On the Nature of the Gods

CICERO

106–43 BC

On the Nature of the Gods

De natura deorum

Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited



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On the Nature of the Gods · Cicero (106–43 BC)

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INTRODUCTION

Do the gods exist, what are they like, and do they care about us? In 45 BC, grieving his daughter Tullia and shut out of politics by Caesar's dictatorship, Cicero set out to bring the whole of Greek philosophy into Latin. *On the Nature of the Gods* is his account of the great question of religion, dedicated to Marcus Brutus, who would help kill Caesar a few months later.

The book stages a conversation at the house of Gaius Cotta in Rome, with Cicero as a young listener. Velleius speaks for Epicurus: the gods are blessed, eternal, shaped like humans, and wholly unconcerned with the world. Cotta, an Academic skeptic who is also one of Rome's high priests, demolishes him. Balbus then gives the Stoic case at length: a divine reason runs through the world, whose order and beauty—the stars, the seasons, the design of the human body—prove that it was made by gods and for gods and humans. In Book III Cotta takes that apart too, ending on the problem of evil: why do the good suffer and the wicked thrive?

Cicero leaves the verdict open, saying only that Balbus' view seemed to him closer to the truth. The dialogue preserves much of what we know about ancient theology and was read eagerly by early Christian writers, Renaissance humanists, and Enlightenment skeptics such as Hume.

Book I

The Epicurean case and its refutation
Velleius sets out Epicurus' untroubled gods; Cotta, the Academic, takes them apart.

CICERO 1.1 Many questions in philosophy have by no means been adequately cleared up so far. But the inquiry into the nature of the gods is, as you know very well, Brutus, especially difficult and obscure. It is both a most noble subject for the mind's understanding and necessary for regulating religion. The views of the most learned men on it are so varied and so much at odds that this fact alone ought to be strong evidence that the starting point of philosophy ... knowledge, and that the Academics were wise to withhold assent from uncertain matters. For what is more disgraceful than rashness? And what is so rash, and so unworthy of a wise man's seriousness and consistency, as either to hold a false opinion or to defend without the least hesitation what has not been thoroughly grasped and understood?[1]

1.2 Take this very question. Most people have said that gods exist, which is the most probable view and the one to which nature leads us all. Protagoras said he was in doubt, and Diagoras of Melos and Theodorus of Cyrene thought there were no gods at all. But those who have said that gods exist are so varied and so divided that it would be an endless task to list their

1 Marcus Junius Brutus, the future assassin of Caesar, is the dedicatee of the work. The manuscripts are damaged here; the usual restoration makes ignorance the starting point of philosophy.

views.[2] For much is said about the forms of the gods, about their locations and dwelling places, and about their way of life, and the philosophers fight over these points with the greatest disagreement. But the issue that most of all holds the heart of the matter is this: do the gods do nothing, undertake nothing, and stay free of all care and management of things? Or, on the contrary, were all things made and established by them from the beginning, and are they ruled and moved by them for infinite time? It is here above all [that] there is great disagreement, and unless it is settled, human beings must remain in the deepest error and in ignorance of the most important matters.[3]

1.3 For there are, and have been, philosophers who held that the gods take no care whatever of human affairs. If their view is true, what piety can there be, what holiness, what religion? All these must be offered purely and chastely to the divine power of the gods only on condition that the gods take notice of them, and that the immortal gods have granted something to the human race. But if the gods are neither able nor willing to help us, if they do not care at all and pay no attention to what we do, if nothing can flow from them into human life, what reason is there for us to offer the immortal gods any worship, honors or prayers? Piety, like the other virtues, cannot exist in the mere show of pretense; and with piety, holiness and religion must also be done away with. Once they are gone, disorder in life follows, and great confusion;

1.4 and I am not sure that, once piety toward the gods is abolished, trust and the fellowship of the human race, and justice, the single most excellent virtue, are not abolished as well. But there are other philosophers, and great and distinguished ones, who hold that the whole world is managed and ruled by the mind and reason of the gods. And not only that: they hold that the same gods take thought and make provision for human life.

2 Protagoras of Abdera (5th century BC) was a famous sophist; Diagoras of Melos and Theodorus of Cyrene were notorious atheists.

