

VIRTVS

On the Nature of the Gods

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Plain English 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 There's still a great deal in philosophy that hasn't been adequately explained. But the question of what the gods are like is especially difficult and obscure, Brutus, as you know very well. It's both a wonderful subject for the mind to explore and essential for guiding religious practice. <Since> the most learned people hold such varied and conflicting opinions about it, <this> question should provide strong evidence that philosophy's starting point [...] knowledge, and that the Academics were wise to withhold agreement on uncertain matters. After all, what's more shameful than jumping to conclusions? What could be more reckless, or less worthy of a wise person's seriousness and consistency, than believing something false, or defending something without any doubt when it hasn't been thoroughly examined and understood?
- 1.2 In this question, for example, most people have said that gods exist. That is the most likely view, and the one we all reach †under nature's guidance. Protagoras said he was unsure. Diagoras of Melos and Theodorus of Cyrene thought there were no gods at all. Those who say that gods exist have so many different and conflicting views that listing them would never end. They say many things about the gods' shapes, their homes and dwelling places, and how they spend their lives. Philosophers argue over these points with the sharpest disagreement. But the heart of the matter is this: do the gods do nothing, undertake nothing, and remain free from all care and management of things? Or, on the contrary,

did they make and arrange everything from the beginning, and do they guide and move everything for all time? Here above all there is a major disagreement. Unless it is settled, people must remain deeply mistaken and ignorant about the most important matters.

- 1.3 There are philosophers now, and there have been others before them, who think the gods have absolutely no concern for human affairs. If they're right, what room is there for devotion, reverence, or religious observance? We owe all these things to the gods' divine power, in purity and sincerity, only if the gods notice them and have given something to the human race. But suppose the gods can't help us, don't want to, don't care about us at all, don't notice what we do, and have nothing they can contribute to human life. What reason do we have to offer the immortal gods worship, honors, or prayers? Devotion, like the other virtues, can't exist in something that's merely an outward pretense. Once devotion goes, reverence and religious observance must go with it. And when those disappear, life becomes disordered and deeply confused.
- 1.4 Indeed, I suspect that if devotion to the gods is removed, trust, human fellowship, and justice, that supreme virtue, may disappear with it. Other philosophers, great and famous ones, think that the gods' mind and reason manage and govern the whole world. And not just that: they also think the gods care for and provide for human life. They believe the immortal gods give humanity crops, the other products of the earth, the weather, the changing seasons, and the changes in the sky that ripen everything the earth produces. They bring together many further arguments, which will be discussed in these books. These make it almost seem that the immortal gods made those very things for human use. Carneades argued so extensively against these thinkers that he stirred people who were not lazy-minded to want to search for the truth.
- 1.5 There is no subject on which not only the uneducated but also the learned disagree so strongly. Their views are so varied and opposed that it is certainly possible that none is true. But it is certainly impossible that more than one is true.

On this subject we can both calm friendly critics and answer hostile attackers. The latter may regret their attacks; the former may be glad to have learned something. People who offer friendly warnings should be taught. People who attack from hatred should be driven back.

- 1.6 I see that the books I've published—quite a few in a short time—have set off a great deal of discussion of different kinds. Some people wonder where this sudden enthusiasm for philosophy came from. Others want to know what definite positions I hold on particular questions. I've also found that many people are surprised by my preference for a philosophy that takes away the light and seems to spread a kind of night over everything. They hadn't expected me to take up the defense of a school that's deserted and has long been abandoned. But I haven't suddenly started doing philosophy. From my earliest years, I've put a great deal of effort and care into it. In fact, I was most deeply engaged in philosophy when I least appeared to be. You can see that in my speeches, which are full of philosophers' ideas. You can also see it in my friendships with very learned men, whose company has always enriched my home, and in the outstanding teachers who instructed me: Diodotus, Philo, Antiochus, and Posidonius.
- 1.7 If all the rules of philosophy apply to life, I believe that in both public and private matters I have done what reason and learning prescribed. But if someone asks what led me to put these things in writing so late, nothing could be easier to explain. I was wasting away in enforced leisure, and the state of public affairs made government by one man's judgment and care unavoidable. So I thought, first of all for the country's sake, that I should explain philosophy to our people. I believed it would greatly add to our country's honor and reputation if subjects so serious and splendid were available in Latin writing too.
- 1.8 And I've even less reason to regret what I've undertaken, since I can readily see how many people I've encouraged not just to study but also to write. Quite a few people educated in Greek learning couldn't share what they'd learned with

their fellow citizens. They didn't believe that what they'd received from the Greeks could be expressed in Latin. In this respect, I seem to have made enough progress that the Greeks don't surpass us even in richness of vocabulary.

- 1.9 Another thing that drove me toward these studies was the grief caused by a great and crushing blow of fortune. If I could have found some greater relief for it, I would not have turned to this above all else. But I could enjoy even this relief best by devoting myself not only to reading books but also to working through the whole of philosophy. All its parts and branches become easiest to understand when entire questions are explained in writing. There is a wonderful continuity and sequence in its subjects. One seems linked to another, and all seem fitted and bound together.
- 1.10 Those who ask what I myself think about every subject are more curious than they need to be. In a discussion, we should look for the weight of reasons, not of authority. In fact, the authority of people who claim to teach often harms those who want to learn. The learners stop using their own judgment. They accept as settled whatever they see approved by the person they trust. Nor do I usually approve of the practice reported about the Pythagoreans. When they asserted something in a discussion and were asked why it was so, they are said to have answered, "He said so himself." "He" was Pythagoras. So powerful was a judgment made in advance that authority could prevail even without a reason.
- 1.11 As for those who wonder why I chose this school above all others, I think my four books on Academic philosophy answer them well enough. Nor have I taken up the defense of ideas that are deserted and abandoned. Opinions do not die when their holders die, though they may miss the light their author gave them. This philosophical method of arguing against every position and deciding nothing outright began with Socrates. Arcesilaus revived it, and Carneades strengthened it. It remained vigorous down to my own time. Now, I understand, it is almost bereft of followers even in Greece itself. I think this happened not through any fault of the Academy but because people are slow. If mastering

any one school is a great task, how much greater is mastering all of them! Yet that is what people must do if they aim to find the truth by arguing both against every philosopher and for every philosopher.

1.12 I don't claim to have mastered something so important and so difficult. I do openly claim to have tried. Still, people who practice philosophy this way can't be left with nothing to guide them. I've discussed this more carefully elsewhere. But some people are so slow and unwilling to learn that they seem to need repeated reminders. We aren't people who think nothing's true. We say that every true impression has false ones alongside it that look so similar that there's no reliable mark for judging them and giving our agreement. It follows that many things are plausible. Even though they can't be grasped with certainty, they have a distinctive, clear appearance, and a wise person's life can be guided by them.

1.13 But now, to clear myself of all resentment, I'll lay the philosophers' views about the gods out in the open. It seems we should call them all together here to judge which view is true. Only then will I consider the Academy presumptuous: if they all agree, or if someone is found who's discovered what's true. So I feel like crying out, as the character does in *The Young Companions*:

"In the name of the gods, of all my fellow citizens, of <all> young men,

"I shout, demand, beg, pray, weep, and appeal to their good faith!"

And it's not over some utterly trivial matter. That character complains that

terrible crimes are being committed in the community: "A prostitute won't take money from a friend who loves her."

1.14 Instead, I want people to attend, understand, and consider what they should think about religion, devotion, reverence, rituals, good faith, and oaths; about temples, shrines, and regular sacrifices; and about the very auspices over which we preside. All these must be referred to this question about the immortal

gods. The profound disagreement of the most learned people on this most important subject will surely force even those who think they have some certainty to feel doubt.

- 1.15 I've noticed this on many other occasions, but especially during a very thorough and careful discussion of the immortal gods at the home of my friend Gaius Cotta. I'd gone to see him during the Latin Festival, at his own invitation and request. I found him sitting in a conversation room, debating with the senator Gaius Velleius. At the time, the Epicureans ranked Velleius first among our countrymen. Quintus Lucilius Balbus was there too. He'd made such progress in Stoic philosophy that people compared him with the leading Greeks in that field.

When Cotta saw me, he said, "You've come at just the right moment. Velleius and I are getting into an argument about something important. Given your interests, it's just the sort of discussion you should join."

- 1.16 "Yes," I said, "I think I've arrived at a good time too, just as you say. Here you are, three leading men from three schools. If Marcus Piso were here as well, none of the philosophical schools—at least, none of those that are respected—would lack a representative."

Then Cotta said, "If our friend Antiochus tells the truth in the book he recently sent to Balbus here, there's no reason for you to miss your friend Piso. Antiochus thinks the Stoics and Peripatetics agree about the substance and differ only in their words. Balbus, I'd like to know what you think of that book."

"What do I think?" he said. "I'm surprised that Antiochus, a remarkably sharp man, hasn't seen the enormous difference between them. The Stoics separate what's morally good from what's advantageous, not just by giving them different names, but by putting them in entirely different categories. The Peripatetics mix moral goodness with advantage. They make the difference between them one of size or, so to speak, degree, rather than kind. This isn't a small disagreement over words. It's a huge disagreement about the things themselves. But let's leave that for another time. For now, shall we go back to what we'd started?"

1.17 “Certainly,” Cotta said. Then, looking at me, he added, “But let’s make sure our new arrival knows what we’re discussing. We were talking about the nature of the gods. I found it very obscure, as I always do, so I was asking Velleius for Epicurus’s view. So, Velleius, if you don’t mind, please go over what you’d begun to say.”

“Of course I’ll go over it. Though he’s come to help you, not me,” he said with a smile. “You both learned from the same Philo that you don’t know anything.” Then I said, “I’ll let Cotta answer for what we’ve learned. But don’t think I’ve come to help him rather than to listen. I’ll be a fair listener, too, free to judge for myself. I’m under no obligation to defend some fixed opinion whether I want to or not.”

1.18 Then Velleius spoke with the great confidence his school usually shows. He feared nothing so much as appearing to doubt anything. He sounded as if he had just come down from the gods’ council and from Epicurus’s spaces between worlds. “Listen,” he said, “not to empty, made-up opinions; not to Plato’s god in the *Timaeus*, the craftsman and builder of the world; not to the Stoics’ old fortune-telling woman, Pronoia, whom we can call Providence in Latin; and certainly not to the world itself, a god with a mind and senses, round, burning, and spinning. These are freakish marvels dreamed up by philosophers asleep, not thought through by philosophers awake.

1.19 “What eyes did your Plato’s mind have that let him see the construction of that enormous work, when he presents the world as something a god constructs and builds? What building operation was there? What tools, levers, machines, and workers did he have for such a huge job? And how could air, fire, water, and earth obey the architect’s wishes and follow his orders? Where did those five shapes come from, which form everything else and are so neatly suited to affecting the mind and producing sensations? It would take too long to deal with every point. They all look more like things he wished for than things he discovered.”

- 1.20 “But here’s the crowning achievement. He not only presents the world as having come into existence, but almost as having been made by hand—and then says it’ll last forever. Do you think someone who believes anything that’s come into existence can be eternal has had even the slightest taste of *physiologia*, the study of nature? As the saying goes, he’s barely touched it with his lips. What structure can’t be taken apart? What can have a beginning but no end? And if your *Pronoea*, or Providence, Lucilius, is the same, I ask again for what I asked for just now: the workers, the machines, the complete plan and equipment for the whole job. But if it’s different, why did it make a world that’ll die, instead of an everlasting one like Plato’s god did?”
- 1.21 “I ask both of them: why did they suddenly become builders of the world after sleeping for countless ages? The fact that there was no world doesn’t mean there were no ages. By ‘ages’ I don’t mean periods made up of counted days and nights and yearly cycles. I admit those couldn’t have existed without the world’s rotation. But there was an eternity stretching back through infinite time, which no measured periods of time marked out. Still, we can understand its extent, because we can’t even conceive that there was”
- 1.22 a time when there was no time. So, Balbus, I ask why your Providence remained idle throughout that immense stretch. Was it avoiding work? But work does not touch a god. Nor would there have been any work, when all the elements—sky, fire, land, and sea—obeyed divine power. And what made the god want to decorate the world with figures and lights, like an official putting on public shows? If he wanted a better place to live himself, then apparently he had previously spent infinite time in the dark, as if in a shack. And afterward? Do we think he enjoys the variety with which we see heaven and earth decorated? What pleasure could that give a god? If it did, he could not have gone without it so long.
- 1.23 “Or did god arrange all this for human beings, as you generally say? For wise people? Then all that enormous construction was for just a few people. Or for fools? First, there wasn’t any reason for him to do favors for bad people.

Second, what did he accomplish? Every fool is unquestionably utterly miserable, above all because they're fools. What could we call more miserable than foolishness? Then there are so many troubles in life. Wise people soften them by weighing them against life's benefits. Fools can neither avoid the troubles coming their way nor bear the ones they've already got. As for those who say the world itself is alive and wise, they completely failed to see what sort of shape could hold an intelligent mind. I'll discuss that a little later. For now, I'll just say this:"

1.24 "I can't get over how slow-witted people must be to insist that an immortal, happy living being is a sphere, just because Plato says no other shape is more beautiful. To me, though, a cylinder, a square, a cone, or a pyramid looks more beautiful. And what sort of life do they give this spherical god? Apparently, he's supposed to spin at a speed so great that we can't even imagine its equal. I don't see where a steady mind or a happy life could find a footing in all that. If even the slightest trace of something in our bodies would cause discomfort, why shouldn't the same thing cause discomfort in god? The earth is certainly part of the world, so it's also part of god. Yet we see vast regions of the earth that are uninhabitable and uncultivated. Some have been scorched by the sun beating down on them. Others have frozen in snow and frost because the sun is so far away. If the world is god, these regions are parts of god, since they're parts of the world. So we must think of some of god's limbs as burning hot and others as frozen cold."

1.25 "Those, then, are your views, Lucilius. But what sort [...] is, I'll go back to the earliest of the predecessors. Thales of Miletus, the first person to investigate these questions, said water was the starting point of everything. God, he said, was the mind that shaped everything out of water—if gods can exist without awareness; and why did he attach mind to water, if mind itself can exist without a body? Anaximander's view is that gods are born, coming into being and passing away at long intervals, and that these gods are countless worlds. But how can we understand a god as anything but everlasting?"

- 1.26 “After him, Anaximenes declared that air was god. He said it came into being, was immeasurable and infinite, and was always moving. As if shapeless air could be a god! Surely a god ought to have not just some shape, but the most beautiful one. And as if everything that’s born weren’t subject to death! Next came Anaxagoras, who studied under Anaximenes. He was the first to hold that the arrangement and order of everything were planned and carried out by the power and reason of an infinite mind. He didn’t see that there can’t be any continuous motion tied to awareness [in] something infinite. Nor can there be any awareness at all unless the thing itself receives an impact and feels it. Then again, if he meant this mind to be a kind of living creature, it’ll need something inside it to account for its name *animal*, ‘living creature.’ But what could be further inside than mind? So let it be surrounded by an outer body.”
- 1.27 “Since that doesn’t suit him, we’re left with a bare, simple mind, with nothing attached to it, yet capable of awareness. That seems beyond our ability to understand or even conceive. Alcmaeon of Croton gave divinity to the sun, the moon, the other heavenly bodies, and the soul as well. He didn’t realize he was giving immortality to things that die. Pythagoras thought there was a soul stretched throughout all nature and passing through it, with our souls taken from it. He didn’t see that pulling human souls away would tear god apart and rip him to pieces. And when souls were miserable, as happens to most of them, part of god would then be miserable. That can’t happen.”
- 1.28 “And why would a human soul be ignorant of anything if it were god? Besides, if this god were nothing but soul, how could he be fixed in the world or poured through it? Then there’s Xenophanes. He treated the infinite whole as god and gave it a mind as well. His account of mind faces the same objections as the others. His account of infinity faces even stronger ones: nothing in it can have awareness or form a connected whole. Parmenides, for his part, came up with something imaginary. He makes a continuous ring of blazing light, shaped like a crown—he calls it στεφάνην, ‘wreath.’ It circles the sky, and he calls it god. No one could imagine either a divine shape or awareness in that. He’s got plenty of other bizarre ideas too. He treats war, conflict, desire, and other things of that

kind as divine, though illness, sleep, forgetfulness, or age can wipe them out. He says the same things about the stars. We've already criticized those ideas in someone else, so let's leave them aside in his case."

1.29 "Empedocles makes plenty of other mistakes, but his worst blunder is his view of the gods. He holds that the four substances he thinks make up everything are divine. Yet it's obvious that they come into being, die out, and have no awareness at all. Protagoras doesn't seem to have any idea about the gods' nature either. He says he has no clear knowledge at all about them: whether they exist or don't exist, or what they're like. And what about Democritus? At one moment he counts images and their circling movements as gods. At another, it's the substance that pours out and sends off those images. At another, it's our own thought and understanding. Isn't he utterly mistaken? He also denies that anything is everlasting, since nothing always stays in the same condition. Doesn't that do away with god altogether, leaving no conception of him at all? And what about the air that Diogenes of Apollonia treats as god? What awareness could it have? What godlike shape?"

1.30 "It would take a long time to discuss Plato's inconsistency. In the *Timaeus* he says the father of this world cannot be named. In the *Laws* he thinks we should not inquire into what god actually is. As for his claim that god has no body—what the Greeks call *asōmaton*, bodiless—we cannot understand what that could be like. Such a being must lack sensation, and also judgment and pleasure. We include all these things in our idea of gods. Yet in both the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* he also says the world is a god, and so are the sky, stars, earth, souls, and those gods handed down to us by our ancestors' institutions. These statements are plainly false in themselves, and sharply contradict one another.

1.31 "Xenophon makes much the same mistakes, though he uses fewer words. In his account of what Socrates said, he has Socrates argue that we shouldn't ask what shape god has. Yet he also has him call both the sun and the soul god, and speak sometimes of one god and sometimes of several. These are much the same errors as those in the views we're discussing in Plato."

- 1.32 “Antisthenes, too, in his book called *On Nature*, says there are many gods in popular belief but only one in nature. He thus does away with the gods’ power and nature. Speusippus does much the same. Following his uncle Plato, he speaks of a certain power that governs everything and has life. He too tries to tear the knowledge of the gods out of our minds.
- 1.33 “Aristotle also makes a mess of things in the third book of his *On Philosophy*, where he disagrees with his teacher Plato. At one moment he assigns all divinity to mind. At another he says the world itself is god. At another he puts some other being in charge of the world, with the job of controlling and maintaining its movement through a kind of backward turning. Then he says the fiery heat of the sky is god. He doesn’t realize that the sky is part of the world, which he himself has identified elsewhere as god. And how could that divine awareness in the sky survive at such enormous speed? Then where do all those gods of his come in, if we count the sky as a god too? He also wants god to have no body, but that strips him of all awareness, and of wisdom too. Besides, how could the world move without a body? Or how could it always be moving itself and still be at rest and happy?”
- 1.34 “His fellow student Xenocrates isn’t any wiser on this subject. His books on the nature of the gods don’t describe any divine shape. He says there are eight gods. Five are those called ‘wandering stars.’ Another is to be thought of as a single god made up of all the stars fixed in the sky, like scattered limbs. He adds the sun as the seventh and the moon as the eighth. It’s impossible to understand what awareness could make these gods happy. Heraclides of Pontus came from the same school of Plato. He filled his books with childish stories. Yet sometimes he thinks the world is divine, and sometimes mind. He also gives divinity to the wandering stars, strips god of awareness, and holds that god’s shape can change. Then, in the very same book, he again includes earth and sky among the gods.”

- 1.35 “Theophrastus’s inconsistency is intolerable too. At one point he gives the mind supreme divine power; at another, the sky; then again, the constellations and stars. His pupil Strato, the one called the natural philosopher, doesn’t deserve a hearing either. He thinks all divine power lies in nature. Nature, he says, contains the causes of birth, growth, and decline, but has no awareness or shape at all.”
- 1.36 “Now I’ll turn to your own school, Balbus. Zeno thinks the law of nature is divine. He says its power consists in ordering what’s right and forbidding the opposite. We can’t understand how he makes this law a living being. We certainly hold that a god must be alive. Elsewhere this same man calls the ether a god—if we can even conceive of a god that feels nothing and never enters our thoughts when we pray, express our hopes, or make vows. In other books he thinks a kind of reason running through the whole natural world has divine power. He gives the stars this same power, then years, months, and the changing seasons. But when he explains Hesiod’s *Theogony*, meaning the origin of the gods, he completely does away with our familiar, established ideas about them. He doesn’t count Jupiter, Juno, Vesta, or anyone bearing such a name among the gods. Instead, he teaches that these names have been assigned, with a symbolic meaning, to things that have neither life nor speech.”
- 1.37 “The view of his pupil Aristo is just as badly mistaken. He thinks we can’t grasp a god’s shape, says the gods have no awareness, and doubts whether a god is even a living being. Cleanthes studied under Zeno alongside the man I’ve just named. Sometimes he calls the universe itself a god. Sometimes he gives that name to the mind and soul of all nature. At other times he says the outermost, highest fire, which spreads around everything and encloses and embraces it all—the fire called ether—is most certainly a god. In the books he wrote against pleasure, he seems positively delirious. Now he imagines the gods with a particular shape and appearance; now he assigns all divinity to the stars; now he thinks nothing’s more divine than reason. The result is that this god, whom we recognize in our minds and want to settle into our mental conception as into his proper place, is nowhere to be found. Then there’s Persaeus, another pupil

of Zeno. He says people were regarded as gods when they'd discovered something of great use in improving human life. Useful and beneficial things themselves, he adds, were given the gods' names. He wouldn't even say these things were inventions of the gods: the things themselves were divine;

1.38 "What could be more absurd than giving divine honors to dirty, ugly things, or placing among the gods people already wiped out by death, whose worship would consist entirely of mourning?

1.39 "Now Chrysippus, who's considered the cleverest interpreter of Stoic dreams, gathers together a great crowd of unknown gods. They're so unknown that we can't even form a rough idea of them, although our minds seem able to picture anything at all. He says divine power resides in reason and in the soul and mind of nature as a whole. He calls the universe itself a god, along with its soul spread throughout it. Then he adds that soul's ruling power, which lies in mind and reason, and the universal nature shared by everything and embracing everything. Then come the † shadow of fate and the necessity governing future events; fire, too, and the ether I mentioned earlier. He adds things that naturally flow and stream out, such as water, earth, and air; the sun, moon, and stars; the totality of things that contains everything; and even human beings who've gained immortality."

1.40 "He also argues that ether is what people call Jupiter, that the air flowing through the seas is Neptune, and that earth is what's called Ceres. He works through the other gods' names in the same way. He also calls the power of the permanent, eternal law Jupiter. This law is like a guide to life and a teacher of duties. That same necessity of fate, he says, is the everlasting truth of what'll happen. None of these things seems capable of possessing divine power."

1.41 "That's what he says in the first book of *On the Nature of the Gods*. In the second, he tries to fit the stories of Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, and Homer to his own statements about the immortal gods in the first book. That way, even those very early poets can look like Stoics, although they never so much as suspected any of these ideas. Diogenes of Babylon follows his lead. In his book

called On Minerva, he separates Jupiter's giving birth and the virgin's coming into existence from the mythical story and turns them into an account of nature."

1.42 "I have presented, more or less, not philosophers' judgments but madmen's dreams. The stories poured out in the poets' words are not much more absurd. Their very charm has made them harmful. They have presented gods blazing with anger and mad with lust. They have shown us their wars, battles, fights, and wounds; their hatreds, quarrels, and feuds; their births and deaths; their complaints and weeping; their desires running loose in every kind of excess; their adulteries and chains; their sexual relations with human beings; and mortals fathered by an immortal.

1.43 "With the poets' mistakes we can join the strange tales of the Magi, the Egyptians' madness on the same subject, and the beliefs of ordinary people, which are deeply inconsistent and ignorant of the truth.

"Anyone who considers how thoughtlessly and rashly these things are said ought to revere Epicurus, and to count him among those very beings we are discussing. He alone saw, first, that gods exist, because nature itself has stamped a concept of them in everyone's mind. What nation or group of people lacks, without being taught, some advance idea of gods? Epicurus calls this *prolēpsis*: a mental picture of something formed beforehand. Without it, nothing can be understood, investigated, or discussed. We have learned the force and value of this principle from Epicurus's heavenly book on the rule and standard of judgment.

1.44 "So you see how soundly the foundation of this inquiry has been laid. This belief wasn't established by any institution, custom, or law. Everyone, without exception, continues to agree firmly on it. We must therefore recognize that the gods exist, since our knowledge of them is rooted in us—or rather, born in us. What everyone's nature agrees on must be true. So we have to acknowledge that the gods exist. Nearly everyone agrees on this, not just philosophers but people

without an education too. We admit that this point is also settled: we have what I called earlier an anticipation, or a prior conception, of the gods (new things need new names, and Epicurus himself called it *πρόληψιν*,

1.45 a word no one had used for it before). We have this notion, then, that the gods are happy and immortal. The same nature that gave us a mental picture of the gods themselves has engraved in our minds that they are eternal and happy. If that is so, Epicurus stated this principle truly: what is happy and eternal neither has any troubles itself nor causes trouble to another. So it is held by neither anger nor favor, since all such feelings belong to weakness.

“If our only aims were to worship the gods with devotion and free ourselves from superstition, enough would have been said. Human devotion would honor the gods’ excellent nature as eternal and supremely happy. Whatever excels deserves respect. And all fear of the gods’ power and anger would have been driven out. We understand that a happy, immortal nature is free of both anger and favor. With these removed, no fears threaten us from above. But to strengthen this belief, the mind asks about a god’s shape, life, and the activity and movement of his mind.

1.46 “As for the gods’ shape, nature gives us part of the answer and reasoning teaches us the rest. In every nation, nature gives all of us an image of the gods in human form and no other. What other shape has ever appeared to anyone, awake or asleep? But we don’t have to refer everything back to our first conceptions. Reasoning itself shows us the same thing.”

1.47 “The finest kind of being, whether because it’s happy or because it lives forever, should also, it seems, be the most beautiful. What arrangement of limbs, what shaping of features, what outline or appearance could be more beautiful than a human being’s? You Stoics, Lucilius, regularly describe God’s craftsmanship and construction. My friend Cotta takes one side and then the other. You explain how everything in the human form is suited not just to practical use but to beauty too;

- 1.48 “If the human form is more beautiful than that of every other living creature, and a god is a living being, then a god surely has the most beautiful form of all. And we agree that the gods are supremely happy. But no one can be happy without virtue. Virtue can’t exist without reason, and reason can’t exist anywhere except in a human form. So we have to admit that the gods have a human appearance.”
- 1.49 “Yet that appearance is not a body but something like a body, and it has not blood but something like blood. Epicurus discovered these things with more insight and stated them more precisely than just anyone can understand. Still, trusting your intelligence, I will discuss them more briefly than the subject calls for. Epicurus sees hidden and deeply concealed things not only with his mind; he handles them as if with his hand. He teaches that the gods’ power and nature are such that, first, they are perceived not by the senses but by the mind. They are not perceived as solid objects or as individual units, like the things he calls *steremnia* because of their solidity. Instead, they are perceived through images, through their likeness and passage. An infinite series of closely similar images arises from countless indivisible particles and flows toward the gods. Our mind fixes and fastens itself on those images with the greatest pleasure, and our understanding grasps what a happy and eternal nature is.
- 1.50 “The supreme power of infinity is well worth deep and careful thought. We must understand that its nature is such that everything has its equal counterpart, with all things balanced equally. Epicurus calls this *isonomia*, meaning equal distribution. From this it follows that if mortal beings are so numerous, immortal beings are no less numerous. And if the forces that destroy are countless, the forces that preserve must also be infinite.
“You Stoics, Balbus, also often ask us what the gods’ life is like, and how they spend their time.
- 1.51 “It is, of course, a life than which none happier or richer in every good thing can be imagined. A god does nothing. He is tangled in no duties and undertakes no labor. He delights in his own wisdom and virtue. He knows for certain

that he will always enjoy pleasures that are both the greatest and eternal.

