INTRODUCTION

In a letter to the emperor Antoninus Pius, Marcus Cornelius Fronto wrote:

> memini me excerpsisse de Ciceronis epistulis ea dumtaxat, quibus inesset aliqua de eloquentia vel philosophia vel de re publica disputatio; praeterea, si quid elegantius aut verbo notabili dictum videretur, excerpsi ... epistulis Ciceronis nihil est perfectius. (Fronto, *Epistulae ad Antoninum imperatorem et invicem* 3.8)
>
> I remember that I excerpted from Cicero's letters at least those passages in which there is some argument on eloquence or on philosophy or on political affairs; moreover, if some witticism seemed particularly elegant or of remarkable expression, I excerpted it ... There is nothing more perfect than Cicero's letters.

Evidently, in the second century AD Cicero's letters were considered, among other things, to be of notable philosophical interest. In contrast, since the discovery of Cicero's correspondence by Petrarch in 1345, interest in the philosophical dimensions of the letters has been remarkably limited. The monumental and magisterial commentaries of Shackleton Bailey are indicative of this:[1] they contain rich and detailed discussion of grammatical, literary, biographical, political, and historical matters; but in comparison, aspects of philosophical significance are all too frequently neglected. Indeed, although Cicero's letters have seen a resurgence of scholarly attention in recent years, focus has been on the literary and stylistic dimensions of the correspondence and matters of sociological

[1] Shackleton Bailey (1965–70), (1977–8), (1980). Note that throughout this study, unless otherwise indicated, I use Shackleton Bailey's text of Cicero's letters. His translations have also been constant companions. They capture in attractive and engaging English much of the personality of Cicero that displays itself in the letters. I have opted to provide more literal translations, although my debt to Shackleton Bailey will be apparent throughout.

and political interest.[2] Notwithstanding Boes' *La philosophie et l'action dans la correspondance de Cicéron*,[3] a provocative but unconvincing study that sees in philosophy an ideological or motivational framework for every one of Cicero's political actions in the period 63–43 BC,[4] and Griffin's seminal paper, 'Philosophical Badinage in Cicero's Letters to his Friends',[5] which vividly draws attention to the wealth of material, nobody has set out to undertake a systematic philosophical study of Cicero's correspondence. This monograph does just that: it is a detailed examination of Cicero's letters from a philosophical point of view.

To be sure, Cicero's letters as a whole are saturated with learned philosophical allusion, philosophical humour, and facts of philosophical interest.[6] Valuable scholarly work has been done on certain aspects of this material. In particular, Rawson derives

[2] For example, Hutchinson (1998), Oppermann (2000), Beard (2002), Biville (2003), Roesch (2004), Leach (2006), Gunderson (2007), Henderson (2007), Hall (2009), and White (2010).

[3] Boes (1990).

[4] I do not engage with Boes directly in this monograph; it suffices to say that his case is problematic for a number of reasons. First, his handling of the ancient evidence is unsatisfactory. Rather than approaching each of the letters on its own merits, he insists on reading all of them firmly in a philosophical framework, in particular in terms of Cicero's desire to further his own *gloria* and to employ it so as to encourage virtuous rule and the good of his fellow citizens (36–54, 81–262). This leads to some particularly tenuous interpretations. For example, in his reading of a letter to Atticus in which Cicero clearly expresses annoyance and reluctance over being saddled with the governorship of Cilicia (5.2.3 = 95 SB), Boes makes the case (181–200) that Cicero actually thought the governorship to be a great opportunity for *gloria* and to put philosophical conviction into practice, and he is forced to say that this letter in fact illustrates that Cicero did not trust Atticus with his true feelings. Furthermore, throughout the book he simply ignores the obvious possibility that Cicero might sometimes be motivated by ordinary social and political concerns (even when making philosophical allusions), which frequently suffice as an explanation for his conduct. He also rests his argument heavily on speculation about what *may* have been in Cicero's lost *De gloria* (36–54), as well as a dubious characterisation of Cicero as a dyed-in-the-wool Platonist, constantly looking to bring about and put into practice Platonic ideals (265–338). In sum, the philosophical elements in the letters do not support Boes' case, and his attempt to use them as an invitation to analyse all Cicero's political actions firmly in terms of philosophical doctrine is untenable. See further the critical comments of Griffin (1995: 327) and Berry (1992). This study is considerably different from that of Boes in its scope, methodology, and claims.

