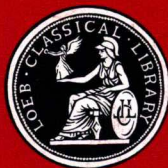


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CICERO
NATURE OF THE GODS
ACADEMICS



Translated by
H. RACKHAM

CICERO

DE NATURA DEORUM

ACADEMIC
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DE NATURA DEORUM

INTRODUCTION

SUBJECT.—In *De Natura Deorum* Cicero put before Roman readers the theological views of the three schools of philosophy that were of chief importance in his day and in the two preceding centuries, the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Academic.

POST-ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY.—In spite of the strong antagonism between the Epicureans and the Stoics, their doctrines had features in common which indeed characterized all the thought of the period. From Aristotle onward Greek philosophy became systematic ; it fell into three recognized departments, Logic, Physics, and Ethics, answering the three fundamental questions of the human mind : (1) How do I know the world ? (2) What is the nature of the world ? (3) The world being what it is, how am I to live in it so as to secure happiness ? And in answer to these questions the Stoics and the Epicureans were agreed (1) that the senses are the sole source of knowledge, (2) that matter is the sole reality, and (3) that happiness depends on peace of mind, undisturbed by passions, fears, and desires. But the ethical systems that they based on these first principles were fundamen-

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tally opposed ; for Epicurus taught that peace of mind is won by liberating the will from nature's law, the Stoics that it comes by submitting to it. Moreover, though both were materialistic, in their detailed systems of nature they differed widely.

EPICUREAN THEOLOGY.—With both schools alike, Theology fell under the second department of philosophy, Physics. But with Epicurus it was only an appendix to his main theory of nature. This he based upon the atomism of Democritus, holding that the real universe consists in innumerable atoms of matter moving by the force of gravity through an infinity of empty space. Our world and all its contents, and also innumerable other worlds, are temporary clusters of atoms fortuitously collected together in the void ; they are constantly forming and constantly dissolving, without plan or purpose. There are gods, because all men believe in them and some men have seen them, and all sensations are true, and so are all beliefs if uncontradicted by sensations. The gods (like everything else) consist of fortuitous clusters of atoms, and our perceptions of them (as of everything else) are caused by atomic films floating off from the surface of their forms and impinging on the atoms of our minds. But it is impious to fancy that the gods are burdened with the labour of upholding or guiding the universe ; the worlds go on of themselves, by purely mechanical causation ; the gods live a life of undisturbed bliss in the *intermundia*, the empty regions of space between the worlds.

STOIC THEOLOGY.—The Stoics, on the contrary, held that the universe is controlled by God, and in the last resort is God. The sole ultimate reality is the divine Mind, which expresses itself in the world-process.

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But only matter exists, for only matter can act and be acted upon; mind therefore is matter in its subtlest form, Fire or Breath or Aether. The primal fiery Spirit creates out of itself the world that we know, persists in it as its heat or soul or 'tension,' is the cause of all movement and all life, and ultimately by a universal conflagration will reabsorb the world into itself. But there will be no pause: at once the process will begin again, unity will again pluralize itself, and all will repeat the same course as before. Existence goes on for ever in endlessly recurring cycles, following a fixed law or formula (λόγος); this law is Fate or Providence, ordained by God: the Stoics even said that the 'Logos' is God. And the universe is perfectly good: badness is only apparent, evil only means the necessary imperfection of the parts viewed separately from the whole.

The Stoic system then was determinist: but in it nevertheless they found room for freedom of the will. Man's acts like all other occurrences are the necessary effects of causes; yet man's will is free, for it rests with him either willingly to obey necessity, the divine ordinance, or to submit to it with reluctance. His happiness lies in using his divine intellect to understand the laws of the world, and in submitting his will thereto.

ACADEMIC SCEPTICISM AND THE LATER REACTION.—The Academic position in Theology was not dogmatic at all, but purely critical. Within a century of Plato's death his school had been completely transformed by Arcesilas, its head in the middle of the third century B.C.; he imported into it the denial of the possibility of knowledge that had been set up as a philosophical system by the Sceptic Pyrrho two

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generations before. Arcesilas was regarded as having refounded the school, which was now called the Second or New Academy. Arcesilas's work was carried further a century later by Carneades, who employed his acute logic in demolishing the natural theology of the Stoics. The next head but one, Philo, Cicero's first Academic master, set on foot a reaction to a more dogmatic position; he asserted that the Academy had not really changed its principles since Plato, and that his predecessors, though attacking the 'criterion' of the Stoics, had not meant to deny all possibility of knowledge: there was a 'clearness' about some sense-impressions that carried conviction of their truth. Philo's successor Antiochus went further and abandoned scepticism altogether; he maintained that the Academy *had* lost the true doctrine of Plato, and he professed to recover it, calling his school the 'Old Academy.'

