

Lowe, Dunstan (2025) *Ovid's Cipus (Metamorphoses 5.565-621) and the Horned Man Paradox*. Classical Philology, 121 (4). pp. 472-491. ISSN 0009-837X. (In press)

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OVID'S CIPUS (*METAMORPHOSES* 15. 565–621) AND THE HORNED MAN PARADOX*

The Cipus episode in Ovid's Metamorphoses 15, featuring a Roman with horns, is unusual because it contains no moment of transformation. The narrative also contrasts with that of Valerius Maximus in ways that the difference between genres cannot entirely explain. I suggest that Ovid alludes to the Horned Man paradox, a comparatively well known (and often derided) logical problem. This would add to existing evidence that Ovid knew and played with philosophical themes, most obviously in the Speech of Pythagoras earlier in Metamorphoses 15.

Keywords: Cipus, Horned Man, Stoicism, philosophy, paradoxes, Ovid

[E]xperience of Ovid's habit of reapplying received literary tropes with a startling panache and an eye for extreme effect (hyperbole, bathos, parody etc.) should put us on our guard on a philosophical front.¹

Ovid's typically off-kilter selection of Roman heroes in the final two books of the *Metamorphoses* includes Cipus, a Roman citizen who is marked for kingship by horns on his head, but patriotically chooses to exile himself instead (15.565–621).² Studies of Ovid's Cipus have explored two main areas of interest, both profiting from comparisons with Valerius Maximus' version of

* This article is dedicated to the memory of Laurence Goldstein (1947–2014), a specialist in paradoxes. I am grateful to Nick Denyer for several helpful suggestions, as well as to the journal's anonymous readers.

¹ Volk and Williams (2022, 9).

² The standard commentary on the Cipus episode is Bömer (1986, 403–17). Cipus was hardly in the first rank of Roman *exempla* in Ovid's time: although he has some historiographical pedigree (see below), he does not feature in Livy's Book 1, and is absent from either the parade of heroes in *Aeneid* 6 or the historical scenes on the shield in *Aeneid* 8.

the same story.³ On one hand is the culture and history of the Republican period: Cipus is an apparent relic of early Republican beliefs, providing the origin-story for a bronze decoration on a historic city gate. Historians and anthropologists have therefore speculated on Ovid's raw materials to suggest origins for the story itself and for the horns motif.⁴ On the other hand, Cipus rejects the kingship ordained by the horns and patriotically chooses exile, which makes him an obvious political exemplum. Critics agree that there is a political allegory here, but there is no consensus on what to make of it.⁵ For this reason, some see Cipus as a cipher for someone in living memory who disavowed premiership: Julius Caesar, Augustus, or Agrippa.⁶ There is repeated emphatic placement of the word "king,"⁷ as well as the phrase "this man alone" (*hic unus*, 594), which resembles how Ovid identifies Augustus himself about two hundred lines later (*qui...unus*, 819–20). But if the political point is this subtle, especially compared to the praise of Caesar at the poem's close (or indeed the *Fasti*'s Julian anniversaries), it is unlikely to be Ovid's only attraction to the story.

³ Valerius Maximus 5.6.3. Pliny mentions Cipus with Actaeon in passing, discounting them from his list of species with horns because they are legendary: "because I consider Actaeon and Cipus—even though he is in Latium's history—to be mythical" (*Actaeonem enim et Cipum etiam in Latia historia fabulosos reor*).

⁴ For folkloric and antiquarian interpretations of the origin of the horns motif, see Palm (1939), Gagé (1972). Pairault-Massa (1990) bases a political reading on a range of antiquarian details. Wiseman (1995, 109) argues that Genucius Cipus (as Valerius Maximus calls him) asserted historic prestige for a plebeian *gens Genucia*, and that Ovid's version features an Etruscan *haruspex* because the Genuci "probably came from an Etruscan background." In Valerius no source for the prophecy is named ("the answer was...," *responsum est*, 5.6.3).

⁵ For summaries of previous scholarly views, see Hardie (2002, 208), Marks (2004, 113), Hardie (2015, 563–64), and Feldherr (2002, note 4), with references.

⁶ Cipus as Julius Caesar: Porte (1985, 193–95), Astorino (2017). Fränkel (1945, 226 n.102) compares Cipus' use of the wreath to that of Caesar, as part of a deeper allegory of Caesar refusing the royal diadem (cf. Suet. *Iul.* 79) intended to compliment Augustus; Kenney (1986, 464) agrees. Cipus as Augustus: Galinsky (1967, 187–90) emphasizes the Augustan associations of the "pacific laurel" donned by Cipus (*pacali...lauro*, 591); more recently, Schmitzter (1990, 260–72) has linked the Cipus episode with Augustus through his birth-sign Capricorn. For some, Cipus is a critique of Augustus: see Fabre-Serris (1995, 166–71), Martin (2009). Granobs (1997, 133–134) is rightly skeptical. Cipus as Agrippa: Galinsky (1967, 188), Díez Platas and López Barja de Quiroga (2010, 278–79).

⁷ "Rex" ait (*Met.* 15.581), *Rex eris* (585), *Rex erit* (595).