[5] Griffin (1995).

[6] This is demonstrated most admirably by Griffin (1995). Boes (1990: 403–11) provides an incomplete catalogue of passages of philosophical interest. Haury (1955) discusses some of the philosophical humour.

from the letters many facts pertinent to contemporary intellectual culture in her *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic*, which sets a daunting standard for any project of such a kind.[7] Certain letters have received detailed attention, such as those to Atticus that betray Cicero's ongoing anxieties concerning the composition of the *Academica*.[8] There has been useful discussion of certain themes, for instance Cicero's exploration of the nature of *otium* and the role and place of philosophy in Roman culture.[9] The letters that contain details of Cicero's working methods, his source materials, his deliberations on how to translate technical Greek philosophical vocabulary – such as ἐποχή and καθῆκον (*Att.* 13.21.3 = 351 SB, 16.11.4 = 420 SB, 16.14.3 = 425 SB) – into Latin, and the publication of and response to his philosophical dialogues and treatises, have also been the subject of considerable scrutiny.[10]

However, such studies have a number of limitations. Most scholars approach the letters with an eye elsewhere: frequently the primary motivation to read the letters is so that one can mine them for facts, or else in order to read another text more fruitfully.[11] Moreover, scholars tend to interpret the philosophical aspects as playful badinage or as ornamental garnish around other more pressing concerns. This implies that, even if they are unquestionably interesting elements of epistolary discourse between erudite Roman luminaries who share 'cultural capital',

[7] Rawson (1985).

[8] Cf *Att.* 13.12.3, 13.13–14.1, 13.14–15.1, 13.16, 13.18, 13.19.3–5, 13.22.1, 13.23.2, 13.24.1, 13.25.3 = 320–3, 325–6, 329, 331–3 SB. For discussion, see especially Griffin (1997a).

[9] For example, Schmidt (1978–9), Benferhat (2005: 98–172), Fox (2007: 30–3), and Gildenhard (2007: 8–63).

[10] Notable examples are Boyancé (1936) and Griffin (1995, 1997a). Powell (1995b: 292) and Dyck (1996: 484–8) are useful on Cicero's deliberations about translating the Greek in particular. Most commentaries on Cicero's philosophical dialogues and treatises will cite passages of interest in the correspondence.

[11] Rawson (1985) is an excellent example of a scholar exploiting the letters for facts and detail. Bringmann (1971) and Wassmann (1996) make liberal use of the letters in order to analyse all the philosophical works of the 40s in the socio-political context in which Cicero composed them. See also Kumaniecki (1957) with respect to Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*. Bringmann (1971: 270–7) singles out a letter to Matius (*Fam.* 11.28 = 349 SB) for special consideration, on which see also Griffin (1997b). See also Boyancé (1936).

and might very well provide us with valuable evidence for the nature and scope of this 'cultural capital', they are not serious pieces of philosophy in themselves.[12]

In this monograph I adopt a different approach to the philosophical elements of Cicero's correspondence, which, I hope, will raise the estimation of the letters' philosophical value and encourage scholars of ancient philosophy in particular to approach this unique, yet sorely neglected collection of texts in a much more nuanced, sensitive fashion. I approach the philosophical elements in the letters as serious and important aspects of Cicero's philosophical practice, worthy of systematic philosophical study in their own right. Moreover, I critically evaluate Cicero's letters in the context of the ancient tradition of 'philosophical letters'. By approaching Cicero's correspondence in this fashion, I establish that some of his letters are pieces of philosophical literature that stand alongside his recognised philosophical works as genuine components of his philosophical legacy and oeuvre. Furthermore, I demonstrate that we can uncover in the letters plenty of technical philosophy – admittedly, frequently allusive, obscure, or bound up with other concerns – which, once analysed carefully, offers a wide range of important and novel insights into Cicero's epistolography, his own philosophical knowledge, development, and practice, and the wider philosophical environment of the first century BC.

