The Classical Quarterly (2021) 71.1 259–275
doi:10.1017/S0009838821000227

NUMA AND JUPITER: WHOSE SMILE IS IT, ANYWAY?*

ABSTRACT

This article examines the Roman tradition that Numa once negotiated with Jupiter about human sacrifice. Complete versions of the myth survive in Ovid, Plutarch and Arnobius (citing Valerius Antias). Previous studies of this tradition have proposed four main interpretations of it, which have done important service in modern reconstructions of the character of Roman religion. These scholarly treatments raise several questions. First, are they actually supported by, or the most convincing way of reading, the surviving ancient sources? If so, have they been correctly attributed? Why might a specific ancient author present the myth of Numa and Jupiter in a manner which suggests one interpretation rather than another? What ideological and theological work does the story do for Ovid, for Plutarch and for Arnobius? Finally, can this myth, in whatever version, support the weight of the implications put on it for the character of Roman religion? This article seeks to enhance our understanding of this myth in its surviving versions, not just by analysing the evidence for each of the modern interpretations, but also by considering why ancient authors tell the myth of Numa and Jupiter the way they do. It is argued that their choices illustrate best not one meaning of the myth nor one Roman way of piety but the richness and diversity of religious reflection in antiquity.

Keywords: Ovid; Arnobius; Plutarch; religion; Jupiter; Numa; theology; gods

Roman tradition held that Numa and his people had once been terrified by frequent lightning bolts, signs of the wrath of Jupiter. Using a secret spell or ritual, the king called the god down to the Aventine Hill to ask how to expiate the portents. The god responded with what sounded like a demand for human sacrifice. The king, however, talked back. When Jupiter demanded a 'head' (*caput*, κεφαλή), Numa offered: 'the head of an onion' (*caepa, capite caepicio*, κρόμμυον). Jupiter rejoined, 'of a human being'; Numa supplied: 'the hairs'. Jupiter gave it one more try, clarifying 'a life' (*anima*); Numa responded: 'of a fish!' Agreement was reached, and from then on Romans expiated lightning at the shrine of Jupiter Elicius with an onion, some human hairs and a fish.

This myth is probably early.[1] It was known to the annalist L. Calpurnius Piso (writing probably in the last quarter of the second century B.C.),[2] and a version of it is attributed to

* This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and by a Naomi Lacey Memorial Fellowship at the Calgary Institute for the Humanities. A stay at the Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique provided precious library resources. For suggestions and assistance, my thanks go out to the participants at the conference 'Numa Numa: The Life and Afterlife of the Second King of Rome' (Ann Arbor, MI, 2017), where an earlier version of this paper was presented; to my SSHRC Research Assistants, Ms Kathrine Bertram (Durham University) and Ms Krystal Marlier; to Dr Lucia Nixon (University of Oxford); to Prof. Noreen Humble (University of Calgary); and to the anonymous readers and editor of *CQ*.

[1] Wiseman posits a dramatic version predating our surviving references: T.P. Wiseman, 'Tales unworthy of the gods', in id., *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter, 1998), 17–24, at 22; T.P. Wiseman, 'Summoning Jupiter: magic in the Roman Republic', in id., *Unwritten Rome* (Exeter, 2008), 155–66, at 165–6.

[2] Plin. *HN* 28.14 (L. Calpurnius Piso, fr. 13 P = fr. 15b Cornell), with T.J. Cornell (ed.), *The Fragments of the Roman Historians*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2013), 3.200–1.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838821000227 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Sullan annalist Valerius Antias, though this survives only in a quotation by the Christian polemicist Arnobius of Sicca.[3] Livy alludes to the myth, though he does not provide a full telling of it.[4] Complete versions survive in only three texts of markedly different dates and genres: Ovid's *Fasti* (3.277–374, probably begun in the early years of our era and revised A.D. 14–17),[5] Plutarch's *Life of Numa* (15, written sometime after the death of Domitian in A.D. 96)[6] and Arnobius' Christian apologetic *Against the Gentiles* (5.1–4, composed between the 290s and the early fourth century A.D.), which combines the aforementioned quotation from Antias with Arnobius' comments in his own voice.[7]

Modern studies of this myth have proposed four main interpretations of it:

1) Jupiter is beaten or tricked by Numa;
2) Jupiter yields because he learns that there are limits to what a Roman god can ask from human beings;
3) Jupiter is testing Numa in the use of words to manage divine–human interactions;
4) Numa's negotiation with Jupiter exemplifies a calm and unemotional kind of piety, which the Romans saw as the ideal form of religiosity.

Some scholars derive these interpretations from the particular versions of Antias, Arnobius, Ovid or Plutarch, whilst others see one or more of these readings as applying to the myth in general. These interpretations have done important service in modern reconstructions of the character of Roman religion. In older work, interpretations 1 (a 'beaten Jupiter') and 2 (a 'yielding Jupiter') were taken to epitomize a characteristically Roman style of legalistic bargaining with the gods ('marchandage'), contributing to a long scholarly tradition of regarding Roman interactions with the divine as controlled and contractual.[8] More recently, John Scheid and scholars following in his footsteps have used interpretations 2 (a 'yielding Jupiter') and 4 (a 'fearless Numa') as evidence that Romans conceptualized divine–human interrelating as limited by a shared set of constraints, with gods expected to behave like citizens and humans expected to suppress their emotions through appropriate ritual practice.[9]

These scholarly treatments of the Aventine-dialogue myth raise several questions. First, are the four current interpretations actually supported by, or the most convincing

[3] Arn. *Adv. nat.* 5.1 (Valerius Antias, fr. 6 P = fr. 8 Cornell).

[4] Livy 1.19.4, 1.20.7, 1.31.6–8.

[5] For dating, see S.J. Green, *Ovid,* Fasti *I: A Commentary* (Leiden and Boston, 2004), 15–24. The edition used here is that of S.J. Heyworth (Cambridge, 2019). Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[6] For dating, cf. C.P. Jones, 'Towards a chronology of Plutarch's works', *JRS* 56 (1966), 61–74; C. Pelling, *Plutarch* Caesar (Oxford, 2011), 2; Wiseman (n. 1 [2008]), 159. The edition used here is that of K. Ziegler (Leipzig, 1973); the section divisions and the translation are those of B. Perrin (Cambridge, MA, 1914).

[7] I accept a date of composition from *c.*A.D. 303: M.B. Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca: Religious Conflict and Competition in the Age of Diocletian* (Oxford, 1995), 47–93; T.D. Barnes, 'Monotheists all?', *Phoenix* 55 (2001), 142–62, at 152–3. The edition used here is that of C. Marchesi (Turin, 1953^2). Unless otherwise noted, the translation follows that of H. Bryce and H. Campbell (Edinburgh, 1895).

[8] E.g. J. Heurgon, *Trois études sur le « Ver sacrum »* (*Collection Latomus* 26) (Brussels, 1957), 50–1; J. Bayet, *Histoire politique et psychologique de la religion romaine* (Paris, 1957), 141; G. Dumézil, *La religion romaine archaïque* (Paris, 1966), 53–4; G. Capdeville, 'Substitution de victimes dans les sacrifices d'animaux à Rome', *MEFRA* 83 (1971), 283–323, at 291; J. Poucet, *Les origines de Rome: tradition et histoire* (Brussels, 1985), 197; R. Turcan (transl. A. Nevill), *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times* (Edinburgh, 2000), 4.

[9] See Sections 2, 3 and 4 below.

