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THE *DE OPIFICIO DEI*: THE WORKMANSHIP OF GOD AND LACTANTIUS*

Lactantius' treatise the *de opificio dei* has received little attention from classical scholars in modern times. There are two main reasons for this. First, Lactantius is regarded essentially as a Christian apologist and therefore of interest primarily to theologians and students of Christian history. Second, that work which has been done on the treatise has tended to the view that the *opif.*'s interest for scholars lies largely in the question of its written sources, its main such source, according to several commentators, being the Hermetic body of writings.[1]

Both of these reasons need re-examining. With regard to the first, it is unfortunate that the only surviving works of Lactantius are his specifically Christian treatises, written after the outbreak of persecution in A.D. 303. As such they represent only a portion of his work, being composed in the last two decades of a long life.[2] The basis of his reputation as a rhetorician, a reputation which secured him his appointment as professor of Latin rhetoric at Nicomedia under Diocletian, must have been his earlier works, which pre-date his conversion in *c.* 300.[3] We know from Jerome that

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Works used will be cited in the notes in an abbreviated form.

S. Brandt, 1891	'Über die Quellen von Laktanz' Schrift De opificio Dei', *Wiener Studien* 13 (1891), 225–92
B. Faes de Mottoni, 1982	'Lattanzio e gli Accademici', *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome, Antiquité* 94 (1982), 335–77
V. Loi, 1970	*Lattanzio: nella storia del linguaggio e del pensiero teologico preniceno* (Zurich, 1970)
R. M. Ogilvie, 1975	'Four Notes on Lactantius', *JThS* 26 (1975), 410–12
R. M. Ogilvie, 1978	*The Library of Lactantius* (Oxford, 1978)
M. Perrin, 1974	*L'Ouvrage du Dieu creatur*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1974)
M. Perrin, 1981	*L'Homme Antique et Chrétien: L'anthropologie De Lactante 250–325* (Paris, 1981)
R. Pichon, 1901	*Lactance* (Paris, 1901)
L. Rossetti, 1928	'Il De opificio Dei di Lattanzio e le sue fonti', *Didaskaleion*, 6 (1928)
J. Stevenson, 1957	'The Life and Literary Activity of Lactantius', *Studia patristica* 1 (1957), 661–77
J. Stevenson, 1961	'Aspects of the Relations between Lactantius and the Classics', *Studia patristica* 4 (1961), 497–503
E. von Ivanka, 1950	'Die stoische Anthropologie in der lateinischen Literatur', *Anzeiger der oesterr. Akad. der Wissenschaft., Phil.-hist. Klasse*, 87 (1950), 178–92.

The text of Lactantius used is ed. S. Brandt, *L. Caeli Firmiani Lactanti Opera Omnia, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (*CSEL*) 19 & 27 (1890–3). The translation of Lactantius used is that of W. Fletcher in edd. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (American edition). The Loeb editions were used for the texts and translations of Cicero and Lucretius.

[1] S. Brandt, 1891: 270ff.; L. Rossetti, 1928: 195ff.; cf. M. Perrin, 1974; 48ff.

[2] Lactantius lived probably from *c.* 250–325, see R. Pichon, 1901: 1–32; J. Stevenson, 1957: 661ff.

[3] See Jerome, *de viris ill.* 80. Lactantius claims not to have spoken publicly so his reputation would be based on his written work.

Lactantius wrote a *Symposium* in his youth in Africa, an *Itinerary* of his journey from Africa to Nicomedia written in hexameters, a *Grammarian*, two books to Asclepiades, four books of letters to Probus, and two books of letters to Demetrianus – his pupil in rhetoric and the addressee of the *de opificio*.[4] Some of these latter may belong to the later period but we know from a letter from Damasus to Jerome that they were lengthy and contained little concerning Christianity, but rather a variety of other subjects.[5] This is confirmed by the couple of fragments that we have.[6] Further, when Constantine appointed Lactantius as a tutor to his son Crispus it was in Latin literature, not Christianity, that he was to instruct him.[7]

It seems, therefore, that Lactantius remained known throughout his life as an able rhetorician, a man of letters writing on a variety of subjects, rather than specifically as a Christian apologist. This being so, it would seem that a case could be made for studying the extant treatises not in terms of the author's Christianity but as examples of his work as a noted rhetor. As the *de opificio dei* was very probably the earliest of his extant works and was written very shortly after losing his post at Nicomedia *c.* 303, it would seem to be the most appropriate starting-point for such a study.[8]

This brings us to the second reason for the *opif.*'s lack of popularity in modern times. The tendency of scholarship over the last century has been to explain every aspect of the thought in the *opif.* in terms of its supposed written sources and to see the worth of the treatise as being in those sources and the author's interweaving of them. This tendency was initiated by the Lactantian editor, S. Brandt,[9] and continued by successive scholars who disputed the exact nature of Lactantius' supposedly unacknowledged sources.[10] The modern French editor of the *opif.*, M. Perrin, notes that Brandt's work is typical of the 'Quellenforschung' of the last century, Brandt regarding the *opif.* as 'a kind of promising excavation site'.[11] Nevertheless, Perrin himself gives the bulk of his own study over to a discussion of possible literary relationships and parallels.

This approach to the *opif.* not only prevents us from understanding the character of the treatise, it has not even achieved its purpose of identifying the *opif.*'s written sources and the degree of their impact upon the work. If, instead, we concentrate on the author's own plan, purpose and argument we can not only begin to appreciate the quality of the *de opificio* as a piece of rhetorical writing but also resolve the source-question itself. I will argue in particular that the *opif.*'s structural plan provides a key to the author's intentions and to the character of the work.

As a teacher writing to a former pupil in rhetoric, and no doubt with at least one eye towards publication, we will expect Lactantius to pay a good deal of attention to the *dispositio* of his work. We may note that the *diuinae institutiones* and the *de ira dei* are dominated by their structural arrangements.[12] Both R. Pichon and

[4] Ibid.

[5] Jerome, *epist.* 35, see J. Stevenson, 1957: 667–8.

[6] See ed. S. Brandt, *CSEL* 27: 155ff.

[7] Jerome, *Chronicle. ad a. Abr.* 2333, see J. Stevenson, 1957: 661f.

[8] For the date of the *opif.* in relation to Lactantius' life and extant works, see especially M. Perrin, 1974: 11–17. I would not wish to claim that the rhetorical element of Lactantius' writings has been completely ignored by modern scholars. Pichon, 1901, devotes a chapter to the topic.

[9] S. Brandt, 1891, see especially p. 292.

[10] Cf. L. Rossetti, 1928, E. von Ivanka, 1950, M. Perrin, 1974 and 1981.

[11] M. Perrin, 1981: 292 (my translation).

[12] It is my view that the structure of the *inst.* reflects four major themes: (i) the steps to eternal life; (ii) Lactantius' view of man's religious history; (iii) the duality of truth and error; (iv) the relationship between *religio*, *sapientia* and *iustitia*.

M. Perrin have sketched what they see as the structural plan of the *opif.* Each has started from a prior view of the treatise's character. As this prior view differs in the two cases so also does the breakdown they suggest. Pichon, viewing the work essentially as an attempt at a narrative scientific treatise, divides it according to the parts of the body and soul and its defence of providence against the Epicureans.[13] As Perrin has noted, this arrangement fails to consider the 'digressions' in the work and does not take into consideration the *opif.*'s non-anatomical aspects.[14] Perrin regards the work as a protreptic discourse with anatomical, philosophical and rhetorical elements determining its 'dialectic' structure.[15] Separating off the introductory and concluding chapters (1 & 20), seeing the structure as 'almond-like', he divides the treatise into three parts. Chapters 2–13 he sees as forming the first part of this teleological explanation of man, dealing with the external, visible parts, the 'zone of certitude'. Chapters 14–18 are the second, concerned with the internal, non-visible parts, which cannot be known. The third part, chapter 19, returns to the zone of certitude in treating of the soul.

