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# "The Weapons of Their Warfare"
## A Study in Early Christian Polemic

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Illuminating for an understanding of the patristic mind in general is an examination of the techniques and forms of rebuttal that the fathers employed in opposing Epicureanism. Basically these methods fall into four categories: religious answers, debaters' tricks, stock arguments, and appeals to "science."

### I. RELIGIOUS ANSWERS

Only rarely does one find a father offering in opposition to the teachings of Epicurus a simple and straightforward presentation of the New Testament *kerygma* as its own best apology. In this respect Tertullian is almost unique. Writing against Marcion's "Epicurean" refusal to allow anger as an attribute of God on the ground that if God is angry or jealous or roused or grieved, He must therefore be corrupted and necessarily die, Tertullian replies: "We are taught God by the prophets and by Christ, not by the philosophers nor by Epicurus. . . . Fortunately, however, it is a mark of Christians that they believe God did in fact die and yet is living forever" (*Adv. Marc.* ii. 16.2-3). In the same treatise Tertullian boldly claims for the incarnate second person of the Trinity all the attributes that Marcion regards as unworthy of his "invisible, unattainable, tranquil" deity, the "god of the philosophers":[1]

> All that you criticize as unworthy [of God] will be attributed to the Son, who is seen, heard, met with; the Father's witness and servant; in himself combining God and man; God in his merits, man in his weaknesses, so as to bestow on man as much as he takes away from God. In short, all that you find disgraceful in my God is the holy secret of mankind's salvation! (Ibid., 27)

#### *Dogmatic Considerations*

After Tertullian the evangelical note disappears almost entirely from the fathers' anti-Epicurean polemic, although we still find an occasional attempt to deal with the issue on religious rather than rationalistic grounds. Ambrose, for example, refuses even to discuss scientific theories underlying such philosophical systems as postulated an eternal or uncreated universe. "To discuss the nature and location of the earth profits us nothing in regard to the life to come; it is sufficient to know the statement of Scripture [Job 26:7] 'that he hung the earth upon nothing'" (*Hex.* i. 6). Religious though this sentiment may be, the center of interest in Ambrose's apologetic has really shifted away from God's

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[1] Cf. *Adv. Marc.*, v. 19, where Tertullian charges Marcion expressly with having taken his doctrine of God from the school of Epicurus.

saving deed in Jesus Christ as the real key to all divine activity. Instead, the emphasis is now laid rather on God's eternal and omnipotent will as the answer to all objections offered to the Christian world view. "It is by the will of God that the earth remains unmoveable and stands forever" (ibid.). It is to this same unmotivated will of God, rather than to His grace in Christ, that Augustine appeals in countering the Epicurean question raised by the Manichees: Why did God after so long a time suddenly decide to create?

> Because he willed to do so! For the will of God is the cause of heaven and earth, and for that reason the will of God is greater than heaven and earth. Now he who says, "Why did he will to make heaven and earth?" asks for something greater than the will of God; but nothing greater can be found. (*Gen. c. Man.* i. 4)[2]

Another father who tries to give a religious answer to the old Epicurean conundrum is Orosius. Less acute in logic than his brilliant friend from Hippo, he manages in this instance at least to remain closer to the distinctively Christian idea that God's redemptive activity must be a part of any answer to unbelief's criticism.

> To these persons [who ask why God waited so long before sending his Son to make known the worship and knowledge of himself] I could truthfully answer that the human race was at the outset created and established for this purpose, that by living under the sway of religion it might peaceably and without toil merit eternal life as the fruit of its obedience. But having abused the goodness of the Creator who had favored it with freedom, it turned its liberty into obstinacy and slipped from contempt of God into forgetfulness of him. So, as things are, the patience of God is just either way; since even when he is held in contempt, he does not utterly destroy anyone to whom he wishes to be merciful, but as long as it is his will, by his power he permits his despiser to be afflicted with troubles. Consequently, it is always just for him to apply whatever discipline he wishes to such a person in his ignorance, to whom at length upon repentance he will lovingly restore the riches of his former grace. (*Hist.* vii. 1)

But Augustine is himself also capable of a more evangelical response to an Epicurean proposition. This becomes evident, for instance, in a sermon in which he discusses the nature of true happiness, *beata vita.* Ask the Epicurean, he says, what it is that makes a man happy, and he will answer: pleasure of the body. Ask a Stoic, and he will say: virtue of the mind. But ask a Christian, and he will say: it is the gift of God.[3] "Incomparably preferable to the vileness of the Epicureans and the pride of the Stoics" is this doctrine of the Christians which finds the only way to true happiness in the Lord who says [John 14:6]: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (*Serm.* 150. 8)

Ambrose strikes a similar note in discussing what constitutes the chief good of man. After a capsule summary (borrowed from Cicero)[4] of the views of Epicurus, his follower Callipho, and the Peripatetic Diodorus, Ambrose sets in opposition to them the Christian doctrine that man's chief good is eternal life, which in turn

[2] See below, p. 439, for another part of Augustine's answer to this question.

[3] Apparently *donum Dei* involves an appositional genitive; the gift is not only from God, it is God.

[4] Cf. Cicero, *De fin.* ii. 6. 19; *Acad.* ii. 42. 131.

rests on knowledge of Christ and on good works as the fruit of this saving knowledge. He then continues as follows:

> The Gospel furnishes proof for both these statements. For concerning knowledge the Lord Jesus said [John 17:3]: "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." And concerning works he answers [Matt. 19:29]: "Everyone that hath forsaken house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." (*De off. min.* ii. 2)

### *Citations from Scripture*

Scattered instances of patristic opposition to several other points of Epicurean teaching occur which are based, if not on the Gospel in its deepest sense, at least on the Scripture as God's revealed Word. These citations of Scripture against the Epicureans exhibit a wide variety of exegetical techniques.

Theophilus, one of the earlier apologists, offers a close paraphrase of Ex. 20:5-6 to support his statement that God is capable of anger — a view which Epicurus, as well as the Stoics, had vigorously contested. Although Theophilus has been called theologically barren and philosophically superficial,[5] on this question at least he takes a sounder position than does Lactantius, for instance, in his treatise *De ira.* For in using the Exodus passage as his proof he avoids Lactantius' theological mistake of emphasizing the need for human fear of God's anger as the motivation for holy living. In keeping with the passage, furthermore, he distinguishes, as Lactantius does not, between God's chastisement and His punishment. (*Ad Aut.* i. 3)

Contradicting the Epicurean definition of pleasure as the absence of pain and the related doctrine that pleasure and virtue are inseparable (*Kyr. dox.,* III and IV), Ambrose cites Phil. 3:7-8 in favor of his own contention that "pain does not lessen the pleasure of virtue" — a use of Scripture which has the merit of setting the blessedness offered by the Gospel in strongest opposition to any and all other attractions. (*De off. min.* ii. 4)

A narrowly logical deduction from a literalistic reading of Heb. 1:3 enables Gregory of Nyssa to prove that the Eunomians, who deny the coeternity of the Son with the Father, are in fact disguised Epicureans.

> Since, then, it is their argument that the Son, that is, the brightness of the glory, was not before he was begotten, and since with the non-existence of the brightness, logical consequence abolishes also the permanence of the glory, and since the Father is the glory from which the only-begotten Light beams forth, let these men so prodigious in wisdom consider that they clearly show themselves to be supporters of the Epicurean doctrines, representing atheism under the guise of Christianity. (*C. Eunom.* iii. 6. 53)

Gregory again uses this argument in an expanded form against the Anomoeans, who shared the views of Eunomius (*De deitate Fil. et Sp. S.* 560C ff.).

Against the notion of Epicurus that memory of past pleasures can overbalance present pain, Jerome puts forward the statements of Ecclus. 11:25 and 27, which simply assert the exact opposite (*In Ies.*

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[5] Cf. J. Geffcken, *Zwei griechische Apologeten* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1907), pp. 250—52; R. M. Grant, "Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus," *Harvard Theological Review,* XL, 230.

