East KA. [*Superstitionis Malleus: John Toland, Cicero, and the War on Priestcraft in Early Enlightenment England*](#). *History of European Ideas* 2014, 40(7), 965-983.

Copyright:

© 2014. This manuscript version is made available under the [CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license](#)

DOI link to article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2014.916099>

Date deposited:

06/05/2016

Embargo release date:

06 February 2016

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence](#)

Superstitionis Malleus: John Toland, Cicero, and the War on Priestcraft in Early Enlightenment England

KATHERINE A. EAST*

Date revised: 14th April 2014

Summary

This paper explores the role of the Ciceronian tradition in the radical religious discourse of John Toland (1670-1722). Toland produced numerous works seeking to challenge the authority of the clergy, condemning their ‘priestcraft’ as a significant threat to the integrity of the Commonwealth. Throughout these anticlerical writings, Toland repeatedly invoked Cicero as an enemy to superstition and as a religious sceptic, particularly citing the theological dialogues *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione*. This paper argues that Toland adapted the Ciceronian tradition so that it could function as an active influence on the construction of his radical discourse. First, it shows that Toland championed a particular interpretation of Cicero’s works which legitimised his use of Cicero in this rational context. Then, it shows the practical manifestations of this interpretation, examining the ramifications for how Toland formed three important facets of his campaign against priestcraft: his identification of priestcraft as a superstition; his argument for a rational religion in which priestcraft could play no role; and his portrayal of anticlericalism as a service to the Commonwealth.

Keywords: Cicero; John Toland; anticlericalism; Enlightenment; superstition; reason.

1. Introduction

* E-mail: katherine.east.2009@live.rhul.ac.uk

In Early Enlightenment England there was little that was safe from the approaching storm of radicalism: the divine right of Kings had already succumbed to an increasingly constitutional government, and the traditional authority of the Church was under sustained attack. This produced a frenzied intellectual exchange, as concerned parties debated the impeachability of the Scripture, the respective merits of reason and faith, and the validity of the power of the Church and its clergy. The seemingly inevitable conclusion, and one reached by many scholars, is that these efforts to confront religious traditions constituted a vital element of the ‘Radical Enlightenment’ narrative.¹ These scholars argue that the discourse coheres to their model of a radical ideology, in which faith, tradition, and authority were jettisoned in favour of reason. This interpretation has been the subject of dispute, as scholars continue to identify numerous intellectual and cultural influences on the development of the Enlightenment, many of which display continuity with preceding traditions.² The presence of an influential Ciceronian tradition contributes a further challenge, potentially reshaping how this religious discourse is understood.

John Toland (1670-1722) was one of the foremost contributors to this radical religious discourse, directing his polemic against any and every attempt by the Church to impede man’s reason or liberty. Toland deemed the biggest danger to be the authority of the clergy, and

¹ This narrative can be traced to Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680-1715*, translated by J. Lewis May, (London, 1953), but has been particularly developed in the works of Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London, 1981) and Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford, 2001).

² Jon Parkin and Timothy Stanton, *Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2013) demonstrate continuity with the natural law theory of the seventeenth century, while J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, volume I: the Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764*, 5 vols (Cambridge, 2004) and Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth-Century: religion, the Reformation, and social change* (Indianapolis, 1976) argued for the continuing influence of Erasmian scholarship on the formation of religious radicalism, and Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: the traditions of scholarship in an age of science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991) has shown that humanist scholarship remained a powerful intellectual tool.

consequently committed himself to waging war against priestcraft.³ Toland reviled the clergy as a threat to the Commonwealth; it used its authority to hinder liberty in both the civil and spiritual spheres, and to further perpetuate its own power by championing absolutist rule.⁴ Toland's condemnation of the clergy's support of the tyrant Charles II expresses this well: 'the Pulpits immediatly sounded with nothing else but *Passive Obedience* and *Non-resistance* to all the King's Commands, of what nature soever under the pain of Eternal Damnation; that if our Property, Religion, or Lives should be attack'd by him, we must have recourse to no defence but Prayers and Tears; and that Monarchy as well as Episcopacy was of Divine Right, with the like extravagant Doctrins'.⁵ The clergy's power, and pursuit of further power, threatened the

³ On this notion of 'priestcraft' and its place in Early Enlightenment England see Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: the Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge, 1992), 1-24, 173-179, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722* (Manchester, 2003), 97; Blair Worden, 'English Republicanism', in James H. Burns and Mark Goldie, *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700* (Cambridge, 1991), 473; Mark Goldie, 'Priestcraft and the Birth of Whiggism', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), 209-211; Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004), 41-44.

⁴ On the clergy and civil tyranny see Mark Goldie, 'The Civil Religion of James Harrington' in Anthony Pagden, *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), 197-206, 212-218, and Goldie, 'Priestcraft', in Phillipson and Skinner, *Political Discourse*, 212; Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 173-179, *Republican Learning*, 247, and "'Religion's safe, with Priestcraft is the War": Augustan Anticlericalism and the Legacy of the English Revolution, 1660-1720', *The European Legacy*, 5.4 (2000), 549-551; Scott, *Commonwealth Principles*, 49-54. On this concept of a spiritual tyranny see Goldie, 'Priestcraft', in Phillipson and Skinner, *Political Discourse*, 220; Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 137-160 and *Republican Learning*, 83, 245, 249-251; Richard Popkin and Mark Goldie, 'Scepticism, Priestcraft, and Toleration', in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), 85; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, xvii-xviii. On the role of the Church in society see Jeremy Gregory, 'The Eighteenth-Century Reformation: the pastoral task of Anglican clergy after 1689', in John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor, *The Church of England c. 1689-c. 1833* (Cambridge, 1993), 67-85.

⁵ John Toland, *The Art of Governing by Party* (London, 1701), 14-15; cf. John Toland *Anglia Libera* (London, 1701), 11-31, *Reasons for Naturalising the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland, on the same foot with all other Nations* (London, 1714), 36, *The Life of John Milton* (London, 1698), 83, *Amyntor: or, a defence of Milton's Life* (London, 1699), 103-104.

integrity of the Commonwealth and the virtue of its citizenry to a far greater extent than any political machinations. This threat needed to be eliminated, and it was in pursuit of this that Toland particularly earned his radical reputation.

Notable throughout this campaign against the authority of the clergy was Toland's reliance on the Ciceronian tradition for inspiration and guidance.⁶ In *Cicero Illustratus*, a work which proposed a new edition of Cicero's complete works, Toland said of Cicero 'profectò prae cunctis mortalibus Superstitionis malleus dici poterat'.⁷ Not an isolated event, Cicero as *malleus Superstitionis* featured throughout Toland's works. Often cited was a passage which appeared towards the end of the second book of *De Divinatione* in which Cicero seemingly declared his own war on superstition:

Nam, ut vere loquamur, superstitio, fusa per gentis, oppressit omnium fere animos atque hominum imbecillitatem occupavit. Quod et in eis libris dictum est qui sunt *de Natura Deorum*, et hac disputatione id maxime egimus. Multum enim et nobismet ipsis et nostris profuturi videbamus, si eam funditus sustulissemus. Nec vero – id enim diligenter intellegi volo – superstitione tollenda religio tollitur. Nam et maiorum instituta tueri sacris caerimoniisque retinendis sapientis est, et esse praestantem aliquam aeternamque naturam, et eam suspiciendam admirandamque hominum generi pulchritudo mundi ordoque rerum caelestium cogit confiteri. Quam ob rem, ut religio

⁶ It was not solely in Toland's religious discourse that Cicero featured prominently, as he drew on Cicero's works for material in his political and scholarly works as well, in particular when seeking to champion republican principles. See, for example, the frontispiece of John Toland, ed., *The Oceana of James Harrington, and his other works*, (London, 1700), which cites Cicero's definition of a *res publica* from *De Republica*, III.43-45, a definition also quoted in full in John Toland, *Vindicius Liborius* (London, 1702), 142-144.