CICERO'S WORK IN PHILOSOPHY. — Cicero studied philosophy in his youth under the heads of all the three leading schools, for Philo of the Academy, Diodotus the Stoic, and Phaedrus the Epicurean all came to Rome to escape the disturbances of the Mithridatic War. He gave two more years to study in his maturity; for at the age of twenty-seven he withdrew for a time from public life, spent six months at Athens studying philosophy under the Epicureans Phaedrus and Zeno, and the Academic Antiochus, and then passed on to Rhodes for rhetoric. There he met Posidonius, who was now the leading Stoic, as Diodotus had stayed in Rome as a guest at Cicero's house and resided there till his death. When Cicero went home and resumed his public career, he still continued his studies in his intervals of leisure, as appears

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from many passages in his Letters. And when under the Triumvirate his career flagged, he turned more and more to letters. After his return from exile in 57 B.C. he wrote *De Oratore*, *De Republica*, and *De Legibus* (his earliest essay in rhetoric, *De Inventione*, had been written before he was twenty-five). Rhetoric and political science again engaged him on his return to Rome after reconciliation with Caesar in 46 B.C. ; and early in 45, after the death of his daughter and the final downfall of Pompey's party at Pharsalus, he retired to a country-house and gave himself entirely to study and to writing. He seems to have conceived the idea of doing a last service to his country by making the treasures of Greek thought accessible to Roman readers. His intention is described in the preface to *De Finibus* (i. 1-13), in which he commends the book to his friend Brutus ; no doubt it was presented to Brutus when he visited Cicero in August (*Ad Att.* xiii. 44). Cicero went on with his work through the following year, after the assassination of Caesar in March, till in the autumn he flung himself again into the arena by attacking Antony with the *Philippics* ; and this led on to his proscription and his death in December 43.

Thus, excepting the treatises named above, the whole of Cicero's important work in the region of thought was accomplished in 46-44 B.C., within the space of two years.

Cicero's service to philosophy must not be underrated. In writing to Atticus (xii. 52) he himself took a modest view : ' You will say " What is your method in compositions of this kind ? " They are mere transcripts, and cost comparatively little labour ; I supply only the words, of which I have a copious flow.' But

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elsewhere he rates his work rather higher : ' As my habit is, I shall draw from the fountains of the Greeks at my own judgement and discretion ' (*Off.* i. 6), and ' I do not merely perform the office of a translator, but apply my own judgement and my own arrangement ' (*Fin.* i. 6). His method was unambitious : he took some recent handbook of one or other of the leading schools of philosophy and reproduced it in Latin ; but he set passages of continuous exposition in a frame of dialogue, and he added illustrations from Roman history and poetry. His object was to popularize among his fellow-countrymen the work of the great masters of thought ; and he had made the masters' thought his own, having read widely and having heard the chief teachers of the day. But to learning and enthusiasm he did not add depth of insight or scientific precision. Nevertheless he performed a notable service to philosophy. With the Greek schools it had now fallen into crabbed technicality : Cicero raised it again to literature, so commending it to all men of culture ; and he created a Latin philosophic terminology which has passed into the languages of modern Europe.

N.D. : DATE OF COMPOSITION.—In the preface to *De Divinatione*, book ii., Cicero gives an account of his philosophical authorship. We read there (§ 3) that he finished his three books *De Natura Deorum* after he had published *Tusculan Disputations* ; and that then, to complete his treatment of the subject, he began *De Divinatione*, intending to add a treatise *De Fato*. The preface quoted was written soon after Caesar's death, but the work itself before it (*id.* § 7), as was *De Natura Deorum* (see i. 4). Cicero's letter to Atticus dated the Ides of June in 45 B.C. (*Att.* xiii. 8) shows

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him engaged upon the whole subject ; he requests Atticus to send him ' Brutus's epitome of the works of Caelius,' which he quotes *N.D.* ii. 8 and several times in *De Divinatione*, and ' Philoxenus's copy of Panaetius's *Περὶ Πρωτοίας*,' which he follows at *Div.* ii. 97 and quotes *N.D.* ii. 118. In a letter to Atticus a little later (xiii. 8. 1) occur the words ' Before dawn, as I was writing against the Epicureans'—a reference to Cotta's speech in *N.D.* i. ; and the next day he writes (*Att.* xiii. 39. 2) ' I am very busy writing ; send me . . . Φαίδρου Περὶ Θεῶν'—which he unquestionably required for *N.D.* i. He was therefore engaged on this treatise in the summer of 45 B.C., while at the same time occupied on the *Tusculans*, which he published first.

