

VIRTVS

On the Nature of the Gods

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Musean Translation

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

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TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

Written 45 BCE · Philosophical dialogue

SOURCE

Original text from the Perseus Digital Library.

GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The Latin witness contains marked lacunae and textual cruces; its composite fragments in 3.65 are not a reconstruction of the lost continuous dialogue. No human specialist or audible-listening review is claimed.

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Book 1



- 1.1 Many matters in philosophy have still received no adequate explanation; but the question of the nature of the gods, Brutus—as you know very well—is especially difficult and obscure, though supremely rewarding for the mind to understand and essential to the proper ordering of religion. The profound differences and disagreements among the most learned men on this subject should themselves furnish powerful evidence that the starting point of philosophy [...] knowledge, and that the Academics were wise to withhold assent where things are uncertain. For what is more shameful than rashness? And what is so rash, so unworthy of a wise man's dignity and steadfastness, as either holding a false belief or defending without any hesitation something not sufficiently examined, apprehended, and understood?
- 1.2 In this inquiry, for instance, most thinkers have affirmed that gods exist: that is the most probable view, and the one to which we all come † under nature's guidance. Protagoras said that he was uncertain; Diagoras of Melos and Theodorus of Cyrene thought that no gods existed at all. Yet those who affirmed their existence differ and disagree so greatly that it would be an endless undertaking to enumerate their opinions. Many accounts are given of the gods' forms, their dwelling places and abodes, and their manner of life, and philosophers dispute these matters with the sharpest disagreement. Above all, on the point that contains the heart of the question—whether the gods do nothing,

undertake nothing, and remain wholly free of the care and management of affairs, or whether, on the contrary, they made and established everything at the beginning and govern and move everything through infinite time—the disagreement is profound. Unless this is settled, humanity must remain in the deepest error and in ignorance of the most important things.

1.3 For there are, and have been, philosophers who believe that the gods exercise no care whatever over human affairs. If their opinion is true, what place can there be for piety, holiness, or religion? All these must be offered in purity and innocence to the divine power, but only if the gods notice them and if the immortal gods have bestowed something upon the human race. If, however, the gods neither can nor wish to help us, take no interest in us at all, do not observe what we do, and can impart nothing to human life, why should we offer the immortal gods any worship, honors, or prayers? Piety, like the other virtues, cannot exist in the outward show of a false pretense; and with it holiness and religion must also disappear. Their removal brings disorder and great confusion into life;

1.4 and I am inclined to think that removing piety toward the gods would also remove good faith, the fellowship of the human race, and justice, the one pre-eminent virtue. But there are other philosophers, great and distinguished men, who believe that the whole universe is ordered and governed by divine intelligence and reason. Nor is that all: they also believe that the gods take thought for human life and provide for it. Crops and everything else the earth produces, the weather and the changing seasons, the alterations of the sky through which everything born of the earth ripens and matures—all these, they think, are the immortal gods' gifts to humanity. They assemble many other arguments, to be discussed in these books, of such a kind that the immortal gods seem almost to have fashioned these very things for human use. Against these thinkers Carneades argued at such length as to awaken in anyone not altogether sluggish a passion to investigate the truth.

- 1.5 For on no subject do not only the unlearned but even the learned disagree so greatly. Their opinions are so various and so much at odds that it is certainly possible that none of them is true, but certainly impossible that more than one is.

On this issue we can both reconcile our well-disposed critics and refute our malicious detractors, so that the latter regret their attacks and the former rejoice in having learned something. Those who offer friendly warnings deserve instruction; those who pursue us with hostility must be repelled.

- 1.6 I see that much discussion has arisen about the several books I have published in a short time. Some wonder where this sudden enthusiasm for philosophy came from; others want to know what settled opinions I hold on each subject. Many, I have noticed, also find it surprising that I have chosen above all a philosophy that takes away the light and seems to spread a kind of night over things, and that I have unexpectedly undertaken the defense of a school deserted and long abandoned. But I did not suddenly begin to philosophize. From my earliest years I have devoted no small measure of effort and attention to that pursuit, and I was philosophizing most when I seemed to be doing so least. My speeches, filled with philosophers' thoughts, bear witness to this, as do my friendships with the learned men whose company has always enriched my house, and those eminent teachers under whom I studied: Diodotus, Philo, Antiochus, and Posidonius.

- 1.7 And if all the precepts of philosophy concern life, I believe that in both public and private affairs I have practiced what reason and learning prescribed. But if anyone asks what prompted me to commit these matters to writing so late, nothing is easier for me to explain. When enforced inactivity had left me dispirited, and the condition of the republic was such that it had necessarily to be governed by the counsel and care of a single man, I thought, first, that for the republic's own sake I should explain philosophy to our people. I considered it of great importance to our country's dignity and renown that matters so weighty and so noble should also find expression in Latin literature.

- 1.8 I regret this undertaking all the less because I readily perceive how many people I have inspired not merely to study but to write. Many men educated in Greek learning could not share what they had learned with their fellow citizens, because they doubted that what they had received from the Greeks could be expressed in Latin. In this field we seem to have made such progress that the Greeks do not surpass us even in richness of vocabulary.
- 1.9 Another impulse toward this work was the anguish of mind caused by a great and grievous blow of fortune. Had I been able to find some greater relief, I would not have sought refuge chiefly here. Yet there was no way I could better enjoy that very relief than by devoting myself not merely to reading books but to a thorough study of the whole of philosophy. All its parts and branches are most easily understood when entire questions are unfolded in writing. For there is a wonderful continuity and sequence in these matters: one seems linked to another, and all fitted and bound together.
- 1.10 Those who ask what I myself think about each subject show more curiosity than they need. In argument we should seek the weight of reasons, not of authority. Indeed, the authority of those who profess to teach often harms those who wish to learn: they cease to exercise their own judgment and take as settled whatever they see has been decided by the person they approve. Nor do I commend the practice attributed to the Pythagoreans. When they asserted something in discussion and were asked why it was so, they reportedly used to answer, "He himself said it"; "he himself" was Pythagoras. So powerful was a preconceived opinion that authority prevailed even without reason.
- 1.11 As for those surprised that I have chosen this particular school, I think I have answered them adequately in my four books on Academic philosophy. Nor have I undertaken the defense of something deserted and abandoned. Opinions do not perish when their authors die, though perhaps they miss the illumination of a great exponent. Thus this philosophical method of arguing against every position and passing no explicit judgment on anything, which began with Socrates, was revived by Arcesilaus, and strengthened by Carneades, flourished

down to our own age. I understand that in Greece itself it is now almost orphaned. This, I think, has happened through human sluggishness, not through any fault of the Academy. For if mastering a single school is a great achievement, how much greater to master them all! Yet this is necessary for those whose purpose is to speak both against and for every philosopher in order to discover the truth.

1.12 I do not claim to have attained the capacity for an undertaking so great and difficult; I openly acknowledge that I have pursued it. Nor, however, can those who philosophize by this method have nothing to follow. I have discussed this subject more carefully elsewhere, but some people are so slow and unwilling to learn that they seem to need repeated reminders. We are not people who think nothing true, but people who maintain that every truth has certain falsehoods attached to it, so similar that they provide no sure mark by which to judge and assent. From this follows the further conclusion that many things are probable: although they cannot be grasped with certainty, they have a distinctive and vivid appearance, and the wise man's life may be guided by them.

1.13 But now, to free myself from all ill will, I shall set the philosophers' opinions on the nature of the gods before the public. Here, surely, everyone should be summoned to judge which of these opinions is true. Only then will the Academy seem presumptuous to me—if all agree, or if someone is found who has discovered what is true. And so I feel like crying out, as in *The Young Companions*:

To the good faith of the gods, all my fellow citizens, all the young,

I cry, appeal, implore, entreat, weep, and plead!

Not over some utterly trivial matter, as when the character complains that

capital crimes are being committed in the city: "A courtesan refuses money from her devoted lover";

1.14 but so that they may attend, examine, and consider what we should think about religion, piety, holiness, ceremonies, good faith, and the oath; about temples, shrines, and solemn sacrifices; about the auspices themselves, over which

we preside. All these matters must be referred to this inquiry into the immortal gods. Surely so great a disagreement among the most learned men on a matter of supreme importance will force even those who think they possess certainty to feel some doubt.

- 1.15 I have often noticed this, but never more clearly than when the immortal gods were discussed with remarkable care and precision at the house of my friend Gaius Cotta. During the Latin Festival I went there at his invitation and request, and found him sitting in a recess, debating with the senator Gaius Velleius, whom the Epicureans then regarded as the foremost Roman of their school. Quintus Lucilius Balbus was also present. He had made such progress in Stoicism that he could be compared with the outstanding Greeks in that field.

When Cotta saw me, he said, “You have come at just the right moment. A dispute on a great subject is arising between Velleius and me, and in view of your interests it is fitting that you should take part.”

- 1.16 “Yes,” I said, “I too think I have arrived at the right moment, as you say. Here are three leading representatives of three schools. If Marcus Piso were here, no philosophy—at least none of those held in honor—would lack a place.”

“If the book our friend Antiochus recently sent to Balbus speaks the truth,” Cotta replied, “you have no reason to miss your friend Piso. Antiochus thinks the Stoics and Peripatetics agree in substance and differ only in words. I should like to know what you think of that book, Balbus.”

“What do I think?” he said. “I am surprised that Antiochus, a man of exceptional acuteness, failed to see the immense difference between the Stoics, who separate moral goodness from advantages not in name but in their entire nature, and the Peripatetics, who blend moral goodness with advantages, making them differ in magnitude and, so to speak, degree rather than in kind. This is no small disagreement about words, but an enormous disagreement about things. However, another time for that; now, if you please, let us return to what we began.”

1.17 “By all means,” said Cotta. Then, looking at me: “But so that our new arrival may know what is being discussed, our subject was the nature of the gods. Since it seemed to me profoundly obscure, as it always does, I was asking Velleius for Epicurus’s opinion. So, Velleius, if it is no trouble, repeat what you had begun.”

“Certainly I shall, though this man has come to help you, not me. Both of you,” he added with a smile, “learned from the same Philo to know nothing.”

Then I said, “Let Cotta answer for what we learned. But do not suppose I have come as his supporter rather than as a listener—and an impartial listener, free to judge, bound by no obligation to defend a fixed opinion whether I wish to or not.”

1.18 Then Velleius, with all the confidence his school customarily displays, fearing nothing so much as the appearance of doubt on any subject, and sounding as though he had just descended from the council of the gods and Epicurus’s spaces between worlds, began: “Listen, not to idle inventions of opinion; not to Plato’s god from the *Timaeus*, that craftsman and builder of the universe; not to the Stoics’ prophetic old woman Pronoia, whom we may call Providence in Latin; nor to the universe itself, endowed with mind and senses, that round, burning, revolving god. These are prodigies and marvels dreamed by philosophers, not reasoned out by them.

1.19 “With what eyes of the mind could your Plato have viewed that workshop for so great a construction, in which he has his god put together and build the universe? What were the labors, the tools, the levers, the machines, the assistants for so great an undertaking? How could air, fire, water, and earth obey and submit to the architect’s will? Where did those five forms originate from which everything else is shaped, falling together so aptly as to affect the mind and produce sensations? It would take too long to discuss every detail of a scheme that seems more a matter of wishes than discoveries.

- 1.20 “But the crowning touch is this: after presenting the universe not merely as something born, but as something almost made by hand, he declared that it would last forever. Do you think a man has tasted even the first drop of natural philosophy—that is, the account of nature—if he thinks anything that has come into being can be eternal? What combination cannot be dissolved? What has a beginning but no end? And if your Providence, Lucilius, is the same as his, I ask for what I asked just now: the assistants, the machines, the entire plan and equipment of the whole enterprise. If it is different, why did it make the universe mortal, rather than everlasting, as Plato’s god did?”
- 1.21 “Of both I ask why they suddenly emerged as builders of the universe, after sleeping through countless ages. For the absence of a universe did not mean the absence of ages. By ages I do not now mean those completed by the tally of days and nights and the yearly courses; I admit that these could not have existed without the revolution of the universe. But there was an eternity stretching back through infinite time, measured by no division of time, yet intelligible in its extent. For we cannot even conceive that there was
- 1.22 a time when there was no time. In that immeasurable expanse, then, I ask you, Balbus, why was your Providence idle? Was it avoiding labor? But labor does not touch a god; nor was there any, when all nature—heaven, fires, lands, and seas—obeyed the divine will. And why should a god desire to adorn the universe with figures and lights, like an aedile decorating the city? To improve his own dwelling? Evidently, then, he had previously spent infinite time in darkness, as though in a hovel. And afterward? Are we to suppose he delighted in the variety with which we see heaven and earth adorned? What pleasure could that give a god? If it could, he could not have gone without it so long.
- 1.23 “Or was all this established by god for humanity’s sake, as you generally say? For the wise? Then this vast construction was undertaken for a handful of people. For fools? In the first place, there was no reason to do good to the wicked. And then, what did he accomplish? All fools are undoubtedly utterly wretched, first because they are fools—for what can we call more wretched than folly?—

and then because life contains so many hardships that the wise soften by balancing them against its advantages, while fools can neither avoid those approaching nor endure those present. As for those who declared the universe itself a living and wise being, they utterly failed to see what sort of form could accommodate an intelligent mind. I shall speak of that shortly; for now I shall say only this:

1.24 “I marvel at the dullness of those who insist that a living being, immortal and blessed, is round because Plato says no shape is more beautiful. To me, a cylinder, a square, a cone, or a pyramid seems more beautiful. And what life is assigned to this round god? Naturally, he is to whirl at a speed whose equal cannot even be imagined. Amid this I cannot see where a steadfast mind or blessed life could find a footing. And if something would be painful when manifested in the smallest part of our bodies, why should it not also be considered painful in a god? The earth, after all, being part of the universe, is also part of the god. Yet we see immense regions of the earth uninhabitable and uncultivated: some are scorched by the sun’s approach, others frozen with snow and frost by its distant withdrawal. If the universe is a god, these regions, being parts of the universe, must be regarded as limbs of the god, some burning, others chilled.

1.25 “So much for your doctrines, Lucilius. As for the character of [...] I shall begin with the earliest of the predecessors. Thales of Miletus, the first to inquire into such matters, said that water was the origin of things and god the mind that fashioned everything from water—if gods can exist without sensation! And why did he attach mind to water, if mind itself can subsist without a body? Anaximander’s opinion was that the gods are born, rising and passing away at long intervals, and that they are innumerable worlds. But how can we conceive a god who is not eternal?

1.26 “After him Anaximenes declared air to be god, saying that it comes into being, is immeasurable and infinite, and is always in motion—as though air without any shape could be a god, especially when a god ought to possess not merely some form but the most beautiful; or as though mortality did not follow every-

thing that has had a birth. Next Anaxagoras, who learned from Anaximenes, was the first to maintain that the ordering and arrangement of all things were designed and accomplished by the power and reason of an infinite mind. He failed to see that in the infinite there can be no continuous movement joined to sensation, and indeed no sensation at all unless nature itself is struck and feels the impact. Besides, if he intended this mind to be a kind of living creature, it must contain something within that would make it a living creature. But what could lie farther within than mind? Then let it be enclosed by an external body.

1.27 “Since that does not please him, a bare and simple mind, with nothing attached to it, capable of sensation, seems beyond the reach of our understanding and conception. Alcmaeon of Croton, who assigned divinity to the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies, and also to the soul, did not perceive that he was granting immortality to mortal things. Pythagoras, who thought a soul extended and moved throughout all nature, from which our souls were plucked, did not see that the detachment of human souls would tear and rend the god; and that when souls were unhappy, as happens to most, part of the god would be unhappy—which is impossible.

1.28 “And why should a human soul be ignorant of anything if it were a god? Again, how could that god, if it were nothing but soul, be fixed in the universe or poured through it? Xenophanes held that, besides attaching mind to it, all that is infinite is god. On mind he will incur the same criticism as the others; on infinity a still sharper one, for in it nothing can have either sensation or coherence. Parmenides invented something quite imaginary: a crownlike structure—he calls it a *stephanē*, a wreath—an unbroken ring of blazing light encircling heaven, which he calls god. No one can suspect either a divine form or sensation in it. He has many other monstrosities of the same sort, since he refers war, discord, desire, and the like to divinity, though these are destroyed by sickness, sleep, forgetfulness, or time. His similar doctrines about the stars have already been criticized in another thinker; let them pass here.

- 1.29 “Empedocles, wrong on many other matters, goes most shamefully astray in his opinion of the gods. He holds that the four elements of which he thinks everything composed are divine, although it is plain that they come into being, perish, and lack all sensation. Protagoras, too, who declares that he has no clear knowledge at all about the gods—whether they exist or not, or what they are like—seems not to have the faintest idea of their nature. And Democritus? He numbers among the gods now images and their movements, now the substance that pours out and emits those images, now our own thought and understanding. Is he not deeply mistaken? Moreover, when he denies that anything is everlasting, on the ground that nothing always remains in the same condition, does he not abolish god altogether, leaving no conception of him remaining? And what sensation or divine form can air possess, the god adopted by Diogenes of Apollonia?
- 1.30 “It would take too long to discuss Plato’s inconsistency. In the *Timaeus* he denies that the father of this universe can be named; in the *Laws* he thinks we ought not to inquire at all what god is. Moreover, he wants god to be without any body—incorporeal, as the Greeks say—but what such a being could be is unintelligible. It must lack sensation, practical wisdom, and pleasure, all of which we include in our conception of the gods. Yet both in the *Timaeus* and in the *Laws* he says that the universe, heaven, the stars, the earth, souls, and those gods handed down by ancestral tradition are divine. These assertions are plainly false in themselves and violently at odds with one another.”
- 1.31 “Xenophon, too, makes almost the same mistakes in fewer words. In his account of Socrates’ sayings he has Socrates argue that we should not inquire into god’s form, and yet call both the sun and the soul god, speaking now of one god and now of several. These involve nearly the same errors as those I mentioned in Plato.
- 1.32 “Antisthenes, in the book entitled *On Nature*, says there are many gods of popular belief but one god of nature, thereby doing away with the power and nature of the gods. Much the same is true of Speusippus, who follows his uncle

Plato: by declaring that a certain animate power governs everything, he tries to uproot the knowledge of the gods from our minds.

- 1.33 “Aristotle, in the third book of *On Philosophy*, introduces much confusion in disagreeing with his master Plato. At one time he assigns all divinity to mind; at another he calls the universe itself god; at another he places someone else over the universe, assigning him the task of governing and maintaining its motion by a kind of reverse rotation. Then he calls the heat of heaven god, not realizing that heaven is part of the universe, which he himself elsewhere designated god. How can that divine consciousness of heaven be preserved at such speed? And where are all those other gods, if we count heaven too as a god? When, again, he makes god incorporeal, he deprives him of all sensation, and of wisdom too. Besides, how can the universe move without a body, or how can it be tranquil and blessed if it is always moving?
- 1.34 “His fellow student Xenocrates is no wiser in this matter. His books *On the Nature of the Gods* describe no divine form. He says there are eight gods: five are those called wandering stars; one is to be regarded as a single god formed from all the fixed stars in heaven, like scattered limbs; he adds the sun as the seventh and the moon as the eighth. What sensation could make these blessed is incomprehensible. Heraclides of Pontus, from the same school of Plato, filled his books with childish fables. Yet he considers now the universe, now mind divine; he also grants divinity to the wandering stars, deprives god of sensation, and makes his form changeable. In the same book he again counts earth and heaven among the gods.
- 1.35 “Theophrastus’s inconsistency is intolerable as well. At one time he assigns divine sovereignty to mind, at another to heaven, and then to the constellations and stars. Nor should we listen to his student Strato, called the natural philosopher. He holds that all divine power resides in nature, which contains the causes of birth, growth, and diminution, but lacks all sensation and form.

1.36 “Zeno—to come now to your people, Balbus—thinks natural law divine, possessing the power to command right actions and forbid their opposites. How he makes this law a living being we cannot understand; yet we certainly want a god to be alive. Elsewhere the same man calls the ether god—if a god without sensation is conceivable, one who never comes before our minds in prayers, wishes, or vows. In other books he considers a certain reason permeating the whole natural world to be endowed with divine power. He attributes the same to the stars, then to years, months, and the changing seasons. When he interprets Hesiod’s *Theogony*, or *Birth of the Gods*, he entirely removes our familiar, established conceptions of the gods. For he does not count Jupiter, Juno, Vesta, or anyone bearing such names among the gods, but teaches that these names have been assigned, with a certain symbolic meaning, to lifeless and speechless things.

1.37 “His pupil Aristo’s opinion is no less deeply mistaken. He holds that god’s form cannot be conceived, denies sensation to the gods, and doubts altogether whether god is alive. Cleanthes, who attended Zeno along with the man I just mentioned, now calls the universe itself god, now assigns the name to the mind and soul of all nature, now judges that the ultimate, highest fire, spread around everything, encircling and embracing everything at its outermost limit—the fire called ether—is most certainly god. In the books he wrote against pleasure he seems delirious: now he invents a certain shape and appearance for the gods, now assigns all divinity to the stars, now thinks nothing more divine than reason. Thus the god whom we recognize in thought, and wish to lodge in the mind’s conception as though in his proper resting place, appears nowhere at all. Persaeus, another pupil of Zeno, says that those who discovered something greatly useful for civilized life were regarded as gods, and that useful and beneficial things themselves were called by divine names. He would not even say that these were discoveries of the gods, but that they were themselves divine.

1.38 “What could be more absurd than either honoring shabby and ugly things as gods or placing among the gods men already destroyed by death, whose entire worship would consist of mourning?

- 1.39 “Chrysippus, considered the shrewdest interpreter of Stoic dreams, assembles a great crowd of unknown gods—so unknown that we cannot even frame a conjectural image of them, though our minds seem able to picture anything in thought. He says divine power resides in reason and in the soul and mind of universal nature. He calls the universe itself god, and the whole diffusion of its soul; then its ruling principle, residing in intelligence and reason; the universal common nature that embraces all things; then the fated †shadow and necessity of future events; and fire, and the ether I mentioned earlier. Then he includes the things that naturally flow and spread—water, earth, and air—the sun, moon, stars, and the totality in which everything is contained; and also those men who have attained immortality.
- 1.40 “He further argues that the ether is what people call Jupiter; that the air flowing through the seas is Neptune; and that the earth is what is called Ceres. He works through the names of the other gods in a similar fashion. He also says that Jupiter is the force of perpetual and eternal law, a kind of guide to life and teacher of duties, and calls this same force fated necessity, the everlasting truth of future events. None of these things is such that divine power can be seen to reside in it.”
- 1.41 “So much for his first book *On the Nature of the Gods*. In the second he tries to accommodate the fables of Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, and Homer to his own statements about the immortal gods in the first, so that even the most ancient poets, who never so much as dreamed of these doctrines, should appear to have been Stoics. Following him, Diogenes of Babylon, in his book entitled *On Minerva*, transfers Jupiter’s labor in childbirth and the maiden’s birth to natural philosophy and detaches them from myth.
- 1.42 “What I have set out is, for the most part, not philosophers’ judgments but the dreams of madmen. Nor are the stories poured out by the poets, whose very sweetness has done harm, much more absurd. They have introduced gods inflamed with anger and maddened by desire, and made us see their wars, battles, fights, and wounds; their hatred, separations, and discord; their births and

deaths, complaints and lamentations; their desires unleashed in every kind of excess, their adulteries and chains, their couplings with human beings, and mortal children born of an immortal parent.

1.43 “With the poets’ error we may associate the monstrous tales of the Magi and the Egyptians’ madness in the same field, as well as popular opinions, which waver in the deepest inconsistency and ignorance of truth.

“Anyone considering how thoughtlessly and rashly these claims are made should revere Epicurus and count him among those very beings who are the subject of this inquiry. For he alone saw, first, that gods exist, because nature herself had impressed the conception of them on everyone’s mind. What nation, what race of people, lacks without instruction a certain anticipation of the gods? Epicurus calls this *prolēpsis*: a conception of something already present in the mind, without which nothing can be understood, investigated, or discussed. The force and usefulness of this principle we have learned from that heavenly book of Epicurus on the standard and criterion of judgment.

1.44 “You see, then, how splendidly the foundation of this inquiry has been laid. Since the belief was established by no convention, custom, or law, and the agreement of everyone without exception remains firm, we must understand that gods exist, because we possess implanted—or rather innate—knowledge of them. What everyone’s nature agrees on must be true; therefore we must admit that gods exist. And since this is agreed by almost everyone, not only philosophers but also the unlearned, we acknowledge another agreed point: we possess this anticipation, as I called it before, or preconception of the gods. New things require new names: Epicurus himself called it *prolēpsis*,

1.45 “a word no one had used for it before. This, then, is our preconception: we consider the gods blessed and immortal. The same nature that gave us a conception of the gods themselves also engraved upon our minds the conviction that they are eternal and blessed. If that is so, Epicurus rightly stated this doctrine:

whatever is blessed and eternal neither has any trouble itself nor causes any to another, and so is subject neither to anger nor to favor, since everything of that kind belongs to weakness.

“If we sought nothing but to worship the gods with piety and to free ourselves from superstition, enough would have been said. For the preeminent nature of the gods, being both eternal and supremely blessed, would receive humanity’s pious worship—whatever excels rightly deserves reverence—and all fear of divine power and anger would have been dispelled. We understand that anger and favor alike are excluded from a blessed and immortal nature; remove them, and no terrors threaten us from above. But to confirm this belief, the mind inquires into god’s form, life, and the activity and movement of his intelligence.

1.46 “As for form, nature partly instructs us, and reason partly teaches us. By nature, all of us in every nation conceive the gods in no form but the human. For what other form ever appears to anyone, awake or asleep? But lest everything be referred to our primary notions, reason itself demonstrates the same conclusion.

1.47 “For it seems fitting that the most excellent nature, whether by virtue of its blessedness or its eternity, should also be the most beautiful. What arrangement of limbs, what configuration of features, what shape or appearance can be more beautiful than the human? You Stoics, Lucilius—my friend Cotta takes now one side, now the other—when you portray divine workmanship and construction, regularly describe how everything in the human figure is adapted not only to use but also to beauty.

1.48 “If the human figure surpasses the form of all living creatures, and god is a living creature, surely his figure is the most beautiful of all. And since it is agreed that the gods are supremely blessed, while no one can be blessed without virtue, virtue cannot exist without reason, and reason can reside nowhere except in a human form, we must acknowledge that the gods have a human appearance.

- 1.49 “Yet this appearance is not body but something like body; it has not blood but something like blood. Although Epicurus’s discoveries here are too acute, and his account too subtle, for just anyone to grasp, I rely on your intelligence and discuss them more briefly than the subject requires. Epicurus, who not only sees hidden and deeply concealed things in his mind but handles them as though with his hand, teaches that the gods’ power and nature are perceived not by the senses but by the mind; not as something solid or numerically individual, like the things he calls solid bodies because of their firmness, but through images perceived in similarity and succession. An infinite appearance of closely similar images arises from innumerable indivisible particles and flows toward the gods; our mind, fixed and intent upon those images with the greatest pleasure, attains an understanding of what a blessed and eternal nature is.
- 1.50 “The supreme power of infinity is vast indeed, and most worthy of deep and attentive contemplation. We must understand its nature to be such that everything has its counterpart in a corresponding equal. Epicurus calls this *isonomia*, or equal distribution. From it follows this conclusion: if the multitude of mortals is so great, that of immortals is no smaller; and if the things that destroy are innumerable, those that preserve must also be infinite.
“You regularly ask us, Balbus, what the gods’ life is like and how they pass their time.”
- 1.51 “Clearly, it is a life than which nothing happier or richer in every blessing can be conceived. A god does nothing, is entangled in no occupations, undertakes no labor. He rejoices in his own wisdom and virtue, and knows with certainty that he will always enjoy pleasures at once supreme and eternal.
- 1.52 “We could rightly call this god blessed, but yours is burdened with work. If the universe itself is god, what can be less restful than revolving around the axis of heaven at astonishing speed without a moment’s interruption? Yet nothing without rest is blessed. Or if there is some god within the universe to direct and govern it, maintaining the courses of the stars, the changes of the seasons, the

succession and order of events, watching over land and sea to safeguard human lives and interests, he is certainly entangled in troublesome and laborious business.