⁷ John Toland, *Cicero Illustratus, dissertatio philologico-critica* (London, 1712), 59: 'truly [he] can be called the hammer of Superstition before all mortals'.

propaganda etiam est, quae est iuncta cum cognitione naturae, sic superstitionis stirpes omnes eiiciendae.⁸

Toland's repeated invocations of this passage affirm that he was eager to identify Cicero with the sentiments contained therein, a characterisation of Cicero which allowed Toland to deploy him in the radical context of his own religious works.⁹ From Toland's *Two Essays*, written in 1695 on the questions of creation and the rise of fables, to his *Pantheisticon* in 1720, in which he detailed his ideal Pantheistic religion, Toland drew on Cicero, particularly *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione*, for philosophical strategies and historical evidence to support his theories. Cicero's role in *Pantheisticon* was so pronounced, his words providing the majority of the pseudo-liturgy contained therein, that he assumed an almost priestly role in Toland's theology.

In spite of the prominent role assumed by the Ciceronian tradition in Toland's radical discourse, it has been all but ignored in scholarship addressing the intellectual forces at work

⁸ Cicero, *De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione*, translated by W. A. Falconer (London, 1927), 537, (*De Divinatione*, II.148-149): 'Speaking frankly, superstition, which is widespread among the nations, has taken advantage of human weakness to cast its spell over the mind of almost every man. This same view was stated in my treatise *On the Nature of the Gods*; and to prove the correctness of that view has been the chief aim of the present discussion. For I thought that I should be rendering a great service to myself and my country if I could tear this superstition up by the roots. But I want it distinctly understood that the destruction of superstition does not mean the destruction of religion. For I consider it the part of wisdom to preserve the institutions of our forefathers by retaining their sacred rites and ceremonies. Furthermore, the celestial order and the beauty of the universe compel me to confess that there is some excellent and eternal Being, who deserves the respect and homage of men. Wherefore, just as it is a duty to extend the influence of true religion, which is closely associated with the knowledge of nature, so it is a duty to weed out every root of superstition'.

⁹ John Toland, *Adeisidaemon, sive Titus Livius a superstitione vindicatus. Annexae sunt ejusdem Origines Judiciae* (Hagae-Comitis, 1709), on the frontispiece of which appeared an excerpt. The passage was also quoted in *Origines Judiciae*, 101-103, the partner work of *Adeisidaemon*, and in *Pantheisticon, sive formula Celebrandae Sodalitatis Socraticae, In Tres Particulas Divisa; quae Pantheistarum, sive Sodalium, Continet I, Mores et Axiomata: II, Numen et Philosophiam: III, Libertatem, et non fallentem Legem, Neque fallendam* (Cosmopoli, 1720), 69-70.

here.¹⁰ This article will attempt to redress that omission, by demonstrating first that Toland deliberately championed a method of reading Cicero which would justify his extensive use of the tradition in a radical context, then exploring the practical results of this reading in how Toland constructed his discourse. It will consequently challenge the assumption that a radical discourse necessitated the rejection of tradition and authority, an assumption which has dominated treatments of the Early Enlightenment.

2. Interpreting Ciceronian Theology

Toland's desire to integrate the Ciceronian tradition into a radical religious discourse was not without its difficulties. There was an ambiguity to Cicero's primary theological works, *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione*, which made their interpretation controversial. This ambiguity emanated from the works' composition as dialogues; *De Natura Deorum* allowed the characters of Velleius, Balbus, and Cotta to articulate the views of the Epicureans, Stoics, and Academics respectively, meanwhile *De Divinatione* saw Quintus Cicero make the Stoic case for divination in the first book, while Marcus Cicero used Academic Scepticism to refute that case in the second book. Questions inevitably arose concerning the location of Cicero's voice in these dialogues. Should Cicero automatically be identified with the character articulating the views of the Academic Sceptics, the school with which Cicero identified himself in life?¹¹ In *De Natura Deorum*, surely Cicero makes his own views clear at the end of book three, when under his own name he concedes the day to the Stoics, or was this simply a slight of hand to protect himself against the wrath of the faithful? Indeed, is there any merit

¹⁰ Exceptions are Tadeusz Zieliński, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig, 1929) and Günther Gawlick, 'Cicero and the Enlightenment', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (1963), 657-682, which offer important but schematic and outdated surveys of the Ciceronian tradition in the Enlightenment. Matthew Fox, *Cicero's Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 2007) attempts to examine the influence of Ciceronian rhetoric in the Enlightenment.

¹¹ See, for example, Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, I.11.

in seeking Cicero's voice at all, or should the works be read as a demonstration of the Academic method, presenting the different sides of a question and leaving it to the reader to draw their own conclusions?

The confusion engendered by this ambiguity regarding Cicero's voice permeated the religious discourse of Early Modern England. There were those within the established Church who sought in *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione* a Cicero whose views were conducive to their own orthodox understanding of Christianity.¹² These clergymen identified Cicero with the statements made under his own name in *De Natura Deorum*, and hence with the conclusion which suggested that he concurred with the views of the Stoic Balbus. This enabled them to identify Cicero as an advocate of such points of orthodoxy as divine providence, and hence revelation, and universal consent.¹³ Richard Bentley, renowned classicist and theologian, in his response to the notorious Freethinker Anthony Collins' work *Discourse on Free-thinking*, elaborated on how Cicero ought to be read to enable these conclusions: 'if we seek therefore Cicero's true Sentiments; it must not be in his Disputes against Others, where he has licence to say any thing for opposition sake: but in the Books where he dogmatizes himself; where

¹² This was primarily confined to so-called 'rational' Anglicans who, influenced by Newtonianism, attempted to cohere natural religion with their orthodoxy; referred to as 'Low Churchmen' and 'Latitudinarians', they counted among their number Samuel Clarke, Ralph Cudworth, and Richard Bentley. The problem of determining appropriate terminology for discussing these men, particularly the 'rationalism' of their ideas, is discussed by John Spurr, "'Rational Religion" in Restoration England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49.4 (1988), particularly 569-581. Regarding this movement within the Church see Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (Hassocks, 1976), 15-21; Gerald Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-1789* (Harmondsworth, 1960), 65-80; Gawlick, 'Cicero in the Enlightenment', 662; Brian Young, 'Conyers Middleton: the historical consequences of heterodoxy', in S. Mortimer and J. Robertson, *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, c. 1600-1750* (Leiden, 2012), 238; Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990), 5-7.

¹³ As is done by Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, third edition, (London, 1711), 18-19 and John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (London, 1675), I.218.

allowing for the word *Probable*, you have all the Spirit and the Marrow of the *Platonic*, *Peripatetic*, and *Stoic Systemes*'.¹⁴ The process by which Cicero could be made a viable tool for these clergymen therefore becomes evident: he must be identified with the views stated under his own name in favour of Stoic theology, and his identification of these views as *probabile* must be equated with dogmatic support.

