

ROMA

On Fate

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Mouseia's complete machine-assisted direct-Latin Plain English translation. Initial drafts used separate Latin-only tasks; later source-based editorial revisions were made by a reviewer with prior editorial access to Musean, not from its English wording. Includes all 48 sections and five fragments/testimonia, with lost passages marked. Perseus source and these derived editions CC BY-SA 4.0.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

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SOURCE

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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 [...] since its subject is conduct, or what the Greeks call “character,” we generally refer to this branch of philosophy as the study of conduct. To expand Latin’s vocabulary, though, we should give it the name “moral philosophy.” Statements also need explaining: what they mean and how they work. The Greek name for them is “propositions.” There is a difficult question about their force when they concern future events or things that may or may not happen. Philosophers name that question “possibilities.” The whole inquiry falls within logic, my term for the method of argument. My books *On the Nature of the Gods* and *On Divination* set out each side’s case at length. That allowed readers to choose the position they found most convincing. Something happened that prevented me from using that approach here, in discussing fate.
- ² Hirtius and I were staying near Puteoli, where I have a house. He was consul-elect, a close friend, and keenly interested in the studies that had occupied me from childhood. We saw a great deal of each other. Our main concern was finding ways for our fellow citizens to live peacefully together. Since Caesar’s death, everyone seemed to be searching for occasions to cause fresh disturbances. We felt we must head those off. That question took up nearly all our talk. Besides our many other conversations, there was a day when we had unusually little to do and visitors were less likely to interrupt. He called on me. We started with what had become our daily duty, almost a fixed routine: discussing peace and public calm.

Chapter 2

- ³ When we had finished, he said, “Well, then? You haven’t given up practicing public speaking, I hope. But you have certainly put philosophy ahead of it. Could I hear something?”

“Of course,” I said. “You can listen or speak yourself. As you rightly suppose, I haven’t abandoned the study of public speaking. I helped kindle your enthusiasm for it too, though you were already on fire when you came to me. My present work doesn’t reduce my ability as a speaker. It actually improves it. A speaker has a lot in common with the kind of philosophy we follow. He borrows precise reasoning from the Academy and gives it richness of expression and verbal polish in return. So,” I said, “since both fields belong to us, you can choose which one you would rather enjoy today.”

“That’s very kind,” Hirtius replied, “and just like everything you do. You have never refused to help with anything I wanted to study.

- ⁴ “But I’m familiar with your teaching on rhetoric. I’ve heard you speak on it often, and I will again. Your Tusculan Disputations show that you’ve adopted the Academic practice of arguing against a proposed position. So, if you don’t mind, I’d like to put forward a position and hear your response.”

“Could anything that will please you be a bother to me?” I said. “But listen to me as a Roman, someone making a cautious start in this kind of argument and returning to these studies after a long break.”

“I’ll listen to your arguments in the same spirit in which I read your books,” he said. “So begin. Let’s sit down here.”

Chapter 3

- ⁵ [...] Take some of those examples: Antipater the poet, people whose birthday falls at the winter solstice, the brothers who became ill together, urine, fingernails, and the others of that sort. Nature's interconnectedness operates in them. I accept that interconnectedness. But it has nothing to do with a power of fate. Some other examples may be chance events, such as the shipwrecked man, Icadius, or Daphitas. And Posidonius seems to have made up some of his stories—my teacher must forgive my saying so. They certainly make no sense. If Daphitas was destined to die by falling off a horse, did that mean a thing that merely went by the borrowed name “horse,” although it was no horse? Was Philip really being warned against those tiny four-horse chariots pictured on the hilt? Surely the hilt didn't kill him! Is it remarkable that an unnamed survivor of a shipwreck should slip into a stream? Admittedly, the writer says that man's death in water had been predicted. But I cannot see any fate at all in the robber Icadius's case;
- ⁶ no prediction about him is recorded. So a stone fell from the cave onto his legs: why is that strange? In my view, it would have fallen even if he hadn't been there. We must either deny chance altogether or allow that chance could have produced this very event. Here is a question with much wider consequences. Imagine there were no such thing as fate: no word for it, no nature belonging to it, no force it exerted. Imagine that most events, or even all events, occurred accidentally and at random. Would events turn out any differently from how they turn out now? Why insist on fate, then? Even without it, everything can be explained through nature or chance.