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Although valuable work has been done on some of these questions, they have seldom been considered holistically. Greater attention is needed, above all, to the shaping of the versions in our sources by their authors' goals, generic conventions, style and religious beliefs. Steps in this direction have been taken for Ovid, but the results are often overlooked in studies of the Aventine dialogue specifically, whilst Plutarch and Arnobius remain underserved. Arnobius' account, for example, is still often treated as a straightforward quotation from Valerius Antias, sometimes without any mention of Arnobius himself.[10] In this paper, I endeavour to improve the accuracy of our understanding of this myth in its surviving versions, not just by analysing the evidence for each of the four main interpretations but also by considering why our ancient authors tell the myth of Numa and Jupiter the way they do. I will suggest that the 'beaten Jupiter' interpretation reveals new features of interest in Arnobius' account, that the 'yielding Jupiter' sheds previously unnoticed light on Plutarch's philosophical commitments, that the 'tested Numa' of Ovid conceptualizes Jupiter as teacher and king rather than as colleague, and that there are alternatives to the 'fearless Numa' proposed by Scheid. To begin, however, it will be helpful to consider the broader question posed above: how far can this myth be used to generalize about Roman religion?

A METHODOLOGICAL STARTING POINT

Using the Aventine-dialogue myth as a paradigm for Roman religiosity is methodologically problematic. This is most obviously true of those older studies which sought to draw conclusions from the plot outline of the myth, as if we could thereby arrive at an overarching meaning for 'the' story, rather than having to work with the diversity of details and views in our individual sources. But it is also a limitation of recent suggestions that specific versions of the myth, such as the Ovidian version upon which Scheid relies, can be taken to illustrate or emblematize characteristics of Roman religion.[11] The reason is that this myth is an outlier. With its god who demands human sacrifice, who speaks audibly and directly to human beings (a rarity in Roman divine–human communication),[12] who can be 'drawn down' from heaven with magical

[10] E.g. W. Krause, *Die Stellung der frühchristlichen Autoren zur heidnischen Literatur* (Vienna, 1958), 177; R. Schilling, *Ovide: Les Fastes* (Paris, 1992), 146; F. Mora, *Arnobio e i culti di mistero: Analisi storico-religiosa del V libro dell'Adversus Nationes* (Rome, 1994), 68, 112–13; M. Pasco-Pranger, 'A Varronian vatic Numa? Ovid's *Fasti* and Plutarch's *Life of Numa*', in D.S. Levene and D.P. Nelis (edd.), *Clio and the Poets: Augustan Poetry and the Traditions of Ancient Historiography* (Leiden, 2002), 291–312, at 297; F. Prescendi, *Décrire et comprendre le sacrifice* (Stuttgart, 2007), 195; D. Preseka, 'Legendary figures in Ovid's *Fasti*', *AAntHung* 48 (2008), 221–36, at 235; Wiseman (n. 1 [2008]). Cornell (n. 2), by contrast, exercises due caution, printing the purported quotation as a 'reported or paraphrased version' (see that edition's typographical conventions).

[11] E.g. J. Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual* (Philadelphia, 2015), 114–16.

[12] See A. Dubourdieu, 'Paroles des dieux', in F. Dupont (ed.), *Paroles romaines* (Nancy, 1995), 45–51, at 47–8; ead., 'Divinités de la parole, divinités du silence dans la Rome antique', *RHR* 220 (2003), 259–82, at 260.

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procedures,[13] and who settles for offerings so bizarre that later writers felt compelled to explain them,[14] the tale departs markedly from classical Roman ritual practice and theological expectation. Numa, likewise, was an exceptional character in Roman tradition, a founder-figure whose unique religious prowess and alleged closeness to the gods was often remarked upon.[15] Rather than taking this myth as typifying Roman piety, I suggest that we proceed to look more closely at the ways in which our surviving ancient authors interpreted and presented it.

INTERPRETATION 1: A 'BEATEN JUPITER'

In this reading, Jupiter is 'beaten', 'tricked', 'outwitted' or 'overcome' by Numa's ingenuity and skill in wordplay. This interpretation has a long scholarly pedigree and continues to be propagated in some recent work.[16] Yet it does not fit all surviving versions of the myth. Plutarch's version makes no mention of the god being outmanoeuvred or circumvented. Ovid's version explicitly contradicts such a reading, for the narrator informs us at *Fast.* 3.337–8 that, when Jupiter appeared to demand the lives of human beings, he 'hid the truth with far-removed ambiguity and terrified the man with vacillating speech' (*uerum ambage remota | abdidit et dubio terruit ore uirum*). As Green rightly notes, this can only mean that Ovid's Jupiter did not really want human sacrifice at all.[17]

An additional objection to the idea that Jupiter is tricked in this myth was raised by Dumézil and has been reiterated recently by Prescendi: that Numa does go on to offer the god the objects he has promised. This feature differentiates this myth from those in which human beings promise the gods one thing but give them another. Prescendi therefore concludes that in this myth in general 'ce n'est pas par la tricherie que l'homme s'impose au dieu, mais par la négociation'.[18] This conclusion is convincing in so far as we take trickery to denote a substitution of offerings without the knowledge of the god to whom they are offered. But what of a substitution forced upon the god with his knowledge but against his will? As is well known, this is what we find in Arnobius and his Antias quotation. What I would like to do now is to consider how

[13] The irregularity of this is well brought out by Wiseman (n. 1 [2008]).

[14] Capdeville (n. 8), 291; Wiseman (n. 1 [2008]), 163.

[15] M. Beard, J. North and S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1998), 1.31–2.

[16] Heurgon (n. 8), 50–1; R. Bloch, *Les prodiges dans l'antiquité classique* (Paris, 1963), 124; Dumézil (n. 8), 53; P. Salat, 'Comment Numa vainquit Jupiter dans une joute verbale', *Annales Latini Montium Arvernorum* 11 (1984), 33–41, at 33; F.M. Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca and London, 1985), 301–2; D. Porte, *L'étiologie religieuse dans les* Fastes *d'Ovide* (Paris, 1985), 137; J. Scheid, 'Numa et Jupiter ou les dieux citoyens de Rome', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 59 (1985), 41–53, at 48; P. Borgeaud, 'Du mythe à l'idéologie: la tête du Capitole', *MH* 44 (1987), 86–100, at 96–7; D. Porte, 'Jupiter Elicius ou la confusion des magies', in D. Porte and J.-P. Néraudau (edd.), *Hommages à Henri Le Bonniec* (Brussels, 1988), 352–63, at 352; A. Borghini, 'La sardelle di Numa: un parallelo ed alcune considerazioni', *Aufidus* 13 (1991), 45–53, at 46; Schilling (n. 10), 146 n. 98; Pasco-Pranger (n. 10), 303; D. Šterbenc Erker, 'Der Religionsstifter Numa im Gespräch mit Jupiter: Menschenbild in der römischen Religion', in B. Ego and U. Mittmann (edd.), *Evil and Death: Conceptions of the Human in Biblical, Early Jewish, Greco-Roman and Egyptian Literature* (Berlin and Boston, 2015), 333–53, at 346; Scheid (n. 11), 115.

[17] S.J. Green, 'Save our cows? Augustan discourse and animal sacrifice in Ovid's *Fasti*', *G&R* 55 (2008), 39–54, at 50 n. 42.

[18] Dumézil (n. 8), 130; Prescendi (n. 10), 197–8.

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and why Arnobius might have promoted this interpretation of the Aventine-dialogue myth. What was Arnobius doing with the 'beaten Jupiter', and what implications might this have for modern work on his treatment?

Arnobius' purported citation of Valerius Antias constitutes the majority of *Adv. nat.* 5.1. This is framed by comments from Arnobius himself (beginning of 5.1, then 5.2–4). In his introduction to the story at 5.1, Arnobius describes Jupiter as 'stupid and incapable of thinking ahead' (*stolidus et inprudens*), 'tricked by the ambiguity of words' (*uerborum ambiguitatibus lusus*). In 5.2–4 Arnobius again emphasizes Jupiter's slow-wittedness and how this enabled Numa to deceive him. The god was so lacking in foresight that he either proposed terms by the ambiguities of which he could be 'captured' (*tam improuidum fuisse Saturnium, ut aut ea proponeret quorum ambagibus ipse caperetur* at 5.3, echoed by the address to Jupiter as *captus* in 5.4) or he failed to perceive by what means 'mortal shrewdness and readiness' would 'trick' him (*aut nesciret futurum, quibus lusura se modis astutia esset calliditasque mortalis*, 5.3). He was dragged to earth 'unwillingly or rather unwittingly' (*Ioue inuito uel potius nescio*, 5.2) and he left the exchange 'vexed at being deceived' (*cum deceptum te doleas*, 5.4). He was not only *inprudens*, Arnobius concludes with a flourish: he was guilty of *inprudentia maxima* (5.4)!