While acknowledging that Ovid's Cipus narrative is historically and politically valuable, I suggest that it is also a third thing: a play on the "Horned Man" (*Keratines*) or "Horns" paradox from the world of philosophy. Both Cipus and the Horned Man have been well studied in themselves,⁸ but not previously linked. Feldherr (2022) rightly draws attention to the motifs of self-referentiality and mimesis in this episode, but interprets them as metapoetic.⁹ The absurd Horned Man paradox was originally a tool for logicians, but was scorned by a number of critics, and was perhaps considered an old chestnut by the Antonine period (to judge by Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 18.2.9, discussed below). If I can show that Ovid made use of it, then this will improve our understanding of what philosophy meant to educated Roman laypeople in the classical period, while also adding an item to the growing list of Ovid's engagements with philosophy. Ovid is in the minority of extant Roman authors (and of Augustan poets) who neither declare nor demonstrate philosophical allegiances. He does not even profess anything as casual as Horace's version of Epicureanism, let alone Lucretius' more evangelical version, or the Stoic outlooks of Manilius and (later) of Lucan and Persius. Yet despite having no apparent stake in discussing philosophy, Ovid can nonetheless play with philosophical ideas, as is obvious from the speech of Pythagoras in *Metamorphoses* 15. I will argue that some unusual features of Ovid's Cipus narrative later in Book 15, which distinguish it from Valerius Maximus' version as well as from Ovid's usual practice in the *Metamorphoses*, make most sense as allusions to the "Horned Man" paradox.

The "Horned Man" Paradox

The "Horns" or "Horned Man" paradox requires the hearer to accept each of two assertions, which drive them to a false conclusion: "What you haven't lost, you still have. You haven't lost horns. Therefore, you have horns." It is one of seven classic fallacies or paradoxes by Eubulides of Miletus, for which he was famous in his own life-

⁸ On the Horned Man (and related problems in logic), see Schulthess (1996), Bobzien (2012).

⁹ Feldherr interprets the doubt over the reality of the horns in various ways, especially as Ovid's commentary on the relationship between metamorphic myth and real-world historiography: "by proving that his horns are real, Cipus simultaneously returns us to the historical world where we do not have horns."

time: a comic fragment (apparently written soon after his death) mocks Eubulides for his “quibbles about horns,” and his contemporary Aristotle also shows knowledge of the paradoxes, despite choosing to ignore them.¹⁰ The fact that they are also ascribed to his successor in the “Dialectical School” Diodorus Cronus, and the Stoic Chrysippus, suggests that both men studied them.¹¹ The comic fragment is the first of many signs that the “Horned Man” attracted considerable attention, perhaps the third most notorious paradox after the Liar and the Heaper (*Sorites*).¹² Philosophical debate was agonistic, and the inability to escape a logical trap was embarrassing, so the “Horned Man” had the special appeal of making the opponent notionally defend himself.¹³ There was probably humour in the very idea of a person having horns, like a dumb animal, especially since they might not see or feel them.¹⁴

¹⁰ “Eubulides the Eristic, quibbling about horns and baffling the orators with falsely pretentious arguments, has passed on, swaggering like Demosthenes” (οὐριστικὸς δ’ Εὐβουλίδης κερατίνας ἐρωτῶν καὶ ψευδαλαζόσιν λόγοις τοὺς ρήτορας κυλίων ἀπῆλθ’ ἔχων Δημοσθένους τὴν ρωποπερπερήθραν, Meineke *CGF* 4.618). Aristotle and Eubulides were hostile to one another (Diog. Laert. 2.6.109): Aristotle does not discuss the seven paradoxes explicitly, but he knows them, alluding to the “Veiled Man” paradox (*Sophistici Elenchi* 24.179a26ff) and possibly the “Liar” (25.180b2–7).

¹¹ Diog. Laert. 7.1.44, 7.1.82 (Stoics generally), 2.10.108 (Eubulides), 2.10.111 (Diodorus Cronus), 7.7.187 (Chrysippus). According to Bobzien (2012, 8), Chrysippus is credited with an impressive range of publications on fallacies (Diog. Laert. 7.196–8). On the Stoic interest in ambiguity, see Edlow (1975), Atherton (1993), Bobzien (2006).

¹² Barnes (1982) gives an excellent discussion of the *sorites* paradox (demonstrating that “Heaper” is the correct translation: 32n8), with examples collected from 29 authors. Among these, Cicero mentions the *sorites* more than half a dozen times. Although no such catalogue yet exists for the Liar paradox, I rely on Barnes’ assertion that it was at least as notorious as the *sorites* (1982, 36).

¹³ Supposedly, Diodorus Cronus was so humiliated by his inability to answer Stilpo’s questions that—after writing a treatise on them—he died of shame (*DL* 2.10). The embarrassing loaded question “Have you stopped... [beating your wife/father, committing adultery, etc.]?” was also known in antiquity (Bobzien 2012, 2).