Both of these suggested breakdowns are in my view incorrect. We can, in fact, determine the work's basic structure not by starting from a prior view of its character but by working from the author's use of introductory sentences for each intended section.

quid est tandem cur nobis inuidiosum quisquam putet, si rationem corporis nostri dispicere et contemplari uelimus? quae plane obscura non est, quia ex ipsis membrorum officiis et usibus partium singularum quanta ui prouidentiae quidque factum sit, intellegere nobis licet.

dedit enim homini artifex ille noster ac parens deus sensum atque rationem, ut ex eo appareret nos ab eo esse generatos, quia ipse intellegentia, ipse sensus ac ratio est. (*opif.* 1.16–2.1)

sed ego de uno corpore hominis tantum institui dicere, ut in eo diuinae prouidentiae potestatem quanta fuerit ostendam, his dumtaxat in rebus, quae sunt conprehensibiles et apertae: nam illa quae sunt animi, nec subici oculis nec conprehendi queunt. nunc de ipso uase hominis loquimur quod uidemus. (4.24)

nunc rationem totius hominis ostendam singulorumque membrorum quae in corpore aperta aut operta sunt, utilitates et habitus explicabo. (8.1)

sequitur necessario ut de internis quoque uisceribus dicere incipiam: quibus non pulchritudo, quia sunt abdita, sed utilitas incredibilis attributa est, quoniam opus fuerat ut terrenum hoc corpus suco aliquo de cibis ac potibus aleretur sicut et terra ipsa imbribus ac pruinis. (11.1)

explicasse uideor omnia quorum ratio intellegi potest: nunc ad ea uenio quae uel dubia uel obscura sunt. (13.9)

superest de anima dicere, quamquam percipi ratio eius et natura non possit. (17.1)

Working from these introductory sentences – there do not seem to be any others that we should include as being of the same standing – and separating off, with Perrin, chapters 1 and 20 which are obviously distinctive in character, the work seems to divide into six three-chapter sections (see Table 1).

It is almost immediately noticeable that the introductions to chapters 2–4 and 5–7 suggest the same subject matter, the body in relation to the question of Providence,[16] whilst 8.1 introduces both 8–10, in which the external parts of the body are the subject, and 11–13, in which the internal parts are discussed. Similarly, a brief reading of chapters 14–19 shows that the 'obscurity' theme introduced at 13.9 runs throughout these chapters, all of which are concerned with what at 14.8 is described as 'those things related to the motions of the mind and soul'. That chapters 14–19 are intimately

[13] R. Pichon, 1901: 271–2, 279–80.
[14] M. Perrin, 1974: 32.
[15] Ibid. pp. 25, 32–7.
[16] See also *opif.* 6.15.

Table 1

Chapter (Brandt ed.)	Content
1	Introduction
2–4	The body in relation to the question of Providence
5–7	The body in relation to the question of Providence – the vessel of man
8–10	The plan of the whole man: the uses and habits of the parts
11–13	As 8–10: the inward parts also
14–16	Things doubtful or obscure
17–19	The soul – its obscure system and nature
20	Conclusion

connected is shown even more clearly by the fact that each has the same internal structure, a matter we shall discuss later.

It seems, then, from our brief analysis so far, that the six sections we have identified pair off, 2–4 with 5–7; 8–10 with 11–13; and 14–16 with 17–19. *This gives us three main parts to the treatise.* The existence of these six sections is also suggested by each appearing to have been planned to include a 'digression' of a basically polemical character (see Table 2).

Table 2

Section	Digression
2–4	2.10–4.24
5–7	Chapter 6
8–10	Chapter 9
11–13	Chapter 12
14–16	15.5–6
17–19	Chapter 18

It will be seen that in general the digressions form the central part of each section although this pattern is to a certain extent obscured. The digressions are at their most lengthy in the first two sections – a significant fact which we will discuss when we examine the purpose behind the division of the *opif.* into three major parts. Neither are the digressions truly digressive, being rather a means of presenting the author's argument in a way which suits the character of the work.[17] But that they were part of Lactantius' plan can be seen from a comparison of their artificial introductions and conclusions.[18]

sed nimis diu de rebus apertissimis disputo, cum sit liquidum nihil sine prouidentia nec factum esse umquam nec fieri potuisse. de cuius operibus uniuersis si nunc libeat disputare per ordinem, infinita materia est. sed ego de uno corpore hominis tantum institui dicere, etc. (4.23–4, concluding 2.10–4.24)

[17] A point recognised by Perrin, 1974: 35 in relation to *opif.* 3, 4, and 6, but not by Pichon, 1901: 268–9.

[18] For ch. 18 see pp. 473–4 and 482 below.

non possum hoc loco teneri quominus Epicuri stultitiam rursum coarguam....uerum alias refellemus Epicurum: nunc de prouidentia ut coepimus disseramus. (6.1; 6.15, introducing and concluding chapter 6)

libet hoc loco illorum reprehendere uanitatem qui dum uolunt ostendere sensus falsos esse, multa colligunt in quibus oculi fallantur...sed nos ad dei opera reuertamur. (9.1; 10.1, introducing and concluding ch. 9)

de utero quoque et conceptione, quoniam de internis loquimur, dici necesse est, ne quid praeterisse uideamur...sed redeamus ad propositum, ut cetera quae supersunt breuiter explicemus. (12.1; 12.18, introducing and concluding ch. 12)

sed erit nobis contra philosophos integra disputatio. conficiamus igitur spatium quod nunc decurrimus. (15.6, concluding 15.5–6)

Thus, working from introductory and concluding sentences and phrases in the *opif.*, and a brief reading of its contents, we can sketch the basic plan of the treatise (Table 3).

Table 3

	Chapter	Section	Part
	1	– *Introduction*	
	2		
'Digression' –	3	– Section 1	
(2.10–4.24)	4		*Part A*. The body as the sign of divine providence and man as the special object of that providence; refutation of the Epicureans
	5		
'Digression' –	6	– Section 2	
	7		
	8		
'Digression' –	9	– Section 3	
	10		*Part B*: The functions of the parts of the human body
	11		
'Digression' –	12	– Section 4	
	13		
	14		
'Digression' –	15	– Section 5	
	16		*Part C*: Things relating to the mind and soul – their obscure nature
	17		
'Digression' –	18	– Section 6	
	19		
	20	(*Literary*) *Conclusion*	

For a greater appreciation of the purpose and character of the treatise we must turn to its opening and closing chapters (1 and 20). These are written in an epistolary style which separates them off from the body of the treatise. We are informed of (i) the context of the work – the persecution; (ii) the author's moral purpose – making Christians more learned; (iii) his subject matter – the body and soul; and (iv) the determining factor in his treatment of these – Cicero's work on the subject.

(i) *The context of the work*

In chapter 1 there are a number of subtle references to the persecution which had been recently initiated. 1.2 refers to 'philosophi sectae nostrae... quamuis nunc male audiant castigenturque uulgo, quod aliter quam sapientibus conuenit uiuant et uitia sub obtentu nominis celent.' This is surely ironic, referring to stock pagan accusations against the Christians. 1.7 links the persecution to the 'adversary', i.e. Satan. Very importantly, 20.1 informs us that the author has deliberately written this treatise *in an obscure manner* because of the necessity of the circumstances.[19] Lactantius seems already to have lost his teaching post because of his faith (1.2)[20] although Demetrianus apparently still holds public office (1.5). Perhaps our writer intends to protect his former pupil by the obscurity of his references to Christianity.

(ii) and (iii) *The moral purpose and the subject matter*

The purpose of the work is stated to be to make 'the philosophers of our sect' better instructed and more learned for the future (1.2). That this learning will bring moral benefits is clear from the following sentences.[21] 1.10–11 informs us that the direct subject of the treatise is man's body and soul, which is the work of the supreme God, creator, and author of providence. The moral effect of knowing man's true nature is brought out at the end of chapter 19. *Inst.* II.10.13–15 implies that the *opif.*'s subject is the question of divine providence. In accepting this we must recognise the complexity of that question for Lactantius. Solving it means showing that man is under God's special care – he is both the object and proof of divine providence. But this can be proved only by showing that man is a heavenly being, having as his good the good of the soul. It must be shown that God has indeed constructed man's body as subserving the soul and that the soul is not tied to the body but has a destiny beyond the death of the body. Only by showing this is the first point proved.