These chapters are heavily sarcastic, peppered by Arnobius' characteristic techniques of rapid-fire, escalating rhetorical questions and *reductio ad absurdum*.[19] The tone of the purported quotation from Antias in *Adv. nat.* 5.1 is less overtly hostile, but it also describes Jupiter as both 'captured' and 'deceived' by human wit. In the exchange Jupiter is 'captured by ambiguous propositions' (*ambiguis Iouem propositionibus captum*). He himself announces: 'You have deceived me, Numa … your shrewdness has circumvented me' (*decepisti me Numa; me ... tua circumuenit astutia*). Thus we see that Jupiter is tricked and outwitted by Numa both in Arnobius and in the Antias fragment.

Pace Dumézil and Prescendi, therefore, there was indeed an ancient tradition depicting Jupiter as 'captured' and 'deceived' by human beings. Where did this tradition come from, and what interests did it serve? If we choose to see the purported quotation in *Adv. nat.* 5.1 as an accurate reflection of what Antias wrote, then the 'beaten Jupiter' interpretation goes back to him, or perhaps to earlier sources. What seems to me more likely, however, is that Arnobius has intervened in Antias' text, so as to make it better suit his own purposes. Whilst this suggestion would deprive us of a pristine quotation from Antias, it enables us to see more clearly what Arnobius is doing in these chapters of *Against the Gentiles.*

As a Christian polemicist against the gods of traditional 'paganism',[20] Arnobius' goal in telling the Aventine-dialogue myth was to make Jupiter look as ridiculous as possible.[21] The unusual features of the myth's plot (discussed above) evidently seemed

[19] See C. Sogno, 'Persius, Juvenal, and the transformation of satire in Late Antiquity', in S.M. Braund and J.W. Osgood (edd.), *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal* (Chichester, 2012), 363–85; M.G. Luopetegui Semperena, 'Rhétorique et argumentation dans l'apologétique latine de la période constantinienne', in A.J. Quiroga Puertas (ed.), *Rhetorical Strategies in Late Antique Literature: Images, Metatexts and Interpretation* (Boston, 2017), 44–72, at 56–8, 67, 71.

[20] Overview in J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979), 255; H. Le Bonniec, *Arnobe: Contre les Gentils, Livre I* (Paris, 1982), 29–30. See especially Arn. *Adv. nat.* 4.30.

[21] P. Santorelli, 'Un dio da distruggere: modalità del discorso polemico in Arnobio', in A. Capone (ed.), *Lessico, argomentazioni e strutture retoriche nella polemica di età cristiana (III–V sec.)* (Turnhout, 2012), 189–214.

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to him to furnish useful ammunition, enabling him to argue that Jupiter displayed attributes unworthy of real divinity.[22] However, some interpretations of this myth would have made Jupiter look worse than others. A 'tested Numa' interpretation, for example, could still portray Jupiter as wise and benevolent towards human beings. Even a 'yielding Jupiter' might be said to have shown clemency. A 'beaten Jupiter' interpretation, by contrast, could be used to argue for the god's inferiority to human beings, his lack of foresight or providence, and his cruelty in demanding human sacrifice in the first place. We can see why Arnobius would have preferred this interpretation of the myth. Might he also have altered the text of Valerius Antias to make it support this construal? I find it interesting that the description of Jupiter as 'captured' and the frank admission that he has been 'deceived' occur only in the final sentence of the fragment and are otherwise echoed only in Arnobius, with no attestation in other extant sources for this myth. I wonder whether Arnobius has engaged in some sleight of hand here, replacing Antias' original conclusion to the dialogue with these explicit statements that Jupiter has been outwitted and overcome.

A long history of Arnobian *Quellenforschung* has demonstrated that he modifies freely the vocabulary and structure of his source material. Adaptation, combination with other sources, and outright innovation, distortion and invention for heightened comedic and satirical effect are the tools of his trade.[23] It is true that for Arnobius' polemic in our passage to work, the reader must believe that he is following Antias, but this does not mean that Arnobius actually played fair.[24] Given his tendency to touch up his source material elsewhere in *Against the Gentiles*, it seems reasonable to suppose that he could have tampered with it in our passage as well.[25] If so, it may have been Arnobius, not Antias or his predecessors, who created the 'beaten Jupiter' interpretation of the Aventine-dialogue myth.

This possibility encourages greater caution in using a 'beaten Jupiter' interpretation of the Aventine dialogue to characterize Roman religion. If this interpretation does go back to Antias, then it would show that he relayed a version of the story in which a god could be overcome by legalistic bargaining, though this would not prove that Antias approved of such a story, or that he considered it emblematic of divine–human relations. If the 'beaten Jupiter' is a Christian creation, on the other hand, then it can tell us even less about how 'pagan' Romans approached their gods. Instead, it may be best to read what we have in Arnobius as another example of the negative reinterpretation by early Christians of 'pagan' tradition, religion and cultural heritage.

[22] Cf. Mora (n. 10), 113–15.

[23] E.g. P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne* (Paris, 1905), 250–1, 264, 279, 284–6; Le Bonniec (n. 20), 40, 92; H. Le Bonniec, 'L'Exploitation apologétique par Arnobe du *De natura deorum* de Cicéron', in R. Chevallier (ed.), *Présence de Cicéron: Hommage au R.P.M. Testard* (Paris, 1984), 89–101; M. Coniglio, 'Nello «scriptorium» di Arnobio', *Scholia* 2 (2000), 71–101; F. Lubian, 'Christian polemic and mythological degradation: *Venus militaris* and *puerorum stupra* in the fourth book of Arnobius' *Aduersus nationes*', *Eisodos* 1 (2014), 33–41; K. Panegyres, 'The rhetoric of religious conflict in Arnobius' *Adversus Nationes*', *CQ* 69 (2019), 402–16. On Arnobius' originality in Book 5 specifically, see Mora (n. 10).

[24] Arnobius introduces the fragment with: *in secundo Antiatis libro … talis perscripta est fabula*. An ancient reader would not necessarily have taken this as the prelude to an unedited quotation. Arnobius' preferred verb for introducing quotation is *inquit.* He frequently uses *scribo* for 'pagan' content which he is summarizing rather than quoting. Since he uses *perscribo* only here, it is difficult to tell whether he means it in the sense of 'to write out in full', 'to describe in detail' or simply 'to record' (see *OLD* s.v. *perscribo*).

[25] My thanks to the anonymous reader for *CQ* for their help on this point.

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INTERPRETATION 2: A 'YIELDING JUPITER'

In this interpretation of the Aventine-dialogue myth, Jupiter is not beaten but instead yields to Numa's persuasion, voluntarily changing his mind and renouncing his demand for human sacrifice. Dumézil and Borghini attributed this reading to Valerius Antias,[26] whilst Scheid derived it from Ovid; more recently, Prescendi has seen it in both Ovid and Antias. For Scheid and Prescendi this reading typifies Roman understandings of the relationship between gods and human beings. Jupiter was acting like a 'tyrant' in demanding human sacrifice, staking a claim to absolute power over human life. Through the negotiation with Numa he learned that divine–human 'contracts' did not require total helpless submission from Roman worshippers. The dialogue, in this view, taught both Jupiter and Roman audiences that there were limits to what the gods could ask of human beings.[27]

In evaluating the merits of these arguments two questions must be asked. First, to what extent are Scheid and Prescendi correct in asserting that Roman readers would have considered Jupiter's demand for human sacrifice unjustifiable and Numa's response the only rational one in the circumstances? Second, do our surviving sources actually transmit a 'yielding Jupiter' interpretation of the Aventine-dialogue myth and, if they do, do they understand this as putting limits on the divine?