¹⁴ Thus Bobzien (2012, 182), who notes that satyrs had horns after conflation with goat-like Pans. The metaphor of the cuckold’s horns is not in fact ancient (editors agree that the often-cited passage in Artemidorus is an interpolation, found no earlier than the eleventh-century MS Laurentianus 87–88), but may reflect a deeper association between horns and buffoonery. References to horns, as to other disfigurements, in Greek and Roman literature are frequently comical: Horace’s Messius is mocked for a scarred brow, which looks like it has lost a horn (*Serm.*

Cicero (like Aristotle) dismisses the paradoxes with very little comment,¹⁵ but the Horned Man paradox itself receives a scattering of mentions in Latin prose from the Neronian period onward, from a mixture of philosophers and non-philosophers.¹⁶ Before then, Romans privileged enough to finish their education with philosophy did so in Greek at centers of learning in Greece, where they might encounter old problems in logic without necessarily studying them; philosophy may even have served as a repertory of rhetorical figures and arguments.¹⁷ In any case, the “Horned Man” had definitely circulated outside strictly philosophical discourse by the second century AD. I shall argue that Ovid’s Cipus episode is evidence of this in Augustan Rome.

Those who ridiculed the Horned Man paradox (and the like) focused on the image of someone checking their forehead. Part of what makes it absurd is the idea that a stupid person might be convinced they really did have horns. According to an anecdote about Diogenes of Sinope, when someone uses the paradox on him, he reacts by touching his forehead: he then says “I, for one, don’t see them.”¹⁸ Likewise, he responds to a refutation of the possibility of

1.5.58–64), and Archilochus wrote “Sing of Glaucus the horn-fashioner” (fr. 117 West = Hesych. κεροπλάστης, Poll. 2.31), which the commentator takes as mockery of a hairstyle with one or more bunched-up braids known as “horns.” (The *Scholiast on Il.* 24.81 gives the same interpretation, though Plutarch *Intelligence of Animals* 24 disagrees.) There are also non-comical examples, such as the frenzied Io in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* (673–677), who mentions the horns on her forehead in a context of pathos.

¹⁵ Cicero dismisses the paradoxes entirely as a frivolous waste of time: “convoluted and thorny ‘sophisms’, which is the name they give to deceptive inferences” *contorta et aculeata quaedam sophismata* (*sic enim appellantur fallaces conclusiunculae*): *Lucullus* 75.

¹⁶ Bobzien (2012, 7 n. 21) provides a list of ancient citations spanning the first century AD (Seneca, Quintilian), the second and third (Fronto, Lucian, Gellius, Clement, Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius), fourth (Jerome), fifth (Martianus Capella), and sixth (Boethius). On the philosophical tradition of the seven paradoxes after antiquity, see Sorensen (2003, 83–99).

¹⁷ These suggestions by DeLacy (1947) are speculative but plausible. Ovid was apparently tutored by two Roman rhetoricians, Arellius Fuscus and Porcius Latro (Sen. *Contr. 2.2.8, 9.5.17*).

¹⁸ πρὸς τὸν συλλογισάμενον ὅτι κέρατα ἔχει, ἀφάμενος τοῦ μετώπου, “ἐγὼ μέν,” ἔφη, “οὐχ ὄρῶ” (Diog. Laert. 6.2.38). Diogenes exploits metaphorical meanings of the word “see:” without a reflecting surface one cannot literally view one’s own forehead, so a theorist might “see” that horns are present, whereas a pragmatist touching his forehead would “see” that they are not. In Plato’s *Alcibiades I* (116e) it is assumed

motion by standing up and walking about. Like many of the anecdotes showing Diogenes' satirical streak, the acts of touching his forehead or walking show that he cares nothing for opinion, including counterintuitive reasoning. Seneca, who (like Diogenes, Aristotle, and Cicero before him) is scornful of the paradoxes, once again talks about forehead-groping in his *Letters*. To illustrate that argumentation cannot defeat common sense, he says that nobody is silly enough to accept the "Horned Man" proposition and feel for horns on his forehead.¹⁹ A few letters later, Seneca criticises philosophers who waste their time examining sophisms, and in the very act of mocking them, shares a funny example: "Mouse is a syllable; a mouse nibbles cheese; therefore, a syllable nibbles cheese."²⁰ The combination of absurdity with a reference to animals invites comparison with a fragment of the Roman poet Lucilius, who wrote in the mid to late second century BC. Lucilius does not use the Horned Man paradox itself, but an equally playful sophism: "The things we see the horse using to run and ride, those he uses to ride and run. We see him ride using eyes. Therefore, he rides using eyes."²¹ Directly after Seneca's mouse example, in the next letter, he mentions the Horned Man paradox again and this time quotes it directly. Here it stands as the ultimate "pointed" quibble for a Stoic, who is imagined wasting time on it while under military siege.²²

that one may answer confidently if asked whether one has two eyes or three, two hands or four, and so on.

¹⁹ "Now, as for a man who's asked whether he has horns: he isn't stupid enough to feel his brow, and neither is he so clueless or dopey that you can use that ingenious syllogism to convince him he isn't sure." (*Ceterum qui interrogatur, an cornua habeat, non est tam stultus, ut frontem suam temptet, nec rursus tam ineptus aut hebes, ut ne sciat tu illi subtilissima collectione persuaseris*, Sen. *Epist. 45.8*).

²⁰ *Mus syllaba est; mus autem caseum rodit; syllaba ergo caseum rodit* (Sen. *Epist. 48.6*).

²¹ Lucil. (fr. 1284–86 Marx = 1250–52 Warmington). Marx identifies this as deriving from Arist. *Sophist. elench. 177a36*. This paradox is more transparent than the Horned Man because it more obviously hinges on two different meanings of the same word and syntax.