- 1.53 “We, however, place the blessed life in peace of mind and freedom from every duty. The same teacher who taught us everything else taught us that the universe was produced by nature, with no need of a builder. This thing that you deny can be accomplished without divine skill is so easy that nature will produce, is producing, and has produced innumerable worlds. Because you cannot see how nature can accomplish this without some intelligence, like tragic poets unable to unravel their plot, you take refuge in a god.
- 1.54 “You would certainly not require his services if you saw the immensity of space, unbounded and limitless in every direction. Launching and stretching itself into that space, the mind travels so far and wide, yet never sees a final shore on which it can come to rest. In this immensity of breadth, length, and height, an infinite host of innumerable atoms flies about. Though void lies between them, they nevertheless cling to one another, catching hold and forming connections. From these arise the shapes and forms of things that you think cannot be produced without bellows and anvils. And so you have imposed upon our necks an everlasting master whom we must fear day and night. Who would not fear a god who foresees, thinks about, and observes everything, considers everything his concern, and is inquisitive and full of business?
- 1.55 “From this arose, first, your fated necessity, which you call *heimarmenē*: you say that whatever happens has flowed from eternal truth and an unbroken chain of causes. What value should we place on a philosophy that, like little old women—and uneducated ones at that—thinks everything happens by fate? Next comes your *mantikē*, called divination in Latin. If we were willing to listen to you, it would steep us in such superstition that we would have to revere inspectors of entrails, augurs, soothsayers, prophets, and interpreters of dreams.

- 1.56 “Freed by Epicurus from these terrors and restored to liberty, we do not fear beings whom we understand neither to devise any trouble for themselves nor to seek it for others; and we worship their excellent and preeminent nature with piety and holiness.
“But my enthusiasm has carried me away, and I fear I have spoken too long. Still, it was difficult to leave so great and splendid a subject unfinished once begun—though I should have thought less about speaking than about listening.”
- 1.57 Then Cotta, with his customary courtesy, said, “But, Velleius, if you had not said something, you certainly could have heard nothing from me. The reason something is true does not usually occur to me as readily as the reason it is false. That has often happened, and it happened just now as I listened to you. Ask me to describe the nature of the gods, and perhaps I shall give no answer. Ask whether I think it such as you have just described, and I shall say that nothing seems to me less likely.
“But before I approach the arguments you advanced, I shall tell you what I think of you yourself.
- 1.58 “I believe I often heard your friend Lucius Crassus place you unquestionably above all Romans, and compare few Greek Epicureans with you. But knowing how wonderfully fond of you he was, I thought his affection had made him speak too generously. Now, although I am reluctant to praise someone to his face, I judge that you have spoken clearly about an obscure and difficult subject, not merely with an abundance of thoughts but with a greater elegance of language than your school generally displays.
- 1.59 “When I was at Athens, I frequently heard Zeno, whom our friend Philo used to call the leader of the Epicurean chorus. Indeed, Philo himself advised me to do so—so that, I suppose, after hearing the leading Epicurean explain how their doctrines were argued, I could judge more easily how well they were refuted. He spoke not like most of them, but as you do: distinctly, weightily, elegant-

ly. Yet what often happened with him happened again just now as I listened to you: I was distressed that so great a talent—forgive my saying so—had fallen upon opinions so trivial, not to say so foolish.

1.60 “Nor shall I myself now offer anything better. As I said just now, on almost every subject, but especially in natural philosophy, I could more readily say what is not so than what is. Ask me what god is, or what he is like, and I shall take Simonides as my authority. When the tyrant Hiero asked him that very question, he requested one day to consider it. Asked again the next day, he requested two. When he repeatedly doubled the number of days and Hiero, in astonishment, asked why, he answered, ‘Because the longer I consider it, the more obscure the prospect seems to me.’ Simonides, I think—tradition makes him not only a delightful poet but in other respects learned and wise—had so many acute and subtle thoughts occur to him that, doubting which was truest, he despaired of finding truth at all.”

1.61 “But your Epicurus—for I prefer to debate with him rather than you—what does he say worthy not merely of philosophy but even of ordinary good sense? “In an inquiry into the nature of the gods, the first question is whether gods exist or not. ‘It is difficult to deny it.’ I grant that, if the question is asked before a public assembly; but in a conversation like this, in a gathering of friends, it is very easy. Thus I myself, a pontiff who believes that public ceremonies and religious observances must be guarded with the utmost reverence, should like to be thoroughly convinced of this first point, that gods exist, not merely as a matter of opinion but as an established truth. For many disturbing considerations arise, so that at times there seem to be no gods.

1.62 “But see how generously I deal with you. I shall not touch doctrines you share with other philosophers, such as this very one. Almost everyone, and I myself above all, believes that gods exist. So I do not contest it; nevertheless, I think the reasoning you offer insufficiently strong. You said that the belief of people of every nation and race was a powerful enough argument for admitting the gods’

existence. But that claim is not only weak in itself; it is also false. In the first place, how do you know the opinions of the nations? I believe there are many peoples so brutalized by savagery that they have no inkling of gods.

- 1.63 “Did not Diagoras, called the Atheist, and later Theodorus openly abolish divine existence? As for Protagoras of Abdera, whom you just mentioned, perhaps the greatest sophist of his time, he began a book with these words: ‘Concerning the gods, I cannot say either that they exist or that they do not exist.’ By order of the Athenians he was banished from their city and territory, and his books were burned in the assembly. This, I think, made many people more reluctant to profess such a view, since even doubt could not escape punishment. What shall we say of the sacrilegious, the impious, and the perjurers?

If ever Lucius Tubulus,

“If Lupus, Carbo, or Neptune’s son,

“as Lucilius says, had thought there were gods, would he have been so perjured or so corrupt?

- 1.64 “So this argument is not as well established as it seems for confirming your position. But since other philosophers share it, I shall leave it aside for the present. I would rather come to doctrines peculiar to your school.

- 1.65 “I grant that gods exist. Teach me, then, where they come from, where they are, what they are like in body, mind, and life; these are the things I want to know. For every purpose you abuse the sovereign freedom of your atoms. From them you fashion and produce whatever comes into your head, as the saying goes. But in the first place there are no atoms. For nothing [...] is empty of body, and every place is occupied by bodies; thus there is no void, and nothing can be indivisible.

- 1.66 “I am now pouring out the oracles of natural philosophers. Whether they are true or false I do not know, but they are nevertheless more like the truth than yours. Those scandalous claims of Democritus—or of Leucippus before him—that there are tiny bodies, some smooth, others rough, some round, others

angular and hooked, some curved and, as it were, crooked; and that heaven and earth were produced from these, with no compelling natural power, but through a kind of chance collision: this is the opinion you, Gaius Velleius, have maintained to your present age. Anyone would sooner dislodge you from the whole settled course of your life than from that authority. For you decided that you ought to be an Epicurean before you learned these doctrines. Thus you had either to take these scandals into your mind or surrender the name of the philosophy you had adopted.

1.67 “What reward would induce you to stop being an Epicurean? ‘None,’ you say, ‘that would make me abandon the principle of a happy life and the truth.’ So this is the truth? About the happy life I make no objection, though you think even a god cannot have one unless he positively languishes in idleness. But where is the truth? In the innumerable worlds, I suppose, some coming into being and others falling apart at every tiniest instant of time? Or in indivisible particles shaping such magnificent works with no directing nature, no reason? But I am forgetting the generosity with which I began to treat you just now, and taking in too much. Let me grant, then, that everything consists of indivisible particles. What follows for our subject?

1.68 “For our inquiry concerns the nature of the gods. Let them be made of atoms, by all means; then they are not eternal. †Whatever is made of atoms came into being at some time. If the gods came into being, there were no gods before they were born; and if gods have a beginning, they must also have an end, as you yourself argued just now about Plato’s universe. Where, then, is your ‘blessed and eternal,’ the two words by which you define god? When you try to establish this, you crawl into a thicket. For you said that in god there is not body but something like body, not blood but something like blood.

1.69 “You very often do this: when you say something improbable and wish to escape criticism, you introduce something that cannot possibly happen at all. It would have been better to concede the very point in dispute than to resist so shamelessly. Thus Epicurus saw that if atoms moved downward by their own

weight, nothing would be in our power, since their motion would be fixed and necessary. He discovered a way to escape necessity, something Democritus had evidently overlooked: an atom, he said, while carried straight downward by its weight and heaviness, swerves a little.

1.70 “It is more disgraceful to say this than to be unable to defend the position he wants. He does the same against the logicians. They teach that in every disjunction of the form ‘either yes or no,’ one alternative is true. He feared that if some statement such as ‘Epicurus will either be alive tomorrow or not be alive’ were granted, one alternative would become necessary; so he denied the necessity of the entire ‘either yes or no.’ What could be more obtuse? Arcesilaus pressed Zeno, maintaining himself that all sensory appearances were false, while Zeno said some appearances were false, not all. Epicurus feared that if one appearance were false, none would be true, and declared all the senses messengers of truth. None of this, except †very much; he took a heavier blow to ward off a lighter one.”

1.71 “He does the same with the nature of the gods. To avoid a combination of indivisible bodies, lest dissolution and dispersal follow, he denies that the gods have body, giving them something like body, and not blood but something like blood. People think it remarkable that one inspector of entrails does not laugh when he sees another. Is that more remarkable than your ability to keep from laughing among yourselves? ‘It is not body, but something like body.’ I could understand what that meant if it were modeled in wax or clay figures; what something like body or something like blood means in a god I cannot understand. Neither can you, Velleius; you merely refuse to admit it.

1.72 “You repeat like dictated lessons the things Epicurus dreamed up while yawning, though he boasted, as we see in his writings, that he had no teacher. I should readily believe that even without his boasting, just as I would believe the owner of a badly built house who boasted that he had employed no architect. For there is not a trace here of the Academy, not a trace of the Lyceum, not even of a child’s schooling. He could have heard Xenocrates—what a man, immortal

gods!—and some think he did. He himself denies it; I believe him—I could believe no one more. He says he heard a certain Pamphilus, a pupil of Plato, at Samos. As a young man he lived there with his father and brothers, because his father Neocles had gone there to obtain an allotment of land; but since the little farm did not support him adequately, I suppose, he became a schoolmaster.

1.73 “But Epicurus treats this Platonist with extraordinary contempt, so afraid is he of seeming ever to have learned anything. In Nausiphanes, the follower of Democritus, he is caught: though he does not deny having heard him, he assails him with every insult. Yet if he had not heard these doctrines of Democritus, what had he heard? What in Epicurus’s natural philosophy does not come from Democritus? Though he changed certain things, such as the swerve of atoms I mentioned a little while ago, he repeats most of the same doctrines: atoms, void, images, infinite space, innumerable worlds, their birth and destruction—almost everything that constitutes an account of nature.

“Now what do you understand by that ‘something like body’ and ‘something like blood’?

1.74 “I not only acknowledge that you know these things better than I do; I willingly accept it. But once they have been stated, why should Velleius be able to understand what Cotta cannot? I understand what body is, what blood is; what something like body and something like blood are, I do not understand in the least. You are not hiding it from me as Pythagoras used to hide things from outsiders, or deliberately speaking obscurely like Heraclitus. Between ourselves, you do not understand it either.

1.75 “I see that you struggle to establish some appearance of the gods that has nothing compact, solid, defined, or projecting, but is pure, smooth, and translucent. We shall therefore say the same as of the Venus of Cos: that is not a body but a likeness of a body, and the blush spread there and mingled with white is not blood but a kind of likeness of blood. So too in Epicurus’s god there are not realities but likenesses of realities.

“Suppose I am persuaded of something that cannot even be understood. Give me the outlines and forms of those shadowy gods of yours.

1.76 “You have no shortage of arguments here to prove that the gods’ forms are human. First, our minds have received the conception and anticipation that when a person thinks of god, a human form occurs to him. Next, since divine nature excels everything, its form too must be the most beautiful, and no form is more beautiful than the human. Your third argument is that no other figure can house a mind.

1.77 “First, then, consider the worth of each argument. You seem to seize as though by right upon something in no way probable.

“To begin with, who was ever so blind in contemplating things as not to see that these human appearances were assigned to the gods either by a deliberate plan of wise men, to turn the minds of the ignorant more easily from a corrupt life to divine worship, or through superstition, so that people might have images whose veneration they believed brought them into the presence of the gods themselves? Poets, painters, and craftsmen strengthened the practice: it was not easy to represent gods acting and undertaking things while maintaining the likeness of other forms.

“Perhaps the belief that nothing seems more beautiful to a human being than another human being also contributed. But do you not see, as a natural philosopher, what a flattering matchmaker nature is, almost a procurer on her own behalf? Do you think there is any beast on land or sea that does not take greatest pleasure in a beast of its own kind? Otherwise, why does a bull not yearn to touch a mare, a horse a cow? Do you think an eagle, a lion, or a dolphin prefers any figure to its own? What wonder, then, if nature has taught human beings in the same way to think nothing more beautiful than a human being? [...] that this is why we thought the gods resembled humans. What do you think? If beasts possessed reason, would not each kind have assigned the highest rank to its own species?

1.78 “Yet, by Hercules, I myself—to speak my mind—however much I love myself, do not dare say I am more beautiful than the bull that carried Europa. For we are not now discussing our intellectual gifts or our speeches, but appearance and shape. But if we chose to invent and combine forms, like that sea creature Triton in the paintings, borne along with swimming beasts joined to his human body, you would not want to be one. I am in a difficult position: nature’s power is so great that no human wishes to resemble anything but a human—and no ant anything but an ant.

1.79 “Yet what human? How few are beautiful! When I was in Athens, scarcely one could be found in each company of young men. I see why you smiled, but that is nevertheless the truth. Besides, we who, with the approval of ancient philosophers, take delight in young men, often find even their defects pleasing. Alcaeus delights in a mole on a boy’s knuckle. But a mole is a blemish on the body; to him, nevertheless, it seemed a beauty mark. Quintus Catulus, father of our friend and colleague, loved your fellow townsman Roscius, and wrote these lines about him:

I stood, by chance, greeting the rising Dawn,
“When suddenly, at my left, Roscius arose.
“With your permission, heavenly ones, let me say it:

“A mortal seemed more beautiful than a god.
“To him, more beautiful than a god; yet Roscius then had, as he has today, the
most badly crossed eyes. What did it matter, if that very feature seemed
piquant and charming to Catulus?

1.80 “I return to the gods. Do we think any of them, if not so cross-eyed, at least slightly squinting? Do any have a mole, a snub nose, drooping ears, a bulging forehead, a big head—features found among us? Or is everything in them flawless? Let that be granted. But do they also all have one face? If there are several, one must be more beautiful than another, and therefore some god is not

supremely beautiful. If they all have one face, the Academy must flourish in heaven: for if god differs in no respect from god, the gods possess no knowledge, no certain apprehension.”

- 1.81 “But what if that claim of yours is completely false, Velleius—that when we think about god no form but the human comes before us? Will you still defend such absurdities? Perhaps the thought does occur to us as you say. From childhood we have known Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Neptune, Vulcan, Apollo, and the other gods with whatever faces painters and sculptors chose to give them; and not faces alone, but adornment, age, and dress. Yet this is not true of the Egyptians, the Syrians, or almost the whole non-Greek world. You would find their beliefs about certain beasts more firmly held than ours about the most sacred temples and images of the gods.
- 1.82 “We see many shrines plundered and images of gods removed by our people from their holiest sites; but no one has ever even heard of an Egyptian harming a crocodile, an ibis, or a cat. What do you think, then? Does not Apis, the Egyptians’ sacred bull, seem a god to the Egyptians? By Hercules, just as surely as your own Juno the Savior seems one to you. You never see her, even in dreams, without a goatskin, spear, little shield, and shoes with upturned toes. Yet neither Argive nor Roman Juno is like that. Thus the Argives have one image of Juno and the people of Lanuvium another. We too have one image of Capitoline Jupiter, and the Africans another of Jupiter Ammon.
- 1.83 “Is a natural philosopher, an observer and tracker of nature, not ashamed to seek testimony to truth from minds steeped in habit? On that principle we could say that Jupiter is always bearded, Apollo always beardless, Minerva’s eyes gray-blue, and Neptune’s blue. We also praise the Vulcan made by Alcamenas at Athens: in that standing, clothed figure, his lameness is slightly apparent but not ugly. Shall we therefore have a lame god because that is the account of Vulcan we have received? Come, do we also make the gods bear the names we use for them?

1.84 “In the first place, there are as many divine names as human languages. Unlike you, who are Velleius wherever you go, Vulcan does not have the same name in Italy, Africa, and Spain. Then again, the number of names is not great even in our pontifical books, whereas the gods are innumerable. Are they nameless? You must certainly say so. What point is there in several names when there is only one face? How much better, Velleius, to admit that you do not know what you do not know, rather than pour out this nonsense until you feel sick and disgusted with yourself! Do you think god resembles me or you? Surely you do not.

“What, then? Am I to call the sun, moon, or heaven a god? Then it is also blessed: what pleasures does it enjoy? And wise: how can wisdom exist in a lump like that?”

1.85 “Those are your arguments. If, then, neither in human [...] as I have shown, nor in some such form, as you are convinced, why hesitate to deny that gods exist? You do not dare. Sensibly enough—though here you fear not the people but the gods themselves. I have known Epicureans who revered every little image. Yet I see that some think Epicurus left the gods in place in words, to avoid offending the Athenians, but abolished them in reality. Thus, among those selected, brief pronouncements of his that you call *kyriai doxai*, or Principal Doctrines, the first, I believe, is this: ‘Whatever is blessed and immortal neither has any trouble nor causes any to anyone.’ Some think he deliberately worded this pronouncement as he did, though he did so simply from an inability to express himself.

1.86 “They judge badly of a man who was anything but cunning. It is uncertain whether he says that something blessed and immortal exists, or that if something does exist, it has that character. They fail to observe that, although he spoke ambiguously here, in many other places both he and Metrodorus spoke as openly as you did a little while ago. He really does believe gods exist; and I have never seen anyone more afraid of the very things he said should not be feared—I mean death and the gods. Ordinary people are not greatly disturbed by them, yet he cries out that they terrify every mortal mind. So many thou-

sands practice robbery with death before their eyes, while others plunder every shrine they can: presumably fear of death terrifies the former, and fear of religion the latter!

“But since you do not dare—for now I shall address Epicurus himself—to deny that gods exist, what prevents you from numbering the sun, the universe, or some eternal mind among the gods?

1.87 “‘I have never seen,’ he says, ‘a soul possessing reason and judgment in any form but the human.’ Well, have you seen anything like the sun, the moon, or the five wandering stars? The sun completes its yearly courses, bounding its movement by the two extremes of a single circuit. The moon, kindled by its rays, completes the same circuit within a month. The five planets, keeping to the same circuit, some nearer the earth and others farther away, cover the same distances from the same starting points in unequal times. Have you seen anything like that, Epicurus?

1.88 “Then let there be no sun, moon, or stars, since nothing can exist except what we have touched or seen. What about god himself? Have you seen him? Why, then, believe he exists? Let us abolish everything new that history or reason brings before us. On that principle, inland peoples must not believe the sea exists. Such narrowness of mind means that if you had been born on Seriphos and had never left the island, where you had often seen little hares and foxes, you would not believe in lions and panthers when told what they were like; and if someone spoke of an elephant, you would even think you were being mocked.

1.89 “You, Velleius, did not follow your school’s practice, but that of the logicians—a tribe of whom your people know absolutely nothing—and drew your conclusion through a tightly constrained argument. You assumed that the gods are blessed: we grant it. That no one can be blessed without virtue: we grant that too, and willingly. That virtue cannot exist without reason: that too must be agreed. You add that reason exists only in human form. Who do you think will grant you that? If that were so, why did you need to reach it step by step? You

could have assumed it on your own authority. And what sort of step-by-step argument is this? I see that you came by steps from blessedness to virtue, from virtue to reason. But how do you get from reason to human form? That is plunging headlong, not descending a stair.

- 1.90 “Nor do I understand why Epicurus preferred to say that gods resemble humans rather than humans gods. You will ask what difference it makes: if this resembles that, that resembles this. I see the point, but what I mean is that the design of the form did not pass from humans to gods. The gods have always existed and were never born, if indeed they are to be eternal; humans, however, were born. Thus human form existed before humans, and the immortal gods possessed that form. Their form should therefore not be called human; ours should be called divine.

“But let that be as you please. My question is this: what extraordinary stroke of luck—for you maintain that nothing in nature”

- 1.91 “was made by reason—yet what vast accident, what fortunate collision of atoms, caused humans suddenly to be born in the form of gods? Are we to think that divine seeds fell from heaven to earth, and humans arose resembling their fathers? I wish you would say so; I would gladly acknowledge kinship with the gods. You say nothing of the kind, but that chance made us resemble the gods. And now we must seek arguments to refute this! If only I could discover truths as easily as I can expose falsehoods!

“You listed from memory, and at length, the philosophers’ opinions on the nature of the gods from Thales of Miletus onward, so that I was delighted to marvel at such learning in a Roman.

- 1.92 “Did all those who held that god could exist without hands and feet seem mad to you?

“Does not even consideration of the usefulness and fitness of human limbs lead you to judge that the gods have no need of human limbs? What use are feet without walking, hands if nothing needs grasping, or the rest of that arrangement of all the bodily parts, in which nothing is idle, causeless, or superfluous?

No art can imitate nature's skill. Shall god then have a tongue and never speak, teeth, palate, and throat for no use, and those parts nature attached to the body for procreation to no purpose? The same applies no less to the internal than to the external organs: heart, lungs, liver, and the rest. Apart from their usefulness, what beauty do they possess, since you insist that they exist in god for beauty's sake?

1.93 “Relying on dreams like these, not only did Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Hermarchus argue against Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles, but even the little courtesan Leontium dared to write against Theophrastus—in polished Attic, certainly, but still! Such license prevailed in Epicurus's Garden. And you people are always complaining. Zeno even used to quarrel; why mention Albucius? Nothing could be more refined or gracious than Phaedrus, yet the old man would grow angry if I said anything rather sharp. All this when Epicurus assailed Aristotle with the most insulting abuse, reviled Phaedo the Socratic most shamefully, and devoted whole volumes to tearing apart Timocrates, brother of his companion Metrodorus, because he differed on some point of philosophy! He was ungrateful to Democritus himself, whom he followed, and treated his teacher Nausiphanes, from whom he had learned something, so badly. Zeno struck with insults not only his contemporaries, Apollodorus Sillis and the rest, but Socrates himself, the father of philosophy: using a Latin word, he called him an Attic buffoon, and he never called Chrysippus anything but ‘Chrysippa.’

1.94 “You yourself just now, while reciting what was almost a senate of philosophers, called the greatest men fools, madmen, lunatics. If none of them saw the truth about divine nature, we must fear that there is no divine nature at all. “For your own assertions are pure invention, scarcely worthy of little old women's midnight musings. You do not perceive how many obligations you must undertake if you persuade us to grant that humans and gods have the same form. Every care and tending of the body that humans require must also be assigned to god: walking, running, reclining, bending, sitting, grasping, and ultimately even conversation and speech.

- 1.95 “And since you say there are both male and female gods, you see what follows. I truly cannot wonder enough where your great founder got these opinions.
“But you never stop crying out that we must hold fast to this: god is blessed and immortal. What prevents him from being blessed if he is not two-footed? Or that state, whether we should call it *beatitas* or *beatitudo*, Latin words for blessedness—both words are certainly awkward, but we must soften words through use—whatever it is, why can it not belong to that sun, this universe, or some eternal mind without bodily shape or limbs?
- 1.96 “You say nothing but, ‘I have never seen a blessed sun or universe.’ Well, have you ever seen any universe besides this one? You will say no. Why, then, did you dare assert that there are not six hundred thousand universes but innumerable ones? ‘Reason taught me.’ Will reason not teach you this, then? Since we seek the most excellent nature, blessed and eternal—the only divine nature—as that nature surpasses us in immortality, so it surpasses us in excellence of mind, and in body as in mind. Why, then, when we are inferior in everything else, are we equal in form? Human virtue came nearer to resembling the gods than did the human figure.
- 1.97 “Can anything be more childish—to press the same point a little longer—than to say that the kinds of beasts born in the Red Sea or India do not exist? Yet even the most inquisitive people cannot, by investigation, hear of as many things as actually exist on land, in the sea, in marshes and rivers. Shall we deny their existence because we have never seen them?
“And the resemblance itself, which pleases you most, is utterly irrelevant. Does a dog not resemble a wolf? And, as Ennius says, ‘How like us is the ape, that ugliest of beasts!’ Yet their characters differ. No beast is wiser than an elephant;
- 1.98 “but what has a more ungainly shape? I speak of beasts; among humans themselves, do we not find unlike characters in very similar forms, and unlike forms in people whose characters agree?

“Indeed, Velleius, once we adopt this sort of argument, consider where it spreads. You assumed that reason could exist only in a human form. Another will assume that it can exist only in an earthly creature, one that was born, grew up, learned, consists of a soul and a frail, perishable body—in short, only in a human and mortal being. If you resist on all these points, why should form alone trouble you? You saw reason and intelligence in humans joined to all the conditions I listed. Remove them, and you still say you recognize god, provided the outlines remain. This is not considering what to say, but almost casting lots for it.

1.99 “Unless perhaps you fail to notice even this: not merely in a human but even in a tree, whatever is superfluous or useless is a hindrance. How troublesome to have one finger too many! Why? Because five need no extra one, either for appearance or use. But your god has not merely one superfluous finger, but a head, neck, nape, sides, belly, back, backs of the knees, hands, feet, thighs, and shins. If he is to be immortal, what do these limbs contribute to life? What does his face itself contribute? The brain, heart, lungs, and liver matter more, for these are the homes of life; the configuration of the face has nothing to do with life’s endurance.

1.100 “And you censured those who, on seeing magnificent and splendid works—the universe itself, its parts, heaven, earth, and seas, and their adornments, sun, moon, and stars—and on recognizing the ripening seasons, their changes and successions, inferred that some excellent and preeminent nature existed, which had made these things and moved, directed, and governed them. Even if their inference goes astray, I can still see what they are pursuing. But what great and outstanding work do you possess that seems the product of a divine mind, from which you infer the gods’ existence? ‘I had,’ you say, ‘a certain conception of god implanted in my mind.’ Yes, a bearded Jupiter and a helmeted Minerva! Do you therefore think they really are like that?”