(iv) *The treatment of the subject*

In *opif.* 1.5–9 Lactantius introduces his theme, opposing the earthly and the heavenly, comparing the transience of the former with the endurance of the latter. In 1.10 he moves from things earthly and heavenly in general to the 'corpus' and the 'mens' or 'animus' in particular. The last section of chapter 1, 1.11–16, is most vital to our understanding of the *opif.*

(1.11) uas est enim quodammodo fictile quo animus id est homo ipse uerus continetur, et quidem non a Prometheo fictum, ut poetae locuntur, sed a summo illo rerum conditore atque artifice deo, cuius diuinam prouidentiam perfectissimamque uirtutem nec sensu conprehendere nec uerbo enarrare possibile est. temptabo tamen, quoniam corporis et animi facta mentio est, utriusque rationem quantum pusillitas intellegentiae meae peruidet, explicare. (1.12) quod officium hac de causa maxime suscipiendum puto, quod Marcus Tullius uir ingenii singularis in quarto De re publica libro, cum id facere temptasset, materiam late patentem angustis finibus terminauit leuiter summa quaeque decerpens. (1.13) ac ne ulla esset excusatio cur eum locum non fuerit exsecutus, ipse testatus est nec uoluntatem sibi defuisse nec curam. in libro enim De legibus primo [*leg.* 1.27] cum hoc idem summatim stringeret, sic ait: hunc locum satis, ut mihi uidetur, in iis libris quos legistis expressit Scipio. postea tamen in libro De natura deorum secundo [2.133ff.] hoc idem latius exsequi conatus est. (1.14) sed quoniam ne ibi quidem satis expressit,

[19] 'Haec ad te, Demetriane, interim paucis et obscurius fortasse quam decuit pro rerum ac temporis necessitate peroraui' (*opif.* 20.1).

[20] See J. Stevenson, 1957: 662; Lactantius, *de mort. pers.* 13.1.

[21] Cf. especially *inst.* 2.1.2–3; and also 4.1.1ff.

adgrediar hoc munus et sumam mihi audaciter explicandum quod homo disertissimus paene omisit intactum. (1.15) forsitan reprehendas quod in rebus obscuris coner aliquid disputare, cum uideas tanta temeritate homines extitisse, qui uulgo philosophi nominantur, ut ea quae abstrusa prorsus atque abdita deus esse uoluit, scrutarentur ac naturam rerum caelestium terrenarumque conquirerent, quae a nobis longe remotae neque oculis contrectari neque tangi manu neque percipi sensibus possunt: et tamen de illarum omnium ratione sic disputant, ut ea quae adferunt probata et cognita uideri uelint. (1.16) quid est tandem cur nobis inuidiosum quisquam putet, si rationem corporis nostri dispicere et contemplari uelimus? quae plane obscura non est, quia ex ipsis membrorum officiis et usibus partium singularum quanta ui prouidentiae quidque factum sit, intellegere nobis licet.

Lactantius informs us that he is going to complete what Cicero left 'almost untouched' (1.14). The reference to *leg.* 1.27 indicates that the issue which that 'man of the greatest eloquence' did not deal with sufficiently is the question of divine providence in relation to man, in particular man's body. Whilst Pichon and Perrin, at least, have recognised that Cicero's work, especially the *de natura deorum* (*ND*), is the major influence on Lactantius, I think we must go further and suggest that the taking on of the mantle of Cicero determines the whole character of the *opif.* and, indeed, that the treatise is very closely modelled on the *ND*, being intended to supplement and improve on it.[22]

At *ND* 2.3 and 3.6 Cicero gives the four subject divisions of his work's second book: (i) to prove the existence of the gods; (ii) to describe their nature; (iii) to show that the world is governed by them; (iv) to show that they care for man. It is the position of *ND* 2 in particular that Lactantius will represent in the *opif.* but 1.11–16 shows that he does not consider that all of the above four topics are open for discussion. (i) and (ii) are excluded because the world was made by the Christian God 'cuius diuinam prouidentiam perfectissimamque uirtutem nec sensu conprehendere nec uerbo enarrare possibile est (1.11).[23] The nature of things on heaven and earth cannot be investigated (1.15) but we can show the existence of providence, and God's special care for man, through the ordering of man's body (1.16). Thus Lactantius has narrowed his scope to (iii) and (iv). In concentrating on these topics he has undoubtedly noted Balbus' words that they will require additional treatment,

tertium et quartum, quia maiora sunt, puto esse in aliud tempus differenda. (*ND* 2.3)

To conclude, *opif.* 1.11–16 shows that Lactantius is going to explain the nature of the body and soul, but in the manner in which they have been discussed by Cicero, particularly in *ND* 2, that is, in relation to the question of providence.

The clearest evidence that the *opif.* is closely modelled on Cicero's treatise is provided by a comparison of their structural plans (see Table 4). The *ND* is divided into three books. The first puts forward and rejects the Epicurean theological position; the second presents the Stoic arguments for the gods and providence; these are then subjected to an Academic critique in book 3. As we have seen, the *opif.* also divides into three major parts. These in fact correspond to the three books of Cicero's work, chapters 2–7 corresponding to *ND* 1, 8–13 to *ND* 2 and 14–19 to *ND* 3. Lactantius' planning and execution of his work display his skill and subtlety as a rhetorician. Each of the three parts relates to the corresponding book of the *ND* in a different way, according to the needs of his argument. In paralleling *ND* 1 *opif.* 2–7 makes Lucretius, instead of Cicero's Vellius, his spokesman for Epicurean views on providence.

[22] Cf. M. Perrin, 1974: 28, 35, 42, 57 which goes some way towards this view. Cf. also R. Pichon, especially pp. 246–66.

[23] Cf. *ND* 1.17 for the question of the gods being 'perobscura'.

Lactantius refutes the Epicurean arguments in this first part – hence the particularly long polemical 'digression' of chapters 3–4 – as does Cicero in his first book.

In the second part of the *opif.* (8–13) the correspondence is even closer, direct use being made of *ND* 2 to present a teleological and functional account of the parts of man's body. The third part (*opif.* 14–19) is, though, perhaps the most subtle and pleasing in its use of the *ND*. The content of *ND* 3 is, on the whole, not useful for Lactantius' purpose. He thus instead adopts the Academic vocabulary and style of argument of Cotta in that book to develop his own quite dogmatic argument concerning man's heavenly aspect, the soul. He is so successful in his adoption of this 'Academic' style of presentation that scholars from Brandt to Perrin have misinterpreted chapters 14–19 as being based on a 'sceptic' or 'probabilist' written source.[24]

Table 4

Cicero's *ND*	Lactantius' *opif.*
Book 1 Epicurean view + refutation	Part A (2–7) Epicurean view + refutation
Book 2 Stoic view, including teleological/functional account of the parts of the body (2.133–50)	Part B (8–13) teleological/functional account of the parts of the body
Book 3 Academic sceptic critique	Part C (14–19) pseudo-sceptical account of things related to the soul (= an argument for the independence of the soul)

Apart from the structural arrangement of the treatise there are other indications that Lactantius is intending to complement Cicero's treatise. In *opif.* 1 and 20, which stand outside the main body of the work, Cicero is prominent, being referred to and discussed by name (1.12–14; 20.5). Indeed, Lactantius implies that he regards himself as in some sense the heir of Tully. With the exception of 5.6, however, – which we shall discuss later, and where Varro is the subject – Cicero is not referred to at all in the body of the treatise (i.e. 2–19), in marked contrast to Lucretius and Varro, and despite the extensive use of his work. This needs explaining. I would suggest, in line with what I have said above, that it is because Lactantius wishes to present his work as a 'Ciceronian' treatise, almost as an addition to the Ciceronian corpus. Acknowledgement and reference to Cicero would therefore be inappropriate. So also he refers specifically to the Epicureans (2.10f.; 3.1ff.; 4.1ff.; 6.1ff.; 6.7ff.; 18.2) and to the Academy (9.1 (v.l.); 15.5) but never to the Stoics, the third school represented in the *ND*. This again is because he is the proponent of the providentialist viewpoint which the Stoics represent in Cicero's work, a viewpoint which Cicero himself admits to sharing at *ND* 3.95.