²² "Everyone would rightly think a man was crazy, if he [...] were sitting casually and posing little queries like this: 'That which you have not lost, you have; you haven't lost horns; therefore, you have horns', and other things contrived in the same style as this pointed silliness" (*Demens omnibus merito viderer, si...sederem otiosus et eiusmodi quaestiunculas ponens: "quod non perdidisti, habes; cornua autem non perdidisti; cornua ergo habes," aliaque ad exemplum huius acutae delirationis concinnata*, Sen. *Epist. 49.8*). This anticipates the idea of philosophers debating how

Seneca is part of the mainstream rejection of the paradoxes, so there may be no direct connection with Diogenes, but it is striking that Seneca says nobody would do what Diogenes reportedly did: touch his forehead to see if he really is a Horned Man.

No source implies that dialecticians produced “answers” for the paradoxes, but they seem to have become hackneyed anyway. In the second century AD, Aulus Gellius—a well-rounded intellectual and therefore philosophically educated, but by no means an expert philosopher—is well aware of how “trick questions” (*captiosae quaestiones*) like the “Horns” paradox work. He says that when dialecticians restrict themselves to yes-no answers, there is no way to win.²³ The Stoics had other syllogisms, more challenging than Lucilius’ horse and Seneca’s mouse, with two mode-forming premises and then a simple assertion as the conclusion.²⁴ If we call this conclusion the punchline, we can see how this type of reasoning might easily be put to humorous effect as a sort of one-liner riddle, which is effectively what the horse and mouse examples are. In a separate context, Gellius records that the “Horned Man” appeared among the intellectual puzzles at a Saturnalia party in Athens during his student days. Apparently it did not present much difficulty.²⁵ Decades later, Sextus Empiricus gives a slightly more

many angels can dance on the head of a pin, found first in William Chillingworth (1648) and Henry More (1659) who are mocking Thomas Aquinas exactly as Seneca mocks Eubulides. Indeed, current urban legends claim that the Byzantines debated some inanity while under siege (angels on pinheads, the gender of angels, the chicken-and-egg question).

²³ “For if I were to ask one of your men like this: ‘If you haven’t lost something, do you have it or not? Answer yes or no’, then whatever short reply he gave, he’d be caught out. For if he says no, he *doesn’t* have what he hasn’t lost, the inference will be that he *doesn’t* have eyes, because he *hasn’t* lost them. But if he says yes, he *does* have it, the inference will be that he has horns, because he *hasn’t* lost those” (*Nam si ita ego istorum aliquem rogem: Quicquid non perdidisti, habeasne an non habeas, postulo ut aias aut neges,*” *utrumcumque breviter responderit, capietur. Nam si non habere se negaverit, quod non perdidit, colligetur oculos eum non habere, quos non perdidit; sin vero habere se dixerit, colligetur habere eum cornua, quae non perdidit*, Gell. NA 16.2.9–10).

²⁴ See Bobzien (1999, 136–37), who cites the following example from Origen (*Contra Celsum* 7.15): “If you know that you are dead, you are dead. If you know that you are dead, not: you are dead. Therefore not: you know you are dead.”

²⁵ “In the third round, this was the challenge. In the fallacies put forward, which words contain the trap, and how can they be taken apart and untangled? ‘What you have not lost, you have; you have not lost horns; therefore, you have horns.’ And the

complicated version, which looks like someone's attempt to revive the challenge.²⁶ Apparently the "Horned Man" paradox was easy to answer by Gellius' day, and it could have become a cliché far earlier. It seems that what began as a research tool (albeit a whimsical one) also became a mere plaything of beginners and dilettantes, or, at least, an amusing intellectual game. Few took it seriously, and even many philosophers called it an objectionable waste of time.

I would now like to suggest other evidence that the Horned Man paradox was treated playfully by non-philosophical Greek and Latin writers, to argue that if Ovid did do this, he was not the first. We have already seen that the comic fragment about Eubulides—probably our earliest surviving reference to the Horned Man paradox—pokes fun at philosophical discourse from the outside. Something similar may be happening in the contextless fragment of Lucilius about horses. Kostenko may well be right that Lucilius was narrating a convivial parlour-game, like the one Gellius played centuries later, though perhaps instead he was parodying philosophical paradoxes.²⁷ Without context we cannot tell, but as a satirist he more likely meant to amuse than instruct.

Two poems from around the first century BC might contain indirect references to the Horned Man paradox, since both light-heartedly imagine people searching their own foreheads. The first is *Anacreontea* 7, a Greek poem of late Hellenistic or perhaps early Imperial date.²⁸ The speaker has been rejected by women for being old and bald, but decides that the closer he is to death, the more he should try to have fun. Therefore, he will not check his brow in a mirror to see whether he really is bald. We might expect the speaker to say "I do not care" about being bald, but he says "I do not know"

same for another fallacy: "That which I am, you are not; I am a person; therefore, you are not a person" (*Tertio in loco hoc quaesitum est, in quibus verbis captionum istarum fraud esset et quo pacto distingui resolvique possent: quod non perdidisti, habes; cornua non perdidisti: habes igitur cornua*"; item altera captio: "quod ego sum, id tu non es; homo ego sum: homo igitur tu non es", Gell. NA 18.2.9).