Chapter 4

- ⁷ We should part amicably from Posidonius, as fairness requires. Back now to Chrysippus and his traps. First we must answer what he says about things being interconnected. The other questions can wait. We can see enormous natural differences between places. Some are good for health; others bring disease. In some places people have too much phlegm, as though their humors were overflowing. Elsewhere they are dried out and parched. There are many other major local differences. Athens has thin air, and people think this helps make its inhabitants mentally sharper. Thebes has thick air, so its people are stout and physically powerful. But thin air won't determine that you listen to Zeno, Arcesilaus, or Theophrastus. Nor will thick air determine that you compete for victory at Nemea instead of the Isthmus. Carry that separation further.
- ⁸ How could local conditions determine our walking in Pompey's Portico instead of the Campus Martius? How could they determine our walking with you rather than another person? Or doing it at the Ides instead of the Kalends? A place's nature affects some things and has no effect on others. Allow the arrangement of the stars some influence too, if you like. It still won't affect everything. "But human natures differ," he says. "One person enjoys sweet flavors; another likes a slightly bitter taste. Some people are sexually uncontrolled, angry, cruel, or arrogant. Others reject those faults. Given such great natural differences, why be surprised that different causes produced them?"

Chapter 5

- ⁹ That argument misses both the subject under discussion and the point on which the case rests. Natural causes that come before an event may give people different inclinations. That does not establish natural, prior causes for our

choices and desires as well. If it did, we would control nothing. Of course, we accept that we don't choose whether we are clever or slow, strong or weak. But it doesn't follow that whether we sit or walk is beyond our choice. Anyone who draws that conclusion has failed to follow the implications. Earlier causes may explain why people are born quick-witted or slow, strong or feeble. That doesn't mean primary causes have also fixed their sitting down, their walking, or any other action they undertake.

- ¹⁰ Accounts describe the Megarian philosopher Stilpo as a very sharp thinker, admired in his own time. His friends themselves say he was addicted to alcohol and women. They mean that as praise, not criticism. His philosophical training had brought those bad tendencies so thoroughly under control that nobody saw him intoxicated or noticed a sign of sexual excess. We also read about Zopyrus's assessment of Socrates. Zopyrus claimed to read a person's nature and character from their body, eyes, face, and forehead. That was his profession. He pronounced Socrates stupid and slow. Socrates had no hollow spaces at his collarbones, he said; those parts were blocked and closed up. He also accused him of a weakness for women. That reportedly made Alcibiades laugh out loud.

Chapter 6

- ¹¹ Such faults can arise from natural causes. But removing them completely, roots and all, so that someone once drawn toward serious vices turns away from them, is another matter. That depends on choice, sustained effort, and education, not on natural causes. All of those disappear if arguments based on divination establish fate's nature and power.

If divination exists, what established principles does its practice start from? By "established principles" I mean the Greek "theorems." I cannot believe other specialists do their jobs with no principles to guide them. Nor can I believe people predict future events through divination with no principles either.

- ¹² Suppose an astrologer's principle runs like this: "Someone born as the Dog Star rises will not meet death at sea." Be careful, Chrysippus! You are wrestling hard with Diodorus, a powerful logician. Don't surrender your case. If that conditional rule is correct, this one is correct as well: "If Fabius's birth took place as the Dog Star rose, he won't die at sea." His being born at that rising and his later dying at sea are therefore incompatible. And we assume his birth at that rising is certain. So these are incompatible too: Fabius exists, and Fabius will meet death at sea. Combine them into "Fabius exists and will meet death at sea," and you have combined contradictory claims. Under the stated assumption, their combination cannot happen at all. That places "Fabius will meet death at sea" among the impossible things. So every false claim about a future event describes something impossible.

