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978-1-107-04081-6 - Philosophical Life in Cicero's Letters
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PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE IN CICERO'S LETTERS

Cicero's letters are saturated with learned philosophical allusions and arguments. This innovative study shows just how fundamental these are for understanding Cicero's philosophical activities and for explaining the enduring interest of his ethical and political thought. Dr McConnell draws particular attention to Cicero's treatment of Plato's Seventh Letter and his views on the relationship between philosophy and politics. He also illustrates the various ways in which Cicero finds philosophy an appealing and effective mode of self-presentation, and a congenial, pointed medium for talking to his peers about ethical and political concerns. The book offers a range of fresh insights into the impressive scope and sophistication of Cicero's epistolary and philosophical practice, and the vibrancy of the philosophical environment of the first century BC. A new picture emerges of Cicero the philosopher and philosophy's place in Roman political culture.

SEAN MCCONNELL is Lecturer in Classics at the University of Otago.

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107040816

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First published 2014

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
 McConnell, Sean.

Philosophical life in Cicero's letters / Sean McConnell.

pages cm. – (Cambridge classical studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-04081-6 (Hardback)

1. Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 2. Cicero, Marcus Tullius—Correspondence. I. Title.

B553.M38 2014

186—dc23 2013040357

ISBN 978-1-107-04081-6 Hardback

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The roots of this book lie in my undergraduate days at the University of Otago, where I first came into contact with Cicero's philosophical writings under the guidance of Jon Hall. I have to admit that at first I was somewhat underwhelmed: against the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, as a philosopher Cicero was struggling to rate. What was new? What was good? Was Cicero worth taking seriously as a first-rate philosophical thinker? With no real answers to these worries, my philosophical interests veered elsewhere, and I came to the University of Cambridge driven by a desire to study Lucretius. Soon my interests had shifted to the interaction between philosophy and politics at Rome in the first century BC, and after some years I came once more to read Cicero's correspondence. I was immediately struck by the philosophical elements permeating the letters and began to suspect that Cicero was doing something markedly different from what one sees in his assorted dialogues and treatises. After an encouraging conversation with David Sedley, for my doctoral thesis I decided to focus on philosophy in Cicero's correspondence. As well as a surprisingly agreeable companion, I now consider Cicero to be an engaging, insightful, and indeed innovative philosophical thinker, deserving of a wider and more appreciative audience. It is hoped that this book conveys something of Cicero's intellectual depth and subtlety, and indeed something of his personality.

The majority of the research for this book was undertaken at the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge. It is an incredibly invigorating place to work, and I would like to thank all those involved in the B Caucus, from whom I have learnt a great deal. I also owe thanks to my college, Clare Hall, which provided a supportive and friendly environment for a number of years, as well as the School of Philosophy at the University of East Anglia.

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Acknowledgements

In particular, I owe a great debt to James Warren, who has been an immense inspiration and guide; his criticisms and comments have always forced me to improve my arguments and analysis, and to think harder on the key issues. It was a privilege to work under his talented, enthusiastic, and kind supervision. I have also benefited greatly from the written critical feedback of David Sedley, Malcolm Schofield, Ingo Gildenhard, Brad Inwood, and Jon Hall. A shorter version of chapter 3 was published as 'Cicero and Dicaearchus' in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 42 (2012): 307–49, and I am grateful to the editor Brad Inwood and Oxford University Press for permission to redeploy many of its arguments here. Various parts of the book were presented at the University of Cambridge, École normale supérieure, University of Glasgow, University of East Anglia, and the University of Otago. Each has benefited from the challenging feedback of the participants. David Sedley read and commented on the final manuscript and saved me from many blushes; all errors and infelicities that remain are, of course, my own.

I am grateful to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust, and the Jebb Fund at the University of Cambridge, for their generous financial support that allowed me to undertake postgraduate research at Cambridge. From my formative undergraduate years at the University of Otago, I would like to thank in particular Jon Hall, John Barsby, William Dominik, Robin Hankey, Charles Pigden, and David Ward. I would also like to thank my copy-editor Alison Tickner, and Michael Sharpe, Gillian Dadd, David Mackenzie, and Elizabeth Hanlon of the Cambridge University Press for all their help in the finishing stages. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for all their encouragement and support over the years: this book is dedicated to them.