To begin with the (im)propriety of Jupiter's request for human sacrifice, Scheid and Prescendi are of course right that Romans of the Late Republican and Imperial periods regarded human sacrifice as inherently 'unRoman' and 'barbaric'.[28] We may therefore join these scholars in seeing Antias, Ovid, Plutarch and Arnobius as likely to have disapproved of Jupiter's initial demand. Yet human sacrifice was practised at Rome into the late second century B.C.: the last attested case is the state-mandated live burial of two Gauls and two Greeks in 114/113 B.C.[29] Given that the Aventine-dialogue myth was in existence by the time of Piso, the first Roman tellers of this tale did not live in a culture that saw all human sacrifice as inappropriate. Rather than perceiving Numa's response as a necessary limiting of the divine, they may have understood it as a lucky, and narrow, escape.[30]

But what of our surviving sources, produced in periods when human sacrifice was seen as morally reprehensible? We have a god who demands human sacrifice but departs with other offerings after interacting with a mortal. Why should this not be because the god changed his mind about which offerings to accept, learning a valuable lesson in the process? The problem is that this is not precisely what our sources say. In fact, they resist a 'yielding Jupiter' reading of the Aventine-dialogue myth. This

[26] Dumézil (n. 8), 53–4; Borghini (n. 16), 45–6.

[27] Scheid (n. 16), 48–50; id., 'La mise à mort de la victime sacrificielle: à propos de quelques interprétations antiques du sacrifice romain', in A. Müller-Karpe et al. (edd.), *Studien zur Archäologie der Kelten, Römer und Germanen in Mittel- und Westeuropa: Alfred Haffner zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Rahden, 1998), 519–29, at 528; Prescendi (n. 10), 195–8, 201–2; Scheid (n. 11), 115–16.

[28] E.g. Livy 22.57.6; Strabo 4.4.5; Plut. *Marc.* 3.3–4; Plin. *HN* 30.4.13; discussion in C.E. Schultz, 'The Romans and ritual murder', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78 (2010), 516–41.

[29] Plut. *Mor.* 283F–284C. I follow Schultz's reconstruction (n. 28) of Roman distinctions between human sacrifice and other forms of ritual death.

[30] Traces of such a view may linger in the fact, acknowledged by Prescendi (n. 10), 195, that our sources do not present the settlement between king and god as doing away with human sacrifice altogether but only as pertaining to this particular case.

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resistance calls for historical explanation, which I will seek to locate in the differing goals, strategies and commitments of our ancient authors.

As we saw in the previous section, Arnobius and Antias depict Jupiter as agreeing to offerings different from those he had originally wanted. 'I had decided (*constitueram*) that lightning would be expiated by human heads', he admits to Numa (*Adv. nat.* 5.1, within the purported quotation from Antias). However, in the text as we have it, he goes along with the switch not because he has been persuaded by the king's argument but because he has no other option. Again within the Antias fragment, Jupiter confesses to Numa: 'your shrewdness has circumvented me' (*me ... tua circumuenit astutia*). This admission is open to interpretation, but it does not appear to lead most naturally to the conclusion that Jupiter is revising his request on the basis of a constructive new understanding of what he can and cannot ask of human beings. Certainly that is not how Arnobius takes it: his framing remarks stress instead the extent to which the man 'got round' the god's (enduring) wishes. Numa's manoeuvres are *circumuentiones* in 5.3, and the king is twice said to 'circumscribe' the god (*circumscripsit*, *circumscribere*) in 5.4. This Jupiter was dragged to earth 'unwillingly' (*Ioue inuito*, 5.2; *inuitum*, 5.3), forced to 'yield to the will of the victor', Numa (*in uictoris concedere uoluntatem*, 5.4).[31] Arnobius also differs sharply from Ovid and Plutarch in presenting Jupiter as angry and threatening both during and after the exchange, thereby insisting that the god was unhappy with the outcome.[32] In light of Arnobius' conviction that true gods were incapable of anger and not subject to passion,[33] the attribution of anger to Jupiter serves both to undermine Jupiter's claim to divinity and to support Arnobius' reading of the Aventine dialogue as the story of Jupiter's defeat. If we accept the suggestion that Arnobius has altered Antias' text at the end of 5.1 (Section 1, above), then it remains possible that Jupiter in Antias' original experienced a more constructive change of mind, perhaps along the lines envisioned by Scheid and Prescendi. The text, as it stands, however, does not conduce to a 'yielding Jupiter' interpretation.

Ovid's telling of the Aventine dialogue does not offer a 'yielding Jupiter' for the same reason that it fails to present a 'beaten Jupiter'. In Ovid, as we have seen, the 'truth' is that Jupiter never wanted human sacrifice at all. On the contrary, he is in control of the exchange and is simply testing the king. Ovid's possible reasons for preferring that interpretation of the myth will be discussed in the next section. Here, the key point is that, if we are to be faithful to our texts, Ovid's Jupiter cannot be said to change his mind or to learn from Numa's arguments.

It is in fact Plutarch who comes closest to showing Jupiter deciding voluntarily to accept a change of offerings. Plutarch agrees with Antias and Arnobius (*contra* Ovid) in implying that Jupiter did want human sacrifice in the beginning: he is 'angry' when he appears on the Aventine (τὸν δὲ θεὸν ὀργιζόμενον), and Numa perceives his request as 'terrible' and needing to be 'turned aside' (τὸν δ' αὖθις ἐκτρέποντα τὸ

[31] Arnobius also tries to claim that the very existence of remedies for lightning constitutes an undermining of divine will, on the grounds that any expiation would render what the god had decided 'vain and empty' (*<ut> quod fieri statui inane fiat et uacuum et sacrorum <ui> uanescat*, 5.2). Arnobius' willingness to distort and disregard the logic of 'pagan' rituals is patent here.

[32] According to Arnobius, the expiations at issue were necessitated by the god's 'wrath and passions' (*iras eius atque animos*, 5.2), speaking with him could only be done 'dangerously' (*periculosius*, 5.2), and in the end he was still 'vexed' (*doleas*, 5.4). In Ovid and Plutarch, by contrast, Jupiter is said to be pleased by the results of the exchange: he smiles or laughs (*risit*) in Ovid, and goes away 'gracious' (ἵλεως) in Plutarch.

[33] See especially *Adv. nat.* 4.24–5, 7.3–9, 7.15, 7.35–6; Le Bonniec (n. 20), 73–80.

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τοῦ προστάγματος δεινόν, *Num.* 15.5). Yet Plutarch agrees with Ovid (*contra* Arnobius) in suggesting that the god was pleased with the substitution Numa proposed: the god went away 'having become gracious' (τὸν μὲν θεὸν ἀπελθεῖν ἵλεω γενόμενον, *Num.* 15.6).[34] Although this plot outline indicates that Plutarch was familiar with a 'yielding Jupiter' interpretation of the Aventine-dialogue myth, Plutarch's presentation also seems to pull against such a reading. Plutarch does not include a statement of acceptance by the god at the end of the dialogue, as we find in Arnobius and Antias (as currently preserved). Nor does Plutarch as narrator state that Jupiter chose to accept Numa's proposal: this must be inferred from the shift in the god's emotions. Although these differences from Antias/Arnobius and Ovid are subtle, they may be significant in the light of Plutarch's evident distaste for the Aventine-dialogue story, which he labels as one of the tales, 'myth-like in their absurdity' and 'mythical and laughable', that Numa irresponsibly induced the Romans to believe.[35] Stoffel located Plutarch's discomfort in an objection to 'dialogue entre un mortel et un dieu'.[36] At *Num.* 4, however, Plutarch maintains that the gods are willing to come amongst and 'associate with' virtuous men (τοῖς διαφερόντως ἀγαθοῖς ἐθέλειν συνεῖναι, καὶ μὴ δυσχεραίνειν μηδὲ ἀτιμάζειν ἀνδρὸς ὁσίου καὶ σώφρονος ὁμιλίαν, 4.3; also 4.7), so divine–human dialogue in itself does not seem to have been a problem for him. I suggest that Plutarch's unease was prompted instead by the theological implications of the very version of the myth that he chose to tell. In other words, a 'yielding Jupiter' was incompatible with Plutarch's understanding of the divine nature.

