

**CICERO'S DE NATURA DEORUM AND
MINUCIUS' OCTAVIUS:**

**AN EXAMPLE OF THE INFLUENCE OF PRE-
CHRISTIAN
PHILOSOPHY ON CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS**

by

FREDERIK CHRISTOPHOOR BOUTER

Thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in
Latin

April, 1984

ISBN 978-1-4477-3407-9

Copyright 2011–F.C. Bouter

First Edition

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first and most profound gratitude I owe Almighty God by whose strength alone I have been able *noctes vigilare serenas*. I am greatly indebted to the Department of Classics: to Dr. Booth, thanks to whose patience, understanding and guidance this work has reached completion. His advice and suggestions have provided a kind of mould in which the substance of my learning has taken this form. To Dr. Verstraete under whose direction I have followed most of my courses; to Dr. Vellek for the overseeing of my programme of studies.

I have also benefited a great deal in the development of my honours programme from courses in other departments and from stimulating

exchanges with fellow students, and for these too I am grateful. I thank also my typist, Robyn Fisher, who, though unfamiliar with the Latin language, worked through the manuscript with marvellous ease. And last but not least I express my most affectionate gratitude to my wife for her patient and loving support through all those ***noctes serenas***.

TABLE OF CONTENTS	Page
ABSTRACT.....	9
INTRODUCTION	11
CHAPTER I: DE NATURA DEORUM	16
EPICUREANISM.....	17
Existence of the Gods	18
Nature of the Gods	19
Nature.....	24
Humankind	26
AGAINST EPICUREANISM	28
Existence of the Gods	29
Nature of the Gods	29
Nature	32
Humankind	34
STOICISM	36
Existence of the Gods	37
Nature of the Gods or God	42
Nature	47
Humankind	54

AGAINST STOICISM	58
Existence of the Gods	59
Nature of the Gods	62
Nature	69
Humankind	71
CONCLUSION	76
NOTES	78
CHAPTER II: OCTAVIUS	81
The Case for Paganism	82
The Academy	82
Stoicism	85
Epicureanism	87
The Case for Christianity	94
CONCLUSION	100
NOTES	102
APPENDIX	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY	105

ABSTRACT

Early Christians, in dialogue with pagans, did not shrink from using pagan reason to support their faith. Paul himself, addressing Greeks, spoke of the teaching of nature (1 Cor. 11), and said that God's invisible qualities. His power and divinity, can be seen in creation (Rom. 1). And on the Areopagus he appealed to the Athenians by quoting from one of their poets. This is one of the reasons why early Christian apologists turned to pre-Christian philosophical writings to find acceptable proofs for their faith. However, almost always, they maintained that all proof must be interpreted. on the basis of biblical revelation.

In this study we have followed the above-named connection, between pre-Christian and Christian thinking, in the influence of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* on the Christian *Octavius*. Isolation of the

various arguments of the former enables us to note the significant re-occurrence of many of them in the latter; many of the tenets of pagan philosophy are thus seen to have been adapted to serve a Christian end.

INTRODUCTION

As Cicero notes in the introduction to his *De Natura Deorum* opinions about the divine nature are among the most important to be debated by humankind, particularly because there is so much uncertainty about them. Around the turn of the third century A.D. a work, the *Octavius*, was compiled purportedly by a certain Minucius Felix in commemoration of his friend Octavius, who had persuaded a pagan to become a Christian in a long discussion set in Ostia. The work itself, showing certain affinities with Tertullian's work, may have originated in Africa.

To judge by its resemblances this work seems to have been modeled on Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, written some three hundred and fifty years earlier, about the middle of the first century B.C. Both works show a triad of speakers, representing two opposed

points of view (the Epicurean and Stoic philosophies in the earlier, the pagan and Christian faiths in the later) presided over by a judge. Another similarity is that the first system (Epicureanism, paganism) is given considerably less attention in each work than the second one. Possibly the reason behind this is that less material was available to the compilers on the first systems, or that the compilers, in their bias, were more interested in presenting information on the second, or some combination of these two possibilities. Cicero ends his work saying that, in his opinion, the Stoics were closest to the truth, and Minucius Felix, himself a Christian, naturally sided with Octavius.

The merit of these works is that they give a bird's-eye-view of the two major streams of their day. Cicero's work provides us with an important, and unique, record of a long tradition of debate within the skeptical Academy; the Octavius gives us a

significant glimpse into the kind of debate which succeeded that of the pagan schools as Christianity came gradually into prominence. It is interesting to note that when Paul was in Athens (Acts 17) he found Epicureans and Stoics there. In Ephesus (Acts 19) the devotees of Artemis rose up against the Christians. These two incidents show the historic relevancy of the confrontations as we have them in the *De Natura Deorum* and the *Octavius* respectively. Paul's use elsewhere (e.g. Acts 17; Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 11) of pagan teachings, and his referring to nature, in addressing gentiles provided serviceable precedent for the use Minucius Felix and others would make of the pagan philosophies in the service of the Christian faith.

There is an important difference between the two books. Cicero's work contains a severe criticism of both major schools by Cotta, who plays the role of judge. But Minucius, who is both compiler and

judge, plays no such major role, the reason being, as has been stated, that he was a Christian himself. Another natural reason, is that it is difficult to conceive of something like an Academy standing between paganism and Christianity. It simply did not exist. One was either Christian or non-Christian, the rise of Christianity having a profound effect on the polarization of positions.

Both works indulge in calumny, and idiosyncratic opinion. In this study we have isolated the relevant statements of both works, with this difference that, in the case of the *Octavius*, we deal only with those tenets that have direct resemblance to their counterparts in the *De Natura Deorum*. This will enable us to pinpoint the extent to which a Christian thinker such as Minucius Felix has drawn upon a pagan work such as the *De Natura Deorum* as a source. This in turn gives us an impression of the importance of pre-Christian philosophies for early

Christian writers in dialogue with their pagan counterparts.

CHAPTER I

DE NATURA DEORUM

The *De Natura Deorum* gives a presentation of Epicureanism, and Stoicism, and a criticism of both by Cotta, who represents the skeptical Academy, which found it easier to criticize than to declare.

Although both the Epicureans and the Stoics were materialists, believing atomic matter and not purely immaterial soul to be the prime basis of existence, they held considerably different views about the role of the divinity. The former group could be called deists in a sense (excepting the deist conception of creation), and the latter pantheists. Hence stem the major differences between their respective teachings on physics, psychology, and theology.

In this chapter we shall give those Epicurean and Stoic theological statements that occur in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. Cotta's counter arguments are divided into two sections, each of which follows the position of the two other schools, first Epicureanism, then Stoicism.

EPICUREANISM

The Epicureans often have been cast as atheists; however, from their statements it is clear that they were primarily deists. They, in turn, mocked the cherished beliefs of their opponents. Both schools were guilty of name calling, slander, and all sorts of abuse. In the present work this has been omitted as irrelevant.

Existence of the Gods

Epicurus maintains that the gods exist because all mankind has a natural idea about them.

Solus enim vidit primum esse deos, quod in omnium animis eorum notionem impressisset ipsa natura (I 43).

Any such idea is called *prolepsis* and serves as the basis of all inquiry and debate.

Quam appellat προληψιν Epicurus, id est anteceptam animo rei quandam informationem, sine qua nec intellegi quicquam nec quaeri nec disputari possit (I 43).

The belief, then, that the gods exist has not been determined by any authority, custom, or law but derives from the universal agreement of humankind.

Cum enim non instituto aliquo aut more aut lege sit opinio constituta maneatque ad unum omnium firma consensio, intellegi necesse est esse deos (I 44).

Nature of the Gods

The natural impression of the gods pictures them as blissful and eternal.

Quod beatum aeternumque sit id nec habere ipsum negotii quicquam nec exhibere alteri, itaque neque ira neque gratia teneri quod quae talia essent imbecilla essent omnia (I 45).

Hanc igitur habemus, ut deos beatos et inmortales putemus (I 45) .

From this it can be deduced that the gods do not have any difficulty, or cause any for others,

wherefore they entertain neither wrath nor grace, for such feelings are only weaknesses.