3 Square brackets mark words that the editor, Plasberg, thought were later additions to the text.

For they think that crops and everything else the earth produces, and the weather, the changes of the seasons and the shifts in the sky, through which all that the earth brings forth ripens and matures, are granted to the human race by the immortal gods. They collect many such things, which will be discussed in these books, and which are of a kind that makes it seem almost as if the immortal gods had fashioned them expressly for human use. Against these philosophers Carneades argued at such length that he roused people who were not sluggish to a desire to search out the truth.[4]

1.5 For there is no subject on which not only the unlearned but even the learned disagree so much. Since their opinions are so varied and so much at odds with one another, one thing is certainly possible: that none of them is true. Another is certainly impossible: that more than one is.

On this subject I can both placate well-meaning critics and refute envious detractors, so that the one group will regret having found fault and the other will be glad to have learned something. For those who advise us as friends should be instructed; those who attack us as enemies should be driven off.

1.6 I see that my books, several of which I have published in a short time, have caused a great deal of talk, and of various kinds. Some people wonder where this sudden enthusiasm of mine for philosophy came from; others want to know what I hold as certain on each subject. I have also noticed that many find it strange that I should have chosen to approve, of all philosophies, the one that snatches away the light and pours a kind of night over things, and that I should unexpectedly have taken up the defense of a school deserted and long since abandoned. But I did not take up philosophy suddenly. From my earliest youth I have spent no small effort and care on its study, and when I seemed least to be doing philosophy, I was doing it most. My speeches show this, packed as they are with the maxims of philosophers; so do my friendships with the most learned men,

4 Carneades (2nd century BC), head of the skeptical Academy, was famous for arguing both sides of every question.

who have always graced my house; and so do those eminent teachers who trained me, Diodotus, Philo, Antiochus and Posidonius.[5]

1.7 And if all the precepts of philosophy bear on how we live, I believe that in both public and private affairs I have put into practice what reason and learning prescribed. But if anyone asks what led me to commit these things to writing so late, there is nothing I can explain more easily. When I was languishing in idleness, and the state of the commonwealth was such that it had to be governed by the counsel and care of one man, I thought, first of all, that philosophy ought to be expounded to our countrymen for the sake of the commonwealth itself. I judged it very important for the honor and glory of our city that subjects so weighty and so splendid should be available in Latin literature as well.[6]

1.8 And I regret my undertaking all the less because I can easily see how many people I have stirred to the pursuit not only of learning but also of writing. Many who had been educated in Greek teachings were unable to share what they had learned with their fellow citizens, because they doubted that what they had received from the Greeks could be expressed in Latin. In this area I think we have made such progress that not even in richness of vocabulary are we outdone by the Greeks.

1.9 I was also driven to turn to these studies by grief of mind, brought on by a great and heavy blow of fortune. Had I been able to find any greater relief for it, I would not have taken refuge in this one above all. And I could have made no better use of philosophy itself than by devoting myself not only to reading books but to treating the whole of philosophy. All its parts and all its members are most easily understood when entire questions are worked out in writing. For there is a remarkable continuity and sequence of subjects, so that each

5 Diodotus was a Stoic who lived in Cicero's house; Philo of Larissa headed the skeptical Academy, Antiochus of Ascalon broke from it to found his "Old Academy," and Posidonius of Rhodes was a leading Stoic.

6 The one man is Julius Caesar, dictator at the time.

seems linked to the next and all seem fitted and bound together.[7]

1.10 As for those who ask what I myself think on each question, they are more curious than they need be. In argument we should look for the weight of reasoning rather than of authority. In fact, the authority of those who profess to teach often stands in the way of those who want to learn: they stop applying their own judgment and take as settled whatever they see decided by the teacher they approve of. Nor do I usually approve of what we are told about the Pythagoreans. When they asserted something in debate and were asked why it was so, they are said to have replied, "He himself said so"—and "he himself" was Pythagoras. So powerful was a judgment formed in advance that authority prevailed even without reasoning.[8]