Plutarch's Middle Platonic god was a benign θεὸς φιλάνθρωπος (*Num.* 4.3).[37] Like the good man, god is characterized by mildness and self-control (πραότης);[38] he is slow to anger and to punish, giving to human beings an example of 'mildness and long-suffering' (τὴν πραότητα καὶ τὴν μεγαλοπάθειαν).[39] This kind of god engages with human beings only in order to 'instruct and exhort them in what is best' (σπουδάζοντας θεοὺς ὁμιλεῖν ἐπὶ διδασκαλίᾳ καὶ παραινέσει τῶν βελτίστων, *Num.* 4.7).[40] Unlike human beings, who can never fully expunge their emotions, the gods experience ἀπάθεια, freedom from all passion.[41] To attribute to them a nature 'susceptible to emotions and involuntary changes' is to 'force us to a disorderly

[34] Salat (n. 16), 36–7; Borghini (n. 16), 46.

[35] 15.1: μύθοις ἐοικότας τὴν ἀτοπίαν λόγους; 15.6: ταῦτα … τὰ μυθώδη καὶ γελοῖα.

[36] E. Stoffel, 'La divination dans les *Vies* romaines de Plutarque: le point de vue d'un philosophe', *CCG* 16 (2005), 305–19, at 308–9, accepted by Prescendi (n. 10), 191 n. 683.

[37] On the meaning of this adjective in Greek religion and philosophy, see J. de Romilly, *La douceur dans la pensée grecque* (Paris, 1979), 43–52, and 275–307 (on Plutarch); R. Hirzel, *Plutarch* (Leipzig, 1912), 23–32; H. Martin, 'The concept of *philanthropia* in Plutarch's *Lives*', *AJPh* 82 (1961), 164–75.

[38] On divine 'mildness': *Mor.* 458B–C. On the good man's control of anger: especially *De cohibenda ira*.

[39] Plut. *Mor.* 551B–C. On the philosophical ideal of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, see F. Becchi, 'Plutarco e la dottrina dell'*homoiôsis theôi* tra Platonismo ed Aristotelismo', in I. Gallo (ed.), *Plutarco e la religione (Atti del VI Convegno plutarcheo, Ravello, maggio 1995)* (Naples, 1996), 321–35.

[40] On Plutarch's understanding of the divine, see J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), 192–229; papers collected in I. Gallo (ed.), *Plutarco e la religione (Atti del VI Convegno plutarcheo, Ravello, maggio 1995)* (Naples, 1996), especially Becchi (n. 39) and G. Sfameni Gasparro, 'Plutarco e la religione delfica: Il dio «filosofico» e il suo esegeta', 157–88; Stoffel (n. 36). On Plutarch's treatment of myth, see C. Pelling, '"Making myth look like history": Plutarch's *Theseus–Romulus*', in id., *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies* (London, 2002), 171–95.

[41] *Mor.* 83E, 443C–D; *Publicola* 6.5. On Plutarch's doctrine of ἀπάθεια, and its differences from that of other Platonists, see Becchi (n. 39), 331–3; also Dillon (n. 40), 193–8, 229; de Romilly (n. 37), 299; D. Babut, 'Du scepticisme au dépassement de la raison: philosophie et foi religieuse chez Plutarque', in id., *Parerga: Choix d'articles de D. Babut* (Lyon and Paris, 1994), 549–81.

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confusion of all things, in which we bring god into men's emotions and activities, drawing him down to our needs, as the women of Thessaly are said to draw down the moon'.[42]

None of this is compatible with a Jupiter who demands human suffering and then recants, an angry god blown about by the wind of his passions. I suspect it is for this reason that Plutarch alone raises the possibility that it was the *daimones* Faunus and Picus, not Jupiter, who taught Numa how to expiate lightning;[43] and for this reason likewise that Plutarch alone derives the epithet 'Elicius' not from the human act of 'eliciting', as in the Latin tradition, but from the god's benevolence.[44] The former gets Jupiter off the theological hook, whilst the latter saves something of his character. Thus, whilst we may say that Plutarch relays a 'yielding Jupiter' version of the Aventine dialogue, his choices about how to tell that story (framing it with disapproving remarks, providing an alternative version in which Jupiter was not the antagonist, emphasizing the god's benevolence and declining to spell out the fact that the god changed his mind) are more interesting than have previously been realized. These choices probably result not just from Plutarch's use of diverse sources, as typically suggested, but from his own theological convictions. Furthermore, they indicate that Plutarch did not see this version of the myth as instructing readers in how gods and human beings should interact, nor as putting healthy limits on what the gods could ask of human beings. Plutarch would probably have agreed with Scheid and Prescendi in deeming Jupiter's request for human sacrifice inappropriate. But he does not appear to have seen Jupiter's eventual decision to settle for lesser offerings as much help. For the philosopher from Chaeronea, a 'yielding Jupiter' was more unsettling than encouraging.

Our conclusions in this section may be summarized as follows. The earliest tellings of the Aventine-dialogue myth may not have presented Jupiter's demand for human lives as inappropriate or tyrannical. Of our surviving sources, none explicitly portrays Jupiter as learning constructively from Numa's arguments, or their exchange as setting useful limits on future interactions between human and divine. Only Plutarch depicts a Jupiter who yields, and that picture is hedged about with reservations probably induced by Plutarch's philosophical commitments. Antias' account may originally have featured a positive divine change of mind, later concealed by Arnobius in the text as we have it, but this must remain speculative. Arnobius himself preferred the 'beaten Jupiter' reading of the myth, because this better suited his purpose of denigrating the king of the 'pagan' gods. Ovid's Jupiter, finally, never changes his mind. His role is not to learn but to test his human interlocutor. Why Ovid and other ancient writers might have preferred (or resisted) the image of a testing Jupiter and a 'tested Numa' is the subject of the next section.

INTERPRETATION 3: A 'TESTED NUMA'

A third interpretation of the Aventine-dialogue myth is that it depicts a test posed by god to man. On this view, Jupiter did not want human sacrifice at all; rather, he made deliberately ambiguous propositions so as to train Numa in the importance of

[42] *Mor.* 416C–F, transl. Dillon (n. 40), 217.
[43] *Num.* 3.3–5.
[44] *Num.* 15.6; cf. Ov. *Fast.* 3.327–8; Livy 1.20.7; Varro, *Ling.* 6.94 with Wiseman (n. 1 [2008]), 155.

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using precise and correct language when dealing with gods. For Dumézil, this is true of the myth in general;[45] other scholars see this moral only in Ovid's version, which is sometimes said to differ in this respect from that of Antias.[46]

The evidence examined in the previous two sections confirms that Antias' account does not propagate a 'tested Numa' interpretation, since his Jupiter (at least in the text as we have it) genuinely wants human sacrifice and is simply outfoxed, involuntarily, by Numa's repartee. Dumézil went too far, therefore, in identifying the verbal test as 'the' meaning of this myth. On the other hand, we have also seen that a 'tested Numa' was indeed what Ovid saw in the Aventine-dialogue story. Why would Ovid have preferred this version?