Another indication of the relationship is the discussion of dreams in *opif.* 18, at first sight an unaccountable diversion away from the single argument which runs through 14–19. We have already noted that the six sections were planned to include polemical

[24] Cf. S. Brandt, 1891: 276ff.; M. Perrin, 1974: 55ff.; 375ff.

refutations presented by Lactantius as digressions and that the polemical aspect is least obvious in 12 and 18. This aspect of 18 becomes clear, however, if, as we suggest, we read this work as a deliberate and carefully controlled supplement to the *ND*. At *ND* 3.94–5 Cicero writes,

> Lucilius autem 'Vehementius' inquit, 'Cotta, tu quidem inuectus es in eam Stoicorum rationem quae de prouidentia deorum ab illis sanctissume et prouidentissume constituta est. sed quoniam aduesperascit, dabis nobis diem aliquem ut contra ista dicamus. est enim mihi tecum pro aris et focis certamen et pro deorum templis atque delubris proque urbis muris, quos uos pontifices sanctos esse dicitis diligentiusque urbem religione quam ipsis moenibus cingitis; quae deseri a me, dum quidem spirare potero, nefas iudico.'
>
> tum Cotta: 'ego uero et opto redargui me, Balbe, et ea quae disputaui disserere malui quam iudicare, et facile me a te uinci posse certo scio.'
>
> 'quippe' inquit Vellius 'qui etiam somnia putet ad nos mitti ab Ioue, quae ipsa tamen tam leuia non sunt quam est Stoicorum de natura deorum oratio.'

In his treatise Lactantius is not only supplying the extra day for the providentialists to answer Cotta and meeting the latter's desire to be refuted, he is also responding to Vellius' sneer concerning the divine origin of dreams. In our discussion of *opif.* 18 we will note that it involves a refutation of both the Epicureans and the Academics.

The *opif.* is a complex work. It has a sophisticated plan that is intended to reflect the plan of the *ND* and provide for the variety of interrelated themes that Lactantius sees as being included in the issue of providence. The refutation of Epicurus and Lucretius in Part A both reflects *ND* 1 and builds up Lactantius' portrayal of man as a heavenly, rational being under God's special care. Part B reflects the Stoic *ND* 2, existing in the guise of a straightforward account of man's body; but it is really concerned almost entirely with those bodily parts seen as serving the soul and the maintenance of its relationship with the body. Part C mirrors the Academic sceptic *ND* 3, apparently being a sceptical investigation into the nature of the mind and soul. It is in reality a single argument for the independence and immortality of the soul with a concluding appeal for the readers to live in accordance with the good of the soul. Chapter 19 is thus the philosophical conclusion to the treatise. We can now study each of the three parts in turn, confirming the Ciceronian character of the *opif.* and the dominance of the author's own input, before drawing our conclusions regarding the long-disputed issue of the treatise's written sources.

Part A of the *de opificio* (2–7) establishes God's care for man and the superior position and heavenly nature of humankind (see Table 5). As we have seen, it parallels Cicero's *ND* 1 but it extends the refutation of the Epicureans to cover more specifically the question of providence in relation to man. Indeed, *opif.* 2.11, 'praetereo quae ad ipsum mundum pertinentia uitio dant, in quo ridicule insaniunt: id sumo, quod ad rem de qua nunc agimus pertinet', may be an indirect acknowledgement of *ND* 1, showing that the *opif.* is intended to complement, not repeat, the *ND*'s work. Because of the refutational character of Part A the polemical 'digressions' are lengthy, extending from 2.10 to the end of chapter 4, as well as chapter 6.

Lactantius is not interested in a dispassionate presentation of Epicurean thought. The opponent is, indeed, often a straw man erected in order to develop the author's argument concerning man's special estate. Thus the long refutation of chapter 4 is in reply not to an Epicurean barrage on the subject but to only a single line in Lucretius' *de rerum natura.*

> cur anni tempora morbos
> adportant? quare mors inmatura uagatur? (5.220–1)

Table 5. *The* de opificio dei: *Part A – Man as the subject of Providence*

Chapter	Paragraph	Content
		Section 1. Comparison of man and beasts
2	1–9	Condition of man and beasts contrasted: beasts have natural protections but man has the divine gift of 'ratio'
	10–11	Introduction of the Epicureans, who criticize the arrangements of nature in order to deny providence
3	1–4	('Digression') 1st Epicurean attack: man is uncared for and is borne in a frailer and feebler state than other animals (cf. Lucretius 5.222–34)
	5–21	*confutatio* of Epicurean position: (5–10) feebleness at birth does not require that man's condition is inferior; (11–21) all men would prefer 'ratio' to strength, 'ratio' gives greater power and is sufficient in itself
4	1	('Digression' continued) 2nd Epicurean attack: man's proneness to sickness and premature death shows that he was made without foresight
	2–22	*confutatio* of Epicurean position: (2–12) the necessity of death for man as an earthly being and hence the necessity of sickness and premature death; (13–14) the denial of providence as the basic Epicurean error: (15–22) the harmful consequences if man were not frail and subject to mortality
	23–4	Conclusion to Section 1
		Section 2. The providential ordering of the bodily parts of men and beasts
5	1–13	God's formation of the bodies of animals, including man
6	1–2	('Digression') 3rd Epicurean attack: the formation of bodies is accidental; natural selection has thinned down an originally much wider range of animals (cf. Lucretius 5.837ff.)
	3–6	*confutatio* of Epicurean position: the necessity of 'ratio'for the birth of things; God's foresight in creation
	7–14	The regularity of the functions of bodily parts as proof of their origin in the divine plan (cf. Lucr. 4.822ff.)
7	1–11	The greatness of God's work in the formation of animal bodies; the variations of a single pattern according to appropriateness
	(9–11)	Concluding discussion introducing the special topic of man's body and the status of the head

Nor is Lactantius intending to give an all-embracing refutation of Epicureanism.[25] He has, however, already formulated his basic approach to the school. He sees it as a type, the antithesis of the providentialist viewpoint. Once providence is denied then all of Epicurean atomism follows.[26] This parallels the position of Cotta in *ND* 1 that Epicureanism, primarily because of its denial of providence, is fatal to religion (*ND* 1.115ff.).

Part B of the *opif.* presents apparently a straightforward functional account of the parts of the human body (see Table 6). In fact, it concentrates on a few parts only,

[25] See *opif.* 6.15; 20.1ff. *re* his intention to give a more complete refutation in the *institutes*.
[26] *opif.* 2.10f.; 4.12ff.; 6.1ff.; cf. especially *inst.* 3.17.8ff.

Table 6. *The* de opificio dei: *Part B – Man's body and the function of its parts*

Chapter	Paragraph	Content
		Section 3. The external and upper parts of the body
8	1	Introduction to Part B
	2–5	Introduction to the head as palace of the *mens*; man's erect posture reflects his status and proper orientation
	6–8	The ears – the combination of beauty and utility
	9–17	The eyes – as windows: it is the *mens* that sees
9	1–5	('Digression') *confutatio* of Academic argument: the reliability of the eyes and the other senses
10	1–5	Parts of the face serving the eyes
	6–9a	The nose
	9–11	The perfection of doubleness-in-unity from the point of view of beauty and utility and in reflecting the cosmos and its control
	12–20	The mouth, its beauty and utility, and speech
	21–27	The rest of the upper, external parts *re* utility and beauty, mostly the hands (22–5)
		Section 4. The inner and lower parts
11	1–20	Treatment in parallel of those parts serving the nourishment of the body (stomach, oesophagus, intestines, bladder) and those serving the nourishment of the soul (lungs, windpipe)
12	1–18	('Digression') the reproductive organs, the contribution of each parent to reproduction
13	1–8	The external, lower parts of man *re* utility and beauty
	9	Conclusion to Part B, Introduction to Part C

notably the head and its organs. It parallels the Stoic *ND* 2 and uses material from *ND* 2.133–50 in particular. Lactantius supplements and shapes this material to his own purpose and the result, I believe, is a treatment at least as impressive as Cicero's.

Our author begins with an eloquent passage pointing out man's erect stature and its consequences, or rather implications. A comparison with Cicero's passage (*ND* 2.140) is revealing. There are two aspects to man's posture that Lactantius wishes to draw out. The first, with Cicero, but emphasized more in the *opif.* – is that man's proper orientation is towards heaven. Secondly, whereas Cicero sees the high placing of the head primarily in terms of the advantages it affords to the senses (*ND* 2.140–1), Lactantius' stress is on the relationship between the status of the *mens* and its position overlooking the body and the whole of creation (8.2–5; also 16.4ff.).

