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978-0-521-00630-9 - Cicero: De Natvra Deorvm Liber I

Edited by Andrew R. Dyck

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DE NATVRA DEORVM  
LIBER I

EDITED BY  
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## PREFACE

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It may seem audacious, in light of A. S. Pease's monumental commented edition of *De natura deorum*, for another English work to be offered to the public dealing with a portion of that text. Pease's diligence in collecting relevant literature, primary and secondary, make his volumes an unrivalled treasure-house of information. However, it must be said that students reading *N.D.* for the first time often find that Pease's work fails to provide accessible answers to the puzzles that perplex them. In not a few cases Pease declines to adjudicate on controversial points, contenting himself with his massive citations; but students tend to lose their way in these thickets and return from their expedition disappointed. Furthermore scholarship on *N.D.* has been going forward since the mid-50s, especially on philosophical points, where, even by standards of his day, Pease was less than sure-footed. On the text, too, progress has been made, in particular P. L. Schmidt's reassessment of the Leiden corpus; hence Pease's stemma (a modification of Mayor's) is superseded, the major problem being the insufficient weight he gives to codex B (see the Introduction §7). Though capable of emendation (cf. on §28), Pease produced a text that is conservative sometimes to the point of unintelligibility (e.g. §§1, 39); he tended doggedly to defend the transmitted text and not consider whether scribes might have fallen into errors that obliterated the required philosophical sense (cf. on §§28 and 89). Moreover, in technique Pease's commentary was conservative even by the standards of its times. The commentator is well placed to provide readers with guidance about the architecture of the text; and the method of explicating the train of thought of an entire section of text before descending to the individual words and phrases was pioneered in Wilamowitz's *Herakles* (1895), Kaibel's *Elektra* (1896), and Norden's *Aeneid VI* (1st edn 1903). Pease, however, still clung to the older method of dealing only with the word or phrase. Immersed in a mass of details, the reader of Pease's commentary may well have difficulty seeing how the argument develops. For

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these reasons English readers might find it useful to have a different type of commentary on *N.D.*, not to replace but to supplement Pease. This volume supplies one for Book I, which is a good vehicle for introducing students to Cicero the writer on philosophy since it exemplifies *in nuce* his technique of *in utramque partem disputare*. It also has considerable interest since it includes a summary of the theological views of many Greek philosophers and the one connected exposition of Epicurean theology surviving from antiquity. It was a Book that Cicero himself seems to have enjoyed writing (see below p. 2 n. 8) and to which he devoted his considerable skills of characterization and rhetorical argument.

I owe thanks to various persons and institutions who have helped in the preparation or improvement of this work. David Blank, Harry Hine, David Konstan, and Dirk Obbink have placed me deep in their debt by providing invaluable comments on an earlier draft; the last named has also very kindly placed at my disposal his manuscript text and translation of Philodemus *De pietate* II; quotations of this material are thus based upon his edition. The series editors, Philip Hardie and E. J. Kenney, have also provided invaluable help; this book has enormously benefited from the latter's unrivalled knowledge of Latin and of the series' target audience: his detailed comments have improved every page. I also thank my wife Janis for her loving understanding and support during the gestation period. The Academic Senate of the University of California, Los Angeles, provided me with a research assistant and other material assistance for several years to help with the preparation of the manuscript. Cambridge University Press and its staff, especially Commissioning Editor Dr. Michael Sharp, have shown exceptional patience and care in handling the publication. Finally, the dedication expresses my thanks to the members of the Philological Seminar of the University of Tübingen, whose gracious hospitality and lively interest in my seminar on *N.D.* I during the Summer Semester of 1999 will always remain a fond memory.