- 1.52 “We would rightly call this god happy, but yours extremely hard-working. If the world itself is god, what could be less restful than turning around the axis of heaven at amazing speed without a moment’s pause? But nothing can be happy without rest. Or if there is some god within the world who rules and governs it, who maintains the stars’ courses, the changing seasons, and the orderly changes of things, who watches over land and sea and protects human interests and lives—then he certainly is caught up in troublesome, demanding business.
- 1.53 “We, however, find a happy life in peace of mind and freedom from every responsibility. The man who taught us everything else also taught us that nature made the universe. There wasn’t any need for construction. You say this couldn’t be done without divine skill. But it’s so easy for nature that it will make countless universes, is making them, and has made them already. You can’t see how nature could do this without some intelligence behind it. So, like tragic playwrights who can’t work out how to end their plot, you turn to a god.”
- 1.54 “You certainly wouldn’t need his help if you could see the vast extent of space, immeasurable and without a limit in any direction. The mind throws itself into it and stretches outward, traveling far and wide. Yet it never sees a final boundary where it could stop. Through this immeasurable width, length, and depth, an endless quantity of countless atoms flies about. Even with empty space between them, they stick together. They catch hold of one another and form connected bodies. That’s how things get their shapes and outlines—shapes you don’t think can be made without bellows and anvils. So you’ve put an everlasting master over our necks, someone we’d have to fear day and night. Who wouldn’t fear a god who foresees everything, thinks about everything, notices everything, and considers everything his concern—a prying god with his hands full?”

- 1.55 “That’s where your necessity imposed by fate first came from. You call it *εἰμαρμένην*, or fate. You say that whatever happens has flowed from eternal truth and an unbroken chain of causes. What’s that philosophy worth? Like old women—and uneducated ones at that—it thinks everything happens by fate. Next comes your *μαντικὴ*, called *divinatio* in Latin: divination. If we were willing to listen to you, it would soak us in so much superstition that we’d have to worship entrail-readers, readers of bird omens, fortune-tellers, prophets, and dream interpreters.”
- 1.56 “Epicurus has released us from these terrors and won our freedom. We do not fear the beings whom we understand neither create trouble for themselves nor try to cause it for others. We worship their excellent, outstanding nature with devotion and reverence.
“But I fear enthusiasm has carried me on too long. It was hard to begin so great and splendid a subject and leave it unfinished. Still, I should have given more thought to listening than to speaking.”
- 1.57 Then Cotta said, with his usual friendliness, “But Velleius, if you had not said anything, you certainly could not have heard anything from me. Reasons why something is true do not usually come to my mind as easily as reasons why it is false. That has happened often, and it happened just now while I listened to you. Ask me what I say the gods’ nature is like, and perhaps I will give no answer. Ask whether I think it is like the nature you just described, and I will say nothing seems less likely to me.
“But before I tackle your arguments, I will tell you what I think of you yourself.
- 1.58 “I think I’ve often heard this about your friend Lucius Crassus: he put you unquestionably ahead of every Roman, and thought only a few Epicureans from Greece could match you. But I knew how deeply he cared for you, so I thought his affection made him more generous with his praise. Now, though I’m reluctant to praise someone to his face, I think you’ve explained a dark and difficult subject clearly. You’ve offered plenty of ideas, and your language has been more polished than your school usually manages.”

- 1.59 “When I was in Athens, I often listened to Zeno. Our friend Philo used to call him the Epicureans’ chorus leader. In fact, Philo himself urged me to listen. I suppose he wanted me to hear how the leading Epicurean presented their arguments, so I could judge more easily how well they were refuted. Unlike most of them, Zeno spoke as you do: clearly, seriously, and elegantly. But listening to you just now, I had the same feeling I often had with him. It bothered me that so much talent—please don’t take offense—had landed on such shallow ideas, not to say such silly ones.”
- 1.60 “I’m not going to offer anything better myself right now. As I just said, on almost any subject, and especially in natural philosophy, I could tell you what isn’t true more readily than what is. Suppose you ask me what a god is, or what a god is like. I’ll take Simonides as my authority. When the tyrant Hiero asked him that very question, he requested one day to think it over. Hiero asked him again the next day, and he requested two days. He kept doubling the number of days, until Hiero asked in surprise why he was doing that. ‘Because,’ he said, ‘the longer I consider it, the murkier the prospect seems to me.’ Simonides wasn’t just a delightful poet. He’s also said to have been learned and wise in other ways. I think many sharp and subtle ideas came into his mind. He couldn’t decide which was truest, and so he gave up hope of reaching any truth at all.”
- 1.61 “But your Epicurus—I’d rather argue with him than with you—what does he say that deserves to count as philosophy, or even as ordinary good sense?”
“The first question in an inquiry into the nature of the gods is whether gods exist or not. ‘It’s hard to deny it.’ I’d think so, if you were asked at a public assembly. But in a conversation like this, at an <informal> gathering, nothing could be easier. I’m a priest myself, and I think we must take the greatest care to preserve our public ceremonies and religious observances. Even so, I’d very much like to be convinced of this first point, that gods exist—not just as a matter of opinion, but as actual truth. Many things come to mind that unsettle me, so that sometimes it seems there aren’t any gods.”

1.62 “But look how generously I’m treating you. I won’t touch the views you share with other philosophers, including this very point. Almost everyone agrees that gods exist, and I’m certainly among them. So I’m not disputing that. Still, I don’t think the reason you offer is strong enough. You said that people of every nation and race believe it, and that this was a substantial enough argument for us to admit that gods exist. That argument is weak in itself, and its claim is false as well. For a start, how do you know what the nations think? I believe there are many peoples so brutalized by their savage way of life that they haven’t the slightest notion of gods.”

1.63 “What about Diagoras, who was called Atheos, ‘the atheist’? And later, Theodorus? Didn’t they openly deny that gods exist? Then there’s Protagoras of Abdera, whom you just mentioned. He was perhaps the greatest teacher of argumentative skill in his day. At the beginning of a book he wrote, ‘About the gods, I can’t say either that they exist or that they don’t.’ On the Athenians’ orders, he was expelled from their city and territory, and his books were burned at a public assembly. I think that made many people more reluctant to declare this opinion. After all, even doubt hadn’t escaped punishment. What shall we say about people who rob temples, or about the irreligious and those who swear falsely?

If Lucius Tubulus ever,

if Lupus or Carbo or Neptune’s son,
as Lucilius puts it, had believed there were gods, would he have been so ready to swear falsely or so corrupt?”

1.64 “So that argument is not as securely established as it seems for proving what you want. But since other philosophers also share this argument, I will leave it aside for now. I would rather come to views that belong to your school alone.

1.65 “I grant that gods exist. So tell me where they come from, where they are, and what they’re like in body, mind, and way of life. That’s what I want to know. You exploit the atoms’ unrestricted rule to explain everything. From them you

invent and produce whatever comes your way, as the saying goes. To begin with, atoms don't exist. There's nothing [...] that's empty of bodies. Bodies occupy every place. So there can be no empty space, and nothing can be indivisible."

1.66 "Now I'm pouring out the natural philosophers' oracles. I don't know whether they're true or false, but they're still closer to the truth [plausible] than yours. Think of those outrageous ideas of Democritus, or even of Leucippus before him. There are supposedly tiny bodies, some smooth, others rough; some round, some angular and hooked; some bent and, so to speak, hook-shaped. From these, the sky and earth came into being. Nature didn't force them together; some chance collision did it. You've reached your present age still holding that opinion, Gaius Velleius. Someone would find it easier to overturn your whole way of life than to shake your loyalty to that authority. You decided you ought to be an Epicurean before you'd learned these teachings. So you had to accept these outrageous ideas or give up the name of the philosophy you'd adopted."

1.67 "What reward would it take to make you stop being an Epicurean? 'Nothing,' you say, 'could make me give up the principles of a happy life and the truth.' So this is the truth? I'm not arguing about a happy life. You don't think even a god can have one unless he languishes in complete idleness. But where's the truth? In those countless worlds, I suppose, with some being born and others collapsing at every tiny instant? Or in indivisible little bodies that fashion such magnificent works without any direction from nature or reason? But I've forgotten the generosity I began showing you a little while ago, and I'm taking on too much. So I'll grant that everything consists of indivisible bodies. What does that have to do with the question?"

1.68 "We're asking about the nature of the gods. Let them be made of atoms, then. In that case, they aren't eternal. †Because anything made of atoms came into being at some point. If the gods came into being, there weren't any gods before they were born. And if the gods had a beginning, they must also have an end.

That's the argument you used a little while ago about Plato's world. So what's become of your 'happy' and 'eternal,' those two words you use to describe a god? When you try to establish that, you crawl into thickets. You were saying that a god doesn't have a body, but something like a body; not blood, but something like blood."

1.69 "You do this very often. You say something implausible, then try to escape criticism by offering something that couldn't possibly happen at all. It would've been better to concede the very point in dispute than to resist so shamelessly. Take Epicurus. He saw that if atoms moved downward under their own weight, nothing would be in our power, because their movement would be fixed and necessary. So he invented a way to escape necessity—something Democritus had apparently missed. He says that as an atom moves straight downward under its weight and gravity, it swerves a little."

1.70 "Saying that is more disgraceful than being unable to defend the position he wants to hold. He does the same thing against the logicians. They teach that in every either-or statement framed as 'either yes or no,' one alternative is true. He got frightened. Suppose he admitted a statement like 'Either Epicurus will be alive tomorrow or he won't.' Then one alternative would become necessary. So he denied that the whole 'either yes or no' statement was necessary. What could be more dull-witted? Arcesilaus pressed Zeno hard. Arcesilaus said that every impression we get through our senses is false. Zeno said some impressions are false, but not all. Epicurus was afraid that if one impression were false, none would be true. So he declared that all the senses report the truth. None of this is anything but †very; he was accepting a heavier blow to ward off a lighter one."

1.71 "He does the same thing about the gods' nature. He wants to avoid making them a collection of indivisible particles, because destruction and dispersal would follow. So he says the gods don't have a body, but something like a body; they don't have blood, but something like blood. People find it amazing that a priest who reads entrails doesn't laugh when he sees another such priest. Is that

more amazing than <the fact that> you can keep from laughing among yourselves? ‘It isn’t a body, but something like a body.’ I could understand what that meant if we were talking about figures modeled in wax or clay. But I can’t understand what something like a body or something like blood means in a god. Neither can you, Velleius. You just won’t admit it.”

1.72 “You repeat these things as though you’d learned them from dictation. They’re things Epicurus dreamed up while yawning. Yet he boasted, as we see in his writings, that he’d never had a teacher. I’d readily believe that even if he didn’t announce it. I’d also believe the owner of a badly built house who boasted that he hadn’t used an architect. There’s no smell of the Academy in his work, or [even] the Lyceum, or even the things children learn at school. He could’ve studied under Xenocrates—and what a man Xenocrates was, immortal gods! Some people think he did. He himself denies it. I believe him more than anyone on that point. He says he attended the lectures of a certain Pamphilus, a student of Plato, on Samos. He lived there as a young man with his father and brothers. His father Neocles had gone there to acquire farmland. But the little farm apparently couldn’t support him well enough, so he became a schoolteacher.”

1.73 “But Epicurus treats this follower of Plato with extraordinary contempt. He’s that afraid of seeming ever to have learned anything. With Nausiphanes, the follower of Democritus, he can’t get out of it. He doesn’t deny studying under him, but he still heaps every insult on him. Yet if he hadn’t heard these teachings of Democritus, what had he heard? What is there in Epicurus’ account of nature that doesn’t come from Democritus? He did change a few things, such as the swerve of the atoms I mentioned a little earlier. But most of what he says is the same: atoms, empty space, images, limitless space, countless worlds, their beginnings and endings—nearly everything that makes up his explanation of nature.”

“Now, what do you mean by that ‘something like a body’ and ‘something like blood’?”

- 1.74 “I don’t just admit that you understand these matters better than I do. I’m quite happy to let you. But once they’ve been stated, what can Velleius understand that Cotta can’t? I understand what a body is and what blood is. But I have absolutely no idea what something like a body or something like blood is. You aren’t hiding things from me, as Pythagoras used to hide them from outsiders. You aren’t deliberately speaking obscurely, like Heraclitus. But, just between us, you don’t understand them yourself.”
- 1.75 “I see that you are struggling to establish some appearance of gods that has nothing compact or solid, nothing in relief or projecting, but is pure, smooth, and transparent. Then we shall say the same as we say about the Venus of Cos: that is not a body, but something resembling a body; that spreading blush mingled with white is not blood, but something resembling blood. So in the Epicurean god there are no actual things, only likenesses of things.
“Suppose I am convinced of something I cannot even understand. Come, give me the features and shapes of those shadowy gods of yours.
- 1.76 “You have no shortage of arguments here to try to prove that the gods have human forms. First, you say this has been pictured and anticipated in our minds, so that when someone thinks of a god, a human shape comes to mind. Second, since divine nature surpasses everything, it must also have the most beautiful shape, and none is more beautiful than the human one. You add a third reason: that a mind can have its home in no other shape.
- 1.77 “First, then, consider each point and what it amounts to. You seem to me to grab hold of something utterly implausible as though it were yours by right.”
“<First> of all, has anyone ever been so blind in looking at the world that he couldn’t see how those human shapes got assigned to the gods? Either wise people deliberately introduced them to turn the ignorant away from corrupt lives and make it easier to lead them to worship the gods, or superstition did it. People wanted images they could worship and believe they were approaching

the gods themselves. Poets, painters, and craftsmen developed these same ideas further. It wasn't easy to show gods doing things and carrying out projects while keeping their shapes modeled on other creatures."

"Perhaps this belief also took hold because nothing looks more beautiful to a human being than another human being. But as a student of nature, don't you see how nature wins us over with flattery, almost acting as her own pimp? Do you think there's any animal on land or sea that doesn't take the greatest pleasure in an animal of its own kind? If that weren't so, why wouldn't a bull get excited by contact with a mare, or a horse by contact with a cow? Do you think an eagle, a lion, or a dolphin prefers any shape to its own? Then why be surprised if nature has given humans the same rule, making them think nothing is more beautiful than a human being? [...] that this is why we thought the gods looked like human beings. What do you think? If animals could reason, wouldn't each kind have rated its own kind highest?"

1.78 "But, by Hercules, I'll tell you what I think. Much as I love myself, I still wouldn't dare say I'm more beautiful than that bull that carried Europa. We aren't discussing our intelligence or our powers of speech here. We're discussing appearance and shape. Suppose we wanted to invent shapes and join them together, like the pictures of Triton of the sea, carried along by swimming beasts attached to a human body. You wouldn't want to be like that. I'm in a difficult position. Nature's influence is so strong that no human wants to look like anything but a human—and no ant like anything but an ant."

1.79 "But which human? How many people are good-looking? When I was at Athens, you could barely find one here and there among whole groups of young men. I see what made you smile, but that's still how it is. Besides, those of us who are attracted to young men, with the ancient philosophers' approval, often find even their flaws appealing. Alcaeus is delighted by a mole on a boy's joint. Now, a mole is a blemish on the body. To him, though, it seemed a bright spot. Quintus Catulus, the father of our colleague and friend here, loved Roscius, your fellow townsman. He even wrote these lines about him:

I happened to be standing there, greeting Aurora as she rose,

when suddenly Roscius rose on my left.

“Heavenly gods, let me say this without offending you:

a mortal seemed more beautiful than a god.

To Catulus, Roscius was more beautiful than a god. Yet his eyes were terribly crossed, just as they are today. What does that matter, if Catulus found that very feature charming and attractive?”

1.80 “Back to the gods. Do we think any of them are, if not badly cross-eyed, at least a little so? Do any have a mole? Do any have snub noses, drooping ears, big foreheads, or big heads, as we do? Or are they all free of defects? Let’s grant you that. But do they all have the same face too? If they have different faces, one must be more beautiful than another. So some god isn’t the most beautiful. If they all have the same face, the Academy must be flourishing in heaven. If there’s no difference between one god and another, the gods can’t know anything or be sure of what they perceive.”

1.81 “What if that claim is completely false too, Velleius—the claim that when we think about a god, no shape comes to mind except a human one? Will you still defend these absurd ideas? Perhaps we do picture gods as you say. From childhood we’ve known Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Neptune, Vulcan, Apollo, and the other gods with whatever appearance painters and sculptors chose to give them. And not just their faces: their accessories, ages, and clothes too. But that isn’t true of the Egyptians, the Syrians, or nearly all the rest of the foreign world. You’d find that their convictions about certain animals are stronger than ours about our most sacred temples and statues of the gods.”

1.82 “We see plenty of shrines plundered by our people, and statues of the gods carried off from the holiest places. But we’ve never even heard of an Egyptian harming a crocodile, an ibis, or a cat. What do you think, then? Don’t the Egyptians regard Apis, their sacred bull, as a god? By Hercules, just as surely as you regard that Sospita of yours as one. You never see her, even in your dreams, without her goatskin, spear, little shield, and little shoes with turned-up toes.

But the Juno of Argos isn't like that, nor is the Juno of Rome. So Juno has one appearance for the people of Argos and another for the people of Lanuvium. Likewise, Jupiter of the Capitol has one appearance for us, and Jupiter Ammon another for the Africans."

1.83 "Should a natural philosopher—that is, an observer and tracker of nature—not be ashamed to seek evidence of truth from minds steeped in custom? On that basis we may say Jupiter is always bearded and Apollo always beardless, Minerva has gray eyes and Neptune blue ones. We praise the Vulcan at Athens made by Alcamenes. He stands clothed, and his slight limp is visible without being ugly. Shall we then count the god as lame because that is the story we have received about Vulcan? And come, shall we also make the gods bear the very names we call them by?

1.84 "But to start with, the gods have as many different names as people have languages. You're Velleius wherever you go. But Vulcan doesn't have the same name in Italy, Africa, and Spain. Besides, even our priests' records don't contain many divine names, while the gods themselves are beyond counting. Do they have no names? That's what your position forces you to say. After all, if they all look alike, what's the point of having different names? Velleius, wouldn't it have been much better to admit you didn't know what you didn't know? Instead, you babble this stuff, make yourself sick, and end up disgusted with yourself. Do you think a god looks like me, or like you? Of course you don't." "What then? Am I supposed to call the sun, the moon, or the sky a god? Then it must be happy too. What pleasures does it enjoy? And it must be wise. How can a block like that have wisdom?"

1.85 "That's your school's argument. So if gods don't have human form [...], as I've shown, or any form like those, as you're convinced, why hesitate to deny that gods exist? You don't dare. That's sensible enough, though here it isn't the public you're afraid of. It's the gods themselves. I know Epicureans who bow before every little idol. Still, I see that some people think Epicurus kept the gods in words but did away with them in reality, so he wouldn't offend the

Athenians. That's why, in that selection of short sayings you call *κυρία δόξαι*, or 'Principal Doctrines,' the first saying is, I think: 'What's happy and immortal neither has troubles itself nor causes trouble for anyone else.' Some people think he deliberately put it that way. In fact, he simply didn't know how to express himself clearly."

- 1.86 "They're judging a man who wasn't at all crafty unfairly. His wording leaves it uncertain whether he means that something happy and immortal exists, or that anything of that kind, if it exists, has those qualities. They fail to notice that although he spoke ambiguously here, in many other passages both he and Metrodorus spoke as openly as you did just now. He certainly thinks gods exist. And I've never seen anyone more afraid of the things he says we shouldn't fear—I mean death and the gods. Ordinary people aren't very disturbed by them. Yet he shouts that they've terrified the minds of every mortal alive. So many thousands carry on as bandits with death hanging over them. Others loot every temple they can. I suppose the first lot are terrified of death, and the second of offending the gods!
- "But since you don't dare deny that gods exist—I'm talking to Epicurus himself now—what keeps you from counting the sun, the universe, or some eternal mind among the gods?"

- 1.87 "He says, 'I've never seen a soul with reason and judgment in any shape except a human one.' Well, have you ever seen anything like the sun, the moon, or the five wandering stars? The sun's motion is bounded by the two extreme points of a single circuit, and it completes its rounds year by year. The moon, lit by that same sun's rays, covers this circuit in a month. The five stars follow the same circle, some closer to the earth and others farther away. They start from the same points and cover the same distances, but take different lengths of time. Have you ever seen anything like that, Epicurus?"

- 1.88 "Then let's say there's no sun, no moon, and no stars, since nothing can exist unless we've touched it or seen it. What about god himself? Have you seen him? Why believe he exists, then? Let's reject everything new that either reports

of events or reasoning bring to our attention. On that basis, people living inland wouldn't believe there's a sea. What a cramped mind! Suppose you'd been born on Seriphus and never left the island. You'd have often seen little hares and foxes there. But when someone described lions and panthers to you, you wouldn't believe they existed. And if someone told you about an elephant, you'd think they were making fun of you."

1.89 "And you, Velleius, didn't follow your own school's usual practice. You used the <tight confines> of an argument to pin down your conclusion, as the dialecticians do—though your whole school knows nothing whatever about their methods. You assumed that the gods are happy. We grant that. Then you said no one can be happy without virtue. We grant that too, and gladly. Next, virtue can't exist without reason. We have to agree to that as well. Then you add that reason can exist only in a human shape. Who do you think will grant you that? If it were true, why did you need to reach it step by step? You'd have been entitled to assume it. And what's this talk of proceeding step by step? I can see your steps from happiness to virtue, and from virtue to reason. But how do you get from reason to human shape? That's not stepping down. It's falling headfirst."

1.90 "I also don't understand why Epicurus preferred to say that gods resemble human beings rather than that human beings resemble gods. You'll ask what difference it makes: if this resembles that, then that resembles this. I understand. But my point is that the gods didn't get their bodily shape from human beings. The gods have always existed. They were never born, if they really are going to exist forever. Human beings, though, were born. So the human shape existed before human beings did, and the immortal gods had that shape. We shouldn't say, then, that their shape is human. We should say that ours is divine."

"But have it your way on that point. What I want to know is how chance could've been so fortunate—for you hold that nothing in nature

1.91 is made by reason. Still, what enormous chance was it, what source of so fortunate a meeting of atoms, that humans were suddenly born with the gods' form? Do we suppose the gods' seed fell from heaven to earth, and humans emerged resembling their fathers? I wish you said so. I would gladly recognize our kinship with the gods. You say nothing of the kind. You say it happened by chance that we resemble gods. And now we are supposed to look for arguments to refute this! If only I could find the truth as easily as I can expose falsehood.

"You listed the philosophers' views of the gods' nature from Thales of Miletus onward, from memory and in great detail. It made me marvel at such learning in a Roman.

1.92 "Did you think everyone who held that a god could exist without hands and feet was talking nonsense?"

"When you consider how useful people's limbs are, and how well they suit their purposes, doesn't even that lead you to see that gods don't need human limbs? What's the point of feet if you don't walk, or hands if there's nothing to grasp? And what about the whole arrangement of the other parts of the body? Nothing in it is pointless, nothing lacks a reason, and nothing's unnecessary. No human skill can match nature's ingenuity. So will a god have a tongue and never speak? Will he have teeth, a palate, and a throat that serve no purpose? Will the parts nature attached to the body for reproduction be useless to a god? That goes for the internal organs as much as the external ones: the heart, lungs, liver, and the rest. Take away their usefulness, and what's attractive about them? After all, you insist that a god has them for their beauty."

1.93 "Was it confidence in dreams like these that led not just Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Hermarchus to attack Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles, but even that little prostitute Leontium to dare to write against Theophrastus? Her language was polished and thoroughly Attic, to be sure. But still! That's how much license there was in Epicurus's Garden. And you people regularly complain about others! Zeno even used to start fights. Why mention Albucius? As for Phaedrus, no one could've been more refined or kinder. But the old man would get angry if I said anything a little sharp. Yet Epicurus heaped the most insult-

ing abuse on Aristotle. He spoke disgustingly of Phaedo, Socrates' follower. He filled whole books with attacks on Timocrates, the brother of his companion Metrodorus, because Timocrates disagreed with him about some point of philosophy or other. He was ungrateful to Democritus himself, whose teachings he followed. And he treated his own teacher Nausiphanes appallingly, though he'd learned <not> nothing from him. Zeno didn't just fire insults at people of his own time—Apollodorus Sillis and the others. He even called Socrates himself, the father of philosophy, 'an Athenian clown,' using the Latin word for 'clown.' And he never called Chrysippus anything but the feminine 'Chrysippa.'"

- 1.94 "Just now, you yourself ran through what sounded like a senate of philosophers. You said those outstanding men were foolish, raving, and insane. If none of them saw the truth about the gods' nature, we have reason to worry that there's no such nature at all.

"What you people say is entirely made up. It hardly deserves to be something old women dream up over their lamps at night. You don't realize how much you'll have to accept if you get us to agree that gods and human beings have the same shape. A god will need all the same bodily care and attention as a human being. He'll have to walk, run, recline, bend, sit, grasp things, and finally even converse and speak."

- 1.95 "For you say there are both male and female gods, and you see what follows. I cannot marvel enough at how that founder of yours arrived at these beliefs.

"But you never stop shouting that we must hold to this: a god is happy and immortal. What stops him from being happy if he does not have two feet? Whether we should call it *beatitas* or *beatitudo*—both Latin words for happiness are certainly awkward, but usage must soften our words—whatever we call it, why can it not belong to that sun, this world, or some eternal mind without a bodily shape or limbs?

- 1.96 “You’re only saying, ‘I’ve never seen a happy sun or a happy universe.’ Have you ever seen any universe besides this one? You’ll say no. Then how did you dare to say there are not six hundred thousand universes, but infinitely many? ‘Reason taught me.’ Won’t reason teach you this too? We’re looking for the finest possible nature, one that’s happy and eternal. That alone is a divine nature. Just as it surpasses us in immortality, it must surpass us in mental excellence—and in bodily excellence as well. So why should we match the gods in shape when we’re inferior in everything else? Human excellence came closer to resembling the gods than the human figure did.”
- 1.97 “Let me press the same point a little longer. Could anything be more childish than denying that certain kinds of animals exist because they’re born in the Red Sea or India? Even the most curious people can’t ask around and hear about all the creatures that live on land, in the sea, in marshes, and in rivers. Should we deny that they exist because we’ve never seen them?
- “And that resemblance you’re so fond of really has nothing to do with the issue. Doesn’t a dog look like a wolf? And, as Ennius says, ‘How much the ape, that ugly beast, resembles us!’ But their behavior is different. No animal has more sense than an elephant.”
- 1.98 “But what animal has a huger shape? I am speaking of animals. What about humans themselves? Do we not find different characters in people with very similar forms, and different shapes in people with the same character?
- “For once we accept this kind of argument, Velleius, notice how far it spreads. You assumed reason could exist only in a human form. Someone else will assume it can exist only in an earthly being; only in one that was born; only in one that grew up; only in one that learned; only in one made of a soul and a weak, perishable body; in short, only in a mortal human. If you resist all these claims, why are you troubled by shape alone? You saw reason and mind in humans accompanied by all the things I have listed. Yet with these removed, you say you still recognize a god, provided the outlines remain. That is not considering what to say, but almost drawing it by lot.

- 1.99 “Perhaps you don’t even notice this: anything unnecessary or useless gets in the way, not just in a human being but even in a tree. What a nuisance it is to have one extra finger! Why? Because the five don’t need another one, either for looks or for use. But your god has much more than one extra finger. His head, neck, the back of his neck, sides, belly, back, the backs of his knees, hands, feet, thighs, and lower legs are all unnecessary. If they’re meant to make him immortal, what do these body parts contribute to keeping him alive? What does his face itself contribute? The brain, heart, lungs, and liver matter more: they’re where life is housed. The shape of the face does nothing to keep life secure.”
- 1.100 “And you criticized people who looked at magnificent, splendid works and suspected that some outstanding, superior being had made them and kept them moving, directing and governing them. They’d seen the universe itself and its parts—the sky, land, and seas. They’d seen their most striking features: the sun, moon, and stars. They’d observed the seasons reaching their fullness, changing, and coming round again. Even if their guess is wrong, I can at least see what leads them to it. But what great, remarkable work can you point to that looks like the product of a divine mind and leads you to suspect that gods exist? ‘I had a certain conception of a god planted in my mind,’ you say. Yes, of a bearded Jupiter and a helmeted Minerva. Do you really think they look like that?”
- 1.101 “How much better ordinary, uneducated people handle this! They give a god not just human body parts, but uses for those parts too. They give him a bow, arrows, a spear, a shield, a trident, a thunderbolt. Even if they can’t see what the gods actually do, they still can’t imagine a god doing nothing. Even the Egyptians, who get laughed at, never made an animal sacred unless they got some benefit from it. Take ibises. They destroy huge numbers of snakes. They’re tall birds with stiff legs and long beaks made of horn. They keep a plague out of Egypt by killing and eating the winged snakes that the southwest wind blows in from Libya’s wastelands. That way, the snakes can’t hurt people with their bites while alive or with their smell when dead. I could discuss the usefulness of mongooses, crocodiles, and cats, but I don’t want to go on too

long. I'll finish with this: at least those foreign peoples made animals sacred because they did some good. Your gods haven't just failed to do any good. They haven't done anything at all."