An alternative reading was championed by those who sought to recruit Cicero as a mouthpiece for heterodoxy: simply identify as Ciceronian the views expressed by the character of the Academic Sceptic in the dialogues. Anthony Collins made this case most explicitly in the *Discourse of Freethinking*, published in 1713, in which he identified Cicero as a fellow Freethinker: 'the true method of discovering the Sentiments of CICERO, is to see what he says himself, or under the Person of an *Academick*...And if CICERO's Readers will follow this Rule of common Sense in understanding him, they will find him as great a *Free-Thinker* as he was a *Philosopher*, an *Orator*, a *Man of Virtue*, and a *Patriot*'.¹⁵ This reading made Cicero's defining characteristic his scepticism, his desire to challenge all dogma.¹⁶ Cicero could consequently be invoked by heterodox writers, who would cite as Ciceronian arguments made against divine providence and intervention, against a God who could act outside the laws of nature and reason.¹⁷ Among the heterodox, particularly the radical Deists and Freethinkers, it

¹⁴ Richard Bentley, *Remarks Upon a late Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London, 1713), II.81-82; cf. Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), I.434.

¹⁵ Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London, 1713), 139.

¹⁶ On the previous influence of Cicero's scepticism see Anthony Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (London, 1974), 232-248; Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: from Savonarola to Bayle* (New York, 2003), 28-35; Charles Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: a study of the influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague, 1972). On its future influence on Hume see Peter S. Fosl, 'Doubt and Divinity: Cicero's influence on Hume's religious scepticism', *Hume Studies*, XX.1 (1994), 103-120.

¹⁷ Anthony Collins, *Discourse*, 135-136; cf. Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as old as the creation: or, The Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (London, 1730), iv and Charles Blount, *Anima Mundi: or, an Historical Narration of the Opinions of the Ancients, concerning Man's Soul after this Life* (London, 1679), 10-11, 33. On the efforts of Deists to make the case against divine providence and revelation see James Herrick, *The Radical*

was the sceptical arguments in *De Divinatione* and *De Natura Deorum* that could be called Ciceronian.

Toland's awareness of these disputes concerning how Cicero's religious texts should be read is made apparent in *Cicero Illustratus*, in which he condemns those among his contemporaries who cited as Ciceronian views which were not in fact his own: 'non Cicero, qui haec aspernatur, citari debuit, sed Velleius Epicureus apud Ciceronem, Balbus Stoicus apud Ciceronem, et sic de aliis'.¹⁸ For Toland, there was no doubt as to where the true Ciceronian voice was located. Cicero was Cotta, the Academic; the conclusion of *De Natura Deorum* was an attempt to protect himself from those Toland likens to the censors of the Catholic Church.¹⁹ Cicero presented his scepticism under his own name in *De Divinatione*; the passage at the conclusion of the second book so prized by Toland was an unassailable clarification of his beliefs.²⁰ Toland permits no prevarication on this reading; the truly Ciceronian views within *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione* are those of an Academic Sceptic. This identification of Cicero with the sceptical views articulated in his works justified, Toland was able to deploy this Cicero in his own endeavours. The practical ramifications of this can be discerned in how three vital aspects of Toland's anticlerical campaign were addressed: the definition of superstition; the nature of religion; and the role of a civil religion.

3. Priestcraft as a Ciceronian *Superstitio*

Rhetoric of the English Deists: the discourse of skepticism, 1680-1750 (Columbia, 1997), 26-36; Roger D. Lund, *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750* (Cambridge, 1995), 1-32; Jacob, *The Newtonians*, 201-250; Cragg, *The Church*, 65-80; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 360-363, 599-627.

¹⁸ John Toland, *Cicero Illustratus*, 37: 'Cicero, who rejected these things, ought not to be cited, but Velleius the Epicurean in Cicero, Balbus the Stoic in Cicero, and in the same way about other things'.

¹⁹ John Toland, *Cicero Illustratus*, 37-38.

²⁰ John Toland, *Cicero Illustratus*, 38.

As noted, Toland demonstrated throughout his works a particular affinity with the passage towards the end of *De Divinatione*, which he deemed Cicero's most conclusive statement of his religious views. In that concluding passage, Cicero made an impassioned pledge to 'superstitionis stirpes omnes eiiciendae'.²¹ This Ciceronian *superstitio*, and the campaign against it in the theological texts, attained a high status in Toland's discourse. He identified in it a definition of superstition and a justification for its elimination which he could direct against priestcraft.

3.1. *The Origins of Superstition*

At the end of *De Divinatione* Cicero provided a clear indication of the source of *superstitio*: 'nam, ut vere loquamur, superstitio, fusa per gentis, oppressit omnium fere animos atque hominum imbecillitatem occupavit'.²² The origin of superstition in the weaknesses of men's minds, their irrationality and fear, was of the utmost importance to Cicero's approach. In *De Divinatione* Cicero often identified the mental frailty of men as the target of divinatory practices: 'quid mirum igitur, si in auspiciis et in omni divinatione imbecilli animi superstitiosa ista concipiant, verum dispicere non possint?'.²³ Cicero extended this argument to condemn those who deliberately exploited such irrationality with the invention of practices like divination, designed to not only manipulate man's weakness, but to perpetuate it by maintaining the irrational fear of the gods which was its basis.²⁴ Superstition grew from the

²¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 537, (II.149): 'so it is a duty to weed out every root of superstition'.

²² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 537, (II.148): 'Speaking frankly, superstition, which is widespread among the nations, has taken advantage over human weakness to cast its spell over the mind of almost every man'.

²³ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 463, (II.81): 'what wonder, then, if in auspices and in every kind of divination weak minds should adopt the superstitious practices which you have mentioned and should be unable to discern the truth?'; cf. *De Divinatione*, II.19, 83, 85, 86, 100, 125, 129. See Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: from the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge Mass., 2004), 127-128.

²⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.83-85.

irrationality of men, and was nurtured by those who sought to encourage and exploit that irrationality for their own purposes.

This is an understanding of superstition which suits Toland's own purposes absolutely. Throughout his works, Toland associates the origins of superstition and its power with the irrational fears of men.²⁵ For example, Toland's third *Letter to Serena* considers the origins of idolatry: 'the fluctuating of mens Minds between Hope and Fear, is one of the chief Causes of Superstition: for being no way able to foresee the Event of what greatly concerns them, they now hope the best, and next minute fear the worst, which easily leads them not only to take any thing for a good or bad Omen, which happen'd to them in any former good luck or misfortune; but also to lay hold of any Advice, to consult Diviners and Astrologers'.²⁶ The uncertainty of life, the fears and troubles which that introduces, creates weakness in the minds of men, making them susceptible to superstitious practices, which in turn further perpetuates their irrational fears. Toland is able to direct this understanding of superstition against both the clergy as an institution, and sacerdotal authority, the basis of its power.

3.2. The Origins of the Clergy

In the preface of the *Letters to Serena* Toland reveals that a particular passage from Cicero's *De Legibus* inspired the first letter in the collection: 'sensus nostros non Parens, non Nutrix, non Magister, non Poeta, non Scena depravat, non multitudinis Consensus abducit: at vero

²⁵ John Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 70; *Clito: a poem on the force of eloquence* (London, 1700), 18; 'A Specimen of the Critical History of the Celtic religion and Learning: containing an Account of the Druids, &c.', in Pierre Des Maizeaux, *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Toland* (London, 1726), I.8-9, 140, 142-143; *Amyntor*, 38; *Christianity not Mystrious* (London, 1696), 44; *An Appeal to Honest People Against Wicked Priests* (London, 1713), 16; *The Art of Restoring* (London, 1714), 29.

²⁶ John Toland, *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), III.78.