Chapter 7

- ¹³ Chrysippus, that is exactly the conclusion you reject. This very issue is your main dispute with Diodorus. According to him, a thing is possible only if it is true now or will become true. Whatever is going to occur has to occur; whatever will never occur is impossible. You say a thing may be possible without ever happening. This gemstone could break, for example, even if it never does. And you say Cypselus didn't have to become king of Corinth, although Apollo's oracle announced his reign a thousand years earlier. But approve those divine predictions, and you must put false predictions in the category of impossibilities [as when someone says Africanus will capture Carthage]. You must also call a future event necessary if it is predicted truly and will occur as predicted. That is Diodorus's whole position, the one opposed to yours.
- ¹⁴ Consider this true conditional: "Being born as the Dog Star rises means you won't die at sea." Its first part is "You were born as the Dog Star rose." That part is necessary. Chrysippus holds that all true statements concerning past events are necessary, disagreeing here with his teacher Cleanthes. The past can-

not change; something true about it cannot turn false. Once the first part of a conditional is necessary, the part following it becomes necessary too. Admittedly, Chrysippus doesn't accept that rule in every case. But if nature supplies a cause that prevents Fabius's death at sea, dying at sea is impossible for him.

Chapter 8

- ¹⁵ Chrysippus gets agitated at this point. He hopes the Chaldeans and other diviners will be fooled. He wants them to stop expressing their principles as conditionals, such as "Anyone born when the Dog Star comes up won't die at sea." Instead they should say, "A person's birth at the Dog Star's rising and that person's death at sea cannot both be true." What a ridiculous freedom to change the rules! To avoid running into Diodorus, he tells the Chaldeans how to formulate their own principles. But suppose they use denials of general both-and statements instead of general if-then statements. Why shouldn't doctors do that too? Or people studying geometry? Or other specialists? A doctor, in particular, could replace "A pulse beating this way means the patient has a fever" with "⟨Someone's⟩ pulse beating this way and that person having no fever cannot both be true." A geometer could stop saying "Great circles within a sphere cut each other into equal halves." Instead: "There being great circles within a sphere and their not cutting each other into equal halves cannot both be true."
- ¹⁶ What conditional could not be changed into a denial of both-and statements like that? We can express the same matters in other forms too. A moment ago I said, "Great circles within a sphere cut each other into equal halves." I could say, "If there are going to be great circles within a sphere." Or I could say, "Because there are going to be great circles within a sphere." Statements come in many forms. None is more twisted than the form Chrysippus hopes the Chaldeans will accept to accommodate the Stoics.

Chapter 9

- ¹⁷ Not one of them actually speaks that way. Learning those verbal twists would be harder than learning when the constellations rise and set. Let us return to Diodorus's disputed theory of "possibilities," which examines what being possible amounts to. He allows possibility only to what is already true or will eventually be true. This connects with the claim that every event had to happen. Whatever is possible is either already the case or will become the case. A true statement concerning a future event cannot become false any more than a true statement concerning a past event can. We can see that the past is fixed. Some future events do not look fixed, so people think they are not. For example, a patient may clearly be dying of a disease. "This disease will kill him" is true. If those same words are true of someone whose disease looks less serious, that person will die just the same. A future truth, then, has no possibility of changing into a falsehood either. Even though "Scipio will die" concerns the future, it cannot become false. It concerns a human being, and human beings must die.
- ¹⁸ Suppose someone said, "Scipio will suffer a violent death during the night in his own bedroom." The statement would be true: it predicts what would actually happen. The fact that it happened shows that it was going to happen. Saying "Scipio will die" was no truer than specifying that death. Death itself was no more necessary for him than dying in that particular manner. Nor is "Scipio was killed" any less able to change from truth to falsehood than "Scipio will be killed." With matters standing like this, why should Epicurus fear fate? Why look to atoms for safety, turn them off their course, and accept two problems that cannot be untangled? One is an event with no cause, which leads to something's coming from nothing. Neither Epicurus nor any other natural philosopher accepts that. The other is this: two indivisible bodies move through empty space, yet one continues straight ahead while the other turns aside.

