

ROMA

On Fate

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Musean Translation

MOUSEIA

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

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TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

Written 44 BCE · Philosophical treatise

SOURCE

Original text from the Perseus Digital Library.

GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The work survives incompletely; its opening, two internal passages and ending are lost. Completeness refers to all surviving text in this edition. No new print-image collation or human specialist certification is claimed.

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Chapter 1

- ¹ [...] because it concerns conduct—"character," as the Greeks call it—we usually call this branch of philosophy the study of conduct; but anyone enriching the Latin language ought to call it "moral philosophy." We must also explain the force and nature of statements, which the Greeks call "propositions." What force these possess when they say something about the future, and about what can or cannot happen, is a difficult question, which philosophers call the question "of possibilities." The whole subject belongs to logic, which I call the art of reasoning. In my books on the nature of the gods, and likewise in those I published on divination, I presented a sustained argument on each side, so that each reader might more readily accept the view that seemed most probable to him. In this discussion of fate, a particular circumstance prevented me from doing so.
- ² I was at my villa near Puteoli, and our friend Hirtius, the consul-elect, was in the same neighborhood. He was a very dear friend of mine, devoted to those studies in which I have lived from boyhood, and we spent much time together, chiefly seeking ways to secure peace and harmony among our fellow citizens. For after Caesar's death, it seemed that every possible ground for fresh disturbances was being sought out, and we thought these must be forestalled. Almost all our conversation was therefore spent in these deliberations. This happened on many occasions; and on one day, freer than usual and less exposed to interruptions, he came to see me, and we began with what had become our daily, almost prescribed business: peace and public quiet.

Chapter 2

³ When we had finished, he said, “Well, then? You have not, I hope, abandoned your exercises in oratory, but you have certainly given philosophy precedence over them. May I hear something?”

“You certainly may,” I said, “or speak yourself, if you prefer. For, as you rightly suppose, I have not deserted those rhetorical studies with which I kindled your own enthusiasm—though it was already blazing when you came to me. Nor do my present pursuits diminish that faculty; they enlarge it. The orator has much in common with the school of philosophy I follow: he borrows precision from the Academy and repays it with fullness of expression and the ornaments of eloquence. And so,” I said, “since both fields are ours, today the choice of which to enjoy shall be yours.”

“That is most welcome,” Hirtius replied, “and just like everything you do. Your goodwill has never refused any wish of mine to learn.

⁴ “But I know your teachings on rhetoric, and have often heard you speak on them and shall do so again. And since your Tusculan Disputations show that you have adopted the Academic practice of arguing against a thesis, I should like to put forward a proposition and hear your reply, if that is no trouble to you.”

“Can anything be a trouble to me,” I said, “that will give you pleasure? But you will be hearing a Roman, someone venturing cautiously into this manner of debate, someone returning to these studies after a long interval.”

“I shall listen to your arguments,” he said, “in the same spirit in which I read your writings. So begin. Let us sit here.”

Chapter 3

- ⁵ [...] In some of these cases—in that of the poet Antipater, of those born on the winter solstice, of brothers falling ill together, of urine, of fingernails, and of the other examples of this kind—the interconnection of nature has its effect. I do not deny that interconnection; but there is no force of fate at work. In others there may be an element of chance, as with that shipwrecked man, with Icadius, and with Daphitas. Some instances, too, Posidonius seems to invent—with all respect to my teacher, let me say it; they are certainly absurd. For consider: if Daphitas was fated to fall from a horse and die in that way, was it from this “horse,” which was not a horse at all but bore a name not its own? Or was Philip being warned to avoid these little four-horse chariots on a sword hilt? As if it were the hilt that killed him! And what is so remarkable about that nameless shipwrecked man slipping into a stream? Though Posidonius does write that this man had been warned he would perish in water. As for Icadius the pirate, I swear I can see no fate at all in his case;
- ⁶ for Posidonius records no prediction made to him. What is surprising, then, about a rock falling from the cave onto his legs? Even if Icadius had not been in the cave at the time, I think that rock would still have fallen. Either nothing whatever happens by chance, or this very thing could have happened by chance. I ask, then—and this question will have far-reaching consequences—if fate had no name at all, no nature, no power, and most things or all things happened at random, by sheer chance, would they happen otherwise than they do now? What point is there, then, in forcing fate upon us, when without fate the explanation of everything can be referred to nature or to chance?