18. 65. 17 f.). Other fathers also indulge in this unimpressive technique of merely quoting such texts of Scripture as appear, on the face of them at least, to state the precise opposite of the Epicurean view they happen to be combatting. Basil, Filastrius, and John Chrysostom each advance a different passage in rebuttal of the atomist explanation of the world's origin. Basil quotes Gen. 1:1; Filastrius, Heb. 11:3; and Chrysostom, Acts 17:24 (*Hex.* i. 2; *Haer.* 98[126]; *Hom. in Act.* 38. 2). Athanasius, on the other hand, is not content with only a single citation but assembles three passages of identical import to prop up the same negation of the Epicurean view, namely, Gen. 1:1; Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate 1; and Heb. 11:3 — although he is careful first of all to base his refutation on the conventional argument from design (*De incarn.* 2 f.; see below, p. 451). On the question of the innumerable worlds as taught by Epicurus, Filastrius in effect appeals to the silence of Scripture to prove that such a doctrine is untenable. It is an "inane opinion," he declares, "since Scripture has spoken of only one world and has taught concerning only one." (*Haer.* 87[115])[6]

Athenagoras seems to have been the first to characterize Epicurean ethics with the notorious watchword of sensualism that occurs three times in the Bible, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die" (*De res.* 19). In this polemical tactic Athenagoras was imitated by Filastrius (*Haer.* 106[134]), Ambrose ( Ep. 63. 17), and Augustine (*Serm.* 150. 5). But it is only Jerome who finally improves on the imitation by finding a new text to hurl at the carnal-minded Epicureans.

> Eat and drink, and if you please, rise up with Israel to play and sing, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die." Let him eat and drink who after his feasting looks for annihilation and who says with Epicurus, "There is nothing after death, and death itself is nothing." We believe Paul who thunders [1 Cor. 6:13]: "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God will destroy both them and it." (*C. Jov.* ii. 6)

It is not only the literal method of Biblical interpretation that the fathers press into service against Epicureanism, but the allegorical method as well. Trying to dispose of that annoying series of questions which the Epicureans propounded about God's activity before He finally decided "in the beginning" to create the world (see above, p. 437), Augustine resorts to the Alexandrian exegesis which explained that the "beginning" spoken of in Gen. 1:1 is not to be understood in a temporal sense at all. Rather, it refers to the preincarnate Christ, whom early Christian Logos speculation identified with the wisdom of God. Thus it is Christ of whom the writer of Proverbs (8:22) speaks when he calls this wisdom of God "the beginning of His ways."[7] (*Gen. c. Man.* i. 3 f.)

More extensive but easier to understand is Peter Chrysologus' allegorical application of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) to the Gentile peoples in general and to the Epicureans in particular. Preaching on this parable, Peter identifies the prodigal with the Gentiles, that is to say, Greeks, who dissipated the

[6] But for patristic agreement with this Epicurean view cp. Origen, *De princ.* iii. 5. 3, and Basil, *Hex.* iii. 3.

[7] Cf. Theophilus, *Ad Aut.* ii. 10, where Prov. 8:27 is interpreted along the same lines.

property of God the Father in the "brothels" of the philosophical schools. Still not satisfied in their hunger for the truth, they attached themselves to the leading citizen (Satan?) of that country, who sent them to his "country-house" of religious superstitions to feed the swine, namely, the devils, with incense, sacrifices and blood.

> But when the Gentiles found nothing in such things, nothing divine, nothing of benefit for salvation, then despairing of God, of providence, of judgment, and of the future, they descended from the school to the gluttony of the belly, being eager to fill themselves with the husks that the swine did eat. This was the experience of the Epicureans. As they passed through the Platonic and Aristotelian schools and found there no teaching of divinity or of knowledge, they surrendered themselves to Epicurus, the most recent promoter of despair and pleasure; and they ate husks — that is to say, they gaped greedily at the sinfully sweet pleasures of the body, and they gave food and pasture to the devils who are always fattening themselves on the vices and filth of bodies. For just as the man who joins himself to the Lord "is one spirit [with him]," so he who joins himself to the Devil is one devil [with him]. *(Serm.* 5. 199A f.)

A kind of feeble climax in the patristic effort to provide a distinctively Christian or at least Scriptural answer to Epicureanism may be seen in a passage from Augustine's *City of God.* Here the great father appeals to the general Biblical concept of divine omnipotence[8] as an argument against those unbelievers, *infideles,* who (like the Epicureans; cf. Diogenes Laertius, x. 88) refuse to lend credence to any marvelous story for which there is no analogy in their experience of natural phenomena: "Let not the unbelievers make themselves a smoke-screen regarding our knowledge of the way things are, as if even by divine power nothing else could be brought to pass in an object than what they through their human experience have found to be in its nature." (*De Civ. Dei* xxi. 8)

## II. Debaters' Tricks

The preceding paragraphs have presented the fathers' religiously oriented rebuttals of Epicureanism rather fully because these constitute — so far as the writer has been able to discover — the total evidence for what may with some justification be regarded as distinctively Christian counterarguments. But preponderant by far in the patristic opposition to Epicureanism are arguments of a rationalistic nature, whether original with the fathers themselves or drawn from pagan sources. The observation which A. D. Nock makes about Tertullian may well be taken as characterizing almost any early Christian apologist or polemicist: "As a skilful fighter he varied his arguments and his interpretations to suit the exigencies of the particular issue at stake. He could not have allowed himself the luxuries of intellectual honesty and patience, even if such concepts had meant anything to him. There was nothing novel about his two main weapons — on the one hand, philosophical tenets, largely in the forms in which they had been predigested by doxographers, on the other hand, *argumenta ad hominem:* these constituted the stock equipment of Christian apologists."[9]

[8] On the frequent appeal to God's omnipotence in the fathers' defense of the doctrine of the resurrection, cf. H. Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body," *Harvard Theological Review,* XLI (1948), 84.

[9] A. D. Nock, "Tertullian and the Ahori," *Vigiliae Christianae,* IV (1950), 130.

*Philosophers Against Themselves*

One of the prime uses to which the fathers put their doxographical material—in this respect imitating the Skeptics—is to show from the inconsistencies, disagreements, and mutual contradictions of the philosophers that it would be hopeless to seek the real truth from them. An early example of this technique as it is directed against the Epicureans among others appears in Theophilus:

> For because they had fallen in love with a vain and silly notion, all these [philosophers and poets] failed to recognize what was true themselves, and of course failed to direct others to the truth. For the very things they said convict them of speaking at variance with themselves, and the majority of them demolished their own doctrines; for they not only refuted one another, but some actually nullified even their own doctrines. . . . For either they made statements about gods and afterwards taught atheism themselves; or if they even spoke about the world's creation, they finally said that all things came about of their own accord. In fact, even when speaking of providence, they taught to the contrary that the world was unaffected by providence. (*Ad. Aut.* iii. 3)

Theophilus embroiders the same theme throughout his work, often with fantastic blunders of doctrinal ascription. For example, in ii. 4 he makes the Stoics share the theological views of Epicurus; in iii. 6 he assails Epicurus with a reproach more suited to an early Stoic like Chrysippus,[10] namely, that in his writings he sanctioned incest and sodomy; and in iii. 7 he ignorantly creates two philosophical schools of thought out of a single teaching of Epicurus.[11]

Tatian varies the apologetic commonplace only to the extent of dramatizing it: "You follow the doctrines of Plato, and a propagandist for Epicurus raises his shrill voice against you; again, you want to follow Aristotle, and a disciple of Democritus reviles you. . . . You, with your heritage of discordant doctrines, though you have no harmony among yourselves, you go on fighting against the harmonious." (*Orat.* 25)

In at least one passage Tertullian makes the Epicureans the sole victims of this expedient: "That nothing exists after death is dogma in the school of Epicurus. . . . It is enough, however, if Pythagoras, whose opinion is no less important, and Empedocles and the Platonists take the opposite view" (*De res. carn.* i. 4). Elsewhere Tertullian introduces a longer section from the doxography with a conventional gambit: "Even that which they had learned deteriorated into uncertainty, and from one or two drops of truth there arose a flood of arguments. . . . The Platonists, to be sure, held that God feels a concern about things, both as regulator and as judge; the Epicureans regarded him as idle and inactive, and, so to speak, a nobody." (*Ad. nat.* ii. 2. 8; cf. *Apol.* 47. 6)

Additional examples of this weary cliché may be drawn from pseudo-Justin (*Cohort.* 4), Basil (*Hex.* i. 2), and Eusebius (*Theoph.* 11. 49). The last-named adds the wry comment that the philosophers

[10] Cf. Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa,* I (Göttingen, 1948), 138.