- ¹⁹ Epicurus can accept truth or falsity for every statement without fearing that he must then accept fate for every event. Take “Carneades goes down to the Academy.” Its truth does not come from eternal causes flowing necessarily from nature. It does have causes, however. Causes that happen to come earlier differ from causes with a natural power to produce an effect built into them. Again, the statement “Epicurus will die after seventy-two years of life, with Pytharatus as archon” was true all along. Yet fate supplied no causes requiring that particular death. Rather, since events turned out that way, they were going to turn out that way through a definite ⟨sequence⟩ of causes.

Chapter 10

- ²⁰ To say that future events cannot change, or that something true about the future cannot become false, does not establish necessary fate. It explains what words mean. Introducing an endless chain of causes is different. That takes free choice from the human mind and ties it to fate’s necessity. Enough on that subject. Let us look at another. Chrysippus reasons this way: suppose some movement has no cause. Then some statements—“propositions,” as logicians call them—will have no truth or falsity. Anything lacking causes that produce it would lack truth or falsity. But truth or falsity belongs to every statement. Therefore, movement with no cause does not occur. On that basis, earlier causes bring about every event. If that holds, fate brings about every event. So whatever takes place does so through fate.
- ²¹ My first response is this. I could side with Epicurus and deny that truth or falsity must belong to every statement. I would sooner take that hit than accept fate for everything. Epicurus’s view at least leaves room for debate. The other view cannot be tolerated. Chrysippus therefore puts all his strength into persuading us that a proposition must be true or false. Epicurus fears that accepting this would force him to accept that fate governs all events. His reasoning is that one alternative’s having been true forever makes it certain; certainty makes

it necessary. He thinks that establishes both necessity and fate. Chrysippus has the opposite fear. Without establishing truth or falsity for every assertion, he fears he cannot maintain that fate, and eternal causes of future events, govern everything.

- ²² Epicurus thinks an atom's change of course lets him avoid fate's necessity. Weight and impact already produce two kinds of movement. Now he adds a third: an atom shifts sideways by the smallest distance, which he calls "the minimum." Whether he admits it in words or not, he has to admit in substance that this sideways shift has no cause. No collision with another atom makes it turn aside. On his theory, indivisible bodies move straight downward under their own weight. How, then, could one hit another? If none ever knocks another aside, none even comes into contact with another. That shows that even if atoms exist and turn aside, they do so without a cause.

Chapter 11

- ²³ Here is why Epicurus came up with this account. Suppose an atom's weight always carried it along in a natural, unavoidable way. The movement of atoms would then force our minds to move as they did. Epicurus feared that this would leave us no freedom. Democritus, the originator of the atomic theory, chose the other option. He accepted necessity as the explanation of everything, rather than strip indivisible bodies of their natural movements. Carneades took a more perceptive approach. In his teaching, the Epicureans could make their case without inventing a swerve. They held that a movement of the mind could be voluntary. Defending that position was the better course. Why bring in a swerve, particularly when they could find no cause for it? Defending voluntary movement would let them answer Chrysippus easily. They could accept a cause for every movement and still reject preceding causes as the explanation of everything that occurs. Our will, on this account, does not have causes outside itself that come before it.

- ²⁴ Our everyday way of speaking is loose, then, when we say that someone wants something, or does not want it, “for no reason.” In saying “for no reason,” we mean that there is no outside cause coming first. We do not mean that there is no cause of any sort. Take the way we call a container empty. We do not mean what the students of nature mean: for them, a void has nothing in it. We mean, for instance, a container without water, wine, or oil. It is the same when we speak of the mind moving “without a cause.” We are denying a cause outside it and prior to it, not denying all causes. Even an atom could be said to travel causelessly through the void as its own heaviness and weight carry it along. No cause from outside comes into play.
- ²⁵ Still, we must distinguish the senses. Otherwise every student of nature will laugh at us for allowing a causeless event. We should put it this way. Movement by heaviness and weight belongs to the very nature of an indivisible body. That nature itself explains why the body travels in that fashion. Apply the same point to voluntary mental movements: there is no need to seek a cause outside them. What makes a movement voluntary is its own nature, which makes it answer to us and leaves us in charge of it. This is not causeless either. The cause is precisely that nature.