- 1.101 “How much better the uneducated multitude handles this! They assign god not merely human limbs but the use of those limbs. They give him bow, arrows, spear, shield, trident, and thunderbolt; and although they do not see what the gods’ activities are, they cannot conceive of a god doing nothing. The Egyptians themselves, whom people ridicule, consecrated no beast except for some benefit they received from it. Ibises, for instance, destroy a vast number of snakes: they are tall birds, with stiff legs and a long, horny beak. They avert a plague from Egypt by killing and devouring the winged snakes carried on the southwest wind from the Libyan wilderness, so that those snakes do no harm either by biting when alive or by their stench when dead. I could discuss the usefulness of mongooses, crocodiles, and cats, but I do not wish to speak at length. I shall conclude thus: at least those peoples consecrated beasts for their benefits, whereas of your gods no benefit is evident, nor even any deed at all.
- 1.102 “‘He has no business,’ Epicurus says. Certainly, like pampered children, Epicurus thinks nothing better than idleness. Yet even children, when idle, enjoy some playful exercise. Do we want god so completely on holiday, so numbed by idleness, that if he stirs we fear he may cease to be blessed? This reasoning not only strips the gods of divine movement and action, but makes human beings idle too, if not even god can be blessed while doing anything.
- 1.103 “But let god, as you wish, be the figure and image of a human. What is his dwelling, his abode, his location? What, then, is his manner of life, and what makes him blessed, as you insist he is? For anyone who is to be blessed must use and enjoy his own good things. Even substances without life each have their own proper place: earth occupies the lowest, water floods over it, a higher region belongs to air, and the highest realm is assigned to ethereal fires. Of beasts, some live on land, some in water, others have a double life in both habitats; and some are even thought to be born in fire, and are often seen flying about in blazing furnaces.

- 1.104 “So I ask, first, where your god lives; next, what causes him to move from his place, if indeed he ever moves; then, since it is characteristic of living creatures to seek something suited to their nature, what god seeks, and to what end he employs the movement of his mind and reason; finally, how he is blessed and how eternal. Whichever of these points you touch is a sore: so ill-founded an account can find no way out.
- 1.105 “For this is what you said: god’s appearance is perceived by thought, not by sense; it has no solidity, nor does it remain numerically the same; our vision of it is such that it is discerned through similarity and succession, and the arrival of similar images from infinite bodies never fails; and so our mind, intent upon them, considers that nature blessed and everlasting. By the very gods we are discussing, what can this mean? If they affect thought alone and have no solidity or projection, what difference does it make whether we think of a centaur or a god? Every other philosopher calls such a mental formation an empty movement; you call it the arrival and entry of images into the mind.
- 1.106 “Thus, when I seem to see Tiberius Gracchus addressing an assembly on the Capitol and bringing forward the voting urn concerning Marcus Octavius, I call that an empty movement of the mind. You, however, say that images of Gracchus and Octavius remain, and when they have reached the Capitol they are conveyed to my mind. You say the same happens with god: our minds are struck by his frequently recurring appearance, and from this he is understood to be blessed and eternal.
- 1.107 “Suppose there are images that strike the mind. Only a certain appearance is presented; is the reason why it is blessed or eternal presented too?
 “And what are these images of yours, or where do they come from? This license comes entirely from Democritus; but he has been criticized by many, and you cannot find a way out: the whole thing wavers and limps. What could be less acceptable than that images of everyone strike me—Homer, Archilochus, Romulus, Numa, Pythagoras, Plato—and not in the form they actually had? How, then, are they images of those people? And images of whom? Aristotle

teaches that the poet Orpheus never existed, and they say that this Orphic poem belonged to a certain Cercon, a Pythagorean. Yet Orpheus—or his image, as you would have it—often comes before my mind.

1.108 “What of the fact that different images of the same person enter my mind and yours? What of images of things that never existed and never could, such as Scylla and the Chimaera? What of people, places, and cities we have never seen? What of an image’s appearing as soon as I wish? What of their coming unbidden even to a sleeper? The whole thing, Velleius, is nonsense. You force images not only upon our eyes but upon our minds: such is your impunity in chattering. And what license you take!

1.109 “‘There is a succession of visions flowing in rapid sequence, so that one appears out of many.’ I would be ashamed to say I do not understand, if you who defend this understood it yourselves. How do you prove that images arrive continuously? Or, if continuously, how eternally? ‘The innumerable multitude of atoms supplies them,’ he says. Will that same multitude, then, make everything everlasting? You take refuge in equilibrium—let us use that word, if you please, for isonomia—and say that because mortal nature exists, immortal nature must also exist. By that reasoning, since humans are mortal, let there be some immortals; and since they are born on land, let them also be born in water. ‘And because there are things that destroy, let there be things that preserve.’ By all means, but let them preserve things that exist. I do not perceive that those gods of yours exist.

1.110 “And how does all that imagery of things arise from indivisible bodies? Even if those bodies existed—and they do not—they might perhaps strike one another and be driven about by collision; they could not create form, shape, color, or life. So in no way do you establish an immortal god.

“Let us now consider his blessedness. Certainly it cannot exist without virtue; but virtue is active, and your god does nothing. Therefore he has no virtue;”

- 1.111 “and so he is not blessed either. What life, then, does he have? ‘A supply,’ you say, ‘of good things, with no intrusion of evils.’ But what good things? Pleasures, I suppose—bodily ones, naturally. For you recognize no pleasure of the mind except what originates in the body and returns to it. I do not suppose you wish to resemble the other Epicureans who are ashamed of certain sayings of Epicurus, in which he declares that he cannot even understand any good apart from luxurious and obscene pleasures. Without blushing, he pursues them all by name.
- 1.112 “What food, then, what drinks, what varieties of sounds or flowers, what touches and scents will you offer the gods to bathe them in pleasure? The poets at least prepare nectar, ambrosia, and feasts, with Juventas, Youth, or Ganymede serving the cups. But what will you do, Epicurus? I cannot see either where your god gets these things or how he uses them. Human nature, then, has richer resources for living happily than divine nature, because it enjoys more kinds of pleasure.
- 1.113 “But you think those pleasures rather slight, which apply a sort of tickling—Epicurus’s own word—to the senses. How long will you trifle with us? Even our friend Philo could not bear to hear Epicureans disdain soft and luxurious pleasures. With his extraordinary memory he used to recite many sayings of Epicurus in the very words in which they were written. He also quoted many still more shameless statements of Metrodorus, Epicurus’s colleague in wisdom. Metrodorus accuses his brother Timocrates of hesitating to measure everything belonging to a happy life by the belly; he says this not once but repeatedly. I see you nodding: you know these passages. If you denied them, I would bring out the books. I am not now criticizing the reference of everything to pleasure—that is another inquiry—but showing that your gods have no share in pleasure, and thus, by your own judgment, are not even blessed. ‘But they are free from pain.’

- 1.114 “Is that enough for the supremely blessed life overflowing with good things? ‘He thinks continually,’ they say, ‘that he is blessed: he has nothing else to turn over in his mind.’ Conceive him, then, in your mind and set him before your eyes: a god who through all eternity thinks of nothing but ‘I am doing splendidly’ and ‘I am blessed.’ Yet I cannot see how that blessed god avoids fearing destruction, when he is struck and shaken without any interruption by the everlasting onrush of atoms, and images are always flowing from him. Thus your god is neither blessed nor eternal.
- 1.115 “But Epicurus even wrote books about holiness and piety toward the gods.’ Yet how does he speak in them? You would say you were hearing Tiberius Coruncanius or Publius Scaevola, chief pontiffs, not someone who utterly uprooted religion and overthrew the immortal gods’ temples and altars, not with his hands like Xerxes, but with arguments. Why say that gods should be worshipped by humans, when the gods not only pay no regard to humans but care about nothing and do nothing at all?
- 1.116 “But theirs is a certain exceptional and preeminent nature, which by itself should draw the wise man to worship it.’ Can there be anything exceptional in a nature that rejoices in its own pleasure and will never do anything, does nothing now, and has never done anything? Again, what piety is owed to one from whom you have received nothing? What can possibly be owed to one who has done no service? Piety is justice toward the gods; but what bond of justice can exist between us and them, when humans have no fellowship with god? Holiness, in turn, is knowledge of how to worship the gods. I do not understand why they should be worshipped when we have neither received nor expect any good from them.
- 1.117 “And why should we revere the gods out of admiration for a nature in which we see nothing outstanding?
 “As for freeing people from superstition, as you regularly boast of doing, that is easy once you have removed all divine power. Unless perhaps you think Diagoras or Theodorus, who denied the gods’ existence altogether, could have

been superstitious? I do not think even Protagoras could, though he was permitted neither alternative, neither that gods exist nor that they do not. The opinions of all these men remove not only superstition, which contains an empty fear of the gods, but religion as well, which consists in their pious worship.

1.118 “What of those who said that the entire belief in the immortal gods was invented by wise men for the republic’s sake, so that religion might bring to duty those whom reason could not? Did they not utterly uproot all religion? What religion, again, did Prodicus of Ceos leave, when he said that things beneficial to human life had been counted among the gods?

1.119 “What of those who relate that brave, famous, or powerful men became gods after death, and that these are the very beings we habitually worship, pray to, and revere? Are they not devoid of all religion? This theory was developed especially by Euhemerus, whom our Ennius both translated and followed more than anyone else. Euhemerus points out even the deaths and burial places of the gods. Does he seem, then, to have strengthened religion, or to have abolished it completely? I leave aside holy and august Eleusis, ‘where peoples from the farthest shores are initiated’; I pass over Samothrace and those rites on Lemnos that ‘are secretly celebrated by night, thickly enclosed by woodland hedges.’ When these are explained and reduced to a rational account, we come to know the nature of things rather than that of the gods.

1.120 “Even Democritus, a man of the first rank, from whose springs Epicurus watered his little gardens, seems to me unsteady on the nature of the gods. At one time he thinks images endowed with divinity exist throughout the universe; at another he calls the elements of mind in that same universe gods; then he speaks of living images that regularly benefit or harm us, then of certain vast images so immense that they embrace the whole universe from outside. All these notions are more worthy of Democritus’s native town than of Democritus himself;

1.121 “for who can conceive those images in his mind, who can admire them, who can judge them worthy of worship or religious devotion?

“But Epicurus tore religion out of human minds by the roots when he deprived the immortal gods of both helpfulness and good will. Although he says that god’s nature is the best and most excellent, he also denies that god possesses good will, taking away what belongs most properly to the best and most excellent nature. For what is better or more excellent than goodness and beneficence? By insisting that god lacks these, you insist that no one, god or human, is dear to god, that no one is loved or cherished by him. Thus not only are humans neglected by gods, but the gods themselves neglect one another. How much better are the Stoics, whom you criticize! They hold that the wise are friends of the wise even when they have never met. Nothing is more lovable than virtue, and whoever has attained it, wherever in the world he may be, will be loved by us.

1.122 “But what harm you do when you locate kindness and benevolence in weakness! To leave aside the power and nature of the gods, do you think even humans would never have been generous and kind if they had not been weak? Is there no natural affection among the good? The very word ‘dear’ speaks of love, from whose Latin name, amor, the name for friendship, amicitia, is derived. If we refer friendship to our own profit, not to the advantage of the person we love, it will be no friendship but a kind of trade in benefits to ourselves. Meadows, fields, and herds of cattle are loved that way, because we reap a profit from them; human affection and friendship are freely given. How much more so, then, is the love of the gods, who need nothing, love one another, and care for humans! If that is not so, why do we revere the gods, why pray to them? Why do pontiffs preside over sacrifices and augurs over auspices? What do we ask of the immortal gods, what do we vow? ‘But Epicurus even has a book On Holiness.’

1.123 “We are being made fools of by a man less distinguished for wit than for the freedom with which he writes whatever he likes. What holiness can there be if the gods have no concern for human affairs? And what living nature can care

for nothing? Surely the truer view is what Posidonius, the friend of us all, argued in the fifth book of *On the Nature of the Gods*: Epicurus thought no gods existed, and said what he did about the immortal gods merely to avert hostility. For he would not have been so foolish as to fashion a god like a little human being, with only the outer outlines and no solid substance, endowed with every human limb but not the slightest use of those limbs, a thin, translucent being who gives nothing to anyone, shows no kindness, and has absolutely no concern or activity. First, such a nature cannot exist at all; seeing this, Epicurus abolishes the gods in reality while leaving them in his account.

- 1.124 “Next, even supposing god is such as to feel no good will, no affection for humans, let him go his way! Why should I say, ‘May he be gracious’? He can be gracious to no one, since, as you say, all good will and affection belong to weakness.”

Book 2



- 2.1 When Cotta had finished, Velleius said, “How rash I was to attempt a contest with an Academic who is also an orator! I should have had no great fear of an Academic without eloquence, or of an orator, however eloquent, without that philosophy. A torrent of empty words does not trouble me, nor do subtle arguments if their expression is dry. But you, Cotta, were powerful in both; all you lacked were an audience and a jury. Still, we can return to this another time. For now, let us hear Lucilius, if it suits him.”
- 2.2 Then Balbus said, “For my part, I should rather hear Cotta again, provided he uses the same eloquence to establish the true gods that he used to demolish the false ones. As a philosopher, as a pontiff, and as Cotta, he ought to hold a view of the immortal gods that is not wavering and uncertain, like the Academics’, but firm and settled, like ours. Enough and more than enough has been said against Epicurus. But I am eager to hear what you yourself believe, Cotta.”
- “Have you forgotten,” he answered, “what I said at the outset—that I could more easily say what I did not believe than what I did, especially on such questions? Even if I had reached some clear conclusion, I should still want to hear you in your turn, after saying so much myself.”

- 2.3 Then Balbus said, “I shall oblige you and be as brief as I can. The exposure of Epicurus’ errors has, in fact, cut a long stretch out of my argument. Our school divides the whole inquiry into the immortal gods into four parts. First they show that gods exist; next, what they are like; then, that they govern the world; and finally, that they care for human affairs. In this conversation let us take the first two; the third and fourth are larger questions, and I think we should postpone them to another time.”
- “Certainly not,” said Cotta. “We have leisure, and the matters we are discussing deserve precedence even over business.”
- 2.4 Then Lucilius said, “The first part hardly seems to need an argument. When we look up at the sky and contemplate the heavens, what could be more evident, more unmistakable, than that some divine power of surpassing intelligence governs them? If that were not so, how could Ennius have said, with everyone’s assent, ‘Look at this shining height, which all invoke as Jupiter’—and called him Jupiter indeed, ruler of all things, guiding everything by his movement, and, as Ennius also says, ‘father of gods and men,’ a god present among us and supreme in power? If anyone doubts this, I can scarcely understand why he should not equally doubt whether the sun exists or not.
- 2.5 “For how is the one more evident than the other? Unless our minds had grasped and understood this truth, the conviction would not remain so firm, would not be strengthened by the passage of time, and could not have grown old with the centuries and generations of humanity. We see that other opinions, false inventions without substance, have withered away over time. Who believes that a centaur or the Chimaera ever existed? What old woman could be found so witless as to fear those monsters in the underworld that people once believed in? Time erases the fictions of opinion; it confirms the judgments of nature.
- 2.6 “Thus among our own people and among others, worship of the gods and reverence for religion grow greater and better every day. This does not happen blindly or by chance, but because the gods often reveal their power in person.

At Lake Regillus, during the Latin war, when the dictator Aulus Postumius fought Octavius Mamilius of Tusculum, Castor and Pollux were seen fighting on horseback in our line. In more recent memory those same sons of Tyndareus announced the defeat of Perseus. Publius Vatinius, the grandfather of the young man we know, was traveling to Rome by night from the prefecture of Reate when two young men on white horses told him that King Perseus had been captured that day. When he reported this to the senate, he was at first thrown into prison for making a reckless statement about public affairs. Later, when a letter arrived from Paulus and the date proved to be the same, the senate rewarded him with land and exemption from public service. Again, tradition records that when the Locrians defeated the people of Croton in a great battle at the river Sagra, news of the battle was heard that very day at the games at Olympia. Often the voices of Fauns have been heard; often gods have appeared in visible form, compelling anyone who was neither dull-witted nor impious to acknowledge their presence.

2.7 “And predictions and foreknowledge of the future—what else do they reveal but that coming events are shown, signaled, foreshadowed, and foretold to human beings? Hence the Latin *ostenta*, *monstra*, *portenta*, and *prodigia*, from *ostendi*, *monstrari*, *portendi*, and *praedici*: being shown, signaled, foreshadowed, and foretold. Suppose we consider Mopsus, Tiresias, Amphiaraus, Calchas, and Helenus inventions of poetic license—though even myths would not have adopted them as diviners if the facts had altogether ruled divination out. Shall we not learn even from examples at home and acknowledge the power of the gods? Will the recklessness of Publius Clodius in the First Punic War leave us unmoved? Mocking the gods even in jest, when the sacred chickens released from their cage would not feed, he ordered them plunged into water: since they would not eat, they should drink. That laughter, when his fleet was defeated, brought him many tears and the Roman people a great disaster. And his colleague Lucius Junius—did he not lose his fleet in a storm during the same war, after disobeying the auspices? Clodius was therefore condemned by the people, and Junius took his own life.

- 2.8 “Coelius writes that Gaius Flaminius fell at Lake Trasimene, with grievous harm to the state, because he neglected religious observance. Their destruction enables us to understand that the state was enlarged under the command of those who obeyed religion. If we choose to compare ourselves with foreign peoples, we shall find ourselves their equals, or even their inferiors, in other respects, but far their superiors in religion—that is, in the worship of the gods.
- 2.9 “Are we to despise that augur’s staff of Attus Navius, with which he marked out the regions of the vineyard to track down a pig? I might think so, had King Hostilius not conducted his greatest wars under his augury. But through the negligence of our nobility, the discipline of augury has been abandoned and the truth of the auspices scorned; only the outward form has been retained. Thus the greatest affairs of state, including the wars on which its safety depends, are conducted without any auspices. None are taken when rivers are crossed, none from the points of spears; no men are summoned, and consequently wills made before battle have disappeared. Our commanders now begin to wage war only when they have laid aside their auspices.
- 2.10 “Yet among our ancestors religion had such power that certain commanders, their heads veiled, consecrated even their own lives to the immortal gods for the state, using a prescribed formula. I could recall many utterances of the Sibyl and many answers of the diviners who inspect sacrifices to confirm what no one ought to doubt. Indeed, events themselves vindicated both the discipline of our augurs and that of the Etruscan diviners in the consulship of Publius Scipio and Gaius Figulus. When Tiberius Gracchus, consul for the second time, was presiding over their election, the first officer collecting the votes suddenly died on the spot, just as he reported their return. Gracchus nevertheless completed the election, but realized that the incident had aroused religious misgivings among the people, and referred it to the senate. The senate resolved that it should be referred to the usual authorities. The diviners were brought in and answered that the officer who had conducted the election was not properly qualified. Then Gracchus, as I used to hear from my father, blazed with anger:

2.11 “What? I was not qualified? I conducted the election as consul and augur, after taking the auspices! Do you Etruscans, you foreigners, understand the Roman people’s law of auspices, and can you interpret its elections?’ So he ordered them out. But later he wrote from his province to the college of augurs. While reading the books, he had remembered that there was a fault in his taking the augural station in Scipio’s gardens: after entering the sacred boundary of the city to hold a senate meeting, he had forgotten to take the auspices when he crossed that same boundary on his return. The consuls, therefore, had been elected under a religious defect. The augurs referred the matter to the senate; the senate ordered the consuls to resign; they resigned. What greater examples do we seek? A man of consummate wisdom, perhaps the most distinguished of all men, chose to confess his error, though he could have concealed it, rather than let religious guilt cling to the state; the consuls chose to surrender their supreme command at once rather than retain it for a single instant against religion.

2.12 “Great is the authority of the augurs; and is not the diviners’ art itself divine? Anyone who sees these things, and countless others of the same kind, must surely be compelled to acknowledge that gods exist. Those whose interpreters they are must certainly exist; and they are interpreters of the gods. Let us therefore admit that gods exist. Perhaps, however, not everything predicted comes true. Neither is medicine no art merely because not all the sick recover. Signs of future events are shown by the gods; if anyone has erred in reading them, the fault lies not with the divine nature but with human interpretation.

“Thus on the main point there is agreement among all people of every nation. Everyone has an inborn conviction, as though engraved upon the mind, that gods exist. What they are like is disputed; their existence no one denies.

2.13 “Our Cleanthes said that conceptions of the gods had taken shape in human minds for four reasons. First he placed the one I have just mentioned, arising from foreknowledge of the future. Second came the impression we receive from the greatness of the benefits furnished by the temperate climate, the fertility of the earth, and the abundance of many other advantages.

- 2.14 “The third was the terror inspired by lightning, storms, rain clouds, snow, hail, devastation, pestilence, earthquakes and often underground rumblings, showers of stones, and raindrops seemingly tinged with blood; then by landslides or sudden chasms in the earth, by unnatural and monstrous births among humans and livestock, by fiery lights seen in the sky, and by the stars the Greeks call ‘comets’ and our people ‘curly-haired stars,’ which recently, during the war with Octavius, foretold great disasters. There is also the appearance of a second sun, which, as I heard from my father, occurred in the consulship of Tuditanus and Aquilius—the very year in which Publius Africanus, another sun, was extinguished. Terrified by these things, people came to suspect the existence of some heavenly and divine power.
- 2.15 “The fourth reason, and perhaps the greatest, was the uniformity of motion and utterly constant revolution of the heavens, the distinctness, usefulness, beauty, and order of the sun, moon, and all the stars. Their very appearance sufficiently indicated that they were not products of chance. If someone enters a house, a gymnasium, or a public square and sees everything arranged with method, proportion, and discipline, he cannot suppose this has come about without a cause: he understands that someone presides and is obeyed. Far more, amid such mighty motions and alternations, amid the ordered sequences of things so numerous and so great—sequences in which the immeasurable, infinite past has never shown a failure—he must conclude that some intelligence governs these vast movements of nature.
- 2.16 “Chrysippus, for all his penetrating genius, speaks in a way that seems learned from nature herself rather than discovered by his own effort. ‘If there is anything in nature,’ he says, ‘that the human mind, reason, strength, and power cannot produce, then what produces it is certainly better than a human being. But the heavenly bodies, and all those things whose order is everlasting, cannot be made by humans. Therefore what makes them is better than a human being. And what would you call it rather than god? For if there are no gods, what can there be in nature better than a human being? Humans alone possess reason,

and nothing can surpass reason. Yet for a human being to think that nothing in the whole world is better than himself is senseless arrogance. Therefore something is better. Therefore god certainly exists.’

2.17 “If you saw a large and beautiful house, you could not be persuaded, even without seeing its master, to believe it had been built for mice and weasels. Then if you think the world’s vast splendor, the great variety and beauty of the heavens, and the enormous power and extent of sea and land are your dwelling, not that of the immortal gods, would you not appear completely senseless? Do we fail to understand even this: everything above is better, while the earth lies lowest, surrounded by the densest air? Precisely for this reason—just as we see that the inhabitants of certain regions and cities have duller minds because of the greater density of their atmosphere—the same has happened to the human race, because humans have been placed on earth, in the densest region of the world.

2.18 “Yet from human intelligence itself we ought to infer that some mind exists, more penetrating than ours and divine. Where did a human being ‘snatch’ this intelligence, as Socrates asks in Xenophon? If someone asks where we obtained our moisture, the heat diffused through our bodies, the earthy solidity of our flesh, or finally that breath-like soul, the answer is clear. One thing we took from earth, another from water, another from fire, another from the air that we draw as breath. But that which surpasses all these—I mean reason, or, if you prefer more words, mind, judgment, thought, and practical wisdom—where did we find it? From where did we take it? Will the world possess everything else and lack this one thing of greatest worth? Certainly nothing in all existence is better than the world, nothing more excellent, nothing more beautiful. Not only does nothing better exist; nothing better can even be conceived. And if nothing is better than reason and wisdom, these must exist in what we acknowledge to be the best of all things.

- 2.19 “And who will not be compelled to accept my argument by the great, unbroken kinship of things, their mutual agreement and harmony? Could the earth flower at one season and in turn grow bare at another? Could the sun’s approach and withdrawal at the summer and winter solstices be recognized through so many changes in things themselves? Could the ocean tides and narrow straits be stirred by the moon’s rising or setting? Could the different courses of the stars be maintained within the single revolution of the whole sky? These things could certainly not occur with every part of the world in harmony unless one divine, all-pervading breath held them together.
- 2.20 “When these matters are discussed more richly and expansively, as I intend to discuss them, they more easily escape the Academics’ captious objections. But when they are compressed into brief, narrow deductions, as Zeno used to do, they are more exposed to criticism. Just as flowing water is hardly, if at all, corrupted, while stagnant water easily is, so a flowing argument washes away the critic’s abuse, while a tightly confined deduction cannot easily defend itself. Zeno compressed the matters I am developing into this form:
- 2.21 “‘What uses reason is better than what does not use reason. Nothing is better than the world. Therefore the world uses reason.’ In the same way it can be proved that the world is wise, happy, and eternal. All these qualities are better than their absence, and nothing is better than the world. From this it follows that the world is god.
- 2.22 “He also argues in this way: ‘No part of something lacking sensation can itself possess sensation. But parts of the world possess sensation. Therefore the world does not lack sensation.’ He presses on and tightens the argument: ‘Nothing devoid of life and reason can generate from itself something alive and rational. But the world generates living and rational beings. Therefore the world is alive and rational.’ He also completed his argument with an analogy, as he often does: ‘If flutes playing harmonious music grew on an olive tree, would you doubt that some knowledge of flute-playing existed in the tree? What if plane

trees bore lyres sounding in rhythm? You would of course conclude that music existed in those plane trees. Why, then, should the world not be judged alive and wise, when it produces from itself living and wise beings?’

2.23 “But since I have begun to proceed differently from what I said at the outset—I said this first part needed no argument, because the existence of the gods was evident to everyone—I nevertheless want to confirm that very point by physical arguments, that is, arguments from nature. The fact is that everything nourished, everything that grows, contains a power of heat within itself; without it, neither nourishment nor growth would be possible. For everything hot and fiery is stirred and driven by its own motion, while whatever feeds and grows employs a certain steady, uniform motion. As long as that motion remains in us, sensation and life remain; when our heat cools and is extinguished, we ourselves die and are extinguished.

2.24 “Cleanthes also shows by the following arguments how great a power of heat exists in every body. No food, he says, is so heavy that it is not digested night and day; even the waste that nature rejects still contains heat. Again, veins and arteries never cease throbbing with a kind of fiery movement. It has often been observed that an animal’s heart, torn out of its body, goes on beating with such activity that it resembles the swiftness of fire. Thus everything that lives, whether animal or growth from the earth, lives because of the heat enclosed within it. From this we must understand that the nature of heat contains a life-giving power extending throughout the entire world.

2.25 “We shall see this more readily if we examine more closely the whole fiery element that penetrates everything. All the parts of the world—I shall touch only on the principal ones—are supported and sustained by heat. This can first be seen in the nature of earth. We see fire struck from stones by impact and friction, the earth steaming with warmth when freshly dug, and warm water drawn even from perennial wells. This happens especially in winter, because a great store of heat is contained in the earth’s hollows, and in winter the earth is denser and therefore holds its inherent heat more tightly.

2.26 “It would take a long discussion, with many arguments, to show that all the seeds the earth receives, and all the growths she produces from herself and holds fast by their roots, arise and increase through a due balance of heat. That heat is also mixed with water is shown first by water’s own fluidity and flow. It could not freeze in the cold or grow solid as snow and frost unless, with heat mixed into it, it could also melt, dissolve, and spread. Thus moisture hardens under north winds and other applications of cold, and in turn softens when warmed and melts with heat. Again, the seas grow so warm when stirred by winds that we can readily understand that heat is enclosed within those immense waters. That warmth must not be regarded as coming from outside or as something added, but as roused by agitation from the sea’s innermost depths—the same thing happens to our own bodies when movement and exercise warm them. Indeed air itself, though by nature extremely cold, is by no means without heat.

2.27 “In fact, it has a great deal of heat mixed into it, for it arises from the exhalation of water. Air must be regarded as a kind of vapor from water, produced by the movement of the heat contained in water. We can see a likeness of this in water boiling over a fire. Then there remains the fourth part of the world. This is itself fiery throughout its nature and imparts wholesome, life-giving heat to all the other elements.