[11] R. M. Grant has detected the cause of Theophilus's error here in a careless misreading of his doxographical text. Cf. "The Problem of Theophilus," *Harvard Theological Review,* CLIII (1950), 184.

"split with each other where it was not right to do so, but where it was necessary to put up a fight with all their might, they came to agreement — how I do not know — but above all they agreed in the error of polytheism." And at the head of his list of philosophers he sets the Epicureans, followed by the Stoics, Aristotelians, Platonists, physicists, and even the Skeptics. (Ibid.)

*Appeals to Prejudice*

The time-honored debater's trick of the *ad hominem* argument finds in the fathers some of its most devoted practitioners, and particularly so in their polemic against Epicureanism. A favorite target for this patristic weapon is, as one would expect, the Epicurean ethics. Freedom from pain cannot be the proper end for beings possessed of rational judgment, argues Athenagoras, "for they would have this in common with beings utterly lacking in sensitivity"; neither can it consist in bodily pleasure, even such as that of nourishment, "else a life like the beasts' would have to hold first place." (*De res.* 24; cf. 19)

This appeal to human dignity in contrast to animal existence presently becomes more crass. Clement submits that Epicurus, by placing happiness in not being hungry or thirsty or cold, teaches "as if it were the case of pigs living on filth, rather than that of rational men and philosophers" (*Strom.* ii. 21. 1072B). As Ambrose uses the argument, its snobbish force rests rather on man-to-man than on man-to-animal comparison. One abhors, he says, the advocacy of pleasure or the fear of pain, the former "as frail and effeminate, the latter as unmanly and weak" (*De off. min.* ii. 3. 9). But in another place, applying the argument to those who, like Epicurus, deny God to be the Creator, Ambrose falls back upon the appeal to human superiority over irrational animals (ibid. 13. 49). As an *ad hominem* argument must be reckoned also Augustine's introduction of a quasi-aesthetic consideration when he repudiates the Epicurean subordination of virtue to pleasure on the ground that "such a life is hideous, *deformis,* indeed." (*De Civ. Dei* xix. 1)

Another part of the stock-in-trade of those who debated questions of philosophy in the ancient world was the invoking of the *consensus hominum*[12]; and also to this invalid type of argument, another form of the appeal to prejudice, the fathers were not averse (cf. Minucius Felix 18. 11). A clear instance of its being employed against the Epicureans specifically appears in a passage of Tertullian in which he opposes Epicurus's view of death. "In keeping with the universal opinion of the human race, we affirm death to be 'the debt of nature.' . . . So that already from this fact the stupidity of Epicurus is brought to shame, who says that no such debt pertains to us." (*De an.* 50. 2)

Several of the fathers who attack Epicurus also make use of the rhetorical question which casts doubt on the pragmatic worth of an opponent's beliefs without testing their factual truth. So Theophilus, for instance, asks: "What good did it do Epicurus to promote the dogma that there is no providence? or Empedocles to teach atheism? or Socrates to swear by the dog?" (*Ad Aut.* iii. 2). Tertullian derides the philosophers' concern with physical science: "Plato's form for the world was

[12] A. D. Nock notes a use of this appeal as early as Plato (*Leg.* 887e), *Vigiliae Christianae,* IV (1950), 131.

round. . . . But Epicurus, who had said, 'What is above us is nothing to us,' when he wanted nevertheless to take a look at the sky, found the sun to be a foot in diameter. . . . The Peripatetics marked it out as larger than our world. Now, I ask you, what wisdom is there in this passion for speculation?" (*Ad nat.* ii. 4. 15). And pseudo-Clement makes sure that the reader does not miss the implied denigration of Epicureanism by answering his own rhetorical question: "What benefit have they contributed to the human race who have said that there is no God, but that all things happen by accident and chance? what else but that men, when they hear such things, think that there is no judge, no overseer of things, and are driven headlong without fear of anyone to every deed that rage or avarice or lust may dictate." (*Recogn.* x. 50)

### *Begging the Question*

Another dodge favored by the fathers in their argumentation against Epicureanism is the *petitio principii.* As part of an inquiry into the nature of the soul Tertullian discusses the question of sleep. He rejects the Epicurean definition out of hand, however, not because of any demonstrated flaws in the theory but because "the immortality of the soul does not allow us to believe that sleep is a diminution of the animal spirit." (*De an.* 43. 2-5)

In a homily on the first Psalm, Hilary of Poitiers aims to refute those who assert that the world is fortuitous in its origin and not the creation of God. But his argument against these Epicurean thinkers amounts to nothing more than a repetition of the charge itself, namely, that they deny God's creation.

> Therefore, all the counsel of these men is vacillating, fickle, and aimless. . . . They could not bring themselves to include in their teaching the doctrine of a Creator of the world; for when you ask about the cause, beginning, and duration of the world, whether the world is for man or man for the world, the reason of death, its extent and nature, their talk always goes round and round these problems of their own impiety and keeps going past without finding a place for them to take their stand in these questions. (*Hom. in Ps.* 1.7)

It hardly needs mention that the Epicureans in fact did furnish detailed answers to the questions Hilary rhetorically puts to them here.

Jerome, too, resorts to this question-begging technique when he rejects the Epicurean belief that in an infinity of ages any given combination of atoms, and thus any event, could ultimately repeat itself. This, he argues, is impossible, for "otherwise Judas has frequently committed treason and Christ has often suffered for us; and all other things which have happened or are going to happen will in similar fashion return to the same periods of time" [13] which, of course, is precisely the point which the alleged Epicurean principle would uphold. (*Comm. in Eccl.* 1)

### *Misinterpretations*

Occasionally the fathers effect a rebuttal of sorts by means of some misapprehension — intentional or otherwise — of the Epicurean doctrine in question. A case in point is Tertullian's lengthy discussion of the reliability of sense perceptions in his

[13] Cf. Usener, frg. 266. It seems likely, however, that Jerome is mixing elements of the Stoic cyclical doctrine with the Epicurean inference.

treatise on the soul. Although he speaks favorably of the Epicurean theory here (which in fact is generally acceptable to him), he finally rejects it too and develops a countertheory of his own. The Epicurean belief that the source of all errors lies in the δόξα he alters so as to lay responsibility for erroneous opinion entirely on external causes that compel the senses to react as they do and in turn to produce the illusion. "It is the causes that deceive the senses and through the senses also the opinions" (*De an.* 17. 8). The mistake of the Epicureans, according to Tertullian, is that "they separated opinion from sensation, and sensation from the soul; but whence does opinion come, if not from sensation?" (ibid. 4 f.). By thus making the δόξα completely dependent on the senses, Tertullian manages to preserve the unity of the soul, which is a paramount consideration for him. "Whence does sensation come," he asks, "if not from the soul? in fact, if the body lacked a soul, it would also lack sensation. So then, sensation comes from the soul, and opinion from sensation; and the whole thing is soul." (Ibid.)

His refutation, however, hinges on an imprecise representation of the Epicurean view. Whereas the Epicureans regarded the δόξα as responsible for error only through negligence of its function (such as failure to take all relevant factors into account — in which case it was a remiss ψευδὴς δόξα), but otherwise capable of gaining correct information through the senses;[14] Tertullian uses the Latin equivalent *opinio* as though it meant the ψευδὴς δόξα only. "Whence does opinion come, if not from sensation? for if the sense of sight did not perceive a round tower, there would be no [false] opinion of its roundness" (ibid.). So he has no difficulty in knocking down the straw Epicurean he has set up.