²⁶ "If you don't have fine horns and have horns, you have horns. You don't have fine horns and have horns. Therefore, you have horns" (Sext. Emp. Pyr. 2.241–42).

²⁷ Kostenko (2001, 125). Pohle (1916) believes Lucilius to be mocking philosophical paradoxes here, but finds Stoic sympathies in other fragments.

²⁸ Poems 1–20 are thought to be Hellenistic or early Imperial. The scholarship on the date range of the *Anacreontea* is summarised in the introduction to Campbell (1988). For a recent treatment of the poems, see Müller (2010).

(οὐκ οἶδα), which in Greek also means “I have not seen.”²⁹ Although it must be tentative, I suggest that we see here a deliberate reversal of the Horned Man paradox, especially the way that Diogenes answered it. The poem might simultaneously play on another of the seven paradoxes, the Bald Man, which asks: how many hairs must a man lose in order to be defined as bald? My other proposed poetic example is in Virgil’s *Eclogue* 6, when the cursed daughters of Proetus hallucinate that they are cows. They are said to “check their smooth brows often, looking for horns” (*et saepe in levi quaesisset cornua fronte*, 6.51), which are of course not there. Neither *Anacreon tea* 7 nor *Eclogue* 6 suggests mockery of philosophy.³⁰ Yet both of them call investigating one’s forehead a foolish act: I suggest that they allude obliquely to the Horned Man paradox, and the absurd act of self-investigation performed so freely by Diogenes.

Ovid’s Cipus as the “Horned Man”

The Cipus story is integral to *Metamorphoses* 15, being sixty lines long and well embedded among the other Republican episodes.³¹ It forms the last of three Italian miracles of spontaneous growth, after the emergence of the prophet Tages from the Etruscan soil (553–59) and the transformation of Romulus’ spear into a tree on the Palatine (560–64). It echoes them both: as Marks observes (2004, 111), the two

²⁹ “The women say: ‘Anacreon, you’re old! Pick up a mirror and look: there’s no hair left, your forehead is smooth.’ As for me, whether my hair is still there or gone, I don’t know. But I do know this: there is all the more reason for an old man to have his fun, while his fate is on the way.”

λέγουσιν αἱ γυναικεῖ·
‘Ανάκρεον, γέρων εἶ·
λαβὼν ἔσσπτρον ἄθρει
κόμας μὲν οὐκέτ’ οὔσας,
ψιλὸν δέ σευ μέτωπον.’
ἐγὼ δὲ τὰς κόμας μέν,
εἴτ’ εἰσὶν εἴτ’ ἀπῆλθον,
οὐκ οἶδα: τοῦτο δ’ οἶδα,
ώς τῷ γέροντι μᾶλλον
πρέπει τὸ τερπνὰ παίζειν,
ὅσῳ πέλας τὰ Μοίρης.

³⁰ Virgil’s lines in *Eclogue* 6 bear no relation to the two actual riddles told in *Eclogue* 3 (see Dix 1995), and despite the *Anacreon tea*’s generic affiliation with the symposium, poem 7 has no connection with riddles beyond a reference to “playing,” παίζειν.

³¹ Galinsky (1967, 183), Pairault-Massa (1990, 288–289).

main elements of the Tages miracle reappear in Cipus' story, because he is acclaimed by an Etruscan seer (*Tyrrhenae gentis haruspex*, 577) and ploughs the soil to claim his award of land (616–19). Meanwhile, the name *Cipus* is very like the word for a boundary-marker (*cippus*), which in its original sense of a “stake,” i.e. a sharpened wooden pole embedded in the ground, recalls Romulus’ spear.³² Cipus even replays Ovid’s own previous work: by discovering his horns reflected in a river, he resembles Io in *Heroides* 14, who does the same thing after she is turned into a cow.³³ Nonetheless, three of the episode’s features are atypical for the poem, and these point towards the Greek ontological problem that I have described. Ovid leaves out the transformation; he dwells on the theme of disbelief in the horns; and he injects a degree of absurdity. All three elements distinguish Ovid’s account from that of Valerius Maximus, which (despite being later in date) generally contains more concrete details, including a moment of transformation.³⁴ This suggests that all three are Ovid’s intentional choices.

Ovid had many options for putting transformation-stories into the historical traditions of the Republican period, and his decision to select Tages, Romulus’ spear, and Cipus—and to give Cipus the most attention—deserves scrutiny. When we compare Valerius Maximus, it seems clear that Ovid did not invent the story: Valerius provides several concrete details including Cipus’ full name and rank (*praetor Genucius Cipus*), and the precise occasion and moment of the prodigy. Valerius may have added such details himself, making a traditional story his own with no priority over Ovid, but they may perhaps be more faithful to an older common source. The

³² Roman *cippi* were usually stone markers, like milestones. Porte (1985, 94) and Pairault-Massa (1990, 300) link the Cipus legend with the *cippi* of the *pomerium*, which Cipus would symbolically cross to become king. Porte even suggests that a *cippus* had marked the spot outside the Porta Raudusculana where Cipus discovers his horns. Barchiesi (1997, 187) suggests that Cipus is in some sense a “boundary stone” of the *Metamorphoses*.