2.28 “From this it follows that, since all the world’s parts are sustained by heat, the world itself is preserved through so long a duration by a like and corresponding power. All the more so because we must understand that this hot, fiery element is diffused throughout nature in such a way that it contains the power of procreation and the cause of generation: through it all animals and all things rooted in the earth must be born and grow.

2.29 “There is therefore a nature that holds the whole world together and preserves it, and that nature is not without sensation and reason. Every nature that is not solitary and simple, but joined and connected with something else, must have some governing principle within itself. In a human being this is the mind; in a beast, something resembling mind, from which impulses toward things arise.

In trees and other growths from the earth, the governing principle is thought to lie in the roots. By ‘governing principle’ I mean what the Greeks call the *hegemonikon*: in each kind of being nothing can or ought to surpass it. Thus whatever holds the governing principle of all nature must also be best of all, and most worthy of power and dominion over everything.

- 2.30 “But we see that sensation and reason exist in parts of the world—for there is nothing anywhere in the world that is not a part of the whole. Therefore these qualities must exist in the part that contains the world’s governing principle, and in a sharper and higher degree. Consequently the world must be wise, and the nature that embraces and holds all things must excel in the perfection of reason. Therefore the world is god, and all the world’s power is sustained by a divine nature.

“Moreover, the world’s fiery heat is far purer, brighter, and more active than the heat we know, which preserves and invigorates the things familiar to us; for those reasons it is better suited to arousing sensation.

- 2.31 “It is therefore absurd to say that humans and beasts are held together by this heat, and through it move and feel, but that the world lacks sensation, though it is held together by a fire unspoiled, unfettered, pure, and at the same time intensely vigorous and active. Especially so, since the world’s fire is not set in motion by something else or by an external impulse, but moves by itself and of its own accord. What could be stronger than the world, to drive and move the heat by which the world is held together?

- 2.32 “Let us listen to Plato, a kind of god among philosophers. He holds that there are two kinds of motion, one originating within a thing, the other outside it; and that what moves by itself, of its own accord, is more divine than what is driven by another’s impulse. This self-originating motion he assigns to souls alone, and he thinks that from them motion takes its first beginning. Therefore, since all motion arises from the world’s fire, and that fire moves not by an external impulse but of its own accord, it must be a soul. From this it follows that the world is alive.

“We may also understand that it possesses intelligence from this: the world is certainly better than any particular nature. Just as no part of our body is worth as much as we ourselves, so the universe must be worth more than any part of the universe. If so, the world must be wise. Otherwise a human being, though a part of the world, would have to be worth more than the entire world because he possesses reason.

- 2.33 “Again, if we choose to advance from the first, rudimentary forms of nature to the highest and perfected forms, we must arrive at the nature of the gods. First we observe that nature sustains the things that spring from the earth. To these she has given nothing beyond preservation through nourishment and growth.
- 2.34 “To beasts, however, she has given sensation and motion, and an impulse by which they approach what is wholesome and withdraw from what is deadly. To humans she has given something more, adding reason to govern the mind’s impulses, now allowing them free play, now restraining them. But there is a fourth and highest level, belonging to beings born good and wise by nature, with right and steadfast reason implanted in them from the beginning. This must be held to surpass humanity and must be assigned to god—that is, to the world, in which that perfect and complete reason must exist.
- 2.35 “For it cannot be said that any order of things lacks some final, perfect attainment. In a vine or an animal, unless some force intervenes, we see nature proceeding by a course of her own to her final end. And just as painting, building, and the other arts achieve a finished work, so in all nature, and to a still greater degree, something must reach fulfillment and perfection. Many external things can prevent particular natures from reaching perfection; but nothing can hinder universal nature, because she herself embraces and contains every nature. Therefore that fourth and highest level must exist, beyond the reach of any force.
- 2.36 “This is the level at which the nature of all things stands. Since it is such that it rules everything and nothing can hinder it, the world must be intelligent, and indeed wise.

“What could be more ignorant than to deny that the nature embracing everything is the best, or, while admitting it is best, to deny that it is, first, alive; next, possessed of reason and judgment; and finally, wise? How else can it be best? If it resembles plants or even beasts, we should regard it as the worst rather than the best. And if it possesses reason but has not been wise from the beginning, surely the world’s condition will be worse than humanity’s. A human being can become wise; but if the world has been foolish throughout the eternity of past time, it will certainly never attain wisdom. Thus it will be inferior to a human being. Since that is absurd, we must hold that the world has been wise from the beginning and is god.

2.37 “For nothing apart from the world lacks nothing, is fitted together and perfected on every side, and is complete in every measure and part. Chrysippus puts it aptly: just as a cover is made for a shield and a sheath for a sword, so everything apart from the world has been brought into being for the sake of something else. The crops and fruits the earth produces are for animals, and animals for humans: the horse for riding, the ox for plowing, the dog for hunting and keeping watch. But the human being himself was born to contemplate and imitate the world—not perfect himself, but a small part of what is perfect.

2.38 “Since the world embraces everything, and nothing exists outside it, it is perfect in every respect. How, then, can it lack what is best? Nothing is better than mind and reason; therefore these cannot be absent from the world. Chrysippus again argues well, using comparisons to show that every quality is better in things fully developed and mature: in a horse than in a colt, in a dog than in a puppy, in a man than in a boy. Likewise, whatever is best in the whole world must exist in something perfected and complete.

2.39 “But nothing is more perfect than the world, and nothing better than virtue. Therefore virtue is a property of the world. Human nature is not perfect, yet virtue is achieved in a human being; how much more easily, then, in the world! Virtue therefore exists in it. Thus it is wise, and consequently a god.

“Once we recognize this divinity of the world, we must assign the same divinity to the stars. They arise from the most active and purest part of the ether, with no admixture of any other element, and are wholly hot and radiant. Thus it is entirely right to say that they too are alive, feel, and understand.

2.40 “Cleanthes thinks that the evidence of two senses, touch and sight, confirms that they consist wholly of fire. The sun’s heat and brightness are more intense than those of any fire, since it shines so far and wide throughout the boundless world. Its touch not only warms but often burns—neither of which it could do unless it were fiery. ‘Therefore,’ he says, ‘since the sun is fiery and feeds on the moisture of Ocean’—because no fire can persist without some nourishment—‘it must resemble either the fire we employ for everyday use and sustenance, or the fire contained in the bodies of living creatures.

2.41 “But this fire of ours, required for the uses of life, destroys and consumes everything; wherever it advances, it throws everything into disorder and scatters it. By contrast, the fire in the body is life-giving and wholesome: it preserves, nourishes, increases, and sustains everything, and endows it with sensation.’ Therefore he says there can be no doubt which of these fires the sun resembles, since it too makes everything flower and develop to maturity, each after its own kind. So, since the sun’s fire resembles the fires within the bodies of living creatures, the sun must also be alive—and so must the other heavenly bodies, which arise in the celestial fire called ether or heaven.

2.42 “Since some living creatures originate on land, others in water, and others in air, Aristotle thinks it absurd to suppose that no living creature is generated in the region best fitted to generate them. The stars occupy the region of ether. Since this is the finest substance, and is always active and vigorous, any creature generated in it must possess the keenest sensation and the swiftest motion. Thus, since the heavenly bodies arise in ether, it follows that they have sensation and intelligence, and consequently must be counted among the gods. We

can indeed see that people inhabiting lands where the air is pure and thin have minds more acute and better fitted for understanding than those who live under a thick, heavy atmosphere.

2.43 “People even think that the food one eats makes some difference to mental sharpness. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the stars possess outstanding intelligence: they inhabit the world’s ethereal region and feed on moisture from sea and land, refined over the great distance it travels. But the clearest evidence of the stars’ sensation and intelligence is their order and constancy, in which there is nothing reckless, nothing variable, nothing accidental; for nothing can move by reason and measure without purpose. The stars’ order and constancy throughout all eternity indicate neither mere nature—for their movement is full of reason—nor chance, which delights in variation and rejects constancy. It follows, then, that they move of their own accord, through their own awareness and divinity.

2.44 “Aristotle also deserves praise for holding that everything in motion moves either by nature, by force, or by choice. The sun, moon, and all the stars move. Things moved by nature are carried either downward by their weight or upward by their lightness; neither happens to the stars, because their motion carries them around in a circle. Nor can it be said that some greater force makes the stars move against their nature—for what greater force could there be? It remains, therefore, that the motion of the stars is voluntary.

“Anyone who sees these things and denies that gods exist acts not only ignorantly but impiously. Nor does it make much difference whether one denies their existence or deprives them of all oversight and activity. To my mind, what does nothing seems not to exist at all. The existence of the gods is therefore so evident that I can scarcely regard anyone who denies it as sane.

2.45 “It remains to consider what their nature is like. Here nothing is harder than to draw the mind’s vision away from the familiar experience of the eyes. This difficulty has led both the ignorant multitude and philosophers who resemble the ignorant to be unable to conceive of the immortal gods except in human

shapes. Cotta has refuted the worthlessness of that opinion; it does not need an argument from me. But since a settled conception in our minds gives us an intuitive awareness that god is, first, a living being, and next, that nothing in all nature surpasses him, I see nothing better suited to this intuition and conception than to judge, first of all, that this very world, which nothing can excel, is a living being and a god.

2.46 “Here Epicurus may joke as much as he likes—a man with little talent for jokes and none of the wit of his native land—and say that he cannot understand what a round, revolving god is like. He will nevertheless never shake me from this position, which even he approves. For he holds that gods exist because there must be some preeminent nature with nothing better than itself. But certainly nothing is better than the world, and undoubtedly what is alive and possesses sensation, reason, and mind is better than what lacks them.

2.47 “Thus it follows that the world is alive and possesses sensation, mind, and reason; and by this argument we conclude that the world is god. But a little later these matters will be more easily understood from the things the world itself produces. Meanwhile, Velleius, please do not parade your school’s utter lack of learning. You say that a cone, a cylinder, and a pyramid seem more beautiful to you than a sphere. Your eyes, too, have a novel way of judging! But let those shapes be more beautiful merely to look at—though even that I do not accept. What could be more beautiful than the one figure that embraces and contains every other figure, that can have no roughness or obstruction, no angular cuts or bends, no protrusions or hollows? There are two supremely excellent forms: among solids, the globe—for that is how I choose to translate the Greek ‘sphere’—and among plane figures, the circle or disk, called *kyklos* in Greek. These two forms alone have all their parts perfectly alike, and the outer edge everywhere equally distant from the center.

2.48 “Nothing could be more harmonious. But if you do not see this, because you have never touched the learned dust of geometry, could you not, even as natural philosophers, understand that this uniform motion and constant order could

not have been maintained in any other shape? Nothing could therefore be more ignorant than the assertions you habitually make. You say that even this world is not certainly round, that it might have another shape, and that the countless other worlds have different shapes from one another.

2.49 “Epicurus would certainly not say such things if he had learned how much twice two makes. But while judging with his palate what is best, he failed to look up at ‘the palate of heaven,’ as Ennius calls it.

“There are two kinds of stars. One travels from east to west over unchanging distances, never deviating a step from its course; the other completes two continuous revolutions over the same distances and courses. Both reveal the world’s rotation, which could occur only in a globular shape, and the circular orbits of the stars.

“First comes the sun, which holds supremacy among the heavenly bodies. It moves in such a way that, after filling the earth with lavish light, it leaves that same earth in darkness, now in one region, now in another. For the earth’s own shadow, blocking the sun, produces night. The periods of night have the same regularity as those of day. The measured approach and withdrawal of that same sun regulate the degrees of cold and heat. For three hundred and sixty-five circuits of the sun, with about a quarter of a day added, complete the yearly revolution. Bending its course now toward the seven northern stars, now toward the south, the sun produces summers and winters, and the two seasons adjoining them, one following the waning winter, the other the summer. Thus the beginnings and causes of everything generated on land and sea derive from the changes of the four seasons.

2.50 “The moon, in its monthly periods, follows the sun’s yearly courses. Its light is faintest when it approaches closest to the sun, fullest whenever it withdraws farthest. Not only does its appearance and shape change, now waxing, now waning back to its beginning, but its position changes too. When this is northerly or southerly, there is something resembling a winter or summer sol-

stice in the moon's course as well. From the moon many influences stream and flow, nourishing living creatures and making them grow, and bringing the earth's products to full development and maturity.

- 2.51 "Most wonderful, however, are the movements of those five stars falsely called 'wanderers.' Nothing wanders that preserves for all eternity its fixed and ordered forward and backward movements and all its other motions. This is the more wonderful in the stars we are discussing because they are now hidden, now revealed again; now they approach, now withdraw; now they move ahead, now follow behind; now they move faster, now more slowly; sometimes they do not move at all, but remain stationary for a time. From their differing motions mathematicians have named the Great Year, completed when the sun, moon, and five wandering stars have finished all their circuits and returned to the same positions relative to one another.
- 2.52 "How long this period is remains a great question, but it must be fixed and definite. The star called Saturn, which the Greeks name Phaenon, 'the Shining One,' is farthest from the earth and completes its course in about thirty years. In this course it produces many marvels, now advancing, now slowing, now disappearing in the evening, now revealing itself again in the morning; yet through the everlasting ages it never fails to produce the same effects at the same times. Below it, closer to the earth, travels the star of Jupiter, called Phaethon, 'the Radiant One.' It completes the same circle of twelve signs in twelve years and produces in its course the same variations as Saturn.
- 2.53 "The next orbit below belongs to Pyroeis, 'the Fiery One,' called the star of Mars. In twenty-four months less, I believe, six days, it traverses the same circle as the two above it. Below this is Mercury's star—the Greeks call it Stilbon, 'the Glittering One'—which traverses the zodiac in about a year and never departs more than one sign's distance from the sun, now preceding it, now following. Lowest of the five wandering stars, and nearest the earth, is the star of Venus, called Phosphorus in Greek and Lucifer in Latin, 'the Light-Bringer,' when it precedes the sun, but Hesperus, 'the Evening Star,' when it follows. It com-

pletes its course in a year, traversing the breadth and length of the zodiac, as the higher stars also do. It never departs more than two signs' distance from the sun, now preceding it, now following.

2.54 "I cannot understand this constancy in the stars, this immense agreement of their periods throughout all eternity amid such varied courses, without mind, reason, and purpose. Since we see these qualities in the stars, we cannot fail to count the stars themselves among the gods.

"Nor do the stars called fixed fail to show the same mind and foresight. Their daily revolution is harmonious and constant. Their courses are not part of the ether, nor are they attached to the sky, as most people say in their ignorance of natural science. For ether is not of such a nature that it can enfold the stars and whirl them about by its own force. Fine, translucent, and suffused with an even heat, ether does not seem well suited to holding the stars.

2.55 "The fixed stars therefore have their own sphere, separate and free from attachment to the ether. Their unceasing, perpetual courses, maintained with wonderful and incredible constancy, reveal that they possess divine power and intelligence. Anyone who does not perceive that these very stars possess the power of gods seems unlikely to perceive anything at all.

2.56 "In heaven, then, there is no chance, recklessness, wandering, or illusion; instead there is complete order, truth, reason, and constancy. Things devoid of these qualities, deceptive and false and full of error, move about the earth below the moon, the lowest of all the heavenly bodies, and upon the earth itself. Anyone who thinks that the wonderful order and incredible constancy of heaven, from which the preservation and safety of all things arise, are devoid of mind must himself be considered mindless.

2.57 "I shall not go wrong, I think, if I draw the beginning of this discussion from the foremost investigator of truth. Zeno defines nature as a creative fire advancing methodically toward generation. He thinks that creation and generation are the special function of art, and that what the hand accomplishes in the works

of our arts, nature accomplishes with far greater artistry—that is, as I said, creative fire, the master of all the other arts. In this sense all nature is artistic, since it has, as it were, a method and path to follow.

2.58 “But the nature of the world itself, which embraces and contains everything within its compass, is described by the same Zeno as not merely artistic but an actual artist, planning and providing for every use and advantage. Just as all other natures are generated, grow, and are maintained through their own seeds, so the nature of the world has all its movements by choice. It applies its efforts and impulses—the Greeks call them *hormai*—and the actions corresponding to them, just as we ourselves do when moved by mind and sensation. Such, then, is the world’s intelligence, which for that reason can rightly be called prudence or providence—the Greek word is *pronoia*, ‘foresight.’ Above all, it provides for and chiefly occupies itself with these things: first, that the world should be as well fitted as possible to endure; next, that it should lack nothing; and most of all, that it should possess surpassing beauty and every splendor.

2.59 “We have spoken of the world as a whole, and of the stars as well. By now we can almost discern a multitude of gods, neither idle nor accomplishing what they do through toilsome and burdensome labor. They are not held together by veins, sinews, and bones; they do not consume foods or drinks that cause a buildup of humors too acrid or too thick; nor do they have bodies such that they dread accidents or blows, or fear illnesses arising from the exhaustion of their limbs. It was fear of these things that led Epicurus to invent gods like mere outlines, doing nothing.

2.60 “But these gods, endowed with the most beautiful form and stationed in the purest region of heaven, move and regulate their courses in such a way that they seem to have agreed together to preserve and protect everything.

“Many other divine natures have also been established and named, with good reason, both by the wisest men of Greece and by our ancestors, because of the great benefits they confer. Whatever brought great advantage to the human

race was thought not to come about without divine goodness toward humanity. Sometimes, therefore, they called what a god had produced by the god's own name, as when we call grain Ceres and wine Liber. Hence the line of

2.61 “Terence, ‘Without Ceres and Liber, Venus grows cold.’ At other times the thing itself, when it contains some greater power, is named in such a way that the power itself is called a god: Faith, for example, and Mind, whom we see enshrined on the Capitol, most recently by Marcus Aemilius Scaurus—though Faith had previously been consecrated by Aulus Atilius Calatinus. You see the temple of Virtue; you see that of Honor, restored by Marcus Marcellus, which Quintus Maximus had dedicated many years before, during the Ligurian war. What of Wealth, Safety, Concord, Liberty, Victory? Because the power of all these things was so great that it could not be governed without a god, the things themselves acquired the names of gods. From the same class come the consecrated names of Cupid, or Desire, Pleasure, and Venus the Goddess of Passion—things vicious rather than natural, though Velleius thinks otherwise. Still, these very vices often strike nature with unusual force.

2.62 “Thus the greatness of their benefits established as gods those who produced each benefit, and the names just mentioned declare the power belonging to each god.

“Human life and general custom have also adopted the practice of raising to heaven, in fame and gratitude, men distinguished for their services. Hence Hercules, Castor and Pollux, Aesculapius, and Liber too—I mean the Liber born of Semele, not the one our ancestors solemnly and reverently consecrated with Ceres and Libera. The nature of that worship can be understood from the mysteries. But because we call those born of us *liberi*, ‘children,’ the offspring of Ceres were named Liber and Libera: this connection is maintained in Libera’s case, but not likewise in Liber’s. Hence also Romulus, whom some consider identical with Quirinus. Since their souls survived and enjoyed eternity, they were rightly regarded as gods, being both supremely good and eternal.

2.63 “Another explanation, drawn from natural philosophy, has also given rise to a great multitude of gods. Clothed in human form, they have supplied poets with stories and filled human life with every kind of superstition. Zeno treated this subject, and Cleanthes and Chrysippus later explained it at greater length. For the ancient belief spread throughout Greece that Heaven was castrated by his son Saturn, and Saturn himself bound by his son Jupiter.

2.64 “A physical explanation of some elegance is enclosed in these impious stories. They meant that the highest, celestial, ethereal nature—that is, the fiery element—which generates everything by itself, lacks that part of the body which would require union with another to procreate. By Saturn they meant the power that maintains the course and revolution of periods and seasons. In Greek this god bears precisely that name: he is called Kronos, which is the same as chronos, ‘a span of time.’ He was called Saturnus because he is ‘sated,’ saturaretur, with years. The story represents him as habitually eating his own offspring, because time consumes its own periods and is insatiably filled with years gone by. He was bound by Jupiter so that his course should not be unrestrained, and so that Jupiter might bind him with the bonds of the stars. But Jupiter himself—that is, the ‘helping father,’ whom, with a change of grammatical form, we call Iovem, Jove, from iuvare, ‘to help’—is called by poets ‘father of gods and men,’ and by our ancestors ‘Best and Greatest.’ They put Best—that is, most beneficent—before Greatest, because to benefit everyone is greater, and certainly more welcome, than to possess great power.

2.65 “Ennius, then, names him as I said above, in these words: ‘Look at this shining height, which all invoke as Jupiter’—more plainly than in another passage of his: ‘Against him, with all the power I have, I shall invoke this shining thing, whatever it is.’ Our augurs also mean him when they say, ‘When Jove lightens and thunders’; for they mean, ‘When the sky lightens and thunders.’ Euripides, among his many splendid sayings, puts this briefly:

‘You see the boundless ether spread on high,
which holds the earth in its soft, encircling clasp:
account him highest of the gods; call him Jove.’

2.66 “The air, however, lying between sea and heaven, is consecrated under Juno’s name, as the Stoics argue. She is Jupiter’s sister and wife because air resembles ether and is most closely joined with it. They made air feminine and assigned it to Juno because nothing is softer. But I believe Juno’s name comes from *iuvare*, ‘to help.’ Water and earth remained, to make the three kingdoms of the stories. Thus the entire kingdom of the sea was given to Neptune, another brother of Jupiter, as we maintain. Just as Portunus comes from *porta*, ‘a gate,’ so Neptune’s name was derived from *nare*, ‘to swim,’ with a slight change in the first letters. All the power and nature of earth was dedicated to Father Dis, ‘the Rich,’ called Pluton by the Greeks, because everything both returns to the earth and arises from it. †To him they assign Proserpina—a Greek name, for she is the one called Persephone in Greek. They mean her to be the seed of grain, and tell how her mother searches for her in hiding.

2.67 “Her mother is Ceres, from *gerere*, ‘to bear’ crops, as though her name were Geres, with the first letter changed, as also happens in Greek; for they too named her Demeter, as though *ge meter*, ‘Earth Mother.’ Mavors is the one who *magna verteret*, ‘overturns mighty things’; Minerva is she who either *minueret*, ‘diminishes,’ or *minaretur*, ‘threatens.’ Since beginnings and endings have the greatest force in everything, they gave Janus first place in sacrifices. His name derives from *ire*, ‘to go,’ and from this open passageways are called *iani* and doors at the thresholds of secular buildings *ianuae*. Vesta’s name comes from the Greeks, for she is the one they call Hestia, ‘Hearth.’ Her power concerns altars and hearths, and therefore all prayer and sacrifice end with this goddess, because she guards the innermost things.

2.68 “The Household Gods are not far removed from this power. Their name, Penates, comes either from *penus*—for that means the whole store of human food—or from their dwelling ‘deep within,’ *penitus*. For this reason poets also call them *penetrales*, ‘gods of the inner sanctuary.’ Apollo’s name, again, is Greek. They identify him with the sun, and think Diana and the moon likewise one and the same. The sun is called *sol* either because it is *solus*, alone among all the stars is so great, or because, when it rises and all the others are obscured, it

alone appears. The moon, luna, is named from *lucere*, ‘to shine.’ She is also Lucina, the Light-Bringer; and so, just as the Greeks invoke Diana as the Light-Bringer in childbirth, our people invoke Juno Lucina. The same Diana is called ‘All-Wandering,’ not from hunting, but because she is numbered among the seven so-called wanderers.

2.69 “She was called Diana because at night she makes something like *diem*, ‘day.’ She is called upon in childbirth because pregnancies reach their term sometimes in seven, but usually in nine, circuits of the moon. These are called *menses*, ‘months,’ because they complete *mensa spatia*, ‘measured periods.’ Timaeus, neatly as in many other passages, after recording in his history that the temple of Diana at Ephesus burned down on the night Alexander was born, added that this was hardly surprising: Diana had wished to attend Olympias in labor and so had been away from home. The goddess who *veniret*, ‘comes,’ to all things our people named Venus; and *venustas*, ‘charm,’ derives from her name, rather than Venus from charm.

2.70 “Do you see, then, how a sound and useful understanding of natural things has been drawn aside toward imaginary, invented gods? This has bred false opinions, confused errors, and superstitions fit almost for old women. We know the gods’ shapes, ages, clothing, and adornment; their lineages, marriages, and kinships too—everything reduced to the likeness of human weakness. They are even represented with troubled minds: we have been told of the gods’ desires, sorrows, and fits of anger. Nor, according to the stories, have they been free from wars and battles, not merely as in Homer, when different gods defended the opposing armies, but even fighting their own wars against the Titans and the Giants. To tell and believe these things is utter foolishness; they are full of absurdity and the utmost frivolity.

2.71 “But once these stories have been scorned and rejected, we shall be able to understand who and what the gods are, and by what names custom has called them: the god pervading the nature of each thing, Ceres throughout the earth, Neptune throughout the sea, and the others in their several realms. These gods

we ought to revere and worship. The best worship of the gods, the purest, holiest, and fullest of devotion, is always to revere them with mind and voice pure, whole, and uncorrupted. For not only philosophers but our ancestors too distinguished superstition from religion.

2.72 “Those who spent whole days praying and sacrificing that their children might ‘survive’ them were called *superstitiosi*, ‘superstitious,’ from *superstites*, ‘survivors’—a word whose meaning later grew wider. Those, however, who diligently reconsidered and, as it were, ‘reread’ everything belonging to the worship of the gods were called *religiosi*, ‘religious,’ from *relegere*, ‘to reread’; just as *ellegentes*, ‘discerning,’ comes from *eligere*, ‘to choose,’ [just as] *diligentes*, ‘diligent,’ comes from *diligere*, ‘to cherish,’ and *intellegentes*, ‘intelligent,’ from *intellegere*, ‘to understand.’ All these Latin words contain the same force of *legere*, ‘to gather or read,’ as ‘religious’ does. Thus ‘superstitious’ became a term of blame, ‘religious’ one of praise. I think I have now sufficiently shown both that gods exist and what they are like.

2.73 “Next I must show that the world is governed by the providence of the gods. This is certainly a great subject, and one much assailed by your school, Cotta; indeed our whole contest is with you. For your school, Velleius, is less familiar with the way each doctrine is stated. You read only your own writings, cherish only your own, and condemn the others without hearing their case. Yesterday, for example, you yourself said that the Stoics introduce an old fortune-teller called *Pronoia*—that is, Providence. You said this through the mistaken belief that they invent providence as a separate goddess who governs and rules the entire world.

2.74 “But the expression is abbreviated. If someone says that the Athenian state is governed by a council, the words ‘of the Areopagus’ are left out; likewise, when we say that the world is governed by providence, understand that ‘of the gods’ is left out. Consider the full and complete expression to be this: the world is governed by the providence of the gods. So please do not expend on ridiculing us that wit which your tribe lacks. And, by Hercules, if you take my advice, do

not even try: it does not suit you, you have no gift for it, you cannot do it. This applies not to you alone, polished as you are by our native manners and the urbane ways of our people, but to the rest of your school, and especially to its founder—a man without skill or learning, insulting everyone, with no sharpness, no dignity, no grace.

2.75 “I say, then, that the world and all its parts were established in the beginning, and are governed at every moment, by the providence of the gods. Our school generally divides this argument into three parts. The first derives from the reasoning that proves the existence of the gods: once this is granted, we must admit that the world is governed by their wisdom. The second shows that everything is subject to a sentient nature and that everything is managed by it in the most beautiful way. Once this is established, it follows that this nature arose from living first principles. The third argument derives from wonder at the things of heaven and earth.

2.76 “First, then, either we must deny that gods exist—as Democritus and Epicurus in a sense do, by introducing their apparitions and images—or those who grant that gods exist must admit that they do something, and something splendid. But nothing is more splendid than the governance of the world. It is therefore governed by the wisdom of the gods. If not, something must certainly exist that is better and more powerful than god, whatever it may be: either a lifeless nature or a necessity driven by mighty force, producing these most beautiful works we see.

