Who are the true philosophers? Who are the *atheoi*, the atheists? Who are guilty of *superstitio*, or its near if not exact equivalent, *deisidaimonia*? Who are guided by the true *logos*? These are some of the questions that define the interactions between Christians and pagans in antiquity. This paper jumps into the second century, *in medias res*, into a debate that had already started in the first century – as for example in Acts 17, where Luke’s Paul is accused of introducing new gods and accuses the Athenians in turn of being δεισιδαιμονεστέρους.¹

My aim here is to explore just one inning in the ongoing series of these interactions, namely the second-century verdicts from pagan philosophers upon Christians. There is a certain artificiality in this timeframe, of course, but I hope it emerges that there is some coherence to what are among the first extant pagan literary responses to Christianity. My criterion for who counts as a philosopher is also a rather pragmatic one: one might more or less say that the figures included here could reasonably find themselves read at Cambridge’s Thursday evening Ancient Philosophy Seminar. There is one group, however, who are added to the category, for reasons that will be made clear. The literature on this subject is vast, but there have been surprisingly few attempts to focus specifically on philosophers and to provide a reasonably comprehensive conspectus of these figures.²

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² For example, there are some broad surveys that take in all the pagan evidence from the period, such as P. de Labriolle, *La réaction païenne: Étude sur la polémique antichrétienne du Ier au VIe siècle* (Paris: L’Artisan du livre, 1942), esp. 19–169; and S. Benko, “Pagan Criticism of Christianity during the first Two Centuries A.D.,” *ANRW II* 23 no. 2 (1980): 1054–1118; on the other hand, some, such as R.L. Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), focus on particular philosophers, in Wilken’s case, on Galen and Celsus.
Epictetus’ evidence comes to us, closely transcribed by Arrian, from Nicopolis in around the year 108 CE, as Millar’s clever detective work makes clear. He therefore marks something of a false start in this story of second-century philosophers because he precedes most of the others discussed here by a good half-century.

In Discourses 4.7, “On Freedom from Fear,” Epictetus begins as follows: When one comes into the presence of a tyrant, what is it that instills fear? Is it the guards with their weapons? No, a small child coming into the presence of the tyrant would not be afraid, because the child does not feel the presence of the guards (4.7.2). Nor would fear be felt by someone coming towards the tyrant with the express purpose of being killed (4.7.3). A person, then, whose goal is neither particularly to prolong their life nor to die should not be afraid either (4.7.4). Again, one should reckon material possessions – and children and wife – as nothing; one has nothing to fear from losing them (4.7.5). Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also. They are mere counters with which one plays the game, not the game itself. This is entirely consistent with one of the main thrusts of Epictetus’ philosophy – namely, that that which is not in our power (what is ‘aprohairetic’) does not belong to us.

He then asks the question:

If someone can then be so disposed towards these things by madness, or by habit like the Galileans, then cannot someone learn by reason and proof that God has made all things in the world as well as the world itself, whole and unhindered and self-determining, and at the same time with its parts arranged for the needs of the whole?

Εἴτα ὑπὸ μανίας μὲν δύναται τις σοῦτως διατεθῆναι πρὸς ταῦτα καὶ ὑπὸ ἔθους οἱ Γαλιλαῖοι· ὑπὸ λόγου δὲ καὶ ἀποδείξεως οὐδεὶς δύναται μαθεῖν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς πάντα πεποίηκεν τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον ὅλον μὲν ἀκώλυτον καὶ αὐτοτελῆ, τὰ ἐν μέρει δ᾿ αὐτοῦ πρὸς χρείαν τῶν ὅλων; (Discourses 4.7.6)

Leaving aside Epictetus’ main point here, we can consider his passing remark about the Galileans. First, there cannot be much doubt that the reference is