I elaborate on my interpretative method further below. It must be stressed at this point that this study is by no means intended to be a comprehensive or exhaustive investigation into all the philosophy, or letters of philosophical significance, in Cicero's correspondence. There is simply too much material, of too disparate a nature, to examine effectively in one forum. Instead, I have decided to limit the scope of the study to a consideration of letters

[12] Griffin (1995: 330) comments: 'the belief that there is little identifiable technical philosophy there, and that the little that is there is too allusive to be useful, doubtless explains the virtual absence of the letters from collections of philosophical fragments'. She notes that von Arnim (1903–5) includes only two passages in *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (*Fam.* 9.4 = 180 SB, 9.22.1 = 189 SB), Usener (1887) two in *Epicurea* (*Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB, 7.26.1 = 210 SB), and that Bailey (1926), Arrighetti (1973), and Long and Sedley (1987) include none.

from the period after Cicero's consulship in 63 BC until Caesar's dictatorship in 45. This has the virtue of being a relatively well-defined period in Roman political history (the first triumvirate, the civil war between Caesar and the republican forces, and the eventual triumph of Caesar), in which Cicero's philosophical activities first come strongly to the fore.[13] I have also chosen to focus on Cicero's engagement with issues pertinent to political philosophy and practical ethics.[14] In each of the book's five chapters I focus on a subject of particular interest and undertake a close reading of a select group of letters.

There are a number of reasons behind my decision to limit the scope of the study to this particular subject matter. For a start, there is quite simply an abundance of rich and variegated material suitable for philosophical analysis. But most of all, it transpires that Cicero's philosophical practice in his letters – his engagement with the tradition of philosophical letters, use of technical argument, and so forth – is most widespread and sophisticated with respect to this subject matter. Thus, focusing on ethical and political issues is an especially effective method to showcase the claims I make regarding the correspondence's philosophical value and significance.[15]

In the first chapter, 'Exploring the relationship between philosophy and politics', I demonstrate how certain concerns about the place and role of philosophy in Roman political life, which Cicero raises in the autobiographical prefaces to his philosophical dialogues and treatises of the 50s and 40s, are foreshadowed and developed in some detail in letters from the 60s and 50s. I trace a transition in Cicero's attitudes regarding the relationship between philosophy and politics – from a position where philosophy is

[13] Note that there are some philosophical elements in letters to Atticus from before Cicero's consulship in 63 BC (1.1.5, 1.3.2, 1.4.3, 1.6.2, 1.7, 1.8.2, 1.9.2, 1.10.3–4, 1.11.3 = 2–10 SB), which I touch on in chapter 1, section 1.2 below.

[14] To be sure, concerns with ethical and political matters permeate the correspondence in a non-philosophical sense as well, and we should by no means feel compelled to analyse all such concerns from a philosophical perspective. Boes (1990) is a good example of the problems that arise from such a critical approach.

[15] Therefore, although this study limits itself to these issues, I hope that it will serve as a model for further investigation into other topics of philosophical interest throughout the correspondence.

dissociated sharply from politics proper, which we can detect in letters from before his exile in 58, to a position where philosophy has a role in practical politics, which is evident by the end of 54 – and analyse the shifting ways in which Cicero presents his own philosophical activities, focusing in particular on his use of the Platonic letters[16] in a famous, open, apologetic letter from December 54, *Epistulae ad familiares* 1.9 (= 20 SB).