Another kind of misapprehension shows up in a passage of Eusebius where with devious logic he produces a startling disjunctive syllogism to the effect that either the Epicureans (as well as other philosophers) are not wise or else the oracles are not of the gods. For if the Epicureans had been truly wise, they would through the oracles have consulted the gods regarding the theological and philosophical points in controversy. In particular, the Epicureans needed to learn not to be atheistic, nor to subject themselves to pleasure, nor to be so foolish as to attribute to indivisible little bodies the power to create the world. If, on the other hand, the Epicureans and other philosophers were right in not consulting the oracles, that only proves that these were not divine and that the popular gods did not exist at all in spite of the recognition accorded them by the philosophers themselves (*Theoph.* ii. 50). The misapprehension lies, of course, in Eusebius's ignoring of Epicurus's denial of the validity of mantic testimony by virtue of his very conception of the gods to begin with.

One may hardly doubt that it is a deliberate misapprehension of Epicurus by means of which Tertullian offers a sophistic refutation of the Second Principal Doctrine. As Waszink points out,[15] the sophistry depends on a literalistic reading of the text, whereby it is made to appear that

[14] Cf. *Kyr. dox.* XXIV; Usener, frg. 248.

[15] J. H. Waszink, *Tertulliani de anima* (Amsterdam, 1957), p. 459.

Epicurus regarded death itself as suffering dissolution, even though it is altogether clear that when he referred to τὸ διαλυθέν, Epicurus had in mind not death but the sentient human being.

> Epicurus, however, in his rather well-known doctrine denied that death pertains to us. For that which is dissolved, he says, is without sensation, and that which is without sensation is nothing to us. However, it is not death itself that is dissolved and lacks sensation, but the human being who suffers death. Yet even Epicurus granted that suffering is a property of the being whose activity it is. Now, if it is a property of man to suffer death, which dissolves the body and destroys sensation, how absurd is the denial that such a potential pertains to man. . . . Death [according to Epicurus] is nothing to us; in that case, life is nothing to us either; for if that by which we are dissolved has no relation to us, then also that by which we are compacted must be unconnected with us. If being deprived of sensation is nothing to us, neither is acquiring sensation anything to us. But let him who destroys the soul also destroy death as well; as for us, we shall treat of death as posthumous life and as another province of the soul, on the grounds that we at any rate pertain to death, even if it does not pertain to us. (*De an.* 42. 1-3)

Sometimes a father's attempt to refute an Epicurean doctrine is patently illogical. While this is perhaps not surprising when it occurs in a work as romantic and artificial as the *Recognitiones* of pseudo-Clement (see below, p. 456), it is hardly what one expects from a theologian of Basil's training and stature. Yet he too is not above having recourse to rhetorical bombast in assailing the cosmology of the Epicureans and other atomists. According to their view, he says, atoms reunite or separate to produce births and deaths, and "the more durable bodies owe their relative permanence to the stronger mutual adhesion of their atoms"; to which he appends the exclamation: "It is truly a spider's web that those writers weave who suggest such feeble and insubstantial origins for heaven and earth and sea!" (*Hex.* i. 2). The vividness of the metaphor serves to conceal the fact that as a rebuttal it is weak and illogical. For Basil ignores the difference between the atoms as individual components of matter on the one hand and the body or bodies of matter composed by the union of atoms on the other. The relative consistency of aggregate masses of atoms would range according to Epicurean physics all the way from vaporous to solid, depending on the nature and form of the uniting atoms, which would be of innumerable kinds — smooth, rough, round, angular, hooked, and so on — and thus capable of all degrees of adhesion. The atomists' explanation at least took into account the capacity for change that is everywhere evident in the universe — something that Basil's objection fails entirely to consider.

## III. Stock Arguments

By far the most common characteristic of patristic polemic against Epicureanism is its dependence on and adaptation of *ad hoc* arguments long known and used by all participants in the philosophical controversies of the Hellenistic period. The centuries-old debates between the various schools of Greek philosophy had produced a great arsenal of such arguments and counterarguments, from which Christian writers drew freely and often. The practice is demonstrable for the whole period

under investigation, from Aristides in the first half of the second century to Augustine in the early fifth. And the borrowings — whether based on firsthand readings or on handbooks — include material drawn ultimately from Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Skeptics, and the Neoplatonists, much of which, however, is mediated through such writers as Posidonius, Cicero, and Seneca. What follows here is a sampling of instances of this practice as it occurs in the fathers' polemic specifically against Epicureanism.

In passing, however, it may first be mentioned that the whole Christian apologetic movement of the second and third centuries stood in debt also to its Jewish antecedents, particularly to the line of argument that had been developed in the Hellenistic synagog. From this traditional apologetic for Judaism the fathers took over especially the contention that whatever was of value in Greek philosophy had in fact been plagiarized from the "barbarian philosophy," that is, from the Old Testament of the Jews, the Mosaic Pentateuch in particular, whose far greater antiquity, they felt, could hardly be disputed.[16] An instance of this strain in Christian apologetic may be seen in a passage of Clement of Alexandria, where — among examples of Greek "plagiarizing" drawn from the teachings of the Stoics, Plato, Pythagoras, and Aristotle — he declares that Epicurus too derived his doctrine of chance from the Old Testament through misapprehension of the statement in Eccl. 1:2, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (*Strom.* v. 14. 132B)

### *Plato*

From charging Greek philosophers with borrowing "truths" from the Jewish prophets and Scriptures, it is only a short step to appealing to Greek philosophy directly for support of Christian doctrines. It is significant in this connection that among the first of the fathers to call upon Plato for assistance in attacking an Epicurean position is that avowed enemy of any alliance between philosophy and faith, the great Tertullian. As a matter of fact, it is in the very work in which he has roundly denounced Plato's view of the soul (in favor of that put forth by the Stoics) that he nevertheless borrows the Platonic description of the body as an obstructing, obscuring, sullying enclosure of the soul (cf. *Phaedo* 61d, e) in support of his opposition to the Lucretian view of the soul's slow disintegration at death:

> For if, as Plato's saying has it, the body is a prison, still when it is in Christ, it is, as the Apostle says, "the temple of God." Meanwhile, however, by its enclosure the body obstructs and obscures the soul, defiles it by concretion with the flesh. For this reason the light by which things are illumined reaches the soul more feebly, as though through a window of horn. Without doubt, when by the force of death the soul is expelled from its con-

[16] In a note to his discussion of the Christian "propaganda literature" C. Schneider warns that the influence of the Jewish apologetic must not be overstressed, since it extends, he says, only to the use of the Septuagint for apologetic purposes; and, besides, only Hellenized Jews published "apologies"; cf. *Geistesgeschichte des antiken Christentums,* II (München, 1954), 20, n. 1. In place though the warning may be, it needs to be regarded with some reservation itself in view of Schneider's consistent disparagement of recent scholarly research into Jewish influences on the New Testament and Christianity. Cf. his comments in connection with his bibliography on Judaism and on W. Davies' excellent study, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism,* ibid. 355, 338.

> cretion with the flesh and by its very expulsion is [properly] clothed, surely it breaks out of the blind veil of the body into the open, to the clear, pure light to which it belongs. At once, in its liberation from matter, it recognizes itself; and in the very act of being set free it recovers its sense of divinity, as one emerges from a dream, passing from images to realities. (*De an.* 53. 5 f.)