Nam a natura habemus omnes omnium gentium speciem nullam aliam nisi humanam deorum (I 46).

This satisfies also the highest esthetic standards, since no form is more beautiful than the human one.

Quae compositio membrorum, quae conformatio liniamentorum, quae figura, quae species humana potest esse pulchrior (I 47)?

It also satisfies logic, for it is fitting that the highest being must possess the most beautiful form as well.

Nam cum praestantissimam naturam, vel quia beata est vel quia sempiterna, convenire videatur eandem esse pulcherrimam (I 47)?

Notwithstanding, they are not corporeal, but only look like the physical body; they do not have real blood but something similar to it.

Nec tamen ea species corpus est, sed quasi corpus, nec habet sanguinem, sed quasi sanguinem (I 4 9) .¹

Without this kind of corporeality, the gods would not be capable of any sensing, nor of pragmatic wisdom, nor of pleasure, for all these concepts are included in the natural conception of the gods.

Quod vero sine corpore ullo deum vult esse ut Graeci dicunt σώματος, id quale esse possit intellegi non potest: careat enim sensu necesse est, careat etiam prudentia, careat voluptate; quae omnia una cum deorum notione comprehendimus (I 30).

For sensing can only take place when a being is hit upon by atoms.

. . . neque sensum omnino quo non ipsa natura pulsa sentiret (I 26) .

Divine nature is solely devoted to its wisdom and virtue, and is completely certain that it will always enjoy perfect and everlasting pleasures in its freedom from any task.

Nihil enim agit, nullis occupationibus est implicatus, nulla opera molitur, sua sapientia et virtute gaudet, habet exploratum fore se semper cum in maximis tum in aeternis voluptatibus (I 51) .

This is consistent with the proposition that happiness consists of security of mind and complete freedom from all occupations.

Nos autem beatam vitam in animi securitate et in omnium vacatione munerum ponimus (I 53).

All these qualities of the gods are not conveyed to us through our senses but directly to our minds. For we experience images, which are caused by an immense flow of atoms, which lead our attention directly to the gods. These images bestow both pleasure and understanding of the nature of the gods, because of what we perceive.²

Imaginibus similitudine et transitione perceptis, cum infinita simillarum imaginum series ex innumerabilibus individuis existat et ad deos adfluat, cum maximis voluptatibus in eas imagines mentem intentam infixamque nostram intelligentiam capere quae sit et beata natura et aeterna (I 49).

According to the principle of *isonomia*, which means 'equal arrangement', there are as many immortals as mortals. This principle of distribution is based on the principle of infinity, which has the property that in totality all things are divided into opposite parts.

Summa vero vis infinitatis et magna ac diligenti contemplatione dignissima est, in qua intellegi necesse est eam esse naturam ut omnia omnibus paribus paria

respondeant. Hanc ἰσονομίαν appellat Epicurus, id est aequabilem tributionem. Ex hac igitur illud efficitur, si mortalium tanta multitudo sit, esse immortalium non minorem (I 50).

Nature

The world has been made by nature itself without the need of any intelligence. Creating is so easy that nature will create, is creating, and has created worlds without number.

Natura effectum esse mundum, nihil opus fuisse fabrica, tamque eam rem esse facilem quam vos effici negatis sine divina posse sollertia, ut innummerabilis natura mundos effectura sit efficiat effecerit (I 53).

Space consists of void in which an infinite number of atoms fly and come together to form all kinds of shapes.

Hac igitur immensitate latitudinum longitudinum altitudinum infinita vis innumerabilium volitat atomorum, quae interiecto inani cohaerescunt tamen inter se et aliae alias adprehendentes continuantur; ex quo efficiuntur eae rerum formae et figurae . . .(I 54) .

According to the principle of *isonomia*, there are just as many destructive causes as preservative ones.

Et si quae interimant innumerabilia sint, etiam ea quae conservent infinita esse debere (I 50)..

The world is not eternal for the simple reason that everything has a beginning and an end.

Hunc censes primis ut dicitur labris gustasse physiologiam, id est naturae rationem, qui quicquam quod ortum sit putet aeternum esse posse? Quae est enim coagmentatio non dissolubilis? Aut quid est cui principium aliquod sit, nihil sit extremum (I 20)?

Humankind

As with the gods, so also with man, happiness consists of security of mind and complete freedom from all occupations.

Nos autem beatam vitam in animi securitate et in omnium vacatione munerum ponimus (I 53).

Wise men can arrange life in such a way as to minimize troubles and maximize happiness. Fools neither can escape trouble, nor endure it. Therefore, folly is the most miserable thing.

Cum omnes stulti sint sine dubio miserrimi, maxime quod stulti sunt (miserium enim stultitia quid possumus dicere?), deinde quod ita multa sunt incommoda in vita ut ea sapientes commodorum compensatione leniant, stulti nec vitare venientia possint nec ferre praesentia (I 23).

Fear is an enemy of happiness. It is, therefore, important to see that the gods take no interest in us nor consider anything of their concern. Given the nature of their happiness, we are not responsible to them for our deeds. A good understanding of this takes away superstitious terrors and any fear of the gods.

Quas vos effici posse sine follibus et incudibus non putatis, itaque inposuistis in cervicibus nostris sempitemum dominum, quem dies et noctes timeremus: quis enim non timeat omnia providentem et cogitantem et animadvertentem et omnia ad se pertinere putantem curiosum et plenum negotii deum (I 54)?

His terroribus ab Epicuro soluti et in libertatem vindicati nec metuimus eos quos intellegimus nec sibi fingere ullam molestiam nec alteri quaerere (I 56).

As far as worship is concerned, we pay homage to nature, which is exalted and excellent.

Et pie sancteque colimus naturam excellentem atque praestantem (I 56).

AGAINST EPICUREANISM

The arguments against Epicureanism, as well as those against Stoicism, are put in the mouth of a certain Cotta, a Roman high priest and pontiff. Cotta did not embrace the beliefs of either school, and though he seems to have been a confused doubter, he made some very keen observations and criticisms. That is what makes him the eloquent spokesman of the Academy. At certain points, one could get the impression that he was a downright skeptic. This is not true, however, and one must be aware that his skepticism is solely a reaction to the Epicurean and Stoic presentation of the truth. His own views do show a longing for the *real* truth, and that is what he wonders about all the time. It must

be concluded that his remarks expose a variety of weaknesses on the parts of both major schools.

Existence of the Gods

The statement that belief in the gods' existence is universal, is not valid for the following reasons: firstly, not all the beliefs of foreign peoples are known. and secondly, there are many atheists and agnostics (I 62,63)

Nature of the Gods

The concept of happiness is one of a life that clearly languishes away with idleness.

Nam de vita beata nihil repugno, quam tu
ne in eo quidem esse censes nisi plane
otio langueat (I 67).⁷

The conception of the gods' happiness as consisting only in selfcontemplation is not a true conception of happiness.

"Cogitat" inquiunt "adsidue beatum esse; habet enim nihil aliud quod agitet in mente.". . . Ita nec beatus est vester deus ... (I 114) .

In fact, the notion of the gods' happiness is worse than that of a spoilt child, who at least wants to enjoy some active play (I 102). It is a projection of a subjective opinion rather than real knowledge of the gods.

Anthropomorphism is a misconception, for every species considers its own form unique. According to this reasoning, an eagle or lion or dolphin would not prefer any other form over its own (I 77). Moreover, if the gods are superior to men in everything else, then they are also superior in form.

Cur igitur cum ceteris rebus inferiores
simus forma pares sumus (I 96)?

Anthropomorphism also runs into the following problems.

If the gods are entirely free from bodily imperfection, then they are all alike. In that case, no recognition is possible. If not, then there must be degrees of beauty. And in that case, not all gods attain to the highest standard (I 80). The logic that reason can only exist in human form does not hold (I 89). Moreover, why would the gods have a human form if they have no need of hands, feet, and intestines (I 92)? Finally, it is not necessary to consider the consequences of stating that the gods are male and female (I 95) .