1.102 "He has no business to attend to,' he says. Clearly Epicurus, like spoiled children, thinks nothing better than doing nothing. But even children, when free from work, enjoy some active play. Do we want a god on such a permanent holiday that he is numb with idleness, and we fear that if he stirs himself he may be unable to stay happy? This argument not only strips the gods of divine movement and action. It also makes people lazy, if not even a god can be happy while doing something.

1.103 "But let the god be a human likeness and image, as you wish. What is his home, his dwelling, his location? How does he spend his life? By what means is he happy, as you want him to be? Anyone who is to be happy must use and enjoy his good things. Even the lifeless elements each have their own proper place. Earth holds the lowest, water floods over it, the next higher place belongs to air, and the highest region is assigned to the fires of aether. Among animals, some live on land, some in water, and some live a double life in both places. Some are even thought to be born in fire and are often seen flying about in burning furnaces.

1.104 "So I ask first where your god lives. Next, what makes him move from his place, if he ever does move? Then, since living creatures characteristically seek something suited to their nature, what does a god seek? For what purpose does he use the movement of mind and reason? Finally, how is he happy, and how is he eternal? Touch any one of these points and you touch a sore. Your theory is so badly set up that it cannot find a way out.

1.105 "This is what you were saying: we grasp a god's appearance through thought, not through our senses. There's nothing solid about it, and it doesn't remain one and the same individual thing. We see it through the resemblance of images passing in succession. Similar images never stop arriving from the infinite supply of bodies. Our minds focus on these, and that's why we think this nature is

happy and everlasting. By the very gods we're discussing, what sort of account is that? If these images only affect our thoughts and have no solidity or depth, what difference does it make whether we're thinking about a centaur or a god? Other philosophers call every such mental picture an empty stirring of the mind. You call it the arrival of images in our minds and their entry into them."

1.106 "For example, when I seem to see Tiberius Gracchus addressing the people on the Capitol and bringing out the voting urn for the decision about Marcus Octavius, I call that an empty movement of my mind. You say images of Gracchus and Octavius remain, and after reaching the Capitol are carried back to my mind. You say the same happens with a god: repeated appearances of his face strike our minds, and from this we understand that gods are happy and eternal.

1.107 "Suppose there are images that strike our minds. All that's presented is some sort of appearance. Does it also show us why that being is happy or why it's eternal?

"And what are these images of yours? Where do they come from? This license certainly started with Democritus. But plenty of people criticized him too, and you can't find a way out. The whole theory wobbles and limps. What could be harder to accept than the claim that images of everyone reach me—Homer, Archilochus, Romulus, Numa, Pythagoras, Plato—and not even looking as those people actually did? How can the images be theirs, then? And whose images are they in some cases? Aristotle tells us that the poet Orpheus never existed. They say this Orphic poem was the work of a certain Pythagorean named Cercon. Yet Orpheus—or his image, as you'd have it—often enters my mind."

1.108 "What about different images of the same person reaching me and reaching you? What about images of things that never existed at all and couldn't exist, like Scylla or the Chimaera? What about images of people, places, and cities we've never seen? What about an image being there as soon as I feel like having it? What about their coming uninvited even when I'm asleep? The whole thing

is nonsense, Velleius. You force these images not just on our eyes but on our minds too. That's how freely you can chatter without being called to account. And what reckless freedom it is!"

1.109 "Images stream past in such quick succession that many look like one.' I'd be embarrassed to say I don't understand if you people who defend this understood it yourselves. How do you prove that images keep arriving without a break? And even if they do, how do you prove they'll do so forever? 'The infinite number of atoms keeps up the supply,' comes the reply. Is that same infinity going to make everything last forever, then? You fall back on equal balance—let's use that, if you like, for *ισονομίαν*. You say that since mortal beings exist, immortal ones must exist too. By that reasoning, since people are mortal, some people must be immortal. And since people are born on land, they must be born in water too. 'And because there are things that destroy, there must be things that preserve.' Fine, let there be. But let them preserve things that exist. I don't recognize the existence of those gods of yours."

1.110 "Still, how does this whole image of things arise from indivisible bodies? Even if these existed, though they do not, they might perhaps strike themselves and be set in motion by colliding with each other. They could not form, shape, color, or bring things to life. So you do not establish an immortal god in any way. "Now let us look at happiness. Certainly it cannot exist without virtue. But virtue is active, while your god does nothing. So he has no virtue.

1.111 "So he isn't happy either. What sort of life does he have, then? 'A supply of good things,' you say, 'with nothing bad getting in the way.' What good things, exactly? Pleasures, I suppose—bodily ones, of course. You don't recognize any mental pleasure except one that starts in the body and comes back to it. I don't suppose you want to be like the rest of the Epicureans, who're embarrassed by some of Epicurus's statements. In those statements he declares that he <can't> even conceive of anything good apart from luxurious and obscene pleasures. And he runs through every one of them by name without a blush."

- 1.112 “So what food or drinks will you give the gods? What different sounds or flowers? What sensations of touch, what smells, will you provide to drench them in pleasure? The poets at least prepare feasts of nectar and ambrosia, with either Juventas or Ganymede serving drinks. But what will you do, Epicurus? I can’t see where your god would get these things or how he’d use them. So by nature, humans are better equipped than gods for a happy life, since they enjoy more kinds of pleasure.”
- 1.113 “But you think less of pleasures that give our senses a kind of ‘tickling’—that’s Epicurus’s own word. How long will you keep playing games? Even our friend Philo couldn’t stand the Epicureans’ dismissing gentle, delicate pleasures. He had an extraordinary memory. He’d quote a great many of Epicurus’s statements exactly as they’d been written. He’d also recite many even more shameless passages from Metrodorus, Epicurus’s fellow sage. Metrodorus criticizes his brother Timocrates for hesitating to measure everything that contributes to a happy life by the stomach. And he doesn’t say this just once, but repeatedly. I see you nodding. You know these passages. If you denied it, I’d bring out the books. I’m not now criticizing the idea that pleasure should be the standard for everything. That’s a separate question. I’m showing that your gods have no pleasure. So even by your own standards, they aren’t happy. ‘But they’re free from pain.’”
- 1.114 “Is that enough for the happiest possible life, overflowing with good things? ‘He’s constantly thinking about how happy he is,’ they say. ‘There’s nothing else for him to turn over in his mind.’ So picture this god. Set him before your eyes, spending all eternity thinking nothing but ‘I’m doing wonderfully’ and ‘I’m happy.’ Still, I don’t see how this happy god can avoid fearing destruction. Atoms constantly collide with him, battering and shaking him without a moment’s break, while images constantly flow away from his own being. So your god is neither happy nor eternal.”

- 1.115 “But Epicurus even wrote books about holiness and religious duty toward the gods.’ Yes, but listen to how he speaks in them! You’d think you were hearing <Tiberius> Coruncanius or Publius Scaevola, those chief priests. You wouldn’t think this was the man who’d uprooted all religion and demolished the immortal gods’ temples and altars—not with his hands, like Xerxes, but with arguments. Why say that people should worship the gods, when the gods don’t look after people and, in fact, don’t care about anything or do anything at all?”
- 1.116 “But their nature is so exceptional and outstanding that it should, all by itself, draw a wise person to worship it.’ Can there be anything exceptional about a nature that enjoys its own pleasure but has never done anything, does nothing now, and will never do anything? And what religious duty do you owe someone from whom you’ve received nothing? What can you owe anyone who’s done nothing to deserve it? Religious duty is justice toward the gods. But what claims can there be between us and them when human beings have no shared bond with a god? Holiness, in turn, means knowing how to worship the gods. I don’t understand why we should worship them if we’ve received no good from them and expect none.”
- 1.117 “And why should we worship the gods out of admiration for their nature, when we see nothing remarkable in it?”
- “It’s easy enough to free people from superstition, as you like to boast you do, once you’ve stripped the gods of all power. Unless perhaps you think Diagoras or Theodorus could have been superstitious, when they denied that gods existed at all. I don’t think even Protagoras could have been. He couldn’t say either that gods exist or that they don’t. All these views remove more than superstition, which involves an empty fear of the gods. They also remove religion, which consists in worshiping the gods with devotion.”
- 1.118 “What about those who said the whole belief in immortal gods was invented by wise people for the state’s sake, so that religion would lead to duty those whom reason could not lead? Did they not uproot all religion? And Prodicus of Ceos,

who said the things that benefited human life were counted among the gods—what religion did he leave, after all?

1.119 “What about those who say that brave, famous, or powerful men became gods after death, and that these are the very gods we regularly worship, pray to, and honor? Aren’t they doing without religion altogether? Euhemerus developed this account more than anyone else. Our own Ennius translated him and followed him especially closely. But Euhemerus points out where the gods died and were buried. Does he seem to have strengthened religion, then, or to have completely destroyed it? I won’t discuss holy, awe-inspiring Eleusis, ‘where peoples from the farthest shores are initiated.’ I’ll pass over Samothrace and the rites on Lemnos, ‘celebrated in secret, entered at night, amid thick woodland hedges.’ Once you explain these things and give a rational account of them, you learn more about the nature of things than about the gods.”

1.120 “Even Democritus, one of the greatest men, seems to me uncertain about the nature of the gods. Epicurus watered his little gardens from that man’s springs. At one point Democritus thinks there are images with divine powers in the universe. At another, he says the basic elements of mind, which exist in that same universe, are gods. Then he calls them living images that regularly help or harm us. Then they’re enormous images, so vast that they surround the whole world from outside. All these ideas suit Democritus’s hometown better than Democritus himself.”

1.121 “Who can get their mind around images like those? Who can admire them? Who can think they deserve worship or religious devotion?”
“Epicurus, though, tore religion out of people’s minds by the roots when he denied the immortal gods both the ability to help and goodwill. He says a god’s nature is the best and most outstanding there is. Yet he also denies that a god has goodwill. He removes the very quality that most belongs to the best and most outstanding nature. What’s better or more outstanding than goodness and generosity? You insist that a god lacks these. That means no one, whether god or human, is dear to a god. No one is loved by him; no one has his affec-

tion. The result is that the gods neglect not just human beings, but one another as well. How much better the Stoics do—the people you criticize! They think wise people are friends with other wise people even if they don't know them. Nothing's more lovable than virtue. Anyone who's gained it will have our affection, wherever in the world they may be."

1.122 "But what a harmful idea you're offering when you base favors and goodwill <on> weakness! Let's set aside the gods' power and nature. Do you really think that even human beings would never have been generous or kind unless they'd been weak? Isn't there any natural affection between good people? The very word *carum*, 'dear,' expresses *amor*, 'love.' And *amor* is where the Latin word *amicitia*, 'friendship,' gets its name. If we direct friendship toward our own profit rather than the benefit of the person we love, it won't be friendship. It'll be a kind of trading for our own advantage. That's how we value meadows, fields, and herds of livestock: for what we get from them. But affection and friendship between people ask for nothing in return. How much more must that be true of the gods! They need nothing, yet they love one another and look after human beings. If that's not so, why do we worship the gods? Why do we pray to them? Why do pontiffs oversee sacred rites and augurs oversee the watching for divine signs? What do we ask the immortal gods for? What do we promise them in our vows? 'But Epicurus even wrote a book about holiness.'"

1.123 "We are being mocked by a man who is less witty than he is unrestrained in what he writes. What reverence can there be if gods do not care about human affairs? And what living nature can care about nothing? Surely, then, the truer view is what our common friend Posidonius argued in the fifth book of his *On the Nature of the Gods*: Epicurus thinks there are no gods, and said what he did about immortal gods to ward off public resentment. He would not have been so foolish as to invent a god resembling a little man only in his outer outlines, not in solid substance; equipped with every human limb, but without even the slightest use for his limbs; thin and transparent; giving nothing to any-

one and showing no favor; caring about absolutely nothing and doing nothing. First, such a nature cannot exist at all. Epicurus sees this and removes the gods in fact while leaving them in words.

- 1.124 “Then, even if a god really is just as you say, with no goodwill or love for people to move him, goodbye to him! Why should I say, ‘May he look kindly on us’? He can’t look kindly on anyone, since, as you say, all goodwill and love come from weakness.”

Book 2



2.1 When Cotta finished, Velleius said, “I really was careless to take on someone who belongs to the Academy and is also a trained speaker. An Academic who couldn’t speak well wouldn’t have frightened me. Neither would a speaker, however eloquent, without that philosophy. A flood of empty words doesn’t upset me, nor does a subtle argument presented in a dry style. But you, Cotta, were strong on both sides. All you lacked was a crowd and a jury. Still, we can return to that another time. Now let’s hear Lucilius, if it suits him.”

2.2 Then Balbus said, “I’d rather hear more from Cotta himself, provided he brings in the real gods with the same eloquence he used to get rid of the false ones. A philosopher, a priest, and a man like Cotta should have a firm, certain view of the immortal gods, as our school does—not a shifting, unsettled view like the Academics. You’ve said enough against Epicurus, and more than enough. But what I’m eager to hear, Cotta, is what you yourself think.”

“Have you forgotten what I said at the start?” Cotta replied. “It’s easier for me to say what I don’t think than what I do, especially on subjects like these. Even if I had reached a clear conclusion, I’d still want to hear from you in turn, after saying so much myself.”

2.3 Then Balbus said, “I’ll do as you ask and keep it as brief as I can. Now that Epicurus’s errors have been exposed, there’s a long stretch of argument I can leave out. Our school divides this whole inquiry about the immortal gods into four parts. First, they show that gods exist. Next, they explain what the gods are like. Then they show that the gods govern the universe. Finally, they show that the gods look after human affairs. Let’s take the first two in this discussion. The third and fourth are bigger subjects, so I think we should leave them for another time.”

“Certainly not,” said Cotta. “We’ve got the time, and these subjects deserve to come before even our business.”

2.4 Then Lucilius said, “The first part hardly seems to need an argument. When we look up at the sky and study the heavenly bodies, what could be plainer or clearer than that some supremely intelligent divine power governs them? If that weren’t so, how could Ennius have said, with everyone’s agreement, ‘Look at this shining expanse above, whom everyone calls on as Jupiter’? Yes, Jupiter—the ruler of everything, who governs it all through motion. As Ennius also calls him, ‘father of gods and men’: a god present among us and supreme in power. If someone doubts that, I really don’t see why he couldn’t also doubt whether the sun exists or not;”

2.5 “Why is the one clearer than the other? Unless our minds had recognized and firmly grasped this, the belief wouldn’t have stayed so steady. Time wouldn’t have strengthened it, and it couldn’t have grown old along with the generations and ages of humanity. We see that other beliefs, made up and empty, have faded away over time. Who believes there ever was a centaur or a Chimaera? Can we find any old woman so foolish that she fears those horrors in the underworld that people once believed in? Time wipes out what people invent but confirms what nature tells us.

2.6 “So, among our people and among others, worship of the gods and sacred religious observances keep growing and improving day by day. This doesn’t happen at random or by chance. The gods themselves often appear and show their

power. At Regillus, during the war with the Latins, the dictator A. Postumius was fighting Octavius Mamilius of Tusculum. Castor and Pollux were seen fighting on horseback in our ranks. In more recent memory, those same sons of Tyndareus announced that Perseus had been defeated. P. Vatinius, the grandfather of the young man here, was traveling to Rome from the prefecture of Reate. At night, two young men with white horses told him that King Perseus had been captured that day; <when> he reported this to the senate, he was first thrown in prison for supposedly making a reckless statement about public affairs. Later, a letter arrived from Paulus and confirmed the same date. The senate then rewarded Vatinius with land and exemption from military service. It's also recorded that when the Locrians defeated the people of Croton in a great battle at the river Sagra, news of that battle reached the games at Olympia that very day. The voices of Fauns have often been heard, and the forms of gods have often been seen. These have forced anyone who wasn't dull-witted or irreverent to admit that the gods were present."

- 2.7 "What else do predictions and foreknowledge of the future show? They show that coming events are pointed out, displayed, foreshadowed, and foretold to human beings. That gives the Latin names ostenta, monstra, portenta, and prodigia: from ostendi, 'be pointed out,' monstrari, 'be displayed,' portendi, 'be foreshadowed,' and praedici, 'be foretold.' Suppose we think that stories have freely invented Mopsus, Tiresias, Amphiaraus, Calchas, and Helenus. Yet even the stories wouldn't have taken them in as prophets if the facts had ruled prophecy out altogether. Won't examples from our own country teach us to recognize the gods' power? Will we learn nothing from Publius Clodius's reckless conduct in the First Punic War? He made a joke of mocking the gods. When the sacred chickens were let out of their cage and wouldn't eat, he ordered them thrown into the water, so that they could drink, since they wouldn't eat. The defeat of his fleet turned that joke into many tears for him and a great disaster for the Roman people. And didn't his colleague Lucius Junius lose his fleet in a storm in the same war, after disregarding the auspices? Clodius was therefore convicted by the people, and Junius killed himself.

- 2.8 “Coelius writes that C. Flaminius fell at Trasimene because he ignored religious obligations, and that the republic suffered a terrible blow with him. Their destruction helps us see that the republic grew under the commands of men who obeyed religious requirements. And if we want to compare ourselves with foreign peoples, we’ll find that in other respects we’re their equals or even their inferiors. But in religion—that is, worship of the gods—we’re far ahead.”
- 2.9 “Should we dismiss that curved staff of Attus Navius, with which he marked off the parts of a vineyard to search for a pig? I might think so, if King Hostilius hadn’t fought great wars under his guidance as an augur. But the nobles’ carelessness has let the study of augury fall away. The reality of the auspices has been rejected, and only the outward appearance remains. So the most important business of the state, including the wars on which its safety depends, is carried on without auspices. No signs at river crossings are observed, nor any from spear points. No men are summoned, and that has put an end to wills made before battle. Our commanders now begin to wage war only after giving up their auspices.
- 2.10 “But among our ancestors religion had such force that some commanders even covered their heads and used a set form of words to devote their own lives to the immortal gods for the state. I could recall many Sibylline prophecies and many answers given by readers of sacrificial entrails to confirm things no one should doubt. An actual event proved the skill both of our augurs and of the Etruscan readers of entrails, when Publius Scipio and Gaius Figulus became consuls. Tiberius Gracchus, in his second consulship, was conducting their election. The first voting officer suddenly died on the spot just after reporting their election. Gracchus nevertheless completed the assembly. When he realized that this had caused religious anxiety among the people, he referred the matter to the Senate. The Senate decided to consult the people it usually consulted. The readers of entrails were brought in. They answered that the official conducting the election assembly hadn’t been acting lawfully. Then Gracchus flared up in anger, as I used to hear from my father:

2.11 “Really? I wasn’t qualified, even though I held the election as consul, as augur, and after taking the auspices? Or do you Etruscans, you barbarians, understand the rules for the Roman people’s auspices? Are you qualified to interpret their elections?’ So he told them to leave. Later, though, he wrote to the college from his province. While reading the books, he’d remembered a religious fault in his choice of a tent site in Scipio’s gardens. After choosing it, he’d entered the pomerium to hold a senate meeting. On his way back, when he crossed that same sacred city boundary, he’d forgotten to take the auspices. The consuls had therefore been elected through a faulty procedure. The augurs referred the matter to the senate. The senate told the consuls to resign. They resigned. What stronger examples could we ask for? An exceptionally wise man—perhaps the most outstanding man of all—preferred to admit a mistake he could have hidden rather than leave the republic burdened with a religious violation. The consuls preferred to give up the highest command immediately rather than hold it for a single moment against religious requirements.”

2.12 “The augurs have great authority. And isn’t the skill of the readers of entrails also divine? If someone sees these cases and countless others like them, isn’t he forced to admit that gods exist? Those whose messages they interpret must certainly exist. They interpret the gods’ messages. So let’s admit that gods exist. But perhaps not every prediction comes true. Well, not every sick person recovers, but that doesn’t mean there is no medical skill. The gods show us signs of future events. If anyone misreads them, the fault lies not in the gods’ nature but in human interpretation.

“And so people of every nation agree on the main point. Everyone has an inborn belief, engraved, as it were, in the mind, that gods exist. Opinions differ about what they are like. No one denies that they exist.

2.13 “Cleanthes, one of our own school, said that ideas of the gods took shape in people’s minds for four reasons. First he put the reason I just mentioned: foreknowledge of future events. Second came our awareness of the great benefits we receive from a balanced climate, fertile land, and a rich supply of many other useful things.

- 2.14 “His third reason was the fear stirred in our minds by lightning, storms, rain clouds, snow, hail, devastation, plague, earthquakes, frequent rumblings of the earth, showers of stones, and raindrops that seem like blood. There are landslides and sudden chasms in the earth. There are unnatural births among people and cattle. There are fiery lights seen in the sky and the stars the Greeks call ‘long-haired’ comets and our people call ‘curly-haired stars.’ These recently warned of great disasters during the war with Octavius. There is also the appearance of a double sun. My father told me this happened when Tuditanus and Aquilius were consuls, in the very year when Publius Africanus, our second sun, went out. Frightened by these things, people came to think that some heavenly, divine power existed.
- 2.15 “The fourth reason, perhaps the strongest of all, is the sky’s even movement <and perfectly steady> rotation, together with the distinct arrangement, usefulness, beauty, and order of the sun, the moon, and all the stars. Just looking at these things would be enough to show that they haven’t come about by chance. Suppose someone walked into a house, a gymnasium, or a public square and saw how everything was planned, regulated, and organized. They couldn’t think this had happened without a cause. They’d realize that someone was in charge and that others followed his directions. How much more clearly must someone recognize this when faced with such enormous movements and changes, such orderly arrangements of things so numerous and so vast? Throughout the immeasurable, endless past, nothing in them has ever gone wrong. We must conclude that some mind governs these immense movements of nature.”
- 2.16 “Chrysippus has an exceptionally sharp mind. Even so, what he says sounds as though he learned it from nature itself rather than worked it out on his own. ‘If there’s anything in nature,’ he says, ‘that the human mind, human reason, human strength, and human power can’t produce, then whatever produces it must be better than a human being. But humans can’t produce the heavenly bodies or any of the things whose order lasts forever. So whatever produces them is better than a human being. What would you call that, if not a god?

Besides, if there are no gods, what in nature can be better than a human being? Humans alone have reason, and nothing can be more excellent than reason. But it's foolish arrogance for a person to think there's nothing in the whole universe better than themselves. So there is something better. That means there certainly is a god."

2.17 "Suppose you see a large, beautiful house. Even without seeing its owner, no one could persuade you that it was built for mice and weasels. Then think of the world's great order, the vast variety and beauty of the heavens, and the great force and size of the sea and land. If you think this is your home and not the home of the immortal gods, wouldn't you seem completely foolish? Don't we even understand that everything above is better, while the earth is lowest, with the thickest air around it? In some regions and cities we see people's minds grow dull because of the greater density of the atmosphere. The same thing has happened to the human race, because it has been placed on the earth, in the thickest region of the world.

2.18 "And yet human ingenuity itself should lead us to believe that there's a mind sharper than ours, a divine mind. Where did humans 'grab' this ability from, as Socrates puts it in Xenophon? Suppose someone asks where we got the moisture and the heat spread through our bodies, or the solid, earthy material of our internal organs, or, finally, that breathlike spirit of ours. The answer's obvious. We took one thing from earth, another from moisture, another from fire, and another from the air that we call breath. But what about what's better than all of these? I mean reason—or, if you'd like more words, mind, judgment, thought, and practical wisdom. Where did we find it? Where did we get it from? Will the universe have everything else, but lack this one thing that's worth the most? Surely, of everything that exists, nothing is better than the universe, nothing more excellent, nothing more beautiful. Not only does nothing better exist; we can't even imagine anything better. And if nothing is better than reason and wisdom, they must be present in what we agree is the best thing of all."

- 2.19 “Who wouldn’t be forced to accept what I’m saying by this great harmony of things, their shared activity, and their unbroken connection? Could the earth flower at one time and then be bare at another? Could the sun’s approach and retreat at the summer and winter solstices be recognized through the way so many things change of themselves? Could the tides of the sea and the narrow straits be stirred by the moon’s rising and setting? Could the stars keep their different courses within the single turning of the whole sky? These things, with all the world’s parts working together, certainly couldn’t happen unless one divine, unbroken breath held them together.
- 2.20 “When these matters are discussed more fully and at greater length, as I intend to do, they more easily escape the Academics’ petty objections. But when, as Zeno used to do, they are drawn together in short, tight arguments, they are easier to attack. A flowing river can hardly be polluted, if at all, while standing water is easily spoiled. In the same way, a stream of speech washes away a critic’s abuse, while a tightly compressed argument has trouble defending itself. Zeno squeezed the points we expand into this form:
- 2.21 “‘Whatever uses reason is better than whatever doesn’t. But nothing is better than the universe. So the universe uses reason.’ The same approach can prove that the universe is wise, that it’s happy, and that it’s eternal. Anything with these qualities is better than things that lack them, and nothing is better than the universe. It follows that the universe is a god.”
- 2.22 “He also argues this way: ‘No part of something that lacks sensation can itself have sensation. But parts of the universe have sensation. So the universe doesn’t lack sensation.’ He goes on to press the point more closely: ‘Nothing that lacks a soul and reason can produce a living, rational being from itself. But the universe produces living, rational beings. So the universe is alive and has reason.’ As he often does, he also uses a comparison to complete his argument: ‘Suppose flutes grew from an olive tree and played in tune. Would you doubt that the olive tree had some knowledge of flute-playing? And suppose plane trees

bore little lyres that played rhythmically. You'd obviously think those trees had musical skill. So why shouldn't we judge the universe to be alive and wise, when it produces living, wise beings from itself?"

2.23 "But I've started doing something different from what I said at the outset. I said that this first part needed no argument, since everyone could see that gods exist. Still, I want this very point confirmed by arguments from physics—that is, from nature. The fact is that everything that feeds and grows contains a force of heat. Without it, nothing could feed or grow. Everything hot and fiery stirs and acts through its own motion. Anything that feeds and grows has a certain steady, even motion. As long as that motion stays in us, sensation and life stay too. But when our heat grows cold and goes out, we ourselves die and go out.

2.24 "Cleanthes also uses these arguments to show how powerful heat is in every body. He says that even the heaviest food is digested, night and day. Heat is even present in the waste that nature throws out. Again, the veins and arteries never stop throbbing, with what seems a fiery motion. People have also often noticed that when the heart of an animal is torn out, it beats so rapidly that it seems to imitate the speed of fire. So everything alive, whether an animal or something the earth produces, lives because of the heat shut inside it. From this we should understand that this kind of heat has within it a life-giving power that reaches throughout the world.

2.25 "We'll see this more easily if we explain more carefully this whole fiery substance that passes through everything. All the world's parts depend on heat for support and survival. I'll touch on the largest ones. We can see this first in the earth. We see fire struck from stones when they hit or rub together. We see freshly dug earth give off steam from its warmth. We also draw warm water from wells that never run dry. This happens especially in winter, because a great amount of heat is held in the earth's hollows. The earth is denser in winter, so it holds its own inner heat more tightly.