One likely factor is the pressure of the comparisons drawn in the *Fasti* between Augustus and the gods (especially Mars and Jupiter). As Hinds has shown, one of Ovid's goals in Book 3 is the 'disarming' of both Mars as character and Augustus as reader.[47] For Feeney and Littlewood, Numa's risky engagement with Jupiter mirrors the 'terrifying battle of wits and words' (Littlewood) in which Ovid felt himself enmeshed during a period of tightening imperial censorship.[48] These comparisons were risky in themselves and, given that human sacrifice was regarded with repulsion in Ovid's day,[49] he may have worried that Augustus would not have appreciated an image of his divine counterpart lusting after human lives. I wonder whether Ovid's insistence that Jupiter never really wanted his worshippers to suffer, even if he seemed angry at first, could even have functioned as a subtle hint to Augustus, and later to Tiberius and Germanicus, that Ovid's banishment was contrary to their true character, and could be walked back without an imperial loss of face. Of course, we should not deny Ovid his own theological concerns: politics aside, perhaps he, like Plutarch, was troubled by versions of the story in which the king of the gods appeared bloodthirsty and cruel. A 'tested Numa' interpretation, unlike a 'beaten' or 'yielding' Jupiter, credits the 'father of the gods and king of humankind' with purely benevolent intentions, and puts him in control of the divine–human interaction.

That a 'tested Numa' showed Jupiter to greater advantage than other ancient readings of the story is confirmed by Arnobius. Although it has not previously been recognized, he, too, provides evidence for a verbal-test interpretation of the Aventine dialogue.

[45] Dumézil (n. 8), 53–4.

[46] Salat (n. 16), 36–7; Pasco-Pranger (n. 10), 303; ead., *Founding the Year: Ovid's* Fasti *and the Poetics of the Roman Calendar* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 97; Prescendi (n. 10), 198; Green (n. 17), 50 n. 42.

[47] S. Hinds, '*Arma* in Ovid's *Fasti* Part 1: genre and mannerism', *Arethusa* 25 (1992), 81–112; S. Hinds, '*Arma* in Ovid's *Fasti* Part 2: genre, Romulean Rome and Augustan ideology', *Arethusa* 25 (1992), 113–53, especially 118–20; A. Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and Augustan Discourse* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1997), 176. On the complexity of Ovid's portrait of Jupiter, see S.J. Heyworth, 'L'Instabilité des dieux dans le livre 3 des *Fastes* d'Ovide', in H. Casanova-Robin, G. Sauron and M. Moser (edd.), *Actes du colloque «Ovide 2017»* (Paris, 2018), 181–211, at 197–202.

[48] D. Feeney, '*Si licet et fas est*: Ovid's *Fasti* and the problem of free speech under the Principate', in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (London, 1992), 1–25, especially 12–13; R.J. Littlewood, '*Imperii pignora certa*: the role of Numa in Ovid's *Fasti*', in G. Herbert-Brown (ed.), *Ovid's* Fasti*: Historical Readings at its Bimillenium* (Oxford, 2002), 175–97, at 188–9; Heyworth (n. 5), 12, 144–5, 148, 151; cf. Barchiesi (n. 47), 203. There is a lively debate about the political significance of Ovid's portrayal of Numa and how this pertains to his view of Augustus. For a balanced summary, see T. Habinek, 'Ovid and empire', in P. Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge, 2002), 46–61, at 58.

[49] See above, page 265.

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At *Adv. nat.* 5.3, Arnobius pretends to make a concession to his imagined 'pagan' interlocutor: 'But let us concede, as it is said, that Jupiter himself knew, and appointed against himself, remedies and arts by which one might appropriately go against his own intentions' (or, perhaps, 'the things he himself had signified') (*sed concedamus, ut dicitur, ipsum aduersum se Iouem remedia scisse atque artes quibus iri obuiam suis significationibus conueniret*, 5.3).[50] Arnobius here lets slip his familiarity with the argument that Jupiter had intended all along, and had revealed voluntarily, the expiations by which his apparent request for human sacrifice could be circumvented. Further clues can be detected in the gibes that follow: it is incredible, Arnobius scoffs, that an eliciting ritual performed by a mortal such as Numa could have been so powerful as to force Jupiter 'to give himself up voluntarily to [Numa's] circumventions' (*potentiora quam Iuppiter fuerunt haec omnia, ut eum compellerent ... uoluntarium sese circumuentionibus tradere*, 5.3).[51] A few lines later, Arnobius admits that the words of the god's first salvo were inherently open to interpretation: '"You will expiate lightning bolts with 'heads'," [Jupiter] says; but the phrase is still incomplete, and the meaning is not fully expressed and defined.'[52] Again, '[the god] had not yet fixed specifically [with his words] that which [needed to be offered], and it was still uncertain and the sentence was not yet finished' when Numa jumped in with his suggestions.[53]

Arnobius does his best to present this as further evidence only of Jupiter's stupidity, but his protestations reveal his awareness that a 'tested Numa' interpretation of the myth could be used to make Jupiter look more competent and less cruel. Whether Arnobius had encountered contemporary 'pagans' who actually advanced this argument is unclear. Given his use of Ovid,[54] he may be engaging deliberately with the version in *Fasti* Book 3; or perhaps Antias originally put forward such a version, which Arnobius replaced with a Jovian admission of defeat at Numa's hands.[55] This possibility urges caution in assuming that the accounts of Antias and Ovid diverged sharply on this point. On the other hand, Arnobius has a habit in *Against the Gentiles* of throwing out and then shooting down every 'pagan' objection he can think of, so the appearance of a 'tested Numa' in our passage may simply be the product of his own brain. In either case, reading Arnobius' treatment as his own, with an eye on his rhetorical and ideological goals, enables us to detect new features within it, and to see that Ovid was not alone in noticing that the myth could be taken this way.

We saw in the previous sections that much scholarly attention has been directed to the possible implications for Roman religion of the 'beaten Jupiter' and the 'yielding Jupiter' interpretations of the Aventine dialogue. They have long been used to characterize Roman

[50] 'Remedies and arts' may denote the expiations agreed upon by Numa and Jupiter (as in Arnobius' remarks preceding the sentence at hand) or the rituals used by Numa to elicit Jupiter from heaven (to which Arnobius alludes in the sentence immediately following). Similarly, 'intentions' or 'significations' may refer to lightning as a signifier of divine wrath, to Jupiter's intention of demanding human sacrifice, or to his reluctance to be pulled down from heaven. The lack of clarity is probably deliberate, a product of Arnobius' scatter-gun style of argument: see above, Section 1.

[51] This could also hint at the polemicist's awareness of a 'yielding Jupiter' interpretation.

[52] *Adv. nat.* 5.3: *expiabis, inquit, capite fulguritia. inperfecta adhuc uox est neque plena proloquii circumscriptaque sententia.*

[53] *Adv. nat.* 5.3: *quod cum nondum specialiter statuisset, essetque adhuc pendens et nondum sententia terminata*. I differ here from Bryce and Campbell (n. 7), who, taking *sententia* as 'decision', think that it was Jupiter's mind, not his utterance, which was not yet made up.

[54] Cf. H. Le Bonniec, 'Échos ovidiens dans l'*Adversus nationes* d'Arnobe', *Caesarodunum* 17 (1982), 139–51, at 140 n. 4; Coniglio (n. 23), 80, 97.

[55] On the likelihood of Arnobius' tampering with Antias' text, see above, Section 1.

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divine–human relationships as negotiative and dialectic, and the 'yielding Jupiter' has been further deployed by Scheid and others as evidence that Romans in general perceived their gods as superiors but simultaneously as 'fellow-citizens' or 'colleagues'.[56] The implications for Roman religion of a 'tested Numa', by contrast, have generated little remark, with the honourable exception of Georges Dumézil. He took Jupiter's testing of Numa as evidence for a characteristically Roman 'prudence verbale', springing from a constant anxiety that rituals could go awry if the slightest offence, or the slightest opening for hostility, were offered to the divine interlocutor.[57] Dumézil's Romans are more anxious than Scheid's, less confident in their own ability to bring the gods round to their point of view. What I hope has become clear is how each scholar's reading of the Aventine-dialogue myth has fed into these different characterizations of Roman religion. Rather than drawing similarly sweeping conclusions from particular interpretations of this highly unusual myth, I would like to return our attention to how our surviving sources perceive the divine–human power dynamics of a 'tested Numa' scenario. Here again the results are influenced by each author's style, goals and religious affiliation.