Atomism is inconsistent with divine immortality, for if they are made of atoms they cannot be eternal,

since it was argued that everything has a beginning and an end (I 68) . Also, it is argued that the theory about the continuous flow of images is not well defined at all. A person could use it to claim that everything is eternal (I 107) .

The theory of the gods' quasi corporeality cannot be understood by anybody, not even the Epicureans (I 74).

Nature

Atoms do not exist. But even if they did, then they probably would be only capable of coming into contact with one another. They could not create form shape, colour, or life.

Quae etiam si essent, quae nulla sunt,
pellere se ipsa et agitari inter se
concursu fortasse possent, formare
figurare colorare animare non possent
(I 110).

There is no void, all space is filled with matter, and there is no such thing as an indivisible body.

Nihil est enim . . . quod vacet corpore;
corporibus autem omnis obsidetur locus;
ita nullum inane, nihil esse individuum
potest (I 65).

The Epicurean belief that freedom of will derives from the spontaneous concourse of atoms, is a device invented to escape determinism. According to this device, atoms, while traveling vertically downward by the force of gravity, make a minute motion to one side.

Velut Epicurus cum videret, si atomi ferrentur in locum inferiorem suoque pondere, nihil fore in nostra potestate, quod esset earum motus certus et necessarius, invenit quo modo necessitatem effugeret, quod videlicet Democritum fugerat: ait atomum, cum

pondere et gravitate directo deorsus
feratur, declinare paululum (I 69).

Also, the principle of *isonomia* is an escape theory and is understood as meaning that because there is mortal substance, there must also be immortal substance. The principle is discredited by stating the mock reasoning that because there are mortal people, there are also some that are immortal, and because there are people born on land, there are people born in the water. As far as the equilibrium between destructive and preservative forces is concerned, this only would maintain what exists (I 109) .

Humankind

Epicurean logic is a total failure since it denies the necessity of a disjunctive proposition.

Hoc dicere turpius est quam illud quod vult non posse defendere. Idem facit contra dialecticos; a quibus cum traditum sit in omnibus diiunctionibus in quibus 'aut etiam aut non' poneretur alterum utrum esse verum, pertimuit ne si concessum esset huius modi aliquid 'aut vivet cras aut non vivet Epicurus,' alterutrum fieret necessarium: totum hoc 'aut etiam aut non' negavit esse necessarium; quo quid dici potuit obtusius (I 70)?

Epicurus stated that all sensation is true, since he was afraid that if it were admitted that one could be false, all could be false (I 70).

The deistic notion leaves no reason for man to worship the gods (I 115, 116), whereas the Egyptians and barbarians even deify different animals for some useful service that they render (I 101).

In the Epicurean theology, there is no place left either for homage, or for piety--justice towards the gods--or for holiness--the science of divine worship.

Quae porro pietas ei debetur a quo nihil acceperis? Aut quid omnino cuius nullum meritum sit ei deberi potest? Est enim pietas iustitia adversum deos; cum quibus quid potest nobis esse iuris, cum homini nulla cum deo sit communitas? Sanctitas autem est scientia colendorum deorum; qui quam ob rem colendi sint non intellego nullo nec accepto ab iis nec sperato bono (I 116).

Epicurus merely tried to avoid popular hostility in holding to some view about the gods, whereas, for himself he did not believe in them at all (I 123).

STOICISM

It has been said already that the Stoics were pantheists. This is apparent throughout the

statements of their belief. For them everything centers around God, who is some kind of soul that permeates the whole world. Constantly, they employ the teleological argument that the world shows such a perfect *design*, that only an all-powerful Being could have created it. They attempt to show this in relation to all aspects of life.

Existence of the Gods

That the gods exist is clear from various records we have about their epiphanies. This is also why, among all nations, reverence for the gods and respect for religion is growing.

Itaque et in nostro populo et in ceteris deorum cultus religionumque sanctitates existunt in dies maiores atque meliores, idque evenit non temere nec casu, sed quod et praesentes saepe di vim suam declarant (II 5, 6).

Another proof is that people everywhere have a clear idea of the gods, which is strengthened with every new generation, while ungrounded beliefs, such as about the hippocentaur, have been fading away. Grounded beliefs, of course, concern things that exist, whereas ungrounded beliefs concern things that do not exist.

Quod nisi cognitum comprehensumque animis haberemus, non tam stabilis opinio permaneret nec confirmaretur diuturnitate temporis nec una cum saeculis aetatibusque hominum inveterari potuisset. Etenim videmus ceteras opiniones fictas atque vanas diuturnitate extabuisse. Quis enim Hippocentaurum fuisse aut Chimaeram putat . . . (II 5)?

Itaque inter omnis omnium gentium summa constat; omnibus enim innatum est et in animo quasi insculptum esse deos. Quales sint varium est, esse nemo negat (II 13).

The art of divination is evidence for the existence of the gods. Empires have been won by religious commanders. However, due to negligence, this gift has fallen into contempt. Misinterpretations are human mistakes.

Magna augurum auctoritas; quid, haruspicum ars nonne divina? Haec et innumerabilia ex eodem genere qui videat nonne cogatur confiteri deos esse? Quorum enim interpretes sunt eos ipsos esse certe necesse est; deorum autem interpretes sunt; deos igitur esse fateamur (II 12).

Quorum exitio intellegi potest eorum imperiis rem publicam amplificatam qui religionibus paruissent (II 8).

Sed negligentia nobilitatis augurii disciplina omissa veritas auspicio-
rum spreta est, species tantum retenta (II 9)

Signa ostenduntur a dis rerum futurarum; in his si qui erraverunt, non

deorum natura sed hominum coniec-
tura peccavit (II 12) .

The power of the gods can also be deduced from the abundance of natural blessings which we enjoy, and from various awe inspiring events.

. . . ex magnitudine commodorum quae
percipiuntur caeli temperatione
fecunditate terrarum aliarumque com-
moditatum conplurium copia quae
terreret animos fulminibus tem-
pestatibus nimbis nivibus grandinibus
vastitate etc.(II 14).

But the most powerful reason for belief is the fact that the whole universe shows design. Nobody would contest that a house or the horary of Posidonius presupposes a designer. So the world shows the power of a superhuman agency .

. . . causam esse eamque vel
maximam aequabilitatem motus con-
versionumque caeli, solis lunae

siderumque omnium distinctionem
 varietatem pulchritudinem ordinem,
 quarum rerum aspectus ipse satis
 indicaret non esse ea fortuita (II 15).

An vero si domum magnam pul-
 chramque videris non possis adduci ut
 etiamsi dominum non videas muribus
 illam et mustelis aedificatam putes (II
 17).

. . . quis in illa barbaria dubitet quin ea
 sphaera sit perfecta ratione (II 88)?

Atqui res caelestes omnesque eae
 quarum est ordo sempiternus ab
 homine confici non possunt; est igitur
 id quo illa conficiuntur homine melius;
 id autem quid potius dixeris quam
 deum (II 16)?

Anybody that believes that the world is the product
 of chance, may as well believe that you could, with a
 pot of letters. shake out the Annals of Ennius. In
 fact, not even a single verse would come about if

you were to throw a great abundance of letters at random on the ground (II 93) .

Nature of the Gods or God

A well defined syllogism proves that the world possesses the faculty of reason, is wise, happy, eternal, and, in fact, God.

Quod ratione utitur id melius est quam id quod ratione non utitur; nihil autem mundo melius; ratione igitur mundus utitur. Similiter effici potest sapientem esse mundum, similiter beatum, similiter aeternum; omnia enim haec meliora sunt quam ea quae sunt his carentia, nee mundo quicquam melius. Ex quo efficietur esse mundum deum (II 21).

This God is both life force and soul, permeating the entire world.

Omne igitur quod vivit, sive animal sive terrae ditum, id vivit propter inclusum in eo calorem. Ex quo intellegi debet eam caloris naturam vim habere in se vitalem per omnem mundum pertinentem (II 24) .