All of section 3, with the exception of its tail-end (10.21–7), is concerned with the senses and thus, from Lactantius' point of view, with the *mens*. The *mens* is the ruler of the body (esp. 8.4; 16.4–6). Despite 16.1f., the author shows his firm belief that the *mens* is situated in the *cerebrum*. The head is thus the seat of the government of the whole creature, the palace of the kingly mind (5.6; 7.10; 8.4; 16.4), the *summum* of man not only in position but in status (7.9). Most importantly, the mind is the 'initium sensus (ac nerui)' (5.6; also 10.10; 16.4; 18.5). Thus *sensus* and *mens* are closely identified by Lactantius. On the one hand the senses are the servants of the mind (8.5), on the other, it is the *mens* itself which perceives (8.10ff.). The key to understanding the *opif.*'s view on the relationship between the *mens* and *sensus* lies not in the *ND* but in *Tusculans* 1, a book which Lactantius makes greater use of in Part C.

nos enim ne nunc quidem oculis cernimus ea quae uidemus: neque est enim ullus sensus in corpore, sed ut non physici solum docent, uerum etiam medici, qui ista aperta et patefacta uiderunt, uiae quasi quaedam sunt ad oculos, ad aures, ad nares a sede animi perforatae. itaque saepe aut cogitatione aut aliqua ui morbi impediti apertis atque integris et oculis et auribus nec uidemus nec audimus, ut facile intelligi possit animum et uidere et audire, non eas partes, quae quasi fenestrae sint animi, quibus tamen sentire nihil queat mens, nisi id agat et adsit.

(*Tusc.* 1.46)[27]

It is Lactantius' reading of this passage which has formed the inspiration of the views he develops in *opif.* 8–10 and 16.[28] Our author's treatment of the ears is brief (8.6–8). The case of the eyes is both more important, they being the primary sense-organs, and more disputed, in that there existed conflicting theories of widespread influence. His treatment of the eyes thus extends from 8.9 to 10.5 (cf. *ND* 2.142–4). Lactantius first eloquently states his view that the eyes act as refracting agents in order for the mind to see the images of objects (8.9). He then rejects the alternative views, which he seems to have found summarized in a reference work containing definitions. At 8.10–11 he defends the 'eyes as windows' position not only by a supporting argument but also by defending it against the Lucretian attack on this view.

dicere porro oculos nullam rem cernere posse,
sed per eos animum ut foribus spectare reclusis,
difficilest, contra cum sensus ducat eorum;
sensus enim trahit atque acies detrudit ad ipsas,
fulgida praesertim cum cernere saepe nequimus,
lumina luminibus quia nobis praepediuntur.
quod foribus non fit; neque enim, que cernimus ipsi,
ostia suscipiunt ullum reclusa laborem.
praeterea si pro foribus sunt lumina nostra,
iam magis exemptis oculis debere uidetur
cernere res animus sublatis postibus ipsis.

(Lucr. 3.359–69)

This passage, and its context in the *de rerum natura*, is perhaps as important for understanding *opif.* 8–10 as is *Tusc.* 1.46. The Lucretian and Ciceronian passages represent for Lactantius the two sides of a debate concerning the survival of the soul and its relationship to the body – the very question behind these chapters of the *opif.* *Tusc.* 1 represents the view of the soul as pre-eminent and independent, surviving the death of the body (1.26–81). Lucretius, on the other hand, argues – among other things – for the inability of the soul to live except in union with the body in a joint nature (3.323–49), and thus will wish to deny that sensation can be an independent action of the *animus*. The association in both Cicero and Lucretius of the doctrine of the soul's immortality with the view of the *mens* as *sensus*, and in particular the eyes as windows, makes it almost inevitable that Lactantius should make the latter an integral part of his work.

Lactantius needs to affirm the reliability of the senses. The eyes must be reliable both because they provide the means of witnessing God's work and because they are themselves part of that work. Also, in stressing the superiority of the soul and often opposing the body and soul he may be associated in the minds of his readers with those who had traditionally distrusted the reliability of the senses.[29] It is necessary for our author to demonstrate the distinctiveness of his own position. He does this in the

[27] Cf. M. Perrin, 1974: 313–5; cf. also *acad.* 2.30.

[28] In wishing to allow Lactantius some originality in his work I do not reject the likelihood of his views' being substantially influenced by current ideas.

[29] Note the Platonist-inspired passage in *Tusc.* 1 following that which Lactantius has used as the basis for his views on the senses (*Tusc.* 1.46–7).

form of a refutational digression in chapter 9, against the (New) Academics, the traditional opponents of the Stoics, whose position he has particularly in mind in this parallel to *ND* 2. Similarly, he selects Stoic doctrines for criticism in chapters 14–19, as Part C represents the Academic critique of *ND* 3. In *opif.* 9 Lactantius uses an Academic style of argument against the Academics themselves, using part of their teaching – 'there are cases where the senses are deceived' – to refute their main position that 'the senses are not reliable'.

The greater part of chapter 10 parallels, uses and develops *ND* 2.142–5. At 10.9–11, however, there is a discussion on the aesthetic perfection of the number two. The point that the chief control of the world is twofold is neither specifically Christian (against Brandt) nor Pythagorean-inspired (against Loi and Perrin).[30] Rather, it is an expression of Lactantius' own interest in duality, deliberately stated here in such a way as to recall Stoic teaching on the cosmos, in keeping with Part B's relationship to the Stoic *ND* 2 (and cf. *ND* 1.52).

Chapter 11 is a further example of the way that Lactantius, as an accomplished rhetorician, employs his material. Taking the *ND*'s straightforward functional account of man's inner parts (*ND* 2.134–9), he develops it into a portrayal of man as an intricate duality and of the body as the servant of the soul. Whereas Cicero states that 'there are three things requisite for the maintenance of animal life, food, drink and breath' (*ND* 2.134), Lactantius writes in terms of the necessity of nourishment for the body – food and drink – and of nourishment for the soul (*anima*) – breath (11.2–3). The whole chapter is detailed with an eye to the parallels between the two systems.

We have noted that chapter 12 is presented as a digression (cf. 12.1 and 12.18). All of the 'digressions' so far have been polemical but 12 is not obviously so. Indeed, polemic is less suited to the character of this essentially constructive middle part of the *opif.* (cf. *ND* 2). In chapter 19, however, we find a dismissal, but not a discussion, of the question of 'whether the soul is produced from the father or rather from the mother, or indeed from both' (19.1). It seems likely that the lack of a discussion here is due to the author's intention for the reader to be reminded of the philosophical views expressed in chapter 12, where the contribution of each parent to the bodily characteristics of the child is discussed. By including the discussion of chapter 12 and making the contrasting statement at the beginning of chapter 19 the author is able to bring out the contrast between the body and the soul, plus the place of God as our heavenly parent.

In Part C of the *opif.* the writer intends to demonstrate the independence and immortality of the soul, a crucial part of divine providence as Lactantius sees it. As we have noted, he follows his Ciceronian model by adopting the style of argument and vocabulary of the *ND*'s Academic spokesman, Cotta. Lactantius is, in fact, directly answering the plea of the Stoic Lucilius Balbus to Cotta at the end of *ND* 2.

> tu autem, Cotta, si me audias, eandem causam agas teque et principem ciuem et pontificem esse cogites et, quoniam in utramque partem uobis licet disputare, hanc potius sumas, eamque facultatem disserendi quam tibi a rhetoricis exercitationibus acceptam amplificauit Academia potius huc conferas.
>
> (*ND* 2.168)

With such a positive invitation it would be surprising if Lactantius did not take on the role of a Christian Cotta for the final part of the treatise. In Academic style, discussions are introduced and concluded with remarks about the obscurity of the

[30] Cf. S. Brandt, 1891: 258f.; V. Loi, 1970: 163ff.; M. Perrin, 1974: 327–9.