2.77 “The nature of the gods, then, is not supreme in power or excellence if it is subject to that necessity or nature which rules heaven, sea, and land. But nothing surpasses god; therefore he must rule the world. God is consequently obedient or subject to no nature; he himself, therefore, rules all nature. For if we grant that the gods are intelligent, we also grant that they exercise foresight, and about matters of the greatest importance. Do they not know, then, what matters are greatest and how they must be handled and protected? Or do they lack the power to sustain and manage such great affairs? Ignorance is alien to the

divine nature, and difficulty in fulfilling a task through weakness is utterly incompatible with the gods' majesty. Thus we reach the conclusion we seek: the world is governed by the providence of the gods.

2.78 “Moreover, since gods exist—if indeed they do, as they certainly do—they must be living beings; and not merely living, but rational, joined together in something like a civic bond and fellowship, governing the one world as a common state and city.

2.79 “It follows that they possess the same reason as the human race, and that both share the same truth and the same law, which commands right and drives away wrong. From this we understand that wisdom and intelligence have also come to humans from the gods. For that reason, by ancestral institutions, Mind, Faith, Virtue, and Concord have been consecrated and publicly enshrined. How can it be consistent to deny that the gods possess these qualities, when we revere their august and holy images? If mind, faith, virtue, and concord exist among human beings, from where could they have flowed down to earth but from above? And since judgment, reason, and wisdom exist in us, the gods must possess these same qualities in a higher degree, and not merely possess them but employ them in the greatest and best affairs.

2.80 “But nothing is greater or better than the world; therefore it must be governed by the wisdom and providence of the gods. Finally, we have sufficiently shown that those beings whose outstanding power and radiant appearance we see are gods—I mean the sun and moon, the wandering and fixed stars, heaven, the world itself, and the power of those things throughout the whole world that bring great use and advantage to the human race. It follows that everything is governed by divine mind and foresight. Enough has now been said about the first part.

2.81 “Next I must show that everything is subject to nature, and is managed by her in the most beautiful way. But first we must briefly explain what nature herself is, so that the point we wish to prove may be more readily understood. Some think nature is a certain irrational force that sets necessary movements going in

bodies. Others think it a force possessing reason and order, advancing, as it were, along a methodical path and revealing what it produces, for what purpose, and what end it pursues. No art, no hand, no craftsman can match her skill by imitation. A seed has such power that, tiny though it is, if it falls into a nature that receives and embraces it, and finds material by which it can be nourished and increased, it shapes and produces things each after its own kind: some merely to be nourished through their roots, others also to move, feel, seek what they desire, and generate their own likeness from themselves.

2.82 “Some, however, apply the name ‘nature’ to everything: Epicurus, for example, whose division makes the nature of all that exists consist of bodies, void, and their properties. But when we say that the world is constituted and governed by nature, we do not mean like a clod or a fragment of stone or something of that sort, with no inherent principle of cohesion, but like a tree or an animal, in which no randomness appears, but order and something resembling art.

2.83 “If the things held in the earth by roots live and flourish through nature’s art, surely the earth herself is sustained by that same power, by nature’s art. Pregnant with seeds, she bears everything and pours it out from herself; embracing roots, she nourishes and increases them, and is herself nourished in turn by the higher, external elements. Her exhalations nourish the air, the ether, and everything above. Thus, if the earth is sustained and made vigorous by nature, the same principle holds throughout the rest of the world. Plants cling to the earth, while living creatures are sustained by breathing air. Air itself sees with us, hears with us, sounds with us, for none of these things can occur without it. It even moves with us: wherever we go, wherever we move, it seems, as it were, to make room and yield.

2.84 “The things borne toward the world’s center, which is its lowest point, those borne upward from the center, and those carried in circular revolution around the center form the world’s continuous and single nature. There are four kinds of bodies, and through their interchange the world’s nature is kept continuous. From earth comes water, from water air, from air ether; then in reverse order,

from ether air, from air water, and from water earth, the lowest element. Thus, as the elements of which everything consists pass upward and downward, to and fro, the union of the world's parts is maintained."

2.85 "It must either be everlasting, with the very arrangement we see, or at least endure for an immense and almost measureless stretch of time. Whichever is true, it follows that nature governs the world. For what fleet under sail, what army drawn up for battle—or, to compare instead the works of nature, what growth of vine or tree, what living creature's shape and arrangement of limbs—reveals as much ingenuity in nature as the world itself? Either, then, nothing is governed by a conscious nature, or we must acknowledge that the world is."

2.86 "Indeed, since it embraces all other natures and their seeds, how can it itself fail to be governed by nature? Anyone who said that teeth and puberty arise by nature, but that the human being in whom they arise is not constituted by nature, would fail to understand that things which bring something forth from themselves possess more perfect natures than the things brought forth. Of everything governed by nature, the world is the inseminator, the sower, the parent, so to speak, the rearer and the sustainer; it nourishes and embraces everything as its own members and parts. But if the parts of the world are governed by nature, the world itself must be governed by nature. And in its government there is nothing to find fault with: out of the natures that existed, the best possible result has been achieved."

2.87 "Let someone show, then, that it could have been better. No one ever will; and anyone who tries to correct anything will either make it worse or demand what could not have been done."

"But if all the world's parts are so constituted that they could neither be better suited to use nor more beautiful to behold, let us consider whether they are the work of chance, or are in a condition in which they could never have held together without the guidance of consciousness and divine providence. If, then, the achievements of nature are better than those of art, and art achieves nothing without reason, nature too must be held to possess reason. How is it

consistent, when you see a statue or a painting, to recognize the application of art; when you see a ship moving in the distance, not to doubt that reason and skill direct its movement; or when you examine a sundial or a water clock, to understand that it tells the hours by art, not chance—and yet to suppose that the world, which embraces those very arts, their craftsmen, and everything else, is devoid of design and reason?”

2.88 “If someone took to Scythia or Britain the sphere recently made by our friend Posidonius, whose successive revolutions reproduce in the sun, the moon, and the five wandering stars the same movements that occur in heaven through successive days and nights, who in those uncivilized lands would doubt that reason had gone into its construction? Yet these men wonder whether the world, from which all things arise and come into being, was itself made by chance, by some necessity, or by divine reason and intelligence. They suppose that Archimedes showed greater powers in imitating the revolutions of the sphere than nature showed in producing them—although the originals were fashioned with many times the ingenuity of their imitations.”

2.89 “Think of the shepherd in Accius, who had never seen a ship before. When from his mountain he first caught sight, far off, of the Argonauts’ strange, divine vessel, he spoke in wonder and terror:

Such a mighty mass comes gliding,

roaring from the deep with vast sound and breath;
it rolls the waves before it, violently raises eddies,
rushes headlong on, sprays the sea and blows it back.
“Now you would think a broken storm cloud rolled along,
now that a rock, hurled high by winds or storms,
was swept away, or rounded whirlwinds
rose from the clashing blows of waves—
unless the sea is raising havoc from the land,
or Triton, overturning caverns with his trident
deep beneath their roots in the surging strait,

has torn a rocky mass from the abyss up to the sky.
At first he cannot tell the nature of the unfamiliar thing he sees. Then, when he
 has seen the young men and heard the sailors' song:
Like dolphins, †swift and eager, snorting through their snouts—
—and much else in the same vein—
A song like the melody

of Silvanus reaches his ears and hearing
—”

2.90 “Just as he believes at first sight that he is looking at something lifeless and without feeling, but afterward, from surer signs, begins to suspect the nature of what he had doubted, so the philosophers, if perhaps the world’s first appearance bewildered them, should afterward have seen its movements confined to their bounds and uniform, everything regulated in fixed ranks and with unalterable constancy, and understood that this heavenly, divine house contains not merely an inhabitant but a ruler and governor, the architect, as it were, of so great a work and so great a gift.”

“As things stand, they seem to me not even to suspect how marvelous the things of heaven and earth are.”

2.91 “To begin with, the earth, set in the middle of the world, is surrounded on every side by this life-giving, breathable substance called air—a Greek word, certainly, but one our people have now adopted through use: it passes freely as Latin. Air in turn is embraced by the boundless ether, composed of the fires on high. Let us borrow that word too, and say ‘ether’ in Latin as we say ‘air,’ although Pacuvius translates it: ‘What I speak of, our people call heaven; the Greeks call it ether’—as though the speaker were not himself a Greek. ‘But he is speaking Latin.’ Only if we are not to hear him as though he were speaking Greek! The same poet makes the point elsewhere:”

- 2.92 “Greek-born: his very speech reveals it.’ But let us return to greater matters. From the ether, then, arise the countless flames of the stars. Foremost among them is the sun, illuminating everything with its dazzling light, many times larger and more extensive than the whole earth; next come the other heavenly bodies, of immense size. These fires, so vast and so numerous, not only do no harm to the earth and earthly things, but benefit them so greatly that, if they were moved from their places and their heat lost its balance and restraint, the earth would inevitably burn up beneath those mighty blazes.”
- 2.93 “Am I not to wonder, then, that anyone can persuade himself that certain solid, indivisible bodies are borne along by their own force and weight, and that from the chance collision of these bodies the world is made, with all its beauty and order? If someone thinks this could have happened, I cannot understand why he should not also believe that, if countless copies of the twenty-one letters, made of gold or whatever material you please, were thrown together somewhere and then shaken out onto the ground, they could produce the *Annals of Ennius* in their proper, readable sequence. I doubt whether chance could accomplish so much even in a single line.”
- 2.94 “Yet how confidently these men assert that the world was made from tiny bodies possessing neither color nor any quality—*poiotes* in Greek—nor sensation, but colliding at random and by chance; or rather that countless worlds are being born and others perishing at every instant! But if the collision of atoms can make a world, why can it not make a colonnade, a temple, a house, a city, which are less laborious—and many things easier still? Certainly they babble so recklessly about the world that I think they have never looked up at this marvelous array of heaven, which is the next subject before us.”
- 2.95 “Aristotle puts it admirably: ‘Suppose there were people who had always lived underground in fine, well-lit houses, adorned with statues and paintings and furnished with everything that those reputed fortunate possess in abundance. Suppose, however, that they had never come above ground, but had learned by report and hearsay that there was some divine presence and power. Then sup-

pose that at some time the earth's jaws opened and they could escape those hidden dwellings and emerge into these regions where we live. When they suddenly saw earth, sea, and sky; when they learned the vastness of the clouds and the force of the winds; when they gazed at the sun and learned not only its size and beauty but its power as well, since it makes the day by pouring light through the whole sky; and when night darkened the earth and they saw the entire sky picked out and adorned with stars, the moon's changing brightness as it waxes and wanes, and the rising and setting of them all, their courses fixed and unalterable through all eternity—when they saw these things, they would surely believe both that gods exist and that these mighty works are the gods' creation.”

2.96 “So much for his words. Let us imagine instead a darkness as deep as that which is said once to have shrouded the neighboring regions when Etna's fires erupted, so that for two days no one could recognize another person. When the sun shone on the third day, they felt they had come to life again. If this same thing happened to us after an eternity of darkness, and we suddenly saw the light, how would heaven appear to us? But daily familiarity and habitual seeing accustom our minds; we neither marvel at the things we always see nor seek their explanations—as though their novelty, rather than their greatness, ought to move us to inquire into their causes.”

2.97 “For who would call someone human if, after seeing the heavens' movements so sure, the stars' ranks so fixed, and everything so closely joined and fitted together, he denied that any reason was present in them and said that things happen by chance whose designing wisdom all our wisdom cannot fathom? When we see something moving by a mechanism—a sphere, a clock, or any of countless other things—we have no doubt that these are works of reason. But when we see the onrush of heaven moving and revolving with marvelous speed, completing its yearly alternations with perfect constancy and with the utmost benefit to the safety and preservation of everything, can we doubt that this comes about not merely through reason, but through reason surpassing and divine?”

2.98 “For now we may set aside the subtleties of argument and contemplate, with our eyes as it were, the beauty of the things we say divine providence has established.”

“First let us look at the earth as a whole, set in the world’s central seat, solid and spherical, drawn together on every side into a globe by its own inward pull, clothed in flowers, grasses, trees, and crops, all of them in incredible profusion, set apart by a variety of which we never tire. Add the cool, unfailing flow of springs, the translucent streams of rivers, the banks robed in deepest green, the hollow depths of caves, the rugged rocks, the heights of overhanging mountains and the immensity of plains. Add, too, the hidden veins of gold and silver and the endless supply of marble.”

2.99 “Then what kinds of animals there are, and how various, tame and wild alike! How birds glide and sing, how cattle graze, how woodland creatures live! What need I say of the human race? Established, as it were, as cultivators of the earth, they allow it neither to grow savage with monstrous beasts nor to become a wilderness of rough undergrowth. Through their labors fields, islands, and shores shine, marked out with houses and cities. If we could see these things with our eyes as we can in our minds, no one surveying the whole earth would doubt divine reason.”

2.100 “And how beautiful the sea is! What a sight it presents as a whole, what a multitude and variety of islands, what delightful coasts and shores! How many kinds of creatures, how unlike one another: some submerged, some floating and swimming, others clinging to rocks in the shells in which they were born! The sea itself, reaching toward the land, plays along the shores so that the two elements seem fused into one.”

2.101 “Next, the air bordering the sea changes between day and night. Sometimes it spreads and thins and rises on high; sometimes it thickens, gathers into clouds, collects moisture, and enriches the earth with rain; sometimes it streams this

way and that and produces winds. It also brings the yearly changes of cold and heat; it supports the flight of birds, and, drawn in as breath, nourishes and sustains living creatures.”

“Last remains the encompassing vault of heaven, farthest above our homes, encircling and containing everything. This is also called ether, the outermost edge and boundary of the world; within it fiery forms trace out their ordered courses in a most marvelous way.”

2.102 “Among them the sun, many times greater in size than the earth, revolves around that very earth. Rising and setting, it makes day and night; now approaching, now withdrawing, it makes two opposite turnings back from its farthest points in each year. Between these it now makes the earth shrink, as though in sadness, and now gladdens it in turn, so that it seems to smile in joy with the sky.”

2.103 “The moon, which, as mathematicians show, is larger than half the earth, travels through the same region as the sun. Now joining the sun, now leaving it, it sends down to earth the light it has received from the sun, while undergoing various changes of light itself. Sometimes, too, it passes beneath the sun and stands in its way, obscuring its rays and light; at other times, falling into the earth’s shadow when directly opposite the sun, it is suddenly eclipsed by the earth’s intervention and interposition. Through the same region the stars we call wandering travel around the earth, and rise and set in the same fashion. Their movements now quicken, now slow,”

2.104 “and often even come to a halt: no spectacle can be more wonderful or more beautiful. Next comes the immense multitude of fixed stars, so arranged and distinguished that they have acquired names from their likeness to familiar shapes.”

At this point he looked at me and said, “I shall use the verses of Aratus, which you translated when you were very young. Because they are in Latin, they give me such pleasure that I remember many of them. So, as we constantly see with our eyes, without any alteration or change,

all the other heavenly bodies glide in swift motion,
and are borne with heaven itself through nights and days,”

2.105 “and no mind eager to see nature’s constancy can ever have enough of
contemplating them.

And the extreme point at either end of the axis

is called the pole.

Around this the two Bears are borne, never setting.

Of these, one is called Cynosura among the Greeks,

the other is named Helice.

We see her brightest stars throughout the night, those which
our people have been accustomed to call the Seven Plow Oxen;”

2.106 “and little Cynosura, marked out in the same way with the same number of
stars, circles the same summit of the sky.

In her as guide the Phoenicians trust by night upon the deep.

“But the former shines more brightly, picked out with stars,
and is seen far and wide as soon as night begins.

“This one is small, but in her lies the sailors’ advantage,

for she turns on an inner course, in a narrow circle.

And to make the sight of these stars more wonderful,
between them, like a river with a racing current,

the grim Dragon winds, coiling above and below
and forming curving loops out of his body.”

2.107 “His whole appearance is splendid, but especially worth seeing are the shape of
his head and his blazing eyes:

Not one star alone shines to adorn his head,

but his temples are marked with a double gleam,

and two hot lights blaze from his savage eyes,
while his chin shines with a single radiant star.
“His head is tilted, bent back on a rounded neck;
you would say he fixes his gaze on the Greater Bear’s tail.”

2.108 “And we see the rest of the Dragon’s body throughout the night;
here this head suddenly hides itself for a little while,

where rising and setting mingle in a single region.
Touching that head,
a weary figure, like a mourner,

revolves,
which the Greeks
call Engonasin, the Kneeler, because he is borne along upon his knees.

“Here is set that Crown with its exceptional brilliance.
It lies behind him; near his head is the Serpent Bearer,
whom the Greeks call by the famous name Ophiuchus.”

2.109 “He holds the Snake in the twofold grip of his hands,
and is himself bound fast by its coiling body,
for the Serpent girdles the man below his breast.
“Yet, bracing himself, he plants his feet heavily

and presses the Scorpion’s eyes and breast beneath them.
Following the Seven Plow Oxen comes
Arctophylax, the Bear Watcher, commonly called Boötes,

because he drives the Bear before him, yoked as to a wagon pole.
Then come the following lines:”

2.110 “Beneath his’—that is, Boötes’—
breast there seems fastened

a star flashing with rays, Arcturus, its illustrious name.
Below his feet is borne
Virgo, her body shining, holding the brilliant Ear of Grain.
And the constellations are so laid out that divine ingenuity appears in these vast
designs:

Beneath the Bear's head you will see the Twin Sons;

under her middle is the Crab, and beneath her feet

the great Lion, shaking a tremulous flame from his body.
The Charioteer
will be borne beneath the Twins' left side.

"Grim Helice watches his head before her.

"And the bright Goat occupies his left shoulder.

Then the following:

But she is endowed with a great and brilliant star;

in contrast, the Kids cast only a little fire upon mortals.

Beneath his feet

stands the horned Bull, braced upon his mighty body.

His head is thickly sprinkled with stars;"

- 2.111 "these stars the Greeks have been accustomed to call the Hyades,
from raining—for hycin in Greek means 'to rain.' Our people ignorantly call
them *Suculae*, the 'Little Pigs,' as though they were named for pigs, not
showers. Behind the Lesser Bear follows Cepheus with outstretched hands;
for he wheels just behind the Cynosuran Bear.
Before him goes
Cassiopeia, with a dim appearance of stars.

"Close beside her turns Andromeda, her body bright,
fleeing sorrowfully from her parent's gaze.

“That Horse, shaking his mane with flashing brilliance,
touches the top of her head with his belly, and one star
joins them, holding two forms in its shared light,
seeking to bind an everlasting knot of stars.

“Next clings the Ram with his twisted horns.
Beside him are
the Fishes, one of which glides a little ahead
and feels more keenly the North Wind’s shivering blasts.”

2.112 “At Andromeda’s feet Perseus is outlined,
whom blasts from the farthest north strike.
Beside
his left knee

you will see the Pleiades with their faint light.

“Then the Lyre is seen, lightly poised and curved.
Then
there is the winged Bird beneath the sky’s broad canopy.
Nearest the Horse’s head is the Water Bearer’s right hand, and then the whole
Water Bearer. Next,
breathing icy cold from his mighty breast,

half-beast in body, comes Capricorn in the great circle;
when Titan has clothed him in unceasing light,
he turns and wheels his chariot at the winter solstice.”

2.113 “Here too is seen
the Scorpion, emerging high and showing himself,
dragging the curving Bow behind with his body’s force.
Beside it
the Bird, bright with feathers, wheels about.

“And close by the Eagle bears itself along, its body blazing.
Next the Dolphin.
Then Orion, leaning forward with slanting body.”

2.114 “Following him,
that burning Dog with the light of stars
shines out. Behind it follows the Hare,
never slackening its race with wearied body.

“And by the Dog’s tail Argo glides, winding along.
“The Ram covers her, and the scaly-bodied Fishes,

as her brilliant body touches the River’s banks.
You will see that River ‘winding’ and flowing far away,
and you will see the long Bonds,

placed at the Fishes’ tails to hold them fast.
“Then beside the Scorpion’s shining sting you will see

the Altar, caressed by the breath of the South Wind.
Beside these the Centaur
advances, hurrying to bring his horse’s parts beneath the Claws.

“Here, stretching out his right hand, which holds the huge four-footed beast,
he reaches forward and fiercely approaches the shining Altar.

“Here the Hydra raises herself from the lower regions;
her body stretches far,
and in the middle of her coil the gleaming Bowl shines out.

“At her far end the Raven, bright with feathered body,
strikes her with its beak; and here, just under the Twins, is that star
called Before-the-Dog, which bears the Greek name Procyon.”

2.115 “Can anyone in his senses suppose that this whole design of stars and this mighty adornment of heaven could have been made from bodies rushing here and there at random and by chance? Or could any other nature, devoid of mind and reason, have produced things which not only required reason to be made, but cannot be understood for what they are without reason of the highest order?”

“And these are not the only marvels. Nothing is greater than the world’s stability and coherence: nothing even imaginable could be better fitted to endure. For all its parts, seeking the center from every side, press toward it equally. And bodies remain joined together most firmly when bound as though by a cord passing around them. This is what that nature does which pervades the whole world, accomplishing everything by mind and reason, and draws and turns its outermost parts toward the center.”

2.116 “Therefore, if the world is spherical, and for that reason all its parts, evenly balanced on every side, are held together both in themselves and with one another, the same must happen with the earth. All its parts must tend toward the center—and in a sphere the center is the lowest point—so that nothing breaks the pull of gravity and weight and thereby weakens that mighty tension. In the same way the sea, though above the earth, nevertheless seeks the earth’s center and is drawn evenly into a sphere on every side: it never overflows or spills away.”

2.117 “The air adjoining it is indeed borne upward by its lightness, yet it spreads itself in every direction. Thus it is continuous and joined with the sea, and is naturally carried toward heaven; tempered by heaven’s fineness and heat, it supplies living creatures with a life-giving, wholesome breath. The highest part of heaven, called the ethereal region, embraces it, retains its own fine heat, unthickened by any admixture, and joins with the outermost air. In the ether the stars revolve, held together in globes by their own inward pressure, their shape and form themselves maintaining their balance. For they are round, the forms which, as I think I said before, are least vulnerable to injury.”

- 2.118 “The stars are fiery by nature. They are therefore nourished by the vapors of the earth, the sea, and the other waters, which the sun raises from the warming fields and from the waters. Sustained and renewed by these, the stars and the whole ether pour them out and draw them back again from the same place, so that almost nothing is lost, or only the very little consumed by the stars’ fire and the ether’s flame. From this our school believes that the event about which Panaetius was said to have doubts will follow: in the end the whole world will catch fire. Once the moisture is consumed, the earth could no longer be nourished, nor could air return, since with all water exhausted it could not arise. Thus nothing would remain but fire, and from it, as a living being and a god, the world would be renewed and the same ordered beauty arise again.”
- 2.119 “I do not wish to seem to you to dwell too long on the system of the stars, especially those called wandering. Their utterly unlike movements produce such harmony: the highest, Saturn, brings cold; Mars, in the middle, brings heat; Jupiter, set between them, brings light and tempers their extremes. Below Mars two stars obey the sun, while the sun itself fills the whole world with its light, and the moon, illuminated by it, brings pregnancy and birth and the ripening of new life. If this union of things, this fitting together of nature as though in agreement for the world’s preservation, leaves anyone unmoved, I know for certain that he has never reflected on any of these things.”
- 2.120 “Come, let us pass from things in heaven to things on earth. What is there here in which the reason of an intelligent nature does not appear? First, the roots of things that grow from the earth give stability to what they support and draw from the earth the sap that nourishes what is held by those roots. Trunks are covered with an inner or outer bark to give them greater protection from cold and heat. Vines, indeed, grasp their supports with tendrils as though with hands, and raise themselves up like living creatures. They are even said to recoil from cabbage stalks, if these are planted nearby, as from something deadly and harmful, and never to touch them at any point.”

- 2.121 “How great is the variety of living creatures, and how great their power to perpetuate each its own kind! Some are covered with hides, others clothed in shaggy hair, others bristling with spines. We see some overlaid with feathers, others with scales; some armed with horns, others given wings for escape. Nature has provided living creatures richly and abundantly with the food suited to each. I could recount the adaptations in their shapes for taking and digesting that food, the ingenious, delicate design of their parts, and the marvelous workmanship of their limbs. For everything enclosed within them has grown and been placed so that nothing is superfluous, nothing unnecessary to the maintenance of life.”
- 2.122 “The same nature has given animals both sensation and appetite: through the latter they strive to obtain their natural food, and through the former they distinguish the harmful from the wholesome. Again, some animals approach their food by walking, others by crawling, others by flying or swimming. Some seize it with their gaping mouths and their teeth themselves, some snatch it with the grip of claws, some with hooked beaks; some suck, some pluck, some gulp, some chew. Some, too, are so low to the ground that they easily reach food on it with their snouts; taller creatures, such as geese, swans, cranes, and camels, are helped by the length of their necks.”
- 2.123 “The elephant has even been given a hand, because its great bulk made access to food difficult. But to beasts whose food consists of †creatures of another kind, nature has given either strength or speed. Some have also been given a certain inventiveness and ingenuity. Among little spiders, for example, some weave a kind of net to dispatch whatever gets caught in it, while others [...] lie in wait to take their prey by surprise; if anything falls into their reach, they snatch and devour it. The pinna—for that is its Greek name—with its two large, open shells, enters into a sort of partnership with a small shrimp to procure food. When little fish have swum into the gaping shell, the shrimp warns the pinna by a bite, and the pinna closes its shells. Thus two utterly unlike little creatures seek their food in common.”

2.124 “Here the wonder is whether they have joined together by some agreement or have been brought together from birth by nature herself. There is also much to wonder at in those aquatic animals that are born on land. Crocodiles, for instance, river turtles, and certain snakes, born out of water, seek water as soon as they can move. Indeed, we often put ducks’ eggs under hens. At first the young, when hatched, are fed by the hens as their mothers, which hatched and brooded them; then, as soon as they can see water, their natural home, they leave the hens and escape when they follow. So great a vigilance for self-preservation has nature implanted in living creatures. I have also read an account of a bird called the spoonbill, which seeks its food by flying up to birds that dive into the sea. When they emerge with a fish they have caught, it grips their heads in its beak and presses until they drop their catch; then it seizes the fish itself. This same bird is said habitually to fill itself with shellfish, digest them with the heat of its stomach, vomit them up, and so pick out what is edible.”

2.125 “Sea frogs are said to bury themselves in sand and move near the water; when fish approach them as though they were food, the frogs kill and devour them. There is a sort of natural war between kite and raven: each therefore breaks the other’s eggs wherever it finds them. And who can fail to marvel at this observation of Aristotle, from whom most of these accounts come? When cranes cross the seas in search of warmer regions, they form a triangle. At its foremost angle they push back the air in their path; then, gradually along either side, their wings act like oars to ease the birds’ passage. The triangle’s base, formed by the cranes, is helped by the winds as though from astern; and they rest their necks and heads on the backs of those flying ahead. The leader himself cannot do this, having nothing to lean on, so he flies back to rest in his turn, and one of those that have rested takes his place. This alternation is maintained throughout the journey.”

2.126 “I could give many examples of this kind, but you see their general character. More familiar still is the great care beasts take of themselves: how they look around while feeding, how they hide in their lairs. And these things are wonderful: dogs cure themselves by vomiting, and Egyptian ibises by purging their

bowels—remedies that physicians’ ingenuity discovered only recently, that is, a few centuries ago. We have heard that panthers, trapped in foreign lands with poisoned meat, have a remedy which they use to escape death. Wild goats in Crete, when pierced by poisoned arrows, are said to seek a plant called dittany; when they have tasted it, the arrows fall from their bodies.”