³³ *adstitit in ripa liquidi nova vacca parentis | cornuaque in patriis non sua vidit aquis* (*Her.* 14. 89–90); *quid te miraris in unda?* (93); *fonte bibis spectasque tuam stupefacta figuram* (97).

³⁴ “A strange and unheard-of kind of prodigy happened to him [...] horn-like things suddenly sprouted on his head” (*novi atque inauditi generis prodigium incidit [...] in capite eius subito veluti cornua erepserunt*, *Val. Max.* 5.6.3).

one disagreement is that in Valerius, Cipus is leaving the city to take command, and, in Ovid, he is returning victorious: as we shall see, Ovid seems to have changed this to add drama. Both authors agree that Cipus was commemorated with a horned head in bronze on the city gate, but only Valerius puts it specifically on the Porta Rauduscula and derives its name from *raudera*, an archaic word for bronze.³⁵ The etymology is not Valerius' main interest, but suggests that some earlier source for the story was historical, connecting past events with the Raudusculan gate. Ovid has very different interests, barely mentioning the gate and ignoring its name. In fact, the historical setting of Ovid's Cipus tale is quite vague, which is not unusual for the Roman contents of the poem.³⁶ So Ovid probably borrowed the Cipus story from a historical or antiquarian source, in which it was at least partly an *action* for the Porta Rauduscula, and retold it in a new form for a new purpose. The changes he makes are all the more important when they stand out from the other stories in the poem.

The Cipus story is obviously among the historical exempla that modelled aspirational behaviour for Roman citizens. In its positive form, the pattern is that a citizen acts for the good of the state, an audience approves, and a legacy is left for others to imitate.³⁷ Ovid could easily have chosen more famous alternatives than Cipus: both Horatius Cocles and Mucius Scaevola are far better known heroes who sacrificed personal interests to preserve the Republic, and they too got the reward of as much land as could be encircled in one day's ploughing.³⁸ Another option for Ovid was Aelius Tubero who killed

³⁵ Festus (321/322) explains *raudera* as a word for unshaped lumps of copper or *aes infectum* which, according to Timaeus, were used as currency at Rome before stamped coins (Plin. *HN* 23.43). According to Gagé (1972, discussing Plut. *Cam.* 12–13), the story of Cipus departing through the Porta Raudusculana activated an Etruscan superstition about misfortunes involving a bronze gate, later exploited against Camillus who was charged with stealing a bronze door during the sack of Veii. According to Valerius Maximus, the name came from bronze horns fixed to the gate in memory of Cipus (*capitis effigies aerea*, 5.6.3): thus Palm (1939) suggests that a protective horned demon of bronze adorned the gate, becoming identified with Genucius Cipus when its origin was forgotten. More likely the name Rauduscula refers to bronze reinforcements or fixings ('Rauduscula', *quod aerata fuit*: Varro *LL* 5.163).

³⁶ Wiseman (1995, 109).

³⁷ On exemplarity in Roman culture, see Roller (2004, 2018), Langlands (2018).

³⁸ Cocles: Liv. 2.10, Dion. Hal. 5.25; Scaevola: Liv. 2.13, Dion. Hal. 5.35.

a portentous woodpecker: like Cipus (Valerius pairs the two, indicating both to be *praetors*), Aelius is blessed with an omen that offers him personal greatness that he publicly disavows. Cipus does this outside a city gate, Aelius in the Forum.³⁹ Yet Cipus is Ovid's only male Republican exemplum in the *Metamorphoses*, and greater heroes such as Cocles, Scaevola, or even Aelius are omitted. The story's main attraction is the horns.

I will now explore the three features of Ovid's narrative that could make more sense as references to the Horned Man paradox. The first is the emphasis on the horns, and in particular on the difficulty of believing in them. The word *cornua* appears eight times in the 57-line episode, or about once every seven lines. In the passage quoted above, Ovid says rather insistently that "Cipus saw his horns in the river—he really saw them" (*vidit Cipus in unda / cornua—vidit enim*); and yet, "he thought that his belief in them was false" (*falsamque in imagine credens / esse fidem*, 565–67). This cognitive double-take could be seen as the first of several—typically Ovidian—hints of farce about these proceedings. The Etruscan *haruspex* somehow reads the entrails of the sheep, which Cipus has just sacrificed, without noticing his horns (575–81). He only lifts his "keen eye" to them afterwards; suitably enough, the entrails themselves show him "great things under way" but "not manifest."⁴⁰ When Cipus later covers his horns with a wreath (15.591–92), he resembles some disreputable horn-garlanders from earlier in the poem: one is King Midas, who uses a wreath to hide his own bestial growth of ridiculous donkey-ears. The others are the river-gods Achelous and Acis, in the undignified positions of having been de-horned by Hercules and crushed to death by Polyphemus.⁴¹ But unlike any of them, Cipus struggles to accept the existence of his

³⁹ Wiseman (1995, 109) reviews the sources for Aelius and outlines the similarities with Cipus.

⁴⁰ *magna quidem rerum molimina vidit in illis, / non manifesta tamen* (578–79); *sustulit acre...lumen* (579–80).