- 2.26 “It would take a long discussion, with many arguments, to show that this balance of heat brings into being and nourishes all the seeds the earth receives, and all the things it produces itself and holds in place by their roots. Water, too, has heat mixed into it. The first evidence is its very fluidity, its ability to flow. It couldn’t freeze in cold weather or thicken into snow and frost unless that same water also spread out, melted and loosened by the heat mixed into it. So moisture hardens when north winds and other sources of cold act on it. Then, in turn, it softens when warmed and melts with heat. Seas, too, grow warm when winds stir them up. That makes it easy to recognize the heat enclosed in those enormous masses of water. We shouldn’t regard that warmth as something foreign that comes from outside. The stirring brings it out from the sea’s deepest parts. The same thing happens in our own bodies when movement and exercise warm them up. Even air, which is extremely cold by nature, is far from being without heat;”
- 2.27 “In fact, a great deal of heat is mixed into it. Air itself rises from water as it breathes out. We should think of it as a kind of vapor from water. It is produced by the action of the heat held in water. We can see something similar in water that boils over a fire. Now take the remaining, fourth part of the world. Its whole nature is hot, and it gives all the other elements a healthy, life-giving heat.
- 2.28 “This leads to a conclusion. Since heat sustains every part of the universe, a similar force of the same nature must preserve the universe itself throughout its long existence. There’s all the more reason to accept this once we recognize that this hot, fiery element spreads through all of nature and holds the power to reproduce and the cause of generation. It must be the source from which all living creatures, and everything rooted in the earth, come into being and grow.”
- 2.29 “So there is a nature that holds the whole universe together and protects it, and it isn’t without sensation and reason. Every natural thing that isn’t isolated or simple, but joined and connected with something else, must have a ruling element within it. In a human being, that’s the mind. In an animal, it’s something

like a mind, which gives rise to its desires for things. In trees and other things that grow from the earth, people think the ruling element is in the roots. By ‘ruling element’ I mean what the Greeks call ἡγεμονικόν. In each kind of thing, nothing can or should rank above it. So whatever holds the ruling position in the whole of nature must be the best of all things, and the most deserving of power and authority over everything.”

2.30 “We see sensation and reason in parts of the universe—and there’s nothing anywhere in the universe that isn’t part of the whole. So these must also exist in the part that rules the universe, and in a sharper and greater form. The universe must therefore be wise. The nature that embraces and holds everything must excel through the completeness of its reason. It follows that the universe is a god, and that all its power is contained within a divine nature.”

“What’s more, the universe’s fiery heat is much purer, clearer, and more mobile than the heat here around us, which sustains the things we know and keeps them thriving. Those qualities make it much better suited to producing sensations.”

2.31 “So it’s absurd to say that the universe has no sensation. This heat holds humans and animals together, and enables them to move and feel. Yet the universe is held together by a fire that’s undiminished, unhindered, pure, and at the same time extremely intense and mobile. Besides, the universe’s fire isn’t stirred by anything else or pushed from outside. It moves by itself, of its own accord. After all, what could be more powerful than the universe, so as to push and move the heat that holds it together?”

2.32 “Let’s listen to Plato, a kind of god among philosophers. He recognizes two kinds of motion: motion that comes from a thing itself, and motion that comes from outside. He considers something that moves by itself, of its own accord, more divine than something set in motion by an outside push. Only souls, he says, have this self-generated motion, and he thinks motion originally comes

from them. Now all motion arises from the universe's fire, and that fire moves of its own accord, not from an outside push. So it must be a soul. It follows that the universe is alive."

"We can also recognize that it has intelligence from this: the universe is certainly better than any other natural thing. Every part of our body is worth less than we ourselves are. In the same way, the universe as a whole must be worth more than any part of it. If that's so, the universe must be wise. Otherwise a human being, who is part of the universe, would have to be worth more than the entire universe because he has a share in reason."

2.33 "Also, if we choose to move from the earliest, unfinished forms of nature to the highest, completed ones, we must reach the nature of the gods. First we notice that nature sustains the things that grow from the earth. It gives them nothing beyond the nourishment and growth needed to preserve them.

2.34 "But it gives animals sensation and movement, along with an impulse to approach things that help them and avoid things that harm them. To human beings it gives something more: reason. Reason directs the mind's impulses, now letting them go, now holding them back. The fourth and highest level belongs to beings born naturally good and wise. Right and steady reason is inborn in them from the start. We must regard this as above the human level and assign it to god—that is, to the world. In the world that complete and perfect reason must be present.

2.35 "We can't say that any order of things lacks a final stage of completion. Take a vine or a farm animal. Unless some force gets in the way, we see nature follow its own course to the end. Painting, building, and the other crafts likewise have an outcome in which the work is finished. So nature as a whole must also reach completion and perfection—and there's even more reason for it to do so. Many outside things can stop other natural things from reaching completion. But nothing can obstruct nature as a whole, because it encloses and contains all those other natures. So that fourth and highest level must exist, which no force can reach."

2.36 “That’s the level occupied by the nature of all things. Since it rules everything and nothing can obstruct it, the universe must be intelligent—and wise as well.”

“What could be more ignorant than to say that the nature embracing everything isn’t the best? Or to admit that it’s the best, but deny that it’s first of all alive, then capable of reason and planning, and finally wise? How else could it be the best? If it were like plants, or even like animals, we should regard it as the worst rather than the best. And even if it has reason, its condition would still be worse than ours if it hasn’t been wise from the beginning. A human being can become wise. But if the universe was foolish throughout the endless stretch of past time, it certainly will never gain wisdom. That would make it worse than a human being. Since that’s absurd, we must regard the universe as wise from the beginning, and as a god.”

2.37 “Nothing except the universe lacks nothing, fits together on every side, and is complete in every detail and every part. Chrysippus makes a good point here. Just as a cover exists for a shield and a sheath for a sword, everything except the universe was brought into being for something else. The crops and fruits the earth produces exist for animals, and animals for human beings: the horse for riding, the ox for plowing, the dog for hunting and guarding. Human beings themselves came into being to study and imitate the universe—not perfect themselves by any means, but a small part of what is perfect.”

2.38 “But the universe embraces everything. There’s nothing that isn’t within it, so it’s complete in every way. How, then, could it lack what’s best? Nothing is better than mind and reason. So the universe can’t lack them. Here again Chrysippus argues well. He adds comparisons to show that everything is better in things that are fully developed and mature: in a horse rather than a foal, a dog rather than a puppy, a man rather than a boy. Likewise, whatever is best in the entire universe must exist in something complete and fully developed;”

- 2.39 “Nothing is more perfect than the universe, and nothing is better than virtue. So virtue must belong to the universe. Human nature isn’t perfect, yet virtue develops in human beings. How much more easily, then, must it develop in the universe! So the universe has virtue. That makes it wise, and therefore a god.”
 “Once we’ve recognized the universe as divine, we must recognize the stars as divine too. They form from the most active and purest part of the ether, with no other kind of substance mixed in. They’re entirely hot and transparent. So we’re fully justified in saying that they too are alive, have senses, and understand.”
- 2.40 “Cleanthes thinks two of our senses, touch and sight, confirm that the stars consist entirely of fire. The sun’s heat and brightness surpass those of any other fire. After all, its light reaches far and wide through this enormous universe. And when we feel it, it doesn’t just warm us; it often burns us. It couldn’t do either unless it were fire. ‘So,’ he says, ‘since the sun is made of fire and feeds on the moisture of Ocean’—because no fire can last without something to feed it—‘its fire must resemble either the fire we use for our everyday needs and food, or the fire contained in living bodies.’”
- 2.41 “But our everyday fire, the kind we need to live, destroys and consumes everything. Wherever it spreads, it throws everything into disorder and breaks it apart. The fire inside bodies does the opposite. It gives life and health. It preserves, feeds, grows, and supports everything, and gives it sensation.’ So he says there’s no doubt which of these two fires the sun resembles. The sun too makes everything flourish and grow to maturity, each thing according to its kind. Since the sun’s fire resembles the fires inside living bodies, the sun must also be alive. The same holds for the other stars, which form in the burning region of heaven called ether or sky.”
- 2.42 “Some living things originate on land, others in water, and others in the air. So Aristotle thinks it’s absurd to suppose that no living thing originates in the region best suited to producing life. Now, the stars occupy the region of ether. It’s the finest substance, always moving and full of energy. Any living thing

born there must therefore have exceptionally sharp senses and be able to move exceptionally fast. Since the stars form in the ether, it follows that they have sensation and intelligence. And that means we must count the stars among the gods. We can actually see that people who live in places where the air is pure and thin have sharper minds, better suited to understanding, than people who live under a thick, dense atmosphere.”

2.43 “People even think the food you eat makes some difference to the sharpness of your mind. So it’s reasonable to think that the stars have outstanding intelligence. They live in the universe’s region of ether, and they feed on moisture from sea and land that has become very fine during its long journey. But the clearest evidence that the stars have sensation and intelligence is their orderly, steady movement. Nothing can move according to a rational plan and fixed measures without intelligence directing it. Their order contains nothing haphazard, nothing changeable, nothing accidental. The stars’ order and their unbroken regularity through all eternity can’t be put down to nature, since that order is full of reason. Nor can they be put down to chance, which loves variety and rejects regularity. So the stars must move of their own accord, through their own awareness and divine nature.”

2.44 “Aristotle also deserves praise for his view that everything that moves does so either by nature, by force, or by choice. The sun, moon, and all the stars move. But things that move by nature go either downward because they’re heavy or upward because they’re light. Neither happens to the stars: their movement takes them around in a circle. Nor can we say that some greater force makes the stars move against their nature. What force could be greater? The only possibility left is that the stars move by choice.”

“Anyone who sees these things and still denies that gods exist shows not just ignorance but a lack of reverence. And there’s really little difference between denying their existence and denying them any management or activity. To my mind, something that does nothing doesn’t exist at all. So the existence of gods is so clear that I can hardly consider anyone who denies it to be in their right mind.”

- 2.45 “What remains is to consider what their nature is like. Here the hardest thing is to turn the mind’s eye away from what our eyes are used to seeing. That difficulty has led ordinary uneducated people, and philosophers who resemble them, to think of the immortal gods only in human shapes. Cotta has already exposed how flimsy that belief is. It doesn’t need an argument from me. But we have a firm idea in our minds, an advance awareness, that a god is first of all alive and second that nothing in all nature is more excellent. Nothing, I think, fits that awareness and idea better than judging, first, that this world itself is alive and a god, since nothing more excellent can exist.
- 2.46 “Epicurus can joke about this as much as he likes. He isn’t very good at jokes, and shows very little of his native country’s spirit. Let him say he can’t understand what a round, spinning god is like. He will never move me from this position, which he himself also accepts. He believes that gods exist because there must be some excellent being with nothing better than it. But certainly nothing is better than the world. And there is no doubt that something alive, possessing sensation, reason, and mind, is better than something that lacks them.
- 2.47 “So we establish that the universe is alive and possesses sensation, intelligence, and reason. This line of argument leads to the conclusion that the universe is a god. But a little later, the things the universe itself produces will make this easier to understand. Meanwhile, Velleius, please don’t advertise your school’s complete lack of learning. You say you find a cone, a cylinder, and a pyramid more beautiful than a sphere. Even your eyesight makes unusual judgments! Still, let’s allow that those shapes are more beautiful to look at, though I don’t agree even with that. What could be more beautiful than the one shape that encloses all the other shapes within itself? It can have no roughness, nothing to catch against, no angular cuts or winding bends, no projections or hollows. There are two outstanding shapes: among solid shapes, the ball, or globus—that’s how I prefer to translate the Greek *σφαῖραν*, ‘sphere’—and among flat shapes, the circle or disk, called *κύκλος* in Greek. Only these two shapes have all their parts as much alike as possible and their outer boundary everywhere the same distance from the center,”

2.48 “and nothing could be better suited to its purpose. But suppose you don’t see this because you’ve never touched the dust where people draw their learned diagrams. Even as students of nature, couldn’t you understand that no other shape could maintain such even movement and such a steady arrangement? So nothing could show less learning than the claim your school regularly makes. You don’t even say for certain that this universe is round. You say it could have some other shape, and that the countless other universes have all sorts of different shapes.”

2.49 “Epicurus certainly wouldn’t have said that if he’d learned how much twice two is. But while he was deciding what tasted best to his palate—his *palatum*—he never looked up at ‘*caeli palatum*,’ the ‘palate of the sky,’ as Ennius calls it.”

“There are two kinds of stars. One travels from east to west over unchanging distances and never turns aside from its course at any point. The other continually completes two revolutions over the same distances and along the same paths. Both show us that the universe rotates, which would be impossible unless it were shaped like a ball, and that the stars travel in circular circuits.”

“First, take the sun, which holds first place among the stars. Its movement fills the earth with abundant light, then darkens that same earth, now in one region and now in another. It’s the earth’s own shadow, shutting out the sun, that makes night. Nighttime intervals have the same regularity as daytime intervals. The sun also regulates cold and heat by coming closer and moving farther away in measured stages. It completes a year’s cycle in three hundred and sixty-five circuits, with roughly a quarter of a day added. As it bends its course now toward the Seven Oxen in the north, now toward the south, it produces summers and winters, along with the two seasons that come after winter as it fades and after summer. So the changes among the four seasons provide the starting points and causes of everything that grows on land and in the sea.”

2.50 “The moon follows the sun’s yearly courses in monthly stretches. Its light is thinnest when it comes closest to the sun, and fullest whenever it moves farthest away. Not only does its appearance and shape change, growing and then waning back to its starting point. Its position changes too. When it is north or

south, its course also has something like a winter and a summer solstice. Many influences stream and flow from it. These feed living creatures and make them grow, and bring the things that spring from the earth to full growth and ripeness.

2.51 “But most remarkable of all are the movements of the five stars wrongly called ‘wanderers.’ Nothing wanders if, through all eternity, it keeps its forward and backward movements, and all its other movements, steady and fixed. This is all the more remarkable in the stars we’re discussing. Sometimes they disappear, then reappear. Sometimes they approach, then retreat. Sometimes they move ahead, then follow behind. Sometimes they move faster, sometimes slower. Sometimes they don’t move at all but remain still for a while. From these different movements, mathematicians have defined what they call the Great Year. It’s completed when the sun, moon, and five wandering stars have all finished their courses and returned to the same positions relative to one another;”

2.52 “How long this lasts is a major question. But it must have a fixed, definite length. The star called Saturn, which the Greeks name Phaenon (Φαίνων), ‘the shining one,’ is the farthest from earth. It completes its journey in about thirty years. Along the way it does many remarkable things. Sometimes it moves ahead, sometimes it slows down. Sometimes it disappears in the evening, then shows itself again in the morning. Yet through endless ages it never changes: it always does the same things at the same times. Below it, closer to earth, travels the star of Jupiter, called Phaethon (Φαέθων), ‘the radiant one.’ It goes around the same circle of twelve signs in twelve years. Its journey shows the same variations as Saturn’s.”

2.53 “The next lower orbit belongs to Pyroeis, ‘the fiery one,’ the star called Mars. It goes around the same circle as the two above it in twenty-four months less, I think, six days. Below it is the star of Mercury, called Stilbon, ‘the glittering one,’ by the Greeks. It goes around the zodiac in about a year. It never moves farther from the sun than the distance of one sign, sometimes going ahead of it, sometimes following behind. The lowest of the five wandering stars and nearest

the earth is the star of Venus. When it goes ahead of the sun, it is called Phosphorus in Greek and Lucifer in Latin, meaning ‘light-bringer.’ When it follows behind, it is called Hesperus, ‘evening star.’ It completes its course in a year, passing across both the width and length of the zodiac, as the stars above it also do. It never goes farther from the sun than the distance of two signs, sometimes going ahead, sometimes following behind.

2.54 “I can’t understand how the stars could be so steady, or how such different journeys could keep such perfectly coordinated times forever, without intelligence, reason, and planning. We see these qualities in the stars. So we can’t help counting the stars themselves among the gods.”

“The stars we call fixed also show this same intelligence and foresight. Their daily rotation is regular and consistent. Their paths aren’t carried along by the ether, nor are the stars fastened to the sky, as most people say because they don’t understand how nature works. The ether doesn’t have the kind of nature that would let it grip the stars and whirl them around by its own force. It’s thin and transparent, with warmth spread evenly through it. That hardly seems suited to holding the stars in place;”

2.55 “So the fixed stars have their own sphere, separate and free from any connection with ether. Their everlasting, unbroken courses, with their astonishing, unbelievable steadiness, show that they have divine power and mind. Anyone who doesn’t recognize that these very stars possess divine power seems incapable of recognizing anything at all.

2.56 “So in heaven there is no chance, no recklessness, no wandering, and no unreality. Instead, everything there is order, truth, reason, and steadiness. Things that lack these qualities—false, unreal things full of error—move around the earth below the moon, which is the lowest of all the heavenly bodies, and on the earth itself. If someone thinks that heaven’s wonderful order and unbelievable steadiness have no mind behind them, he must be considered mindless himself. All the preservation and safety of everything spring from that order.

- 2.57 “So I don’t think I’ll go wrong if I begin this discussion with the leader in the search for truth. Zeno defines nature as a skilled fire that goes about producing things in a methodical way. He thinks that making and producing things is the special work of a craft. What our hands do in the work of our crafts, nature does with far greater skill. By nature I mean, as I said, a skilled fire that teaches all the other crafts. In this sense, nature in every form works skillfully. It has something like a method and a course to follow.”
- 2.58 “But Zeno says that the nature of the world itself, which embraces, encloses, and holds everything, is not only skilled but an actual craftsman. It plans and provides for everything useful and fitting. Other natural beings are each born, grow, and are sustained from their own seeds. In the same way, the world’s nature has all its motions by choice. Its efforts and impulses, which the Greeks call *hormai*, ‘urges,’ and the actions that follow them are just like ours, as we are moved by our minds and senses. Since the world’s mind is like this, it can rightly be called forethought or providence—the Greek word *pronoia* means ‘thinking ahead.’ It provides above all for these aims and is chiefly occupied with them: first, to make the world as well fitted as possible to last; next, to ensure that it lacks nothing; and most of all, to give it outstanding beauty and every kind of order.
- 2.59 “I have spoken about the world as a whole, and also about the stars. By now we can almost see the great number of gods. They aren’t idle, and they don’t perform their tasks with burdensome, tiresome labor. They aren’t held together by veins, sinews, and bones. They don’t consume food and drink of the sort that could build up fluids that are too sharp or too thick. Their bodies aren’t such that they must fear falls or blows, or dread diseases caused by tired limbs. It was fear of these things that made Epicurus invent his gods, mere outlines that do nothing.
- 2.60 “They have the most beautiful form and occupy the purest region of the sky. They move and manage their journeys in a way that makes them seem to have agreed to work together to preserve and protect everything.”

“There are also many other forms of divinity that the wisest Greeks and our own ancestors recognized and named because of their great benefits. They had good reason. They thought that anything bringing a great benefit to the human race must come from divine kindness toward us. Sometimes, then, they gave something produced by a god the name of that god. We do this when we call grain Ceres and wine Liber. That’s the source of the line from”

2.61 “Terence, ‘Without Ceres and Liber, Venus grows cold.’ At other times, something with an especially great power gets a name that makes the power itself a god. Examples are Fides, Good Faith, and Mens, Mind. We see their shrines on the Capitol, dedicated most recently by M. Aemilius Scaurus. Fides had already been consecrated earlier by <A.> Atilius Calatinus. You can see the temple of Virtus, Courage. You can also see the temple of Honos, Honor, which M. Marcellus restored. Q. Maximus had dedicated it many years earlier during the Ligurian War. And what about Ops, Plenty; Salus, Safety; Concordia, Harmony; Libertas, Freedom; and Victoria, Victory? All these things had such great power that they couldn’t be controlled without a god. So the things themselves received the names of gods. The sacred names of Cupid, Pleasure, and Venus Lubentina, Venus of Desire, belong to this same group. These are corrupt impulses, not natural ones—though Velleius thinks otherwise. Still, these very faults often stir our nature with particular force.”

2.62 “So the greatness of these benefits led people to recognize as gods those who produced each kind of benefit. The names I mentioned a little earlier show what power each god has.”

“Human society and common practice also came to raise men who had done outstanding good into heaven through their praise and goodwill. That’s how Hercules became a god, and Castor and Pollux, and Aesculapius, and Liber too. I mean the Liber born to Semele, not the one our ancestors solemnly and reverently worshiped together with Ceres and Libera. What that means can be understood from the mysteries. But because we call our own children *liberi*, Ceres’ children were named Liber and Libera. People keep this parentage for

Libera, but not for Liber. Romulus belongs here too; some think he's the same as Quirinus. Since these men's souls lived on and enjoyed everlasting life, people rightly regarded them as gods. They were both supremely good and eternal."

2.63 "A different line of thought, this time about the workings of nature, also produced a great number of gods. Dressed in human form, they supplied the poets with stories and filled human life with every kind of superstition. Zeno dealt with this subject, and Cleanthes and Chrysippus later explained it at greater length. An old belief spread throughout Greece that Caelus, the Sky, was castrated by his son Saturn, and that Saturn himself was bound by his son Jupiter:"

2.64 "Hidden inside these irreverent stories is a rather clever account of nature. The highest heavenly substance is ether, or fire. It produces everything by itself. So they meant that it had no use for the bodily part that needs a partner to produce offspring. Saturn, in their account, was the power that governed the course and cycle of periods of time. The god's Greek name expresses that very thing. He's called Κρόνος, Cronus, which they identify with χρόνος, 'time,' or a stretch of time. The Latin name Saturnus comes from *saturaretur annis*, 'he was filled with years.' The story says he used to eat his own children because time devours its own stretches and fills itself endlessly with the years that have passed. Jupiter bound him to keep his course from running out of control, tying him down with the bonds of the stars. Jupiter himself is the helping father: *Iuppiter*, explained as *iuvens pater*. When we change the grammatical case, we call him *Iovem*, connecting the name with *iuuando*, 'helping.' The poets call him 'father of gods and humans.' Our ancestors called him Best and Greatest. And they put Best, meaning most generous, before Greatest. That's because helping everyone is a greater thing, and certainly more welcome, than having great"

2.65 "wealth. This, then, is the god Ennius names, as I said earlier, in the words 'Look at this shining thing above, whom everyone calls Jupiter.' That's clearer than his wording elsewhere: 'Against him I'll call on whatever this shining thing

is to bring a curse, as far as it's in my power.' Our augurs also mean this god when they say 'when Jupiter flashes and thunders.' What they're saying is 'when the sky flashes and thunders.' Euripides has many excellent sayings, and puts this one briefly:

You see the boundless ether spread above,
holding the earth in a gentle embrace:
take this as the highest god, and call him Jupiter."

2.66 "The air lies between the sea and the sky. According to the Stoics' account, it's worshiped under the name Juno. She's Jupiter's sister and wife because air resembles ether and is very closely joined to it. They made air feminine and assigned it to Juno because nothing is softer. But I think Juno's name, *Iuno*, comes from *iuuando*, 'helping.' Water and earth remained, making three kingdoms to divide up as the stories tell. So Neptune, whom we regard as Jupiter's brother, received another of them: the entire kingdom of the sea. Just as Portunus comes from *porta*, 'gate,' Neptunus was formed from *nando*, 'swimming,' with a small change to the opening letters. All the earth's power and nature were assigned to Father Dis. His name means 'rich,' from Latin *dives*, just as the Greeks call him Pluton (Πλούτων), the Rich One. That's because everything returns to the earth and everything rises from it. † With him is Proserpina (that's a Greek name, since she's the one called Persephone, Περσεφόνη, in Greek)—they take her to be the seed of crops and tell the story that her mother searches for her while she's hidden away."

2.67 "The mother, in turn, is Ceres. Her name comes from gerendis frugibus, 'bearing crops,' as though it were *geres*. The first letter happened to change, just as it did in Greek. The Greeks, too, called her Δημήτηρ, as though the name were γῆ μήτηρ, 'earth mother.' Mavors gets his name from magna verteret, 'he would overturn great things.' Minerva is the goddess who would either minueret, 'diminish,' or minaretur, 'threaten.' Beginnings and endings matter most in everything. So people decided that Janus should come first in sacrifices. His Latin name, Ianus, comes from eundo, 'going.' That's also why passages that people can walk through are called *iani*, and doors at the entrances of buildings that

aren't sacred are called *ianuae*. Vesta's name comes from Greek: she's the goddess the Greeks call Hestia (Ἑστία), 'Hearth.' Her power concerns altars and hearths. Because she guards what's deepest inside, every prayer and sacrifice ends with her."

2.68 "The household gods, the Penates, have much the same power. Their name may come from *penu*, 'food supply'—*penus* means everything people eat. Or it may come from *penitus* insident, 'they live deep inside.' That's also why poets call them *penetrales*, 'gods of the inner rooms.' Apollo's name is Greek. People identify him with the sun, and they think Diana and the moon are the same goddess. The sun is called *sol* either because he alone—*solus*—among all the stars is so large, or because, once he rises and all the others are hidden, he alone appears. The moon is called *luna* from *lucendo*, 'shining.' She's also *Lucina*, the goddess who brings light. So during childbirth the Greeks call on Diana as *Lucifera*, 'the light-bearer,' while our people call on Juno as *Lucina*. This same Diana is called *Omnivaga*, 'the all-wandering one.' That's not because she hunts, but because she's counted among the seven heavenly bodies described as wanderers;"

2.69 "She's called Diana because at night she makes something like *diem*, 'daylight.' People call on her during childbirth because babies are ready to be born after seven circuits of the moon in some cases, or nine in most. These circuits cover *mensa spatia*, 'measured stretches,' which is why they're called *menses*, 'months.' Timaeus made a neat point here, as he often does. In his history, he said that Diana's temple at Ephesus burned down on the very night Alexander was born. He added that this was hardly surprising: Diana had wanted to be there when Olympias gave birth, so she'd been away from home. Our people named Venus as the goddess who came to everything—from *veniret*, 'would come.' And *venustas*, 'charm,' comes from Venus, rather than Venus from *venustas*."

2.70 “So do you see how good, useful discoveries about nature were developed into imaginary, made-up gods? This produced false beliefs, confused errors, and superstitions fit for old women. We know the gods’ shapes, ages, clothes, and ornaments, and also their family lines, marriages, and relationships. Everything has been made to resemble human weakness. They are even presented as emotionally disturbed. We have heard of their lust, grief, and anger. Nor, as the stories tell it, were they free of wars and battles. This wasn’t just as in Homer, where different gods defended the two opposing armies. They also fought wars of their own, against the Titans and against the Giants. It is extremely foolish to tell and believe these stories. They are full of nonsense and utter silliness.

2.71 “Still, once we reject and put aside these stories, we can understand the gods who extend through the nature of each thing—Ceres through the land, Neptune through the seas, and the others through other things. We can understand who they are, what they are like, and what names custom has given them. We ought to honor and worship these gods. The best, purest, holiest, and most devoted worship of the gods is always to honor them with clean, whole, uncorrupted minds and voices. It wasn’t just philosophers who distinguished superstition from religion. Our ancestors did too.

2.72 “For people who spent whole days praying and offering sacrifices so that their children would outlive them—would be superstites—were called *superstitiosi*, ‘superstitious.’ Later, that word took on a wider meaning. But <those> who carefully went back over everything involved in worshipping the gods, as though reading it again, were called *religiosi*, ‘religious,’ from *relegendo*, ‘going over again.’ This is <just as> *elegantes*, ‘discerning,’ comes from *eligendo*, ‘choosing,’ [just as] *diligentes*, ‘careful,’ comes <from> *diligendo*, ‘loving,’ and *intellegentes*, ‘understanding,’ comes from *intellegendo*, ‘understanding.’ All these words contain the same force of *legere*, ‘gather or read,’ that’s present in *religioso*, ‘religious.’ That’s how ‘superstitious’ became a word of criticism and ‘religious’ a word of praise. I think I’ve now shown well enough both that gods exist and what they’re like.”