Chapter 12

- ²⁶ Given all that, why should we have to accept fate as the explanation of every event before we can call every statement true or false? Here is his reply: “A claim that something will happen cannot be true unless there are causes that will make it happen. So anything truly going to happen must have causes. When it occurs, then, fate will have brought it about.” Well, that settles the business—provided you really have to choose between fate governing all events and the possibility of a causeless event.

- ²⁷ Consider this statement: “Scipio is going to take Numantia.” Must an everlasting succession of causes, each generating the next, bring this result about before that statement can be true? Imagine someone making it six hundred centuries earlier. Could it have been false? If “Scipio is going to take Numantia” was not true back then, “Scipio took Numantia” is not true even after Numantia has been destroyed. So could an event ever have taken place without its having been true that it would take place? We call a statement about the past true when what it says held true at some earlier point. The same applies to the future: we will call the statement true when what it says will hold true at a later point.
- ²⁸ Classifying every statement as true or false does not at once establish eternal, unalterable causes. Such causes would rule out any outcome different from the one that is coming. A statement like “Cato is coming to the senate” gets its truth from chance causes. Those causes are not locked into nature and the universe. Yet if his coming is true, that truth cannot change, any more than the truth that he came can change. There is no reason here to be frightened of either necessity or fate. We will certainly have to admit the following: “Suppose ‘Hortensius is coming to the house at Tusculum’ is not true. It must, then, be false.” These people refuse both alternatives. That is impossible.
- The argument called “lazy” will not stop us either. Philosophers call a certain line of reasoning the “idle argument.” Following it would mean never doing anything at all in our lives.

Chapter 13

- ²⁹ They put their challenge this way: “Suppose fate has decreed your recovery from this illness. You will get well, doctor or no doctor. Now suppose fate has decreed that you will not recover from this illness. You will not get well, doctor or no doctor. Fate has decreed one of these two outcomes. So why bother getting a doctor?” “Lazy” and “idle” are apt names for this kind of challenge. Apply its reasoning generally, and you remove all activity from life. You can also

change the wording to omit fate entirely and still make the same point. Here is how: “Suppose ‘You will get over this illness’ has been true for all eternity. You will get well, doctor or no doctor. Now suppose ‘You will get over this illness’ has been false for all eternity. You will not get well, doctor or no doctor.” The rest of the argument stays the same. Chrysippus objects to this reasoning.

- ³⁰ He says: “Events can be single or linked together. Take ‘Socrates is going to die on that date.’ That is single. His date of death is fixed regardless of anything he does or leaves undone. But take this decree of fate: ‘Laius is going to father Oedipus.’ You cannot add, ‘Whether Laius sleeps with a woman or not.’ Here the events are linked and jointly fated.” He uses that expression because fate decrees both Laius’ sleeping with his wife and his having Oedipus by her. Compare “Milo is going to compete in wrestling at the Olympics.” Someone would be wrong to answer, “Then he will wrestle, opponent or no opponent.” Wrestling is a linked event: it cannot take place without an opponent. This same reply disposes of all such trick arguments. It is a trick to say, “You will get well, doctor or no doctor.” Getting a doctor is no less decreed by fate than getting well. “Jointly fated,” as I said, is his name for these events.

Chapter 14

- ³¹ Carneades would have none of this approach. In his view, people arrived at the conclusion of this argument much too hastily. He therefore pressed his attack on another front, without any dishonest quibbling. Here was his reasoning. Let preceding causes account for every event. That would put every event in an interconnected, interwoven chain of nature. In that case, necessity produces every event. If that is right, we have control over nothing. Yet we do have control over something. Now, to say fate accounts for every event is to give every event preceding causes. Therefore fate cannot account for every event that occurs.