Chapter 4

- ⁷ But let us take leave of Posidonius on friendly terms, as we should, and return to the snares of Chrysippus. Let us first answer him on this very interconnection of things; we shall pursue the rest afterward. We see how greatly places differ in their natural conditions: some are healthy, others pestilential; in some, people are phlegmatic and, as it were, overflowing with humors; in others, dried out and parched. There are many other striking differences between one place and another. At Athens the air is thin, which is even thought to make the Athenians keener of mind; at Thebes it is thick, and so the Thebans are stout and strong. Yet that thin air will not make someone attend the lectures of Zeno, Arcesilaus, or Theophrastus, nor will the thick air make him seek victory at Nemea rather than at the Isthmus. Take the distinction further.
- ⁸ What can the nature of a place do to make us walk in Pompey's Portico rather than on the Campus Martius? With you rather than with someone else? On the Ides rather than the Kalends? Just as the nature of a place has some bearing on certain things and none on others, so let the configuration of the stars have an influence on certain things, if you wish; it certainly will not influence everything. "But," he says, "since people's natures differ—some delighting in sweet things, others in slightly bitter ones; some lustful, others irascible or cruel or proud, while others recoil from such vices—since, then, one nature differs so greatly from another, what wonder is it that these differences should arise from different causes?"

Chapter 5

- ⁹ In arguing this way, he fails to see what the question is, or where the issue lies. The fact that natural, antecedent causes make different people more inclined toward different things does not mean that our acts of will and desire also have natural, antecedent causes. If that were so, nothing would be in our power. As it is, we admit that it does not rest with us whether we are sharp or dull, strong or weak. But anyone who thinks it follows that even sitting or walking is not a matter of choice fails to see what follows from what. People may be born clever or slow, strong or weak, through antecedent causes; it does not follow that their sitting, walking, or undertaking any action is likewise determined and settled by primary causes.
- ¹⁰ We have heard of Stilpo, the Megarian philosopher, a decidedly acute thinker, highly esteemed in his day. His own friends write that he was given to drink and women; they write this not to blame him, but rather to his credit. For through philosophy he had so mastered and subdued his vicious nature that no one ever saw him drunk, and no one ever saw in him a trace of lust. Again, have we not read how Zopyrus judged Socrates? Zopyrus was a physiognomist who professed to discern people's characters and natures from their bodies, eyes, faces, and foreheads. He declared Socrates stupid and dull because there were no hollows above his collarbones: those regions, he said, were obstructed and closed. He added that Socrates was given to women; at this, Alcibiades is said to have burst out laughing.

Chapter 6

- ¹¹ But though such vices may spring from natural causes, their being uprooted and utterly removed, so that the very person inclined toward them is drawn away from such great faults, depends not on natural causes but on will, effort, and training. All these are swept away if the force and nature of fate are to be established by an argument from divination.

For if divination exists, from what established principles of its art does it proceed? By “established principles” I mean what the Greeks call “theorems.” I cannot believe that other practitioners perform their work without any established principle, or that those who practice divination predict the future without one.

- ¹² Let the astrologers’ principles, then, be of this kind: “If someone was born, for example, at the rising of the Dog Star, he will not die at sea.” Be on your guard, Chrysippus, lest you abandon your position, over which you have so great a struggle with Diodorus, a formidable dialectician. For if this conditional is true, “If someone was born at the rising of the Dog Star, he will not die at sea,” then this is also true: “If Fabius was born at the rising of the Dog Star, Fabius will not die at sea.” These statements, then, conflict with one another: that Fabius was born at the rising of the Dog Star, and that Fabius will die at sea. And since it is taken as certain about Fabius that he was born at the rising of the Dog Star, these statements also conflict: that Fabius exists, and that he will die at sea. Thus this conjunction too is made up of incompatible statements: “Fabius exists, and Fabius will die at sea”—something that, on the assumption laid down, cannot even happen. Therefore “Fabius will die at sea” belongs to the class of things that cannot happen. Thus everything falsely asserted about the future is impossible.