. . . cui duo placet esse motus, unum suum alterum externum, esse autem divinius quod ipsum ex se sua sponte moveatur quam quod pulsu agitetur alieno. Hunc autem motum in solis animis esse ponit, ab hisque principium motus esse ductum putat. Quapropter quoniam ex mundi ardore motus omnis oritur, is autem ardor non alieno impulsu sed sua sponte movetur, animus sit necesse est; ex quo efficitur animantem esse mundum (II 32).

Thus it is proven that the world is an animate being. And just as no part of our body is worth more than our entire selves, thus the entire world is superior to any of its parts. Since we are part of the world, the world soul possess higher intelligence than we do (II 29-32) .

Once it has been established that the world soul, consisting of heat, is divine, then it must be concluded that the sun *and* the stars are divine as well. As the most elevated inhabitants of the aether, they must have the highest intelligence. Their orderly courses must be voluntary and based on their own will, for there cannot be a higher force (II 40-44). Their unflinching accuracy is only understandable in terms of intelligence and purpose (II 54). The divine form, then, is spherical, for the globe is the most perfect figure and can include all other kinds. It is also the most suitable one for rotatory movement.

Ex utraque re et mundi volubilitas, quae nisi in globosa forma esse non posset, et stellarum rotundi ambitus cognoscuntur (II 49).

Nature has the purpose of creating something the way a craftsman would. It experiences what the Greeks called ὁρμαί,³ something to the effect of *motions of the will*, desiring and trying to accomplish its goal. Nature tries to streamline the *hormae* by an adequate course of actions. As such, the world mind is termed *providence*, or προνοια in Greek.

Censet enim artis maxume proprium esse creare et gignere, quodque in operibus nostrarum artium manus efficiat id multo artificiosius naturam efficere, id est ut dixi ignem artificiosum, magistrum artium reliquarum (II 57).

. . . sic natura mundi omnes motus habet voluntarios conatusque et adpetitiones quas ὁρμαί Graeci vocant, et his consentaneas actiones sic adhibet ut nosmet ipsi qui animis movemur et sensibus. Talis igitur mens mundi cum sit ob eamque causam vel prudentia vel providentia appellari recte possit (Graece enim πρόνοια dicitur) (II 58).

Many of the attributes of the world soul have come to be deified, as well as many of its products; concepts such as Faith, Mind, Liberty, Victory, and products such as corn and wine, under the names of Ceres and Liber, have been worshipped as gods and goddesses. Also humans, who by their lives expressed some unique aspect of the world soul, have been deified, notably Hercules, Castor and Pollux, and Aesculapius. The entire pantheon is a corruption of the true philosophy about the world soul (II 59-72)..

Videtisne igitur ut a physicis rebus
bene atque utiliter inventis tracta ratio
sit ad commenticios et fictos deos (II
70)?

The combined and harmonious energy of the gods is designated by the term "Providence." They are beings exercising activity of the highest kind. They are superior to the world and rule the world as a state (II 73-80).

Sic cum dicimus providentia mundum administrari deesse arbitrate 'deorum' (II 74).

. . . aut qui deos esse concedant iis fatendum est eos aliquid agere idque praeclarum (II 76) .

Atqui necesse est cum sint di (si modo sunt, ut profecto sunt) animantis esse, nec solum animantis sed etiam rationis compotes inter seque quasi civili conciliatione et societate coniunctos, unum mundum ut communem rem publicam atque urbem aliquam regentis (II 78).

Nature

The world was set in motion in the beginning. Providence, by means of a sentient nature (*natura sentiens*), rules it, and strives for the best in beauty and perfection.

Dico igitur providentia deorum mundum et omnes mundi partes et initio constitutas esse et omni tempore administrari . . . omnes res subiectas esse naturae sentienti ab eaque omnia pulcherrime geri (II 75).

Haec (providentia) potissimum providet et in his maxime est occupata, primum ut mundus quam aptissimus sit ad permanendum, deinde ut nulla re egeat, maxime autem ut in eo eximia pulchritudo sit atque omnis ornatus (II 58) .

Nature is that intelligent order that governs all the organisms of the world.

Sed nos cum dicimus natura constare admiinistrarique mundum . . . dicimus . . . ut arborem ut animal, in quibus nulla temeritas sed ordo apparet et artis quaedam similitudo (II 82) .

Reasoning from the lowest form of life, the plants, we arrive, via animals and man, at an understanding of God, who is completely good and consistent. Everything occupies a certain place on this scale. Every organism tries to attain perfection, being hindered by various obstacles, but only nature in its entirety is completely free.

Atque etiam si a primis inchoatisque naturis ad ultimas perfectasque volumus procedere, ad deorum naturam perveniamus necesse est (II 33).

Etenim ceteris naturis multa externa quominus perficiantur possunt obsistere, universam autem naturam nulla res potest impedire, propterea quod omnis naturas ipsa cohibet et continet (II 35).

There are four kinds of matter, which form an arrangement of layers through which all things travel up and down.

Et cum quattuor genera sint corporum,
vicissitudine eorum mundi continuata
natura est. Nam ex terra aqua ex aqua
oritur aer ex aere aether, deinde
retrorsum . . . Sic naturis his ex quibus
omnia constant sursus deorsus ultro
citro commeantibus mundi partium
coniunctio continetur (Il 84) .

This structure is eternal, or at least of
immeasurable duration. Also, it is perfect and
nobody can improve it. Since it is best as it is, it can
never be the product of chance.

Quae aut sempiterna sit necesse est . .
.aut certe perditurna, permanens ad
...inmensum . . . tempus (Il 85).

Quodsi omnes mundi partes ita
constitutae sunt ut neque ad usum
meliores potuerint esse neque ad
speciem pulciores . . . (Il 87).

Hic ego non mirer esse quemquam qui
sibi persuadeat corpora quaedam
solida atque individua vi et gravitate

ferri mundumque effici ornatissimum et
pulcherrimum ex eorum corporum
concursione fortuita (II 93)?

The earth is at the centre of the universe. The sun, moon, planets, and constellations revolve around her.

Ac principio terra universa cernatur,
locata in media sede mundi (II 98).

. . . sol . . . circum eam ipsam volvitur. .
. luna . . . eae stellae quas vagas
dicimus . . . Sequitur stellarum in-
erantium maxima multitudo. (II 102-104).

It is thought that the fiery substance of the stars is being fed by vapours arising from the earth, and that the earth, in turn, is constantly revitalized when these vapours return. If, in this cyclical regeneration of the universe, some matter is lost, then in the end

there will be a great conflagration, fire only being left once all moisture has been used up (II 118).

. . . nihil ut fere intereat aut admodum paululum . . . ut ad extremum omnis mundus ignesceret (II 118).

The planets of the solar system are believed to have various functions. Saturn has a cooling effect. Mars exudes heat, and Jove gives light and warmth (II 119).

Every species of the flora and fauna has some unique characteristic, which is imparted by intelligent nature, in order to protect it.

. . . obducunturque libro aut cortice trunci quo sint a frigoribus et caloribus tutiores (II 120).

. . . quarum aliae coris tectae sunt aliae villis vestitae aliae spinis hirsutae . . . (II 121).

Dedit autem eadem natura beluis et sensum et appetitum, ut . . . altero secernerent pestifera a salutaribus. Jam vero alia animalia gradiendo alia serpendo ad pastum accedunt, alia volando alia nando . . . (II 122).

Similarly, for the purpose of preservation and perpetuation every species is divided into male and female. Animals differ too in the way in which they care for their offspring.

Nam primum aliae mares aliae feminae sunt, quod perpetuitatis causa machinata natura est (II 128).

. . . etsi pisces, ut aiunt, ova cum genuerunt relinquunt, facile enim illa aqua et sustinentur et fetum fundunt. Testudines autem et crocodiles dicunt, cum in terra partum ediderint, obruere ova, deinde discedere; ita et nascuntur et educantur ipsa per sese (II 129) .

Nature has also taken good care of humankind. Rivers everywhere fertilize the land. An immense

variety and quantity of delicious food is provided. The rhythm of day and night contributes to activity and repose (II 130-132).

All the beauties of nature must have a special purpose. It is concluded that they were not just intended for plants or animals , but in the first place for the gods and humankind.