In the second chapter, 'Cicero and Plato's *Seventh Epistle*', I undertake a detailed investigation into the philosophical significance of Cicero's letters to Atticus from the civil war between Caesar and Pompey in early 49 BC. There is striking evidence in these letters that the seventh Platonic letter in particular served as a model or inspiration for Cicero's own epistolary, philosophical, and political activity at this time. By reading Cicero's letters to Atticus through and against the seventh Platonic letter, I demonstrate how Cicero carefully constructs a sophisticated philosophical narrative surrounding his life, opinions, and actions in the civil war. In particular, I argue that it is a serious and sustained piece of philosophical autobiography: it is an *apologia* on the general model of the seventh Platonic letter.

In the third chapter, 'Cicero and Dicaearchus', I examine Cicero's engagement with the ethical views of Dicaearchus. There is evidence in certain letters to Atticus that Dicaearchus was, in particular, an important figure in Cicero's deliberations on the question of the best life, the choice between pursuing the contemplative life or that of political activity. However, we do not possess a clear account of Dicaearchus' arguments for the supremacy of the political life in the surviving evidence from antiquity; nor is it clear how his stance relates to the opposing positions of Theophrastus and Aristotle in the Peripatetic tradition. I reconstruct Dicaearchus' views and assess how they figure in Cicero's ethical and political deliberations, focusing in particular

[16] One might prefer to talk of the pseudo-Platonic letters. Note that throughout this study I present these letters as genuine works of Plato. This is not intended to convey my own judgement on the letters' authenticity, but rather to reflect the fact that Cicero and his contemporaries thought that they were indeed genuine; see further chapter 1, nn. 14–15 below.

on an epistolary exchange with Atticus on the eve of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey in 50 BC.

In the fourth chapter, 'A Stoic lecture: *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22', I analyse perhaps the most detailed and technical philosophical letter in the extant correspondence. The letter is addressed to Lucius Papirius Paetus and takes the form of a formal Stoic *schola* or lecture, on the question whether the wise man will speak frankly and call a spade a spade. The letter, I argue, was written at the same time as the *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (March/April 46 BC) and shares many of their attributes, in particular a critical commentary on Caesar, fresh from his decisive victory over the republican forces in Africa. Building on my detailed analysis of Cicero's handling of various philosophical issues surrounding personal liberty and free and frank speech in 9.22 (= 189 SB), I then examine and assess the ways in which he employs Stoic and Academic philosophy in a number of letters from 46 and 45 BC as a means to highlight and resolve ethical and political issues that have become problematic under the new regime.

In the fifth chapter, 'Dealing with Caesar: the συμβουλευτικόν', I examine Cicero's attempt to deal directly with Caesar in 45 BC via the medium of the philosophical letter of advice. A vivid series of letters to Atticus details Cicero's plan and addresses the letter's content and reception. Philosophical elements abound and, most strikingly, Cicero refers to using Aristotle's letters to Alexander the Great as a model. Here I explore Cicero's handling of philosophical themes such as *gloria* and the good king as he seeks to influence and relate to Caesar, now in a position of dictatorial power.

Although these five chapters are presented as discrete 'case studies' focusing on a particular topic or aspect of Cicero's philosophical practice, there are a number of themes that run throughout them all. For instance, in all the chapters we observe Cicero's ongoing preoccupation with the question of the best life, the question whether the life of *otium* and theoretical reflection is better than that of political activity. Throughout we see Cicero dealing with the question how one should weigh and reconcile the competing claims of the *honestum* ('the honourable' or 'the good') and the *utile* ('the expedient'). And in all five chapters

we examine Cicero's exploration of the ways in which philosophy can be pursued and applied effectively or legitimately in Roman political life. The five studies demonstrate how Cicero deals with such ethical and political issues in different ways at various times, drawing where appropriate on a rich background of philosophical sources, approaches, and interests (which we can detect in the letters themselves).