1.11 Those who are surprised that I have followed this school above all have, I think, been answered sufficiently in my four books of *Academics*. Nor have I taken up the defense of a deserted and abandoned cause. Views do not die when the people who held them die, though they may miss the light their author shed on them. Take this method in philosophy of arguing against everything and openly passing judgment on nothing: it began with Socrates, was revived by Arcesilaus, was strengthened by Carneades, and has flourished right down to our own time—though I understand that in Greece itself it is now all but orphaned. I think this has happened not through any fault of the Academy but through the dullness of men. For if it is a great thing to master each school separately, how much greater to master them all! Yet that is what must be done by those whose aim is to speak both against and for all the philosophers in order to find the truth.[9]

1.12 I do not claim to have attained the ability for so great and difficult a task; I do declare that I have pursued it. Yet it cannot

7 Cicero's daughter Tullia died in February 45 BC.

8 Pythagoras of Samos (6th century BC) founded a philosophical and religious community in southern Italy.

be that those who philosophize in this way have nothing to follow. I have discussed this point more carefully elsewhere, but because some people are so slow and hard to teach, it seems they need reminding more often. We are not people to whom nothing seems true. We are people who say that certain false things are attached to all true ones, with so close a resemblance that they contain no sure mark for judging and assenting. From this arises the further view that many things are probable: although they are not firmly grasped, still, because they present a distinctive and clear appearance, the wise man's life can be guided by them.

1.13 But now, to free myself from all ill will, I will set out the views of the philosophers on the nature of the gods. At this point it seems that everyone should be summoned to judge which of them is true. I will think the Academy presumptuous only if they all agree, or if someone is found who has discovered what is true. So I feel like crying out, as in *The Young Comrades*: "Gods, all my countrymen, all you young men— / I cry, I demand, I beseech, I beg, I weep and I implore your protection!"—and not over some utterly trivial matter, like that character who complains that capital crimes are being committed in the city: "A courtesan refuses to take money from a loving friend!"—[10]

1.14 but so that they may come, learn and consider what we ought to think about religion, piety, holiness, rites, good faith and oaths; about temples, shrines and solemn sacrifices; and about the very auspices over which I preside (for all these things bear on this question about the immortal gods). Surely so great a disagreement among the most learned men on the greatest of subjects will force even those who think they hold something certain to begin to doubt.[11]

9 The *Academics* (Academica) is Cicero's work on the theory of knowledge, written earlier in 45 BC. Arcesilaus (3rd century BC) turned Plato's Academy toward skepticism.

10 *The Young Comrades* (Synephebi) was a comedy by Caecilius Statius (2nd century BC), adapted from a Greek play by Menander.

11 Cicero had been a member of the college of augurs since 53 BC.

AT COTTA'S HOUSE

Cicero joins Cotta, Velleius and Balbus during the Latin Festival; Velleius is asked to begin.

CICERO 1.15 I have noticed this on many other occasions, but most of all when the immortal gods were discussed very thoroughly and carefully at the house of my friend Gaius Cotta. I had come to see him during the Latin Festival at his own request and invitation, and found him sitting in an alcove, debating with the senator Gaius Velleius, whom the Epicureans at that time ranked first among our countrymen. Quintus Lucilius Balbus was there too, who had made such progress in Stoicism that he was compared with the leading Greeks of that school.[12]

COTTA As soon as Cotta saw me, he said, "You've come at just the right moment. A heated argument on a great subject is starting up between me and Velleius, and given your interests it is quite fitting that you join in."

CICERO 1.16 "Well, I think so too," I said, "that I have come, as you say, at the right moment. For here you are, three leaders of three schools, gathered together. If Marcus Piso were here, no philosophy—none, at least, of those held in honor—would be without its place."[13]

COTTA Then Cotta said, "If the book that our friend Antiochus recently sent to Balbus here is telling the truth, you have no reason to miss your friend Piso. For Antiochus holds that the Stoics agree with the Peripatetics in substance and differ from them in words. I would like to know what you think of that book, Balbus."

BALBUS "Me?" he said. "I am amazed that Antiochus, a man exceptionally sharp, did not see the vast difference between the

12 Gaius Aurelius Cotta (consul 75 BC) was a pontiff and an Academic. The Latin Festival was an annual holiday of the Latin peoples celebrated on the Alban Mount.