Animis omnes tenduntur Insidiae'.²⁷ Cicero sought to demonstrate that disagreements concerning justice emanate not from any flaw in reason or natural law, but from a failure among men to understand reason appropriately. Toland explains that from this passage developed the subject of his first letter, on the origin of prejudices, '*showing the successive Growth and Increase of Prejudices thro every step of our lives, and proving that all the Men in the World are join'd in the same Conspiracy to deprave the Reason of every individual Person*'.²⁸ In the first letter Toland pledged to identify the different ways in which man's reason was being depraved, and to what end. The connection to the clergy is forged here: 'the strange things and amazing story's we have read or heard (if of any Concern to a particular Religion) are daily confirm'd to us by the Preacher from the Pulpit, where all he says is taken for Truth by the greatest part of the Auditory, no body having the liberty to contradict him, and he giving out his own Conceits for the very Oracles of God'.²⁹ It is the clergy which sets the most traps to undermine man's irrationality.

The clergy's reasons for depraving man's reason is linked by Toland to the theory of priestly imposture. The third *Letter to Serena* explores the origins of idolatry, integrating an extensive account of the origins of priestly power.³⁰ According to Toland's history of idolatry, priests established their power by manipulating the fear of death which afflicted so many: 'it

²⁷ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, preface, quoting Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and the Laws*, translated by James E. G. Zetzel, 122, (*De Legibus* I.47): 'neither Parents or Nurse or Schoolmaster, or Poet, or Playhouse depraves our Senses, nor can the Consent of the Multitude mislead them: but all sorts of Traps are laid to seduce our Understandings'.

²⁸ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, preface; cf. 'Critical History', *Collection*, I.140.

²⁹ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, I.8.

³⁰ On the tradition of the theory of imposture see Harrison, '*Religion*' and the Religions, 14-18, 73-77, and Justin Champion, 'Legislators, impostors, and the politic origins of religion: English theories of 'imposture' from Stubbe to Toland', in Silvia Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert, and Richard H. Popkin, *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe: studies on the Traité Des Trois Imposteurs* (Dordrecht, 1996), 333-356.

seems evident from the remotest Monuments of Learning, that all Superstition originally related to the Worship of the Dead, being principally deriv'd from Funeral Rites, tho the first occasion might be very innocent or laudable...but the Flatterers of great Men in the Persons of their Predecessors, the excessive Affection of Friends or Relations, and the Advantage which the Heathen Priests drew from the Credulity of the simple, carry'd this matter a great deal further'.³¹ Toland invokes Ciceronian evidence, particularly from the *Tusculan Disputations*, to support this thesis.³² Toland extends this argument to encompass the deification of inappropriate objects as vital to the progression of idolatry, primarily using the descriptions in *De Natura Deorum* of the efforts of the Stoics to expand the fear of the gods among the people through such means.³³ According to Toland's account, priests and others who sought power for themselves introduced rituals and false religious practices built on the fears and irrationalities of men. The clergy's desire to undermine reason therefore becomes clear, as their power was rooted in the irrationality of men.

The contemporary clergy was perpetuating this deception in order to maintain the irrational fears which granted them power.³⁴ Toland provides a catalogue of the clerical practices which can be classified as superstitions: 'having given this summary Account, SERENA, of ancient and modern Heathenism, we may remark that almost every Point of those

³¹ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, III.72-73; cf. Milton, pp. 91-92 and *The Memorial of the State of England, in Vindication of the Queen, the Church, and the Administration* (London, 1705), 6.

³² John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, II.28, quotes Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I.38; *Letters to Serena*, II.44-46, quotes *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I.36; *Letters to Serena*, III.81-84, quotes *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I.37; *Letters to Serena*, III.84-87, quotes *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I.28-29.

³³ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, III.72-74, quotes Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II.62; *Letters to Serena*, III.77-80, quotes Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.4; *Letters to Serena*, III.87-90, quotes *De Natura Deorum*, II.60-61; *Letters to Serena*, III.90-93, quotes *De Natura Deorum* I.101; *Letters to Serena*, III.119-123, quotes *De Natura Deorum*, II.63.

³⁴ See Harrison, 'Religion' and the Religions, 77-85 and Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: superstition, reason, and religion, 1250-1750* (Oxford, 2010), 309 for further examples.

superstitious and idolatrous Religions are in these or grosser Circumstances reviv'd by many Christians in our Western Parts of the Word, and by all the Oriental Sects: as Sacrifices, Incense, Lights, Images, Lustrations, Feasts, Musick, Altars, Pilgrimages, Fastings, religious Celibacy and Habits, Consecrations, Divinations, Sorcerys, Omens, Presages, Charms, the Worship of dead Men and Women, a continual Canonization of more, Mediators between God and Men...'.³⁵ This is an accusation repeated in *An Appeal to Honest People against Wicked Priests*, with Toland attacking the sacrament of the Eucharist, one of the two sacraments maintained in the Protestant faith, and elsewhere in his works.³⁶ Toland was determined to show that the power of the clergy depended on the exacerbation and perpetuation of man's irrational fears; in this way, their power became a *superstitio* by Ciceronian standards.

3.3. *The Irrationality of Sacerdotal Authority*

The second way in which Toland employs Ciceronian *superstitio* in his war against priestcraft is to discredit the core of priestly power, sacerdotal authority. It is in this aspect of Toland's war against priestcraft that Cicero's sceptical assault on Stoic belief in divination in the second book of *De Divinatione* proves most useful. Cicero is quite explicit that in opposition to the numerous examples provided by Quintus as evidence for divination, he will counter with *ratio*, the enemy of irrational superstitions: 'argumentis et rationibus oportet, quare quidque ita sit, docere, non eventis, eis praesertim quibus mihi liceat non credere'.³⁷ Cicero particularly rejects as irrational the belief that certain people are specially enabled as vessels for messages from

³⁵ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, III.127-128. The catalogue Toland presents here has some resemblance to Hobbes' description of pagan religious practices in *Leviathan*, XII.18-19.

³⁶ John Toland, *Appeal*, 37; cf. *A Defence of Mr. Toland, in a Letter to Himself* (London, 1697).

³⁷ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 399-401, (II.27): 'you ought to have employed arguments and reason to show that all your propositions were true and you ought not to have resorted to so-called occurrences – certainly not to such occurrences as are unworthy of belief'; cf. *De Divinatione*, II.86. See Brian Krostenko, 'Beyond (Dis)belief: rhetorical form and religious symbols in Cicero's *De Divinatione*', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 130 (2000), 370-373, on the rhetorical significance of this *ratio* vs. *exempla* approach.

the divine, and capable of the interpretation of those messages. This is particularly evident in his passages attacking the divinatory powers of dreams.³⁸ Cicero's rejection of the belief that the divine would communicate with selected individuals as an irrational superstition was of much use to Toland.

Toland employed this material in his *Origines Judiciae*, when he directed the Ciceronian denial of the divinatory power of dreams against the tradition that Moses was a vessel of divine knowledge. Dreams merely conveyed a perception of that reality, not divine intelligence: 'suntque inter doctorum doctiores qui omnes Dei Apparitiones, in Pentateucho et alibi relatas, ad Somnia et Extases constanter referunt: unde non nemo aiebat esse convertibilia, sive dixeris Abrahamo loquutum esse Deum in somnio, sive Abrahamum somniasse sibi loquutum esse Deum; sicuti de quodam Alexandri somnio scribens Cicero, *non audivit* (inquit) *ille Draconem loquentem, sed est visus audire*'.³⁹ Toland also used Cicero to demonstrate the extent to which such claims to divine interpretation could be exploited for the acquisition of secular power, using Cicero's quotation from Demosthenes describing the manipulation of an oracle by Philip: 'ita Demosthenes (referente Cicerone) *Pythiam Phillipizare dicebat, id est, quasi cum Philippo facere. Hoc autem eo spectabat* (addit ille) *ut eam a Philippo corruptam*

³⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.124-142.