- 2.73 “Next I need to show that the gods’ foresight governs the world. This is certainly a major subject, Cotta, and your school has attacked it. In fact, the whole debate is with your people. You and your school, Velleius, are less familiar with how each question is discussed. You read only your own writings and love only your own teachings. You condemn everyone else without hearing their case. For example, yesterday you yourself said that the Stoics bring in a fortune-telling old woman called Pronoea—that is, Providence. You said that because you mistakenly think they invent Providence as a separate goddess who steers and rules the entire world.”
- 2.74 “But that is an abbreviated way of speaking. Suppose someone says that the state of Athens is ruled by a council, leaving out ‘of the Areopagus.’ In the same way, when we say that providence runs the world, you should understand that ‘of the gods’ has been left out. The full, complete statement is this: the world is run by the providence of the gods. So please don’t use up on mocking us the wit that your tribe doesn’t possess. By Hercules, if you take my advice, you won’t even try! It doesn’t suit you; you haven’t been given the gift; you can’t do it. This doesn’t apply just to you, whose manners have been polished by family training and the sophistication of our people. It applies to the rest of your school and especially to the man who produced those ideas: a man without training or learning, who attacks everyone, without any sharpness, weight, or charm.
- 2.75 “So I say that the world and all its parts were first formed by the gods’ providence and are always governed by it. Our school usually divides this argument into three parts. The first starts from the reasoning that proves that gods exist. Once that is granted, we must admit that their planning runs the world. The second shows that all things are subject to a natural power that has sensation, and that this power manages everything in the best way. Once that is established, it follows that this nature was produced from living principles. The third line of argument comes from wonder at the things of heaven and earth.

- 2.76 “First, then, we must either deny that gods exist—which, in a way, is what Democritus does when he introduces likenesses, and Epicurus when he introduces images—or, if we admit that gods exist, we must admit that they do something, and something outstanding. But nothing is more outstanding than governing the world. So the world is governed through the gods’ planning. If that isn’t so, something must certainly exist that’s better and more powerful than a god, whatever that something may be. It might be lifeless nature, or necessity driven by immense force, producing these wonderfully beautiful works we see;”
- 2.77 “In that case, the gods’ nature isn’t supremely powerful or outstanding. It’s subject to the necessity or nature that rules the sky, seas, and lands. But nothing is superior to a god. So a god must rule the world. A god therefore doesn’t obey any natural power or stand under its authority. Instead, he rules all of nature himself. After all, if we admit that the gods have intelligence, we also admit that they plan ahead—and plan for the most important things. So do they not know what the most important things are, or how to manage and protect them? Or do they lack the power to keep such great things going and run them? But ignorance is foreign to the gods’ nature. And struggling to carry out a duty because of weakness is completely out of keeping with their greatness. That establishes what we set out to prove: the gods’ foresight governs the world.”
- 2.78 “Now, since there are gods—if indeed there are, as there certainly are—they must be alive. And not just alive: they must have reason and be joined together by something like the bonds and fellowship of citizenship. They rule one world as a shared state and city.
- 2.79 “It follows that they have the same reason as the human race. Truth is the same in both, and so is law, which commands what is right and forbids what is wrong. From this we understand that good sense and intelligence have also come to human beings from the gods. That is why our ancestors established the consecration and public dedication of Mind, Faith, Virtue, and Harmony.

How can we consistently deny that these qualities belong to the gods, when we honor their revered and holy images? If mind, faith, virtue, and harmony exist in the human race, where could they have flowed down to earth from, except from those above? And since we possess planning, reason, and good sense, the gods must possess these same things on a greater scale. They must not only possess them but also use them on the greatest and best things.

2.80 “Nothing is greater or better than the world. So it must be run by the gods’ planning and providence. Finally, we have sufficiently shown that these are gods whose remarkable power and brilliant appearance we can see. I mean the sun, the moon, the wandering and fixed stars, the sky, and the world itself, along with the power of those things present throughout the world that bring great use and benefit to humanity. It follows that everything is ruled by divine intelligence and good sense. Enough has been said about the first part.

2.81 “Next I must show that everything is subject to nature and that nature manages it in the best way. But first we must briefly explain what nature itself is, to make the point we want to prove easier to understand. Some think nature is a force without reason that causes necessary movements in bodies. Others think it is a force that shares in reason and order, proceeds along a kind of path, and makes clear why it produces each result and what end it pursues. No art, no human hand, no craftsman can match its skill by imitation. A seed, they say, has such power that, tiny though it is, it can enter a natural setting that receives and holds it, find material to feed on and grow from, and then shape and produce each thing according to its kind. Some things merely feed through their roots. Others can also move, feel, desire, and produce from themselves others like themselves.

2.82 “Some people use ‘nature’ as a name for everything. Epicurus, for example, divides it this way: the nature of everything that exists consists of bodies, empty space, and what happens to them. But when we say that nature holds the world together and runs it, we don’t mean that it is like a clod of earth, a piece of

stone, or something of that kind, with no inner principle of cohesion. We mean it is like a tree or an animal, in which we see no random activity but order and something resembling skill.

2.83 “Now, if things rooted in the earth live and thrive through nature’s skill, surely that same power, nature’s skill, holds the earth itself together. Pregnant with seeds, the earth gives birth to everything and pours it out of itself. It embraces roots, feeds them, and makes them grow. In return, it’s fed by the natural things above and outside it. The earth’s own exhalations also feed the air, the ether, and everything higher up. So if nature holds the earth together and keeps it thriving, the same reasoning applies to the rest of the world. Plants cling to the earth, while living creatures depend on breathing air. The air itself sees with us, hears with us, and makes sounds with us: none of these things can happen without it. It even moves along with us. Wherever we go, wherever we move, it seems to make room and give way.”

2.84 “Things carried toward the world’s center, its lowest point, things carried upward away from the center, and things carried in a circle around the center form the world’s single, continuous nature. There are four kinds of bodies, and their interchange makes the world’s nature continuous. Water comes from earth, air from water, and ether from air. Then, in reverse, air comes from ether, water from air, and earth, the lowest, from water. So these elements, of which everything consists, move up and down, back and forth, and keep the world’s parts joined together.

2.85 “It must either last forever, just as we see it now, or at least endure for an extremely long, almost limitless time. Either way, it follows that nature runs the universe. What fleet under sail, what army in formation, shows as much skill in nature as the universe itself? Or, to compare things that nature produces, what growing vine or tree, what animal’s shape and arrangement of limbs, shows as much? So either nothing is governed by a nature that has awareness, or we have to admit that the universe is governed that way.”

2.86 “The universe contains all other natural things and their seeds. How can it itself not be managed by nature? That would be like saying that teeth and puberty arise naturally, but the human being in whom they arise is not a natural structure. Anyone who says that fails to understand that things which produce something from themselves have a more complete nature than the things they produce. Of everything managed by nature, the universe is the source of seed, the sower, and, so to speak, the parent that raises and feeds them. It feeds and holds everything together as its own limbs and parts. If nature manages the parts of the universe, nature must manage the universe itself. And there is nothing in the way it is managed that anyone can fault. Given the materials available, the best possible result has been achieved.”

2.87 “Then let someone show that it could have been better. No one ever will. Anyone who tries to correct something will either make it worse or ask for something that could not have been done.

“Now all the parts of the universe are so arranged that they could neither work better nor look more beautiful. Let us ask whether this is an accident, or whether their arrangement could not possibly hold together without intelligent control and divine planning. Things made by nature are better than those made by skill. Skill produces nothing without reason. So we must not think that nature lacks reason either. When you look at a statue or a painting, you know skill went into it. When you see a ship moving in the distance, you have no doubt that skill and reason are making it move. When you look at a sundial, with its marked lines, or a water clock, you understand that it tells the hours by skill, not chance. How, then, can you think the universe has no plan or reason? It contains those very skills, the people who practice them, and everything else.”

2.88 “Suppose someone took to Scythia or Britain the sphere our friend Posidonius recently made. Each turn of it reproduces the movements that the sun, moon, and five wandering stars make in the sky each day and night. Who in those uncivilized lands would doubt that reason went into making that sphere? Yet these people doubt whether the universe itself, from which everything comes into being and is made, was produced by chance, by some kind of necessity, or

by divine reason and intelligence. They think Archimedes was more capable of copying the sphere's rotations than nature was of producing them. And yet the real movements are made with far greater skill than these imitations."

2.89 "Think of the shepherd in Accius who had never seen a ship. From his mountain he spotted the Argonauts' strange, godlike craft in the distance. Amazed and terrified at first, he says:

Something so huge slides along,

roaring out at sea with an enormous noise and blast:
it rolls waves ahead of it and forces whirlpools up,
surges forward, splashes the sea, and blows the spray back;
one moment you'd think a broken storm cloud was rolling along,
another, that some rock flung high by winds was being swept away
or driven by gales, or that rounded whirlwinds
were rising where crashing waves struck them—
unless the sea is heaving up some wreckage from the land,
or perhaps Triton, tearing caves apart with his trident,
far below their roots, deep in the surging strait,

is hauling a mass of rock from the depths to the sky:
At first he can't tell what this unfamiliar thing he's looking at might be. Then

he sees the young men and hears the sailors singing:
just as †swift and lively dolphins snort through their snouts
—and much else along the same lines—

Much like Silvanus's tune,

a song and sound reach his ears
—"

2.90 "So at first sight this man thinks he is looking at something lifeless, without awareness. Then clearer signs make him begin to guess the nature of the thing he had been uncertain about. Philosophers should have done the same. Perhaps their first view of the universe confused them. But later they saw its movements

were regular and steady, and that everything was controlled by a fixed order that never changed. Then they should have understood that this heavenly, divine home has someone in it—not just an occupant, but a ruler and director, a kind of architect of this enormous work and gift.

“As it is, I do not think they even begin to grasp how wonderful the things of heaven and earth are.”

2.91 “To begin with, the earth sits at the center of the universe. All around it lies the life-giving, breathable substance called air, or aer. That’s a Greek word, of course, but our people have already taken it into everyday use. It’s familiar enough to count as Latin. Around the air, in turn, stretches the boundless ether, made of the fires highest above us. Let’s borrow this word too: aether can be Latin just as aer is. Pacuvius does translate it: ‘What I’m speaking of, our people call caelum, “sky”; the Greeks call it aether.’ As though the person saying that weren’t Greek! ‘But he’s speaking Latin.’ Only if we aren’t listening to him as someone who’s supposed to be speaking Greek. The same writer makes the point elsewhere:”

2.92 “‘A Greek by birth: his speech itself makes that clear.’ But let us return to more important things. From the ether come the countless fires of the stars. Chief among them is the sun. It lights everything with its brilliant light and is many times bigger and wider than the whole earth. Next come the other stars, also of immense size. These fires, so great and so numerous, do no harm at all to the earth or to things on it. In fact, they help them so much that, if they were shifted out of place, the earth would inevitably burn up. The restraint and balance that keep such great heat in check would be gone.”

2.93 “After all this, shouldn’t I be amazed that anyone can convince himself of the following? Certain solid, indivisible bodies move under the force of their weight, and their accidental collisions produce this wonderfully ordered and beautiful universe. If someone thinks that could happen, I don’t see why he wouldn’t also believe this: take countless copies of the twenty-one letters, made

of gold or anything else, throw them together somewhere, and shake them out onto the ground. They could form Ennius's *Annals*, ready to read straight through in order! I doubt chance could manage even a single line."

2.94 "Yet these people insist that the universe was completed by tiny bodies colliding blindly and by chance—bodies with no color, no quality of any kind, what the Greeks call *ποιότητα*, and no sensation. Or rather, they say countless universes are being born and dying at every instant. But if a collision of atoms can make a universe, why can't it make a colonnade, a temple, a house, or a city? Those take less work, and there are plenty of much easier things too. They certainly spout such reckless nonsense about the universe that I don't think they've ever looked up at the wonderfully ordered display of the heavens. That's our next topic."

2.95 "So Aristotle puts it very well: 'Suppose there were people who had always lived underground, in fine, well-lit homes. These were decorated with statues and paintings and supplied with everything that people considered fortunate have in plenty. But they had never come up above ground. They had heard reports and stories, though, of some divine power, some force belonging to gods. Then one day the earth opened up. They could leave their hidden homes and come out into the places where we live. Suddenly they would see the earth, the seas, and the sky. They would learn how huge the clouds are and how powerful the winds. They would see the sun and discover not just its size and beauty, but what it does: it makes the day by flooding the whole sky with light. Then, when night darkened the earth, they would see the whole sky dotted and decorated with stars. They would see the changing brightness of the moon, now growing, now shrinking, and the risings and settings of all these bodies, and their fixed, unchanging courses through all eternity. Once they saw these things, they would certainly believe both that gods exist and that these great works belong to the gods.'"

- 2.96 “That’s what he said. Now let’s picture darkness as thick as the darkness that once reportedly covered the regions near Mount Etna when its fires erupted. For two days no one could recognize another person. When the sun shone out on the third day, people felt they’d come back to life. Suppose the same thing happened to us after everlasting darkness, and we suddenly saw the light. What would we think of the sight of the sky? Instead, our minds grow used to what our eyes meet every day. We neither wonder at the things we always see nor ask how they work—as though their novelty, rather than their greatness, ought to move us to look for their causes.”
- 2.97 “Who would call someone human if he saw the sky’s movements so dependable, the stars’ order so fixed, and everything so closely connected and fitted together, yet denied that there was any reason behind it? He says things happen by chance, though we cannot use our own planning to grasp how much planning goes into them. When we see something moved by a mechanism—a sphere, a clock, or any number of other things—we have no doubt that it is the work of reason. But we see the sky rush round and turn at an astonishing speed. It unfailingly brings about the yearly changes, keeping everything safe and sound. Can we doubt that this happens through reason, and not just any reason, but an outstanding, divine reason?”
- 2.98 “We can now put aside fine points of argument and, in a way, look with our own eyes at the beauty of the things we say were arranged by divine care. “First, look at the earth as a whole. It sits at the center of the universe, solid and round. The pull of all its parts toward their own center makes it a globe. It is covered with flowers, grasses, trees, and crops. Their incredible numbers come in a variety we can never get tired of. Add to these the cool, never-failing springs, the clear flowing rivers, the lush green covering of their banks, the deep hollows of caves, the rough rocks, the towering heights of mountains, and the vast plains. Add, too, the hidden veins of gold and silver, and the endless supplies of marble.”

- 2.99 “Then there are so many different kinds of animals, tame and wild. Think of birds gliding and singing, herds grazing, wild creatures living in the woods. And what should I say of human beings? They have been placed on earth as its caretakers, so to speak. They do not let savage beasts turn it into a wilderness or let rough undergrowth overrun it. Through their work, fields, islands, and coastlines shine with houses and cities spread across them. If we could see all this with our eyes as we can with our minds, no one looking at the whole earth would doubt that divine reason was at work.”
- 2.100 “And how beautiful the sea is! Think of its appearance as a whole, its many different islands, and its lovely coasts and shores. Think how many kinds of creatures it holds, and how different they are: some underwater, some floating, some swimming, and some clinging to rocks in the shells they grow with. The sea itself reaches toward the land and plays along its shores, until the two substances seem blended into one.”
- 2.101 “Next comes the air beside the sea, with its alternation of day and night. Sometimes it spreads out, grows thin, and rises high. Sometimes it thickens and gathers into clouds, collects moisture, and enriches the earth with rain. Sometimes it streams this way and that, making winds. It also brings the yearly changes of cold and heat. It supports birds in flight, and, as living creatures breathe it in, it feeds them and keeps them alive.”
“Last comes the surrounding vault of the heavens, highest and farthest from our homes. It encloses everything and holds everything in. This is also called ether, the universe’s outermost edge and boundary. Within it, fiery shapes trace their orderly courses in a most wonderful way.”
- 2.102 “Among these is the sun, many times larger than the earth, which revolves around the earth itself. By rising and setting it makes day and night. Moving closer and then farther away, it makes two turns each year, in opposite directions from the farthest points of its path. Between these points, at one time it makes the earth shrink, as though in sadness, and at another makes it glad again, so that it seems to share the sky’s happiness.”

2.103 “The moon, which mathematicians show is more than half the earth’s size, travels the same stretches of sky as the sun. Sometimes it meets up with the sun; sometimes it moves away. It sends down to earth the light it receives from the sun, while its own light goes through various changes. Sometimes it moves below and directly in front of the sun, blocking its rays and light. At other times, when it’s opposite the sun, it enters the earth’s shadow. With the earth coming between them and blocking the way, the moon suddenly disappears. The stars we call wanderers also travel around the earth through these same stretches of sky. They rise and set in the same way, and their movements sometimes speed up and sometimes slow down,”

2.104 “and often they even stand still. Nothing could be more wonderful or beautiful to watch. Next comes the great number of fixed stars. Their arrangement is so clearly marked out that they have been named for their likeness to familiar shapes.”

At this point he looked at me. “I will use the poems of Aratus,” he said. “You translated them when you were very young. I enjoy them so much in Latin that I remember many passages by heart. So, as we constantly see with our own eyes, without any change or variation,

the other heavenly bodies glide in the sky’s swift motion,
and travel with the sky through nights and days.”

2.105 “and anyone who wants to see nature’s regularity could never get enough of watching them.

The very tip at either end of the axis

is called a pole.

Around this circle the two Bears, which never set.

The Greeks call one of these Cynosura,

the other is called Helice,

whose brightest stars we see all night long. These are the stars
our people have long called Septem Triones, the Seven Plow Oxen;”

2.106 “Little Cynosura circles the same pole of the sky, with the same number of stars
laid out much the same way.

The Phoenicians trust her as their guide at night on the open sea.

“But that first Bear shines brighter, with more clearly marked stars,
and as soon as night falls, she’s the first seen far and wide.

“This one is small, but sailors find her useful:

she turns on an inner course, in a smaller circle.

And to make these stars still more wonderful to look at,
between them, like a river with a rushing current,

fierce Draco winds, curling above and below
and making twisting loops with his body.”

2.107 “His whole appearance is splendid, <and> especially worth looking at are the
shape of his head and the blaze of his eyes:

Not just one star shines to adorn his head:

his temples are marked by a double glow,
two burning lights blaze from his fierce eyes,
and his chin shines with a single radiant star;
his head is tilted, <but> bent back on his rounded neck—
you’d say his gaze was fixed on the larger Bear’s tail.”

2.108 “We see the rest of Draco’s body all night long,
but this head briefly, suddenly, hides itself here,

where rising and setting meet in a single region.

“Close to this head,

a shape like a tired, grieving person

turns.

“The Greeks

call him Engonasin, because he moves resting on his knees.

“Here is set the Crown, shining exceptionally bright.
“This is behind him. By his head is the Serpent Bearer,
whom the Greeks call by the familiar name Ophiuchus.”

2.109 “He holds the Snake tightly between his two hands,
and is himself bound by its twisted body,
for the Serpent circles the man’s waist below his chest.
“Still he plants his feet, straining hard,

and presses the Scorpion’s eyes and chest with them.
“Following the Seven Plow Oxen comes
Arctophylax, the Bear Keeper, commonly called Boötes,

because he drives the Bear ahead as though hitched to a wagon pole.
“Then comes what follows:”

2.110 “Beneath this man’s’—Boötes’s—
chest a star seems fixed,

its rays shining: its famous name is Arcturus.
“Below his feet moves
the Maiden, her body shining, holding the bright Ear of Grain.
“The constellations have been mapped out in such a way that divine skill shows
in these vast designs:
You would see the Twin Sons below the Bear’s head.

“Under her middle is the Crab, while at her feet lies

the great Lion, shaking flickering flame from his body.
“The Charioteer
will move across below the Twins’ left side.

“Fierce Helice watches his head facing her.

“The bright Goat occupies his left shoulder.

“Then comes what follows:

But she is marked by a great and brilliant star,

while the Kids, in contrast, send only a little light to mortals.

“Below his feet

the horned Bull stands firm with his powerful body.

“His head is sprinkled with many stars.”

2.111 “The Greeks have long called these stars the Hyades
from raining—ῥεῖν means ‘to rain.’ Our people ignorantly call them *Suculae*,
‘little sows,’ as though they were named after pigs, *subus*, rather than
showers of rain. Cepheus follows the smaller Bear <behind> her back, with
his palms spread out:

he turns right behind the Bear *Cynosura*.

Ahead of him is

Cassiepia, with stars that are hard to see.

“Beside her turns the bright figure

of *Andromeda*, sad and fleeing her mother’s gaze.

“The Horse, tossing his mane in flashing light,

touches the top of her head with his belly, and a linking star—

one shared light—holds both figures together,

wanting to tie an everlasting knot of stars.

“Next *Aries* stands fixed, with his twisted horns.

Beside him are

the Fish, one of which moves a little farther ahead

and feels more of the north wind’s chilling blasts.”

2.112 “At Andromeda’s feet is the figure of Perseus,
whom winds strike <from> the far northern reaches.
And
beside his left knee

you’ll see the Vergiliae faintly shining.

“Next the Lyre appears, gently tilted and curved.

Next

there’s the winged Bird beneath the sky’s wide canopy.

Near the Horse’s head is Aquarius’s right hand, followed by the whole figure of

Aquarius. Then,
breathing icy cold from his powerful chest,

half-beast Capricorn stands on the great circle;

when Titan clothes him in unbroken light,

he swings his chariot around, making his turn at the winter solstice.”

2.113 “Here can be seen
the Scorpion rising high into view,

with his hindquarters forcefully dragging the curved Bow.

“Near him

the Bird turns round, shining with its wings.

“And close by, the Eagle moves with blazing body.

“Then the Dolphin.

Next Orion, straining with his body at an angle.”

2.114 “Following him,
that blazing Dog shines in the light
of the stars. Behind comes the Hare,
never tiring enough to slow its run.

“At the Dog’s tail, Argo winds and glides along.

“The Ram and the scaly-bodied Fish cover her

as her shining body touches the River’s banks.

You’ll see the River ‘winding’ and flowing far,
and you’ll see the long Chains,

set beside the Fish’s tails to hold them.

“Then, near the shining Scorpion’s pointed tip, you’ll see

the Altar, gently brushed by the south wind’s breath.

Close to these the Centaur

moves along, hurrying to bring his horse parts beneath the Claws.

“Here he holds out his right hand, which grips a huge four-legged beast,
and fiercely reaches toward the shining Altar.

“Here the Water Snake rises from the lower regions,

her body stretching far,

and the bright Cup shines in the middle of her coils.

“At her tail the Raven, his feathered body gleaming,

pecks with his beak. And here, right beneath the Twins, is

the Dog’s Forerunner, known in Greek as Procyon.”

2.115 “Could any sane person think that this whole arrangement of stars, this vast and beautiful order of the sky, could have been made by bodies rushing here and there blindly and by chance? Could any other kind of nature, without mind and reason, have made these things? They needed reason not only to be made. We cannot even understand what they are like without the highest use of reason.

“And these are not the only wonderful things. Nothing is greater than the fact that the universe is so stable and holds together so well that we cannot even imagine anything better fitted to last. All its parts press equally toward the center from every side. Bodies stay joined most firmly when they are held together

as though by a band wrapped around them. This is what nature does as it spreads through the whole universe, making everything with mind and reason, drawing and turning the outermost parts toward the center.”

2.116 “So, if the universe is round, and that shape keeps all its parts evenly balanced on every side, both on their own and in relation to each other, the same must hold for the earth. All its parts press toward the center, which is the lowest point in a sphere. Nothing can break that concentrated pull of weight and heaviness and make it give way. The same reasoning applies to the sea. Although it lies above the earth, it still seeks the earth’s center. That makes it round and evenly balanced on every side, so it never overflows or spills away.”

2.117 “The air touching the sea rises upward because it is light. Still, it spreads out in every direction. So it is joined directly to the sea and naturally moves toward the sky. The sky’s thinness and heat temper it, and it supplies living things with healthy, life-giving breath. The highest part of the sky, called ether, surrounds the air. It keeps its own heat, thin and unthickened by any mixture, and joins with the air’s outer edge. The stars turn in the ether. Their own inward pressure holds them together as globes, and their very shape and form keep them balanced. They are round, and, as I think I said before, this is the shape least open to damage.”

2.118 “The stars are fiery by nature. So they feed on vapors from the earth, the sea, and the other waters, drawn up by the sun from the warmed fields and waters. Fed and renewed by these vapors, the stars and all the ether pour them out and draw them back from the same places. Almost nothing, or very little, is lost, consumed by the stars’ fire and the ether’s flame. From this our school thinks there will come the event that Panaetius was said to doubt: in the end the whole universe will catch fire. When the moisture has been used up, the earth could no longer be fed and the air could not return. With all the water exhausted, air could not arise. So nothing would be left but fire. Then this fire, a living being and a god, would renew the universe, and the same ordered world would arise again.”

- 2.119 “I do not want you to think I am spending too long on the stars, especially those called wanderers. Their very different movements make such a harmony. The highest, Saturn’s star, cools things; the middle one, Mars’s, burns them. Jupiter’s, between these two, lights things and keeps them in balance. Below Mars, two stars obey the sun. The sun itself fills the whole universe with its light. The moon, lit by the sun, brings pregnancy and birth and the right times for bringing life into being. If someone is not moved by this linking of things, this fitting together of nature in harmony, so to speak, to keep the universe safe, I know for certain that he has never thought about any of it.”
- 2.120 “Now let’s come down from the heavens to things on earth. Is there anything here that doesn’t show nature working intelligently? Start with the things that grow from the earth. Their roots support what rests on them and keep it steady. Those roots also draw nourishment from the earth to feed the plants they hold in place. A covering of inner or outer bark protects their trunks against cold and heat. Then look at vines. They take hold of supports with their tendrils, as if they were hands, and pull themselves upright like animals. In fact, people say that if cabbage stalks are planted nearby, vines shrink away from them as though they were deadly and harmful. They won’t touch any part of them.”
- 2.121 “What a variety of animals there is! What power they have to keep each kind going! Some are covered with hides, others clothed in hair, others bristling with spines. We see some covered in feathers, others in scales, some armed with horns, others equipped with wings to escape. Nature has provided animals with a rich, plentiful supply of the food suited to each. I could list how their shapes help them get and process that food, how skillfully and precisely their parts are arranged, and how wonderfully their limbs are built. Everything enclosed inside them is made and placed so that none of it is useless, none unnecessary for keeping them alive.”

- 2.122 “Nature has also given animals senses and appetite. Appetite drives them to seek their natural food; their senses let them tell what’s harmful from what’s healthy. Some animals reach their food by walking, others by crawling, flying, or swimming. Some take it into their open mouths with their teeth. Others seize it with gripping claws or hooked beaks. Some suck, some pluck, some gulp, and some chew. Some are low enough to reach food on the ground easily with their beaks. Taller animals—geese, swans, cranes, and camels—have long necks to help them;”
- 2.123 “the elephant was even given a hand—its trunk—because its huge body made food hard to reach. For beasts whose diet meant eating †other kinds of animals, nature supplied either strength or speed. Some were also given a kind of ingenuity and skill. Among spiders, for example, some weave something like a net so they can kill whatever gets caught in it. Others [...] watch for a chance to strike unexpectedly, seize whatever comes their way, and eat it. The pina—that’s its Greek name—opens wide in its two large shells and forms a sort of food-gathering partnership with a little shrimp. When small fish swim into the open shell, the pina, alerted <by> the shrimp, bites its shells shut. That’s how two very different little creatures get their food together;”
- 2.124 “and it’s remarkable to ask whether they came together through some agreement or whether nature itself joined them from birth. There’s also something quite remarkable about water animals that are born on land. Crocodiles, river turtles, and certain snakes are born outside the water, but as soon as they can move, they make for it. We even put ducks’ eggs under hens quite often. At first, the ducklings are fed by the hens that hatched them and kept them warm, as though these were their mothers. But as soon as they’ve caught sight of water, their natural home, they leave the hens and escape when the hens follow them. Nature has planted such a strong instinct for self-preservation in animals. I’ve also read about a bird called the platalea. It gets food by flying up to birds that dive into the sea. When they come up with a fish, it keeps squeezing

their heads with its beak until they drop their catch, and then it snatches it. This same bird is also said to fill itself with shellfish. After digesting them with the heat of its stomach, it throws them up and picks out the edible parts.”

2.125 “Sea frogs are said to bury themselves in sand and move about near the water. Fish come toward them as though they were food, only to be killed and eaten by the frogs. The kite and the raven seem to have a natural war with each other. So either one breaks the other’s eggs wherever it finds them. And who could fail to marvel at this observation of Aristotle’s, who supplied most of these examples? When cranes cross the seas on their way to warmer places, they form a triangle. At its leading point they push aside the air coming toward them. Then, along both sides, their wings work like oars and gradually make the birds’ flight easier. The cranes forming the triangle’s base get help from the winds, as if the wind were pushing at a ship’s stern. They rest their heads and necks on the backs of the birds flying ahead. The leader can’t do that, since it has nothing to lean on. So it flies to the rear to get some rest too, and one of the rested birds takes its place. They keep taking turns like this throughout the journey.”