*Ita fit credibile deorum et hominum
causa factum esse mundum quaeque
in eo sint omnia (II 133).*

Humankind

Heaven is there to be wondered at and is used for navigation and reckoning time. The fruits of trees and vines, and the products of the ground are for man's delight. The animals serve him according to

their abilities; the dog watches, the ox plows, and the donkey carries. Many kinds of birds, fishes and beasts are caught to be eaten. The whole earth, far and wide from its most open places to its remotest corners, stores an abundance of commodities, which are immensely rich both in quantity and quality (II 154-161).

The providence of the gods is summed up in man, from the lowest to the highest things.

Faciliusque intellegetur a dis immortalibus hominibus esse provisum si erit tota hominis fabricatio perspecta omnisque humanae naturae figura atque perfectio (II 133).

The body needs breath, drink, and food, which are dispersed all through the body. It is held up by the skeleton, and held together by joints and sinews. Man's erect position constitutes him a contemplator of the heavens, over against the denizens of the

ground. The five senses have been well organized. *Every* one of them has a perfectly suitable function (II 133-146).

Man has the mental ability to make syllogistic conclusions. What a vast array of emotions can be expressed through speech! Man's dexterity enables him to create a wide diversity of arts and to fabricate an endless collection of tools. Man builds structures ranging in size and grandeur from sheds to temples and palaces. He tames animals, from dogs to elephants, forges metals such as gold and copper, and works timber into furniture and ships. He harnesses the elements of sea and wind, and irrigates barren plains (II 147-152).

Man is not perfect, yet virtue is realized in him. How much the more so with the world soul. It must possess perfect virtue, comprise all things, and be wise and divine (II 37-39) .

The gods take care of important businesses; they neglect the unimportant ones. Therefore, great men always enjoy prosperity in their enterprises.

Magna di curant, parva neglegunt . . .
Nemo igitur vir magnus sine aliquo
adflatu divino umquam fuit (II 167).

Man's intellect culminates in a knowledge of the gods, and fills him with humbleness and a host of other virtues. His virtues emulate and resemble divinity, and extoll him to a position little inferior to the gods.

Quae contuens animus accedit ad
cognitionem deorum, e qua oritur
pietas, cui coniuncta iustitia est
reliquaeque virtutes, e quibus vita
beata existit par et similis deorum,
nulla alia re nisi immortalitate, quae nihil
ad benevivendum pertinet, cedens
caelestibus (II 153).

AGAINST STOICISM

Although Cotta seems to have had more contempt for Epicureanism, in his reaction against Stoicism he was much more voluminous. In it he broached some very sensitive topics such as the problem of good and evil, and notably, the role of gods and man with regard to this problem. No matter how much he wanted to solve it, he could not come to a final conclusion. The more he thought about it, the cloudier the issue became for him. Yet he remained loyal to his ancestral belief, which he accepted on the authority of tradition.

. . . mihi quidem ex animo excuti non potest esse deos, id tamen ipsum, quod mihi persuasum est auctoritate maiorum . . . (III 7) .

Existence of the Gods

Stoicism does not prove the existence of the gods.
In fact it shows them to be non-existent, as it seems.

. . . cur ita sit, nihil tu me doces (III 7).

. . . quae mihi talis videtur fuisse, ut,
cum ostendere velles quales di essent,
ostenderes nullos esse (III 20).

Stoicism makes use of all kinds of foolish beliefs,
and tries to interpret them in its own way. But such
an important matter as the existence of the gods is
not to be established by fools.

Atque haec . . . fama . . . sunt, quibus
intelligis resistendum esse ne per-
turbentur religiones; vestri autem non
modo haec non refellunt verum etiam
confirmant interpretando quorsum
quidque pertineat (III 60).

Grave etiam argumentum tibi videbatur quod opinio de dis immortalibus et omnium esset et cotidie cresceret: placet igitur tantas res opinione stultorum iudicari, vobis praesertim qui illos insanos esse dicatis (III 11)?

The accounts about the epiphanies are just rumours. Homer, for instance, says that the sons of Tyndareus were buried. How, then, can it be supposed that they chose a peasant like Vatinius, instead of Marcus Cato, the then most important senator, to reveal the views of a great victory (II 11)?

Divination is not a proper proof of the gods' existence. Stoicism, by using the allegory of medicine, which can be understood with our reason, fails to explain how divination can be understood. Many diviners are liars. Moreover, it is often better not to know the future (III 15).

The gods have nothing to do with the sacrifices of army leaders in the past. Their bravery was a strategy to make their armies follow them in battle. If the gods bestowed victory on the basis of self-sacrificing, they would be unjust (III 15).

The existence of the gods cannot be proven by the abundance of good things, or by various portents. The point is not whether many people claim that the gods are behind these things, the point is whether they exist or not (III 16).

. . . sed non id quaeritur, sintne aliqui
qui deos esse putent: di utrum sint
necne sint quaeritur (III 17) .

The example of the house is inadequate as well. According to it, the world must be considered the abode of the gods. If the world had been built like a house, that would be believable. However, it has been made by nature, not then by the gods (III 26).

Nature of the Gods

Nature is not God, and certainly not only God. For, although it is involved in the cycle of birth, growth, and decay, it is completely destitute of sensation and of form (I 35). If God is incorporeal, then he is devoid of sensation and wisdom (I 33). If God is pure soul, how is he made to penetrate the universe (I 28)? If the world is God, then how can he be free from suffering in a situation of inconceivable rotatory velocity? Since this condition is painful for man, why would it be painless for God (I 24)? God must also be unhappy, for humans are often unhappy, and they are part of God. But God cannot experience unhappiness. Moreover, to maintain that we are part of God, is tantamount to tearing God apart (I 27).

So also the world is not God, for then also the deserts, scorched by the sun, must be regarded as God's limbs, subjected to the rhythm of heat and

cold (I 24). All philosophers from Thales to Chrysippus are wrong in their explanations of God. One sees God as some universal mind, another as air, infinite and immeasurable, and as having a beginning. Again, another thinks that all things are regulated and completed by the power and reason of an infinite mind.

Inde Anaxagoras, qui accepit ab Anaximene disciplinam, primus omnium rerum discriptionem et modum mentis infinitae vi ac ratione dissignari et confici voluit (I 26).

The gods are not infinite for there can be no sensation, no ongoing action, and no contact with anything outside in something that is infinite.

. . . neque motum sensui iunctum et continentem in infinito ullum esse posse (I 26).

Tum Xenophanes, qui mente adiuncta omne propterea quod esset infinitum deum voluit esse, de ipsa mente item reprehenditur ut ceteri, de infinitate autem vehementius, in qua nihil neque sentiens neque coniunctum potest esse (I 28).

The Stoic syllogism that the rational is superior to the non-rational, but nothing is superior to the world, thus the world is rational, is fallacious just because it would prove too much. It could be used to prove that the world can read a book, play music, and be capable of every such thing. Consequently, the world is not God in accordance with your reason, even though the world is superior in beauty and regulation (III 22, 23).

The vital force of fire cannot be God. Everything that possesses sensation has a beginning, changes, and is subject to death. If the vital force is soul, and if our own bodies live by virtue of fire, then fire itself

must possess sensation. However, every living thing comes to grief sometime or other, so also the vital force of fire. This is the more so seeing that fire needs fuel (III 30-37).

Are we to ascribe reason and all kinds of virtues to God? He does not and cannot experience evil, why would he then have need of a rationality to choose between good and evil? So, also, why would he need any virtues, or intelligence? There is nothing for him to seek out, since nothing is hidden from him. Why justice that apportions to everyone a right measure? Why temperance, bravery or courage? He does not experience any pain, labour, or danger.

God then is devoid of reason and all virtues. But such a god could not be understood.

Nec ratione igitur utentem nec virtute ulla praeditum deum intellegere qui possumus (III 38, 39)?