13 Marcus Pupius Piso (consul 61 BC) was a follower of the Peripatetic school.

Stoics, who separate the honorable from the advantageous not in name but in their whole kind, and the Peripatetics, who mix the honorable with the advantageous, so that the two differ from each other in magnitude and, as it were, by degrees, not in kind. This is no small disagreement about words but a very great one about things. But more on this another time. Now, if you agree, let us go on with what we began."

COTTA 1.17 "I do agree," said Cotta. "But so that our new arrival"—looking at me—"does not miss what is going on: we were discussing the nature of the gods. Since it seemed to me very obscure, as it always does, I was asking Velleius for Epicurus' view. So, Velleius," he said, "if you don't mind, go back over what you had begun."

VELLEIUS "I will, though he has come here as an ally not for me but for you. For you both," he said with a smile, "learned from the same Philo to know nothing."

CICERO Then I said: "What we learned is Cotta's business. But I don't want you to think that I have come as his ally. I have come as a listener—and an impartial one, free in my judgment, bound by no constraint that would oblige me to defend some fixed view whether I like it or not."

VELLEIUS ATTACKS PLATO AND THE STOICS

Plato's craftsman god, the Stoics' Providence and a round, spinning world-god are ridiculed as dreams.

VELLEIUS 1.18 Then Velleius, with great confidence, as is the way with those people, fearing nothing so much as seeming to be in doubt about anything, as if he had just come down from the council of the gods and from Epicurus' spaces between the worlds, said: "Listen—not to worthless, made-up views; not to the craftsman and builder of the world, the god of Plato's *Timaeus*; not to the Stoics' fortune-telling old woman Pronoia, whom in Latin we may call Providence; nor yet to the world itself as a god endowed with mind and senses, round, fiery and revolving.

These are the monstrosities and marvels of philosophers who are not reasoning but dreaming."[14]

1.19 With what eyes of the mind could your Plato have seen that great workshop in which he has the world assembled and built by god? What engineering was there, what tools, what levers, what machines, what workmen for so vast a task? How could air, fire, water and earth obey and submit to the will of the architect? And where did those five shapes come from, out of which everything else is formed, so neatly suited to affecting the mind and producing sensations? It would take too long to go through all of it—things such that they seem to have been wished for rather than discovered;

1.20 but this one takes the prize: that a man who presented the world not only as born but as practically handmade should have said it will be eternal. Do you think this man had even tasted, as they say, with the tip of his lips *physiologia*—that is, the science of nature—when he believes that anything that has come into being can be eternal? What joining together cannot be taken apart? Or what is there that has a beginning and no end? As for your Pronoia, Balbus: if she is the same one, I ask what I asked a moment ago about the workmen, the machines, the whole design and equipment of the entire work. If she is a different one, why did she make the world mortal, and not eternal as Plato's god did?

1.21 I ask you both why the builders of the world suddenly appeared after sleeping through countless ages. For if there was no world, that does not mean there were no ages. (By "ages" I do not now mean those made up of numbers of days and nights in yearly courses; I admit those could not have been produced without the revolution of the world. But there was a kind of eternity stretching from infinite time, which no marking off of periods measured; yet in terms of extent we can understand

14 Epicurus placed his gods in the intermundia, the spaces between the worlds. Pronoia is Greek for "providence"; Plato's craftsman god appears in his dialogue *Timaeus*.

what it was like, since it cannot even be conceived that there was ever

1.22 a time when there was no time.) In that vast stretch, then, Balbus, I ask why your Pronoia sat idle. Was she avoiding work? But work does not touch a god, and there was none to do, since all natures—sky, fires, lands, seas—obeyed the divine power. And what made god want to decorate the world with constellations and lights, like an aedile? If it was so that god himself might live better, then evidently he had lived for an infinite time before in darkness, as if in a hovel. And then: are we to think he delights in the variety with which we see the sky and the earth adorned? What delight can that be to a god? And if it were one, he could not have done without it for so long.[15]