⁴¹ Achelous hides his broken horn with a wreath (9.2–3, 99–100); Acis wreathes his new horns in reeds at 13.894 (*incinctus iuvenis flexis nova cornua kannis*). Cipus' masking of his shameful head with a wreath cannot directly allude to Caesar's adoption of the *corona civica* if what Suetonius reports had any credence at the time (*Div. Jul. 45: calvitii vero deformitatem iniquissime ferret, saepe obtrectatorum iocis obnoxiam expertus* etc.), since this would recall Caesar's baldness in a highly offensive way.

horns. The *haruspex* too has trouble seeing the unseen horns, and the crowd of spectators will have their own problems with seeing horns, first looking for them in vain and then refusing to look at them.

The second strange feature of the narrative is that the actual emergence of Cipus' horns is neither seen nor felt, only implied. The metamorphosis takes place at an unknown time and is caused by anonymous powers for unexplained reasons: such arbitrary changes do happen elsewhere in the poem, though rarely.⁴² What seems virtually unique is that there is no actual moment of change for Cipus. Physical changes are the point of the poem and even the much briefer stories of Tages and Romulus' spear both have wondrous moments of transformation. Ovid usually describes mutating bodies with relish. But in the *Metamorphoses*, neither Cipus nor any other Roman citizen is shown undergoing bodily transformation.⁴³ Ovid had the chance to build a chain of three outgrowths, tracing a rustic evolution of Italian founder-figures, from soil to tree to cattle: but he passes this up. In fact, it would be mistaken to say that Cipus' horns "grow" or "sprout" in Ovid, since that event is significantly absent from his version. Before Cipus enters the poem, he has somehow acquired the horns without noticing (565–69):

*aut sua fluminea cum vidit Cipus in unda
cornua (vidit enim) falsamque in imagine credens
esse fidem, digitis ad frontem saepe relatis,
quae vidit, tetigit, nec iam sua lumina damnans
restitit*

...or when Cipus saw, on the river's waters, his horns—
because he did see them—and thinking his belief in the
image to be false, kept putting his fingers to his forehead.

⁴² Segal (1969, 274). Linking the omen to a divine intent would complicate the moral point of the story. If it is a curse, Cipus somehow merited punishment; if a blessing, he merits punishment by rejecting it.

⁴³ The nearest thing is Caesar's metamorphosis into a star, but in fact only his soul does this, kindling into flame as Venus carries it skyward. We are told that the soul would otherwise have dissipated (*nec in aera solvi | passa recentem animam caelestibus intulit astris*, 15.845–46).

What he saw, he touched. No longer disbelieving his eyes,
He stopped resisting.

With neither moment of origin nor divine authorship, Cipus' horns are ontological: they "are the case." Ovid reimagines Cipus as an embodiment of the "horned man" paradox, as if a pair of horns have somehow been argued into existence.

The third strange feature of the narrative is Cipus' decision to call a public meeting and trick the loyal crowd out of accepting him as king, before dramatically revealing his horns. Because Ovid has changed Cipus' departure to a victorious return, this explains why he both wears the wreath and calls the assembly outside the pomerium, since both were normal preludes to the celebration of a triumph.⁴⁴ But as Marks rightly observes, it strains credulity that Cipus does not go directly into exile, as in Valerius Maximus.⁴⁵ An audience is necessary for a dramatization of the horns problem, and in fact Cipus' sudden change of appearance—to *them*—is the closest thing in the episode to an actual moment of metamorphosis. Cipus speaks in riddles, describing the mysterious man with horns as someone "closer to him than anyone," whom he "prevented from entering the gates." When the crowd hear that someone has been ordained king by horns appearing on his head, they start looking among themselves for the horned man, and Ovid describes the moment in these words (608):

spectant frontes praedictaque cornua querunt.

They examine one another's foreheads and look for the horns that were foretold.

In other words, they look for horns based on what Cipus has said. His speech is not a paradox, but is still a deliberately misleading type of declaration, whose result is to persuade the audience that one of them has horns, when in reality none of them do. When the audience finally see Cipus' horns, they are unwilling to look at his

⁴⁴ This is nicely observed by Granobs (1997, 137).

⁴⁵ Marks (2004, 114).

“noble head,” and insist that he hides them again (613–15).⁴⁶ Here Ovid interjects again, as if speaking for them: “who could believe it?” (*quis credere possit?*, 613). The very idea that Cipus, who insists that the horned man must be exiled, is himself the horned man, is an ironic situation that Ovid seems to engineer deliberately. By having Cipus speak about himself as a stranger, Ovid effectively moves him into the territory of three other Eubulidean paradoxes: the Masked Man (*enkekalymmenos*), the Electra, and the Overlooked Man (*dialanthanôn*). All three share the same idea: if you have not noticed that an approaching person is your father or brother, do you “know” or “not know” your father or brother? In this case, the question could be posed of the audience: if they have not noticed that Cipus is the horned man, do they “know” or “not know” the horned man? It seems unlikely that Ovid specifically meant Cipus’ speech to evoke these three other paradoxes. The dramatic irony underpinning them appears not only in Cipus’ speech but elsewhere in the poem too, so it is probably better to see such irony—and indeed the convolutions and absurdities of paradoxical thinking in general—as compatible with Ovid’s tendencies as a poet.

The combined effect of these three features is to make Ovid’s Cipus episode more about wonder and confusion than transformation or heroism. It is not about getting horns, or indeed losing them, but about the problem of believing in them: the horns are repeatedly put in doubt, even after they are manifestly real to everyone.