According to Stoicism, humans have their souls from the world soul. However, from where do they have their various mental abilities? Can it be imagined that the stars, since they are gods, are having conversations with one another? The world, therefore, is not God, nor are the stars gods. Our abilities are the gifts of nature, they are not part of nature as being a god with all kinds of human characteristics. It is stupid to think that the stars are gods because of their great regularity. For if regulation is the earmark of divinity, then the tides are divine, and even the regular attacks of ague! All these things must be explained by reason. But since you cannot do that, you make them gods (III 23-27) .

Sed omnium talium rerum ratio reddenda est; quod vos cum facere non potestis, tamquam in aram confugitis ad deum (III 24, 25).

It is not arrogant to say that man is superior to the world and to the stars. On the contrary, it is wise to be aware that he is a being, possessing reason and conscience, whereas Orion does not (III 26).

Stoicism is wrong in saying that the entire pantheon is a corruption of the truth about the real gods. It only reckons Jupiter and Neptune gods. But why not also Orcus, their brother? And then also the famous rivers of the Nether World. If Saturn is a god, then also Caelus, his father. But then also Caelus' parents, Aether and Day. And then also their siblings Love, Guile, Fear, Toil, and so on. Why should not the Furies be gods and the nymphs, and the clouds, and indeed, all gods of the barbarians? Moreover, if Jupiter were to be god, we run into the problem of finding out who is the right one. There are also different Herculesees, Vulcans, Dianas, Venuses, and Cupids (III 39-60). Either, then, we must believe in all or in none. .

Aut igitur haec monstra probanda sunt
aut prima illa tollenda (III 44).

Ergo hoc aut in inensum serpet, aut
nihil horum recipiemus; nec illa infinita
ratio superstitionis probabitur; nihil
ergo horum probandum est (III 52).

Stoicism is wrong in assigning divinity to
abstractions. For they are merely human
characteristics or values, for example intelligence,
faith, and honour and victory.

. . . ceteraque eius modi rerum vim
habere videmus, non deorum. Aut
enim in nobismet insunt ipsis . . . aut
optandae nobis sunt (III 61).

Stoic etymologies are miserable, dangerous, and
fanciful. In fact, they are turning the foolish authors
of the fables about the gods into sages. But in
rationalizing these stories, Stoics acknowledge that
human opinion is quite different from fact. We must,

THEREFORE, abandon the practice of making derogatory statements about the gods (III 62, 63) .

Nature

Why did God or Providence wait so long before it created the world? Was it to avoid fatigue? However, God cannot experience fatigue. Or why would the universe be a kind of embellishment? He certainly did not live in darkness for an eternity, and then decide to put up some illumination (I 22) .

The world has been created by nature, and not, then, by the gods.

Ita prorsus existimarem, si illum aedificatum esse, non quem ad modum docebo a natura conformatum putarem (III 26).⁴

It is true that nature has a great regularity. But it does not follow that this can only be so by virtue of the divine power. On the contrary, the forces of nature, itself, keep everything together. In fact, the greater nature's harmony is by its own voluntary will, the less likely is it that it has been made by divine reason.

. . . estque in ea iste quasi consensus.
. . . sed ea quo sua sponte maior est eo minus divina ratione fieri existimanda est (III 28).

Every living thing is subject to feeling and suffering, also to change, and to death. Also every living thing has natural feelings of desiring and avoiding. It desires things that are natural to its kind, and avoids things that are unnatural to its kind. Unnatural things are destructive. Every living thing flees from these things. Therefore, it will die.

Quod autem refugit, id contra naturam est, et . . . habet vim interimendi; omne ergo animal intereat necesse est (III 33).

Animal life is not solely dependent on fire as an absolute force. When exposed to great heat, or when destitute of water or air, a living being will die as well. Moreover, Stoicism fails to explain why fire is the only animate being as over against air (III 35, 36).

Humankind

How can it be maintained that the universe was created for humankind? For most people are fools, and God certainly does not owe a favour to the wicked. Moreover, it would have missed its purpose anyway, for fools do not understand God (I 23).

Wicked behavior abounds everywhere. Wickedness is aided and abetted by reason. But just as wine is not good when administered to the sick, it would have been better if reason had not been bestowed upon humankind at all, rather than with such an indiscriminate measure (III 69). The gods did not take care of humankind at all, since only few or none possess virtuous reason (III 70).

Stoicism claims that man makes bad use of a good thing. It is certainly true that man makes bad use of it. But it is not clear from the nature of the talent, what the nature of the will of the benefactor is. God merely gives reason, and man either turns it into something good or bad (III 70, 71). If it is the gods who bestowed reason, then with it they gave all sorts of evil. If only they had not given it (III 75) !

Stoicism keeps claiming that it is humankind that is to blame for all evil. However, God should have

given an ability to reason that was devoid of evil. What allowance, then, for making a mistake was there for the gods? But how could God have been mistaken (III 76)?

Stoic providence is to be chastised for giving reason to those it foreknew would abuse it. Unless it did not foreknow, but that is denied (III 78). Foolishness is the greatest evil, and wisdom is attained by nobody. How great is man's misery! If the gods really cared about man, they should have created everybody good. But if that could not have been realized, they should at least have cared for the good. But history proves that good people fall victim to misfortune everywhere. If, therefore, the gods have any regard for human affairs, then their involvement is performed indiscriminately (III 79-82). Yet this reasoning does not give mankind the freedom to sin, since the conscience of good and evil is such a strong, binding power.

In vita in hoc loco versatur oratio, videtur enim auctoritatem adferre peccandi: recte videretur, nisi et virtutis et vitiorum sine ulla divina ratione grave ipsius conscientiae pondus esset (III 85).

Without the force of the conscience, nothing can stand. Just as a family or state seems to lack reason if there is no recompense in accordance with behavior, so it must be concluded that there is no divine governance if it does not distinguish between good and bad people.

. . sic mundi divina in homines moderatio profecto nulla est si in ea discrimen nullum est bonorum et malorum (III 85).

Virtue is accomplished by ourselves, and as such it is a source of praise and pride. It is not bestowed by the gods, therefore, nobody ever thanked the gods for making him a good person (III 87) .

The prosperity of bad people disclaims altogether the power of the gods (III 88). If sometimes good men have a good end, then these are exceptions (III 89). It cannot be said that the gods neglect small matters, for they cannot even have the excuse of ignorance (III 90). Either Providence does not know its own powers, or it neglects humans, or it does not have the power to determine what is best (III 92). It is said that it does not care about individuals. But then it also does not care about cities, tribes, and nations. How can it be maintained that the gods do not care about individuals, yet give everyone dreams? If you say that it is good to make vows, then this only makes sense if the gods listen to these. For vows are made by individuals (III 93).

CONCLUSION

It is good to realize that Cotta at various points, now deliberately, now perhaps unwittingly, misinterprets the Epicurean and Stoic arguments, and thus answers them with a mock reasoning. Also he tends to add arguments, belonging to the traditions of these schools, from other sources, and then fights these.

The *De Natura Deorum* being such a large work, one wonders to what extent it actually represents a real discussion, or whether it is a fictitious construction for philosophico-literary purposes. Cicero requests in a letter to Atticus (XIII 8), written on the Ides of June 45 B.C., a certain philosophical treatise, and in another letter he writes that he is engaged in an article against the Epicureans, while working on the *De Natura Deorum*. If this discussion did not take place in a strict historical sense, it still is

completely relevant; it would only be the setting that is fictitious, but not the actual arguments.

Because the *Octavius* is a much smaller work, it is much more reasonable to suggest that it represents a real life experience. But even if it is not, it gives a very good impression of similar discussions that must have taken place countless times. In this regard both works also provide good entertainment.

NOTES

1. Rackham's translation of this important passage is "yet their form is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance; it does not contain blood, but the semblance of blood."

This translation does not seem altogether consistent with the theory of atomism. It must be said, however, that the Epicureans themselves remained vague on this point. Perhaps the passage must be interpreted to mean that their form is not of human substance, but of a material composition that only looks like the human one.

2. According to Bailey, "Cicero may fairly be convicted of an inaccuracy due to brevity of expression; he ought rather to have said: 'An infinite succession of similar images is formed out of

innumerable atoms, which flow together to make in successive instants the forms of the gods.' " (C. Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, p. 459) .