2.126 “I could give many examples like these, but you see the general pattern. Then there are the more familiar ways animals take such pains to protect themselves: looking around while they feed and hiding in their dens. And these things are amazing: dogs treat themselves by vomiting, and Egyptian ibises by clearing out their bowels. Doctors only worked out these treatments recently—that is, a few centuries ago. We’ve heard that panthers caught with poisoned meat in uncivilized lands have a remedy that keeps them from dying when they use it. And people say that when wild goats in Crete have been pierced by poisoned arrows, they look for a plant called dictamnus. Once they’ve tasted it, the arrows fall out of their bodies;”

2.127 “and shortly before giving birth, female deer thoroughly purge themselves with a little plant called seselis. We can also see how each animal uses its own weapons to defend itself against force and danger. Bulls use their horns, boars

their teeth, and lions their speed. Some protect themselves by running away, others by hiding. Cuttlefish release ink; torpedo fish numb their attackers. Many animals also drive off pursuers with an unbearably foul smell.”

“To keep the world’s beauty lasting forever, the gods in their foresight took great care that there would always be kinds of animals, trees, and all the things held in the earth by roots. All of these carry within them the power of seed, so that many can grow from one. This seed is enclosed deep inside the berries produced by each kind of plant. Those same seeds both provide abundant food for people and fill the earth with fresh growth of the same kinds of plants.”

2.128 “Why go into the careful planning we can see in animals, which keeps their species going forever? To start with, some are male and others female. Nature arranged this so their kind could continue. Then there are the body parts, ideally suited for producing offspring and conceiving them. Both males and females also feel a remarkable urge to mate. Once the seed has settled in place, it draws almost all the nourishment to itself. Enclosed in that nourishment, it develops into an animal. When the young animal slips out of the womb and is born, almost everything its mother eats begins turning into milk, in those animals that feed their young this way. The newborns seek out the teats without anyone teaching them. Nature guides them, and the plentiful milk fills them up. There’s another way we can see that none of this happens by chance, and that it’s all the work of a nature that plans ahead and knows what it’s doing. Animals that have large litters, like pigs and dogs, have been given many teats. Those that have few young have only a few.”

2.129 “Need I describe how much love animals show in raising and protecting their young, until they can defend themselves? Fish, though, are said to leave their eggs once they have laid them. The water easily supports the eggs, and they hatch out their young. Turtles and crocodiles, they say, lay their eggs on land, bury them, and leave. So the young hatch and grow up by themselves. Hens and other birds look for a quiet place to lay their eggs. They build themselves nesting places and nests, and line them as softly as they can to keep the eggs as safe as possible. When they have hatched their chicks, they protect them, warm-

ing them with their wings so the cold will not hurt them, and shielding them from the sun when it is hot. When the chicks can use their little wings, the mothers go with them on their flights. Their other work of caring for them is over.”

2.130 “Human skill and care also help keep some animals and plants alive and well. Many farm animals and cultivated plants couldn’t survive without people looking after them.”

“Different places also offer different, very useful resources for human life and prosperity. The Nile waters Egypt. It keeps the land completely flooded and covered all summer, then retreats, leaving the fields soft and coated with silt, ready for sowing. The Euphrates makes Mesopotamia fertile. Every year it brings in what amounts to fresh farmland. The Indus, the largest of all rivers, doesn’t just enrich and soften the fields with water. It even sows them. It’s said to carry along a great quantity of seeds resembling grain.”

2.131 “I could mention many other remarkable things in different places, and many fertile fields producing different crops. And how generous nature is! It produces so many kinds of food, with so many different pleasant tastes. They don’t all come at one time of year, either. That way we always have both fresh variety and plenty to enjoy. Then consider the Etesian winds. How well timed they are, and how healthy—not just for humans, but for farm animals too, and indeed for everything that grows from the earth. Their breezes take the edge off excessive heat. Those same winds also give ships fast, reliable passages at sea. There’s much I have to leave out, though I’m still saying a great deal.”

2.132 “We cannot list all the uses of rivers, the tides †advancing and retreating over great distances, mountains covered in plants and woods, salt deposits far from the seashore, lands full of healing medicines, and, finally, the countless skills needed for food and life. Then the alternation of day and night preserves living things, giving one time for activity and another for rest.

“So from every side and by every line of reasoning, the conclusion is that divine intelligence and planning manage everything in this universe wonderfully, for the safety and preservation of all.”

2.133 “Suppose someone asks who all this vast construction was undertaken for. Was it for trees and plants? Nature does support them, even though they have no sensation. But that answer is absurd. Was it for animals? It’s no more believable that the gods went to so much trouble for creatures that can’t speak and understand nothing. Who, then, would anyone say the world was made for? Clearly, for living beings that use reason: gods and humans. Surely nothing is better than they are, since reason stands above everything else. So it becomes believable that the world, and everything in it, was made for gods and humans.”

“It will be easier to understand that the immortal gods have provided for humans if we examine the whole construction of a human being, and the entire shape and finished design of human nature.”

2.134 “An animal’s life depends on three things: food, drink, and breath. The mouth is perfectly suited to taking all of these in, with the adjoining nostrils giving extra help in breathing. The teeth set in the mouth chew the food, breaking it down and softening it. The sharp front teeth cut food into pieces with a bite. The back teeth, called molars, grind it up. The tongue also seems to help with this grinding.”

2.135 “The gullet joins the tongue at its roots. This is the first passage that things taken into the mouth slip into. It touches the tonsils on either side and ends at the very back and innermost part of the palate. The tongue stirs and moves, pushing the food down, almost shoving it in. Once the gullet receives it, it pushes it farther down. The parts below the food being swallowed widen, while those above it tighten.”

2.136 “But the windpipe—the doctors call it the ‘rough artery’—has its opening next to the roots of the tongue, a little above the point where the gullet joins the tongue. It reaches right down to the lungs. It receives the air drawn in by breathing, then lets that same air out again from the lungs. A sort of lid covers

it. This was provided so that breathing wouldn't be blocked if some food happened to fall into it. The stomach lies below the gullet and receives food and drink, while the lungs and heart draw breath from outside. The stomach has many wonderfully constructed features, made mostly of fibrous tissue. It has many folds and twists. Whatever it receives, dry or wet, it holds in and keeps there so it can be changed and digested. The stomach alternately tightens and loosens, pressing and mixing everything it has taken in. It contains a great deal of heat. That heat, the grinding of the food, and the action of breath make it easy for everything to be digested and processed, then distributed through the rest of the body. The lungs, meanwhile, have a porous structure and a softness like sponges, ideally suited to drawing in breath. They alternately contract as they breathe and expand †with breath, so that the food of life, which provides living creatures with their chief nourishment, is drawn in repeatedly.”

2.137 “The fluid that nourishes us separates from the rest of the food and seeps from the intestines— †the belly—to the liver. It travels along certain channels laid out from the middle of the intestine right to the liver's ‘gates,’ as they're called. These channels reach the liver and attach to it. From there, other channels [...] extend, and the food flows down through them after leaving the liver. Once the bile and the fluids discharged from the kidneys have been separated from this food, the remainder turns into blood. It flows together at those same gates of the liver, where all its channels meet. The food passes along these channels and, at this very spot, pours into the vein called the hollow vein. It then travels through that vein to the heart, now fully processed and digested. From the heart it's distributed throughout the body through a great many veins that reach every part.”

2.138 “It wouldn't be very hard to explain how the intestines get rid of the leftover food by alternately tightening and loosening. Still, let's pass over that, so the discussion doesn't become unpleasant. Instead, let's explain this incredible piece of nature's construction. The air drawn into the lungs by breathing is warmed first by the breathing itself, then by contact with the lungs. Some of it is sent out again when we breathe out. Some is taken into a part of the heart

called a ventricle. A second, similar chamber is attached to it, and blood from the liver flows into that chamber through the hollow vein just mentioned. From these chambers, then, blood spreads through the veins into the whole body, and breath spreads through the arteries. Both kinds of vessels form a dense, extensive network woven throughout the body. They bear witness to an incredible power of skilled, divine craftsmanship.”

2.139 “What about the bones? They support the body and have remarkable joints, suited to keeping it stable, defining its limbs, allowing movement, and carrying out every bodily action. Add to these the sinews, which hold the joints together, and their interwoven network extending throughout the body. Like the veins and arteries, they start from the heart and spread out through the whole body.”

2.140 “We can add many things to this account of nature’s careful, skillful planning. They show how great and exceptional the gods’ gifts to humans have been. To begin with, humans were raised up from the ground and made tall and upright, so they could look at the sky and gain knowledge of the gods. Humans come from the earth not simply to live and settle here, but to watch the things above us in the heavens. No other kind of animal gets to see that spectacle. The senses explain things to us and bring us reports. They’re wonderfully made and positioned to do their necessary jobs, up in the head as if in a fortress. The eyes, like lookouts, hold the highest position. From there they can see the most and carry out their task;

2.141 “And the ears are rightly placed high on the body, since they have to pick up sound, which naturally travels upward. The nostrils rightly point upward too, since every smell rises. And there’s a good reason they’re close to the mouth: they play a big part in judging food and drink. Taste needs to recognize the different things we eat, so it lives in the part of the mouth where nature has opened a route for food and drink. Touch, meanwhile, is spread evenly through the whole body. That lets us feel every blow and every excessive exposure to

cold or heat. Architects keep a building's necessarily foul discharges away from its owners' eyes and noses. In the same way, nature has put similar things far away from the senses."

2.142 "What craftsman could have designed the senses so skillfully, except nature? Nothing could be more ingenious. First, nature covered and enclosed the eyes in very thin membranes. It made these transparent so we could see through them, but strong enough to hold the eyes in place. It made the eyes smooth and movable, so they could turn away from anything harmful and easily look wherever they wanted. The part we actually see with, called the pupil, is so small that it can easily avoid things that might hurt it. The eyelids cover the eyes. They're extremely soft to the touch, so they won't hurt the pupil, and perfectly suited to covering it so nothing falls in, and then uncovering it again. Nature also arranged for this to happen over and over, extremely quickly."

2.143 "The eyelids are defended by a sort of fence of hairs. When the eyes are open, these push back anything that might fall into them. When the eyes close in sleep and we do not need them for seeing, these hairs let them rest as though wrapped up. The eyes are also usefully set back and protected on every side by raised parts. First, the brows covering them above turn aside sweat flowing down from the head and forehead. Then the cheeks protect them from below, set beneath them and sticking out a little. The nose is placed so that it seems like a wall between the eyes."

2.144 "Hearing is always open, because we need this sense even when asleep. When it receives a sound, it can even wake us from sleep. It has a winding passage, so nothing can get in, as it could if the opening were straight and direct. Nature has also arranged that any tiny creature trying to force its way in will stick in earwax, as though in birdlime. The parts we call ears stick out on the outside. They were made to cover and protect the organ of hearing, and to keep incoming voices from slipping away and scattering before they strike it. Their entrances are hard, almost like horn, and have many bends, because sound

reflected by surfaces like these grows louder. That is why string instruments resonate through tortoise shell or horn, and why sounds come back louder from winding and enclosed places.”

2.145 “The nostrils, similarly, are always open because their work is essential. But their entrances are narrow, to keep anything harmful from getting through. They are always moist too, which is useful for keeping out dust and many other things. Taste is wonderfully protected. It is contained in the mouth, well placed both to do its work and to stay safe.

“All human senses are far better than those of animals. First, in the arts judged by sight—painted, modeled, and carved shapes—and even in bodily movements and gestures, the eyes see many finer points. They also judge the †beauty, order, and, so to speak, right arrangement of colors and shapes. And they judge greater things as well. They recognize good and bad qualities. They recognize someone who is angry or friendly, happy or grieving, brave or cowardly, bold or afraid.”

2.146 “The ears, too, have an amazing, finely developed ability to judge. They distinguish the variety of sounds, their intervals, and their separate notes, both in the voice and in music from pipes and strings. They also recognize many kinds of voice: ringing and husky, smooth and rough, low and high, flexible and stiff. Only human ears can judge these differences. The nose and the senses of taste and †to some extent touch also have great powers of judgment. People have invented even more crafts than I’d like for producing and fully enjoying these sensations. It’s obvious how far the blending of perfumes, the seasoning of food, and ways of making bodies alluring have gone.”

2.147 “Anyone who doesn’t see divine care at work in perfecting the human mind and intellect, reason, judgment, and practical wisdom seems to me to lack those very things. Cotta, I wish I had your eloquence while discussing this. How well you’d describe, first, our great capacity for understanding, and then our ability to connect and grasp what follows from our starting points. That’s how we judge what results from each thing and reach conclusions through reasoning.

We define individual things and grasp them within clear boundaries. That shows us what knowledge can do and what it's like. Even in a god, there's nothing better. And what great abilities you Academics undermine and dismiss: we use both our senses and our minds to perceive and grasp things outside us,"

2.148 "and by bringing these perceptions together and comparing them, we also develop skills we need, some for everyday life and some for enjoyment. Then there's the power of speech, which you like to call the ruler of everything. How wonderful it is, and how divine! First, it lets us learn what we don't know and teach others what we do know. We use it to encourage; we use it to persuade. We use it to comfort people in distress; we use it to free terrified people from their fear. We use it to restrain people carried away with excitement; we use it to put out desire and anger. Speech has bound us together through shared rights, laws, and cities. Speech has taken us out of a savage, brutal way of life."

2.149 "Unless you've looked closely, you wouldn't believe how much equipment nature has put together to make speech possible. First, the windpipe runs from the lungs right up to the back of the mouth. Through it, the voice, which starts in the mind, is received and sent out. Then there's the tongue, placed inside the mouth and bounded by the teeth. It shapes and controls the unchecked flow of the voice. By striking the teeth and other parts of the mouth, it makes vocal sounds distinct and clear. That's why our people often compare the tongue to a pick, 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, ready to serve so many skills! The fingers bend and straighten easily. Their supple connections and joints let them move effortlessly in every direction. By moving its fingers, the hand can paint, model, engrave, and draw sounds from strings and pipes. Those things provide enjoyment. Others meet our needs: I mean farming, putting up buildings, weaving or sewing coverings for our bodies, and every kind of work in copper and iron. So we can see how we've obtained everything

we need. We've applied craftspeople's hands to discoveries made by the mind and things perceived by the senses. That has given us shelter, clothing, and safety, along with cities, walls, homes, and shrines."

2.151 "Human work—that is, our hands—also provides variety and abundance in food. The fields produce many things obtained by hand, either to be eaten at once or stored away for later use. We also eat animals of the land, water, and air, getting them partly by catching them and partly by raising them. By taming four-footed animals, we also make transport possible. Their speed and strength give us speed and strength. We load some beasts with burdens; we put them under the yoke. We use elephants' very sharp senses and dogs' ability to track for our own advantage. We draw iron out of the earth's caverns, a material needed for farming. We find deeply hidden veins of copper, silver, and gold, useful for practical purposes and beautiful for decoration. We cut down trees and use every kind of timber, cultivated or wild. Some we burn to warm our bodies and soften our food; some we use for building, so that roofs over us can keep out cold and heat."

2.152 "It is also extremely useful for building ships. Their voyages bring us all life's supplies from every direction. Nature has produced nothing more violent than the sea and the winds, yet we alone can control them, thanks to our knowledge of navigation. We also enjoy and use a great many things from the sea. Human beings likewise have complete control over the benefits of the land. We enjoy the plains; we enjoy the mountains. The rivers are ours; the lakes are ours. We sow crops; we plant trees. We make the land fertile by bringing water to it. We hold rivers back, straighten their courses, and divert them. In short, with our own hands we try to create what amounts to a second nature within the natural world."

2.153 "And hasn't human reason reached right up into the sky? Alone among living creatures, we've learned when the stars rise and set and what courses they follow. Human beings have defined the day, the month, and the year. We've understood eclipses of the sun and moon and predicted them for all time to

come: which will happen, how large they'll be, and when they'll occur. As the mind studies these things, it moves toward knowledge of the gods. That knowledge gives rise to religious devotion, which is joined with justice and the other virtues. From these comes a happy life, equal and similar to the life of the gods. It falls short of the gods in heaven only in immortality, which contributes nothing to living well."

"Now that I've explained these things, I think I've shown well enough how far human nature surpasses all other living creatures. We should recognize, then, that neither the shape and arrangement of our limbs nor the power of our intelligence and mind could have been made what they are by chance."

2.154 "What remains is to show, and at last to bring my speech to a close, that everything in this universe that human beings use was made and prepared for their sake.

"First, the universe itself was made for gods and humans, and the things in it were provided and brought into being for human benefit. The universe is a sort of shared home of gods and humans, or a city belonging to both. They alone use reason and live by justice and law. We should think of Athens and Sparta as founded for Athenians and Spartans. Everything in those cities is rightly said to belong to those peoples. In the same way, we should think that whatever is in the whole universe belongs to gods and humans."

2.155 "Then there are the circuits of the sun, the moon, and the other stars. These help hold the universe together, but they also give human beings a spectacle to watch. There's no sight we tire of less, none more beautiful, and none more outstanding in its rational order and skill. By measuring their courses, we've learned when the seasons arrive and how they differ and change. If only human beings know these things, we should conclude that they were made for human beings."

2.156 "The earth is rich in crops and many kinds of legumes, which it pours out with immense generosity. Does it seem to produce them for wild animals or for human beings? And what should I say about vines and olive trees? Their abun-

dant, flourishing fruits have nothing at all to do with animals. Livestock know nothing about planting or cultivation, harvesting and gathering produce at the right time, or storing it and putting it away. Human beings both use all these things and take care of them.”

2.157 “So, just as we must say that lyres and pipes were made for people who could use them, we must admit that the things I’ve mentioned were provided only for those who use them. If some animals steal or snatch something from them, we won’t say that these things grew for those animals too. People don’t store grain for mice or ants. They store it for their wives, children, and households. So, as I said, the animals enjoy it secretly, while the owners do so openly and freely;”

2.158 “We must therefore admit that these abundant resources were provided for human beings. Unless, perhaps, the great richness and variety of fruits, with their pleasing taste, smell, and appearance, make us doubt that nature gave them to people alone! These things are so far from being provided for animals as well that we can see the animals themselves were produced for human benefit. What else do sheep provide except wool to be worked and woven into clothing for people? Without human tending and care, they could not be fed, maintained, or made to yield any benefit. Dogs keep such faithful watch, show their owners such loving affection, hate strangers so much, have such an incredible sense of smell for tracking, and are so eager in the hunt. What else does this show but that they were born for human convenience?”

2.159 “What about oxen? Their backs alone show that they weren’t shaped to carry loads. Their necks, though, were made for a yoke, and their strong, broad shoulders for †pulling plows. In the golden age, as the poets call it, people used oxen to work the earth and break up its clods. They never used any violence against them:

Then suddenly a race of iron sprang up
and was the first to dare to forge a deadly sword

and taste the young ox its own hands had yoked and tamed:

People thought oxen were so useful that eating their flesh was considered a crime. It would take a long time to go through all the uses of mules and donkeys. Those uses were certainly provided for human benefit.”

2.160 “What does a pig offer besides food? Chrysippus actually says its soul was given to it as a kind of salt, to keep it from rotting. Since this animal was suitable for people to eat, nature made no farm animal more fertile. And what about the great numbers and delicious taste of fish and birds? They give us so much pleasure that our Pronoea sometimes seems to have been an Epicurean herself. Yet those birds couldn’t even be caught without human intelligence and ingenuity. Still, we think some birds were born to help us predict events: both those whose flight gives signs and those whose calls do, as our augurs classify them.”

2.161 “Then there are the huge, wild beasts we catch by hunting. We eat them, and hunting gives us practice similar to military training. We also tame and train them for use, as we do elephants. From their bodies we take many remedies for diseases and wounds, just as we do from certain plants and herbs. We’ve learned what these are good for through long experience and trial. We can survey the whole earth and all the seas with our minds, as though with our eyes. You’ll see vast stretches of productive farmland, mountains covered in dense growth, pastures for livestock, and then sea voyages made at incredible speed.”

2.162 “And not just on the earth’s surface, but also deep in its inner darkness lie hidden a great many useful things. They came into being for human use and are discovered by human beings alone.

“Both of you may seize on the following point to criticize it: you, Cotta, because Carneades enjoyed attacking the Stoics; you, Velleius, because Epicurus ridicules nothing so much as predictions of the future. Yet I think it gives the strongest support for the belief that the gods’ foresight looks after human affairs. Divination certainly exists. It appears in many places, circumstances, and times, in private affairs but above all in public ones.”

2.163 “People who examine sacrificial entrails see many things; augurs foresee many things. Much is revealed through oracles, much through prophecies, much through dreams, and much through portents. Understanding these signs has often brought about results <in line with> people’s wishes and interests, and has also kept many dangers away. So whatever this ability to know the future is—a power, an art, or a natural capacity—the immortal gods have certainly given it to human beings and no other creature.”

“Perhaps none of these points moves you on its own. Still, taken together, with all their connections and links, they certainly ought to have moved you.”

2.164 “The immortal gods regularly care and provide not just for the human race as a whole, but also for individuals. We can narrow down the whole human race, moving step by step to smaller groups and finally to individuals. Suppose, for the reasons we’ve already given, we think the gods care for all people everywhere, on any coast or in any region of lands cut off from the landmass we inhabit. Then they also care for the people who share these lands with us, from east to west.”

2.165 “And if they care for the people who inhabit what is, in effect, the great island we call the inhabited world, they also care for those who occupy its different parts: Europe, Asia, and Africa. So they care about parts of those regions too, such as Rome, Athens, Sparta, and Rhodes. And within those cities, they care about individuals separately from the population as a whole. During the war against Pyrrhus, for example, there were Curius, Fabricius, and Coruncanius; during the first Punic War, Calatinus, Duellius, Metellus, and Lutatius; during the second, Maximus, Marcellus, and Africanus. After them came Paulus, Gracchus, and Cato, and within our fathers’ memory, Scipio and Laelius. Our own country and Greece have produced many other outstanding men as well. We must believe that none of them could have become what he was without a god’s help.”

- 2.166 “This reasoning led poets, especially Homer, to assign particular gods to the leading heroes—Ulysses, Diomedes, Agamemnon, and Achilles—as companions in their crises and dangers. Besides, the gods have often appeared in person, as in the cases I mentioned earlier. These appearances show that they care for people both [in] communities and as individuals. We can also recognize this care in signs of future events, which appear to people both asleep and awake. We receive many warnings through unusual occurrences, many through sacrificial entrails, and many through other things. Long experience has recorded these in a way that has produced the art of divination.”
- 2.167 “So no great man has ever lived without some divine inspiration. Nor is this a valid way to argue against it: if a storm damages someone’s crops or vineyards, or chance takes away some of life’s comforts, we shouldn’t conclude that the person it happens to is hated or neglected by a god. The gods care about big things and ignore small ones. For great men, though, everything always turns out well—assuming our own school and Socrates, the leading figure in philosophy, have said enough about the abundance and wealth that virtue brings.”
- 2.168 “These are pretty much the points that came to mind which I thought I should make about the nature of the gods. Now, Cotta, if you take my advice, you will argue the same case. Remember that you are both a leading citizen and a priest. Since your school lets you argue either side, choose this side instead. Direct toward it that power of argument which you gained from rhetorical training and which the Academy has developed. The habit of arguing against the gods is bad and irreverent, whether you do it sincerely or only pretend.”

Book 3



- 3.1 When Balbus finished, Cotta smiled and said, “Balbus, you’re rather late in telling me what to defend. While you were speaking, I was already working out my reply. My aim was not so much to refute you as to ask about things I didn’t fully understand. But we each have to use our own judgment. It’s hard for me to think just what you want me to.”
- 3.2 Then Velleius said, “Cotta, you have no idea how eagerly I’m waiting to hear you. Our friend Balbus enjoyed your attack on Epicurus. Now I’ll return the favor and listen carefully to your attack on the Stoics. I hope you’ve come as well prepared as usual.”
- 3.3 “By Hercules, I have, Velleius,” Cotta said. “My position with Lucilius isn’t the same as it was with you.”
“How is that?” he asked.
“Because your Epicurus doesn’t seem to put up much of a fight about the immortal gods. He simply doesn’t dare deny that gods exist, for fear of making enemies or facing a charge. But he insists that the gods do nothing and care about nothing. He says they have human limbs but make no use of them. He seems to be playing a game. He thinks it’s enough to say that some blessed and eternal nature exists.

3.4 “But you noticed, I think, how much Balbus had to say. Even if his arguments weren’t all true, they fitted together and formed a whole. So, as I said, I intend less to refute his speech than to ask about the things I didn’t quite understand. Balbus, I’ll leave the choice to you. Would you rather answer my questions one at a time about what I didn’t grasp, or hear my whole speech?”

Balbus replied, “If you want anything explained, I’d certainly rather answer. But if you’re questioning me to refute me rather than to understand me, I’ll do whichever you prefer. I’ll answer each question at once, or answer them all when you’ve finished.”

3.5 “Excellent,” Cotta said. “Then let’s follow the discussion wherever it takes us. But before we get to the subject, a few words about me. Your authority carries real weight with me, Balbus. So do your closing remarks, when you urged me to remember that I’m both Cotta and a pontiff. I assume you meant that I should defend the beliefs about the immortal gods that we inherited from our ancestors, along with our sacred rites, ceremonies, and religious practices. I’ll always defend them, and I always have. No argument from anyone, educated or not, will ever shake the beliefs I inherited about worshiping the immortal gods. But in religious matters, I follow the chief pontiffs Ti. Coruncanius, P. Scipio, and P. Scaevola—not Zeno, Cleanthes, or Chrysippus. And I’d rather listen to what C. Laelius, an augur and a wise man too, says about religion in that famous speech than to any leading Stoic. The Roman people’s religion as a whole falls into two parts: sacred rites and the taking of omens. There’s a third part as well: any warnings about the future that interpreters of the Sibyl or readers of sacrificial entrails have drawn from portents and unnatural occurrences. I’ve never thought any of these religious practices should be treated with contempt. I’m convinced that Romulus laid our state’s foundations by establishing the taking of omens, and Numa by establishing sacred rites. It could certainly never have become so great without securing the fullest favor of the immortal gods.”

3.6 “Now you know what Cotta thinks, and what a pontiff thinks, Balbus. Next, make me understand what you think. From you, a philosopher, I ought to get a reasoned account of religion. Our ancestors I must trust even when they give no reasons.”

“What reasoned account do you want from me, then, Cotta?” Balbus asked.

“You divided your subject into four parts,” he replied. “First you meant to show that gods exist, next what they are like, then that they govern the world, and last that they care for human affairs. That was your outline, if I remember correctly.”

“Quite correctly,” said Balbus. “But I’m waiting to hear your questions.”

3.7 “Let’s take each point in order,” Cotta said. “First comes something everyone agrees on, except the utterly irreligious: that gods exist. Nothing could burn that belief out of my heart. Still, although our ancestors’ authority has convinced me of it, you give me no explanation of why it is true.”

“If you’re convinced,” Balbus said, “why do you want me to teach you?”

“Because I’m approaching this discussion,” Cotta replied, “as though I’d never heard or thought anything about the immortal gods. Treat me as a beginner, a pupil with no prior views, and teach me what I ask.”

3.8 “Tell me, then,” he said, “what you want to ask.”

“First, why did you say so much on this very point? You said that [the clear point in] this part needed no argument, because it was clear and everyone agreed <that gods exist>.”

“Because I’ve noticed you too, Cotta,” he replied, “when speaking in court, piling as many arguments as you can on the judge, whenever your case gives you the chance. Philosophers do the same. I did it too, as well as I could. Your question is like asking me why I look at you with two eyes instead of closing one, when I could get the same result with just one.”