- ³² There is no way to make this reasoning tighter. But suppose someone tried to turn the same reasoning around: “Suppose it has been true for all eternity that every future event will take place. Its outcome is therefore certain to be exactly as it is going to be. So every event must belong to an interconnected, interwoven chain of nature.” That would be an empty argument. The two questions are very different. Is a natural cause making the future true for all eternity? Or can we understand that something is truly going to happen without there being an eternal natural chain? Carneades accordingly said that even Apollo could tell the future only in cases where nature held causes that made the outcome unavoidable.

Chapter 15

- ³³ What could the god himself consult to announce that Marcellus—the three-time consul—would lose his life at sea? That had indeed been true for all eternity. But there were no causes producing that result. Carneades therefore believed Apollo could not even know about past events if they left no marks, no footprints, so to speak. Still less could he know what lay ahead! To know the future, you first have to know the causes that produce each event. On that basis, Apollo could not have made a prediction about Oedipus unless nature already contained causes making his killing his father inevitable. The same applies to any similar prediction. The Stoics say fate accounts for all events. Accepting oracles of this sort, and the other evidence taken from divination, fits their position. But people who say the future has been true for all eternity are not committed to the same claim. Ask yourself, then, whether their case is really identical to the Stoics’ case. The Stoics are much more restricted. The others’ reasoning has room to move freely.
- ³⁴ Now grant that an event cannot occur without a cause coming before it. What is gained by denying that this cause is tied to an eternal series of causes? To be a cause, something must produce the result attributed to it. Think of a deadly

wound, indigestion that causes sickness, or fire that causes heat. Something's merely coming first does not make it a cause. It has to come first in a way that actually brings about the result. Going down to the field did not cause me to play ball. Giving birth to Alexander did not make Hecuba the cause of the Trojans' ruin. Nor did fathering Clytemnestra make Tyndareus the cause of Agamemnon's ruin. On that basis, when a bandit robs a smartly dressed traveler, the traveler himself would count as the cause.

35 This passage from Ennius is a case in point:

"If only the axes in Pelion's woods
had never chopped the fir trunks down to the earth!"

He could have started even earlier: "If only Pelion had never grown a single tree!" Or earlier still: "If only there had never been any mountain called Pelion!" Keep tracing earlier events like that, and you can go backward without end.

"And if only the work of starting that ship
had never begun with that timber."

Why run through these earlier events? Because of what comes next:

"For my deluded mistress would never have put a foot outside her home,
Medea, her mind sick, hurt by violent love,"
†not that these things brought about her love.

Chapter 16

36 They draw a distinction between a circumstance without which something cannot happen and one whose presence makes the result unavoidable. On that account, none of the things mentioned is a cause. None produces, by its own power, what it is said to cause. Something's being indispensable does not make it a cause. A cause must necessarily bring about its effect when it comes into

play. Before Philoctetes received the snakebite wound, what cause existed in nature for his being left on Lemnos? After the bite, a cause did exist, closer to the outcome and more directly connected with it.

³⁷ So understanding the outcome shows us what caused it. Still, the statement “Philoctetes will be left behind on the island” was always true. It could not change from a truth into a falsehood. Consider a pair of opposites. Here I mean statements in which one says yes to something and the other says no. Despite Epicurus’ objections, there must be a true statement on one side and a false one on the other. Throughout all past ages, for instance, it was true to say “Philoctetes will suffer a wound.” Saying “He will suffer no wound” was false. Unless, of course, we choose to follow the Epicureans! They say that statements of this kind have no truth or falsity. Or, embarrassed by that position, they take an even more shameless one. In their view, an either-or statement made from a contradictory pair is true, but neither of the statements forming that pair is true.

³⁸ What extraordinary freedom to say anything! What a sorry failure to understand argument! Suppose someone says something that has no truth or falsity. At least it is not true. But how can something not true avoid being false? And how can something not false avoid being true? *⟨So⟩* Chrysippus’ claim stands: every statement has one of two values, true or false. Reason itself will force this conclusion on us: some things have always been true, yet they have no chain of eternal causes binding them. Fate places no necessity on them.