Whereas Tertullian here accepts the aid of Plato's teaching *in spite of* its connection with a doctrinal system that regarded the ultimate realities as immaterial, the only other father who could rival Tertullian's claim to the position of chief theologian of the West in the patristic age, Augustine, turns to Plato as an ally against Epicurus and others precisely *because* he was the champion of the immaterial nature of the soul as well as of the first principles of the universe. He declares that it is to the Platonists, who have recognized the true God as the author of all things, that those philosophers must yield who, like Epicurus, "surrendered their minds to their bodies, and supposed the principles of nature to be material," and who believed, as did the Epicureans, "that living things could be brought into being from things without life." (*De Civ. Dei* viii. 5; cf. 7)[17]

In the East too Plato continued to furnish the fathers with stock rejoinders to the Epicurean denial of a supernatural creation of the universe. Understandably, the *Timaeus* in particular was a favorite quarry of ideas for those fathers who comment in some detail on the creation account as given in Genesis.[18] Chief among them — after Origen, who is considered to have been the first to use the *Timaeus* commentaries for purposes of a Christian interpretation of Genesis (ibid., p. 422) — is Basil. Attention has already been called to anti-Epicurean sentiment in his *Hexaemeron;* and one needs only to place a passage like *Hex.* i. 1 f. alongside *Tim.* 28b-29e to recognize Basil's reliance on Plato, even though in the same context he insists that over against the errors of paganism regarding the origin of the world it is sufficient to oppose the divine truth contained in the words of Moses.

*Hexaemeron*

"In the beginning God created." What beautiful order! He first lays down a beginning, so that none may suppose that the world never had a beginning. . . . The Constructor of this Universe, whose creative power is not commensurate with one world, but goes beyond it to infinity, brought the immensities of the visible world into existence by the flick of His will. If then the world has a beginning and has been made, find out who gave it that beginning and who was its Maker. Rather, lest in your search you perhaps be turned aside from the truth by human speculations, He came in advance with His teaching, fixing in our souls as a seal and safeguard the reverend name of God, saying, "In the beginning God created." The Blessed Nature, Goodness without envy, Object of Love for all beings endowed with reason, Beauty most to be desired, Beginning of all that exists, Fount of

[17] Augustine here overlooks the fact that Plato too can speak of that which lives as having arisen from what was dead, as he does, for instance, in "proving" the immortality of the soul from the principle that everything arises from its opposite and hence the souls of the dead must exist in a place from which they again return to life. Cf. *Phaedo* 70c ff.

[18] Cf. Schneider, I, 413—24, for an illuminating discussion of the early Christian view of nature as it was influenced by Greek thought in general.

life, intellectual Light, unapproachable Wisdom, it is He who "in the beginning created heaven and earth."

*Timaeus*

We must consider first . . . whether the world has always existed, without any beginning of generation, or whether it has come into existence, having begun from some beginning. It has come into existence. . . . But that which has come into existence, must, we say, of necessity have come into existence from some Cause. Now, to find the Maker and Father of this Universe is itself a task, and when you have found Him, to tell of Him to all men is impossible. . . . If, then, this world is beautiful and its Constructor good, it is evident that He looked upon the Eternal. . . . For the world is the most beautiful of the things that have come into existence, and He is the Best of all causes. . . . He was good, and in Him who is good there never arises any envy concerning anything. Being free of envy, He wished everything to be as nearly like Himself as possible.

*Aristotle*

Although Aristotle falls far behind Plato in influence on the ancient church,[19] he is not altogether absent from Christian argument against Epicurean views. Nemesius of Emesa, for example, in the lengthy passage in which he attacks Epicurus's definition of pleasure,[20] reproduces substantially the same arguments by which Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (vii. 12) attacked as a false philosophic principle the statement that pleasure is a "becoming" rather than a static condition. (*De nat. hom.* 18. 28 f.)

*Stoicism*

By far the strongest echo of Greek philosophy to be heard in the Christian polemic against Epicureanism arose from Stoicism. The reason for this is no doubt to be found in the fact that of all the philosophical controversies of the day none was carried on with more unremitting vigor than that between the Porch and the Garden — though the Academy stood ready at any time to take up the cudgels that either of the other two might for a moment lay down.[21]

At the beginning of the list of apologists stands Aristides, and already with him the characteristic Stoic line of anti-Epicurean argument makes its appearance. After an introduction in which he refers to his own birth as having been an act of divine providence, he passes over to the Creation itself, out of which — in true Stoic fashion — he claims to recognize the powerful activity of God. This observation in turn leads him to express the view that the Creator has in fact made all things for the sake of man (1. 3 ff.) — a doctrine maintained by the Stoics only in the face of vigorous attacks upon it by the Epicureans.[22] The same Stoic thought recurs in later apologists, such as Theophilus (*Ad Aut.* i. 6), pseudo-Clement (*Hom.* iii. 36), and in the *Epistle to Diognetus* (10. 2).[23]

[19] Schneider, II, 286, n. 1, holds that until the time of Boethius, whenever the Christians did use Aristotle, they "platonized" him. If this generalization is valid, the instance under consideration here represents a notable exception.

[20] With some sophistry Nemesius is here unjustly ascribing the Epicurean view to the Neoplatonists, whom he really has under attack in this context.

[21] The basic discussion of these controversies and their influence on early Christian apologetic is still that of Geffcken, pp. xvii—xxii.

[22] Cf. Lucretius, v. 156—234; Lucian, *Jupp. trag.* 46 f.; Cicero, *De nat. deor.* ii. 62. 154 ff.

[23] The apologists may derive it from Philo; cf. *De prov.* 11. 84.

For the Stoics the notion that the world and all things in it were created for the sake of man was a corollary to their doctrinal emphasis on the orderliness of Creation as one of their chief arguments for the existence of God.[24] This Stoic emphasis on the order and system to be seen in creation the fathers take over also in their opposition to the Epicurean contention that the universe comes into being by chance. Athenagoras, for instance, says of those philosophers "of no small reputation" who thought that the universe is constituted without any definite order that "they fail to perceive that of all the things that go together to make up the whole world, not a one is out of order or neglected." (*Legat.* 25; cf. 4)

This emphasis of the early apologists on a Creation so orderly and unexceptionably beneficial to man as to compel his profoundest admiration and praise soon becomes in later fathers the full-blown Stoic argument from design. As might be expected, it is especially against Epicureanism, with its thoroughgoing antiteleological principles, that the fathers ring all the familiar changes on this theme of the world's grand design proclaiming its Maker.

Minucius Felix borrows freely from the second book of Cicero's *De natura deorum,* in which the Stoic spokesman Balbus responds to the Epicurean Velleius. Almost the whole of *Octavius* 17—19 is made up of reminiscences of the *De natura deorum,* woven together with material which Minucius has evidently drawn from another source.[25] Here it will suffice to note parallels in a few key passages.

*Octavius*

All the more does it seem to me that they lack mind and sense and even eyes who claim that this whole universe with its design has not been brought about by divine reason, but that it is a conglomeration of bits and pieces uniting at random. (17.3)

What can be more obvious, more manifest, more patent, when you raise your eyes toward heaven and when you scan what is beneath and around, than that there is some deity of surpassing wisdom, by whom all nature is inspired, moved, nourished, and governed? (17.4)

If on entering some house you had seen everything neat, in order, and well-kept, you would certainly believe that a master was in charge of it; so, in this house of the world, when in heaven and on earth you perceive foresight, order, and law, you must believe that the master and author of the universe is more beautiful than the very stars and than any portion of the entire world. (18.4)

*De natura deorum*

Does it seem possible to any sane person that this whole assortment of stars and this vast celestial design could have been brought into being out of atoms rushing hither and yon fortuitously and at random? or, indeed, could any other being destitute of mind and reason have brought them into being. (ii. 44. 115)

For what can be more obvious and more patent, when we look up to heaven and contemplate the heavenly bodies, than that there is some deity of surpassing wisdom, by whom these things are ruled? (ii. 2. 4)

[24] Cf. Cicero, *De nat. deor.* i. 36. 100; ii. 32. 82; 44. 115 ff.