Chapter 7

- ¹³ But this, Chrysippus, is precisely what you do not want, and it is over this very point that your chief contest with Diodorus arises. For he says that only what is true or will be true is possible; whatever is going to happen, he says, must happen, and whatever is not going to happen, he denies can happen. You, on the other hand, say that even things that will not happen are possible: this gem, for instance, can be broken, even if it never will be. You also say it was not necessary for Cypselus to reign at Corinth, though Apollo's oracle had proclaimed it a thousand years before. But if you endorse these divine predictions, you will class false assertions about the future among impossibilities [as if one were to say that Africanus would take Carthage]; and if something is truly asserted about the future, and will happen as asserted, you will call it necessary. That is the whole doctrine of Diodorus, so hostile to your school.
- ¹⁴ For if this conditional is true, "If you were born at the rising of the Dog Star, you will not die at sea," and its first clause, "You were born at the rising of the Dog Star," is necessary—all truths about the past are necessary, according to Chrysippus, who here disagrees with his teacher Cleanthes, because they are unalterable and past events cannot change from true to false—then, if the first clause of the conditional is necessary, its consequence becomes necessary too. Chrysippus, to be sure, does not think this holds in every case; nevertheless, if there is a natural cause why Fabius will not die at sea, Fabius cannot die at sea.

Chapter 8

- ¹⁵ At this point Chrysippus, in a fever of perplexity, hopes that the Chaldeans and the other diviners can be taken in, and will not use conditionals to state their principles in this form: "If someone was born at the rising of the Dog Star, he

will not die at sea.” Instead, they are to say, “It is not the case both that someone was born at the rising of the Dog Star and that he will die at sea.” What laughable license! To avoid colliding with Diodorus himself, he teaches the Chaldeans how they ought to formulate their principles. For I ask: if the Chaldeans are to speak in this way, putting forward negations of indefinite conjunctions rather than indefinite conditionals, why cannot physicians do the same? Why not geometers? Why not all the other practitioners? A physician, in particular, will not state an established finding of his art in this form: “If someone’s pulse beats in this way, he has a fever.” Instead, he will say, “It is not the case both that <someone’s> pulse beats in this way and that he has no fever.” Likewise, a geometer will not say, “In a sphere, great circles bisect one another,” but instead, “It is not the case both that there are great circles in a sphere and that they do not bisect one another.”

- ¹⁶ What cannot be converted in this way from a conditional into the negation of a conjunction? Indeed, we can express the same things in other ways too. I just said, “In a sphere, great circles bisect one another.” I can say, “If there are to be great circles in a sphere”; I can say, “Because there are to be great circles in a sphere.” There are many forms of statement, and none more contorted than this one, with which Chrysippus hopes the Chaldeans will content themselves for the Stoics’ sake.

Chapter 9

- ¹⁷ Yet none of them speaks that way: mastering these contortions of language is a greater task than mastering the rising and setting of the constellations. But let us return to that argument of Diodorus which they call the argument “on possibilities,” an inquiry into the meaning of what is possible. Diodorus holds, then, that only what is true or will be true is possible. This bears on the claim that nothing happens which was not necessary, and that whatever can happen either already is or will be; that statements about the future can no more

change from true to false than statements about the past. In past events, however, the unalterability is plain, while in some future events, because it is not plain, it is thought not even to exist. Thus, of someone in the grip of a fatal disease, it is true to say, "He will die of this disease"; but if the same thing is truly said of someone in whom the disease's power is not so apparent, it will happen nonetheless. It follows that even in the future no change from true to false can occur. For "Scipio will die," though said of the future, has such force that it cannot change into a falsehood: it is said of a human being, who must die.