Table 7. *Part C: An argument for the independence and immortality of the soul*

Chapter	Para.	Content
		Section 5. The parts of man related to the soul
14 (i)	1	Sceptical introduction
	2–4a	Obscurity of the functions of various organs
(ii)	4b–5	Consideration of Stoic four organ/passion theory
	6–8	Rejection of this theory on epistemological grounds
(iii)	9a	Preferable view – these organs are to retain the soul in the body
(iv)	9b	Sceptical conclusion
15 (i)	1a	Sceptical introduction – what can we say of the voice?
(ii)	1b	Consideration of the Stoic theory that the voice is air struck by breath Rejection of this theory
(iii)	2–4a	Preferable view – the internal origin of the voice
(iv)	4b–6	Sceptical conclusion but also ('digression') refutation of Academic scepticism
16 (i)	1–2	Sceptical introduction
(ii)	3	Consideration of the theory that the *mens* is in the breast – the unlikelihood of this
(iii)	4–6a	Preferable view – the *cerebrum* is the seat of the *mens*
(iv)	6b–18	Long sceptical conclusion and argument for the mind's independence and obscure nature and quality
		Section 6. The soul
17 (i)	1	Sceptical introduction
(ii)	2	Consideration of the theory that the *anima* is (*a*) *sanguis*, (*b*) *ignis*, (*c*) *uentus*
	3–8	Rejection of these theories
(iii)	9a	Preferable view – the soul exists in the body by union of all three of these
(iv)	9b	Sceptical conclusion
18 (i)	1	Sceptical introduction
(ii)	2	Consideration of the theory that the *animus* and *anima* are the same faculty
(iii)	3	Preferable view – that they are different
(iv)	4–11	('Digression') on sleep and dreams, refutation of Epicureans and Academics
19 (i)	1	Sceptical introduction
(ii)	2	Rejection of the theory that the soul derives from one or both parents (cf. ch. 12)
(iii)	3–5	Correct view – the soul comes from God
(iv)	6–10	Moral and dogmatic conclusion

subject, whilst the conflicting views of the philosophical schools are highlighted. In keeping with the relationship to *ND* 3 it is views of Stoic origin in particular that come up for criticism. Yet with all this Lactantius develops a quite dogmatic argument through these chapters and ends in chapter 19 with a position opposing that of Cotta. How he develops this argument whilst maintaining an 'Academic approach to things' can be seen by examining the *dispositio* of chapters 14–19 (see Table 7). The general structural plan is followed in that Part C consists of two sections each containing a polemical digression. However, the formation of each individual chapter in this third part is also dominated by its conformity to a single structural plan. Each follows the pattern of (i) a sceptical introduction; (ii) a consideration of one or more philosophical theories which are then either implicitly or explicitly rejected in favour of (iii) an alternative, preferable view which contributes to Lactantius' main argument; (iv) a sceptical conclusion.

The pattern, then, is to question the possibility of knowledge on a subject, reject various views of the philosophers, and then present how we should consider the matter. Lactantius thus reflects the approach of Cotta in two specific respects. First, in *ND* 3 the Academic spokesman wishes to accept religion on the basis of tradition and authority rather than through the arguments of the philosophers (*ND* 3.5–6). Second, the chapter plans reflect Cotta's method in the personal disavowal of knowledge (e.g. *opif.* 16.1; 17.6) and the subsequent refutation of others' theories (*ND* 1.57, 60). The reflection is particularly obvious at *opif.* 17.6:

neque enim tam obscuram nobis huiusmodi rerum dico esse rationem, ut ne hoc quidem intellegamus, quid uerum esse non possit, an si mihi quispiam dixerit aeneum esse caelum aut uitreum aut, ut Empedocles ait, aerem glaciatum, statimne adsentiar, quia caelum ex qua materia sit ignorem? sicut enim hoc nescio, ita illud scio.

Chapter 14 must be seen as the beginning of Lactantius' parallel to *ND* 3. It is not a hasty explanation of those organs which he has failed to deal with in the previous chapters.[31] The inclusion of most of the organs listed is determined by their part in the Stoic-originated theory of the location of the passions. This theory, widely known by Lactantius' time, has been selected for two reasons. It provides a parallel to Cotta's critique of Stoic doctrines in *ND* 3 and it serves as an example of the type of doctrine which is unacceptable because it makes assertions about things which are outside the reaches of the senses and whose nature therefore cannot be known (14.6–8, cf. 1.15). The Academic flavour of 14 is accentuated by the denial of the usefulness of dissection (14.6, cf. *acad.* 2.122). Chapter 14's contribution to Lactantius' main argument is twofold. It demonstrates the close and complex relationship of the body and soul and, conversely, it marks out how the author intends to show the distinctiveness of the soul from the body. He stresses the epistemological distinctiveness of the *animus/mens/anima* – its obscure nature, to develop an argument that the soul is immortal and independent of and superior to the body:

omnia quae ad motus animi animaeque pertineant, tam obscurae altaeque rationis esse arbitror, ut supra hominem sit ea liquido peruidere.

(14.8)

Lactantius' choice of method enables him skilfully to parallel Cotta's Academic scepticism whilst at the same time making dogmatic statements about the independence of the soul.

Chapter 15 continues the Cotta-like approach, again selecting a doctrine of Stoic

[31] Against Perrin, 1974: 371ff., who suggests the use of a 'deficient' source.

origin for refutation. Lactantius wishes to demonstrate that the voice is part of man's heavenly aspect and he does so by showing the obscurity of its nature (15.4), having just in chapter 14 informed us that obscurity pertains to those things related to the mind and soul.[32] Chapter 15 also serves another function in that it contains a polemical 'digression' against the Academics themselves, whose very method he is representing in these chapters. This allows him to show the distinctiveness of his own position. In addition, the chapter contains a further, deliberate irony. It rejects a Stoic definition of the voice but replaces it, using Academic-type vocabulary ('similior ueri'), with the explanation found in the Stoic *ND* 2(.149).

It is with the next chapter, however, that Lactantius' argument for the independence of the *mens/animus* really gets going. The obscurity and profundity of questions concerning the mind leads us to a wonder and admiration for God's work.[33] The argument is developed in stages. At 16.1–5 the distinctiveness and special character of the *mens* is implicit in the impossibility of identifying it with any one particular part of the body – although, of course, it has already in chapter 8 been positively located in the *cerebrum*. In 16.6–7 the argument is developed. The mind appears to move through the body and, at line 18, the *mens/corpus* distinction is made explicit. In 16.8–11 the *mobilitas* of the mind is stressed with the purpose of showing its freedom from the body and the resemblance of the *mens* to God is introduced. The Academic style is kept up, with the use of such terms as 'argumentis probabilibus' (16.4). At 16.2 Lactantius states that 'I will not conceal what my own sentiments are; not that I should affirm that it is so – for in a doubtful matter ['re dubia'] it is the part of a foolish person to do this', deliberately mirroring Cicero's remarks regarding the cautiousness of the Academy at *ND* 1.1.

As *ND* 3 provides the method rather than the material for Lactantius' discourse on the soul's independence in Part C, he has recourse to *Tusc.* 1, using its account of theories concerning the nature and place of the soul (*Tusc.* 1.18–20) as the basis for his discussion in *opif.* 16–17. As in the earlier chapters, however, Lactantius keeps a firm grasp on his material and his argument. At 16.4–5 he adds his own arguments for the brain as the seat of the mind but as if they were the arguments of the philosophers.

We must be very cautious of drawing a 'Lactantian psychology' from this or other chapters of the *opif.* – although Perrin attempts to do so – for I do not think that our author is very interested in psychological theory. He is not primarily a philosopher but a rhetorician whose purpose is to persuade by the art of rhetoric, albeit, in this particular treatise, through the medium of philosophy. We do know that he wishes to present the mind as being situated in the *cerebrum*, as stated at 8.3. Also, at 16.6–9 he shows by his arrangement and phrasing that he believes – or wants us to believe – that the mind does in fact only *seem* ('uideatur') to move between the brain and the breast. But I do not believe that the question is of intrinsic interest to him. It is used to introduce the concept of the mind's *mobilitas*, and even this concept is produced only to assist in demonstrating the heavenly nature of the *mens*.

On the face of it, chapters 16 and 17 are separate discussions, the one concerning the *mens*, the other the *anima*. The distinction is superficial, however, being intended partly to allow the question of the relationship of the two to introduce the 'digression'

[32] At *opif.* 2.6 Lactantius has already summarised his view of man's distinctive nature as being encapsulated by 'ratio', 'sensus' and 'eloquens'. He further links the power of speech to the *anima* at 11.9ff. in his discussion on the windpipe.