Arnobius may be said to see a 'tested Numa' reading as bringing the gods closer to the human level, but as a Christian polemicist he presents this as an inappropriate violation of divine transcendence. No true divinity, he suggests, would lower itself to such empty converse with mere mortals. A real god would never have stood chatting on a 'little wart of a single hill' (*uerrucula collis unius*) with a 'feeble little human' (*homunculus*, *Adv. nat.* 5.3), saying one thing but meaning another. Interestingly, Ovid seems to have worked hard to counter a similar impression, despite his interest elsewhere in the *Fasti* in depicting gods who act very like human beings.[58] As Bömer and Littlewood have noted, Ovid's Numa is remarkably cautious in his approaches to the divine:[59] he sacrifices before attempting to trap the lesser deities Faunus and Picus (*Fast.* 3.300), and apologizes humbly to them once they have been caught (3.309–10). He addresses Jupiter with a series of propitiatory conditionals ('if we have touched your altars with pure hands, … if a pious tongue asks') and a deferential salutation ('King and Father of the lofty gods').[60] Both Faunus and Ovid as narrator avow their concern for what it is *fas* or *nefas* to know or say (*Fast.* 3.313–14, 3.323–6). Ovid's account also maintains explicitly the superiority of Jupiter. Faunus warns Numa: 'You ask great things, which it is not *fas* for you to learn by our admonition. Our divinity has its limits. We are rustic gods and rule over the high mountains; Jupiter has control of his own kingdom' (*magna petis, nec quae monitu tibi discere nostro | fas sit: habent fines numina nostra suos. | di sumus agrestes et qui dominemur in altis | montibus; arbitrium est in sua regna Ioui*, *Fast.* 3.313–16).[61] Finally, in Ovid it is Jupiter, not Numa, who

[56] Scheid (n. 16); Prescendi (n. 10), 197; Šterbenc Erker (n. 16), 350; Scheid (n. 11), 115.
[57] Dumézil (n. 8), 53–4.
[58] R. Heinze, *Ovids elegische Erzählung* (Leipzig, 1919), 15–17.
[59] F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Die Fasten*, 2 vols. (Heidelberg, 1957, 1958), 2.166–7; Littlewood (n. 48), 185.
[60] *Fast.* 3.334–6: *altorum rexque paterque deum, | si tua contigimus manibus donaria puris, | hoc quoque quod petitur si pia lingua rogat*. On the translation, see S.J. Heyworth, 'Some polyvalent intra- and inter-textualities in *Fasti* 3', in S.J. Harrison, S. Frangoulidis and T.D. Papanghelis (edd.), *Intratextuality and Latin Literature* (Berlin–Munich–Boston, 2018), 273–88, at 275; id. (n. 5), 149.
[61] On the reading *regna*, as opposed to the more commonly accepted *tecta* or *tela*, see Heyworth (n. 5), 146.

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conceals or reveals the 'truth', and who decides whether or not to accede to the king's prayer. It is the gods who set the test; Ovid's mortals can only sit it.

These features of Ovid's account are partly influenced by generic conventions as well as by the broader themes of the *Fasti*. The notion of approaching the gods with 'pure hands and pious lips' is a commonplace.[62] The image of Faunus and Picus as midway up the divine ladder evokes Ovid's more widely deployed imagining of a social-status hierarchy of gods, in imitation of the hierarchies of the Roman society and the Augustan political settlement.[63] Ovid's poem plays constantly with the concept of boundaries, so we can see why his telling of the Aventine dialogue would dwell on the bounds of piety and the shifting lines between gods and human beings.[64] Given that the poem likens Jupiter and Augustus, Ovid may also have considered it politically prudent to stress the respect owing to the divine counterpart of the *princeps*. Yet these factors do not negate the religious significance of Ovid's picture: as Littlewood argues, the dense clustering of piety-language in our passage must also be designed to lay special stress on the depth of Numa's respect for the gods.[65]

Surprisingly, then, we may say that it is the Christian writer Arnobius who, in his broadside against the Aventine dialogue, puts forward a (hostile) understanding of its divine–human dynamic which comes closest to Scheid's picture of contractual and collegial interchange. Writing within a 'pagan' tradition, Ovid promotes by contrast a Dumézilian perception of divine–human interactions as fraught with potential peril. My point is not that one view is right and the other wrong, but that we must be more careful than heretofore in reading them into our surviving sources. Ovid's account indeed displays rich reflection on the relationship between gods and human beings, but his Jupiter is more king than colleague.

INTERPRETATION 4: A 'FEARLESS NUMA'

A final interpretation of the Aventine-dialogue myth, put forward by John Scheid on the basis of Ovid's version in *Fasti* Book 3, is that it taught Romans to master their fear when dealing with gods. Scheid recognizes that Ovid portrays Numa as frightened in Jupiter's presence. However, he believes that Ovid also shows Numa learning 'not to have fear in the presence of the gods'.[66] In contrast to the king's 'calm assurance', Ovid's populace displays only a 'vulgar and ridiculous panic' of which Romans in the historical period disapproved.[67] Proper religious conduct, as illustrated by this myth, consisted in 'ignoring and dominating emotion' and in interacting with the gods in a 'rational and cold' manner.[68]

[62] Bömer (n. 59), 167; Heyworth (n. 5), 144.

[63] Cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.170–6; *Fast.* 5.19–32; with E. Fantham, *Latin Poets and Italian Gods* (Toronto, 2009), 83; A. Feldherr, *Playing Gods: Ovid's* Metamorphoses *and the Politics of Fiction* (Princeton, 2010), 146–7; Šterbenc Erker (n. 16), 344; Heyworth (n. 5), 146.

[64] J.F. Miller, *Ovid's Elegiac Festivals: Studies in the* Fasti (Frankfurt, 1991), 35–43; Dubourdieu (n. 12 [1995]), 48–50; Šterbenc Erker (n. 16), 348.

[65] Littlewood (n. 48), 185; also Scheid (n. 16), 46; Prescendi (n. 10), 193 n. 688.

[66] Scheid (n. 16), 49–50.

[67] Scheid (n. 16), 45, 48–9.

[68] J. Scheid, 'Les émotions dans la religion romaine', in F. Prescendi and Y. Volokhine (edd.), *Dans le laboratoire de l'historien des religions: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Borgeaud* (Geneva, 2011), 406–15, at 409–11, 413–14. Similarly in 2015: Scheid (n. 11), 114–16.

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Scheid's ultimate conclusion that many Romans were suspicious of highly emotional styles of religiosity is unarguable, which helps to explain the ongoing influence of this fourth reading of the Aventine-dialogue myth. In this paper, I wish to ask a more precise set of questions. How closely does a 'fearless Numa' reading actually map onto the versions of the myth told by our surviving ancient sources? How likely is it that Roman readers would have read the sources this way?