¹⁸ Likewise, if someone had said, "Scipio will die at night in his own bedroom, struck down by violence," he would have spoken truly. He would have said that something was going to happen which was in fact going to happen; and that it was going to happen must be understood from the fact that it did happen. "Scipio will die" was no truer than "He will die in that way"; it was no more necessary for Scipio to die than to die in that way; "Scipio has been killed" is no more incapable of changing from true to false than "Scipio will be killed." Since this is so, Epicurus has no reason to dread fate and seek refuge in atoms, diverting them from their course and taking on, at one stroke, two insoluble difficulties. The first is that something should happen without a cause, from which it will follow that something comes from nothing—a view acceptable neither to him nor to any natural philosopher. The second is that, when two indivisible bodies travel through the void, one should move in a straight line and the other swerve.

¹⁹ For Epicurus may concede that every statement is either true or false without fearing that everything must therefore happen by fate. The truth of a statement such as "Carneades goes down to the Academy" does not arise from eternal causes flowing from the necessity of nature; yet neither is it without causes. There is a difference between causes that have chanced to precede an event and causes that contain within themselves a natural power to produce it. Thus it was always true that "Epicurus will die after living seventy-two years, in the

archonship of Pytharatus.” Yet there were no fated causes why it should happen in that way. Rather, because it did turn out so, it was going to turn out, through a fixed ⟨sequence⟩ of causes, just as it did.

Chapter 10

- ²⁰ Those who say that future events are unalterable and that a truth about the future cannot turn into a falsehood do not establish the necessity of fate; they explain the force of words. But those who introduce an everlasting chain of causes strip the human mind of free will and bind it in the necessity of fate. Enough of this; let us consider something else. Chrysippus argues as follows: “If there is motion without a cause, not every statement—what dialecticians call a ‘proposition’—will be either true or false; for whatever has no efficient causes will be neither true nor false. But every statement is either true or false. Therefore there is no motion without a cause. If that is so, everything that happens happens through antecedent causes. If that is so, everything happens by fate. It follows, then, that whatever happens happens by fate.”
- ²¹ Here, to begin with, if I chose to agree with Epicurus and deny that every statement is either true or false, I would rather take that blow than endorse the view that everything happens by fate. The former position at least admits of argument; the latter is intolerable. And so Chrysippus strains every nerve to persuade us that every proposition is either true or false. For Epicurus fears that, if he concedes this, he must concede that whatever happens happens by fate. He thinks that if one of two alternatives has been true from eternity, it is also certain, and if certain, necessary; in this way, he thinks, both necessity and fate are established. In just the same way, Chrysippus fears that, unless he secures the principle that every statement is either true or false, he cannot maintain that everything happens by fate and through eternal causes of future events.

- ²² But Epicurus thinks the necessity of fate can be avoided by the atom's swerve. Thus, besides motion from weight and from a blow, a third kind of motion arises, when an atom swerves by the smallest interval—what he calls “the minimum.” That this swerve occurs without a cause he is compelled to admit in substance, if not in words. For an atom does not swerve because another atom strikes it. How can one be struck by another if, as Epicurus holds, the indivisible bodies are carried by their weight perpendicularly downward in straight lines? It follows that, if one is never driven aside by another, neither does one ever touch another. From this it follows that, even if an atom exists and swerves, it swerves without a cause.

Chapter 11

- ²³ Epicurus introduced this account because he feared that if the atom were always carried along by its natural and necessary weight, we would have no freedom: the mind would move as the motion of the atoms compelled it. Democritus, the originator of the atomic theory, preferred to accept this—that everything happens by necessity—rather than strip indivisible bodies of their natural motions. Carneades took a shrewder course. He taught that the Epicureans could defend their position without this invented swerve. Since they maintained that there could be a voluntary movement of the mind, they would have done better to defend that than to introduce a swerve for which, above all, they could discover no cause. Once they had defended this, they could readily resist Chrysippus. For in granting that there is no motion without a cause, they need not grant that everything that happens happens through antecedent causes: our will has no external, antecedent causes.
- ²⁴ We thus stretch the ordinary usage of language when we say that someone wants or does not want something without a cause. By “without a cause” we mean without an external, antecedent cause, not without any cause at all. When we call a vessel empty, we are not speaking as the natural philosophers

do, for whom ‘empty’ means containing nothing whatever; we mean, for example, that the vessel contains no water, wine, or oil. So too, when we say that the mind moves without a cause, we mean that it moves without an antecedent, external cause, not altogether without a cause. The atom itself may be said to move without a cause when it travels through the void by its own gravity and weight, since no cause acts on it from outside.