[25] R. Beutler has made a prima facie case for regarding Posidonius or a work dependent on him as Minucius's second source, *Philosophie und Apologie bei Minucius Felix* (Weida i. Thür., 1936), pp. 21 ff. The identifiable sources are conveniently gathered by J. P. Waltzing in the appendix of his edition of the *Octavius* (Louvain, 1903).

When a person comes into some house, or gymnasium, or market place, and sees in everything a system, harmony, and regularity, he cannot conclude that these things came about without a cause; but he understands that there is someone who is in charge and to whom obedience is being rendered. Far more in the case of the vast motions and alternations [of the heavenly bodies] . . . he must assume that such great movements of nature are governed by some mind. (ii. 5.15)

More than a fourth of Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On the Soul and the Resurrection* is given to proving — against Epicurean[26] denial of it — the immortality of the soul. The entire passage abounds in derivative materials, and again prominent among these is the argument from design: "Anyone who sees a garment takes into account its weaver, and at the sight of a ship he thinks of the shipwright, and the thought of the builder's hand occurs at once to the mind of those who look upon a building; but when these people gaze at the world, they are blind to Him who is manifested through these objects of our sight" (*De an. et res.* 24A). The similarity to the Cicero passages cited above is evident.[27] Almost as striking are the echoes of the *De natura deorum* that can be heard as Gregory (resp. Macrina) develops this cosmological proof for God's existence in the following passage:[28]

*De anima et res.*

When one sees the harmony of the universe, of the wonders both in heaven and on earth . . . and the extremely swift rotation of the vault of heaven, and the movement of its inner orbits in the opopsite direction, plus the intersections and conjunctions and measured intervals of the planets . . . can one fail to be taught clearly by these phenomena that a divine power is showing itself both skillful and wise in the things that exist and, as it pervades the universe, is bringing all parts into harmony with the whole and is controlling everything by the exercise of a single force? (24Cff.)

*De natura deorum*

When we see something being moved by a sort of mechanism, a planetarium for instance, or a clock, or many other things, we do not doubt that these are the products of reason. Now, when we see the span of heaven being moved and revolving with amazing speed, accomplishing its yearly alternations with utmost dependability and to the perfect safety and preservation of all things, do we doubt that these things are done, not merely by reason, but in fact by a reason that is unique and divine? (ii. 38. 97)

Equally close to both Gregory and Cicero is the opening passage of Eusebius' *Theophany.* Perhaps, if the Greek original were extant, there would be almost verbatim agreement with Gregory's version of the Stoic commonplace. The following is the writer's translation of H. Gressmann's German rendition of the surviving Syriac version of the lost Greek original: "Neither are they [who deny God's existence] able to build a house without forethought and planning, nor can a ship be fairly knit together without a shipwright, nor can a garment be woven without the weaver's art. . . . I do not know what insanity keeps them from paying attention to the courses of the sun, etc. . . ." (*Theoph.* i. 1)

Athanasius sees divine purposefulness

[26] A fleeting reference to the Stoics in this connection is a formality only, occasioned by Macrina's allusion to Paul's speech on Mars' Hill, Acts 17:18. The doctrine that she attributes to the opponents is that of Epicurus only.

[27] For a parallel in Philo cf. *De prov.* i. 72.

[28] Cf. also Pseudo-Clement, *Recogn.* viii. 20 to 22.

evident especially in the distinctions observable in Creation, in the disparateness, for instance, of sun, moon, and earth, of hand, eye, and foot. It is to these distinctions that he appeals to prove against the Epicureans that the universe comes from the creative hand of an intelligent Maker. The passage in question amounts to an irreducible summation of the teleological argument in the *De natura deorum* (ii. 93—153). He declares that the Epicureans speak right in the face of obvious fact and experience when they ascribe the origin of all things to chance. For, he goes on to say, "such an arrangement [as that of sun, moon, and earth, of foot, hand, and head] makes it known to us that they did not come into being of themselves; rather it demonstrates that a cause preceded them, from which cause it is possible to perceive that God is both the disposer and the maker of all things." (*De incarn.* 2)

Thus, far from dying out as the patristic age drew to its close in the fifth century, the argument from design continued to make its rationalistic appeal to almost all Christian writers and teachers. Augustine, for instance, introduces the familiar teleological motif into his writings in a variety of contexts, not all of them of an apologetic or polemical character.[29] A clear instance of his use of it against Epicureanism, however, is the following:

> For even if you concede that there are atoms, if you concede also that they strike and knock one another about in chance collisions, is it then right to concede to those [philosophers] that the atoms, rushing together by chance, produce an object in such a way as to shape it with a form, trim it with an appearance, furbish it with symmetry, embellish it with color, and animate it with the breath of life? (*Ep.* 118.31)

Whether in any given instance the primary influence or philosophical source for the patristic argument from design was Cicero or Seneca, Posidonius or Plato, or merely a doxographical handbook,[30] is not of immediate relevance in this inquiry. What the foregoing examples make clear is the fact that in countering the Epicurean doctrines of chance and of a mechanistic universe the fathers regularly resort to the kind of argument popularized by the Stoics in defense of their notion of an all-ruling, providential, divine Reason.

The fathers also find in Stoic thought resources for their attacks on the ethics of Epicureanism, which is not surprising in view of the Stoics' regard for virtue as man's chief good and their understanding of virtue as being essentially the struggle of reason in man against all irrational and uncontrolled impulses or "affects," πάθη.

Especially adaptable to their own use would Christian thinkers find the extreme view of a Stoic rigorist like Cleanthes, who held that of the four chief "affects" defined by Zeno — pleasure, anxiety, desire, and fear[31] — the first, pleasure, even in its

[29] A. S. Pease places the number of occurrences at about 50; cf. "Caeli enarrant," *Harvard Theological Review,* XXXIV (1941), 196.

[30] On this exceedingly intricate question, for which there can be at best only tentative answers, A. S. Pease offers some sober and cautious opinions, ibid., pp. 179, 195. Max Pohlenz, however, in his magisterial study of Stoicism suggests that scholars have in the past tended to attribute too much influence to Posidonius so far as patristic thought on cosmology is concerned, *Die Stoa,* II, 210. He is referring to Karl Gronau particularly, but Pease would fall under the same condemnation.

[31] Cf. Diogenes Laertius, vii. 110.

broader sense is unnatural and hence blameworthy.[32] The close relationship thus drawn by the Stoics between πάθος and ἁμαρτία [33] is accepted by Clement of Alexandria, for example, and leads him to look for the origin of sin at that point where πάθος has its inception. But, like Cleanthes, Clement appears to consider pleasure, ἡδονή, as the basic πάθος. It is from pleasure he says, that another "affect," namely desire, ἐπιθυμία, gets its incentive (*Strom.* ii. 20. 1064A). More than that, pleasure is in Clement's view the very fountainhead of virtue's opposite, wickedness, the μητρόπολις κακίας (*Strom.* vii. 6. 33). Consequently Clement agrees with the Stoics also in this, that the Epicureans, as advocates of pleasure, are not acting according to reason and hence are not to be reckoned in the number of genuine philosophers. (*Strom.* vi. 8. 289A)

The influence of Stoic thinking, such as that of Cleanthes, on patristic treatment of Epicurean ethics is still clearly evident two centuries after Clement, as Augustine in criticizing those who count virtue a good, but only for pleasure's sake, quotes a purple patch from some lost writing of Zeno's disciple and successor. Without mentioning Cleanthes by name,[34] Augustine refers to philosophers who paint a kind of word picture

> in which Pleasure sits like a kind of luxurious queen on a royal chair, and the virtues are subject to her as maidservants, watching for her nod, in order to do whatever she commands. Prudence she bids to be on the watch to discover how Pleasure may reign and still be safe. Justice she bids to perform those good deeds of which she is capable, so as to gain the friendships that are necessary for bodily comforts, and to do wrong to no one, lest by breaking the laws Pleasure should lose her life of security. Fortitude she bids to keep her mistress, namely, Pleasure, bravely in mind, so that if her body should experience some pain, short of that which brings on death, she may assuage the stings of her present pain through the recollection of her former delights. Temperance she bids to take only a little of even her favorite foods, lest through immoderate use something prove harmful and disturb her health, and hereby Pleasure, which the Epicureans reckon to be chiefly in the health of the body, suffer grievous damage. Thus the virtues, with all their reputation for merit, will be in sevitude to Pleasure, as to some imperious and disreputable woman. (*De civ. Dei* v. 20)

Another Stoic concept which some of the fathers find useful in contexts of an anti-Epicurean cast is that of the *Logos spermatikos*. Such is the case, for example, when they feel obliged to answer the kind of gibe which the enemies of Christianity borrowed from the Epicurean polemic against the Stoic notion of the making of the world (see above, pp. 437 and 439). Cicero had his Epicurean Velleius ask in the *De natura deorum* (i. 9. 21): "Why did these deities suddenly awake into activity as world-builders after countless ages

[32] Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* xi. 73; also, Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen,* III, 1, 4th ed. (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1909), 224. In its narower sense of a particular "affect," pleasure was regarded by all Stoics as contrary to nature and therefore to be shunned. The wise man's satisfaction brought him a sense of joy, χαρά, not pleasure, ἡδονή; ibid., p. 222, n. 3.