2.127 “And shortly before giving birth, hinds purge themselves with a little plant called seseli. Again, we see how each creature defends itself with its own weapons against force and fear: bulls with horns, boars with tusks, lions by charging. Some protect themselves by flight, others by concealment; cuttlefish by pouring out ink, torpedo fish by numbing their foes; many also drive off pursuers with an unbearably foul smell.”

“To make the world’s adornment perpetual, the providence of the gods has taken great care that the kinds of animals, trees, and everything rooted in the earth should always exist. All these possess within themselves the power of seed, so that many may be generated from one. This seed is enclosed in the innermost part of the fruits produced by each plant; these same seeds both provide abundant food for human beings and fill the earth with new plants of the same kind.”

2.128 “Need I speak of the wisdom that appears in animals for the perpetual preservation of their kind? First, some are male, others female, an arrangement nature devised for perpetuation; next, their bodily parts are perfectly suited to begetting and conceiving, and both male and female feel extraordinary desires to join their bodies. When the seed has settled in its place, it draws almost all nourishment to itself, and, surrounded by this, shapes a living creature. Once this has slipped out and fallen from the womb, in animals nourished by milk almost all the mothers’ food begins to turn to milk; and the newborn, with no teacher but nature for their guide, seek the breasts and are filled from their abundance. To make us understand that none of this is accidental and that all of it is the work of a provident, ingenious nature, creatures that produce many young, such as pigs and dogs, have been given many teats, while those that bear few have few.”

- 2.129 “Need I speak of the great love animals show in rearing and guarding their offspring until they can defend themselves? Fish, admittedly, are said to abandon their eggs when they have laid them, since the water easily supports the eggs, and the young hatch from them. Turtles and crocodiles, too, are said to bury their eggs after laying them on land and then depart; thus the young are born and rear themselves on their own. But hens and other birds seek a quiet place for laying, build themselves resting places and nests, and line them as softly as possible so that their eggs may be kept safe with the greatest ease. When they have hatched their chicks, they guard them, warming them with their wings against injury from cold and placing themselves between them and the sun when it is hot. Once the chicks can use their little wings, the mothers accompany their flights and are released from the rest of their care.”
- 2.130 “Human ingenuity and diligence also contribute to the preservation and well-being of some animals and some of the things the earth produces. For many cattle and plants cannot survive without human care.”
- “Great advantages for human life and prosperity are also found in different places. The Nile waters Egypt: after keeping it submerged and flooded throughout the summer, it withdraws, leaving fields softened and coated with silt for sowing. The Euphrates makes Mesopotamia fertile, bringing it what amount to new fields every year. The Indus, the greatest of all rivers, not only enriches and softens the fields with water but even sows them, for it is said to carry down with it a great quantity of seeds resembling grain.”
- 2.131 “I could produce many other memorable examples from other places, many fertile fields bearing different crops. But how generous nature is, producing so many foods, so varied and so delightful, and not at just one season of the year, so that both freshness and abundance may always give us pleasure! And how timely, how beneficial she has made the Etesian winds, not only for human beings but also for cattle and indeed everything that springs from the earth! Their breath tempers excessive heat, and they also guide voyages at sea, swift and sure. Much must be passed over, yet much is being said.”

2.132 “For there is no counting the advantages of rivers; the sea’s tides, with their † great advance and retreat; the clothed and wooded mountains; the salt deposits farthest from the seashore; the lands richly stocked with healing medicines; and finally the innumerable arts necessary to sustenance and life. Again, the alternation of day and night preserves living creatures, assigning one time for action and another for rest.”

“Thus from every side, by every line of reasoning, the conclusion follows: divine intelligence and design govern everything in this world in a marvelous way for the well-being and preservation of all.”

2.133 “But suppose someone asks for whose sake this vast construction was made. For trees and grasses, which, though without sensation, are nevertheless sustained by nature? That would be absurd. For animals? It is no more plausible that the gods took such pains for the sake of dumb, uncomprehending creatures. For whose sake, then, would one say the world was made? Clearly, for those living beings that use reason: gods and human beings. Nothing, certainly, is better than they, since reason surpasses everything. Thus it becomes credible that the world, and everything in that world, was made for the sake of gods and human beings.”

“And we shall understand more easily that the immortal gods have provided for human beings if we examine the whole construction of the human body, the entire form and perfection of human nature.”

2.134 “Since the life of living creatures is sustained by three things—food, drink, and breath—the mouth is perfectly fitted to receive them all, with the adjoining nostrils adding to its supply of breath. The food is chewed by the teeth set in the mouth, and is broken down and softened by them. The sharp front teeth divide the food by biting; the innermost teeth, called molars, grind it up, a process in which the tongue too appears to help.”

2.135 “Joining the tongue at its root, the gullet receives what has been taken into the mouth, which first slips down into it. Touching the tonsils on either side, it ends at the farthest, innermost part of the palate. When the tongue’s activity

and movements have pushed the food down, thrust it downward as it were, the gullet receives it and drives it on. Its parts below the swallowed food expand, while those above it contract.”

2.136 “But the windpipe—the ‘rough artery,’ as physicians call it—has its opening joined to the tongue’s roots a little above the point where the gullet meets the tongue. It extends as far as the lungs, receives the air drawn in by breathing, and exhales and returns it from the lungs. It is covered by a sort of lid, provided to prevent the obstruction of the breath if any food should happen to fall into it. Now the stomach, situated below the gullet, is a receptacle for food and drink, while the lungs and heart draw breath from outside. The stomach has many wonderfully fashioned parts, consisting chiefly of sinewy tissue. It is full of folds and windings, and confines and holds whatever it has received, dry or moist, so that it may be changed and digested. It now contracts, now relaxes, pressing together and mixing everything it has received, so that through its abundant heat, its grinding of the food, and the breath as well, everything may easily be digested, fully processed, and distributed through the rest of the body. The lungs have a certain porousness and a softness like that of sponges, perfectly suited to drawing breath. They contract as they breathe and then expand with †breath, so that this food of life, which above all sustains living creatures, may be drawn in repeatedly.”

2.137 “From the intestines, the juice that nourishes us, †separated in the stomach from the rest of the food, passes to the liver through certain channels drawn and directed from the middle intestine to the liver’s gates, as they are called. These reach the liver and attach to it; from there other channels [...] extend, through which the food passes as it flows from the liver. Once the bile and the fluids discharged from the kidneys have been separated from this food, the remainder turns into blood and flows together at those same gates of the liver to which all its channels lead. Passing through them, the food pours, at this very point, into the vein called the vena cava; through it, now fully processed and digested, it flows to the heart. From the heart it is distributed throughout the body by a great many veins extending into every part.”

- 2.138 “How the remnants of food are expelled by the intestines’ alternate contraction and relaxation is not at all difficult to describe, but it should nevertheless be passed over, lest our discussion contain anything unpleasant. Let us explain instead nature’s incredible workmanship. The air drawn into the lungs in breathing is warmed first by the act of breathing itself and then by contact with the lungs. Part of it is returned in exhalation, while part is received by a portion of the heart called a ventricle. Joined to this is another like it, into which blood flows from the liver through that vena cava. In this way, from these parts blood is poured through the veins into the whole body, and breath through the arteries. Both sets of vessels, numerous and closely woven throughout the body, bear witness to an incredible power of skillful, divine workmanship.”
- 2.139 “What shall I say of the bones? Forming the body’s supporting structure, they have marvelous joints, fitted both to give stability and to define the limbs, and adapted to movement and every bodily action. Add to these the sinews that hold the joints together, and their interlacing network extending through the whole body: like the veins and arteries, they are drawn out and issue from the heart, and are carried throughout the body.”
- 2.140 “Many things can be added to this account of nature’s diligent and ingenious forethought, showing how great and how outstanding are the gifts the gods have bestowed upon human beings. First, the gods raised them from the ground and set them tall and upright, so that by gazing at heaven they might gain knowledge of the gods. For human beings come from the earth not as mere residents and inhabitants, but as spectators, so to speak, of the things above and of heaven—a spectacle that belongs to no other kind of living creature. The senses, interpreters and messengers of the world, are wonderfully made and placed in the head, as in a citadel, to meet our needs. The eyes, like sentinels, occupy the highest position, from which they may see the most and perform their duty;”

2.141 “and the ears, having to perceive sound, which naturally travels upward, are rightly placed in the upper parts of the body. The nostrils, too, are rightly set high, because every odor travels upward; and since they have an important role in judging food and drink, they have been placed near the mouth for good reason. Taste, which had to distinguish the kinds of things we eat, dwells in that part of the mouth where nature has opened a passage for food and drink. Touch is spread evenly throughout the body, so that we can feel every blow and every excessive impact of cold or heat. And just as architects, in buildings, turn away from their owners’ eyes and noses the outlets whose unavoidable discharge would contain something offensive, so nature has banished similar things far from the senses.”

2.142 “What craftsman but nature, whose skill nothing can surpass, could have achieved such ingenuity in the senses? First she clothed and enclosed the eyes in exceedingly thin membranes, making these transparent so that we could see through them, yet strong so that the eyes would be held in place. But she made the eyes slippery and mobile, so that they could turn aside from anything harmful and direct their gaze easily wherever they wished. The actual point of vision, with which we see, called the pupil, is so small that it easily avoids things that could harm it. The eyelids, the eyes’ coverings, are exceedingly soft to the touch, so as not to injure the organ of vision, and perfectly fashioned both to close over the pupils and keep anything from falling in, and to open them. Nature provided that this could be done over and over with the greatest speed.”

2.143 “The eyelids are fortified, too, with a sort of palisade of hairs, to repel anything falling in when the eyes are open; and when they close in sleep, when we do not need our eyes for seeing, the eyes rest wrapped up, as it were. Moreover, the eyes are advantageously recessed and sheltered on every side by raised parts. Above, the eyebrows covering them ward off sweat flowing down from the head and forehead; below, the cheeks protect them, set beneath and slightly projecting; and the nose is so placed that it seems like a wall between the eyes.”

2.144 “But the organ of hearing is always open, for we need its perception even when asleep; and when it receives a sound, we are awakened from sleep itself. Its passage is winding, to keep anything from entering that might enter if it lay open in a straight, direct line. Provision has also been made that, if the tiniest creature tries to force its way in, it should stick in the earwax as though in birdlime. Outside project the parts called ears, made both to cover and protect the organ of hearing and to keep the sounds that reach them from slipping away and wandering off before they strike that organ. Their entrances, however, are hard and almost hornlike, with many windings, since surfaces of this kind reflect and amplify sound. For this reason, too, stringed instruments resonate through a tortoiseshell or horn, and sounds are returned louder from winding, enclosed spaces.”

2.145 “Similarly, the nostrils, which are always open to perform their necessary functions, have rather narrow entrances to keep anything harmful from penetrating them. They always contain moisture, useful for warding off dust and many other things. Taste is splendidly protected: it is enclosed in the mouth in a position suited both to its use and to keeping it safe.”

“And all human senses far surpass those of animals. First, the eyes discern many things more finely in the arts that fall under their judgment—in painted, modeled, and carved forms, and also in bodily movement and gesture. They judge the †beauty, order, and, so to speak, appropriateness of colors and shapes, and even greater things as well. For they recognize virtues and vices: they recognize the angry and the kindly, the joyful and the grieving, the brave and the cowardly, the bold and the timid.”

2.146 “The ears likewise possess a marvelous, finely skilled judgment, by which they distinguish the variety, intervals, and separation of sounds in the music of the voice, pipes, and strings, and the many kinds of voice: ringing and dark, smooth and rough, low and high, flexible and rigid. Only human ears judge these things. The nose, taste, and †to some extent touch likewise have great powers of discrimination. More arts have even been invented than I could wish for receiv-

ing and fully enjoying the pleasures of these senses. For it is plain how far the blending of perfumes, the seasoning of foods, and the embellishment of bodies have gone.”

2.147 “Indeed, anyone who fails to see that the human soul and mind themselves, reason, judgment, and practical wisdom, have been perfected by divine care seems to me to lack these very things. In discussing them, Cotta, I wish I might be given your eloquence. How you would describe the greatness, first, of our understanding, and then of our ability to connect and comprehend consequences in relation to their premises! Through this, evidently, we judge what follows from what and reach conclusions by reasoning; we define individual things and encompass them within precise limits. From this we understand the power and nature of knowledge, than which nothing even in a god is more excellent. And how great are those capacities which you Academics undermine and abolish: that through both senses and mind we perceive and grasp the things outside us;”

2.148 “and by bringing these perceptions together and comparing them, we also create arts, some required for the uses of life, others for enjoyment. Then how splendid, how divine, is the power of speech, ‘mistress of the world,’ as you like to call it! First, it enables us to learn what we do not know and to teach others what we do. Then by it we exhort, by it we persuade; by it we comfort the afflicted, by it we lead the terrified away from fear; by it we restrain the overexcited, by it we quench desire and anger. It has bound us together in a community of justice, laws, and cities; it has drawn us away from a savage, bestial life.”

2.149 “Unless you pay close attention, it is incredible how much workmanship nature has devised for the use of speech. First, the windpipe extends from the lungs to the innermost part of the mouth; through it the voice, originating in the mind, is received and poured out. Then in the mouth lies the tongue, bounded by the teeth. It shapes and limits the voice’s unrestrained outpouring and makes its sounds distinct and clear-cut by striking both the teeth and other

parts of the mouth. Thus our people commonly compare the tongue to a plectrum, the teeth to strings, and the nostrils to the horns that resonate with the strings in music.”

2.150 “And what useful hands nature has given human beings, servants of how many arts! For the fingers contract and extend easily, and thanks to their flexible joints and articulations they find no movement difficult. Thus by applying its fingers the hand is suited to painting, modeling, carving, and drawing sounds from strings and pipes. These arts serve pleasure; others serve necessity: I mean cultivating fields, building houses, making coverings for the body, woven or sewn, and every kind of work in bronze and iron. From this we understand that, by applying craftsmen’s hands to the mind’s discoveries and the senses’ perceptions, we have obtained everything that enables us to be sheltered, clothed, and safe, and to possess cities, walls, homes, and shrines.”

2.151 “Again, human labor—that is, human hands—provides both variety and abundance of food. Fields yield many things procured by the hand, either for immediate consumption or to be put away in storage for the years ahead. Besides, we eat animals of land, water, and air, some by catching them, others by rearing them. By taming four-footed beasts we also provide transportation; their speed and strength give us strength and speed ourselves. We place burdens on some beasts; we put them under yokes. We make full use, for our own advantage, of elephants’ exceedingly keen senses and dogs’ tracking abilities. We extract iron from the earth’s caverns, a substance necessary for cultivating fields; we discover deeply hidden veins of copper, silver, and gold, suited both to practical use and to beautiful adornment. By felling trees we use timber of every kind, cultivated and wild, partly to warm our bodies with fire and soften our food, partly to build, so that, enclosed in houses, we may ward off cold and heat;”

2.152 “it is also immensely useful for making ships, whose voyages supply all the necessities of life from every quarter. Thanks to our knowledge of seamanship, we alone control those most violent forces nature has produced, the sea and the winds, and we enjoy and use a great many products of the sea. Likewise, the

advantages of the land are entirely under human dominion. We enjoy the plains, we enjoy the mountains; the rivers are ours, the lakes are ours. We sow crops, we plant trees; by bringing in water we give the land fertility; we confine rivers, straighten them, divert them. In short, with our own hands we attempt to make, within the natural world, a second nature, as it were.”

2.153 “And has not human reason penetrated even into heaven? Alone among living creatures, we have learned the risings, settings, and courses of the stars; the human race has defined the day, the month, the year. Eclipses of sun and moon have been understood and predicted for all future time: which will occur, how great they will be, and when they will happen. By contemplating these things, the mind approaches knowledge of the gods. From this arises reverence, with which justice and the other virtues are joined; from these comes a happy life, equal and similar to the gods’, inferior to the heavenly beings in nothing but immortality, which has no bearing on living well.”

“Having set out these matters, I seem to have shown sufficiently how greatly human nature surpasses all living creatures. From this we must understand that neither the shape and arrangement of our limbs nor such powers of intelligence and mind could have been produced by chance.”

2.154 “It remains for me to show—and at last bring my speech to its close—that everything in this world which human beings use has been made and provided for their sake.”

“First, the world itself was made for gods and human beings, and the things within it were provided and devised for human benefit. For the world is, as it were, the shared home of gods and human beings, or the city of both; they alone, using reason, live by justice and law. Just as we must think Athens and Sparta were founded for the Athenians and Spartans, and rightly say that everything in those cities belongs to those peoples, so we must think that everything in the whole world belongs to gods and human beings.”

- 2.155 “Again, the revolutions of sun, moon, and the other stars, though they also contribute to the world’s coherence, nevertheless offer human beings a spectacle. No sight is more inexhaustible, none more beautiful or more remarkable for its rational order and ingenuity. For by measuring their courses we have learned the seasons’ ripening, variety, and changes. If human beings alone know these things, we must judge that they were made for human beings’ sake.”
- 2.156 “And the earth, rich in crops and the many kinds of legumes it pours forth with the greatest generosity: does it seem to produce these for wild beasts or for human beings? What need I say of vines and olive groves, whose exceedingly abundant and flourishing fruits have nothing at all to do with animals? For no beasts have any knowledge of sowing, cultivating, harvesting and gathering fruit at the right time, or storing it and putting it away; the use and care of all these things belong to human beings.”
- 2.157 “Just as we must say that lyres and pipes were made for those who could use them, so we must acknowledge that the things I have mentioned were provided only for those who use them. If some animals steal or snatch something from them, we shall not say they came into being for those animals too. For human beings do not store grain for mice or ants, but for their spouses, children, and households. Thus the animals, as I said, enjoy it by stealth; its owners do so openly and freely;”
- 2.158 “we must therefore admit that these abundant resources have been provided for human beings. Unless, perhaps, the great abundance and variety of fruits, and the pleasure they give not only to taste but also to smell and sight, cast doubt on whether nature has bestowed them on human beings alone! So far are these things from having been provided for animals as well that we see the animals themselves were brought into being for human benefit. What do sheep provide except clothing for human beings, when their wool has been worked and woven? Without human cultivation and care they could not have been fed or sustained, or yielded any benefit. And dogs—their faithful watchfulness, their

loving fawning on their masters, their hatred of strangers, their incredibly keen noses for tracking, their eagerness in the hunt—what else do these signify but that they were brought into being for human advantage?”

- 2.159 “What shall I say of oxen? Their very backs proclaim that they were not shaped to carry burdens, while their necks were born for the yoke, and their broad, strong shoulders for †drawing plows. When the race of gold, as the poets call it, used them to till the earth by breaking up its clods, they never suffered any violence:

Then suddenly arose a race of iron,
the first that dared to forge the deadly sword

and taste the young ox tamed and yoked by human hands.

So great was the benefit thought to come from oxen that eating their flesh was held a crime. It would take too long to pursue the uses of mules and donkeys, which were certainly provided to serve human beings.”

- 2.160 “What does a pig have to offer except food? Chrysippus indeed says its very soul was given to it as salt, to keep it from rotting; and because this animal was suited for human consumption, nature produced nothing more prolific. Why speak of the abundance and deliciousness of fish, or of birds? They give us so much pleasure that our Providence sometimes seems to have been an Epicurean. Nor could birds even be caught without human reason and ingenuity; though we believe that some birds, both those that give signs by flight and those that give signs by voice, as our augurs call them, were born for the purpose of foretelling events.”

- 2.161 “Again, we capture huge, wild beasts by hunting, both to eat them and to train ourselves in hunting as an imitation of military discipline, to use them when tamed and thoroughly trained, as we use elephants, and to select from their bodies many remedies for diseases and wounds. We do the same with certain plants and herbs, whose uses we have learned through long practice and experiment. You may survey the whole earth and all the seas with your mind as

though with your eyes: you will see the immense, fruitful stretches of plain, the mountains' dense covering, the pastures of cattle, and then voyages across the sea at incredible speed."

2.162 "And not only above the earth: even in its innermost darkness lie hidden the useful properties of countless things, produced for human use and discovered by human beings alone."

"But the point which each of you may seize upon for criticism—you, Cotta, because Carneades liked to assail the Stoics, and you, Velleius, because Epicurus ridicules nothing so much as the prediction of future events—seems to me to offer perhaps the strongest confirmation that the gods' foresight cares for human affairs. For divination certainly exists, appearing in many places, circumstances, and times, both in private life and especially in public affairs:"

2.163 "the diviners who inspect sacrifices discern much; augurs foresee much; much is revealed through oracles, much through inspired prophecies, much through dreams, much through portents. By understanding these, people have often obtained many results that accorded with their wishes and interests, and have averted many dangers as well. Therefore this capacity—whether a power, an art, or a natural endowment—for knowing future events has certainly been given by the immortal gods to human beings and to no other creature."

"If these individual arguments happen not to move you, still, taken as a whole, connected and joined together, they certainly ought to have done so."

2.164 "And the immortal gods regularly care and provide not only for the whole human race but also for individuals. We may narrow down the whole of humankind, reduce it step by step to smaller groups, and finally reach individuals. For if, on the grounds we have already given, we think the gods care for all human beings wherever they are, in whatever region or part of lands separated from the continuous stretch of this land we inhabit, they also care for the people who inhabit these lands with us from east to west."

- 2.165 “But if they care for those who inhabit that great island, as it were, which we call the inhabited world, they also care for those who occupy parts of that island—Europe, Asia, Africa. Therefore they also cherish parts of those regions, such as Rome, Athens, Sparta, and Rhodes; and, apart from the whole body of citizens, they cherish individuals in those cities: Curius, Fabricius, and Coruncanius in the war with Pyrrhus; Calatinus, Duilius, Metellus, and Lutatius in the First Punic War; Maximus, Marcellus, and Africanus in the Second; after them Paulus, Gracchus, and Cato, and, within our fathers’ memory, Scipio and Laelius. Our own state and Greece have produced many other exceptional men besides, none of whom, we must believe, could have become what he was without a god’s help.”
- 2.166 “This reasoning led the poets, especially Homer, to assign particular gods to the foremost heroes—Ulysses, Diomedes, Agamemnon, Achilles—as companions amid crises and dangers. Moreover, the gods’ own frequent appearances, such as those I recalled earlier, show that they care for communities and individual people alike. This is also understood from signs of future events, which are presented to us sometimes asleep, sometimes awake. We receive many warnings, too, through marvels, many through the entrails of sacrifices, and through many other things which long experience has so carefully observed that it has produced the art of divination.”
- 2.167 “No man, then, has ever been great without some divine inspiration. Nor should we try to refute this by judging that, if a storm has damaged someone’s crops or vineyards, or if chance has taken away some of life’s advantages, the person who suffers one of these things is either hated or neglected by a god. The gods care for great things and disregard small ones. For great men, however, all things always turn out well—if, indeed, our school and Socrates, the foremost philosopher, have spoken adequately about the richness and abundance of virtue.”

2.168 “These, more or less, were the things that occurred to me which I thought should be said about the nature of the gods. But you, Cotta, if you listen to me, should plead the same case, remembering that you are both a leading citizen and a pontiff. Since your school permits you to argue on either side, choose this side instead, and direct toward it that power of discussion which you gained from rhetorical exercises and which the Academy has enlarged. For arguing against the gods is a wicked and impious practice, whether it is done sincerely or in pretense.”

Book 3



- 3.1 When Balbus had finished, Cotta smiled. “You are late in telling me what to defend, Balbus. While you were speaking, I was thinking over what I should say in reply—not so much to refute you as to inquire into what I did not fully understand. But since everyone must use his own judgment, it is hard for me to think just what you would like.”
- 3.2 Here Velleius said, “You have no idea, Cotta, how eagerly I am waiting to hear you. Our friend Balbus enjoyed your argument against Epicurus; now, in return, I will give you an attentive hearing against the Stoics. I hope you have come well prepared, as you usually do.”
- 3.3 “By Hercules, I have, Velleius,” Cotta replied. “My position with Lucilius is not the same as it was with you.”
“How is that?” he asked.
“Because your Epicurus seems to me to put up no great fight about the immortal gods. He merely dares not deny their existence, for fear of incurring hatred or prosecution. But when he insists that the gods do nothing, care for nothing, and possess human limbs without having any use for those limbs, he seems to be playing with us, and to think it enough to say that there is a certain blessed and eternal nature.”

- 3.4 “But you noticed, I imagine, how much Balbus said, and how closely his points fitted and held together, even if they were not altogether true. As I said, then, I intend not so much to refute his speech as to inquire into what I did not fully understand. So I leave it to you, Balbus: would you rather answer my questions one by one about what I have not quite grasped, or hear my entire speech?”
- “For my part,” said Balbus, “if you want anything explained, I would rather answer. But if you are questioning me less to understand than to refute me, I will do whichever you wish: either answer each question as you ask it, or answer everything when you have finished.”
- 3.5 “Excellent,” said Cotta. “Then let us follow where the discussion itself leads us. But before the subject, a few words about myself. I am deeply moved, Balbus, by your authority, and by that appeal at the end of your speech, urging me to remember that I am both Cotta and a pontiff. Its point, I suppose, was that I should defend the beliefs about the immortal gods inherited from our ancestors, and their sacrifices, ceremonies, and religious observances. I certainly will always defend them, as I always have. No argument from anyone, learned or unlearned, will ever dislodge me from the conviction I inherited from our ancestors about the worship of the immortal gods. But in matters of religion I follow the chief pontiffs Tiberius Coruncanius, Publius Scipio, and Publius Scaevola—not Zeno or Cleanthes or Chrysippus. And I have Gaius Laelius, both augur and sage, whom I would rather hear speaking on religion in that celebrated speech than any leader of the Stoics. The entire religion of the Roman people falls into sacrifices and auspices, with a third category added whenever interpreters of the Sibyl or diviners examining entrails give warnings drawn from portents and prodigies to foretell the future. I have never thought that any of these religious practices should be slighted. I am convinced that Romulus, by establishing the auspices, and Numa, by establishing sacrifices, laid the foundations of our state, which surely could never have grown so great without winning the fullest favor of the immortal gods.”

- 3.6 “You have heard, Balbus, what Cotta thinks, what a pontiff thinks. Now let me understand what you think. From you, as a philosopher, I ought to receive a reasoned account of religion; our ancestors I ought to trust even when they give no reason.”
- “What account, then,” said Balbus, “do you require of me, Cotta?”
- “Your division,” he replied, “had four parts: first you intended to show that gods exist; next, what they are like; then, that they govern the world; and finally, that they care for human affairs. That was your division, if I remember rightly.”
- “Quite rightly,” said Balbus. “But I am waiting for your questions.”
- 3.7 “Let us examine each point in order,” said Cotta. “If the first is what everyone but the utterly impious agrees on—that gods exist—this conviction, at least, cannot be burned out of my heart. Yet you give me no instruction at all about why this belief, which I hold on the authority of our ancestors, should be true.”
- “If you are convinced,” said Balbus, “why do you want to learn it from me?”
- “Because,” Cotta replied, “I approach this discussion as if I had never heard or thought anything about the immortal gods. Take me as a novice, an untouched pupil, and teach me what I ask to know.”
- 3.8 “Tell me, then,” he said, “what you want to know.”
- “What do I want? First, why, after saying that [the obvious point in] this part needed no argument at all, since it was obvious and universally agreed that gods exist, you spoke at such length on that very point.”
- “Because I have noticed, Cotta,” he said, “that you too, when speaking in court, often overwhelm a judge with as many arguments as you can, provided the case allows it. Philosophers do the same, and I have done it as best I could. Your question is rather like asking why I look at you with both eyes instead of closing one, when I could achieve the same result with one.”
- 3.9 “You must judge how close that comparison is,” said Cotta. “In a lawsuit, if something is evident and everyone agrees on it, I do not usually argue the point: argument weakens what is self-evident. And even if I did so in lawsuits, I would not do the same in a discussion as exacting as this. There would be no

reason to close one eye, since both have the same view, and since nature, which you claim is wise, has chosen to give us two openings for light, pierced through from the mind to the eyes. But because you did not trust the point to be as obvious as you would like, you tried to prove the gods' existence by many arguments. For me, one was enough: that our ancestors handed down this belief to us. But you disdain authorities and fight with reason."

