

# CICERO SCEPTICUS

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CHARLES B. SCHMITT

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# CICERO SCEPTICUS:

A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF  
THE *ACADEMICA* IN THE RENAISSANCE



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*To*  
*My Mother*  
  
*and*  
  
*to*  
*the Memory of*  
*My Father*

## PREFACE

As originally planned this volume was meant to cover a somewhat wider scope than, in fact, it has turned out to do. When, in 1968, I initially conceived of preparing it, it was proposed to deal with several aspects of early modern scepticism, in addition to the *fortuna* of the *Academica*, and to publish various loosely related pieces under the title of 'Studies in the History of Early Modern Scepticism.' Thereby, I foresaw that I would exhaust my knowledge of the subject and would then be able to turn my attention to other matters. In initiating my research on this topic, however, I soon found that there remained a much greater bulk of material to study than could possibly be dealt with between the covers of the single modest volume which I envisioned. My proposed section on Cicero's *Academica* was to cover between 50 and 75 pages in the original plan. It soon became apparent, however, especially after Joannes Rosa's hitherto unstudied commentary on Cicero's work was uncovered, that this material would have to be treated at a much greater length than I had foreseen. The present volume is the result of this expanded investigation. The monograph which has come from this alteration in plans has, I think, the virtues of continuity and cohesiveness and one hopes that these advantages offset the benefits of a broader scope which were sacrificed.

In the near future I hope to publish a series of several additional foundational studies on the sources and development of early modern scepticism, which were put aside when I decided to narrow the focus of the present investigation. They should supplement the present volume and my earlier one on Gianfrancesco Pico. In this proposed volume, I hope to deal with, *inter alia*, the translations of Sextus Empiricus into Latin and the vernacular languages from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, the evolution of the sceptical terminology in ancient, medieval, and modern philosophical vocabulary, and the continuity of

the Greek sceptical tradition in the Byzantine world. It is hoped that such studies will enlarge the factual and documentary basis for further investigations on the precise role played by the Greek sceptical tradition in the development of early modern philosophy.

I trust that the reader will find in the present volume a certain amount of either new or little-known information on the sceptical tradition, new material which can eventually be integrated in the historical synthesis of the period dealt with. These pages have been written with a twofold purpose in mind. First of all, I have done my best to present the factual side *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, rather than bending it to a more Wittgensteinian, more 'scientific,' or less theological or philological state than, in fact, it was. Secondly, I have tried to initiate an interpretation of this new factual information and to relate it to the historical picture we already have of the thought of the Renaissance period.

In finding the leisure to prepare this study, as well as many other publications of mine over the past four years, I am above all indebted to the University of Leeds, which provided me with a Research Fellowship to carry out my studies wheresoever they might lead me. It is hoped that this volume might be a permanent memorial to the generosity which the university has bestowed upon me. In addition, I am deeply indebted to the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Villa I Tatti, Florence) for a Fellowship for the academic year 1970-71, during which time this research was brought to a conclusion. One hopes that certain sections of this book – as well as earlier publications of mine – will serve to call attention to the often forgotten fact that the Italian Renaissance was not confined to matters of art, but that the science, the philosophy, and the theology (and not only the heretical brand!) of the period are worth studying as well. In any case, I am most grateful for the opportunity to have spent another year in Florence to benefit from the facilities of I Tatti and other cultural institutes and libraries of the city. Not least of all, it gave me once again the luxury of encountering numerous fellow students of the Italian Renaissance.

In preparing this volume I have benefited from the help of many individuals and institutions. It has been my experience, in preparing this, as well as earlier studies over a number of years, that by far the greater majority of scholars and librarians have been exceedingly willing to aid my research in every way possible. This help, far outweighs the obstacles put in my path by a few scholars, who would disdain the work of others as not worthy of consideration, and those few librarians,

who see it as their primary task to prevent the scholar from having access to the books he needs.

My first debt is to the Brotherton Library of the University of Leeds, the *arcana* of which certainly rival many older, richer, and better-known libraries. Here, amid frustrations and discouragements, I was able to do a very large part of the research necessary for this book. I am indeed grateful to some members of the staff of that library for their efforts in my behalf. Other libraries of Great Britain, which provided facilities and materials for the necessary research, are the John Rylands Library and the University Library (especially Dr. Margaret M. Wright, Keeper of the Christie Collection) of Manchester; the Bodleian Library of Oxford University; the Cambridge University Library; the Warburg Institute Library and the British Museum Library of London. The Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris provided numerous rare items difficult to find elsewhere. In Italy thanks must go to the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice; the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (especially to Sig. Ivaldo Baglioni of the Sala di Consultazione for his help over the years), the Biblioteca Laurenziana, the Biblioteca della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia in Florence; the Biblioteca Comunale di Faenza (especially to Dott. essa Zama); the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; and the Biblioteca della Università Pontificia Gregoriana of Rome. Once again the National Central Library of Great Britain has most faithfully supplied needed items on inter-library loan.

In addition to the obvious aid given to me by these various libraries, a number of individuals have generously devoted considerable time to discussing the material of this book with me or have read sections of it, offering many suggestions for its improvement. I have not in all instances followed their suggestions, but in many cases I have, thereby having been saved from many egregious blunders and omissions. I am indeed grateful to my colleagues at Leeds, H. B. Gottschalk, I. W. F. Maclean, and M. C. Smith for reading sections of my manuscript with the care, thoroughness, and incisiveness which I have come to expect of them. To Paul Grendler, Edward Mahoney, and John Monfasani, who also read large sections of the book in typescript, I owe a special debt of gratitude for their willingness to discuss in detail many specific points covered in this and other writings of mine. I have learned much over the years from conversations on the history of philosophy with Richard Popkin, be they at La Jolla or Paris, at Leeds or New York, or somewhere in between. Although perhaps not so directly related to the present publication, I should also like to express my thanks to the

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From all of these people I have learned much, but errors, omissions, and mistaken judgements are certain to remain, for I believe that the scholar should write new books from time to time and not continue to rewrite his thesis over and over again until old age catches up with him. If the blemishes in this work are minor, I ask the reader to communicate them to me; if major, I urge him to publish a rectification, so we can all gain thereby.

December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1971  
Leeds, England

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## NOTE ON REFERENCES AND CITATIONS

In an effort to simplify the system of footnotes and bibliography we have decided to give only short references in the notes. The full bibliographical details of all of the works cited can be found in the Bibliography at the end of the volume. For example, a footnote reference of the sort 'Cicero (1885), 114' means Cicero, *Academica*, ed. James S. Reid (London: Macmillan, 1885), page 114. In the cases where the same author has published two or more works in the same year these will be distinguished by adding 'a', 'b', etc. to the year reference. In the case of standard classical authors, we have often merely cited the text and given the references in accord with common usage, e.g. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1040a1.

In the case of the *Academica*, the text cited most often, we have generally relied on Reid's edition. With regard to references to Sextus Empiricus and Diogenes Laertius, in particular, we have consistently cited from the Loeb editions, though it is realized that better editions of the Greek text are available. This is to facilitate the task of checking references for the reader without Greek. Particularly in the case of Sextus the numeration of the chapters of various works differs in the Loeb and the Teubner editions. The reader of Greek should however be able to find the texts referred to quite easily.

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