

That the supreme God ought to be understood as impassible and not subject to emotion is a common belief in Greek theological discourse, both pagan and Christian. In his *De ira Dei*, however, the fourth century Christian author Lactantius defends the existence of God's anger as a *materia* (15) of his being that is both necessary and beneficial to humans. Against the Church Fathers, Lactantius maintains that God is not only capable of feeling the emotion of anger, but also that an accurate understanding of that anger and its operation in the lives of mortals is essential to one's knowledge of the divine, from which participation in the true religion and, ultimately, salvation follow (4-6). In this formulation, God's wrath is seen as the highest form of justice, above all human laws and institutions, as well as invaluable as a means by which to deter mortals from sinning (15-18). At the crux of Lactantius' break from traditional philosophical conceptions of divine anger is his model for the nature of the Christian God: Lactantius offers a view of the divine nature that allows for a God who experiences anger almost as would man, with the important qualification that it is just, regulated, and ultimately bred from kindness (17). This paper will address the ways in which this belief in a supreme God who is angry, and justifiably so, compares to Epicurean, Stoic, and Christian beliefs in a God unaffected by either kindness or anger, as well as the ramifications of this position for ancient conceptualizations of anger as an emotion.

Lactantius' arguments present a number of perspectives from which to explore the relationship between pagan and Christian conceptions of divine anger, including the relevance and representation of philosophical ideas of anger as an emotion, the consequences of believing in a God who is subject to similar emotions as humans, and the place of Lactantius' doctrine in the broader context of evolving early Christian theologies (proto-orthodox and proto-heterodox). It is through an examination of these three lines of inquiry that Lactantius' text is both most productive and most problematic: his treatment of the philosophers is often cursory and inconsistent; he does not define satisfactorily his classification of anger as a *materia* of God (15-16); and finally, his theological position on anger is convoluted by a number of excursions on, for example, the origin of the world and the seasons (10-11; 13), seemingly woven from an elaborate cloth of third and fourth century Christianities. Further, at the same time that Lactantius distinguishes his definition of God's anger from those of the philosophers (17), he sees that anger as necessary for the functioning of a religious system based on the proper worship of God (6, 8), a sentiment which would seem to align him, in part, with pagan beliefs about the proper worship of a deity as ensuring the health and productivity of a person or people.

The belief in a Christian god capable, and in fact in need, of anger is further complicated by questions of agency and responsibility, as well as anger's function in personal and social relationships between both mortals and the divine. A consideration of *De ira Dei* in the context of recent theoretical discussions of the emotions will help to elucidate the function and conception of anger in the period under study. If we are correct to follow Lactantius' argument that divine anger is essential for the regulation of human behavior, are we to view the ancient conceptualizations of emotions as rational or as irrational? Is it possible to take Lactantius' view of the dichotomy of soul (good) and body (bad) as a model for understanding the role of human agency in incurring God's wrath – are sin and unrighteousness of the flesh inevitable or is the mind capable of controlling them? And, finally, how would these and other questions change one's relationship with God, particularly if, as Lactantius argues, that relationship should be deeply rooted in fear of the divine (12)?