[33] Ibid., p. 237. Zeller here cites Plutarch, *De virt. mor.* 10.

[34] Cicero, however, whom Augustine is almost certainly following here, does attribute the illustration to Cleanthes, *De fin.* ii. 21. 69; cf. von Arnim, *Stoic. vet. frag.*, 553.

of slumber?" But when Celsus adapts this Epicurean argument to his own attack upon Christitanity, Origen responds:

> It was not as though God arose from a long sleep and sent Jesus to the race of men. For good reasons he has at just this time completed the plan of salvation that required his incarnation, but he has always been doing good to the race of men. For of the good things that have happened among men not one has taken place without the divine Logos having come to visit the souls of those who have been able, if only for a brief time, to receive such workings of the divine Logos. (*C. Cels.* vi. 78)

Essentially the same thoughts are expressed by Justin Martyr. (*Apol.* i. 46)

Stoically oriented too is the theodicy of the fathers as they struggle with the problem of evil in their response to the Epicurean-Skeptic kind of argument that attacks the doctrine of divine providence by pointing to the existence of harmful plants and dangerous animals. A typical example is that of Basil, who is only following the lead of Chrysippus[35] when he insists that every creature serves some divinely intended purpose and ultimately the good of man (*Hex.* v. 4; ix. 5).[36] Similarly, Titus of Bostra opposes this aspect of Epicurean pessimism in its Manichean form with a thoroughly Stoic discussion of the usefulness of poisonous animals either as a source of medicines or as a means of disciplining man by wholesome fear (*Adv. Man.* ii. 20, 22, 24). These, however, are not the first of the fathers to borrow this Stoic notion, for already Origen suggests that external evils may only be God's way of schooling or chastising man for his own benefit. (*C. Cels.* vi. 56)

A commonplace of Epicurean polemic against the idea of providence was the observation that animals were manifestly better endowed by nature than man.[37] In rebuttal the fathers emphasize mainly three points: man's bodily equipment is a necessary consequence of his endowment with reason; his individual limbs and organs are in fact useful and advantageous; and his physical structure is aesthetically superior to that of the animals. These points were all stock rejoinders of the Stoics to the Epicurean-Academic criticism of their doctrine of providence, as may be seen from Cicero's *De natura deorum* ii. 133—53. A comprehensive treatment of all three points is given by Gregory of Nyssa, who devotes several chapters of his *De hominis opificio* (7—9 and 30) to this topic. That he has the Epicurean criticism in mind is clear from a comparison of his introduction of the problem with that of Lactantius (Gregory, *De hom. op.* 7. 1; Lactantius, *De op. De.* 3. 1; cf. 2. 10). In addition to the extended discussion which this defense of man's natural endowments receives in Gregory, the same arguments appear also in Origen (*C. Cels.* iv. 78 ff.), pseudo-Clement (*Recogn.* viii. 29 ff.), and Eusebius. (*Theoph.* i. 47 f.)

Some of the main elements in Gregory

35 Cf. Plutarch, *De Stoic. repugn.* 1044D, 1049A; also W. Capelle, "Zur antiken Theodicee," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie,* XX (1907), 189; Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen,* III, Part I, 175, nn. 1—3.

36 The examples cited by Basil in support of his contention are by no means all derived from Stoic sources; cf. K. Gronau, *Poseidonios und die Jüdisch-Christliche Genesisexegese* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1914), pp. 100—106. Nevertheless, the tenor of the argument remains clearly Stoic; cf. Cicero, *De nat. deor,* ii. 47. 120; 50. 127; 64. 161; Philo, *De prov.* ii. 103 f.

37 Cf. Usener, frg. 372: Lactantius, *De op. De.* 2. 10.

of Nyssa's "proof" for a blessed future life of the soul show significant points of agreement with Cicero's treatment of the same subject in his first *Tusculan Disputation,* which in turn is marked by the influence of the independent Stoic, Posidonius.[38] Cicero suggested that some men have had difficulty with the idea of souls living in a future state of bliss simply because "they were unable to see with their minds, but subjected everything to the test of their eyes" (*Tusc.* 1. 37). Gregory applies this Ciceronian criticism to Epicurus, saying that to the latter "the visible was the limit of reality, for he made sense-perception the measure of our apprehension of things; he had completely closed the eyes of his soul and was incapable of seeing anything of what is incorporeal and needs to be grasped with the mind." (*De an. et res.* 21B)

Again, Cicero observed that many have regarded the soul as perishable and mortal because "they were unable to understand or grasp what the nature of the soul is like without a body" and could not "conceive of souls living an independent life" (*Tusc.* i. 16. 37; 22. 50). Corresponding closely to this is Gregory's contention that the Epicurean deniers of the soul's immortality, who suppose that the soul is nowhere after death, actually are just as unable to conceive of the manner of the soul's union with the body during its life in the flesh as they are of its independent existence after the body's dissolution. (*De an. et res.* 24B)

### *The Academy*

Ordinarily the agnostic tendency of the Academy would keep Christian writers from sharing or borrowing its viewpoints. An exception to this rule arises, however, when the Academy directs its critical barbs at Epicurean teaching. It is, for instance, undoubtedly the Academic ridicule of Epicurus's theory of the gods' anthropomorphic mode of existence[39] that prompts the early apologist Aristides — as it did the great Jewish Hellenist Philo before him[40] — to emphasize strongly that in the Christian view God is altogether formless and sexless. (*Apol.* i. 1. 5)[41]

Within a century, however, it is no longer a merely negative position, a defense against anticipated Academic criticism, that is discernible in the fathers' discussion of the divine attributes, but rather a positive acceptance and adaptation of the Academy's arguments for their own counterattacks on opponents of the faith. Origen is indeed ingenious enough to use the same basic argument in quite dissimilar contexts. Against those who in Epicurean fashion would speak of the bodies of heavenly beings as only outwardly and apparently like those of human beings — thus to ward off the Academic objection that divine natures would hardly have any use for organs and limbs required by earthly existence — Origen retorts: "It would lead to a very absurd conclusion to suppose that these organs had merely a surface like man's, after the manner of a statue, but no longer any depth as well" (*De orat.* 31. 3). It was in this very vein that the Academic Cotta taunted his Epicurean

[38] For Cicero's dependence on Posidonius in *Tusc.* i. see Pohlenz, II, 115 f.

[39] Cf. the remarks of Cotta as spokesman for the Academy in Cicero's *De nat. deor.* i. 29. 80 ff.; also, Seneca, *Apoc. Claud.*

[40] Cf. Geffcken, pp. xxviiif. and 39.