[33] 'sed ut exposita rei difficultate intellegas quanta sit diuinorum operum magnitudo' (16.2, cf. 16.11; 'admirandum' – 16.8 (x2), and 16.9).

in chapter 18 and to maintain the semblance of a physiological-psychological work. As we have noted, the single discussion in *Tusc.* 1 concerning the *animus* underlies both 16 and 17. Further, the assertion at 17.1 that the *anima* is immortal makes sense only if it is the conclusion to the 'argument' of the previous chapters, thus relying upon an identification of the *anima* and the *mens* or *animus*.

17.1 (i) The *anima* is vigorous and moves by itself at all times (cf. esp. 16.8–11, 16 on the *mens*).
(ii) The *anima* cannot be seen or touched (cf. 14.7f.; 15.5; 16.11)
(iii) Therefore the *anima* is eternal.

In fact, *mens* and *animus* have been used as interchangeable opposites of *corpus* since 1.10–11, whilst 17.2 signifies the equation of *animus* with *anima* (cf. *Tusc.* 1.19).[34]

The bulk of 17 is an expansion on its first sentence, using the Ciceronian material and employing Cotta's critical approach. The case of *ignis* allows Lactantius to parallel Cotta's refutation of the Stoic doctrine at *ND* 3.35–7.

The question which introduces chapter 18, 'whether the soul and the mind are the same, or there be one faculty by which we live, and another by which we perceive and have discernment' is, in part, artificial. There has been no hint so far that Lactantius regards man as having a tripartite nature and, as we have seen, the argument of the previous chapter depends upon an identification of the *anima* with the *mens/animus*. However, Lactantius is concerned about the statement in Lucretius' *de rerum natura*.

> tu fac utrumque uno sub iungas nomine eorum,
> atque animam uerbi causa cum dicere pergam,
> mortalem esse docens, animum quoque dicere credas,
> quatenus est unum inter se coniunctaque res est.
>
> (3.421–4)

He identifies the view that the *anima* and the *mens/animus* are the same with the Epicureans and their denial of the soul's immortality (*opif.* 18.2) and thus wishes to assert their separation, despite the opposite assertion in the preceding chapters.[35] This further demonstrates how Lactantius is prepared to switch positions on an issue according to the needs of his overall argument.

Chapter 18 is intended as a refutation of the Epicureans not only in rejecting the implications of the Lucretian passage quoted above. It responds also to the sneer of Velleius concerning the Stoic doctrine of the divine origin of dreams at the end of *ND* 3. In addition it considers and uses the Academic view of dreams as 'false presentations' (cf. *acad.* 2.88). The eloquent 'digression' on dreams argues against the Epicureans that not only are we sent dreams by God but the whole system of dreams is a further example of God's providence. He does not commit himself to the view that all our dreams contain divine revelation. We also have 'false' dreams and these are part of the process instituted by God to allow us to rest.[36] The refutation of the Epicureans is heightened by Lactantius' deliberate use of the imagery and vocabulary of Lucretius in the rich prose of *opif.* 18.4–8.

Chapter 19 is the philosophical conclusion to the *opif.* but it is not to be separated off from the preceding chapters as Perrin desires.[37] It follows the same structural plan as 14–18, and if it makes dogmatic statements, so also do they. The opening sentences

[34] For an exhaustive discussion of Lactantius' use of these terms see M. Perrin, 1981: 231–6.

[35] Cf. F. A. Schob's and R. M. Ogilvie's identification of the second Epicurean poet referred to in *opif.* 18.2 as Varro of Atax, in R. M. Ogilvie, 1975: 411f.

[36] This completes chapter 9's refutation of the Academics on false presentations in relation to *acad.* 2.88.

[37] M. Perrin, 1974: 37.

are intended to remind the reader of the discussion in chapter 12 concerning the parental contribution to a child's sex and character. In contrast, the production of the soul is the work of our heavenly Father only. Thus the distinctive character of the soul, which Part C is intended to prove, is indicated by the contrast with chapter 12 and by the soul's epistemological status, its incomprehensibility. The paralleling of *ND* 3 is continued in 19 but the chapter also includes a direct refutation of part of that book. At *ND* 3.64f. Cotta ends his criticism of Stoic theology and commences a critique of the school's theodicy. Despite the lacuna in Cicero's work the two stages of Cotta's argument are clear from *ND* 3.66–93. (i) If God is good and cares for man why did he bestow reason on man when it brings injury not benefit to its possessor, and why are so few men, if any, wise? (ii) If God is good why does he not punish the wicked and care for the good?

opif. 19.8–10 is a direct, if brief, answer to these criticisms, providing further evidence of the relationship between Lactantius' treatise and the *ND*. God *is* good and wisdom is a divine and excellent gift. It is given to all men but it is in the power of each person whether to use it. Also, it does bring benefit to its possessor for it provides the basis of virtue which brings eternal life. Cotta has made the mistake of judging these things 'by the flesh' (19.9). To understand the matter properly one must judge by heavenly standards. To achieve eternal life one must live according to the good of the soul, the true man, who can 'neither be touched, nor looked upon, nor grasped, because he lies hidden within this body which is seen'. This is the moral conclusion to the argument contained in the three parts of the *opif.* Man is under God's special care: whilst other animals have certain natural defences man has the heavenly gift of *ratio* (Part A). A study of man's body shows the *mens* is at its highest point, controlling the body, and that the body is designed to serve the mind or soul (Part B). A study of man's heavenly aspect, his mind or soul, shows that it is of a distinctive nature, independent of the body and immortal (Part C). Man must therefore live for the good of his soul.

Having considered the character of the *opif.*, its purpose, method and argument, we may finally address the question of its written sources, as this has dominated the efforts of scholars writing on the treatise. Apart from works cited in the *opif.* – the works of Cicero listed in *opif.* 1, a book of Varro's, and Lucretius' poem – commentators have suggested the use of further works of Cicero, the Hermetic writings, a Posidonian treatise on man, a 'middle-Platonic' work such as Apuleius' *de dogm. Plat.*, grammatical and philosophical doxographic works, and a sceptic or 'probabilist' work on human psychology.

If Lactantius is using sources which he does not acknowledge there may be three reasons for his not citing them or their authors by name. (i) Use of a work is deliberately concealed because acknowledgement of its use would be embarrassing to Lactantius or his cause. (ii) Use of a work is indirectly acknowledged by Lactantius. (iii) The work is of a type that one does not normally acknowledge.

The first answer might be applicable if Lactantius were using a source which would be identified by his Christian readers with their persecutors. Such sources might include Hermetic or late Platonist works. Yet there might be an advantage in using such works if they were shown to support the Christian viewpoint. Also, Lactantius is extremely free in his citation of Hermetic works, for example, in the *institutes*, much of which was also written during persecution. Another reason for concealment might be that Lactantius does not wish to acknowledge non-Ciceronian works because of his desire to retain the Ciceronian character of the *opif.* This is possible and we must

note that the two authors Lactantius refers to apart from Cicero are Varro and Lucretius – both of whom he would know as being personally connected with Cicero. Thus, our author makes a point of noting the connection between Varro and Cicero in the one place in the body of the work where he mentions the latter (5.6).

The second solution, that the author indirectly rather than directly acknowledges a written source, applies to various of the works of Cicero which he has used, including *Tusc.* 1 and the *academica*. As the whole treatise is deliberately 'Ciceronian' it would be neither necessary nor appropriate to acknowledge which particular texts he is using. To do so would destroy the character of the treatise.

The third possibility is that Lactantius is using works the character of which is such that one would not normally cite them by name. This is likely to be the case only with certain reference books. Lactantius seems to be using such a work, probably grammatical and containing definitions, at *opif.* 8.10 and 15.1. Indeed, at 15.1 the work may be indirectly acknowledged through the reference to 'grammatici'.

We must remember that our author had probably already passed his half-century when he sat down to write the *opif.* He brought to it all the influences and ideas of those years of rhetorical training and practice, most of the information in his head not traceable to any particular school, let alone written work. To note parallels in thought between Lactantius and others, and to suggest the original inspiration of some of his ideas is perhaps interesting, even useful. But then to suggest the necessity of literary connections where they are neither acknowledged by the author nor required by identity of vocabulary or order of ideas is in most cases not only speculative but destructive to an understanding of the character of Lactantius' work.