3.10 "Allow my reason, then, to contend with yours.

"You bring forward all these arguments for the existence of gods, and by arguing make doubtful what in my opinion is not doubtful at all. I committed to memory not only the number but the order of your arguments. The first was that, on looking up at the sky, we immediately understand that some divine power governs these things. From this came the quotation, 'Look at this blazing height above, which all invoke as Jupiter.'"

3.11 "As if any of us called that Jupiter rather than the god on the Capitol! Or as if it were obvious and universally agreed that those beings are gods, when Velleius and many others will not even grant you that they are alive. You also thought it a weighty argument that belief in the immortal gods was universal and growing daily. Are matters of such importance, then, to be decided by the opinions of fools—especially in your school, which calls them mad? 'But we see the gods in person: Postumius at Lake Regillus, Vatinius on the Salarian Way'—and something, too, about the Locrians' battle by the Sagra. These beings you called the sons of Tyndareus—that is, men born of a man—and Homer, who lived not long after their time, says they were buried at Sparta. Do you think they came to meet Vatinius on white geldings, without a single groom, and announced the Roman people's victory to Vatinius, a country fellow, rather than to Marcus Cato, then our leading citizen? Do you also believe that the mark still visible on a flint at Lake Regillus, resembling a hoofprint, was made by Castor's horse?"

3.12 “Would you not rather believe what can be supported by argument—that the souls of distinguished men, such as those sons of Tyndareus, are divine and eternal—than that men who had once been cremated could ride horses and fight in battle? Or if you say this could happen, you must explain how, not produce old women’s tales.”

3.13 “Do you think these are tales?” Lucilius asked. “Do you not see the temple dedicated by Aulus Postumius to Castor and Pollux in the Forum? Do you not see the Senate’s decree concerning Vatinius? As for the Sagra, the Greeks even have a familiar proverb: they say what they affirm is more certain than what happened at the Sagra. Should not these authorities carry weight with you?”

“You fight me with hearsay, Balbus,” Cotta replied, “but I ask you for reasons.

[...]

[...]

[...]

[...] follow what is going to happen.”

3.14 “For no one can escape what is going to happen. Often it is not even useful to know the future. It is wretched to torment yourself without accomplishing anything, without even that last, universal comfort, hope—especially since you yourselves say that everything happens by fate, and that fate is what has always been true from all eternity. What benefit is there, then, what aid to taking precautions, in knowing that something will happen, when it will certainly happen anyway? Besides, where does this divination come from? Who discovered the significance of a cleft in a liver? Who took note of the crow’s call, or of lots? I believe in these things, and I cannot treat with contempt the augural staff of Attus Navius, whom you mentioned. But I must learn from philosophers how these things came to be understood, especially since those diviners of yours are wrong about so very much.”

- 3.15 “‘But doctors too,’ you said, ‘are often mistaken.’ What resemblance is there between medicine, whose principles I can see, and divination, whose origin I do not understand? You also think the gods were appeased by the self-sacrifice of the Decii. How monstrous was their injustice, if they could not be reconciled to the Roman people unless men like those died! That was a commander’s maneuver, what the Greeks call a stratagem—but the maneuver of commanders who cared for their country and did not spare their lives. They thought that the army would follow its commander as he spurred his horse and hurled himself against the enemy; and so it did. As for the voice of Faunus, I have certainly never heard it. If you say you have, I will believe you, though I have no idea what Faunus actually is. So far, then, Balbus, as far as your contribution goes, I do not understand that gods exist. I do believe they exist, but the Stoics teach me nothing.”
- 3.16 “For Cleanthes, as you said, thinks that conceptions of gods have taken shape in human minds in four ways. One, about which I have said enough, arose from foreknowledge of the future; a second from violent storms and other upheavals; a third from the usefulness and abundance of the things we enjoy; and a fourth from the ordered movements of the stars and the regularity of the heavens. We have discussed foreknowledge. As for disturbances in sky, sea, and earth, we cannot deny that, when they occur, many people fear them and think they are the work of the immortal gods.”
- 3.17 “But the question is not whether there are people who believe in gods; it is whether gods exist or not. The other reasons Cleanthes gives—the abundance of the benefits we receive, and the ordered succession of the seasons and regularity of the heavens—we shall consider when we discuss the providence of the gods, on which you spoke at such length, Balbus.”
- 3.18 “To that same point we shall also postpone what you attributed to Chrysippus: that, since nature contains something human beings could not produce, there must be something better than humanity. We shall postpone your comparisons between the beauties of a house and the beauty of the world, and your appeal

to the harmony and accord of the universe as a whole. Zeno's brief and, as you thought, pointed syllogisms will also wait for the part of the discussion I have just named. Then, in their proper place, we shall examine all your physical arguments about the power of fire and the heat from which, you said, everything is generated. Everything you said the day before yesterday, when trying to prove the existence of gods, about why the universe as a whole, the sun, the moon, and the stars possess sensation and intelligence, I shall reserve for that same occasion."

3.19 "But I shall keep asking you the same question: by what reasoning do you convince yourself that gods exist?"

"I believe I have supplied the reasoning," said Balbus. "But you refute it in such a way that, just when you seem about to question me and I have prepared to answer, you suddenly turn the discussion aside and give me no opportunity to reply. So matters of the greatest importance have passed without discussion—divination and fate, subjects on which you speak briefly but our school usually has much to say. Yet they are separate from the question now before us. So, if you please, do not jumble the issues; let us settle what this discussion is asking."

3.20 "Very well," said Cotta. "Since you divided the whole inquiry into four parts, and we have discussed the first, let us consider the second. It seemed to me to amount to this: while trying to show what the gods are like, you showed that there are none. You said it was extremely difficult to draw the mind away from what the eyes are accustomed to seeing. But since nothing was more excellent than god, you had no doubt that the world was a god, because nothing in nature was better than the world—if only we could conceive of it as alive, or rather see this with the mind as we see other things with our eyes."

3.21 "But when you deny that anything is better than the world, what do you mean by 'better'? If more beautiful, I agree; if better suited to our needs, I agree with that too. But if you mean that nothing is wiser than the world, I utterly disagree—not because it is hard to draw my mind away from my eyes, but because the more I withdraw it, the less I can grasp in thought what you intend. 'Noth-

ing in nature is better than the world.’ Nor is anything on earth better than our city. Do you therefore think the city possesses reason, thought, and intelligence? Or, because it does not, do you think an ant should be ranked above this most beautiful city, because the city has no sensation, while the ant has not only sensation but intelligence, reason, and memory? You must see what is conceded to you, Balbus, not simply assume whatever you wish.”

3.22 “For that whole line of argument was an expansion of Zeno’s old syllogism, brief and, as you thought, pointed [...]. Zeno argues as follows: ‘What employs reason is better than what does not employ reason; but nothing is better than the world; therefore the world employs reason.’”

3.23 “If you accept this, you will soon make the world appear an excellent reader of books. Following Zeno’s footsteps, you can construct this syllogism: ‘What is literate is better than what is not literate; but nothing is better than the world; therefore the world is literate.’ In the same way it will also be eloquent, a mathematician and musician, learned in every discipline—in short, a philosopher. You often said that nothing happens without god, and that nature has no power to fashion what is unlike itself. Am I to grant, then, that the world is not only alive and wise, but a lyre player and a trumpeter too, since men skilled in these arts also spring from it? This father of the Stoics offers no reason, then, why we should think the world employs reason, or even why we should think it alive. The world, therefore, is not a god; and yet nothing is better than it. For nothing is more beautiful, nothing more beneficial to us, nothing more splendid to look at or more regular in motion.

“But if the universe as a whole is not a god, neither are the stars, whose countless numbers you placed among the gods. Their even and everlasting courses delighted you—and rightly, by Hercules, for their regularity is marvelous and unbelievable.”

3.24 “But not everything, Balbus, that follows a fixed and regular course must be attributed to a god rather than to nature. What could be more regular, do you think, than the recurring ebb and flow of the Euripus at Chalcis, or of the

Sicilian strait, or the surging Ocean in those places ‘where the ravenous wave divides Europe from Libya’? What of the tides on the coasts of Spain or Britain? Can their advance and retreat at fixed times not occur without a god? Consider, please: if we call divine every motion and everything that keeps its order at fixed times, must we not also call tertian and quartan fevers divine? What could be more regular than their recurrence and course? But a reason must be given for all such things.”

3.25 “When you cannot give one, you take refuge in god as if at an altar.

“You also thought Chrysippus spoke shrewdly—a man undoubtedly quick-witted and seasoned. I call people quick-witted whose minds turn quickly, and seasoned those whose minds have been toughened by experience as hands are by work. He says, then: ‘If there is something a human being cannot produce, whoever produces it is better than a human being. But a human being cannot produce the things found in the world. Whoever could produce them is therefore superior to humanity. But who could be superior to humanity except a god? Therefore a god exists.’ All these arguments turn on the same error as Zeno’s.”

3.26 “For no distinction is made between what is better and what is more excellent, or between nature and reason. Chrysippus also denies that, if there are no gods, anything in all nature is better than humanity. Yet he considers it the height of arrogance for anyone to think that nothing is better than a human being. Granted, it may be arrogant to value oneself above the world. But it is not arrogant—rather, it is sensible—to understand that one has sensation and reason, and that Orion and the Dog Star do not. He also says, ‘If a house is beautiful, we understand that it was built for its owners, not for mice; likewise we ought to think of the world as the gods’ house.’ I certainly would think so, if I believed it had been built, rather than—as I shall show—formed by nature.”

3.27 “But Socrates in Xenophon asks where we could have obtained our minds if there were no mind in the world. And I ask where we obtained speech, rhythm, and song—unless we really think the sun talks with the moon when it draws

nearer, or that the world sings in harmony, as Pythagoras believes. These are nature's works, Balbus: not nature 'proceeding artistically,' as Zeno says—we shall soon see what that means—but nature setting everything in motion and action through its own movements and changes."

3.28 "So I liked that account of nature's harmony and accord, in which you said that its parts, joined as if by kinship, act together. What I did not accept was your denial that this could happen unless they were held together by a single divine breath. Nature holds together and endures by its own powers, not those of gods. It has that kind of mutual accord which the Greeks call 'sympathy.' But the greater this is through nature's own spontaneous action, the less reason there is to think it the work of divine intelligence."

3.29 "How, though, do you answer the arguments Carneades used to advance? If no body is immortal, no body is everlasting; but no body is immortal, nor is any body indivisible or incapable of being broken or pulled apart. Since every living being has a nature susceptible to outside influences, none can escape the necessity of receiving something from without—of undergoing, as it were, and suffering something. If every living being is like this, none is immortal. Likewise, if every living being can be cut and divided, none is indivisible, none eternal. But every living being is liable to receive and undergo an external force. Every living being must therefore be mortal, capable of dissolution and division."

3.30 "For if all wax were changeable, nothing made of wax could be unchangeable; likewise nothing made of silver or bronze, if the nature of silver and bronze were changeable. In the same way, then, if all things that are [...] from which everything is composed are changeable, no body can be unchangeable. But the elements of which everything is composed are changeable, in your view; therefore every body is changeable. Yet if any body were immortal, not every body would be changeable. The result is that every body is mortal. For every body is either water or air or fire or earth, or something compounded of these, or of some portion of them."

- 3.31 “None of these is exempt from destruction. Everything earthy can be divided; liquid is so soft that it can easily be compressed and crushed; fire and air are very easily driven aside by any blow, and by nature yield readily and disperse. Besides, all these things perish when they turn into another element: this happens when earth changes to water, when air arises from water, and ether from air, and when these same elements return in the opposite direction. But if the elements that compose every living being perish, no living being is everlasting.”
- 3.32 “And even if we leave this aside, no living being can be found that was never born and will always exist. For every living being has sensations: it therefore feels heat and cold, sweetness and bitterness; no sense can receive pleasant impressions without also receiving their opposites. If, then, it feels pleasure, it feels pain as well; and what is subject to pain must also be subject to destruction. We must therefore admit that every living being is mortal. Further, if something feels neither pleasure nor pain, it cannot be a living being.”
- 3.33 “But if whatever is a living being must feel them, and whatever feels them cannot be eternal, and every living being has sensations, then no living being is eternal. Further, there can be no living being without natural desire and aversion. What accords with nature is desired, and its opposites are avoided. Every living being desires some things and flees others; what it flees is contrary to its nature, and what is contrary to nature has the power to destroy. Every living being must therefore perish.”
- 3.34 “There are countless grounds on which we can establish and demonstrate that nothing endowed with sensation can escape destruction. For the very things we feel—cold, heat, pleasure, pain, and the rest—destroy us when intensified. No living being lacks sensation; therefore no living being is eternal. Moreover, a living being’s nature is either simple—earthy, fiery, airy, or watery, a condition we cannot even conceive—or compounded of several elements, each with its own place toward which nature’s force carries it: one to the lowest region, another to

the highest, another to the middle. These can hold together for a certain time, but by no means forever: each must be swept by nature to its own place. No living being, then, is everlasting.”

3.35 “But your people, Balbus, usually trace everything back to the power of fire, following, I believe, Heraclitus. Not everyone interprets even him in the same way; †since he did not wish what he said to be understood†, let us leave him aside. You, however, say that every active force is fire, and that living beings therefore die when their heat fails, while throughout nature what has warmth lives and flourishes. I do not understand why bodies die when their heat is extinguished, but not when their moisture or breath is lost—especially since they also die from too much heat.”

3.36 “So heat is no exception in this respect. Still, let us see where the argument leads. Your view, I think, is that, outside living bodies, nothing in nature and the world is alive except fire. Why fire rather than breath, of which living beings’ souls too consist, and from which they are called ‘animate’? How can you assume as conceded that the soul is nothing but fire? It seems more plausible that the soul is something like a blend of fire and breath. ‘But if fire is itself alive, with no admixture of another element, then, since its presence in our bodies enables us to feel, it cannot itself lack sensation.’ Again, the same reply applies: whatever has sensation must feel both pleasure and pain, and whatever pain can reach, destruction can reach as well. The result is that you cannot even make fire eternal.”

3.37 “What, then? Do you not also hold that every fire needs food and cannot possibly endure unless it is fed; that sun, moon, and the other stars are nourished by water, some fresh, some seawater? Cleanthes gives this as the reason the sun turns back and does not advance beyond the summer circle or the winter one: it must not stray too far from its food. We shall consider the merits of this account shortly. For now, let us draw the conclusion: what can perish is not eternal by nature; fire will perish unless it is fed; therefore fire is not everlasting by nature.”

3.38 “What sort of god, moreover, can we conceive who possesses no virtue? Shall we attribute practical wisdom to a god, the knowledge of things good, bad, and neither good nor bad? If nothing bad affects him or can affect him, what need has he to distinguish good from bad? What need has he of reasoning or understanding, which we use to reach the obscure through the evident, when nothing can be obscure to a god? As for justice, which allots each his due, what has that to do with gods? Human fellowship and community, as you say yourselves, brought justice into being. Temperance consists in forgoing bodily pleasures: if there is room for it in heaven, there is room for pleasures too. And how can a god be conceived as courageous? In pain, in toil, or in danger?”

3.39 “None of these touches a god. How, then, can we conceive of a god who neither employs reason nor possesses any virtue?

“Nor, when I consider what the Stoics say, can I look down on the ignorance of ordinary, uneducated people. Here are the practices of the uneducated: the Syrians worship a fish; the Egyptians have consecrated almost every kind of animal. In Greece they have many gods who were once human: Alabandus at Alabanda, Tenes at Tenedos, and throughout Greece Leucothea, who was Ino, and her son Palaemon—Hercules, Aesculapius, the sons of Tyndareus, our own Romulus, and many others, whom they think admitted to heaven like new citizens added to the register.”

3.40 “So much for the unlearned. What of you philosophers, who know better? I pass over your lofty doctrines: let the world itself be a god. This, I suppose, is that ‘blazing height above, which all invoke as Jupiter.’ Why, then, do we add more gods? And what a multitude! To me, at least, they seem very numerous. You count the individual stars as gods, and call them either by animals’ names—the Goat, the Scorpion, the Bull, the Lion—or by those of inanimate things—the Argo, the Altar, the Crown.”

3.41 “But even if we concede these points, how can the rest not merely be conceded but even understood? When we call grain Ceres and wine Liber, we are using a familiar figure of speech. But do you think anyone so mad as to believe that

what he eats is a god? As for those you say have passed from humanity into the company of gods, give an account of how this could happen, or why it has ceased to happen, and I will gladly learn. As things stand, I cannot see how the man to whom, as Accius says, ‘torches were brought on Mount Oeta,’ could pass from that burning ‘into his father’s eternal home.’ Yet Homer has Ulysses meet him in the underworld, like the others who had departed this life.”

3.42 “Indeed, I should very much like to know which Hercules in particular we worship. Those who explore the inner recesses of obscure literature hand down several. The oldest was born of Jupiter—but the oldest Jupiter, too, since we also find several Jupiters in the ancient writings of the Greeks. From him and Lysithoe, then, came the Hercules whom we are told contended with Apollo over the tripod. A second, an Egyptian, is said to have been born of the Nile and to have composed the Phrygian writings. A third belongs to the Idaean Fingers, to whom they bring offerings for the dead †to whom. A fourth, son of Jupiter and Asteria, Latona’s sister, is worshiped especially at Tyre; they say Carthage was his daughter. A fifth is in India, called Belus. The sixth is this familiar son of Alcmena, fathered by Jupiter—but the third Jupiter, since, as I shall soon show, several Jupiters too have come down to us.”

3.43 “Since the discussion has brought me to this point, I will show that I have learned better lessons on worshiping the immortal gods from pontifical law and ancestral custom, from those little sacrificial cups Numa left us, of which Laelius speaks in that precious little speech, than from the reasoning of the Stoics. For if I follow you, tell me what to answer someone who asks me this: ‘If there are gods [...], are the Nymphs also goddesses? If the Nymphs are, so are the little Pans and Satyrs. But these are not gods; therefore the Nymphs are not [goddesses] either. Yet temples have been publicly vowed and dedicated to them. Therefore the other gods to whom temples have been dedicated are not gods either. Go further: you count Jupiter and Neptune as gods; therefore their brother Orcus is also a god, and the rivers said to flow in the underworld—Acheron, Cocytus, Pyriphlegethon—and then Charon and Cerberus must be considered gods.’”

3.44 “But that must be rejected; therefore Orcus is not a god either. What do you say, then, about his brothers?’ Carneades used to say these things not to abolish the gods—what could less befit a philosopher?—but to prove that the Stoics explain nothing about them. He therefore pressed on: ‘Well, if these brothers are counted among the gods, can their father Saturn be denied a place, when he is so widely worshiped, especially in the West? If he is a god, we must admit that his father Heaven is also a god. If so, Heaven’s parents, Aether and Day, must also be held gods, along with their brothers and sisters, whom the ancient genealogists name as follows: Love, Deceit, † Measure, Toil, Envy, Fate, Old Age, Death, Darkness, Misery, Lamentation, Favor, Fraud, Obstinacy, the Fates, the Hesperides, Dreams. All these, they say, were born of Erebus and Night. Either we must accept these monstrosities, then, or reject those first gods too.’”

3.45 “What? Will you say that Apollo, Vulcan, Mercury, and the others are gods, but hesitate over Hercules, Aesculapius, Liber, Castor, and Pollux? Yet these are worshiped just as much as those, and among some peoples far more. These too, then, must be considered gods, though born of mortal mothers. What of Aristaeus, said to have discovered the olive, Apollo’s son; Theseus, Neptune’s son; and the others whose fathers are gods? Will they not be counted among the gods? What of those whose mothers are goddesses? Even more so, I imagine. Just as [in] civil law the child of a free mother is free, so by natural law the child of a divine mother must be a god. Thus the islanders of Astypalaea worship Achilles with the greatest reverence. If he is a god, Orpheus and Rhesus are gods too, each born of a Muse—unless perhaps marriages at sea rank higher than those on land. If these are not gods because they are worshiped nowhere, how are the others gods?”

3.46 “Consider, then, whether these honors are paid to human excellence, not immortality—as you too, Balbus, seemed to suggest. And if you think Latona a goddess, how can you not think the same of Hecate, whose mother Asteria is Latona’s sister? Or is she a goddess too? We have seen her altars and shrines in Greece. But if she is a goddess, why not the Eumenides? If they are goddesses—

they have a sanctuary at Athens and, as I understand it, the grove of Furina here at Rome—then the Furies are goddesses, watchers, I suppose, and avengers of crime and wickedness.”

3.47 “But if there are gods of a kind that intervene in human affairs, Natio too must be considered a goddess. We regularly offer sacrifice to her when we make the circuit of the shrines in the territory of Ardea. Because she watches over married women in childbirth, she was named Natio, Birth, from those being born. If she is a goddess, all those you mentioned are gods: Honor, Faith, Mind, Concord; therefore Hope and Moneta the Warner too, and everything we can fashion for ourselves in thought. If that is not plausible, neither is the premise from which these conclusions flowed. Tell me, moreover: if those we worship and have received by tradition are gods, why should we not count Serapis and Isis in the same class? If we do, why reject the gods of foreign peoples? We shall then include among the gods oxen and horses, ibises and hawks, asps, crocodiles and fish, dogs, wolves and cats, and many other beasts besides. If we reject these, we shall also reject the premises that gave rise to them.”

3.48 “What next? Will Ino be considered a goddess and called Leucothea, the White Goddess, by the Greeks, and Matuta by us, though she is Cadmus’s daughter, while Circe, Pasiphae, and Aeetes, born of Perseis, Ocean’s daughter, and fathered by the Sun, are not counted among the gods? Yet our colonists at Circeii also worship Circe devoutly. So you consider her a goddess. What will you answer Medea, whose two grandfathers were gods, the Sun and Ocean, and whose father was Aeetes and mother Idyia? What of her brother Absyrtus—called Aegialeus in Pacuvius, though the former name is more common in ancient writings? If these are not gods, I fear for Ino’s position; for all these claims have flowed from the same source.”

3.49 “Will Amphiarus and Trophonius, then, be gods? Our tax contractors, at least, when the censors’ contract exempted lands belonging to immortal gods in Boeotia, denied that anyone who had once been human was immortal. But if these are gods, Erechtheus certainly is: we have seen both his shrine and his

priest at Athens. If we make him a god, what doubt can we have about Codrus, or the others who fell fighting for their country's freedom? If this is not acceptable, neither should we accept the earlier claims from which these flow."

- 3.50 "In most states, indeed, we can understand that the memory of brave men has been consecrated with honors paid to immortal gods in order to foster courage, so that the best men might more readily face danger for their country. For this very reason Erechtheus and his daughters are counted among the gods at Athens, where there is also the daughters of Leos' shrine, called the Leocorion. The people of Alabanda worship Alabandus, who founded that city, more devoutly than any of the renowned gods. When someone there pestered Stratonicus, insisting that Alabandus was a god but Hercules was not, he gave one of his many witty replies: 'Then,'"
- 3.51 "he said, 'let Alabandus be angry with me, and Hercules with you.' But do you not see, Balbus, how far your arguments drawn from heaven and the stars spread? The sun and moon are gods; the Greeks identify the one with Apollo, the other with Diana. But if the moon is a goddess, then the Morning Star and the other wandering stars will also take their place among the gods; therefore the fixed stars too. Why should the rainbow's form not be counted among the gods? It is beautiful, and because of that appearance, and because its origin is marvelous, it is said to be the daughter of Thaumias, Wonder. If its nature is divine, what will you do with clouds? The rainbow itself is made from clouds colored in a certain way; one cloud is even said to have given birth to the Centaurs. But if you enroll clouds among the gods, you will certainly have to enroll storms, which have been consecrated in the rites of the Roman people. Rain, storm clouds, squalls, and whirlwinds must therefore be considered gods. Our generals, at least, have customarily sacrificed a victim to the waves when embarking at sea."
- 3.52 "Again, if Ceres is named from 'bearing,' as you said, the earth itself is a goddess—and is held to be one, for what else is Tellus? But if the earth is, so is the sea, which you identified with Neptune; therefore rivers and springs too.

Accordingly, Masso dedicated a shrine to Fons, the god of springs, after his campaign in Corsica; and in the augurs' prayer we see Tiberinus, Spino, Anemo, Nodinus, and other names of neighboring rivers. Either this will spread without limit, then, or we shall accept none of it. That limitless system of superstition cannot be approved; therefore none of these claims should be approved."

3.53 "So, Balbus, we must also argue against those who say that these gods, whom we all worship with solemn reverence, were transferred from the human race to heaven not in reality but only in belief. To begin with, the so-called theologians count three Jupiters. The first and second were born in Arcadia: one had Aether for his father and, they say, fathered Proserpina and Liber; the other had Heaven for his father, and is said to have fathered Minerva, whom they call the originator and inventor of war. The third was a Cretan, Saturn's son, whose tomb is shown on that island. The Greeks also give the name Dioscuri, Sons of Zeus, to several groups. First are the three called the Anactes, the Lords, at Athens: Tritopatreus, Eubuleus, and Dionysus, born of the most ancient King Jupiter and Proserpina. Second are Castor and Pollux, born of the third Jupiter and Leda. The third group, according to some, consists of Alco, Melampus, and †Euilulus, sons of Atreus, who was Pelops's son."

3.54 "Then there are the Muses: the first four, [born] of the second Jupiter, †born, and Thelxinoe†, Aoede, Arche, and Melete; the second nine, offspring of the third Jupiter and Mnemosyne; and the third, [of the third Jupiter,] born of Pierus and Antiope. Poets commonly call these last Pierides and Pieriae; their names and number are the same as those immediately before them. You say the sun was named Sol because it is alone; yet how many Suns the theologians bring forward! One was born of Jupiter and was Aether's grandson; another of Hyperion; a third of Vulcan, the Nile's son, whose city the Egyptians maintain is the one called Heliopolis. A fourth is the one whom Acantho is said to have borne at Rhodes in the heroic age, father of Ialysus, Camirus, and Lindus, from whom the Rhodians descend. A fifth is said to have fathered Aeetes and Circe in Colchis. There are several Vulcans too:"

- 3.55 “the first was born of Heaven, and by Minerva fathered the Apollo whom ancient historians held to be the guardian of Athens. The second, born [in] the Nile, is called Opas by the Egyptians, who regard him as the guardian of Egypt. The third was born of the third Jupiter and Juno, and is said to have presided over the smithy on Lemnos. The fourth was born of Maemalius and ruled the islands near Sicily that were called the Vulcanian Islands.”
- 3.56 “One Mercury was born of Heaven as father and Day as mother; his private parts are said to have become indecently aroused because the sight of Proserpina excited him. Another, the son of Valens and Phoronis, is the subterranean being identified with Trophonius. A third was born of the third Jupiter and Maia; they say he and Penelope were Pan’s parents. A fourth had the Nile for his father; the Egyptians consider it sacrilege to speak his name. The fifth, worshiped by the people of Pheneus, is said to have killed Argus and for that reason fled to Egypt, where he gave the Egyptians laws and writing. The Egyptians call him Theyt, and the first month of their year bears the same name.”
- 3.57 “The first Aesculapius was Apollo’s son, worshiped by the Arcadians, who is said to have invented the surgical probe and to have been the first to bandage a wound. The second was the second Mercury’s brother: they say he was struck by lightning and buried at Cynosurae. The third, son of Arsippus and Arsinoe, is said to have first discovered purging the bowels and extracting teeth; his tomb and grove are shown in Arcadia, not far from the River Lusius. The oldest Apollo is the one I mentioned a little earlier as born of Vulcan, the guardian of Athens. Another, son of Corybas, was born in Crete and is said to have contested that island with Jupiter himself. The third was born of the third Jupiter and Latona; they say he came to Delphi from the Hyperboreans. The fourth is in Arcadia; the Arcadians call him Nomion, the Lawgiver, because they say they received their laws from him.”