The five chapters are organised in such a way as to complement one another as much as possible.[17] The first two can be considered a pair: both deal primarily with Cicero's engagement with Platonic philosophy, in particular the Platonic letters. They share and offer different perspectives on a number of specific concerns, such as the development of Cicero's philosophical profile, his use of Platonic epistolary models, and his application of Platonic and Academic arguments and models in the realm of Roman politics. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters, in which I consider Cicero's use of Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy,[18] balance and contrast with the first two: they show that Cicero employs a much wider range of philosophical resources and approaches in his letters than those we might associate closely with the Academy.[19] The first

[17] This means that although the letters I consider are drawn from across a long period of time and differing circumstances, the chapters do not follow a chronological order.

[18] Note that although I do not devote a chapter specifically to Cicero's use of Epicurean philosophy, we shall often see him handling various topics associated closely with Epicurean ethical and political thought. Cicero's engagement with Epicureanism in correspondence with proponents such as Gaius Cassius Longinus (*Fam.* 15.16–19 = 213–16 SB), Gaius Trebatius Testa (*Fam.* 7.12 = 35 SB, 7.14 = 38 SB, 7.16 = 32 SB), Atticus (e.g., *Att.* 4.6.1 = 83 SB, 7.2.4 = 125 SB), and Papirius Paetus (*Fam.* 9.25 = 114 SB) has already been well noted and fruitfully analysed in terms of badinage; see especially Griffin (1995: 331–9). For detailed discussion of Cicero's treatment of Epicurean philosophy more generally, see Maso (2008).

[19] I try as much as possible to avoid the question of determining Cicero's philosophical allegiance and whether it changed at various periods. Cicero was clearly well schooled in all the major schools of philosophy: as a young man at Rome he attended the lectures of Philo, head of the sceptical New Academy (*Brut.* 306); between 79 and 77 BC he studied at the Academy in Athens and attended the lectures of Antiochus, head of the Old Academy (*Fin.* 5.1); while at Athens he also attended the lectures of the Epicurean Phaedrus, among others (*Fin.* 1.16); the Stoic philosopher Diodotus, who came to Rome in 88 BC, lived in his house (*Brut.* 309). Cicero himself provides a detailed account of his formative education in *Brutus* 303–22, and Wood (1988: 42–69) provides an accessible summary with further references. It is standardly maintained that Cicero was a consistent adherent of the sceptical New Academy. However, some scholars have questioned this. On this debate, see further the arguments in Glucker (1988), Steinmetz (1989), Lévy (1992), and Görler (1995, 1997). I am content to show how Cicero

chapter also serves a programmatic function: it identifies Cicero's early and often embryonic engagement with themes and subjects that are explored and developed in further detail in the other four chapters, such as Dicaearchus' relevance for the question of the best life and the use of Socrates and Plato as exemplary models. Moreover, the second, fourth, and fifth chapters are closely related: they all focus on Cicero's use of philosophical material that reflects on issues surrounding personal liberty and free and frank speech, as he attempts to navigate the problematic socio-political environment at Rome during the civil war and Caesar's dictatorship.

The five studies are, therefore, intended to have a cumulative persuasive role and to be mutually reinforcing.[20] When put together, they produce a detailed picture of the impressive scope, sophistication, and vibrancy of Cicero's epistolary and philosophical practice, offer a range of fresh insights into his philosophical activities, knowledge, and development, and demonstrate the considerable importance that the correspondence has for our understanding of Cicero's philosophical life and legacy.

Clearly this project relies heavily on how we view the nature of the evidence with which we are dealing, and also the soundness and applicability of the philosophical approach that I am proposing. A number of methodological issues need to be addressed before we begin.

The nature of the evidence continues to be a difficult and contentious matter. There are a number of questions surrounding the organisation, editing, and publication of the letters that continue to be debated, but about which we cannot be certain.[21] Uncertainty about many of these issues does not affect us

employs in his letters a wide range of philosophical resources and approaches, where appropriate as circumstances dictate, and how he engages knowledgeably and comfortably with many philosophical figures, traditions, arguments, and texts. This is a practice we might expect of a learned Academic sceptic, and on the whole the letters perhaps lend most support to this view of Cicero's philosophical allegiance, but I do not wish to focus overly much on this issue.