N.D. NOT COMPLETELY FINISHED.—There is no evidence that he ever actually published *N.D.* ; although he speaks of it as ' finished' (*Div.* ii. 3) it clearly lacks his final touches. The dialogue as it stands is one continuous conversation, ending at nightfall (iii. 94), but traces remain suggesting that it was first cast into three conversations held on three successive days, each book containing one ; see ii. 73, " As you said yesterday" (with note *ad loc.*) ; iii. 2, " I hope you have comewellprepared" ; iii. 18, " All that you said the day before yesterday to prove the existence of the gods."

CONTENTS OF *N.D.*—*De Natura Deorum* opens with a preface dedicating the work to Cicero's friend Brutus. Cicero explains how philosophy occupies his retirement from public life and consoles him in the bereavement of his daughter's death ; and how the undogmatic style of the Academic school of thought, of which he was an adherent, was especially suited to the subject of theology. The scene of the dialogue

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is then laid and the characters introduced. The theology of Epicurus is taken first. It is expounded by Velleius (§§ 18-56), who precedes his exposition by a preliminary attack on the theology and cosmogony of Plato and the Stoics, and a refutation (§§ 25-41) of the theology of the other schools from Thales downward. He is answered (§§ 57 to end) by the Academic Cotta, who demolishes the Epicurean theology, and pronounces Epicureanism to be really fatal to religion (§ 115).

In Book ii. the Stoic theology is set out by Balbus, who proves (1) the divine existence (§§ 4-44), and expounds (2) the divine nature (§§ 45-72), (3) the providential government of the world (§§ 73-153), and (4) the care of providence for man (§§ 154 to end). Cotta again replies, in Book iii., giving the Academic criticism of the Stoic theology under the same four heads: (1) §§ 7-19, (2) §§ 20-64, (3) § 65 (the rest of this division is lost), (4) §§ 66 to end.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.—Thus although as it stands the dialogue is one continuous conversation with the same persons present throughout, it falls into two separate parts, in which two different speakers take the lead; but the rejoinder in both cases is made by Cotta. Velleius the Epicurean speaker and Balbus the Stoic are only known to us from this book, except that *De Oratore* (iii. 78) gives Velleius as a friend of the orator L. Licinius Crassus, and mentions 'duo Balbi' among the Stoics of the day. Both spokesmen, and also Cotta the Academic, are spoken of here as leaders in their schools (i. 16). Cotta had already been commended to Cicero by Atticus (*Att.* xiii. 19. 3), and had been mentioned by Cicero before in *De Oratore* (iii. 145) as having joined the Academy; Cicero

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in his youth had listened eagerly to his oratory (*Brutus*, 305, 317); he had been banished in 90 B.C. under the Varian law (*De Or.* iii. 11), had returned to Rome 82 B.C. (*Brut.* 311), and became consul 75 B.C. and then proconsul of Gaul, but died before his triumph. Cicero is almost a *κωφὸν πρόσωπον*; in the Introduction (i. 16 f.) he makes a complimentary reply to Cotta's greeting, and one other short remark when Velleius says that as another pupil of Philo he will be a valuable ally for Cotta. Cotta in his reply to the Epicurean exposition asks leave (ii. 104) to quote Cicero's translation of the astronomical poem of Aratus, but Cicero gives his consent by silence. At the close of the work (iii. 95) Cicero ends by noting the impression that the debate had made on his own mind.

SUPPOSED DATE OF THE DIALOGUE.—The imaginary scene of the dialogue may be dated in 77 or 76 B.C. In a list of political murders given by Cotta (iii. 60) the latest is that of Q. Scaevola, which was in 82 B.C. The Stoic professor Posidonius is spoken of as 'the friend of us all' (i. 123), which seems to put the scene after 78 B.C. when Cicero heard him lecture at Rhodes (although he had visited Rome on an embassy from Rhodes in 86 B.C.); but there is no reference to Cotta's consulship, 75 B.C. The date suggested fits in with the reference to P. Vatinius as 'adulescens' (ii. 6); he became quaestor in 63 B.C. when Cicero was consul.

SOURCES OF *N.D.*—It is of interest to try to ascertain the sources from which Cicero gets his materials for the treatise. In the Epicurean's review of the earlier Greek philosophers (i. 25-41) there are references to their works, and later there are allusions to Epicurus's writings (§ 43 *Περὶ Κριτηρίου ἢ Κανόν*, 'a heavenly