Conclusion

It is both tempting and difficult to find philosophical ideas in Ovid, and many efforts have been inconclusive, as they must be with any poet (Roman or otherwise), unless they are expressing doctrinal views more or less explicitly.⁴⁷ The one great proof of Ovid’s

⁴⁶ Some critics have claimed that a public gift of “a crown” accompanies the gift of land, but this is a misreading: the Latin clearly says that the people insisted on replacing his festal garland (*nec honore carere / ulterius passi festam inposuere coronam*, 614–615, followed by the disjunctive *at*). The verb *impono* means that they physically put it on his head, rather than urging him to replace it.

⁴⁷ The role of philosophical doctrine in Roman poetry has not been fully explored, but some light was shed by contributions to the colloquium *Les Présocratiques dans la poésie latine* held at Paris-Sorbonne University in January 2011. On Lucretian

philosophical knowledge is when Pythagoras speaks more than four hundred lines about transformation in *Metamorphoses* 15; but it is now well established that this speech—ironically—recalls the poetry of Empedocles, and it is far from straightforwardly didactic.⁴⁸ Scholars have made cases that Ovid draws on Greek philosophy in other parts of the *Metamorphoses*, especially the cosmogony in Book 1;⁴⁹ some have even claimed that he used Stoic concepts.⁵⁰ But as Philipp DeLacy observed over 75 years ago, “for Ovid the use of philosophy is simply a part of poetic technique.” The Speech of Pythagoras ranges grandly through metempsychosis, vegetarianism, and elements-based physics, but leaves out Pythagoras’ numerology and attributed sayings entirely, and instead includes a selection of paradoxography, such as the *bougonia* and the life cycle of the phoenix. This demonstrates not only that Ovid selects from philosophy what is relevant to his metamorphosis theme, but also that he is more interested in the lives and famous opinions of philosophers, what we might call philosophy-as-anecdote or philosophical trivia, than in philosophy as a science. This is why he most often draws on the colourful Presocratics: and why two later philosophers, Socrates and Anaxarchus, receive only a mere mention in the *Ibis* for their horrible deaths.⁵¹ Ovid uses philosophical content in the same way that he uses myth and history, and so what seems like a doctrinal viewpoint is often better

atomism in the *Aeneid*, see Gorey (2021). On philosophy in Ovid, see Volk and Williams (2022) and Kelly (2025).

⁴⁸ Pythagoras’ speech includes the topics of natural philosophy, scientific aetiology, divine inspiration and metempsychosis (see Myers 1997, 133–66, Galinsky 1998) and reworks Lucretian language (Segal 2001). On “Empedoclean epos,” see Hardie (1995), followed by Farrell (2014) and Nelis (2014).

⁴⁹ DeLacy (1947) suggests some general reminiscences of philosophers in Ovid. Krupp (2009) speculates that Ovid’s representation of Narcissus may draw inspiration from fifth-century ontological scepticism. On philosophical elements in Ovid’s cosmogony, see Myers (1997). Kelly (2022) argues that Ovid uses Plato’s dialogues to question how myth relates to natural philosophy in a creationist cosmogony. Galson (2016) sees multiple engagements with philosophical schools in the *Metamorphoses*, and demonstrates in turn that there is a long reception history of philosophical engagements with the poem.

⁵⁰ The 1950s saw a series of attempts to read Stoicism into Ovid: Alfonsi (1954, 1958); Wilkinson (1955, 213–19); Stephens (1958).

⁵¹ Ovid mentions Socrates drinking hemlock (*Ibis* 494, 559–60) and Anaxarchus being pounded to death (571–72).

explained as engagement with a certain text. In particular, the intertextual presence of Lucretius does not amount to an endorsement, or even a full understanding, of Epicureanism.⁵² Even those who argue for philosophical allusions in Ovid see them as occasional and unsystematic. This leaves plenty of opportunity to find more, so long as Ovid's choice can be explained locally, or opportunistically (for what it can offer a theme like meta-morphosis), rather than programmatically.

I hope to have shown that Ovid may allude to the Horned Man paradox in his version of the legend of Cipus, the "horned man" of Republican Rome. Although it is strange to propose an ontological transformation among so many visible ones (which no commentator has done before), this helps to explain the differences between Ovid's version and that of Valerius Maximus, which I suggest cannot be explained entirely by the difference in genre. Infusing a Greek philosophical trope into a Roman historical legend would somewhat follow Ovid's broader Greece-to-Rome pattern of Book 15, in which Pythagoras teaches Numa, Hippolytus becomes Virbius, and Aesculapius migrates from Epidaurus to Rome. Philosophical trivia was a reservoir of learning from which an educated and intellectually nimble poet could draw, alongside those of astrology, ethnography, paradoxography, and many others. Ovid, the most playful and irreverent poet of the Augustan age, might not admire the Horned Man paradox as a problem of logic (and it seems that few did). But he might well appreciate its absurdity, and use it to deform a Roman historical exemplum into something unexpected.

DUNSTAN LOWE

University of Kent, d.m.lowe@kent.ac.uk

⁵² On Ovid's uses of Lucretius, see Wheeler (1995) and the chapters by Roy Gibson, Alison Keith, Charles Ham, and Darcy Krasne in Volk and Williams (2022).

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