³⁹ John Toland, *Origines Judiciae*, 167-168, quoting Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 527-529, (II.141): 'and there are those among the more learned of learned men who having related every Apparition of God, in the *Pentateuch* and similar, constantly refer to Dreams and Ecstasies: from which some were saying that it was changeable, either you may have said that God spoke to Abraham in a dream, or that God spoke to him as he was daydreaming; just as Cicero wrote about a certain dream of Alexander, *he did not hear the serpent speak, but thought he heard it*'; cf. Toland, *Two Essays sent in a letter from Oxford, to a nobleman in London* (London, 1695), II.31-32. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England* (London, 1971), 128-146, on the role of dreams in the early Church.

diceret'.⁴⁰ Toland's appreciation of the Ciceronian arguments against the possibility of direct communications from the divine is evident.

The appeal of these arguments in *De Divinatione* becomes further apparent when related to one of Toland's foremost strategies in his war on priestcraft: exposure of sacerdotal authority as a superstition. Sacerdotal authority essentially amounted to the claim that divine power could be interpreted by, even delegated into, the clergy; it was this authority, cited as *de iure divino*, that allowed priests to perform sacraments and liturgy, interpret the Bible, guide the laity, and which underwrote the apostolic succession.⁴¹ Toland attacked the idea of this divine authority of the clergy in his poem *Clito*, declaring 'RELIGION's safe, with PRIESTCRAFT is the War, All Friends to Priestcraft, Foes of Mankind are. Their impious Fanes and Altars I'll o'erthrow, And the whole Farce of their feign'd Saintship show'.⁴² Toland's doubts concerning the sacerdotal authority of the clergy are even more explicitly stated in his *Christianity not Mysterious*: 'the *Priests*, but very rarely, and then obscurely, taught in publick, pretending the Injunctions of their *Divinities* to the contrary, lest their Secrets, forsooth, should be expos'd to the Profanation of the Ignorant, or Violation of the Impious...and it was inexpiable Sacrilege for any to enter these but such as had a special Mark and Privilege, or as much as to ask Questions about what passed in them. All the Excluded

⁴⁰ John Toland, *Origines Judiciae*, 171, quoting Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 505, (II.118): 'in this way Demosthenes (as was quoted by Cicero) said that the Pythian priestess 'philippized', in other words, that she was Philip's ally. By this he meant (he adds) that she had been bribed by Philip'.

⁴¹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 25-77, on the changing role of 'magic' in the Church. See also Harrison, 'Religion' and the Religions, 19-28; Goldie, 'Civil religion', in Pagden, *Languages of Political Theory*, 212-218; Champion, "'Religion's safe'", 550-551. See Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 304-305, on sacerdotal authority as superstition in the broader tradition.

⁴² John Toland, *Clito*, 16.

were for that Reason stil'd *the Profane*, as those not in Orders with us *the Laity*'.⁴³ The supposed sacred power of the clergy was contrary to all reason, and hence could be categorised as a superstition.

Toland's reading of Cicero's theological dialogues provided him with an understanding of superstition which was ideal for his campaign against priestcraft. According to Cicero, superstitions were beliefs and practices whose power was based in the irrationality of men. According to Toland, the clergy's power originated from and continued to rely upon irrationality. There was no other conclusion but that priestcraft was a superstition.

4. Rationalising Religion

This identification of priestcraft as a superstition proves all the more pertinent when another key statement from Cicero is considered: 'nec vero – id enim diligenter intellegi volo – superstitione tollenda religio tollitur'.⁴⁴ Cicero is adamant that his attack on divination should not be misconstrued as an attack on religion, but should be appreciated as an attempt to purify irrational superstitions from religion. Ciceronian *religio* plays a prominent role in this strategy, as Toland identified his 'true' religion with the rational religion he located in Cicero's theological works.

4.1. Ciceronian Reason

According to Toland's reading, Cicero could be identified with the characters of Cotta in *De Natura Deorum* and himself in *De Divinatione*, both of whom champion a rational, natural

⁴³ John Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious*, 69; cf. 155-156, 164, and 'The primitive Constitution of the Christian Church: with an Account of the principal Controversies about Church-Government, which at present divide the Christian World', in Des Maizeaux, *Collection*, II.121-123.

⁴⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 537, (II.148): 'but I want it distinctly understood that the destruction of superstition does no mean the destruction of religion'; cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, I.117, II.71.

religion. This is important for Toland, as throughout his works he made the case that religion should be rational. In *Pantheisticon*, the work in which Toland explored his personal religion most extensively, he repeatedly identifies Pantheism with reason: ‘RATIO est vera et prima lex; Lux, lumenque vitae’.⁴⁵ The members of this Pantheistic society are encouraged not to allow themselves to be deceived by anything which contradicts their reason, as it will be a superstition, and inconsistent with their true religion. It is Cicero to whom Toland turns for a definition of the *ratio* which underpins his religion. Obtained from the sixth book of Lactantius’ *Divine Institutes*, Toland quotes in full this paraphrase of the definition of right reason expounded by Laelius in the third book of *De Republica*, as he defended justice against the attack by Philus.⁴⁶ There are two key qualities to right reason in this definition which make it particularly useful in the religious context Toland envisages: right reason is consonant with nature, and it is universal, accessible to all men.⁴⁷ Toland concludes his quotation of this definition of reason with the statement that ‘Hac Lege institui regique volumus: Haudquaquam mendacibus, Et superstitiosis hominum commentis’.⁴⁸ Anything to be included with the true religion must cohere with *ratio*; superstitions, defined by their irrationality, can therefore be safely eliminated, as inconsistent with the true religion.

4.2. A Natural Religion

This first feature of true religion is stated clearly in the Ciceronian definition of reason quoted by Toland: ‘est quidem VERA LEX RECTA RATIO, naturae congruens, diffusa in omnes,

⁴⁵ John Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 57: ‘REASON is the true and first Law, The Light and Splendour of Life’.

⁴⁶ Cicero, *De Republica*, III.33; preserved in Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, 6.8.6-9. Toland had already used this passage in full to define reason in *Nazarenus: Or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London, 1718), I.179-180.

⁴⁷ See also John Toland, *Two Essays*, 2.

⁴⁸ John Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 68: ‘we are willing to be brought up, and governed by this Law, Not by the lying, and superstitious fictions of men’.

constans, sempiterna'.⁴⁹ This is also in evidence in the conclusion of *De Divinatione*, when Cicero declares that the beauty of the universe may be taken as evidence of a divine being, and goes on to provide this description of *religio*: 'quam ob rem, ut religio propaganda etiam est, quae est iuncta cum cognitione naturae, sic superstitionis stirpes omnes eiiciendae'.⁵⁰ This is an understanding of natural religion which proved intensely appealing to Toland, as the core belief of his natural philosophy Pantheism was the conflation of god and nature as one entity.⁵¹ Toland drew on Cicero in order to illustrate this conception of the divine: 'MOD. Carmen accinamus De natura UNIVERSI. MOD & RESPONDI. "Quicquid est Hoc, omnia animat, Format, alit, auget, creat; Sepelit, recipitque in sese omnia: Omniumque idem est Pater; Indidemque omnia, quae oriuntur, De integro atque eodem occidunt"''.⁵² Toland's Pantheism demanded coherence with the laws of nature.

Within the 'liturgy' recorded in *Pantheisticon*, Toland quoted in full the account of Academic physics provided by Cicero in the *Academics*.⁵³ According to this theory, influenced by Stoicism, nature and the universe are formed by matter, and a force animating that matter;

⁴⁹ John Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 67-68, quoting Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, 71, (*De Republica*, III.33): 'true law is right reason, consonant with nature, spread through all people'.