1.23 Or were these things, as you usually say, set up by god for the sake of human beings? For the wise? Then so vast a construction was made for a handful. For fools? But first, there was no reason for god to do favors for the wicked. Second, what did he achieve, since all fools are beyond doubt utterly miserable—above all because they are fools (for what can we call more miserable than folly?), and then because life holds so many hardships that the wise soften them by setting advantages against them, while fools can neither avoid them as they come nor bear them when they are present? As for those who said that the world itself is a living and wise being, they utterly failed to see into what shape the nature of an intelligent mind could fit. I will speak of this a little later; for now, just this much:

1.24 I will marvel at the dullness of those who want an immortal and blessed living being to be round, because Plato says there is no shape more beautiful. Yet to me a cylinder, a cube, a cone or a pyramid seems more beautiful. And what life is assigned to that round god? Why, to be whirled around at a speed so great that nothing equal to it can even be imagined. I do not see where in that a steady mind and a blessed life can find a footing. And what would be distressing in our own bodies

15 Aediles were Roman magistrates who decorated the city with statues and lamps for public festivals; Latin *signa* means both "statues" and "constellations."

if we felt even the slightest trace of it, why should the same not be considered distressing in a god? For the earth, since it is part of the world, is surely also part of the god. Yet we see that vast regions of the earth are uninhabitable and uncultivated, some scorched by the sun's nearness, others frozen with snow and frost because the sun is far away. If the world is a god, then these regions, since they are parts of the world, must be counted as limbs of the god, some of them burning, some of them frozen.

A HISTORY OF ERRORS

Velleius reviews what every philosopher from Thales to Chrysippus has said about the gods.

VELLEIUS 1.25 So much for your views, Balbus. But as to what sort … is, I will go back to the earliest of their predecessors. Thales of Miletus, who was the first to inquire into such matters, said that water is the origin of things, and that god is the mind that shaped everything out of water—fine, if gods can exist without sensation. And why did he join mind to water, if mind itself can exist without a body? Anaximander's view, on the other hand, is that the gods are born, rising and setting at long intervals, and that they are countless worlds. But how can we conceive of a god who is not eternal?[16]

1.26 Next, Anaximenes declared that air is god, and that it comes into being and is immeasurable, infinite and always in motion. As if formless air could be god, especially when a god ought to have not just some form but the most beautiful one! Or as if everything that has come into being were not bound to die! Then Anaxagoras, who was taught by Anaximenes, was the first to hold that the ordering and measure of all things were designed and brought about by the power and reason of an infinite mind. In this he failed to see that there can be no motion that is joined to sensation and also [in] continuous union with the infinite, nor any sensation at all in which the whole being is

16 Thales and Anaximander, both of Miletus (6th century BC), were the earliest Greek natural philosophers.

not itself struck and feels the blow. Further, if he meant that mind to be some kind of living creature, there will have to be something inside it from which the creature gets its name. But what is more inward than mind? So let it be surrounded by an outer body;[17]

1.27 and since he does not accept that, a mind bare and simple, joined to nothing through which it could feel, seems to escape the reach and grasp of our understanding. Alcmaeon of Croton, who granted divinity to the sun, the moon and the other stars, and to the mind besides, did not realize that he was giving immortality to mortal things. Pythagoras, for his part, held that mind extends through and pervades the whole of nature, and that our own minds are plucked from it. He did not see that god would be torn apart and mangled by the separation of human minds, and that whenever those minds were miserable, as happens to most of them, a part of god would be miserable—which cannot be.[18]

1.28 And why would the human mind be ignorant of anything, if it were god? Further, if that god of his were nothing but mind, how could he be either fixed into the world or poured through it? Next Xenophanes, who held that the universe as a whole, being infinite, with mind added to it, was god, will be criticized like the others over mind itself, and more severely over infinity, in which nothing can either have sensation or be joined to anything. As for Parmenides, he invents something fanciful: a crown-like thing (he calls it στεφάνην [crown]), a continuous ring of glowing light that encircles the heavens, and this he calls god. In it no one can imagine either a divine shape or sensation.[19] He has many other monstrosities too. He refers war, dis-

17 Anaximenes of Miletus (6th century BC) made air the first principle; Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (5th century BC) taught that mind ordered the universe.