Chapter 17

³⁹ I see it this way. Among the earlier philosophers there were two positions. For one group, fate determined everything, and that fate brought unavoidable compulsion with it. This was the position of Democritus, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Aristotle. For the other group, movements of our minds that we freely

choose had nothing to do with fate. Chrysippus seems to have wanted a compromise, as though serving as an arbitrator by agreement. In practice he sides more with those who want mental movements freed from necessity. But his own terminology gets him into trouble. Without meaning to, he ends up upholding the very necessity of fate.

- ⁴⁰ We can look, if you wish, at assent to see what this amounts to. I dealt with assent at the opening of my discussion. Those earlier philosophers who attributed all events to fate also attributed assent to force and necessity. Their opponents exempted assent from fate. You could not, they said, subject assent to fate while keeping it free of necessity. Their reasoning went like this. Assume fate governs everything. Each event must then have a prior cause. If this holds for impulses, it holds for what follows from impulses, including assent. But if the cause of an impulse is not located in us, the impulse itself is beyond our control. What the impulse produces must then be beyond our control as well. That leaves us without control of either our assent or our actions. Consequently there would be no justice in praise or blame, in honors or punishments. They regard that as an unacceptable result. So, they think, it is reasonable to conclude that not all events are fated.

Chapter 18

- ⁴¹ Chrysippus rejects necessity but wants nothing to happen without prior causes. So he distinguishes kinds of causes, hoping both to escape necessity and to keep fate. “Some causes,” he says, “are complete and primary; others are contributing and immediate. So when we say that everything happens by fate through preceding causes, we do not mean complete and primary causes. We mean contributing [preceding] and immediate causes.” This is how he answers the argument I set out a little earlier. If everything happens by fate, it does follow that everything happens through prior causes. But these are not primary and complete causes. They are contributing and immediate ones. Even if these

causes themselves are not under our control, it does not follow that impulse is not under our control either. That would follow if we said everything happened through complete and primary causes. Then, because those causes were not under our control, impulse would not be under our control either.

- ⁴² So the earlier argument will work against people who introduce fate in a way that also brings in necessity. But it will have no force against people who say that preceding causes are not complete or primary. Chrysippus thinks he can easily explain what it means to say that assent happens through prior causes. Assent cannot happen unless an impression stirs it. Still, because it has that impression as its immediate cause, not its primary cause, it fits the account we gave earlier, as Chrysippus intends. Not that assent can happen without some outside force setting it in motion: an impression must stir assent. But he goes back to his cylinder and his spinning top. These cannot start moving unless they are pushed. Once that happens, however, he thinks the cylinder keeps rolling and the top keeps spinning because of their own nature.

Chapter 19

- ⁴³ He says: “Pushing a cylinder gives it the start of its motion, not its capacity for rolling. An impression presented to the mind does something similar. It leaves its own likeness stamped there, rather like a seal. But giving assent remains our decision. Assent, like the cylinder in our example, receives a push from outside. After that, its own power and nature carry on the movement. A single event without a prior cause would disprove the claim that fate governs everything. But a prior cause seems likely for every event that takes place. What could justify refusing to acknowledge fate as the explanation of all events? Only be sure you understand how the kinds of causes differ and how they must be distinguished.”

⁴⁴ That is Chrysippus' explanation. Now take the people who deny that fate governs assent. If they †still acknowledge that an impression has to precede assent, the argument is different. But suppose they allow that impressions come first while still rejecting fated assent, because that immediate and closely connected cause does not set assent in motion. Look at whether their point is actually the same as his. Chrysippus allows the impression to be assent's immediate and closely connected cause. He does not [nor] allow it to be a cause that forces assent, making all events both caused in advance and compelled if they are all fated. His opponents likewise accept that impressions must arrive before assent. They will say this: "If saying that all events are fated means that each event requires a cause to come before it, we must acknowledge that all events are fated." It is therefore easy to understand their disagreement. When each party opens up and explains its position, both arrive at one result. Their words differ; their actual views do not.