⁵⁰ *De Divinatione*, 537, (II.148-149): 'wherefore, just as it is a duty to extend the influence of true religion, which is closely associated with the knowledge of nature, so it is a duty to weed out every root of superstition'.

⁵¹ On Toland's Pantheism see Jeffrey Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: theology, politics, and Newtonian public science* (Manchester, 2009), 143-147; Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists: studies in Early Enlightenment* (London, 2009), 92-94; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 610-613; Justin Champion, 'John Toland: the Politics of Pantheism', *Revue de Synthèse*, 2-3 (1995), 259-280; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 60-62. On Pantheism in general in this period see Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge, 1981), 162-187; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*; Cragg, *The Church*, 37-49; Champion, 'Politics of Pantheism', 278-279; Michael Levine, *Pantheism: a non-theistic concept of deity* (London, 1994), 47-70.

⁵² Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 55, quoting Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 367, (I.131): 'MOD. Let us sing a hymn, on the nature of the universe. MOD & RESP. "Whate'er the power may be, it animates, Creates, gives form, increase, and nourishment To everything: of everything the sire, It takes all things unto itself and hides Within its breast; and as from it all things Arise, likewise to it all things return"'.

⁵³ Cicero, *Academica*, I.24-29, quoted in *Pantheisticon*, 58-61.

this force and matter must coexist for anything else to exist. For the Stoics, the divine is the force which animates matter, and hence the universe and everything within it; they call this force alternately *pneuma*, providence, reason or necessity.⁵⁴ The Academics, including Cotta, are satisfied by this physical account of the universe, in which nature and the divine are one. Toland was evidently also satisfied by this explanation, concluding the passage with an exclamation of its effective summation of the situation: ‘de natura EFFICIENTIS plus quàm EFFECTI, Non est cur imposterum dubitemus’.⁵⁵ The Stoic and Academic physical philosophy portrayed here in large part cohered with the materialist philosophy Toland had presented in his works, most extensively in the fourth and fifth of his *Letters to Serena*, and in the ‘Discourse’ which prefixed his *Pantheisticon*. This philosophy established that the force animating the matter which constituted the universe was God.

Integral to Toland’s Pantheism is the rejection of the idea that the divine could act outside the laws of nature, as it was one with nature; God cannot be viewed as distinct from the universe, and is hence governed by its laws.⁵⁶ It is in this aspect of Pantheism that the character of Cotta in *De Natura Deorum* proves useful, as he provides the sceptical arguments directed against the Stoic belief in providence, a belief which also transgressed Toland’s Pantheism. Balbus in *De Natura Deorum* articulates the Stoic case for divine providence: ‘nihil est autem praestantius deo; ab eo igitur mundum necesse est regi; nulli igitur est naturae oboediens aut subiectus deus, omnem ergo regit ipse naturam’.⁵⁷ The arguments made by Cotta

⁵⁴ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II.45-72; cf. Andrew Lintott, *Cicero as Evidence: a historian’s companion* (Oxford, 2008), 350-358.

⁵⁵ John Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 61: ‘the nature of the efficient, no more than that of the effect, leaves us no room for doubt’.

⁵⁶ Wigelsworth, *Deism*, 146-147; Levine, *Pantheism*, 93-112.

⁵⁷ Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods, Academica*, translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), 197-199, (*De Natura Deorum*, II.77): ‘but as a matter of fact nothing exists that is superior to god; it follows therefore that

to challenge this Stoic conception of the divine are all directed against the elevation of the divine above nature.⁵⁸ Cotta attempted to liberate nature from Stoic divine reason, arguing that reason and the patterns of nature belonged to nature itself: ‘illud non probabam, quod negabas id accidere potuisse nisi ea uno divino spiritu contineretur. Illa vero cohaeret et permanet naturae viribus, non deorum’.⁵⁹ While the greater portion of Cotta’s refutation of divine providence was lost, or destroyed, sufficient material remains to confirm his rejection of the belief that a divine force could surpass or overrule the laws of nature. In this way, Toland drew on the representation of natural religion in Cicero’s works and deployed it as a means of testing religious beliefs; those that transgressed the laws of nature could not be part of a true religion.

4.3. A Universal Religion

The second feature of this true religion was that it should be accessible to the reason of all men: ‘neque est quaerendus Explanator, aut Interpres ejus alius; nec erit alia Lex Romae, alia Athenis, alia nunc, alia posthac: sed et omnes gentes, et omni tempore, una Lex, et sempiterna et immortalis, continebit’.⁶⁰ Those elements of religion which contravene this can therefore be considered superstitions superfluous to religion. Toland makes this a fundamental feature of his Pantheism. First, he states through the ‘liturgy’ in *Pantheisticon* his rejection of the inventions of men: ‘MOD.: Non clarae sunt fictae Leges, nec universales, Non semper eadem,

the world is ruled by him; therefore god is not obedient or subject to any form of nature, and therefore he himself rules all nature’.

⁵⁸ David Fott, ‘The politico-philosophical character of Cicero’s verdict in *De Natura Deorum*’, in Walter Nicgorski, *Cicero’s Practical Philosophy* (Notre Dame, 2012), 163-168.

⁵⁹ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, III.28: ‘but I could not accept your assertion that this could not have come about were it not held together by a single divine breath. On the contrary, the system’s coherence and persistence is due to nature’s forces and not to divine power’.

⁶⁰ Cicero, *De Republica*, III.33, quoted in *Pantheisticon*, 68: ‘there will not be one law at Rome and another at Athens, one now and another later; but all nations at all times will be bound by this one eternal and unchangeable law’.

nec efficaces unquam: RESP.: Paucis ergò, aut oppidò nullis sunt utiles, Solis exceptis INTERPRETIBUS'.⁶¹ He then describes the accessibility fundamental to the Pantheistic religion: 'religionem eorum animadvertas simplicem, claram, facilem, intemeratam, et gratuitam; non fucatam, implicitam, operosam, incomprehensibilem, aut mercenariam'.⁶² As any true, rational religion should be, Pantheism is fully accessible to all men.

Integral to this is the argument that religious knowledge existed in the state of nature, prior to the intervention of established religion and priests.⁶³ The existence of a primitive religion was an historical argument used regularly by Toland to challenge Christian orthodox history.⁶⁴ This argument for the existence of religion in the state of nature features in the second of the *Letters to Serena*, dealing with the immortality of the soul, and the earlier parts of the third letter, dealing with the origins of idolatry. In these sections Toland proves, by appealing to historical evidence including that provided by Cicero, that awareness of the immortality of the soul was acquired without the aid of revelation or priestly knowledge.⁶⁵ In the absence of depravers of reason, primitive men were able to develop a simplistic form of religion in no way reliant on rites, images, or any other practices associated with priestcraft. It was the corruption of this practice which introduced superstition to the world: 'I shall only endeavour to show by what means the Reason of men became so deprav'd, as to think of subordinate Deitys, how the

⁶¹ John Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 69: 'PRES.: Laws framed by Men, are neither clear, nor universal; nor always the same, nor ever efficacious. RESP.: They are therefore useful to few, or wholly to none. Interpreters alone excepted'.

⁶² John Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 76: 'you may perceive that their religion is simple, clear, easy, without blemish, and freely bestowed; not painted over, nor intricate, embarrassed, incomprehensible, or mercenary'.

⁶³ On the significance of this original primitive religion for the Deists and Freethinkers see Herrick, *Radical Rhetoric*, 30-31; Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 133-137, 140-160; Harrison, 'Religion' and the Religions, 61-73; Levine, *Pantheism*, 224-226.

⁶⁴ See John Toland, *Nazarenus*; 'Primitive religion' and 'Critical History', in Des Maizeaux, *Collection*.