3.9 “You must judge how good that comparison is,” Cotta said. “In court, when something is clear and everyone agrees about it, I don’t usually argue for it. Arguments weaken what is self-evident. Even if I did that in legal cases, I

wouldn't do it in a discussion requiring this sort of precision. You'd have no reason to close one eye: both have the same view. Besides, nature, which you want to make wise, wanted us to have two openings running from the mind to the eyes, to let in light. No, you wanted to prove the gods' existence with many arguments because you didn't trust it to be as clear as you would like. For me, one thing was enough: our ancestors handed this belief down to us. But you set authority aside and fight with reasoning.

3.10 "So let my reasoning compete with yours.

"You put forward all these arguments for the gods' existence. In my opinion, your arguments turn something not at all doubtful into a matter of doubt. I've remembered not only the number of your arguments but their order. The first was that, when we look up at the sky, we immediately realize that some divine power rules all this. That led to the line: 'Look at this shining height above, which everyone calls Jupiter.'

3.11 "As if that's what any of us means by Jupiter, rather than Jupiter on the Capitol! Or as if it were obvious, and everyone agreed, that those things are gods, when Velleius and plenty of others won't even grant you that they're alive. You also thought it was a weighty argument that everyone believes in the immortal gods and that this belief grows stronger every day. So you're happy to let fools' opinions settle questions this important? That's especially strange coming from you people, who say those fools are insane. 'But we see the gods in person: Postumius did at Lake Regillus, and Vatinius on the Salarian Road.' There was something or other, too, about the Locrians' battle at the Sagra. Now, you called these gods the Tyndaridae. In other words, they were human beings born to a human father. Homer, who lived not long after their time, says they were buried at Sparta. Yet you think they met Vatinius on white geldings, without any camp servants, and announced the Roman people's victory to him? To Vatinius, a countryman, rather than M. Cato, the leading public figure at the time? Then do you also believe that the mark still visible in the flint at Lake Regillus, which looks like a hoofprint, was made by Castor's horse?"

3.12 “Wouldn’t you rather believe something that can be established: that the souls of outstanding men, such as those Tyndaridae, are divine and eternal? Isn’t that better than believing that men who’d already been cremated could ride horses and fight in battle? If you say that was possible, you need to explain how. Don’t offer old women’s fairy tales.”

3.13 “Do you think they’re fairy tales?” Lucilius asked. “Don’t you see the temple in the forum dedicated to Castor and Pollux <by> A. Postumius? Don’t you see the senate’s decree about Vatinius? As for the Sagra, the Greeks even have a common saying about it. When they insist that something is true, they say it’s more certain than what happened at the Sagra. Shouldn’t authorities like these carry weight with you?”

“You’re fighting me with hearsay, Balbus,” Cotta said. “What I want from you is reasons [...]

[...]

[...]

[...] follow what will happen;”

3.14 “because no one can escape what’s going to happen. Often, knowing the future isn’t even useful. It’s miserable to suffer without being able to do anything, without even hope—that last comfort, but one everyone shares. That’s especially true when you yourselves say everything happens by fate, and define fate as whatever has always been true for all eternity. What good does it do to know that something will happen? How does that help you guard against it, if it’s certain to happen anyway? And where does this divination come from? Who discovered the split in a liver? Who took note of a crow’s call, or of the drawing of lots? I believe in these things, and I can’t dismiss that curved staff of Attus Navius you mentioned. But I need philosophers to teach me how people came to understand these signs, especially since those diviners say so many things that aren’t true.”

- 3.15 “But doctors often make mistakes too”—that was what you said. What does medicine have in common with divination? I can see the reasoning behind medicine. I don’t understand where divination comes from. You also think the Decii appeased the gods by vowing to give their own lives. How could the gods have been so unfair that they wouldn’t be reconciled to the Roman people unless men like that died? That was a commander’s tactic, what the Greeks call a *στρατήγημα*. But it was the tactic of commanders who looked after their country and didn’t spare their own lives. They thought the army would follow a commander who spurred his horse and charged into the enemy. And that’s what happened. As for Faunus’s voice, I’ve certainly never heard it. If you say you’ve heard it, I’ll believe you, though I don’t know what Faunus actually is. So, Balbus, you still haven’t helped me understand that gods exist. I do believe they exist, but the Stoics teach me nothing about it.”
- 3.16 “As you said, Cleanthes thinks the idea of gods took shape in human minds in four ways. One was through foreknowledge of the future; I’ve said enough about that. The second was through storms and other violent disturbances. The third was through the usefulness and abundance of the things we receive. The fourth was through the orderly arrangement of the stars and the regularity of the sky. We’ve discussed foreknowledge. As for disturbances in the sky, sea, and land, we can’t deny that, when they happen, many people fear them and think the immortal gods cause them.
- 3.17 “But the question isn’t whether some people think gods exist. It’s whether gods exist or not. The other reasons Cleanthes gives concern, first, the abundance of benefits we receive, and second, the order of the seasons and the regularity of the sky. We’ll deal with those when we discuss the gods’ care for the world, about which you said so much, Balbus.
- 3.18 “We’ll also leave until that same discussion what you said Chrysippus argued: since there’s something in nature that a human being couldn’t make, there must be something better than a human being. We’ll leave your comparison between the beautiful things in a house and the beauty of the universe, too,

along with your appeal to the harmony and agreement of the universe as a whole. Zeno's short, rather clever arguments can also wait for the part of the discussion I just mentioned. At that same time, in their proper place, we'll examine everything you said about nature: the power of fire and the heat from which you said everything is generated. I'll also save for that discussion everything you said the day before yesterday when you wanted to prove that gods exist—your reasons for saying that the whole universe, the sun, the moon, and the stars have awareness and intelligence."

3.19 "But I'll keep asking you the same question, over and over: what reasons convince you that gods exist?"

"I think I've given my reasons," Balbus replied. "But here's how you refute them. You seem about to ask me a question, and I get ready to answer. Then you suddenly turn the discussion elsewhere and don't give me a chance to respond. So some very important subjects have gone by without discussion: divination and fate. You touch on those questions briefly, while our school usually has a great deal to say about them. But they're separate from the question we're dealing with now. So, if you don't mind, don't mix things up. Let's use this discussion to settle the question we're asking."

3.20 "Excellent," Cotta said. "You divided the whole question into four parts, and we've discussed the first. So let's consider the second. As I see it, when you set out to show what the gods are like, you ended up showing that there aren't any. You said it was extremely hard to free the mind from its habit of relying on the eyes. But nothing is more excellent than a god, and nothing in nature is better than the universe. So you had no doubt that the universe was a god. We only needed to be able to think of it as alive—or rather, to see this with the mind, just as we see other things with our eyes."

3.21 "But when you say nothing is better than the universe, what do you mean by 'better'? If you mean more beautiful, I agree. If you mean better suited to our needs, I agree with that too. But if you mean nothing is wiser than the universe, I don't agree at all. It's not because I find it hard to turn my mind away from

what my eyes see. The more I do that, the less I can grasp what you want me to think. ‘Nothing in nature is better than the universe.’ Well, nothing on earth is better than our city, either. Does that make you think our city has reason, thought, and intelligence? Or, since it doesn’t, do you think an ant should rank above this beautiful city? The city has no awareness, while the ant has not only awareness but intelligence, reason, and memory. You need to look at what I’m granting you, Balbus, not just assume whatever you want.”

3.22 “That whole argument grew out of Zeno’s old, short argument—the one you thought was so clever [...]. Zeno reasons like this: ‘What uses reason is better than what doesn’t use reason. But nothing is better than the universe. So the universe uses reason.’”

3.23 “If you accept that, you’ll soon have the universe reading a book like an expert. Following Zeno’s lead, you can argue this way: ‘Something that can read is better than something that can’t. Nothing is better than the universe. So the universe can read.’ By that reasoning, it’s also a good speaker, a mathematician, and a musician. In fact, it’s trained in every branch of learning, and finally, it’s a philosopher. You’ve often said that nothing happens without a god, and that nature has no power to produce things unlike itself. Should I grant you that the universe isn’t just alive and wise, but also plays the lyre and the trumpet, since people with those skills are born from it too? So this founding father of the Stoics gives us no reason to think the universe uses reason, or even that it’s alive. The universe, then, isn’t a god. Still, nothing is better than it. Nothing is more beautiful, nothing is better for us, nothing is more splendid to look at or steadier in its movements.”

“If the universe as a whole isn’t a god, neither are the stars, those countless stars you included among the gods. Their steady, eternal courses delighted you. And rightly so, by Hercules: their regularity is amazing, almost beyond belief.”

3.24 “But, Balbus, not everything that follows a fixed, steady course should be credited to a god rather than to nature. What could be more regular, do you think, than the constant back-and-forth movement of the Euripus at Chalcis? What

about the Sicilian strait? Or the surge of the Ocean in those places ‘where the sweeping wave divides Europe and Libya’? And the tides off Spain or Britain—can’t they come in or go out at fixed times without a god? Please consider this: if we call every movement divine, and everything that keeps to a regular schedule, won’t we also have to call fevers divine when they return every third or fourth day? What could be more regular than their return and their course? But we need to explain all such things;”

3.25 “and when you can’t do that, you run to a god as though taking refuge at an altar.”

“You also thought Chrysippus made a sharp argument. He was certainly a clever, shrewd man. By *versutus*, ‘clever,’ I mean people whose minds *versantur*, ‘turn,’ quickly; by *callidus*, ‘shrewd,’ those whose minds, through experience, have ‘become calloused’—*concalluit*—as hands do through work. Here’s what he says: ‘If there’s something a human being can’t make, whoever makes it is better than a human being. But a human being can’t make the things in the universe. So whoever could make them is superior to a human being. And who could be superior to a human being except a god? Therefore, a god exists.’ All of this involves the same mistake as Zeno’s arguments.”

3.26 “He doesn’t distinguish what ‘better’ or ‘superior’ means, or how nature differs from reason. This same man says that if there are no gods, nothing in all nature is better than a human being. Yet he thinks it’s the height of arrogance for any human to believe that nothing is better than a human. Granted, it may be arrogant to think you’re worth more than the universe. But there’s nothing arrogant about recognizing that you have senses and reason, while Orion and the Dog Star don’t. That’s good sense instead. He also says, ‘If a house is beautiful, we understand that it was built for its owners, not for mice. In the same way, we should think of the universe as the gods’ house.’ That’s exactly what I’d think—if I believed it had been built, rather than shaped by nature, as I’ll show.”

- 3.27 “But in Xenophon’s account,’ you say, ‘Socrates asks where we got our minds from, if there was no mind in the world.’ Well, I ask where we got speech, rhythm, and song. Unless we think the sun talks with the moon when it comes closer, or that the world sings in harmony, as Pythagoras believes! These are nature’s work, Balbus. Not a nature that ‘moves along like a skilled craftsman,’ as Zeno says—we’ll soon see what that means—but a nature that stirs and drives everything through its own movements and changes.
- 3.28 “So I liked your discussion of nature’s agreement and harmony. You said its parts were linked as if by kinship and worked together. What I didn’t accept was your claim that this couldn’t happen unless a single divine breath held it together. Nature holds together and lasts through natural forces, not through gods. It has that sort of harmony which the Greeks call ‘sympathy,’ a mutual response between its parts. But the greater that harmony is through nature’s own action, the less we should think divine planning produces it.
- 3.29 “And how do you answer these arguments that Carneades put forward? If no body is immortal, no body lasts forever. But no body is immortal, nor is any body indivisible or incapable of being split or pulled apart. Every living thing has a nature that can be affected. None can avoid taking something in from outside—that is, in a sense, having something done to it and being affected by it. If every living thing is like that, none is immortal. Likewise, if every living thing can be cut up and divided, none is indivisible and none is eternal. Yet every living thing is open to receiving and enduring an outside force. So every living thing must be mortal, capable of coming apart, and divisible.”
- 3.30 “Suppose all wax could change. Then nothing made of wax could be unchangeable. The same would hold for anything made of silver or bronze if silver and bronze were changeable by nature. So, in the same way, suppose all the things that are [...]—the things everything is made of—can change. Then no body can be unchangeable. But the things everything is made of can change, according to you. So every body can change. Yet if any body were immortal, not

every body could change. It follows that every body is mortal. After all, every body is water, air, fire, earth, or something made from these or from some part of them.”

3.31 “None of these is free from destruction. Everything made of earth can be divided. Liquid is so soft that it can easily be pressed and crushed. Fire and air are very easily displaced by any impact. Their nature is especially yielding and easily scattered. Besides, all these things cease to exist when they change into a different substance. That happens when earth turns into water, water gives rise to air, and air to the upper fire, and when these same changes take place in reverse. If <it’s true that> the things that make up every living being perish, no living being lasts forever.

3.32 “And even if we set these points aside, no living thing can be found that has never been born and will go on existing forever. Every living thing has senses. So it feels hot and cold, sweet and bitter. It can’t take in pleasant things through any sense without also taking in their opposites. So if it can feel pleasure, it can feel pain too. And anything that can suffer pain must also be capable of destruction. We must therefore admit that every living thing is mortal. Besides, anything that feels neither pleasure nor pain can’t be a living thing;”

3.33 “But if it is a living being, it must feel them. And what feels them can’t be eternal. Every living being feels them. Therefore no living being is eternal. Besides, there can be no living being without natural attraction and avoidance. Things in keeping with its nature attract it; it avoids their opposites. Every living being seeks some things and flees others. What it flees is against its nature. What is against its nature has the power to destroy it. Therefore every living being must perish.

3.34 “There are countless ways to establish and prove that nothing with senses can escape destruction. The very things we feel—like cold, like heat, <like> pleasure, like pain, and like the rest—kill us when they become intense. No living thing is without senses. So no living thing is eternal. A living thing must either have a simple nature, consisting of earth, fire, air, or moisture—we can’t even

understand what such a thing would be like—or be made of several kinds of matter. Each of these has its own place, which nature’s force carries it toward: one to the bottom, another to the top, another to the middle. They can hold together for a time, but there’s no way they can do so forever. Nature must pull each to its own place. So no living thing lasts forever.”

3.35 “But your school, Balbus, usually traces everything to the power of fire. In this you follow Heraclitus, I think. People don’t all interpret even him the same way. † Since he didn’t want what he said to be understood †, let’s leave him aside. You say that every active force is fire. So living beings die when their heat fails, and throughout nature what has heat has life and strength. But I don’t see why bodies should die when their heat goes out, yet not die when they lose moisture or breath—especially since too much heat kills them too.

3.36 “So that point about heat is common ground. Still, let’s see where the argument ends. Your position, I think, is that in nature and the world outside us, nothing is alive except fire. Why fire rather than breath? Breath also makes up the mind of living things, and its name, *anima*, gives us the word *animal*. And how can you take it for granted that the mind is nothing but fire? It seems more likely that the mind is something like a blend of fire and breath. ‘But if fire is itself alive, without any other kind of matter mixed into it, then it can’t lack sensation. After all, when it’s in our bodies, it makes us feel.’ We can repeat the same answer: whatever has senses must feel both pleasure and pain, and whatever can suffer pain can also suffer destruction. So you can’t establish that even fire is eternal.”

3.37 “What’s more, don’t you yourselves hold that all fire needs food and can’t possibly last unless it’s fed? And that the sun, moon, and other stars feed on water, some on fresh water, others on seawater? Cleanthes gives this as the reason the sun turns back instead of going beyond the circle of the summer solstice, and likewise the winter solstice: it mustn’t get too far from its food. We’ll examine

that whole account shortly. For now, let's settle this conclusion: anything that can perish isn't eternal by nature. Fire will perish unless it's fed. So fire isn't everlasting by nature."

3.38 "And what sort of god can we imagine who has no virtue? Shall we give a god practical wisdom? That consists in knowing what is good, what is bad, and what is neither. If nothing bad affects him or ever can, why does he need to distinguish good from bad? Why does he need reasoning or understanding? We use those to work from what is clear to what is hidden. But nothing can be hidden from a god. And what has justice, which gives each their due, to do with the gods? As you say yourselves, justice arose from human association and community. Self-control consists in passing over bodily pleasures. If there is a place for it in heaven, there is also a place for pleasures. And how can we imagine a brave god? Brave in pain, in hard work, or in danger?

3.39 "none of which applies to a god. So how can we conceive of a god who neither uses reason nor has any virtue?"

"And I can't look down on the ignorance of ordinary, uneducated people when I consider what the Stoics say. Here are things uneducated people do: the Syrians worship a fish, and the Egyptians have made nearly every kind of animal sacred. In Greece, they count many former humans as gods: Alabandus at Alabanda, Tenes at Tenedos, and, throughout Greece, Leucothea, who was once Ino, and her son Palaemon. Then there are Hercules, Aesculapius, the sons of Tyndareus, our own Romulus, and many others. People think they've been admitted to heaven like new citizens added to the rolls."

3.40 "So that's what uneducated people say. What better ideas do you philosophers have? I'll pass over those other claims—they're splendid, of course. Let's grant that the world itself is a god. I suppose this is that 'shining height above, whom everyone calls on as Jupiter.' Why add more gods, then? And what a crowd there is! There certainly seem to be plenty to me. You count every individual

star as a god. You name these gods either after animals, like the Goat, the Scorpion, the Bull, and the Lion, or after lifeless things, like the Argo, the Altar, and the Crown.”

3.41 “But suppose we grant all that. How can the rest possibly be accepted—or even understood? When we call grain Ceres and wine Liber, we’re using ordinary figures of speech. But do you think anyone is crazy enough to believe that what he eats is a god? As for those you say became gods after being human, you explain how that could have happened or why it stopped happening. I’ll gladly learn. As things stand, though, I don’t see how the man to whom ‘torches were applied on Mount Oeta,’ as Accius says, could have gone from that blaze ‘to his father’s eternal home.’ And yet Homer has Ulysses meet him in the underworld, just like the others who had died.”

3.42 “Still, I’d very much like to know which Hercules we’re supposed to worship. People who dig into obscure, little-known writings tell us there were several. The oldest was Jupiter’s son—but the oldest Jupiter’s son, since we also find several Jupiters in early Greek writings. That Jupiter and Lysithoe were the parents of the Hercules who, we’re told, fought Apollo over the tripod. Another is said to have been an Egyptian, the son of Nile, who supposedly put the Phrygian writings together. The third is one of the Idaean Dactyls. People bring him offerings for the dead †to whom. The fourth is the son of Jupiter <and> Asteria, Latona’s sister. He’s worshiped especially at Tyre, and Carthage is said to be his daughter. The fifth is in India and is called Belus. The sixth is this familiar Hercules, whom Jupiter fathered by Alcmena—but that was the third Jupiter. As I’ll soon show, we’ve been told of several Jupiters too.”

3.43 “Now that my argument has brought me here, I’ll show that I’ve learned better lessons about worshipping the immortal gods from the rules for our priests and our ancestors’ customs—from these little cups Numa left us, which Laelius discusses in that little gem of a speech—than from Stoic arguments. If I follow your teachings, tell me how to answer someone who asks me this: ‘If there are gods [...], are the Nymphs goddesses too? If the Nymphs are, so are the little

Pans and the Satyrs. But those aren't gods, so the Nymphs aren't [goddesses] either. Yet temples have been publicly promised and dedicated to them. Then the other gods with dedicated temples aren't gods either. Now take this further. You count Jupiter and Neptune as gods. That makes their brother Orcus a god too. We must also consider the rivers said to flow in the underworld gods—Acheron, Cocytus, and Pyriphlegethon—and then Charon and Cerberus.”

3.44 “But we have to reject that. Then Orcus isn't a god either. So what do you say about his brothers?’ Carneades used to make these arguments, not to do away with the gods—what could be less fitting for a philosopher?—but to prove that the Stoics explained nothing about them. So he kept pressing: ‘If these brothers belong among the gods, can anyone deny that their father Saturn does too? People generally worship him most in the west. If he's a god, we must admit that his father, Caelus (Heaven), is also a god. In that case, Caelus's parents, Aether, the upper air, and Dies (Day), must count as gods too, along with their brothers and sisters. The ancient writers on divine family trees give these names: Love, Deceit, †Measure, Work, Envy, Fate, Old Age, Death, Darkness, Misery, Complaint, Favor, Fraud, Stubbornness, the Fates, the Hesperides, and Dreams. They say all these were born to Erebus and Night. So either we must accept these monsters or we must give up the gods we started with.”

3.45 “What? Will you say Apollo, Vulcan, Mercury, and the rest are gods, but have doubts about Hercules, Aesculapius, Liber, Castor, and Pollux? Yet people worship these just as much as those others, and some people worship them far more. So we must count these sons of mortal mothers as gods. What about Aristaeus, Apollo's son, who is said to have discovered the olive? What about Theseus, Neptune's son, and the others whose fathers were gods? Won't they belong among the gods? And those whose mothers were goddesses? I'd think their claim was even stronger. Just as [under] civil law a person whose mother is free is free, so under natural law someone whose mother is a goddess must be a god. That's why the islanders of Astypalaea worship Achilles with such devotion. If he's a god, Orpheus and Rhesus are gods too, since each had a Muse for

his mother. Unless, of course, marriages at sea count for more than marriages on land. If these aren't gods because no one worships them anywhere, how can those others be gods?"

3.46 "So consider whether these honors reward people's good qualities rather than their immortality. You seemed to be saying that yourself, Balbus. But if you think Latona is a goddess, how can you deny that Hecate is one? Her mother is Asteria, Latona's sister. Or is she a goddess too? We've certainly seen her altars and shrines in Greece. But if she's a goddess, why not the Eumenides? If they're goddesses—they have a shrine in Athens, and here, as I understand it, the grove of Furina—then the Furies are goddesses. I suppose they watch for criminal acts and wickedness and punish them."

3.47 "If gods of this kind exist and take part in human affairs, we must also consider Natio a goddess. We regularly offer her a sacrifice when we make the circuit of shrines in the countryside around Ardea. Her name, Natio, comes from those being born, since she watches over married women in childbirth. If she's a goddess, all those you mentioned are gods: Honor, Good Faith, Mind, and Harmony. Then Hope and Moneta are too, along with everything we can dream up in our own minds. If that isn't plausible, neither is the starting point these ideas came from. And tell me this: if the gods we've inherited and worship really are gods, why shouldn't we put Serapis and Isis in the same class? If we do that, why reject the gods of foreign peoples? Then we'll add cattle and horses to the gods, ibises and hawks, asps, crocodiles, and fish, dogs, wolves, and cats, and plenty of other animals. If we reject these, we'll also reject the beliefs they came from."

3.48 "What next? Will Ino count as a goddess, called Leucothea, 'White Goddess,' by the Greeks and Matuta by us, though she's Cadmus's daughter? Yet Circe, Pasiphae, and Aeetes won't belong among the gods, though their mother was Perseis, Oceanus's daughter, and their father was Sun? Besides, our colonists at Circeii worship Circe devoutly too. So you count her as a goddess. What answer will you give Medea? Her two <divine> grandfathers were Sun and

Oceanus, her father was Aeetes, and her mother was Idyia. And what about her brother Absyrtius? Pacuvius calls him Aegialeus, but the older writings more often use the other name. If these aren't gods, I'm worried about what will become of Ino. All these claims flow from the same source."

3.49 "Or will Amphiaraus and Trophonius be gods? When land belonging to the immortal gods in Boeotia was exempted under the censors' rules, our tax contractors denied that anyone who had once been human was immortal. But if these are gods, Erechtheus certainly is. We've seen both his shrine and his priest in Athens. If we make him a god, how can we have any doubts about Codrus, or about the others who fell fighting for their country's freedom? But if that isn't convincing, we shouldn't accept the earlier claims these conclusions come from either."

3.50 "And in most communities, you can see why brave men have been remembered with honors paid to immortal gods. It was a way to encourage courage, so that the best citizens would be more willing to face danger for their country. That's precisely why Erechtheus and his daughters rank as gods at Athens. Athens also has a shrine to the daughters of Leos, called the Leocorion. The people of Alabanda actually show more devotion to Alabandus, their city's founder, than to any of the famous gods. While visiting them, Stratonicus made one of his many witty remarks. Someone kept pestering him, insisting that Alabandus was a god and Hercules wasn't. 'Then,'

3.51 "he said, 'let Alabandus be angry with me, and Hercules with you.' But Balbus, you don't see how far your arguments about the sky and stars can spread. You say the sun and moon are gods. The Greeks identify the sun with Apollo and the moon with Diana. But if the moon is a goddess, Lucifer and the other wandering stars will have to count as gods too. So will the fixed stars. And why shouldn't the rainbow we see count as a god? It's beautiful. Because of its appearance, and because something wonderful produces it, it's said to have been born to Thaumas. If the rainbow has a divine nature, what will you do with clouds? After all, a rainbow forms when clouds take on certain colors.

One cloud is even said to have given birth to the Centaurs. If you admit clouds among the gods, you'll certainly have to admit storms. The Roman people have consecrated them in their religious rites. So rain, rain clouds, gales, and whirlwinds must be considered gods. Our own commanders have regularly sacrificed an animal to the waves when setting out to sea.

3.52 “Now, if Ceres gets her name from *gerere*, ‘bearing,’ as you said, the earth itself is a goddess. People do regard it that way: what else is *Tellus*? But if the earth is a god, the sea is too. You said the sea was *Neptune*. Then rivers and springs must be gods as well. That’s why *Masso* dedicated a shrine to *Fons* after coming back from *Corsica*. And in the augurs’ prayer we find *Tiberinus*, *Spino*, *Anemo*, *Nodinus*, and other names of nearby rivers. So either this will spread without any limit, or we won’t accept any of these things. We can’t approve that endless line of superstitious reasoning. That means we shouldn’t accept any of these things as gods.

3.53 “So, *Balbus*, we must also argue against those who say that the gods we all worship with such reverence and devotion were raised from human life to heaven in people’s beliefs, not in fact. To begin with, the people called theologians count three *Jupiters*. The first two were born in *Arcadia*. The first had *Aether* as his father and is also said to have fathered *Proserpina* and *Liber*. The second had *Caelus* as his father. He’s said to have fathered *Minerva*, whom they describe as the first to practice war and its inventor. The third was from *Crete*, a son of *Saturn*. His tomb is shown on that island. The Greeks also give different accounts of the *Dioscuri*, the sons of *Jupiter*. The first group consists of three, called the *Anactes*, ‘Lords,’ at *Athens*: *Tritopatreus*, *Eubuleus*, and *Dionysus*. Their parents were the most ancient King *Jupiter* and *Proserpina*. The second group, *Castor* and *Pollux*, were born to the third *Jupiter* and *Leda*. Some give the names of the third group as *Alco*, *Melampus*, and † *Euilolus*. They were sons of *Atreus*, whose father was *Pelops*.

3.54 “Then there are the Muses. The first group numbered four, [born] to the second Jupiter: †born and Thelxinoe†, Aoede, Arche, Melete. The second group numbered nine, born to the third Jupiter and Mnemosyne. The third were born [to the third Jupiter], to Pierus and Antiope. Poets commonly call them the Pierides or Pieriae. They have the same names and number as the group just before them. And although you say the Sun, Sol, got his name because he is solus, ‘alone,’ look how many Suns the theologians produce! One was a son of Jupiter and a grandson of Aether. Another was a son of Hyperion. A third was a son of Vulcan, himself a son of the Nile. The Egyptians say his city is the one called Heliopolis. The fourth is said to have been born to Acantho on Rhodes in the heroic age. He was the <father> of Ialysus, Camirus, and Lindus, from whom the Rhodians come. The fifth is said to have fathered Aeetes and Circe in Colchis. There are several Vulcans too:

3.55 “the first was a son of Caelus. He and Minerva were the parents of the Apollo whom ancient historians regarded as Athens’ protector. The second was born [in] the Nile. The Egyptians call him Opas and regard him as Egypt’s guardian. The third was born to the third Jupiter and Juno. He’s said to have run the forge on Lemnos. The fourth was a son of Maemalius. He ruled the islands near Sicily that used to be called the Vulcanian Islands.

3.56 “One Mercury had Caelus as his father and Dies as his mother. His penis is said to have become obscenely erect because the sight of Proserpina excited him. Another, the son of Valens and Phoronis, is thought to live underground and is identified with Trophonius. A third was born to the third Jupiter and Maia. He and Penelope are said to have been Pan’s parents. The fourth had the Nile as his father. The Egyptians consider it wrong to speak his name. The fifth is worshipped by the people of Pheneus. He’s said to have killed Argus and fled to Egypt because of it, then given the Egyptians laws and writing. The Egyptians call him Theyt. Their first month of the year has that same name.