3.58 “There are also several Dianas: the first, daughter of Jupiter and Proserpina, is said to have borne the winged Cupid. The second is better known, the one we are told was born of the third Jupiter and Latona. The third is said to have Upis for her father and Glaucus for her mother; the Greeks often call her Upis after her father. We have many Dionysuses: the first born of Jupiter and Proserpina; the second of the Nile, said to have killed Nysa; the third had Cabirus for his father, and is said to have ruled as king over Asia—the Sabazian rites were established for him. The fourth was born of Jupiter and the Moon, and the Orphic rites are thought to be performed for him. The fifth was born of Nysus and Thyone, and is believed to have instituted the festivals celebrated every third year.”

3.59 “The first Venus was born of Heaven and Day; we have seen her shrine at Elis. Another sprang from foam; she and Mercury, we are told, were the parents of the second Cupid. A third, born of Jupiter and Dione, married Vulcan, but she and Mars are said to have been the parents of Anteros, Love Returned. The fourth, conceived in Syria and Cyprus, is called Astarte and is recorded as having married Adonis. The first Minerva is the one we mentioned above as Apollo’s mother; the second sprang from the Nile and is worshiped by the Egyptians of Sais. The third is the one we said above was begotten by Jupiter. The fourth, born of Jupiter and Coryphe, Ocean’s daughter, is called Coria by the Arcadians and is said to have invented four-horse chariots. The fifth is Pallas’s daughter, said to have killed her father when he tried to violate her virginity; they attach winged sandals to her feet.”

3.60 “The first Cupid is said to have been born of Mercury and the first Diana; the second of Mercury and the second Venus; the third, who is also Anteros, of Mars and the third Venus. These and other such stories have been gathered from the ancient traditions of Greece. You understand that they must be resisted if religion is not to be thrown into confusion. Yet your school not only fails to refute them, but actually confirms them by interpreting what each story signifies.

“But let us now return to the point from which we digressed. Do you really think, then, that any subtler reasoning is needed to refute these claims?”

3.61 “For we see that mind, faith, hope, virtue, honor, victory, safety, concord, and the like have the character of things, not gods. They either reside within us, like mind, hope, faith, virtue, and concord, or are things we should wish for, like honor, safety, and victory. I see the usefulness of these things; I also see statues consecrated to them. But why divine power should reside in them I shall understand when I have learned it. Fortune especially must be counted in this class: no one will separate her from fickleness and recklessness, qualities certainly unworthy of a god.”

3.62 “And why are you so delighted with that explanation of myths and unraveling of names? Heaven was castrated by his son, Saturn likewise bound by his son: these and similar stories you defend in a way that makes their inventors appear not merely sane but wise. And in unraveling names you toil pitifully: ‘Saturn, because he saturates himself with years; Mavors, because he overturns great things; Minerva, because she diminishes or because she threatens; Venus, because she comes to everything; Ceres, from bearing.’ What a dangerous practice! Many names will leave you stranded. What will you do with Vejovis? What with Vulcan? Though, since you think Neptune was named from swimming, there will be no name whose derivation you cannot explain from a single letter. In that case, indeed, it seemed to me that you were floundering more than Neptune himself.”

3.63 “First Zeno, then Cleanthes, then Chrysippus undertook an enormous and wholly unnecessary burden: to account for invented myths and explain why each thing was given its particular name. When you do this, you surely admit that reality is very different from what people believe: that those called gods are natural substances, not divine persons. So great was the error that destructive things were not only given divine names but even assigned rites of worship. We see a shrine of Fever on the Palatine, one of Orbona, Bereavement, beside the temple of the Lares, and an altar consecrated to Bad Fortune on the Esquiline.”

3.64 “Let philosophy banish every such error, so that when we discuss the immortal gods we say things worthy of the immortal gods. I have my own view about them, but I have nothing on which to agree with you. You say Neptune is an intelligent soul extending throughout the sea, and say the same of Ceres. Yet I cannot grasp this intelligence of sea or earth in thought, or even form a conjecture about it. I must therefore seek elsewhere to learn both that gods exist and what they are like; such as you wish them to be [...].”

3.65 “[...] let us examine what follows: first, whether the world is governed by the gods’ wisdom; then, whether the gods care for human affairs. These are the two points left from your division, and, if you agree, I think we should discuss them more closely.”

“I certainly agree,” said Velleius. ‘I expect greater things still, and I heartily assent to what has been said.’”

“Then Balbus said, ‘I do not want to interrupt you, Cotta, but we shall take another occasion; I will certainly make you admit it. But [...].’”

“[...]

Cicero — — after saying many things that could undermine religious observances, nevertheless says that [Cotta] holds that these matters should not be debated before the public, lest such discussion extinguish the religious practices publicly adopted (Lact. Inst. 2.3.2)”

“[...]

For, to begin with, we cannot be brought to believe that this immortal and supremely excellent nature is divided into sexes — — before all others, Tullius — — fearing no charge of impiety — — showed with greater piety what he thought of such a belief (Arnob. Nat. 3.6)”

“[...]

whether the world is governed by the gods’ wisdom (v. 5)”

“[...] on the abundance of the benefits we receive”

“[...] on the ordered succession of the seasons and the regularity of the heavens”

“[...] on Chrysippus’s arguments, on the comparison of a beautiful house with the beauty of the world, on the harmony and accord of the whole world, on Zeno’s syllogisms”

“[...] on the power of fire and the heat from which all things are generated”

“[...] whether the universe as a whole, the sun, the moon, and the stars possess sensation and intelligence; on the heavenly bodies’ need for nourishment”

“[...] on nature proceeding artistically”

“[...] that the world was not built but formed by nature

[...]”

“First, then, it is not plausible that the matter from which all things arose was produced by divine providence; rather, it has and has always had its own power and nature. Just as a builder, when about to build something, does not make the material himself but uses what is available, and a modeler likewise uses wax, so this divine providence needed material at hand—not material it made itself, but material it found ready. But if matter was not made by god, neither were earth, water, air, and fire made by god.

[...]”

“Why, if god made everything for humanity’s sake, are so many things found in both sea and land that oppose us, are hostile to us, and bring us destruction? [10] Failing to see the truth, the Stoics have met this objection most foolishly. They say that among growing things and among animals there are many whose usefulness is still hidden, but that it will be discovered in the course of time, just as necessity and experience have already discovered many things unknown to earlier ages. [11] What use, after all, can be found in mice, cockroaches, and snakes, which trouble and harm human beings? Is some medicine hidden in them? If there is, let it eventually be discovered: it will, of course, be a remedy against evils, whereas their complaint is that evil exists at all. [12] They say that a viper, burned and reduced to ash, cures the bite of the same creature. How much better it would have been for the creature not to exist at all than for a remedy against it to be required from the creature itself! (Lact. ira 13.9-12)

“[...]

God either wishes to remove evils and cannot, or can and does not wish to, or neither wishes to nor can, or both wishes to and can. [21] If he wishes to and cannot, he is weak, which is incompatible with god. If he can and does not wish to, he is begrudging, which is equally foreign to god. If he neither wishes to nor can, he is both begrudging and weak, and therefore not a god. If he both wishes to and can, which alone befits god, where do evils come from, or why does he not remove them? (Lact. ira 13.20-21)

“[...]

Human beings surpass all beasts (Dion. GL. 1.313.10)

“[...]”

“Human beings surpass all beasts

[...]”

“Things will certainly not go that way; there is a great struggle ahead.

“For would I plead with him in such honeyed words,
if not to serve my purpose?”

- 3.66 “Does she seem to reason too little, and not to be plotting monstrous destruction for herself? And how cunningly reasoned is this: ‘Who wants what he wants will find things turn out as he works for them’ — a line that sows every kind of evil.
‘Today, in his misguided thinking, he has handed me the bars
with which I will unlock all my anger and bring him ruin,
grief for me and mourning for him, death for him and exile for me.’
“Beasts, of course, do not have this reason, which you say was granted to humanity alone as a divine gift.”

3.67 “Do you see, then, what a gift the gods have bestowed on us? And the same
Medea, fleeing her father and her country:

‘After her father

draws near and is already almost ready to seize her,
meanwhile she slaughters the boy, divides his limbs joint by joint,
and scatters his body far and wide across the fields. She does this
so that, while the father gathers up his son’s scattered limbs,
she may escape, and grief delay him in pursuit,
and she may secure her safety by murdering her own kin.”

3.68 “She lacked neither wickedness nor reason. And what of the man preparing
that deadly feast for his brother? Does he not turn his reasoning this way
and that in thought?

‘I must raise a greater weight, stir up a greater evil,

to batter and crush his bitter heart.’

“Nor should we pass over the other man himself,

‘who was not content to lure his brother’s wife to adultery,’

“of whom Atreus speaks rightly and with perfect truth:

‘What I think the highest danger in the highest affairs

is that royal mothers should be defiled,

the bloodline tainted, the lineage mixed.’

“But how cunning was this very man, who sought a kingdom through
adultery:

‘I add to this,’ he says, ‘that the father of the heavenly gods,

as a portent, sent me a marvel, a bulwark of my reign:

a lamb among the flocks, gleaming with golden fleece,

which Thyestes once dared steal from the royal house,

[in] which deed he took my wife as his accomplice.”

3.69 “Does he not seem to have used the utmost reason along with the utmost wickedness? Nor is the stage alone full of these crimes: everyday life is full of crimes almost greater still. Every household feels it; so do the Forum, the Senate house, the Field of Mars, our allies, and our provinces: reason serves wrongdoing just as it serves right action. But right action comes from few people, and rarely; wrongdoing comes constantly, and from the great majority. It would have been better, then, for the immortal gods to have given us no reason at all than to have given it with such destructive consequences. Just as it is better not to give wine to the sick at all, since it rarely helps and very often harms, than to risk certain destruction in the hope of uncertain recovery, so perhaps it would have been better for humanity never to have received that swift movement of thought, that keenness and ingenuity we call reason, rather than to have received it so generously and abundantly, since it destroys so many and saves so very few.”

3.70 “If, then, divine intelligence and will cared for human beings by bestowing reason on them, it cared only for those to whom it gave good reason. These, as we see, are very few, if indeed there are any. But it is unacceptable that the immortal gods should have cared for only a few. It follows, therefore, that they cared for no one.

“You usually meet this argument by saying that the gods have not provided any less excellently for us because many people misuse their gift; many people also misuse inherited estates, yet that does not mean they have received no benefit from their fathers. Does anyone deny it? But what likeness is there in this comparison? Deianira did not intend to harm Hercules when she gave him the tunic steeped in the Centaur’s blood; nor did the man who opened Jason of Phrae’s abscess with his sword intend to help him, though doctors had been unable to cure it. Many people have helped when they meant to harm, and harmed when they meant to help. Thus the result of a gift does not reveal the giver’s intention; nor, if the recipient makes good use of it, does that prove the giver gave it out of friendship.”

3.71 “For what lust, what greed, what crime is undertaken without a plan, or accomplished without mental activity and thought—that is, reason? Every judgment is an act of reason: good reason if the judgment is true, bad reason if it is false. But from god we have only reason, if indeed we have it from him; good reason or bad comes from ourselves. Reason was not given to human beings by the gods’ favor in the way that an estate is bequeathed. For what could the gods have given humanity instead, if they had wanted to harm us? What seeds of injustice, intemperance, and cowardice could there have been, unless reason underlay those vices?

“We were just mentioning Medea and Atreus, heroic figures who, after reckoning and calculating, planned monstrous crimes.”

3.72 “What of comedy’s frivolities? Do they not constantly turn on reason? Does the man in *The Eunuch* not argue with considerable subtlety?

‘What am I to do, then?

“‘She shut me out; she calls me back. Shall I return? Not if she begs me.’

“And the man in *The Young Comrades* certainly does not hesitate, in the Academic manner, to use reason to fight the common view, when he says that ‘in the depths of love and poverty it is pleasant’

‘to have a father miserly, graceless, harsh toward his children,

who neither loves you nor cares for you.’”

3.73 “He even supplies little arguments for this incredible opinion:

‘You might cheat him of some income, or through the accounts

divert some payment, or use a little slave

to frighten the timid man out of his money. In short, what you get

from a stingy father, how much more gladly you squander!’

“The same man argues that an easygoing, generous father is a disadvantage to a son in love:

‘I do not know how to trick him, or what to take from him,

or what deceit or scheme to contrive against him:
my father's kindness has tied up all my tricks,

my frauds and sleights of hand.'

"What, then? Could these tricks, schemes, frauds, and sleights of hand have
existed without reason? What a splendid gift from the gods, allowing
Phormio to say:

'Bring on the old man; all my plans are ready in my heart.'"

3.74 "But let us leave the theater and come to the Forum. The praetor takes his seat. What is to be tried? Who set fire to the public records office. What crime could be more secret? Yet Quintus Sosius, a distinguished Roman knight from Picenum, confessed that he had done it. Who falsified public records: Lucius Alenus did that too, when he forged the signatures of the six leading clerks. What could be more ingenious than this man? Look at other trials: the gold of Tolosa, the conspiracy in Jugurtha's interest. Recall earlier cases: Tubulus, for taking money to decide a case. Later ones: the trial for unchastity under Peducaeus's bill. Then these everyday cases: assassinations, poisonings, embezzlement, and the trials concerning wills under the new law. From this comes the legal claim, 'I declare that the theft was committed with your assistance and advice'; from this, so many proceedings for bad faith—in guardianship, agency, partnership, and trust, and all the other breaches of good faith in buying, selling, hiring, and letting. From this comes the public prosecution over a private matter under the Laetorian law; from this, that net that sweeps up every kind of dishonesty, the action for malicious fraud introduced by our friend Gaius Aquillius. Aquillius himself holds that such fraud is established when one thing is pretended and another done."

3.75 "Are we to think, then, that the immortal gods sowed this vast crop of evils? For if the gods gave human beings reason, they gave them malice: malice is cunning and deceitful reasoning directed toward harm. Those same gods also gave fraud, crime, and all the rest, none of which can be undertaken or accomplished without reason. Just as that old woman wishes

‘that in the woods of Pelion the fir beams,
cut down by axes, had never fallen to the ground,’

“so I wish the gods had never given humanity this cunning, which very few use well—and even those few are often crushed by those who use it badly—while countless people use it wickedly. It seems, then, that this divine gift of reason and planning was bestowed on human beings for deceit, not goodness.”

3.76 “But you keep insisting that the fault belongs to human beings, not gods. As if a doctor blamed the severity of a disease, or a helmsman the violence of a storm! They are only little human beings, certainly, but ridiculous all the same. ‘Who would have called you in,’ someone might say, ‘if those things did not exist?’ Against a god one may argue more freely: ‘You say the fault lies in human vices. You should have given human beings a kind of reason that excluded vice and fault.’ Where, then, was there room for the gods to make a mistake? We leave estates in the hope of making a good bequest, and that hope may deceive us. How could a god be deceived? As the Sun was when he let his son Phaethon mount his chariot? Or Neptune when Theseus destroyed Hippolytus, having received from his father Neptune the power to make three wishes?”

3.77 “These are poets’ tales; we want to be philosophers, authorities on facts, not fictions. Yet even those poetic gods, if they had known their gifts would be fatal to their sons, would be thought to have erred in their generosity. And if what Aristo of Chios used to say is true—that philosophers harm those of their listeners who misinterpret sound teaching, since the profligate can emerge from Aristippus’s school and the harsh from Zeno’s—then certainly, if those who heard them were going to leave as vicious people because they twisted the philosophers’ arguments, it would be better for philosophers to remain silent than to harm their listeners.”

3.78 “Likewise, if human beings turn reason, given by the immortal gods with good intentions, to deceit and malice, it would have been better for humanity not to have received it than to have received it. Just as a doctor would be gravely at fault if he knew that a patient prescribed wine would drink it too strong and

immediately die, so your Providence deserves blame for giving reason to people it knew would use it perversely and wickedly. Unless perhaps you say it did not know! If only you would—but you will not dare, for I am well aware how highly you esteem its name.”

- 3.79 “But this argument can now be brought to a close. If folly, as all philosophers agree, is a greater evil than all evils of fortune and body put together on the other side, and no one attains wisdom, then all of us are in the utmost misery, though you say the immortal gods have cared for us so excellently. For just as it makes no difference whether no one is healthy or no one can be healthy, so I cannot understand what difference there is between no one’s being wise and no one’s being able to be wise.

“We have said far too much about something perfectly obvious. Telamon, however, completes the whole argument for the gods’ neglect of humanity in a single line:

‘For if they cared, good people would fare well, bad people badly—which is not the case.’

“They ought indeed to have made everyone good, if they really cared for the human race.”

- 3.80 “But failing that, they certainly ought to have cared for the good. Why, then, did the Carthaginian overwhelm the two Scipios, supremely brave and excellent men, in Spain? Why did Maximus bury his son, a former consul? Why did Hannibal kill Marcellus? Why did Cannae carry off Paulus? Why was Regulus’s body surrendered to Carthaginian cruelty? Why did the walls of his own home not protect Africanus? But these and many others are old examples; let us look at more recent ones. Why is my uncle Publius Rutilius, a man of utmost integrity and learning, in exile? Why was my fellow priest Drusus killed in his own home? Why was the chief pontiff Quintus Scaevola, a model of self-control and wisdom, butchered before Vesta’s image? Why, even earlier, were so

many leading citizens killed by Cinna? Why was that most treacherous of men, Gaius Marius, able to order the death of Quintus Catulus, a man of the highest distinction?”

3.81 “The day would fail me if I tried to count the good people who have met with misfortune, and no less if I listed the wicked who have prospered. Why did Marius die so happily in his own home, an old man in his seventh consulship? Why did Cinna, the cruelest of men, rule so long? ‘But he paid the penalty.’ It would have been better to restrain him and prevent him from killing so many outstanding men than for him eventually to pay the penalty himself. Quintus Varius, a monstrous man, perished in the utmost torture and torment. If this was because he had killed Drusus with a sword and Metellus with poison, it would have been better for them to be saved than for Varius to pay for his crime. Dionysius was tyrant of a most wealthy and prosperous city for thirty-eight years.”

3.82 “And for how many years before him did Pisistratus rule in the very flower of Greece! ‘But Phalaris, but Apollodorus paid the penalty.’ Yes, after torturing and killing many people. Many pirates, too, are often punished; yet we cannot deny that more captives have been cruelly killed than pirates. We have heard that Anaxarchus, the follower of Democritus, was butchered by a Cypriot tyrant, and Zeno of Elea killed under torture. What shall I say of Socrates, whose death often brings me to tears as I read Plato? Do you see, then, that in the gods’ judgment—if they observe human affairs—all distinction has been abolished?”

3.83 “Diogenes the Cynic used to say that Harpalus, considered a successful brigand in those days, bore witness against the gods by living so long in such good fortune. Dionysius, whom I mentioned earlier, was sailing to Syracuse after plundering Proserpina’s sanctuary at Locri. As he held his course with a most favorable wind, he laughed and said, ‘Do you see, friends, what a fine voyage the immortal gods grant the sacrilegious?’ Being a shrewd man, once he had grasped the lesson clearly and fully, he held to the same view. When he brought

his fleet to the Peloponnese and entered the temple of Olympian Jupiter, he stripped the god of a gold mantle of great weight, with which the tyrant Gelo had adorned Jupiter from the spoils of the Carthaginians. He even joked that a gold mantle was heavy in summer and cold in winter, and threw a woolen cloak over him, saying that it suited every season. He also ordered the gold beard removed from Aesculapius at Epidaurus: it was not fitting, he said, for the son to wear a beard when his father was beardless in every shrine.”

3.84 “He then ordered the silver tables removed from all the shrines. Since they bore the inscription ‘of the good gods,’ according to ancient Greek custom, he said he wished to make use of their goodness. He likewise took without hesitation the little gold Victories, bowls, and crowns held out in the statues’ extended hands, saying that he was accepting them, not taking them away: it was foolish to ask the gods for good things but refuse to take them when they held them out and offered them. They also say that he brought the things I have mentioned, taken from the shrines, into the marketplace and sold them by auction. After collecting the money, he issued an edict that everyone who possessed anything from the sanctuaries should return each object to its own shrine before a fixed day. Thus to impiety toward the gods he added injustice toward human beings. Yet Olympian Jupiter did not strike him with lightning, nor did Aesculapius waste him away with a wretched, lingering disease and kill him. He died in his own bed and was carried to the †tyrant’s funeral pyre; and the power he himself had won by crime he handed down to his son as an inheritance, as though it were just and lawful.”

3.85 “My argument dwells unwillingly on this subject, for it seems to sanction wrongdoing. It would rightly seem so, were it not that, quite apart from any divine reckoning, conscience itself has great weight in matters of virtue and vice. Remove conscience, and everything collapses. Just as no household or state would seem to be ordered by any rational discipline if it provided neither rewards for right action nor punishments for wrong, so surely there is no divine governance of the world in relation to humanity if it makes no distinction between good and bad.”

- 3.86 “But the gods neglect lesser matters; they do not attend to everyone’s little fields or vines, and if blight or hail has harmed someone, Jupiter was not obliged to take notice. Even kings in their kingdoms do not concern themselves with every tiny detail.’ That is what you say—as if I had just been complaining about Publius Rutilius’s estate at Formiae, not the loss of his civic security. Yet all mortals hold that they receive their external advantages from the gods—vineyards, grainfields, olive groves, abundant crops and fruit, in short, every comfort and success in life. But no one has ever credited a god with the gift of virtue.”
- 3.87 “And rightly so. For we are justly praised for virtue, and rightly take pride in it; this would not be so if we received it as a gift from a god rather than from ourselves. But if our honors or wealth increase, or if we acquire some other accidental good or avert some evil, then we thank the gods, and then we think no credit belongs to us. Has anyone ever thanked the gods for being a good man? But for being rich, honored, or unharmed, yes. People call Jupiter Best and Greatest for these reasons—not because he makes us just, temperate, or wise, but because he makes us safe, sound, wealthy, and well supplied.”
- 3.88 “Nor has anyone ever vowed a tenth to Hercules if he became wise—though Pythagoras, on discovering something new in geometry, is said to have sacrificed an ox to the Muses. I do not believe that, however, since he would not sacrifice a victim even to Apollo at Delos, for fear of spattering the altar with blood. To return to the point, all mortals judge that good fortune should be sought from a god, but wisdom obtained from oneself. However many shrines we consecrate to Mind, Virtue, and Faith, we still see that these things lie within ourselves. The means of gaining hope, safety, aid, and victory must be sought from the gods.
- “The prosperity and success of the wicked, then, disprove, as Diogenes said, all the gods’ force and power.”

3.89 “‘But good people sometimes have good outcomes.’ We seize on these cases and attribute them to the immortal gods without any reason. When Diagoras—the one called the Atheist—came to Samothrace, a friend said to him, ‘You think the gods neglect human affairs. Do you not notice, from all these painted tablets, how many people escaped the violence of a storm through their vows and reached harbor safely?’ ‘That is how it appears,’ he said, ‘for those who were shipwrecked and died at sea are not pictured anywhere.’ On another occasion, while he was sailing, his fellow passengers, frightened and terrified by a storm, told him their misfortune was deserved, since they had admitted him to the same ship. He pointed out many other ships struggling on the same course and asked whether they thought Diagoras was also aboard those ships. The truth is that your character and the way you have lived make no difference to good or bad fortune.”

3.90 “‘The gods do not attend to everything,’ he says, ‘any more than kings do.’ What resemblance is there? If kings knowingly overlook something, they are greatly at fault; but a god does not even have ignorance as an excuse. A fine defense you make of him, when you say that the gods’ power is such that, even if someone escapes punishment for his crime through death, the punishment is exacted from his children, grandchildren, and descendants! What marvelous fairness in the gods! Would any state tolerate a legislator who proposed a law condemning a son or grandson if his father or grandfather had done wrong?

‘What limit will be set to the slaughter of Tantalus’s line,
or when, in paying for Myrtilus’s death,
will punishment ever have its fill?’”

3.91 “I could not easily say whether poets corrupted the Stoics or the Stoics lent authority to the poets: both speak monstrous and shameful things. A man hurt by Hipponax’s iambic verse or wounded by a poem of Archilochus did not harbor a grief sent by a god rather than conceived within himself. Nor, when we see the lust of Aegisthus or Paris, do we seek its cause in a god, when we can almost hear guilt speak. Nor do I judge that the recovery of many sick people came from Aesculapius rather than Hippocrates; nor will I ever say that the

Spartans' discipline was given to Sparta by Apollo rather than Lycurgus. Critolaus, I say, destroyed Corinth, and Hasdrubal Carthage. Those two gouged out those eyes of the seacoast—not some angry god, whom you deny can feel anger at all.”

3.92 “But a god could certainly have come to their aid and saved cities so great and noble. You yourselves habitually say that there is nothing a god cannot accomplish, and without any effort. Just as the human limbs move without exertion at the mind’s mere wish and will, so, you say, all things can be shaped, moved, and changed by the gods’ command. You do not say this in a superstitious, old-womanish way, but on consistent physical principles: the matter from which and in which everything exists is entirely flexible and changeable, so that there is nothing that cannot be fashioned and transformed from it, however suddenly; divine providence is the shaper and governor of it all, and therefore, wherever it turns, can accomplish whatever it wishes. Accordingly, it either does not know its own power, or neglects human affairs, or cannot judge what is best.”

3.93 “‘It does not care for individual people.’ No wonder: not even for cities. Not for cities? Not even for nations and peoples. If it disregards even these, what wonder that it has disregarded the entire human race?

“But how can you both say that the gods do not attend to everything and maintain that dreams are distributed and allotted to human beings by the immortal gods? I bring this up with you because belief in the truth of dreams belongs to your school. And you also say that vows ought to be undertaken. Yet individuals make vows; therefore the divine mind hears about individuals too. You see, then, that it is not as busy as you supposed. Grant that it is fully occupied, turning the heavens, watching over the earth, governing the seas: why does it let so many gods remain idle and do nothing? Why does it not put some unoccupied gods in charge of human affairs—those gods whose countless numbers you described, Balbus?

“This is nearly all I had to say about the nature of the gods—not to abolish it, but to make you understand how obscure it is and how difficult to explain.”

- 3.94 With these words Cotta finished. Lucilius said, “You have certainly attacked with great force, Cotta, the Stoic doctrine of divine providence, which they established with the utmost reverence and wisdom. But since evening is coming on, you will give us another day to answer these arguments. My contest with you is for hearths and altars, for the gods’ temples and shrines, and for the walls of the city, which you pontiffs declare sacred, encircling the city more carefully with religion than with its actual ramparts. To abandon these, as long as I can breathe, I consider a sacrilege.”
- 3.95 “For my part,” said Cotta, “I both wish to be refuted, Balbus, and preferred to discuss the points I argued rather than pronounce judgment on them. I know for certain that you can easily defeat me.”
- “Of course,” said Velleius, “since he even thinks dreams are sent to us by Jupiter—though dreams themselves are less insubstantial than the Stoics’ account of the nature of the gods.”
- After these words we parted: Velleius thought Cotta’s argument truer, while I thought Balbus’s leaned more toward the probable truth.