[41] From Goodspeed's Latin translation of the Syriac, *Die ältesten Apologeten* (Göttingen, 1914), pp. 3 f.

friend with attributing to the gods a quasi-human form (*De nat. deor.* 1. 26. 71—27. 75). On the other hand, as H. Chadwick has shown,[42] Origen also manages by only a slight modification to turn the same anti-Epicurean polemic of the Academy against the church's own traditional doctrine of the resurrection, arguing that a body must in any case be suited to its environment. (Frg. *ap.* Methodius, *De res.* i. 22. 4 f.; cf. *C. Cels.* vii. 32)

### *Neoplatonism*

Some of the later fathers put themselves in debt also to Neoplatonism. Against the Epicurean and Stoic teaching of the material nature of the soul, Nemesius simply says:

> What has been said by Ammonius, the teacher of Plotinus, and by Numenius, the Pythagorean, will be sufficient. Their argument is this: Bodies are by their very nature mutable, dissoluble, and divisible indefinitely. Since there is nothing left in them that is not subject to change, something is needed to hold them together, to assemble their parts, and — as it were — bind them fast and keep them united. This something we call the soul.[43] Now, if the soul is at all corporeal, even if it were the most rarefied sort of body, what in turn holds it together? [44] For it has been shown that every body requires a cohesive principle. And thus the argument is carried back indefinitely, until we come to a soul that is incorporeal. (*De nat. hom.* 2. 12)

Augustine's well-known sympathy for Neoplatonic thought and modes of expression [45] is reflected in an anti-Epicurean passage of his *Confessions,* in which he speaks critically of his earlier self for having once been almost ready to accept the Epicurean position on the value of pleasure.

> Concerning the nature of good and evil I used to argue with my friends . . . that in my opinion Epicurus would have taken the victor's palm except that I believed there still was a life for the soul after death and places of recompense — something that Epicurus refused to believe. And I would ask them: If we were immortal and living in a state of continual bodily pleasure with no fear at all of losing it, what reason would there be for us not to be happy or to look for anything else? I failed to realize that this very thing was what led to my great misery, namely, that I had sunk so far and was so blind as to be unable to contemplate the light of virtue and of that beauty which must be embraced for its own sake and is seen, not by the bodily eye, but only by one's inner vision. (*Conf.* vi. 16. 26)[46]

## IV. Appeals to "Science"

At times the fathers turn to the science of their day for aid in refuting Epicureanism — somewhat in the manner of "fundamentalists" who, though they reject on principle the authority of science in matters of faith, nevertheless are quick to quote from scientists such statements as may seem to militate against one or another facet of, for instance, the evolution-

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42 Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body," *Harvard Theological Review,* XLI (1948).

43 Posidonius (*ap.* Achilles Tatius, ed. Maass, p. 41) had already made this point against Epicurus: οὐ τὰ σώματα τὰς ψυχὰς συνέχει, ἀλλ' αἱ ψυχαὶ τὰ σώματα. Cf. Lucretius, iii. 440 ff.

44 Cf. the striking reminiscence of Nemesius in John Philoponus's commentary on Aristotle, *On the Soul,* cited by Telfer, *Library of Christian Classics,* IV (Philadelphia, 1955), 262, n. 2.

45 Cf. *Contra Acad.* iii. 18. 41; 19. 42; 20. 43; also the echoes of Plotinus, *Enn.* v. i. 2 in *Conf.* ix. 10.

46 Cf., for example, Plotinus, *Enn.* i. 6. 8 f.

ary hypothesis. A case in point is that of pseudo-Clement and the use to which he puts his "scientific" notions of gravity in his polemic against Epicurean atomism. With fatuous rhetoric he asks these questions of his hypothetical Epicurean opponent:

> If this vault of heaven that we see was erected by the gradual concourse of atoms, why did it not collapse in the very process of construction, since indeed the yawning top of the edifice was not propped up and held together by any supports? . . . In addition, I ask also this: What is the pavement on which the foundations of such an immense mass are laid? Again, that which you call the pavement, on what does it rest? And likewise, that other something, on what does it rest? And I go right on with my interrogation until the answer comes to nothing and void. *(Recogn.* viii. 18)

Even more unhappy in view of Galileo's decisive experiment is pseudo-Clement's solemn perpetuation of the Aristotelian argument[47] against the atomists:

> Therefore, since some [atoms], being fiery, always tend upward, and others being moist and dry, always tend downward, while others move in between in an uneven course, how could they come together and compose one body? For if, to use an example, someone should from a fair height throw down very small pieces of straw and pieces of lead of the same minute size . . . the heavier reach bottom far more quickly. So the atoms too, even if they are equal in size, still, being unequal in weight, the lighter will never be able to keep up with the heavier. *(Ibid.* 17)

[47] Aristotle, *De caelo,* iv. 309b. 14; *Phys.* 4. 216a. 12.

Somewhat more respectable is the appeal Nemesius makes to the authority of the great anatomist and physiologist Galen to disprove the atomists' theory of vision. From the seventh book of Galen's *De placitis* Nemesius claims to quote the following: "Even if some portion or power or image or quality from the bodies we are looking at were to enter into the eye, we should not then know the size of what we were seeing, such as, for instance, the greatest mountain; for it is entirely contrary to reason that the image of so large an object should enter in at our eyes" (*De nat. hom.* 7. 28). Very similar to this is the way in which Augustine disposes of the same atomist theory: "How can these images in their entirety be contemplated at once, if only so much of them can be thought of at a time as can come, enter into, and touch the mind, and if whole images cannot enter into such a small object, or in their entirety touch the small mind?" *Ep.* 118. 29).

On the scientific question of the size of the sun, which the Epicureans held to be no larger than it appears, Basil simply takes over the Posidonian arguments of Cleomedes,[48] who had directed the second book of his treatise *De motu circulari corporum caelestium* specifically against Epicurus. A few brief passages will suffice to indicate Basil's familiarity with Cleomedes' version of Posidonius.

*Basil*

The size of objects that are seen at a great distance is reduced, since the strength of our vision is unable to attain the complete pas-

[48] Basil's application of the arguments from Posidonius is rather slipshod, however. On this see Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile et l'Hellenisme* (Paris, 1934), p. 152.

sage of the space between, but is, as it were, exhausted halfway across and reaches the visible objects with but a small part of itself. (*Hex.* vi. 9)

If you ever cast your gaze over the water from a peak overlooking a great sea, how big did the largest of the islands seem to you? (Ibid.)

[The sun and moon] are so great in circumference that the light which issues from them is sufficient to illuminate both sky and air, and to extend simultaneously over all the earth and the sea. (Ibid.)

*Cleomedes*

For human vision is not able to attain such a degree of strength that what is a million stades distant from us should appear to be as large as it really is. (*De mot.* ii. 1. 69)

Whenever our gaze is cast from a very great height and great distance upon one of the largest islands, it appears to be so small that the rim of the sun when rising or setting appears on both sides of it. (Ibid. 77)

[Epicurus] ought at any rate to have taken note of the power of the sun, and to have taken to heart the fact that it illuminates the world of almost infinite size. (Ibid. 84)

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This review of the methods of rebuttal which the fathers used against Epicureanism has shown how ready they often were to advance an argument for the sake of rhetorical refutation only, without real concern for its validity or, indeed, for its theological warrant. For the most part their counterarguments are as varied and inconsistent as is their representation of the Epicurean system in the first place. One finds, for example, over against the ethics of the Garden very little in the way of a simple evangelical expression of Christian sanctification such as St. Paul enunciates in 1 Cor. 6:19-20; while in questions of physics the Epicureans are met with the speculative notions of creationist Greek philosophy propped up with Biblical "prooftexts." So the story ends, one which taken by itself adds little luster to our picture of the early church. The tone and the method of patristic polemic against genuine Epicureanism show that despite the theological considerations out of which it sprang, also this opposition to a pagan system of thought soon became, on the whole, only another phase of that philosophical secularization of the Gospel which characterized the church's efforts to achieve status, to gain a hearing and acceptance in the cultured society of the first few centuries. Hearing and acceptance the fathers finally did gain in this way — but at what cost to the very Gospel they wished to serve, Christian theology itself must decide.

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