3.57 “The first Aesculapius was a son of Apollo and is worshipped by the Arcadians. He’s said to have invented the surgical probe and to have been the first to bandage a wound. The second was the brother of the second Mercury. He’s said to have been struck by lightning and buried at Cynosurae. The third was a son of Arsippus and Arsinoe. They say he first discovered how to purge the bowels and pull teeth. His tomb and sacred grove are shown in Arcadia, not far from the river Lusius. The oldest Apollo is the one I mentioned a little earlier, Vulcan’s son and the guardian of Athens. Another was a son of Corybas, born in Crete. He’s said to have fought Jupiter himself for possession of that island. A third was born to the third Jupiter and Latona. They say he came to Delphi from the Hyperboreans. A fourth was born in Arcadia. The Arcadians call him Nomion, from *nomos*, ‘law,’ because they say they got their laws from him.

3.58 “There are several Dianas as well. The first was born to Jupiter and Proserpina and is said to have given birth to the winged Cupid. The second is better known. We’ve been told that her parents were the third Jupiter and Latona. The third is said to have had Upis as her father and Glauce as her mother. The Greeks often call her Upis, using her father’s name. We have many gods called Dionysus. The first was born to Jupiter and Proserpina. The second was a son of the Nile and is said to have killed Nysa. The third had Cabirus as his father. They say he ruled Asia as its king, and the Sabazia festival was established for him. The fourth was born to Jupiter and Luna. The Orphic rites are believed to be performed in his honor. The fifth was born to Nysus and Thyone. He’s thought to have established the festivals held every third year.

3.59 “The first Venus was born to Caelus and Dies. We’ve seen her shrine at Elis. The second sprang from foam. We’ve been told that she and Mercury were the parents of the second Cupid. The third was born to Jupiter and Dione and married Vulcan. But she’s said to have had Anteros by Mars. The fourth was conceived in Syria and Cyprus. She’s called Astarte and is said to have married Adonis. The first Minerva is the one we mentioned earlier as Apollo’s mother. The second was born to the Nile and is worshipped by the Egyptians of Sais. The third is the one we said earlier was fathered by Jupiter. The fourth was

born to Jupiter and Coryphe, a daughter of Oceanus. The Arcadians call her *Kopíav* and say she invented four-horse chariots. The fifth was a daughter of Pallas. She's said to have killed her father when he tried to violate her virginity. She's given winged sandals to wear.

3.60 “The first Cupid is said to have been born to Mercury and the first Diana. The second was born to Mercury and the second Venus. The third, who is also Anteros, was born to Mars and the third Venus. These stories <and others> like them have been collected from the old traditions of Greece. You understand that they must be challenged if religious beliefs aren't to become confused. But your people don't just fail to reject them. They actually support them by explaining what each detail stands for.

“But let's return now to the point we left when we went off on this discussion. Do you really think we need a more intricate argument to refute these ideas?”

3.61 “We see that intelligence, faithfulness, hope, virtue, honor, victory, safety, concord, and other such things are things, not gods. Either they are in us—like intelligence, hope, faithfulness, virtue, and concord—or we have to wish for them—like honor, safety, and victory. I see how useful these things are. I also see the statues dedicated to them. But why they should contain divine power I will understand when I've been taught it. Fortune especially belongs in this class. No one can separate her from inconsistency and blind chance, which certainly aren't worthy of a god.

3.62 “Now why do you enjoy explaining myths and unraveling names so much? Caelus was castrated by his son, and Saturn too was tied up by his son. You defend these stories and others like them in a way that makes the people who invented them look not just sane but wise. And the effort you put into explaining names is pitiful: ‘Saturnus, because he saturat, fills himself with years; Mavors, because he magna vertit, overturns mighty things; Minerva, because she minuit, diminishes, or minatur, threatens; Venus, because she venit, comes to everything; Ceres, from gerendo, carrying.’ What a dangerous habit! Plenty of names will leave you stuck. What will you do with Veiovis? What about

Vulcan? Still, since you think Neptune gets his name from nando, ‘swimming,’ you’ll be able to explain the origin of any name from a single letter. But in that explanation, you seemed to be floundering more than Neptune himself.”

3.63 “First Zeno, then Cleanthes, then Chrysippus took on a great and quite unnecessary burden: to give rational accounts of made-up myths, and explain why each name was given. When you do this, you certainly admit that the facts are very different from what people think. The things called gods are natural substances, not divine persons. The mistake went so far that even harmful things not only received divine names but had rites established for them. We see a shrine to Fever on the Palatine, <one to Orbona, Bereavement, at> the temple of the Lares, and an altar to Bad Fortune consecrated on the Esquiline.

3.64 “So let’s drive every mistake of this kind out of philosophy. When we discuss the immortal gods, let’s say things worthy of them. I have my own views about them, but I can’t find anything in yours to agree with. You say Neptune is a mind with intelligence extending throughout the sea. You say the same about Ceres. But I can’t grasp this intelligence of the sea or the earth. I can’t even form a faint idea of it. So I have to look elsewhere to learn both that gods exist and what they’re like, the kind you want them to be [...].”

3.65 “[...] Let’s look at what comes next. First, <do> the gods govern the world through wise planning? Second, do they look after human affairs? Those are the two parts of your outline I still have to deal with. If you all agree, I think we should discuss them more closely.”

“I certainly agree,” said Velleius. “I’m expecting even more important things, and I strongly agree with what’s been said.”

Then Balbus said, “I don’t want to interrupt you, Cotta. We’ll find another time. I’ll certainly get you to admit it. But [...].”

“[...]

Cicero — — reports that, although he had said many things that could undermine religious practices, [Cotta] nevertheless held that these matters shouldn’t be debated in public, so that a debate of this kind wouldn’t wipe out

the religious practices the community had adopted (Lact. Inst. 2.3.2)”

“[...]

For, to begin with, we can’t be brought to believe that this immortal, supremely excellent nature is divided into sexes — — above all, Tullius — — without fearing any accusation of irreverence — — showed with greater reverence what he thought about such a belief (Arnob. Nat. 3.6)”

“[...]

whether the gods govern the world through wise planning (v. 5)”

“[...] about the abundance of benefits we enjoy”

“[...] about the orderly succession of seasons and the regularity of the heavens”

“[...] about Chrysippus’s arguments, about comparing a beautiful house with the beauty of the world, about the harmony and agreement of the whole world, about Zeno’s conclusions”

“[...] about the power of fire and the heat from which everything is generated”

“[...] whether the whole world, the sun, the moon, and the stars have sensation and a mind; about the heavenly bodies needing food”

“[...] about nature proceeding with skill”

“[...] the world wasn’t built but was shaped by nature

[...]”

“First, then, it isn’t likely that divine foresight made the material from which everything came. Rather, that material has its own power and nature, and had them in the past. When a builder is about to build something, he doesn’t make the material himself. He uses what’s ready for him. A sculptor does the same with wax. In the same way, this divine foresight must have had material available—not material it made itself, but material already at hand. But if a god didn’t make matter, then a god didn’t make earth, water, air, or fire either.

[...]”

“Why, if a god made everything for human beings, do we find so many things both at sea and on land that work against us, harm us, <and> kill us? [10] The Stoics failed to see the truth and gave a thoroughly foolish answer to this. They say that many plants and animals have uses we haven’t discovered yet. In time, they say, we’ll find those uses, just as need and experience have already discovered many things unknown in earlier ages. [11] But what possible use can we find in mice, cockroaches, and snakes, which trouble and harm human beings? Is some medicine hidden in them? If there is, let it be discovered someday. It will still be a remedy against harm, when the very complaint is that harm exists at all. [12] They say a viper burned down to ashes cures a bite from that same kind of creature. How much better it would’ve been if the creature hadn’t existed at all, instead of our having to look to it for a remedy against itself. (Lact. ira 13.9-12)

“[...]

A god either wants to remove evils and can’t, or can and doesn’t want to, or neither wants to nor can, or both wants to and can. [21] If he wants to and can’t, he’s weak, which can’t be true of a god. If he can and doesn’t want to, he’s spiteful, which is just as foreign to a god. If he neither wants to nor can, he’s both spiteful and weak, and so isn’t a god at all. If he both wants to and can—the only possibility that suits a god—then where do evils come from, or why doesn’t he remove them? (Lact. ira 13.20-21)

[...]

human beings surpass all animals (Diom. GL. 1.313.10)

“[...]”

“human beings surpass all animals

[...]”

“That won’t work that way at all; there’s a great struggle ahead.

“For me to beg him with all that sweet talk,
unless I had something to gain:”

3.66 “Does she seem short on reasoning, as she plots a wicked disaster for herself?

And how cunningly reasoned is this:

If you want what you want, things will turn out as you work for them.

That line is the seed of every evil.

Distracted, today he handed me the bars,

with which I'll let all my anger loose and bring ruin on him:

grief for me, mourning for him; destruction for him, exile for me.

Beasts certainly don't have this reason, which you say the gods gave as a favor to
human beings alone.

3.67 “So do you see how great a gift we've received from the gods? And the same

Medea, fleeing her father and her country,
after her father

comes close and is almost ready to seize her,

meanwhile kills the boy and cuts his body apart, limb by limb,

and scatters it all over the fields. She does this

so that, while the father gathers his son's scattered limbs,

she can escape, and grief can slow his pursuit,

so that murdering her own kin can bring her safety.

3.68 “She had no lack of reason, any more than she lacked wickedness. And the man

preparing that deadly meal for his brother—isn't he turning his reasoning
this way and that in his mind?

I must build a greater weight of trouble, stir up a greater evil,

to crush and break his bitter heart.

Nor should we pass over that other man himself,

who wasn't content to lure a wife into adultery.

Atreus speaks rightly and truly about him:

What I consider the greatest danger at the highest level of power

is that royal mothers are defiled,

the line corrupted, the blood mixed.

Yet how cunningly he acted, seeking a kingdom through adultery:

‘I add to this that the father of the gods sent me a sign,

a marvel to secure my reign:

a lamb among my flocks, shining with golden fleece,

which Thyestes once dared steal from the palace,

[in] this matter he took my wife as his helper.’

3.69 “Doesn’t he seem to have used the greatest wickedness along with the greatest powers of reasoning? The stage isn’t the only place filled with these crimes. Everyday life is full of almost greater ones. Every household feels it; so do the courts, the Senate house, the electoral field, our allies, and our provinces. Just as reason is used for right action, it is used for wrongdoing. The first happens rarely and among few people; the second happens all the time and among very many. It would have been better for the immortal gods to give us no reason at all than to give it with so much harm. Wine rarely helps the sick and very often harms them. So it’s better not to give it at all than to run into obvious danger in the hope of an uncertain cure. In the same way, I wonder whether it would have been better for the human race not to receive at all that quick movement of thought, that sharpness and cleverness we call reason, rather than to receive it so generously and freely. It destroys many and benefits very few.

3.70 “So if the divine mind and will looked after human beings by giving them reason, it looked after only those it gave good reason to. We can see that there are very few such people, if there are any at all. But you won’t accept that the immortal gods looked after only a few people. It follows, then, that they looked after no one.”

“Here’s your usual answer to this point: the gods haven’t failed to provide for us in the best possible way just because many people misuse their gift. Plenty of people misuse their inheritances too, but that doesn’t mean their fathers gave

them no benefit. Does anyone deny that? But how are the two cases alike? Deianira didn't mean to hurt Hercules when she gave him the tunic soaked in the Centaur's blood. And the man whose sword opened Jason of Pherae's abscess, which the doctors couldn't cure, didn't mean to help him. Many people have helped when they meant to hurt, and hurt when they meant to help. So what someone gives doesn't reveal what they intended by giving it. And just because the person receiving something uses it well, that doesn't mean the giver gave it out of friendship."

- 3.71 "What act of lust or greed, what crime, is undertaken without a plan? Or carried out without mental activity and thought—that is, without reasoning? Every opinion involves reason. If the opinion is true, it's good reasoning; if false, bad reasoning. But all we get from a god, if we get it at all, is reason. Whether that reason is good or bad comes from us. Reason isn't a gift the gods give human beings in the way a father leaves an inheritance. If the gods had wanted to hurt human beings, what better gift could they have given? And where would the seeds of injustice, lack of self-control, and cowardice be if reason didn't lie behind those vices?"

"We just mentioned Medea and Atreus, characters from heroic stories who work out and weigh their plans as they plot appalling crimes."

- 3.72 "What about the frivolous plots of comedy? Aren't they always based on reasoning? Doesn't that young man in *The Eunuch* argue cleverly enough? What am I to do, then?

"She shut me out and calls me back. Go back? Not if she begs me.

And in *The Young Comrades*, another character doesn't hesitate to use reason against common opinion, just as the Academics do. He says that, when you're deeply in love and have no money, it's pleasant to have a father who is greedy, unkind to his children,

hard to deal with, who doesn't love you or care about you,

3.73 “And he supports this unbelievable view with little arguments:

Either cheat him out of his income, or use the account books

to divert a payment, or use a slave boy

to scare money out of him. After all, money from a stingy father

is so much more fun to throw away;

and he argues that an easygoing, generous father is a nuisance to a son in love:

How I can fool him, what I can get out of him,

what trick or scheme I can cook up against him—

“I’ve got no idea. Every plot, every lie,

every sleight of hand—my father’s kindness has shut them all down.

So could those plots, schemes, lies, and tricks have existed without reason?

What a splendid gift from the gods! It lets Phormio say:

Bring on the old man! I’ve already got every plan ready in my mind.”

3.74 “But let’s leave the theater and go to the forum. The praetor takes his seat.

What’s the case about? Who set fire to the public records office? What crime

could be more secret? Yet Quintus Sossius, a distinguished Roman knight from

Picenum, admitted doing it. Who altered the public records? Lucius Alenus

did that too, by copying the handwriting of the six leading officials. Could any-

one be more ingenious? Look at the other investigations: the gold from Tolosa

and the Jugurthine conspiracy. Go back further, to Tubulus taking money to

decide a lawsuit. Then come forward to the investigation into sexual offenses

under Peducaeus’s bill. Then there are the everyday cases: murder, poisoning,

theft of public money, and now investigations into wills under the new law.

That’s where we get the legal claim, ‘I declare that the theft took place with

your help and advice.’ That’s where we get all those lawsuits over breaches of

trust in guardianship, agency, partnership, and property held in trust, along

with the other dishonest dealings involved in buying, selling, hiring, or renting

out. That’s where we get a public prosecution over a private matter under the

Laetorian law. And that’s where we get the sweeping net that catches every kind

of dishonesty: the legal action for fraud introduced by our friend Gaius Aquillius. Aquillius himself holds that fraud is established when someone pretends to do one thing but actually does another.”

- 3.75 “Are we really to believe that the immortal gods sowed this enormous crop of evils? If the gods gave people reason, they also gave them malice. Malice is simply a clever, deceptive use of reason to hurt someone. Those same gods also gave us fraud, crime, and all the other things that no one can plan or carry out without reason. So, just as that old woman wishes,

‘If only axes in Pelion’s woods
had never felled fir beams to the ground!’

I wish the gods had never given people this cleverness. Very few use it well, and even they are often crushed by those who use it badly. Countless people use it dishonestly. So this divine gift of reason and judgment seems to have been given to people to help them cheat, not to help them be good.”

- 3.76 “But you keep insisting that people are to blame, not the gods. That’s like a doctor blaming the seriousness of the disease, or a ship’s captain blaming the force of the storm. Of course, they’re only human. Still, it’s ridiculous. Someone might say, ‘Who would have called you in if those problems didn’t exist?’ We can argue more freely against a god: ‘You say people’s faults are to blame. Then you should have given people a kind of reason that ruled out faults and wrongdoing.’ So how could the gods have made a mistake? We leave estates to people in the hope that we’re choosing well, and our hope can prove wrong. But how could a god be wrong? Or was it like Sol letting his son Phaethon into his chariot, or Neptune, when Theseus destroyed Hippolytus after his father Neptune had granted him three wishes:”

- 3.77 “Those are poets’ tales. We want to be philosophers, reporting facts, not fables. Yet even those poetic gods, if they’d known their gifts would destroy their sons, would be thought to have done wrong in giving them. And take what Aristo of Chios used to say. Philosophers harm listeners who put a bad interpretation on good teaching: people can leave Aristippus’s school as reckless pleasure-seekers,

or Zeno's as harsh men. If that is true—if listeners are going to leave as worse people because they twist philosophers' discussions—then surely it would be better for philosophers to keep silent than to harm their listeners.

3.78 “In the same way, if people turn the reason the immortal gods gave them with good intentions into a tool for fraud and malice, humanity would have been better off without it. Suppose a doctor orders a sick man to drink wine, knowing he'll drink it too strong and die at once. The doctor would be seriously at fault. Your Providence deserves the same blame for giving reason to people it knew would use it wrongly and dishonestly. Unless perhaps you say it didn't know. I wish you would! But you won't dare. I know how highly you value its name.”

3.79 “But we can finish this part of the argument now. All philosophers agree that foolishness is a greater evil than all the evils of fortune and the body put together on the other side. Yet no one achieves wisdom. So all of us are suffering the worst evils, even though you say the immortal gods have taken excellent care of us. There's no difference between no one being healthy and no one being able to be healthy. In the same way, I don't see what difference it makes whether no one is wise or no one can be wise.”

“We've already said far too much about something completely obvious.

Telamon settles the whole question of the gods' neglect of people in a single line:

‘If they cared, good people would do well and bad people badly. That's not what happens.’

If the gods really were looking after humanity, they should have made everyone good;”

3.80 “or, failing that, they should at least have looked after the good. Why, then, did the Carthaginian defeat the two Scipios in Spain, men of outstanding courage and goodness? Why did Maximus have to bury his son, who had been consul? Why did Hannibal kill Marcellus? Why did Cannae take Paulus's life? Why was

Regulus's body handed over to Carthaginian cruelty? Why couldn't Africanus find protection within the walls of his own home? But these are old cases, and there are many more. Let's look at more recent ones. Why is my uncle Publius Rutilius in exile, a man as blameless as he is learned? Why was my friend Drusus murdered in his own home? Why was the chief priest Quintus Scaevola, a model of self-control and good judgment, butchered in front of Vesta's statue? Why, even before that, did Cinna kill so many of the state's leading men? Why was Gaius Marius, the most treacherous man of all, able to order the death of Quintus Catulus, a man of exceptional standing?"

3.81 "The day would end before I could list all the good people who have suffered, or all the wicked people who have done wonderfully well. Why did Marius die so happily, an old man in his own home, during his seventh consulship? Why did Cinna, the cruelest man of all, rule for so long? 'But he paid for it.' It would have been better to stop him, to prevent him from killing so many outstanding men, than to make him pay for it eventually. Quintus Varius, a thoroughly vicious man, died under the most agonizing torture and punishment. If that was because he'd killed Drusus with a sword and Metellus with poison, it would have been better to keep those men alive than to make Varius pay for his crime. Dionysius was tyrant of an immensely wealthy and prosperous city for thirty-eight years;"

3.82 "and long before him, Pisistratus ruled for many years in the most flourishing part of Greece. 'But Phalaris and Apollodorus paid for their crimes.' Yes, after they'd tortured and killed many people. Plenty of bandits pay for their crimes too. Still, we can't say that more bandits have been killed than captives have been put to cruel deaths. We're told that Anaxarchus, a follower of Democritus, was tortured to death by a Cypriot tyrant, and that Zeno of Elea was killed under torture. What can I say about Socrates? Whenever I read Plato, I find myself crying over his death. So don't you see? If the gods watch human affairs, their judgment makes no distinction between good and bad."

3.83 “Diogenes the Cynic used to say that Harpalus testified against the gods. In those days Harpalus was considered a successful robber, and he lived in that good fortune for so long. Take Dionysius, whom I mentioned earlier. After plundering Proserpina’s temple at Locri, he was sailing to Syracuse. With a perfectly favorable wind carrying him along, he laughed and said, ‘Do you see, friends, what a fine voyage the immortal gods give people who rob their temples?’ He was a sharp man. Once he’d fully and clearly grasped the point, he stuck to that view. When he brought his fleet to the Peloponnese and entered the temple of Olympian Jupiter, he stripped Jupiter of a very heavy gold cloak. The tyrant Gelo had adorned Jupiter with it, using spoils taken from the Carthaginians. Dionysius even joked that a gold cloak was heavy in summer and cold in winter. He threw a woolen cloak over Jupiter instead, saying that it was suitable for every season. He also ordered the gold beard removed from Aesculapius at Epidaurus. It wasn’t right, he said, for the son to have a beard when his father was beardless in every temple.”

3.84 “He then ordered the silver tables removed from all the shrines. They bore the inscription ‘Of the good gods,’ following the old Greek custom. He said he wanted to benefit from their goodness. He also took, without a moment’s hesitation, little gold Victories, offering bowls, and wreaths held in the outstretched hands of the statues. He said he was accepting them, not taking them away. After all, it was foolish to ask the gods for good things and then refuse to accept them when they held them out and offered them. They say this same man brought the things I’ve mentioned out of the temples into the marketplace and sold them through an auctioneer. Once he’d collected the money, he issued an order: anyone who possessed anything from a shrine had to return each object to its own shrine by a fixed date. So he added injustice toward people to his disrespect for the gods. Yet Olympian Jupiter didn’t strike him with a thunderbolt. Aesculapius didn’t waste him away and kill him with a long, painful illness. Instead, he died in his own bed and was carried to a †tyrant’s funeral pyre. The power he’d gained through crime he passed on to his son as an inheritance, as though it were just and lawful.”

- 3.85 “I discuss this point unwillingly, because it seems to give people license to do wrong. It would rightly seem so if our own conscience didn’t carry serious weight in judging both virtue and vice, even without considering the gods. Take conscience away, and everything collapses. A household or state wouldn’t seem organized by any plan or rule if it had no rewards for good actions and no penalties for wrongdoing. In the same way, the world certainly has no divine direction of human affairs if it makes no distinction between good and bad.
- 3.86 “‘But the gods neglect smaller matters. They don’t attend to everyone’s little fields and little vines. If blight or hail damages someone’s crops, Jupiter wasn’t required to take notice. Even kings don’t concern themselves with every tiny detail in their kingdoms.’ That’s what you say. As if I’d been complaining just now about Publius Rutilius’s estate at Formiae, not about the loss of his security! And all human beings do hold this view: they get their outward advantages from the gods—their vineyards, grainfields, olive groves, rich harvests of grain and fruit, and in short all life’s comfort and prosperity. But no one has ever credited a god with giving him virtue.
- 3.87 “Of course, that’s right. We deserve praise for our goodness, and we’re right to take pride in it. That wouldn’t be true if it were a gift from a god rather than something that came from ourselves. But when we gain honors or wealth, get some other lucky break, or escape some misfortune, we thank the gods. Then we don’t think any credit belongs to us. Has anyone ever thanked the gods for being a good person? But people have thanked them for being rich, honored, or unharmed. They call Jupiter Best and Greatest for these things—not because he makes us just, self-controlled, and wise, but because he keeps us safe and sound, wealthy and well supplied.”
- 3.88 “No one’s ever promised Hercules a tenth as an offering if they became wise—although Pythagoras is said to have sacrificed an ox to the Muses when he discovered something new in geometry. But I don’t believe that story, since he wouldn’t even sacrifice an animal to Apollo on Delos, to avoid splashing blood on the altar. To get back to the point, everyone agrees on this: we should ask a

god for good luck, but get wisdom from ourselves. However many shrines we dedicate to Mind, Virtue, and Good Faith, we still recognize that these things lie within us. We have to ask the gods to make hope, safety, help, and victory possible.”

“So, as Diogenes used to say, the prosperity and success of bad people show that the gods have no power or authority at all.”

3.89 “‘But sometimes things turn out well for good people.’ We seize on those cases and credit the immortal gods for them without any reason. When Diagoras—the man they call the Atheist—visited Samothrace, a friend said to him, ‘You think the gods don’t care about human affairs. Don’t you see from all these painted panels how many people have escaped a violent storm and reached harbor safely by making vows?’ ‘That’s how it is,’ he said. ‘There aren’t any pictures anywhere of the people who were shipwrecked and died at sea.’ On another occasion, when he was sailing, the passengers were frightened and terrified by a storm. They told him they deserved what was happening because they’d taken him aboard their ship. He pointed out many other ships struggling on the same course and asked whether they thought Diagoras was aboard those ships too. That’s how things are: whether your luck is good or bad has nothing to do with the kind of person you are or how you’ve lived.”

3.90 “‘The gods don’t take notice of everything,’ he says, ‘nor do kings.’ What similarity is there? If kings knowingly let things pass, they are seriously at fault. But a god can’t even plead ignorance. You make a fine defense of him when you say the gods have the power to exact a criminal’s punishment from his children, grandchildren, and descendants, even if he escapes it by dying. What wonderful fairness from the gods! Would any state tolerate someone proposing a law that condemned a son or grandson because his father or grandfather had done wrong?

What limit will be set to the slaughter of Tantalus’s descendants?

“Or when will there ever be enough punishment to pay for Myrtilus’s death?

3.91 “I couldn’t easily say whether the poets corrupted the Stoics or the Stoics gave the poets authority. Both say monstrous and shameful things. Someone hurt by Hipponax’s iambic verse or wounded by Archilochus’s poetry wasn’t carrying around pain sent by a god. It was pain they’d developed themselves. And when we see the lust of Aegisthus or Paris, we don’t look to a god for its cause, since we can almost hear their guilt speaking. I also credit Hippocrates rather than Aesculapius with restoring many sick people to health. And I’ll never say that the Spartan system of training was given to Sparta by Apollo rather than Lycurgus. Critolaus, I tell you, destroyed Corinth, and Hasdrubal destroyed Carthage. Those two men gouged out those eyes of the coast, not some angry god. You deny that a god can get angry at all.”

3.92 “But a god could certainly have helped and saved such great and splendid cities. You yourselves often say there is nothing a god can’t do, and without any effort. Just as people’s limbs move without strain, by thought and will alone, so everything can be shaped, moved, and changed by the gods’ will. You don’t say this superstitiously, like an old woman’s tale, but on a consistent basis in natural science. The matter of things, from which and in which everything exists, is wholly flexible and changeable. So there is nothing that can’t be shaped or transformed out of it, however suddenly. Divine providence shapes and governs all of it. Wherever this providence turns, it can do whatever it wants. Therefore it either doesn’t know its own power, neglects human affairs, or can’t judge what is best.

3.93 “‘It doesn’t care about individual people.’ That’s no surprise: it doesn’t even care about cities. Not cities? Not even nations and peoples. If it’s going to disregard even them, why be surprised that it’s disregarded the whole human race?”

“But how can you say that the gods don’t attend to everything, while also insisting that the immortal gods distribute and allot dreams to people? (I’m discussing this with you because your school holds that dreams tell the truth.) And at the same time you also say that people should make vows? After all, individuals make vows, so the divine mind listens to individuals too. You see,

then, that it isn't as busy as you thought. Suppose it is fully occupied, turning the sky, watching over the earth, and governing the seas. Why does it let so many gods do nothing and sit idle? Why doesn't it put some of those idle gods in charge of human affairs? You've described countless gods, Balbus."

"That's about all I had to say about the nature of the gods. My aim wasn't to deny it, but to help you understand how unclear it is and how hard it is to explain."

3.94 With those words Cotta ended. But Lucilius said, "Cotta, you've attacked very forcefully the Stoic account of divine providence, which they have established with the greatest reverence and wisdom. But since evening is coming on, give us another day to answer these arguments. I'm fighting you for our altars and hearths, for the gods' temples and shrines, and for the city's walls. You pontiffs say those walls are sacred, and you surround the city with religion more carefully than with the walls themselves. I think it would be wrong for me to abandon them as long as I can breathe."

3.95 "I certainly hope to be refuted, Balbus," Cotta replied. "I preferred to discuss the points I raised rather than decide them, and I know very well that you can easily defeat me."

"Of course," Velleius said, "when he even thinks Jupiter sends us dreams! Yet dreams themselves aren't as empty as the Stoics' account of the gods' nature." After these words, we parted. Velleius thought Cotta's argument nearer the truth; I thought Balbus's came closer to what seemed true.