Neither Antias/Arnobius nor Plutarch describes how the king might have felt during the Aventine dialogue. Plutarch's description of Jupiter's request as 'terrible' (δεινός, *Num.* 15.5) suggests that it could have inspired fear, but Plutarch does not elaborate. We are left with Ovid's version, and here fear, not fearlessness, predominates.[69] It is Numa's fear of the wrath (*ira*) of 'savage Jove' (*saeui ... Iouis*) which Egeria must assuage (*Fast.* 3.289–90). When Jupiter arrives on the Aventine, the woods tremble and the earth sinks beneath his weight,[70] and as for Numa himself: 'the heart of the king shook, and the blood fled from his whole body, and his bristling hair stood on end' (*constat Auentinae tremuisse cacumina siluae, | terraque subsedit pondere pressa Iouis. | corda micant regis totoque e corpore sanguis | fugit et hirsutae deriguere comae*, *Fast.* 3.329–32). Scheid's interpretation allows for these initial feelings of fear, as we have seen. But what Ovid does not give us is the change Scheid posits in Numa's emotions during the dialogue. Numa does 'regain his senses' in beginning to speak with the god (*rediit animus, da certa piamina, dixit*, 3.333), but Ovid does not say that this return to consciousness expunges the king's fear; on the contrary, Jupiter's reply instantly 'terrifies' him again (*terruit ... uirum*, 3.338). The next emotion is attributed not to the king but to the god: it is Jupiter who smiles or laughs, commends Numa as a 'man who must not be stopped from conversation with gods', and announces that he will reward the Romans with 'sure pledges of empire' (*risit et, his, inquit, facito mea tela procures, | o uir colloquio non abigende deum. | sed tibi ... | imperii pignora certa dabo*, 3.343–6). Only then do we find another mention of Numa's feelings: he returns to the people 'glad' (*ille redit laetus*, 3.349). It is reasonable enough to suppose that Numa had to pluck up his courage in order to speak with Jupiter, but, *pace* Scheid, Ovid does not say so. The elegist's interest lies elsewhere, in the emotional reorientation Numa experiences in response to the god's own initiatives. When Jupiter appears to threaten harm, the king feels fear; when Jupiter promises benevolence, the king's heart lifts. As we saw in the previous section, for Ovid the power lies mostly with Jupiter, not with Numa.

This portrayal makes sense when we consider Ovid's political circumstances, a factor overlooked by Scheid. If Jupiter is (like) Augustus (as we saw in Section 3 of this paper), then Ovid would be a fool to suggest that either Numa (Ovid's poetic alter ego) or Numa's/Ovid's fellow citizens should trade awe of him for calm assurance, cold rationality and confidence in a 'contract'. One did not make contracts with the elderly Augustus, especially not when one was a poet in far-flung exile.[71] This may be one reason why, when Egeria addresses Numa's anxiety about 'savage Jove', she does not advise him to stop fearing the god altogether (as Scheid's reconstruction

[69] Ahl (n. 16), 301–2; Dubourdieu (n. 12 [1995]), 48.

[70] Bömer (n. 59), 166 notes that epiphanies were often said to produce such effects on nature and human beings. See further G. Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2015), especially 21, 32–43, 98–105, 110, 231.

[71] On the parallels Ovid draws between himself in exile and the Caesars as dangerous gods, cf. Heyworth (n. 60); id. (n. 5), 12, 151.

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would appear to demand) but simply not to fear him 'excessively' (*nimium*). That Ovid's Numa went on trembling before the gods even after this episode is suggested by his characterization at *Fast.* 6.259–60, where he is credited with the most 'god-fearing' nature ever born in Sabine land (*regis ... quo non metuentius ullum | numinis ingenium terra Sabina tulit*).

As for the disjunction Scheid sees between Numa's fear and the undignified panic of the populace, I must confess that I simply cannot detect this in Ovid's account. People and king share in the fear of Jupiter, as Ovid makes clear at *Fast.* 3.288: 'the king trembles and terror holds the hearts of the multitude' (*rex pauet et uulgi pectora terror habet*). The language Ovid employs for the people's fear does not seem noticeably harsher than that which he deploys for Numa's own; at 3.362, it is the people's minds (*mentes*) which 'tremble' (*pauent*, the same verb used for Numa at 3.288). That the people are still troubled by 'hope and fear' (*sollicitae mentes speque metuque*, 3.362) when they assemble to await the god's promised pledges on the day after the Numa–Jupiter dialogue need not redound to their discredit, as Scheid supposes. Numa, too, was anxious until he received direct reassurance from Jupiter, and it was widely recognized in antiquity that autopsy was more credible than someone else's report.[72] Until the promised physical proof of Jupiter's benevolence appeared, the people had only Numa's word to go on. Why should they not continue to feel fear as well as hope?

In sum, although Romans could perhaps have imagined Numa outgrowing his fear of the gods during his repartee with Jupiter, this does not seem like the most natural way of reading Ovid's account. The likelihood that ancient audiences would have taken Ovid this way is further reduced when we consider the prominence of the ancient claim that Numa himself brought *metus deorum* to Rome. Ovid introduces his Aventine dialogue with precisely this claim: Numa 'decided to tame [the *Quirites*] by law and by fear of the gods' (*molliri placuit iure deumque metu*, *Fast.* 3.278). The same assertion recurs in a plethora of other ancient authors.[73] This is quite different from teaching fellow-citizens how to channel, dominate or ignore an emotion they already experience, as Scheid would have it. Against this background, an ancient reader encountering the fear-vocabulary in *Fasti* Book 3 seems more likely, to me, to have called to mind the tradition of Numa as instiller of *metus deorum*, than to have derived the moral that they ought to suppress their feelings when dealing with gods.

As noted above, the question is not whether we think Scheid's preferred flavour of Roman religiosity existed in antiquity, but whether we can derive it from the evidence we have. In the case of Numa's exchange with Jupiter, I think that the answer is no. Ovid's imagining of the Aventine dialogue emphasizes fear, not fearlessness, as the defining feature of this interaction between the Romans and their supreme god. Scholars who wish to downplay the role of emotions in Roman religion should look to other sources to prove that point.

CONCLUSION: FROM CONTRACT TO CONSTERNATION

This paper set out to enhance our understanding of the Aventine-dialogue myth by determining whether the four current interpretations of it are adequately supported in

[72] T. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith* (Oxford, 2015), 39–45, 65–74.

[73] Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.61.1; Livy 1.19.4; Ov. *Met.* 15.482–4; Plut. *Num.* 8.3, 20.6; Tac. *Ann.* 3.26. See further R.M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy, Books 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), 90, 94–5.

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our ancient sources; whether they have been correctly attributed if so; why our surviving authors portray the myth the way they do; and what those authorial choices tell us about how Antias, Ovid, Plutarch and Arnobius perceived this myth. Interpretation 1, the 'beaten Jupiter', is propagated by Arnobius, and by Antias as Arnobius preserved him; I have suggested that this reading was especially well suited to Arnobius' polemical purpose of attacking the 'pagan' gods, and that it may be his own creation. Interpretation 2, the 'yielding Jupiter', is not present in Antias/Arnobius or Ovid, but it is attested in Plutarch; at the same time, Plutarch appears to resist this version because it contradicts his own conception of the divine. Interpretation 3, the 'tested Numa', is promoted by Ovid and also attested in Arnobius, who appears to have seen it as a possible escape route for 'pagans' seeking to defend Jupiter's reputation. Finally, interpretation 4, the 'fearless Numa', is not well supported by the surviving sources, which concentrate rather on the terror Jupiter inspires in human beings.

We have also seen how modern scholars have used these various readings of the Aventine-dialogue myth as paradigms for Roman conceptions of divine–human relations and power dynamics. I have suggested that these reconstructions go beyond the ancient evidence. If the 'beaten Jupiter' was a Christian creation, then it would be unwise to count it as evidence that Romans saw divine–human relations as contractual and legalistic. Ancient authors do not appear to have taken the 'yielding Jupiter' as a model for placing healthy limits on the gods. The 'tested Numa' casts Jupiter more as king and examiner than as colleague. The 'fearless Numa', finally, may say more about our desire to expunge emotion from Roman religion than it does about the feelings of ancient readers in the face of their gods. It is time to stop looking to the story of Numa and Jupiter for templates from which we can generalize about Roman religion. Each ancient author we have examined grappled with the problems posed by this highly unusual myth in their own way. Their choices illustrate best not one meaning of the myth nor one Roman way of piety but the richness and diversity of religious reflection in antiquity.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838821000227 Published online by Cambridge University Press