⁶⁵ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, II.28, quoting Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I.38; *Letters to Serena*, II.46, quoting *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I.36; *Letters to Serena*, III.77-80, quoting *De Divinatione*, II.4.

Worship of many Gods was first introduc'd into the world, and what induc'd Men to pay Divine Honors to their Fellow-Creatures, whether on Earth or in the Heavens'.⁶⁶ The existence of religious knowledge amongst the pagans prior to the institutions of religion was wielded as proof of the rational nature of true religion.

Toland also used the argument that a rational religion should be accessible to the reason of all against the place of fables, myths and mysteries in religion.⁶⁷ Toland's most notable work on this subject was *Christianity not Mysteriorious*, and the subsequent *Defence* of that work, in which the presence of mysteries in Christianity was vigorously condemned.⁶⁸ Such inventions were accused of being a way of obscuring religion from man's reason, and therefore cannot count as true religion. In order to demonstrate this, in *Clidophorus* Toland drew extensively on Cotta's arguments intended to disprove Stoic fables: 'they were too sagacious to admit the truth of such things in the literal sense, and too prudent to reject them all as nonsense: which led them of course, by the principle of self-preservation, to impose upon them a tolerable sense of their own; that they might not be deem'd wholly to deny the Religion in vogue, but to differ onely from others about the design and interpretation of it'.⁶⁹ Toland then quotes Cotta's accusation that such fables are perpetuated by the Stoics who attempt to develop these fables as divine explanations for natural occurrences, thereby inhibiting the access of men's reason.⁷⁰ Toland concludes that 'the same CICERO does often elsewhere express his

⁶⁶ John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, II.69-70.

⁶⁷ John Toland, *Two Essays*, 29-31; 'Clidophorus; or of the Exoteric and Esoteric Philosophy', in John Toland, *Tetradymus* (London, 1720), 79-80, 87; 'Critical History', in Des Maizeaux, *Collection*, I.40. See Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions*, 14-18.

⁶⁸ Champion, *Republican Learning*, 83.

⁶⁹ John Toland, 'Clidophorus', in *Tetradymus*, 91-92.

⁷⁰ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, III.63.

aversion to Fables; as being, if not the parents, yet certainly the fosterers of Superstition'.⁷¹ A true religion has no need for such fabrications, as it is fully accessible to the reason of men.

Cicero's works, as read by Toland, contributed vital strategies to his war on priestcraft. In them, Toland found a definition of superstition which could be used to condemn priestcraft. Moreover, he found the argument that a true religion must be purged of superstitions, as a true religion is rational, justifying his campaign against the power of the clergy. Ciceronian *superstitio* and *religio*, and their separation, prove essential constituents of Toland's war on priestcraft.

5. A Rational Religion and the State

There is one last statement in *De Divinatione* which proves important to Toland's war on priestcraft: 'multum enim et nobismet ipsis et nostris profuturi videbamus, si eam funditus sustulissemus'.⁷² The eradication of superstition becomes then not only a philosophical act, intended to purify religion, but a practical act, intended to contribute to the *res publica*. Toland's war on priestcraft was a constituent of his broader republican project; he too conceived of this attack on the clergy as not only philosophical but practical, intended to serve the Commonwealth. But how was stripping religion of its superstitious elements, whether that be divination or priestcraft, a service to the state?

5.1. Endorsing a Civil Religion

The character of Marcus Cicero in *De Divinatione* shows himself to be aware of a fundamental contradiction in his argument: while questioning the legitimacy of divinatory practices fundamental to traditional Roman religion in this work, he was engaging in these practices

⁷¹ John Toland, 'Clidophorus', in *Tetradymus*, 91-92.

⁷² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 537, (II.148): 'for I thought that I should be rendering a great service to myself and my country if I could tear this superstition up by the roots'.

publicly, both as an augur and as an orator.⁷³ For Cicero, private doubts about the validity of certain religious practices did not necessarily equate to the rejection of public religion.⁷⁴ Cicero repeatedly acknowledges throughout the second book of *De Divinatione* the vital function played by a public religion in society, in particular a religion controlled by the state.⁷⁵ Cicero does not attempt to deny his recognition of the political necessity of certain divinatory practices: ‘ut ordiar ab haruspicina, quam ego rei publicae causa communisque religionis colendam censeo’.⁷⁶ Similar statements occur concerning the haruspices and even augury, in spite of Cicero’s position as an augur.⁷⁷ Cicero recognised the importance of piety for social order, due to the influence of religion on the masses, and as a result demonstrated respect for traditional Roman institutions not just in *De Divinatione*, but as Cotta in *De Natura Deorum*: ‘harum ego religionum nullam umquam contemnendam putavi, mihique ita persuasi, Romulum auspiciis Numam sacris constitutis fundamenta iecisse nostrae civitatis, quae numquam profecto sine summa placatione decrum immortalium tanta esse potuisset’.⁷⁸ The Cicero

⁷³ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.45-46, 54, 70, 140. In his speeches, Cicero regularly invoked traditional Roman practices to strengthen his argument; cf. *Pro Sestio*, 98; *De Domo Sua*, 7; *Pro Flacco*, 67; *Pro Fonteio*, 47; *De Haruspicum Responsis*, 18-19.

⁷⁴ This separation of public and private beliefs is a prominent feature of Toland’s Pantheism, see *Pantheisticon*, 78, and ‘Clidophorus’, in *Tetradymus*, 94; cf. Harrison, ‘Religion’ and the Religions, 85-92, Stephen Daniel, ‘The subversive philosophy of John Toland’, in Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells, *Irish Writing: exile and subversion* (Basingstoke, 1991), 1-12, and Gavina Cherchi, ‘Atheism, dissimulation and atomism in the philosophy of John Toland’, *PhD. Dissertation* (London, 1994), 61-69.

⁷⁵ Fott, ‘Political-philosophical character’, 168-174; Robert J. Goar, *Cicero and the State Religion* (Amsterdam, 1972), 29-33; Krostenko, ‘Beyond (Dis)belief’, 353-355.

⁷⁶ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 401, (II.28): ‘I shall begin with soothsaying, which, according to my deliberate judgement, should be cultivated from reasons of political expediency and in order that we may have a state religion’.

⁷⁷ See Cicero, *De Legibus*, II.31-33; *De Divinatione*, II.70, 75.

⁷⁸ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 289-291, (III.5): ‘well, I have always thought that none of these departments of religion was to be despised, and I have held the conviction that Romulus by his auspices and Numa by his establishment of our ritual laid the foundations of our state, which assuredly could never have been as great as it is had not the fullest measure of divine favour been obtained for it’; cf. Goar, *Cicero and Religion*, 114-120.

identified by Toland in *De Divinatione* and *De Natura Deorum* made a compelling advocate for the utility of a civil religion.

