this sense, Cicero proposes an end to the dispute between rhetoricians and philosophers, presenting as a solution for the orator the union between these two worlds. This split between rhetoric and philosophy, which became famous with Plato (PINTO, 2010, p. 81-82), is criticized by Cicero, since, according to the Roman, this gives less power of persuasion to the philosophical content itself. In view of this, Cicero brings Greek philosophy to the Roman way of life (AUVRAY-ASSAYAS, 2018, p. 58-62), more accustomed to the pursuit of political eloquence by means of imposing and solemn speeches.

On the other hand, although Cicero considered the Stoic speech not very eloquent, preferring and praising the Aristotelian contribution, it is important to note that the Roman went beyond Aristotle's proposal: although the Stagirite occupied himself with the theme of passions in his *Rhetoric*, his emphasis still remained on the structure of arguments. Cicero, for his part, preferred to do the opposite: he devoted himself more to what derives from the self-representation of the orator and the passions aroused in the public than to the proofs derived from arguments (FREITAS, 2017, p. 113-114).

Back to Stoics

For Cicero (*De Oratore*, I, LIII 228-LV 233), an emblematic case that highlights the problem of *Stoa* rhetoric was the condemnation of the Stoic Publius Rutilius Rufus. Rufus refused to make passionate appeals and gave up any ornament in his defense

⁹ “(...) the interest of the city is not to separate philosophy and eloquence, but to unite both (CICERO. *De Inventione*, I, 1, 1 e 4,5).

speech, restricting himself to the pure truth that the subject allowed. This case is interesting because it bears similarities to the way Socrates performed his defense, as described by Plato in his *Apology*. Socrates did not make an ingenious or beautiful speech, but asked the judges to ignore the way in which he would express himself and dwell only on the analysis of the matter (MAY, 2002, p. 64). The Athenian rejected the strategies of conventional oratory and demonstrated great dialectical skill.

Just as Socrates was not persuasive enough in his defense, it can be said that the same was true for Rutilius Rufus. To Cicero (*De Oratore*. I, 230), Rufus was a great human being, but unfortunately he did not obtain absolution precisely because of his Stoic insistence not to worry about abundance in speech and not to appeal to strategies of emotional manipulation. In affirming this, Cicero wanted to demonstrate that Stoic rhetoric has little power of persuasion to the public.

According to Atherton (1988, p. 34-36), Socratic dialectics is not oriented to political speeches or to a large audience, but to one-on-one philosophical encounters. Stoics, on the other hand, seek to provide a model of discourse that embraces both the public and the private spheres, since the Stoic philosopher does not have a public and a private language. In view of this, Atherton maintains, Stoic rhetoric, subsidized by the analysis of judgments of its dialectics, may even prove more precise, but less convincing to a plural audience. Moreover, and not least important, Atherton argues that because Stoics regard rhetoric as a virtue, they end up disregarding the public success of speeches, since virtue is a matter of private success. By seeing virtue in good speech, Stoics eliminate the public criteria of success and failure.

On the other hand, it is known, as has already been seen, that it is not the case that Stoics bring only elements of dialectics for the elaboration of rhetorical speech. Despite Socratic influence, there is also, in Stoicism, a specific study of rhetoric. It cannot be said that Stoics simply ignore methods of organizing speech in a way that is better understood by the public. What they do, in fact, is to devote themselves not to the particularities of their audience, but to what is common between the orator and *any* public: reason. Taking into account the human condition of dealing with judgments, Stoics establish a clear rhetoric in order to make the issues evident. To Stoicism, as to Socrates, evil is only done by mistake, since no one chooses evil because they want to, but because they have made a mistake. Even passions (which are negative emotions for

Stoics) occur through judgments, because they are the fruit of opinions, of a view of the world, of things, or of people (DIOGENES LAERTIUS, VII, 110-116). For this reason, it is also not the case that they disregard the emotional reaction of the public through speech: in fact, Stoics know that they can arouse various emotional reactions, because they are tied to the opinions that the listeners possess. As the speech develops, the judgments of the listeners are put to the test and may trigger particular passionate reactions, according to each person. Thus, it is not the case to claim that the sobriety of Stoic rhetoric necessarily implies cold speeches or, as Sarah C. Stroup mentions (2007, p. 27), more adequate for a library. The core of the matter is that Stoics try to make an exposition in the best possible way through speech: it is the challenge of speaking veraciously, and the main goal is not simply to win a legal or political dispute. Commitment to the truth requires much more than commitment to advocate in a judicial or ideological cause.

What Cicero criticizes in Stoicism is precisely what caused Stoic innovation in the field of rhetoric: the incorporation of dialectical questions (GOURINAT, 2000, p. 41). Stoic accuracy of speech provided by the dialectical resource indicates a greater concern than the persuasion of a particular audience with a particular culture. Although Cicero criticized the position of *Stoá* philosophers, considering it unfit for political oratory¹⁰, it is important to note that Stoics understand the political ideal of harmony (*homónoia*) by a broader view, since they refer to the cosmic dimension of the human being, a dimension that underpins cosmopolitanism, the universal citizenship based on a community of rational beings. In view of this, communion by *lógos* is the most important thing for Stoics, since, for them, reason is what underpins politics beyond the different kinds of *ethos* of peoples (MARCUS AURELIUS, *Meditations*, IV, 4).

A more specific example of how dialectics adheres to rhetoric can be found in the thought of the Stoic Posidonius. Thanks to Quintilian's testimony, we know that Posidonius makes an analysis of the *status* of rhetoric in the light of dialectics. In *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian states that the Stoic divides *status* (*stásis*) into two genres, having each genre subdivisions. These genres are (I) *vox* (language) and (ii) *res*

¹⁰ Criticism that philosophy found no place in the conciliation of a broader audience is also noted by Philodemus in SUDHAUS, *Philodemi Volumina Retórica II*, col. XVIII, 9-20, p. 223 (Fr. 388 - Crisipo de Solos).

(thing/fact), and are directly associated with the division of Stoic dialectics into *phoné* (significant) e *prágmata* (signifieds) (KIDD, 2004, p. 687). As Quintilian states, these genres are subdivided as follows:

Under language he thinks come the questions: 'Does this have any meaning?'; 'What is its meaning?'; 'How many meanings has it?'; 'And how?' Under fact he classifies 'conjecture', which he says depends on sense-perception; 'quality', that is definition of the fact, which Posidonius names as conceptual; and 'relation'. A result of this classification is another division into 'written' [law] and 'unwritten' (QUINTILIAN. *Institutio Oratoria*, III, 6, 37-8)¹¹.

As seen in the above section, it is not possible to characterize Stoic rhetoric as shallow or poorly elaborated. What can be noticed is that the Stoics devoted themselves to it in a different way than Cicero. Given the specificity of the Stoic philosophical paradigm, it must be understood that their idea of rhetoric is not the same as Cicero's. In view of this, it is necessary to contextualize Cicero's criticism of Stoics, knowing the different speech proposals and the different objectives pursued by both.

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¹¹ Fr. 189 Edelstein-Kidd.

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