The forms of the gods, then, remain the same, but not their matter, which changes constantly like the streaming water that forms a waterfall. This is also apparent from Cotta's Commentary (I 114)

'nec tamen video quo modo non vereatur iste deus beatus ne intereat, cum sine ulla intermissione pulsetur agiteturque atomorum incursione sempiterna, cumque ex ipso imagines semper afluant.

Thus the understanding is complete in that innumerable atoms flow together into the gods, and leave them again to leave us an impression of them.

3. The relevant definitions of ὄρμαί are 'struggles', 'efforts to reach a thing,' and 'eagernesses,' 'passions' or 'impulses.' (Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon).

4. A few rather important pieces of Cotta's discourse have been lost. Unfortunately, the passage in which he was to explain why the world was created by nature, is one of them.

CHAPTER II

OCTAVIUS

The Octavius presents the controversy between an adherent of paganism, Caecilius, and a Christian, Octavius. Both use arguments from the pre-Christian schools of philosophy, the one to support his holding to tradition, the other to defend his embracing of the new way. They do not, then, adhere to anyone of the three major schools, but simply employ proofs from them for the sake of their own beliefs.

In this chapter we shall isolate those arguments that could have been taken from the *De Natura Deorum*, and explain in what way they have been used in support of the two above mentioned faiths.

The Case for Paganism

Caecilius makes ample use of the various pre-Christian philosophical schools. Interchangeably he employs Epicureanism and Stoicism, as well as the Academic points of view. In this section we group the statements of his respective sources under their appropriate headings.

The Academy

Caecilius takes the Academic stance that nobody knows for certain what the truth is (V 2). Cotta, and Cicero himself as well, had not embraced wholeheartedly any of the major schools. They found it easier to criticise the other systems than to come up with one themselves (I 2; 60; II 2). The world suffers from the accidents of lawless chance.

. . . vel nimbis confidentibus tonitrua mugire, rutilare fulgora, fulmina praemicare: adeo passim cadunt, montes inruunt, arboribus incurrunt, sine dilectu tangunt loca sacra et profana, homines noxios feriunt et saepe religiosos (V 9).

Adeo aut incerta nobis veritas occultatur et premitur, aut, quod magis credendum est, variis et lubricis casibus soluta legibus fortuna dominatur (V 13).

Cotta had proposed in like manner that the gods have nothing to do with humankind, because hardly anybody possesses virtuous reason (III 70) .

Because of the uncertainty of life it is good to hold to tradition and worship the gods in the traditional way.

Cum igitur aut fortuna certa aut incerta natura sit, quanto venerabilius ac melius antistitem veritatis maiorum excipere disciplina, religiones traditas colere, deos . . . adorare . . . prioribus credere (VI 1).

Cotta had likewise accepted the authority of his forefathers, and in fact did not see any reason in Stoicism to believe in the gods (III 7). The God of the Christians is either powerless or unjust for they labour under all kinds of trouble.

. . . egetis algetis, opere fame laboratis, et deus patitur dissimulat, non vult aut non potest opitulari suis; ita aut invalidus aut iniquus est (XII 2).

The abundance of evil in the world was evidence for Cotta that Stoic Providence is to be blamed, or that the gods simply have no power (III 78,88).

Stoicism

No matter how uncertain we are about the gods, mankind in general believes in them.

Itaque cum omnium gentium de dis immortalibus, quamvis incerta sit vol ratio vel origo, maneat tamen firma consensio, neminem fero tanta audacia. . . nescio ...qui hanc religionem tam vetustam, tarn utilem, tam salubrem dissolvere aut infirmare nitatur (VIII 1).

The Stoics had used the argument of universal consent to prove the existence of the gods (II 5, 6). History attests to this, and proves it. People began to employ religious practices to obtain divine recompense or approval, or to divert the wrath of the gods. People have offered themselves up, and their sacrifice was divinely attested. Quite often disdain for the auguries has resulted in calamity (VII: 1-5).

Stoicism attached much importance to divination, and regretted its negligence (II 8-10). Even sleep teaches us about the gods.

Etiam per quietem deos videmus,
audimus, agnoscimus (VII 6).

According to Cotta, the Stoics believed that dreams were given directly by the gods to every individual (III 93).

Nature's order, founded on divine laws, is eternal.

. . . naturae divinis legibus constitutus
aeternus ordo (XI 1).

Apparently some Stoics did not regard it as impossible that the world might be eternal, although they reckoned also with the possibility of an eventual conflagration (II 85).

Epicureanism

All things are formed by the fortuitous concourse of atoms. They are born, grow up and die again. How, therefore can it be assented that a certain God is the craftsman of these things?

Sint principio omnium semina natura in se coeunte densata, quis hic auctor est? Sint fortuitis concursionibus totius mundi membra coalita, digesta, formata, quis deus machinator? Sidera licet ignis accenderit et caelum licet sua materia suspenderit, licet terram fundaverit pondere et mare licet influxerit e liquore unde haec religio, unde formido quae superstitio est? Homo et animal omne quod nascitur, inspiratur, attollitur, elementorum ut voluntaria concretio est, in quae rursum homo et animal omne dividitur, solvitur, dissipatur (V 7, 8).

The Epicureans held it as an absolute truth that the world came into existence by chance, and that no God had been involved in this (I 20, 53).

The God the Christians invented, is a prying busybody who even checks out people's hidden thoughts (X 5).

Epicurean philosophers liked to poke fun at the Stoic idea of God, saying that he had made the earth by means of bellows and anvils, and that he was an eternal, frightening bully of a taskmaster, meddling in everything (I 54, 56). But it is all morbid imagination, and, at best, poetical fancy.

Omnia ista figmenta male sanae opinionis
et inepta solacia a poetis fallacibus indul-
cedinem carminis lusa a vobis nimirum
credulis in deum vestrum turpiter reformata
sunt (XI 9).

And so did the Epicureans reject most Stoic ideas about God, and decried them as dreams of madness, and as almost as absurd as poetical works (I 42). The Christians are so foolish that they do not see that their present suffering disclaims

entirely their hope for eternal bliss. In fact, this hope is just a means to solace them for their earthly pain, and seems to be a reaction against their fear of punishment in the hereafter (IX 5; XII 1, 3; cf XXXV 3).

Caecilius' use of Epicurean, Stoic and Academic arguments, then, is about equally divided. What is so striking is that he employs Epicurean and Academic dogmas against Christianity, and Stoic doctrines in support of his pagan beliefs.

Caecilius' belief, then, is a syncretic conglomerate of three systems in support of his pagan faith. It is obvious that there are some inherent incompatibilities in it. On the one hand he believes in divination, and the sacrifice of the Decii, but on the other hand he sides with the Epicurean belief that the world has come about through chance. It would

have been more consistent to become either completely Epicurean, or Stoic, or Academic.

However, the make-up of his personal background did not allow this. We can surmise with reasonable certainty that originally he was a pagan not given to philosophical speculation. However, Christianity being a more thorough order of thought, he was forced by its challenge to take refuge in various non-Christian philosophies. And this diversified technique only made his case weaker. The artificial nature of his reaction can be seen in his stating that the natural order is eternal, something that both the Epicureans and Stoics denied. In all likelihood he made this violent reaction against the Christian belief that God will end the world, and judge it. But his greatest weakness is shown in the fact that on the one hand he employs the Epicurean argument of creation-by-chance, but on the other hand states

that the natural order has been established by divine laws.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that at the end of Octavius' discourse he succumbs to Christianity. We can be sure that in the process of his transition from pagan to Christian he has experienced many a change of emotion. As a pagan he could not become an Epicurean or Stoic, given the force of the Academic position in his argument. He is, therefore, irritated by the Stoical certainty of Octavius' attitude. He misses this certainty because he simply cannot embrace any of the major pre-Christian schools.

That is why, in his ambivalent situation, he takes recourse to the Academic stance that the truth just cannot be ascertained altogether. We suspect that he could not espouse the Academic opinions completely, not only because he sympathized with various Stoic beliefs, but also because Christianity

presented certain answers that went beyond Stoicism, and as such weakened the Academic stance. In this difficult position rested the choice between Epicureanism or Christianity.