- ²⁵ Yet again, lest all the natural philosophers laugh at us for saying that anything happens without a cause, we must draw a distinction. We must say that it is the nature of the indivisible body itself to move by weight and gravity, and that this very nature is the cause of its moving as it does. Likewise, no external cause need be sought for the mind’s voluntary movements. Voluntary movement contains within itself the nature that makes it lie in our power and obey us; nor is this without a cause, for its very nature is the cause of that.

Chapter 12

- ²⁶ Since this is so, why must we grant that whatever happens happens by fate before we can say that every proposition is either true or false? “Because,” he says, “there can be no truth about future events that have no causes to bring them about. Things that are true must therefore have causes; and so, when they occur, they will have occurred by fate.” The business is settled—if, indeed, we must grant you that either everything happens by fate or something can happen without a cause.
- ²⁷ Can the proposition “Scipio will take Numantia” be true in no other way than if, from all eternity, cause begetting cause will bring this about? Could it have been false if it had been uttered six hundred centuries before? And if the proposition “Scipio will take Numantia” was not true then, neither is the proposition “Scipio has taken Numantia” true even after the city’s destruction. Can anything, then, have happened that it was not true would happen? For just as we

call statements about the past true when their present-tense statements were true at an earlier time, so we shall call statements about the future true when their present-tense statements will be true at a later time.

- 28 Nor does it follow at once, if every proposition is either true or false, that there are immutable, eternal causes which prevent anything from turning out otherwise than it will. The causes that make such future statements as “Cato will come to the Senate” true are chance causes, not causes locked into the nature of things and the universe. Yet, when it is true that he will come, that is as unalterable as his having come; and this gives us no reason to fear fate or necessity. For we shall have to admit: “If the proposition ‘Hortensius will come to the Tusculan villa’ is not true, it follows that it is false.” These people want neither alternative, which is impossible.

Nor shall we be hindered by what is called the idle argument. There is an argument the philosophers call the “idle argument”; if we obeyed it, we would do nothing at all in life.

Chapter 13

- 29 For this is how they put the question: “If it is your fate to recover from this illness, you will recover whether you call in a doctor or not. Likewise, if it is your fate not to recover from this illness, you will not recover whether you call in a doctor or not. And one or the other is your fate. There is therefore no point in calling in a doctor.” This kind of questioning has rightly been called idle and inert, since the same reasoning will remove all action from life. You may even alter it so as not to introduce the word ‘fate,’ and still retain the same meaning, as follows: “If the statement ‘You will recover from this illness’ has been true from all eternity, you will recover whether you call in a doctor or not. Likewise, if the statement ‘You will recover from this illness’ has been false from all eternity, you will not recover whether you call in a doctor or not”—and then the rest. Chrysippus criticizes this argument.

- ³⁰ “Some things,” he says, “are simple, others conjoined. ‘Socrates will die on that day’ is simple. Whether he does anything or not, his day of death has been fixed. But if the fated statement is ‘Oedipus will be born to Laius,’ one cannot say ‘whether Laius has intercourse with a woman or not.’ The matter is conjoined and co-fated.” That is the term he uses, because it is fated both that Laius will sleep with his wife and that he will father Oedipus by her. Thus, if it had been said, “Milo will wrestle at the Olympic Games,” and someone replied, “Then he will wrestle whether he has an opponent or not,” he would be mistaken. For “he will wrestle” is conjoined with something else, since there is no wrestling without an opponent. All sophisms of this kind are therefore refuted in the same way. “You will recover whether you call in a doctor or not” is a sophism, since calling in a doctor is as much fated as recovering. These, as I said, he calls co-fated events.