18 Alcmaeon of Croton (early 5th century BC) was a physician and natural philosopher associated with the Pythagoreans.

19 Xenophanes of Colophon (6th century BC) was a poet-philosopher who attacked human-shaped gods. Parmenides of Elea (early 5th century BC) set out his philosophy in a poem.

cord, desire and other things of that kind to god, though these are wiped out by disease, or sleep, or forgetfulness, or the passage of time. He says the same about the stars, but since I have already criticized that in another, I may pass over it in his case.

1.29 Empedocles, who goes wrong in many other ways, slips most disgracefully in his view of the gods. He holds that the four substances from which he thinks everything is composed are divine, yet it is plain that they come into being and are extinguished, and that they lack all sensation. Nor does Protagoras, who says he has nothing at all clear to say about the gods—whether they exist or not, or what they are like—seem to have any inkling of the nature of the gods. What about Democritus? He counts among the gods now the images and their revolutions, now the nature that pours out and emits the images, now our own thought and understanding. Is he not caught in the greatest error? And since he also denies that anything at all is eternal, because nothing remains permanently in its own state, does he not abolish god so completely as to leave no notion of him whatever? And the air that Diogenes of Apollonia treats as god—what sensation can it have, or what form of a god?[20]

1.30 As for Plato's inconsistency, it would take a long time to describe. In the *Timaeus* he says that the father of this world cannot be named; in the books of the *Laws* he thinks one should not inquire at all into what god is. And his wish that god be wholly without body (what the Greeks call ἀσώματον [bodiless])—what that could be like is beyond understanding. Such a god must lack sensation, must lack practical wisdom too, must lack pleasure, and all of these we include in our notion of the gods. He also says, both in the *Timaeus* and in the *Laws,* that the world is god, and the heavens, and the stars, and the earth, and minds, and the gods we have received from the institutions of our ancestors. These claims are plainly false in themselves and sharply inconsistent with one another.

20 Empedocles of Acragas, Protagoras of Abdera and Democritus of Abdera were 5th-century BC thinkers; Democritus' atomism was the basis of Epicurus' physics. Diogenes of Apollonia (5th century BC) made air the first principle of all things.

1.31 Xenophon, too, makes nearly the same mistakes in fewer words. In his record of what Socrates said, he has Socrates argue that one ought not to ask about the form of god; and he has the same Socrates call both the sun and the mind god, and speak now of one god, now of several. These are almost the same errors as those we are pointing out in Plato.[21]

1.32 Antisthenes too, in the book entitled *On Nature*, says that the gods of popular belief are many but the god of nature is one, and so abolishes the power and nature of the gods. Speusippus does much the same. Following his uncle Plato, he speaks of a certain force by which all things are governed, and that a living one, and so tries to root the knowledge of the gods out of our minds.[22]

1.33 Aristotle, in the third book of his *On Philosophy*, creates great confusion by disagreeing with his teacher Plato. Now he attributes all divinity to mind; now he says that the world itself is god; now he sets some other being over the world and assigns it the role of directing and maintaining the world's motion by a kind of reverse rotation; then he says that the fiery heat of the heavens is god, not realizing that the heavens are part of the world, which he himself has elsewhere designated as god. But how can that divine sensation of the heavens be preserved amid such great speed? And where, then, are all those many gods, if we count the heavens too as god? And when the same man wants god to be without body, he robs him of all sensation, and of practical wisdom too. Besides, how can the world move if it lacks a body? Or how, if it is always moving itself, can it be at rest and blessed?[23]

1.34 Nor is his fellow pupil Xenocrates any wiser in this area. In his books *On the Nature of the Gods* no divine form is described. He says there are eight gods: the five that go by the names of the wandering stars; one composed of all the stars fixed in the heav-

21 Xenophon's record of Socrates' conversations is the *Memorabilia* (Memoirs of Socrates).

22 Antisthenes was a follower of Socrates and a forerunner of the Cynics. Speusippus, Plato's nephew, succeeded him as head of the Academy.