The fact that eventually he opted for Christianity shows that this system, in the way it was presented to him, had more in common with his own syncretic background than with Epicureanism. This is indeed evident from Octavius' defence, which tends to incorporate various ideas from the different philosophies. This incorporation must have given Caecilius the feeling that not everything was lost. And thus, in the end, he saw no objection to becoming a Christian.

We conclude that Caecilius' discourse is a characteristic, last, desperate attempt of paganism, that it had much in common with Stoicism and the Academy, and that Epicureanism was just employed

as an awkward but convenient stick with which to beat the Christian idea of God. Under the pressure of that idea the most logical thing was to become either completely Epicurean or Christian. For any middle-ground position was too inherently inconsistent. Caecilius chose the latter, because Christianity, although it was opposed to paganism, had more similarities with his own idiosyncratic conception. The jump to Epicureanism was too big because he had hardly anything in common with it. This shows that either he did not know Epicureanism well enough, or that he did know it, but did not approve of it, or possibly, that he had a passing knowledge of it, but that his intuition had stopped him along the way.

The Case For Christianity

Octavius seems to have had very little in common with either the Academy or the Epicureans . In fact those instances, where his stance can be termed "academic" -- for instance his views on auspices (XXVI) and various superstitions, such as the temple of Fever (XXV 81, DND III 63) --it can equally be called Epicurean, simply because the stance on these matters is shared by both schools.

Octavius refers only twice directly to Epicurean philosophy, in the one instance to their belief that the world is not eternal (XXXIV 3), in the other to Epicurus' posing nature as the supreme creator (XIX 8).¹ According to the Epicureans everything has come into existence by chance, and will come to an end by chance. Logically, this applies also to the entire world (I 20). The world having been created by the laws of chance, there is no need of a creator

(I 53).² Octavius gives these references in answer to Caecilius' claim that the order of nature is eternal, and that there is no creator.

Octavius' discourse, then, draws mostly on Stoicism. There are many statements that are virtually Stoic, and which we know well from the *De Natura Deorum*. Since they are identical, it is unnecessary to give them here; for purposes of comparison, however, an appendix is attached, in which the stoic tenets as stated in the *Octavius* are arranged categorically, together with their counterparts from the *De Natura Deorum*, from which they may reasonably be assumed to derive.

We are only interested, in this section, what could be called the Christianizing of the pre-Christian schools, Christianity seems to have a certain capacity for integrating other points of view into its system. It has almost always done this wherever it penetrated,

although this capacity has often degenerated into a tendency inconsistent with its most basic premises.

It is in this light that we must see Octavius' defense against Caecilius' challenge, for he beats him with his own weapons, and on his own ground. First, he opposes the flaws and faults in his attack. This prepares the way for a barrage of Stoic fire. And then the door has been opened for a flow of Christian ideas that are backed up by a copious stream of quotations from a great variety of sources.

After unnerving Caecilius, Octavius employs a variety of Stoic arguments, all of which hinge upon the idea of a teleological design (XVI 5- XVIII 1). Then he adds some ideas from his Christian background, namely that God not only takes care of the universe in its entirety, but that He pays attention to the details as well, unlike Stoic Providence. The

argument of the house he stretches to incorporate all the stars.

In this he clearly goes beyond the Stoics, who believed that the stars were gods, moving by their voluntary power. Also he shows that Providence is not the united power of a collectivity of gods, but the universal government of one, supreme God. This he attempts to prove with different kinds of evidence, such as the ending in bloodshed of many historical monarchies, and the fact that bees and cattle have one leader (XVIII 2-7).

He then cites a number of philosophers from Thales to Plato, showing that in everyone he finds something he can agree with. Thales believed in a divine mind that formed all things out of "water". Anaximenes posed "air" as an infinite and immeasurable god. Pythagoras' idea of God was a mind that permeates the entire universe. Anaxa-

goras regarded God as an infinite intelligence that gives life to everything, and so on. Octavius sees something good even in Epicurus, who put nature above the gods (XIX 4-15).

Like the Academy, he throws the Stoic interpretations overboard as mistaken. To accomplish this he quotes also from sources besides the *De Natura Deorum*, and tries to establish that the gods were men (XX). In providing this answer he attempts to go beyond the Academy.

So, from various sources he gives evidence that the auguries were plain frauds (XXVT 1-6). Here again he goes beyond the Academy, not only in research, but also in adducing the theory that demons are behind these and other lies. Demonology opens the second half of Octavius' discourse, which draws upon entirely other sources, and thus is beyond the scope of this thesis. As far as sources are

concerned, Caecilius' attack relies mostly on the *De Natura Deorum*. But he certainly does not employ it as the only guide. Octavius goes far beyond the *De Natura Deorum*, and, although Cicero's work fulfills a very essential function, the sum of other sources is greater.

However, it must be said that no single source by itself is used as widely as the *De Natura Deorum*, not even the Bible. In fact, there is not one direct reference to Christ or any scripture. It seems that Octavius in his defense took the latter for granted, and restricted himself, more or less, to Caecilius' background, to show that he was wrong even on his own terms. Also anybody that looks for an answer to the sensitive questions of Cotta about the problem of good and evil, is bound to be disappointed. Probably it is because Caecilius, in his attack on Christianity, never posed this problem, and thus Octavius never broached it.

CONCLUSION

In reflecting on the *De Natura Deorum* and the *Octavius*, it must be said that the former gives an impression of the state of things in pre-Christian philosophy, and that the latter is one of the first Latin Christian apologetics.³ The notable difference between the two is the conspicuous absence of something like the Academy in the *Octavius*.

Minucius Felix, who presides as arbiter over Caecilius and Octavius, is himself a Christian, and as such of course cannot, like Cotta, criticize the other two. The reason behind this difference might be said to be that Christianity solved a number of problems, and went far beyond both Stoicism, the Academy, and the deistic aspect of Epicureanism. In this situation anyone that disagreed with Christianity had the option of becoming either a heretic or an

atheist, paganism no longer being philosophically defensible.

The *De Natura Deorum* and the *Octavius* form important cogs in the wheel of the history of human thinking. The old questions of 'where do we come from,' 'who are we,' 'for what purpose do we exist,' and 'where are we going' have remained basically the same. It is the answers to these questions that vary from time to time, from continent to continent, and even from person to person.

NOTES

1. It must be realized that Caecilius' arguments of universal consent and of the lawless reign of chance, can also be ranked under Epicureanism

2. It seems that Octavius, who recognizes God in nature, and, of course above nature, thinks that Epicurus, in declaring nature the creator of the universe (DND I 53), unwittingly was referring to God!

3. According to Armstrong (*An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*) the first apologists wrote in Greek, of whom Justin is the most famous.

Appendix

Octavius' use of Stoicism in the DND.

<i>Exist. of gods</i>		<i>Nature of gods</i>	
<u>O</u>	<u>DND</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>DND</u>
XVII 3,4,6	II 15,16	XIX 4	I 25
7,8,	II 93	5	I 26
XIII 4	II 17	6,7	I 28
5	II 73-80	7	I 32
XX 3	II 5	8	I 29,35
		9	I 35
		10,11	I 36-39
		12	I 41
		13	I 37
		14	I 30
		XX 6	II 59-72
		XXI 1,2	II 59-72
		XXIII 7	II 41
		XXV 8	III 63

<i>Nature</i>		<i>Humankind</i>	
<u>O</u>	<u>DND</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>DND</u>
XVII 5, 10	II 220-22	XVI 5	II 153
6,9	II 130-32	5	II 147
6	II 156	XVII 2	II 140
XXXIV 2,3	II 118	6	II 155
	I 20	XVIII 1	II 133-146

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Armstrong, A. H. *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*. London: Methuen & Co.Ltd., 1959.

Bailey, C. *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928.

Liddell and Scott. *Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Rackham, H. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum with an English Translation*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1933.

Rendall, G.H. *Minucius Felix with an English Translation*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1931.