The framework of the source discussion was established by Brandt in 1891, who argued that apart from his acknowledged written sources Lactantius drew upon two other main works: an Hermetic source and a 'sceptic' source.[38] He pointed out that *opif.* 2–13 makes extensive use of the concept of the combination of beauty and utility in the human body (2.7–9; 5.11; 7.6–11; 8.5–8, 13; 10.4, 7, 10; also cf. 8.1; 10.12, 18–27; 11.1; 13.3, 5, 7). This, argued Brandt, is not Lactantius' own contribution, being entirely absent from the later part of the treatise, but is instead characteristic of his Hermetic source, as is seen if one compares *inst.* 2.10.13f. where Hermes is actually referred to.[39] Further similarities between the *opif.* and the Hermetic literature include the resemblance of infants to their parents and the rapid movement of the human soul. From chapter 14, Brandt argued, Lactantius uses a 'sceptic' source dealing with matters of psychology (and the body) which stressed the impossibility of knowledge in relation to these matters.[40] Brandt believed that Lactantius had also made use of the elder Pliny. L. Rossetti, in 1928, supported Brandt's view regarding the use of an Hermetic source, adding further arguments. He also suggested a use of Seneca's writings in the *opif.*[41]

In 1950 E. von Ivanka presented a completely different viewpoint.[42] Building on the work of K. Reinhardt he argued that the same 'Gedankengang' stemming from Posidonius can be traced in a variety of authors writing on man, including Cicero, Lactantius, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose and Basil of Caesarea. Ivanka argues that the later anthropological depictions in Latin literature are not replicas of Cicero's work but instead draw with Cicero on two Posidonian works, one anatomical, the other treating man as a 'Vernunftwesen'.[43]

[38] S. Brandt, 1891: 225ff.
[39] Ibid. 272f.
[40] Ibid. 285.
[41] L. Rossetti, 1928, esp. 195ff.
[42] E. von Ivanka, 1950: 178–92.
[43] Ibid. 190–1.

M. Perrin represents a further stage of scholarship on the sources of the *opif.* Against Brandt and Rossetti, Perrin regards Cicero as the major influence, rejecting the use of Hermetic sources, Pliny, and, to a lesser extent, Seneca.[44] Perrin sees Ivanka's work as demonstrating the use of one or more manuals on human physiology. He himself sees the necessity of more than one manual as the *opif.* reflects the views of a number of schools, although he believes that Lactantius represents above all a late stage of middle Platonism.[45] He argues that the 'sceptic' source is in fact 'probabilist', in the tradition of Carneades, with its marked opposition to Stoic views on the soul.[46]

We must, then, examine whether Lactantius made use of these suggested written sources. Perrin has made a number of reasonable criticisms of the Hermetic-source theory. He concludes that Lactantius did not know Hermes until after he wrote the *opif.*, unless he did not use it because of its anti-Christian character.[47] However, the conjunction of Hermetic ideas noted by Brandt and Rossetti is perhaps a little too far-reaching to be merely coincidental, especially considering the extent of Lactantius' knowledge of Hermes a short while later, when writing the *institutes.* Particularly strong is Brandt's point that Lactantius specifically mentions Hermes regarding beauty and utility at *inst.* 2.10.13f., just before referring to the *opif.*[48] On the other hand, the beauty-and-utility combination in *Poimandres* 5 (= Hermes 5.6), the Hermetic text cited by Brandt, is only briefly expressed and not strikingly close to Lactantius. The view expressed there that there are shameful parts of the body which God has hidden is totally alien to the thought of the *opif.* (cf. *opif.* 13.1). Also, Brandt's argument that the beauty-and-utility passages cannot be Lactantius' own work because they are entirely absent after chapter 13 is based on his failure to recognise that Lactantius is mirroring the structure of Cicero's *ND* and therefore is deliberately giving a different character to chapters 14–19. We may conclude that Lactantius probably knew some Hermetic works when writing the *opif.* and that they provided a part of the inspiration for a few of the ideas contained in the treatise. There is no evidence, however, that Lactantius is following them in any sense as a direct written source.

Although Ivanka's Posidonian hypothesis has a certain inherent attractiveness, it does not bear close inspection as far as Lactantius is concerned. The differences between Cicero and Lactantius are most easily and reasonably explained in terms of the latter's different purpose and developments of thought, whilst the similarities between Lactantius and other Christian writers on man are not remarkable among co-religionists from the same cultural background writing on the same subject. Lactantius never once mentions Posidonius or implies the use of a Stoic source earlier than Cicero. Ivanka (p. 189) suggests that the latter part of *opif.* 19 is Lactantius' polemic against his own 'Vorlage' of Posidonian 'vitalism'. Yet this ignores the much more evident parallel with Cotta's discussion on providence, wisdom and the reward of virtue in *ND* 3.

Much of Perrin's criticism of earlier scholars is valid and his edition of the *opif.* is indispensable to anyone studying the treatise. The closeness of the relationship to the

[44] M. Perrin, 1974: 46–50.

[45] Ibid. 55–7.

[46] Ibid. 55. In his later work, however, Perrin writes that the polemic against the Stoics regarding the soul may be based on a Platonic 'oral source' such as lectures similar to Apuleius' *de dogm. Plat.* (Perrin, 1981: 286f., cf. 254–9).

[47] M. Perrin, 1974: 51.

[48] R. Pichon, 1901: 69–70 explains Lactantius' use of the double concept as being a response to his Roman readers' love of engineering and artistic excellence.

ND is never fully explored by him, however, as he always draws back from a full Ciceronian hypothesis through a refusal to allow a degree of originality to Lactantius' work. This leads him to seek additional sources to explain those aspects of the *opif.* not directly dependent on Cicero's dialogues.[49] He is thus forced to posit the use of various manuals where the real reason for the presence of a variety of philosophical viewpoints in the *opif.* is its relationship to the *ND*.

Finally, the argument for a sceptic or probabilist written source is surely based on a misinterpretation of *opif.* 14–19. As we have seen, the Academic mode of Part C is a deliberate device employed by Lactantius to parallel *ND* 3.

Can we then say with any certainty what written sources Lactantius did use in writing the *opif.*? Direct use of Plato, Xenophon, Apuleius and Galen were already ruled out by Brandt.[50] Perrin has further argued convincingly against a use of the work of the elder Pliny.[51] We have concluded that a past reading of certain Hermetic writings may have played an indirect part in the inspiration of the *opif.* but there is no indication of a direct literary connection. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that Lactantius has used Greek works at all in the preparation of his treatise.

Our author cites Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.894 probably from memory but his immediate library in composing the *opif.* otherwise seems to consist of Varro, Lucretius and Cicero plus, probably, a grammatical reference work. There is no evidence that he is using Seneca directly, although it must always remain a possibility that that author's lost work on premature death has been used in *opif.* 4. Of Cicero's works Lactantius in *opif.* 1 cites *de re pub.* 4, *de leg.* 1 and *ND* 2. In addition, we know from a fragment of *de re pub.* 3 in Augustine's *contra Iulianum* 4.1260 that Lactantius is also using this book in *opif.* 3.[52] We have noted his debt to *Tusc.* 1 and the *academica*. Above all else the *ND* must be seen as the primary influence on the structure and character of this earliest extant work of Lactantius. Yet Lactantius never slavishly follows Cicero. He uses him discriminatingly and always with a clear view of his own purpose in mind, seeing himself as resolving the uncertainty, and hence the ultimately unsatisfactory character of the *de natura deorum*.

Lucretius is the direct spokesman for Epicurus in the *opif.*, being used to parallel the *ND*'s use of Velleius. Lactantius never quotes the poet at length, selecting instead brief passages suitable for refutation in his programme of proving God's providential care for man. His use of Varro is more neutral, this Latin author generally providing Lactantius with etymological information (5.6; 8.6; 10.1, 16f.; 14.3; 17.5). Only at 12.6ff. does Varro seem to be the source for philosophical views.[53]

A study of the *de opificio dei* in terms of its literary and rhetorical qualities would need to be carried out by a scholar more learned in this field than I. I have merely tried to show that the treatise is deserving of such a study, that it is of inherent interest not from the viewpoint of its sources but in terms of the author's plan, his purpose, and the execution of his work.

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[49] See especially M. Perrin, 1974: 54.
[50] S. Brandt, 1891: 256–60.
[51] M. Perrin, 1974: 46f.
[52] Ibid. 259.
[53] J. Stevenson, 1961: 502.