23 *On Philosophy* was an early dialogue of Aristotle's, now lost.

ens, as if of scattered limbs, which must be regarded as a single god; as the seventh he adds the sun, and as the eighth the moon. In what sense these could be blessed is impossible to understand. From the same school of Plato came Heraclides of Pontus, who stuffed his books with childish stories. Even so, he thinks now the world, now mind, is divine; he also attributes divinity to the wandering stars; he deprives god of sensation and wants his form to be changeable; and in the same book he again counts the earth and the heavens among the gods.[24]

1.35 Nor can we tolerate the inconsistency of Theophrastus. Now he assigns divine rule to mind, now to the heavens, and then to the constellations and stars of the heavens. Nor should we listen to his pupil Strato, the one called "the Natural Philosopher," who holds that all divine power resides in nature, which contains the causes of birth, growth and decay but lacks all sensation and shape.[25]

1.36 Zeno—to come now to your own school, Balbus—thinks that the law of nature is divine, and that it has the power of commanding what is right and forbidding the opposite. How he makes this law a living being we cannot understand; and we certainly want god to be a living being. In another place the same man says that the ether is god—if a god without sensation can be understood at all, one who never presents himself to us in our prayers, or our wishes, or our vows. In other books he thinks that a certain reason pervading the whole of nature is endowed with divine power. He attributes the same divinity to the stars, and then to the years, the months and the seasons.[26] And when he interprets Hesiod's *Theogony*, that is, *The Origin of the Gods*, he does away entirely with the customary and accepted notions of the gods. He counts neither Jupiter nor Juno nor Vesta nor any-

24 Xenocrates succeeded Speusippus as head of the Academy; Heraclides of Pontus was another pupil of Plato. The "wandering stars" are the five planets known in antiquity.

25 Theophrastus succeeded Aristotle as head of the Peripatetic school; Strato of Lampsacus succeeded Theophrastus.

26 Zeno of Citium (c. 334–262 BC) founded the Stoic school; he is not the Epicurean Zeno whom Cotta mentions at 1.59.

one so named among the gods, but teaches that these names were given, by a kind of symbolism, to lifeless and mute things.[27]

1.37 His pupil Aristo holds a view in no less serious error: he thinks that the form of god cannot be understood, says that there is no sensation in the gods, and is altogether in doubt whether god is a living being or not. Cleanthes, who studied under Zeno together with the man I have just named, says now that the world itself is god; now he gives this name to the mind and soul of all nature; now he judges that the surest god is that remotest and highest heat, spread out on every side, outermost, encircling and embracing all things, which is called ether. And in the books he wrote against pleasure, as if raving, the same man now invents a certain form and appearance for the gods, now assigns all divinity to the stars, now thinks that nothing is more divine than reason. So it turns out that the god we know with the mind, and want to lodge in the mind's conception as in an imprint, appears absolutely nowhere.[28] Persaeus, another pupil of the same Zeno, says that those men were regarded as gods who had discovered something of great benefit for civilized life, and that useful and healthful things themselves were called by the names of gods. So he did not even say that these were discoveries of the gods, but that they were themselves divine;[29]

1.38 and what could be more absurd than either to give the honor due to gods to things that are base and ugly, or to place among the gods men already wiped out by death, whose whole worship would consist in mourning?

1.39 Then there is Chrysippus, who is regarded as the craftiest interpreter of the Stoics' dreams. He gathers a great crowd of unknown gods—so unknown that we cannot form any picture of them even by guesswork, though our mind seems able to paint anything at all in thought. He says that divine power resides in

27 Hesiod (c. 700 BC) was a Greek poet; his *Theogony* tells of the birth and genealogy of the gods.
28 Aristo of Chios was a pupil of Zeno. Cleanthes (c. 331–232 BC) succeeded Zeno as head of the Stoic school.
29 Persaeus of Citium was a pupil and housemate of Zeno.

reason and in the soul and mind of universal nature. He says that the world itself is god, and the universal outpouring of its soul; then the world's own ruling part, which operates in mind and reason; and the common nature of things, universal and containing everything; then the power of fate and the necessity of future events; besides these, fire and the ether I mentioned before; then the things that by nature flow and pass into one another, such as water, earth and air; the sun, the moon, the stars, and the totality of things in which all is contained; and even those human beings who have attained immortality.[30]

1.40 He also argues that the ether is the one people call Jupiter; that the air which pervades the seas is Neptune; and that the earth is the one called Ceres; and he works through the names of the other gods in a similar way. He also says that the force of the everlasting and eternal law, which is a kind of guide of life and teacher of duties, is Jupiter; and he calls the same thing the necessity of fate and the eternal truth of future events. None of this is such that divine power seems to reside in it.