[20] I provide extensive cross-references between chapters in the notes.

[21] There is good evidence that the letters were published before the end of the first century AD; see especially Setaioli (1976), Beard (2002: 116–19), and White (2010: 31–61). Cornelius Nepos refers to being allowed to read Atticus' personal volumes of Cicero's letters soon after his death (*Att.* 16). There is extensive bibliography in Nicholson (1998)

significantly. For us, the most pressing problem arises from the organisation of the letters into books. Each separate collection of letters has been organised into books by some ancient editor, sometimes around a particular theme, as in *Epistulae ad familiares* 13, comprising solely letters of recommendation, and 14, comprising letters to Cicero's wife Terentia and other household members.[22] It would appear that the corpus as a whole has been consciously put together in a particular manner for one reason or another; and this is clearly an important fact we cannot ignore.[23]

and White (2010: 175), and the key evidence is presented in Büchner (1939). Cicero himself professes interest in editing and publishing selected correspondence: *mearum epistularum nulla est συναγωγή; sed habet Tiro instar septuaginta, et quidem sunt a te quaedam sumendae. eas ego oportet perspiciam, corrigam; tum denique edentur* (*Att.* 16.5.5 = 410 SB). In *Fam.* 16.17.1 (= 186 SB) he jokes that Tiro too wants his letters made into volumes (*video quid agas; tuas quoque epistulas vis referri in volumina*), which suggests that letters were being organised into collections in Cicero's own lifetime (cf *Att.* 9.10.4 = 177 SB). But clearly Cicero himself did not organise, edit, and publish the entire corpus as we have it. Tiro and Atticus are cited frequently as the obvious culprits; see further McDermott (1972) and Zetzel (1973). The corpus itself is gargantuan: we have 931 extant letters, organised in separate collections *ad familiares*, *ad Atticum*, *ad Quintum fratrem*, and *ad Brutum*, beginning in 68 BC and continuing until just before Cicero's death on 7 December 43. In addition, we know that many more letters once existed in other collections in antiquity but are now lost; and we know that many letters simply never made it into a collection – see further Nicholson (1998: 76–87) and White (2010: 31–61, 171–5); also Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 1.60, 1.68–9).

[22] Note that certain books form larger units within the collection as a whole. For instance, books 7–10 of the *Epistulae ad Atticum* all concern the episode 'Cicero in the civil war' and are demarcated clearly from books 6 and 11.

[23] We have received the correspondence organised into books in the manuscripts, and there is no reason to doubt that this is how the letters were presented in antiquity. Beard (2002: 117) notes that 'in antiquity the books were apparently not known by numbers, but by the name of their first addressee' (she cites Aulus Gellius *NA* 1.22.19, 12.131.21). The manuscripts by all accounts appeared something of a mess to the scholars who first looked at them critically: as well as the problems with the Latin, they found it difficult to discern any order in the sequence received from antiquity; see Shackleton Bailey (1965–70: 1.77–101, 1977–8: 1.3–26), Ramage (1967: 318), and Beard (2002: 107–16), for the history of this critical reception. Beard (2002) stresses the importance of the original presentation of the letters in the face of modern attempts to reorganise them into chronological order, most famously by Tyrrell and Purser (1879–1933), whose practice has been followed in part by the current authority, Shackleton Bailey (1965–70, 1977–8, 1980). I am inclined to agree with Beard that repackaging the letters in this manner loses an important aspect of the corpus, namely that the letters were intended to be read in books for specific reasons, and (the desired) effects rely on each letter's place in relation to the others. However, neither the modern nor the ancient order would necessarily be Cicero's – chronological sequence does not salvage Cicero's organisation of the collection – and, as I make clear in the next paragraph, it is vital when we interpret the letters that we distinguish between what is editorial and what is authorial.