

Infelix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas: Caesar's Divine Transgression of Epic Proportions in Lucan's Pharsalia

It has been long acknowledged by scholars that in Lucan's *Pharsalia* the gods are not afforded their typical epic role as divine overseers of the universe. Instead, the narrator often makes use of natural philosophy to explain mechanisms of his catastrophically ruined world and, perplexingly, often frames the acquisition of the knowledge of such mechanisms negatively. He leaves his audience with neither the gods nor the philosophers to look towards for answers, simultaneously contributing to and providing an explanation for the chaos of this civil war. The rejection of the gods in the *Pharsalia* is highly intentional, for Ennius and Naevius prove to us that historical epic before Lucan was no stranger to the divine. As Ahl (1974) points out, by avoiding the gods as personal agents, two critical structural elements of the poem arise: 1) its moral fabric is redefined in terms of the righteousness of Cato against the corruption of Caesar, rather than the personal interests of the divine as is traditionally found in epic, and 2) there is great opportunity for the use of natural philosophy, both Stoic and Epicurean.

One such example of the latter (which itself reinforces the former) is Caesar's inquiry into the source of the Nile and the response given to him by the priest Acoreus in Book 10. Rossi (2005) compares this episode to both the epic trope of the bard's song and the typical presentation of poet-philosophers as is found in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* and Virgil's *Georgics*. I would like to take Rossi's comparison a step further in combination with the convoluted nature of the relationship between divine knowledge and the poem's narrator to demonstrate how the poet's skepticism culminates in Caesar's hubristic desire to ascertain the source of the Nile. In seeking this divine knowledge, Caesar is amplified from mere tyrant to usurper of the gods themselves.

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