⁴⁵ In general, the distinction runs as follows. For some events, after certain causes have come first, we can truly say we have no power to stop the resulting events from occurring. For others, the causes may already have come first, yet we retain the power to change the result. Both parties accept that division. One party, however, calls an event fated when its preceding causes leave us unable to change its outcome. Things we can control, they say, have no fate attached to them [...]

Chapter 20

⁴⁶ That is the right way to conduct this debate. There is no point seeking support from atoms that stray and turn off course. He tells us, "The atom takes a swerve." My first question is: why? There was already another force moving atoms. In Democritus' account it was a push—his term is a blow. In your account, Epicurus, it was heaviness and weight. What new natural cause, then, turns an atom aside? Do atoms perhaps draw lots to settle which one swerves

and which does not? Why should the distance of the swerve be the least possible, never any larger? Why just one of those smallest units, rather than two or three?

⁴⁷ That is wishing, not reasoning. Your account does not say that a blow from outside displaces an atom and makes it turn aside. Nor does it supply anything in the void it travels through to explain why its travel should cease to be straight. And nothing has changed inside the atom to stop it keeping to the natural motion its own weight gives it. He has supplied no cause for the swerve at all. Even so, he believes he has made a point, although what he says meets rejection and refusal in everyone's mind.

⁴⁸ Indeed, to my mind nobody does more than this man to confirm fate and, beyond fate, the compulsion and necessity governing all events. Nobody does more to abolish freely chosen movements of the mind. He admits that he could not oppose fate by any other means: his only escape was to invent these swerves. Let us even grant the existence of atoms, though I cannot possibly be persuaded of it. That would still leave those swerves unexplained forever. Suppose natural necessity assigns atoms their motion by weight. After all, anything heavy must move and travel unless something gets in its way. Then swerving must also happen of necessity, as a natural property of some atoms—or of all atoms, if that is what they want [...]

Fragment 1

¹ In the book he wrote about fate, Marcus Cicero calls this question very hard to understand and very tangled. He adds that the philosopher Chrysippus, too, failed to disentangle himself from it. Cicero puts it this way: “Chrysippus is all worked up, struggling to explain in what ⟨way⟩ everything can happen through fate while something is still up to us. He gets himself into the following tangle.” Gel. N. A. 7.2.15

Fragment 2

- ² “And brings the changes around”: the definition of fate follows Tullius’ account. He says: “Fate means events connected to one another through all eternity. This connection varies by its own rule and order. Yet the variation itself lasts eternally.” Serv. ad Vergil. A. 3.376

Fragment 3

- ³ These lines of Homer also support this view. Cicero translated them into Latin: “People’s minds are like the light with which Father Jupiter himself has lit the crop-bearing earth.”
Augustin. de civ. dei 5.8

Fragment 4

- ⁴ According to Cicero, the celebrated physician Hippocrates recorded a suspicion about two brothers: he thought they were twins. They had started being ill together. In both brothers, the illness grew worse at once and eased at once. The Stoic Posidonius, a keen follower of astrology, regularly insisted that the brothers had matching arrangements of stars when they were born and matching arrangements when they were conceived. To the physician, their very similar bodily makeup explained the case. To the philosopher who studied the stars, the explanation was the stars’ power and arrangement when the brothers were conceived and when they were born. Augustin. de civ. dei 5.2

Fragment 5

- ⁵ And so that a poet may not be considered a witness of too little weight, take Cicero as your authority for how highly this fish was valued by the famous Publius Scipio Africanus, also called Numantinus. These are Cicero's words in the dialogue *On Fate*: "Scipio was at his place near Lavernium, with Pontius there too. A sturgeon happened to be brought to Scipio. It is very rarely caught, but people say it is one of the finest fish. Scipio had invited one and then another of the people who had come to pay their respects and seemed likely to invite still more. Pontius whispered in his ear: 'Scipio, watch what you are doing. That sturgeon is for a small number of people.'" Macrobius *Saturnalia* 3.16.3