Chapter 14

- ³¹ Carneades did not approve of this entire kind of reasoning, and thought that the argument had been brought to its conclusion far too heedlessly. He therefore pressed the case in another way, without any quibbling. His argument was this: if everything happens through antecedent causes, everything happens in an interwoven, interlocking natural chain. If that is so, necessity brings everything about. If that is true, nothing is in our power. But something is in our power. Yet if everything happens by fate, everything happens through antecedent causes. Therefore, not everything that happens happens by fate.
- ³² This reasoning cannot be drawn any tighter. For if someone wished to turn the same argument back and say, “If every future event has been true from all eternity, so that it will assuredly occur just as it is going to occur, everything must happen in an interwoven, interlocking natural chain,” he would be saying nothing. There is a great difference between a natural cause making future events true from all eternity, and our being able to understand that future

events may be true even without an eternal natural cause. Carneades therefore used to say that not even Apollo could foretell future events, except those whose causes were so contained in nature that they must occur.

Chapter 15

³³ For what could the god himself consult to foretell that Marcellus, who was consul three times, would perish at sea? This had indeed been true from all eternity, but it had no causes to bring it about. Carneades thus believed that not even past events were known to Apollo if no signs of them survived as traces—much less future events! Only when the causes producing each event were known could one know what would happen. Thus Apollo could not have made a prediction about Oedipus, or anything of that kind, unless causes had already been laid down in the nature of things that made it necessary for him to kill his father. Accordingly, if the Stoics, who say that everything happens by fate, are consistent in accepting such oracles and the other evidence drawn from divination, while the same need not be said of those who say that future events have been true from all eternity, consider whether their position is really the same as the Stoics'. The Stoics are more tightly hemmed in; the others' reasoning is unfettered and free.

³⁴ But if we grant that nothing can occur without an antecedent cause, what is gained by saying that this cause is not linked to eternal causes? A cause is that which brings about the thing of which it is the cause: a wound causes death, indigestion illness, fire heat. Thus we must not understand a cause to mean whatever precedes a thing, but whatever precedes it in such a way as to produce it. My going down to the Campus was not the cause of my playing ball; nor was Hecuba the cause of the Trojans' destruction because she gave birth to Alexander; nor Tyndareus the cause of Agamemnon's destruction because he fathered Clytemnestra. For by this reasoning a well-dressed traveler, too, will be called the cause of a highwayman's robbing him.

- 35 Of this kind are those lines of Ennius:
 “If only in Pelion’s grove no axes
 Had felled the firwood timbers to the earth!”
 He might have gone back still further: “If only no tree had ever grown on
 Pelion!” Further still: “If only there had never been a Mount Pelion!” In
 the same way, retracing earlier events, one may go back without end.
 “And from that place no start on building a ship
 Had ever been made.”
 Why recall these past events? Because this follows:
 “For then my deluded mistress would never have set foot outside her home,
 Medea, sick at heart, wounded by savage love,”
 †not that those things brought about her love.

Chapter 16

- 36 They say, however, that there is a difference between something without which an effect cannot be produced, and something with which an effect must be produced. None of those things, then, is a cause, since none by its own force produces the thing of which it is called the cause. A cause is not that without which something does not happen, but that which, when it is present, necessarily produces the thing of which it is the cause. Before Philoctetes had been wounded by the snake’s bite, what cause was contained in the nature of things that would bring about his being abandoned on the island of Lemnos? Afterwards, however, there was a cause closer and more directly linked to the outcome.
- 37 The course of the event, then, reveals the cause. Yet the proposition “Philoctetes will be abandoned on the island” had been true from all eternity, and could not change from true to false. For of two contradictory propositions—and here I call contradictory those of which one affirms something and the other denies it—of these, I say, one must be true and the other false, despite

Epicurus. Thus “Philoctetes will be wounded” was true through all the preceding ages, and “He will not be wounded” was false. Unless, perhaps, we wish to follow the view of the Epicureans, who say that such propositions are neither true nor false; or, when they are ashamed of that, still say something more shameless: that disjunctions of contradictories are true, but neither of the propositions they contain is true.

- 38 What astonishing license, what pitiable ignorance of reasoning! For if something stated is neither true nor false, it is certainly not true. But how can what is not true fail to be false? Or how can what is not false fail to be true? <Therefore> the position defended by Chrysippus will stand: every proposition is either true or false. Reason itself will compel the admission both that some things have been true from all eternity and that they are not bound to eternal causes, but are free from the necessity of fate.