This is reflected once more in Toland's own works, in which he elevates Cicero as a favoured source for the necessity of a state-controlled public religion. In the opening passages of Toland's *Origines Judiciae*, the work in which Toland sought to politicise Moses and the origins of Christianity, Toland drew extensively on Cicero to make the case that religion was necessary to the state, on account of its ability to influence the masses: 'fateris (*Auguste dulcissime*) me recte omnino affirmare, in *Adeisidaemone meo*, nobiliores fere omnes et doctiores Romanos, Cultum sacrum, a Numa Pompilio traditum, vel tradi creditum, pro Politico habuisse Commento; et, ut cum Cicerone loquar, eos persuasos fuisse *totam de Diis immortalibus opinionem, fictam esse ab hominibus sapientibus Reipublicae causa: UT QUOS RATIO NON POSSET, EOS AD OFFICIUM RELIGIO DUCERET*'.⁷⁹ Toland then quotes in full a passage from the second book of *De Divinatione* which reiterates the point that religion served the state by means of influencing the masses, and that as a result the practice of augury should be maintained, provoking an exclamation from Toland regarding the fact that this was being acknowledged by someone who was an augur himself.⁸⁰ As a final confirmation, Toland once more quotes the relevant section of the favoured passage from the end of *De Divinatione*, in which Cicero explicitly states that the rationalisation of religion will serve the state. Toland concludes that 'hoc et de me quoque diligentissime intelligi volo, cum impugnando

⁷⁹ John Toland, *Origines Judiciae*, 101-102, quoting Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 113, (I.118): 'you acknowledge (*sweetest August*) that I altogether rightly confirmed, in my *Adeisidaemon*, that all the more noble and more learned Romans held that the sacred Cult, handed down, or believed to have been handed down, by Numa Pompilius, was a political invention; and, as I say with Cicero, they had been persuaded that *the entire nation of immortal gods is a fiction invented by wise men in the interest of the state, to the end that those whom reason was powerless to control might be led in the path of duty by religion*'; cf. Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 173-179, 186-195, and 'Legislators, impostors, and the politic origins of religion', 333-334.

⁸⁰ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.70, quoted in Toland, *Origines Judiciae*, 101-103.

Superstitionem, Religionem propugnare sit unicum mihi'.⁸¹ Toland found in his reading of Cicero an understanding of the practical necessity of a public religion which cohered with his own goals; the attack on priestcraft was not an attack on religion or the Church as such, but a necessary step in the pursuit of a civil religion, for liberated from the false authority of the clergy, there was nothing to prevent the Church being subsumed into the state.

5.2. Anticlericalism as a Service to the State

The campaign against priestcraft waged so assiduously was all in the pursuit of this goal, just as Cicero's elimination of superstition was in the service of the state. The false authority of the clergy was central to the claim made by the ecclesiastical establishment that it was independent from the authority of the state: 'first, I mean those who sawcily strike at the Queen's Supremacy, by asserting the Independency of the Church upon the State, calling their own Decrees thundering Anathemas, Sentences ratify'd in Heaven, and which they defy any Power on Earth to reverse'.⁸² Toland was greatly perturbed by the threat posed to the constitution of the Commonwealth by this belief in the Church's independence from state authority. The association of the Tories with the High Church Anglicans had already done much to confirm his fears; the influence granted to this element of the Church had resulted in political power for the House of Convocation, Acts of Conformity, and the crisis of the trial of Sacheverell.⁸³ Most outrageous to Toland was the clergy's amenability to absolute power, which led them to preach divine right and passive obedience in return for the influence in the civil sphere.⁸⁴ Toland envisaged a different public religion in the Commonwealth:

⁸¹ John Toland, *Origines Judiciae*, 103: 'and I want this also to be understood about me most carefully, since Superstition must be attacked, Religion alone shall be defended by me'.

⁸² John Toland, *Appeal*, 36-37.

⁸³ On these historical developments see particularly Geoffrey Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell* (London, 1973), and John Kenyon, *Revolution Principles: the politics of party 1689 – 1720* (Cambridge, 1977), 128-145.

⁸⁴ John Toland, *Appeal*, 45-48; cf. *Art of Governing*, 14-15 and *Anglia Libera*, 177-190.

‘Religion it self is not more natural to Man, than it is for every Government to have a *national Religion*, or som public and orderly Way of worshipping God, under the Allowance, Involvement, and Inspection of the civil Magistrat’.⁸⁵ By eradicating priestcraft Toland hoped to create a rational religion which rather than undermining the Commonwealth could be employed in its service.

It is not only the relationship of the Church with the constitution of the Commonwealth which motivates Toland’s rationalisation of religion, but its relationship with society. Once the special authority of the clergy is eradicated, their spiritual tyranny over the citizens of the Commonwealth could be ended, allowing a rational and virtuous community to develop, vital to the survival of the Commonwealth.⁸⁶ Toland believed a civil religion would invite a different form of piety: ‘according to this model, the Christian Worship does not consist (it seems) in stately Edifices, sumptuous Altars, numerous Attendants, gorgeous Habits, exquisite Musick, or a curiously contriv’d, expensive, and ceremonious service, supported by ample revenues and possessions...a man’s behaviour, and not the cant of a party, not the particular garbs or customs of any place, but the goodness and sincerity of his actions, wou’d be the real test of his Religion’.⁸⁷ The measure of a man’s faith would become his actions and his virtue, making him a more useful member of the Commonwealth. It is to Cicero once more that Toland turns to express the consequences of this modification for the clergy’s influence over society: ‘*Cicero*, I say, telling those Priests to their faces, that, if they wou’d go about to defend those things by Divine Religion, which were condemn’d by Human Equity, what wou’d be the consequence, thus accosts them; if you shou’d do this *we must look out for other Ceremonies*,

⁸⁵ John Toland, *Anglia Libera*, 95-96; cf. Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 179-186, and *Republican Learning*, 141-142.

⁸⁶ John Toland, *The State-Anatomy of Great Britain* (London, 1717), 19; cf. Pagden, *Languages of Political Theory*, 6-11.

⁸⁷ John Toland, ‘Primitive Constitution’, in Des Maizeaux, *Collection*, II.145-146; cf. *Clito*, 17.

for other Priests of the immortal Gods, for other Expounders of Religions. This is in our stile, we must look out for another Liturgy, for other Bishops, and for other Preachers’.⁸⁸

Toland’s reading of Cicero provided him with one final weapon in his war on priestcraft: it provided the means to portray his efforts as part of the greater good. The Commonwealth would benefit, as would its citizens; Toland’s anticlericalism was part of a republican project, designed for the protection and perpetuation of a constitution directed towards the defence of its people’s liberties.

6. Conclusion

Toland’s invocations of Cicero throughout his anticlerical works are not merely rhetorical flourishes; he was actively adapting the Ciceronian tradition into a weapon for radical, rational discourse, and using it accordingly to strengthen his own arguments. This is evident in his efforts to legitimise a reading of Cicero’s theological works which identified Cicero’s voice with the arguments of the Academic Sceptic school, so that the aspects of those texts which were useful to Toland’s arguments could be imbued with Ciceronian authority. It is further evident in the use to which Toland puts this interpretation of Cicero: he condemns priestcraft as a superstition by identifying it with Ciceronian *superstitio*; he uses Cicero’s separation of *superstitio* and *religio* to demonstrate that priestcraft has no place in a true religion; finally, he uses Cicero’s argument that the elimination of such superstitions is a service to the state to show that a civil religion is in the best interests of the Commonwealth. In both principle and practice, Toland repeatedly invokes Ciceronian ideas, and their associated authority, and uses them towards a radical goal.

⁸⁸ John Toland, *State-Anatomy*, 80-81, quoting Cicero, *De Domo Sua*, 2.

It is the extent to which Toland actively engaged with the Ciceronian tradition and adapted it for radical purposes that poses a challenge to the assumptions of the Radical Enlightenment narrative. The portrayal of the Early Enlightenment as a period which rejected all forms of authority and tradition in favour of philosophical reason, contributing to the decline of the Ciceronian tradition, is undermined by the efforts of a figure strongly associated with the radical identity of the period. Toland's use of Cicero reveals him not rejecting the past, and tradition, and authority, but instead adapting them for the construction of rational ideologies. The idea that tradition and reason were oppositional in the Early Enlightenment is therefore revealed as flawed; Toland's adaptation of Cicero for his radical discourse shows that tradition and reason could function together in the formation of a new world.