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volume,' § 49, and §§ 45 and 85 the *Κύρια Δόγματα*). But there is nothing to prove that Cicero had read these first-hand authorities, and it is more probable that he followed his usual method of adapting his exposition of each division of his treatise from a single recent writer. For the exposition of Epicureanism which forms the first half of Book i. this was probably a work of his master, Zeno. This conjecture has been supported by a curious accident. Among the papyri discovered at Herculaneum in 1752 is a mutilated Epicurean treatise (fully published in a volume of *Herculaneusia* in 1862); there is reason to assign this to Zeno's pupil, Philodemus; and the fragments are enough to show considerable agreement with *N.D. i.* The Epicurean argument in *N.D. i.* has three parts: a general attack on the Platonic and Stoic cosmology, a review of the older philosophers, and an exposition of Epicurean theology. In the papyrus the first part is lost, but it contains the two latter and they correspond very closely with *N.D.*, in spite of some differences; the two books even agree in quotations from Xenophanes, Antisthenes, Aristotle, Chrysippus, and Diogenes of Babylon (*N.D. i.* §§ 31, 32, 33, 41). Mayor thinks that both books take their topics and arguments from Zeno, the teacher of both authors, and as the historical review in both stops at the middle of the second century B.C., Zeno's work may well have been based in turn on one by his predecessor Apollodorus.

Coming to the Academic Cotta's criticism of Epicureanism in the second half of Book i., the Stoic Posidonius is referred to (i. 123) as 'the friend of us all,' and his work *On Nature* is quoted as authority for part of the argument, and may be the source of

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the whole ; there are Stoic touches throughout (§ 80 the jest at the Academy, § 95 the divinity of the universe, § 100 the teleological argument, § 103 beasts born in fire, § 110 virtue as an active principle, § 115 the definitions of piety and holiness, § 121 the union of man and God). But the Stoic origin of the passage is disputed by some authorities, and it has indeed an Academic colouring : it may possibly come, like Book iii., from Clitomachus, the editor of Carneades, though Carneades is nowhere quoted here as he is in Book iii.

For the Stoic system in Book ii. Cicero probably follows Posidonius. He was unlike most of his school (1) in having literary tastes, and using an easy style with historical illustrations, (2) in being interested in science, and (3) in admiring Plato and Aristotle and adapting Stoicism to suit their doctrines. These features are seen in Cicero's exposition : (1) poetic quotations occur in §§ 4, 65, 89, 104-114, 159, and historical illustrations in §§ 6-11, 61, 69, 165 ; (2) § 88 refers to the orrery of Posidonius and to astronomical details, tides, the ether, volcanoes, climate, human diet, the kinship of plant, animal, and human life (an Aristotelian touch, conflicting with the older Stoicism), the eternity of the rational soul (which with the early Stoics perished in the universal Conflagration), the origin of civilization (a rationalization of the myth of the Golden Age) ; (3) Plato is 'the god of philosophers' § 32, and Aristotle is praised §§ 95, 125, and many details are borrowed from him.

The source of the Academic criticism of Stoic theology which occupies Book iii. is certainly Hasdrubal of Carthage, better known under his Greek name of Clitomachus. He was born c. 180 B.C. and went to

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Athens about the age of twenty-five, becoming the pupil of Carneades and succeeding him as head of the Academy. He left voluminous records of the doctrines of his master, who left none. Carneades was the great source of all criticism of the Stoics, especially of their theology: he 'was fond of tilting at the Stoics,' *N.D.* ii. 162. The proof of the mortality of all animal life, *N.D.* iii. 29-34, and the sorites, §§ 43-52, are explicitly taken from Carneades.

MSS.—There are many mss. of Cicero containing *De Natura Deorum*, but few are old and none earlier than the ninth century. All go back to one archetype, as is proved by errors, gaps, and transpositions common to all; but none seems to have been copied directly from it, and there appear to have been two lines of tradition from it, exemplified by two of the oldest mss., which must be deemed the most important; both belonged to Voss and are at Leyden—A dating at the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century, and B a little later. They have many errors and some considerable gaps in common, but differ in many readings and transpositions. The other superior mss. all group with A, viz. V (the Palatine, at Vienna, almost of the same date), N (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, twelfth century, descended from V), O (Bodleian, end of twelfth century); and so do all the inferior copies.

The present edition merely notes at the foot of the page a few of the variants of A and B and of the other mss. (grouped together as *deteriores*) in places where the true reading seems doubtful.

EDITIONS.—For a full view of our evidence for the text the student may be referred to the editions of Plasberg (Leipzig, *ed. major*, 1911, revision announced xviii

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1930, *ed. minor*, 1917). The foundation of modern texts is the edition of Orelli and Baiter (1861), based on five mss., three mentioned above, A, B (called by Orelli P) and V, another at Leyden (Heinsianus, twelfth century), and one at Erlangen, E. The invaluable edition of Joseph Mayor (Cambridge, 1880-1885) also employs evidence collected from twelve other mss. by various scholars, and the texts of the four editions published at the revival of learning, at Venice (A.D. 1508), Paris (1511), Leipzig (1520), and Basel (1534): the sources of these texts are not entirely known to modern scholars. In addition to his elaborate critical notes Mayor supplies the student with an exhaustive accumulation of explanatory and illustrative commentary.

H. R.

1930.

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