Chapter 17

- 39 There were two views among the ancient philosophers. One was held by those who thought everything happened by fate in such a way that fate brought with it the force of necessity; Democritus, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Aristotle held this view. The other was held by those who thought that the mind’s voluntary movements were free of fate altogether. It seems to me that Chrysippus, like an arbitrator chosen by the parties, wished to strike a middle course; yet he inclines rather toward those who wish the mind’s movements to be freed from necessity. But in using his own terminology he slips into such difficulties that, against his will, he establishes the necessity of fate.
- 40 If you please, let us examine how this works in the case of acts of assent, which I discussed at the beginning of my discourse. Those ancient thinkers who held that everything happens by fate said that acts of assent were produced by force and necessity. Those who disagreed with them freed assent from fate, and

denied that necessity could be removed from acts of assent if fate were applied to them. They argued as follows: if everything happens by fate, everything happens through an antecedent cause; and if impulse does, so too do the things that follow impulse, and therefore acts of assent as well. But if the cause of impulse does not lie in us, neither is impulse itself in our power. If that is so, neither do the things brought about by impulse lie in us. Neither acts of assent nor actions, then, are in our power. It follows that neither praise nor blame, neither honors nor punishments, are just. Since this is wrong, they think they have plausibly established that not everything that happens happens by fate.

Chapter 18

- ⁴¹ Chrysippus, however, rejecting necessity yet unwilling that anything should occur without prior causes, distinguishes kinds of causes so as both to escape necessity and to retain fate. “Of causes,” he says, “some are complete and principal, others auxiliary and proximate. Hence, when we say that everything happens by fate through antecedent causes, we do not mean through complete and principal causes, but through auxiliary [antecedent] and proximate causes.” Thus he meets the argument I concluded a little earlier as follows: if everything happens by fate, it does indeed follow that everything happens through prior causes, but not through principal and complete causes; rather, through auxiliary and proximate causes. If these causes themselves are not in our power, it does not follow that impulse is not in our power either. That would follow if we said that everything happens through complete and principal causes: since those causes were not in our power, impulse too would not be in our power.
- ⁴² That argument will therefore hold against those who introduce fate in such a way as to attach necessity to it; but it will have no force against those who will not call antecedent causes complete or principal. Chrysippus thinks he can readily explain what is meant by saying that acts of assent occur through prior causes. Although assent cannot occur unless stirred by an impression, neverthe-

less, since that impression serves as a proximate, not a principal, cause, assent, as Chrysippus maintains, has the character we described a little earlier. Not that it can occur without some force being aroused from outside—for assent must be stirred by an impression—but he returns to his cylinder and spinning top, which cannot begin to move unless struck. Once that happens, however, he holds that for the rest the cylinder rolls and the top spins by their own nature.

Chapter 19

- ⁴³ “Just as the man who pushed the cylinder,” he says, “gave it the beginning of its motion, but did not give it its capacity to roll, so an impression presented to the mind will indeed impress and, as it were, stamp its own image upon it, but our assent will be in our power. And that assent, as we said of the cylinder, once set in motion from outside, will move for the rest by its own force and nature. If anything were brought about without an antecedent cause, it would be false that everything happens by fate. But if it is likely that a cause precedes everything that happens, what reason can be offered for not admitting that everything happens by fate? Only let the distinction and difference between causes be understood.”
- ⁴⁴ Now that Chrysippus has explained matters in this way, if those who deny that acts of assent occur by fate †nevertheless admit that they do not occur without a preceding impression, that is a different account. But if they grant that impressions precede, yet hold that acts of assent do not occur by fate because that proximate and immediate cause does not set assent in motion, consider whether they are not saying the same thing. Nor will Chrysippus, in granting that the proximate and immediate cause of assent lies in the impression, [nor will he] grant that this is a cause which necessitates assent, so that, if everything happens by fate, everything happens through antecedent and necessitating causes. Likewise, those who disagree with him, while acknowledging that acts of assent do not occur without impressions coming first, will say that if every-

thing happened by a fate of such a kind that nothing happened without a cause going before it, one would have to acknowledge that everything happens by fate. From this it is easy to understand that, since both parties, once they have disclosed and explained their meaning, reach the same conclusion, they disagree in words, not in substance.

- ⁴⁵ In general, the distinction is this: in some cases it can truly be said that, once these causes have gone before, it is not in our power to prevent the events of which they were the causes from occurring; in other cases, even when causes have gone before, it is still in our power for the outcome to be otherwise. Both parties approve this distinction. But one party holds that those events which, once their causes have gone before, it is not in our power to make turn out otherwise occur by fate, whereas events that are in our power are exempt from fate [...]

Chapter 20

- ⁴⁶ This is how the case should be argued, rather than seeking refuge in atoms wandering and swerving from their path. "The atom swerves," he says. First, why? Atoms already had one kind of force of motion from Democritus, that of impact, which he calls a blow; from you, Epicurus, they had that of gravity and weight. What new cause, then, is there in nature to make the atom swerve? Or do they draw lots among themselves to decide which will swerve and which will not? Why do they swerve by a minimal interval, and not a greater one? Why do they swerve by one minimal interval, but not by two or three?
- ⁴⁷ This is wishful thinking, not argument. For you do not say that an atom is struck from outside, displaced, and made to swerve; nor that in the void through which the atom travels there was any cause for it not to travel in a straight line; nor has any change taken place in the atom itself to make it cease

to follow the natural motion of its own weight. Thus, although he has offered no cause to bring about that swerve, he still thinks he is saying something when he says what everyone's mind rejects and repudiates.

- ⁴⁸ Indeed, no one seems to me to have done more to establish not only fate but the necessity and compelling force of all things, and to abolish the mind's voluntary movements, than this man who admits he could not otherwise have withstood fate without taking refuge in these invented swerves. For even if atoms existed—though their existence cannot in any way be established to my satisfaction—those swerves could still never be explained. For if nature's necessity has bestowed on atoms their movement by gravity, since every weight must move and be carried along when nothing hinders it, then this too must be necessary: that certain atoms—or, if they wish, all atoms—should naturally swerve [...]

Fragment 1

- ¹ Thus Marcus Cicero, in the book he wrote on fate, while calling this question exceedingly obscure and entangled, says that the philosopher Chrysippus too failed to extricate himself from it. These are his words: "Chrysippus, tossing in uncertainty and struggling to explain in what <way> everything happens by fate and yet something lies in our power, becomes entangled in the following way." Gel. N. A. 7.2.15

Fragment 2

- ² "And brings round the changes": the definition of fate according to Tullius, who says, "Fate is a connection of things holding one another fast through eternity, varying according to its own order and law, yet in such a way that the vari-

ation itself is eternal.” Serv. ad Vergil. A. 3.376

Fragment 3

- ³ Those lines of Homer, too, support this view; Cicero translated them into

Latin:

“Men’s minds take their temper from the light with which the Father
Jupiter himself has bathed the fruitful earth.”

Augustin. de civ. dei 5.8

Fragment 4

- ⁴ Cicero says that Hippocrates, that most distinguished physician, left a written account of certain brothers whom he suspected of being twins because they began to fall ill together, and their illness grew worse at the same time and abated at the same time. The Stoic Posidonius, much devoted to astrology, used to insist that they had been born under matching configurations of the stars, and their conceptions too had taken place under matching configurations. Thus what the physician believed belonged to the closest similarity in their bodily constitution, the philosopher-astrologer attributed to the influence and configuration of the stars at the time when they were conceived and born. Augustin. de civ. dei 5.2

Fragment 5

- ⁵ And lest a poet be thought too slight a witness, hear on Cicero’s authority in what esteem this fish was held by that great Publius Scipio Africanus and Numantinus. These are Cicero’s words in the dialogue On Fate: “When Scipio

was at his own place near Lavernium, with Pontius there as well, a sturgeon happened to be brought to him. It is very rarely caught, but is, they say, a fish of the very highest distinction. Scipio had invited first one and then another of those who had come to pay their respects, and seemed likely to invite still more, when Pontius whispered in his ear: ‘Scipio,’ he said, ‘take care what you do: that sturgeon is a fish for only a few.’” Macrobius *Saturnalia* 3.16.3