1.41 and all this is in the first book of his *On the Nature of the Gods*. In the second he tries to adapt the tales of Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer to what he himself had said about the immortal gods in the first book, so that even the most ancient poets, who never had the slightest inkling of these ideas, would seem to have been Stoics. Diogenes of Babylon follows him in the book entitled *On Minerva*: he detaches Jupiter's giving birth and the virgin's origin from myth by turning them into natural science.[31]

1.42 What I have set out are, for the most part, not the judgments of philosophers but the dreams of madmen. Indeed, they are not much more absurd than the things poured out by the voices of the poets, which have done harm by their very charm. The poets have presented gods inflamed with anger and raging

30 Chrysippus (c. 280–207 BC), the third head of the Stoic school, was its chief systematizer.

31 Orpheus and Musaeus were legendary early poets to whom religious poems were ascribed. Diogenes of Babylon (2nd century BC) headed the Stoic school; in myth Minerva was born from Jupiter's head.

with lust, and have made us see their wars, battles, fights and wounds; their hatreds, too, their quarrels and feuds, their births and deaths, their complaints and laments, their passions let loose in every kind of excess, their adulteries and chains, their couplings with the human race, and mortals born of an immortal.

1.43 With the poets' error we may couple the monstrous tales of the Magi and the madness of the Egyptians, which is of the same kind, and also the opinions of the common people, which, through ignorance of the truth, are full of the greatest inconsistency.[32]

VELLEIUS: EPICURUS' GODS

Every people has a preconception of gods; they are blessed, eternal, human in form, and untroubled by any work.

VELLEIUS Anyone who considers how thoughtlessly and rashly all this is said ought to revere Epicurus and count him among the very beings this inquiry is about. For he alone saw, first, that the gods exist, because nature itself had imprinted the notion of them on the minds of all. What nation or race of human beings is there that does not have, without being taught, some preconception of the gods? Epicurus calls it πρόλημψιν [preconception], that is, a kind of outline of a thing grasped in advance by the mind, without which nothing can be understood, investigated or discussed. We learned the force and usefulness of this reasoning from that heavenly volume of Epicurus, *On the Rule and the Criterion*.[33]

1.44 So you see that the foundation of this inquiry has been splendidly laid. For since this belief was not established by any institution, custom or law, and the agreement of everyone without exception remains firm, it must be understood that gods exist, because we have implanted, or rather innate, notions of them. And what the nature of all people agrees on must be

32 The Magi were the priestly caste of the Persians.
33 Epicurus' lost work known as the *Canon* ("Rule") dealt with the criteria of truth.

true. So it must be admitted that gods exist. Since this is accepted by nearly everyone—not only by philosophers but also by the uneducated—we admit that this too is accepted: that we have this "preconception" of the gods, as I called it before, or "prenotion" (for new things must be given new names, just as Epicurus himself called it πρόληψιν [preconception],

1.45 a word no one had used for it before)—this, then, we have, so that we think the gods blessed and immortal. For the same nature that gave us an outline of the gods themselves has engraved on our minds that we should hold them eternal and blessed. If that is so, Epicurus rightly stated the principle that what is blessed and eternal neither has any trouble itself nor causes trouble for another, and so is subject neither to anger nor to favor, since everything of that kind is a mark of weakness.

If we were seeking nothing else than to worship the gods with piety and to be freed from superstition, enough would have been said. For the exalted nature of the gods would be worshiped by human piety, since it is both eternal and supremely blessed (for whatever excels deserves rightful veneration); and all fear of the power and anger of the gods would have been driven out, since it is understood that both anger and favor are excluded from a blessed and immortal nature, and once these are removed, no fears threaten us from the gods above. But to confirm this belief, the mind inquires into the form of god, his life, and the activity and working of his mind.[34]

1.46 As for form, nature partly prompts us and reason partly teaches us. From nature, all of us, of all nations, have no other image of the gods than a human one; for what other form has ever appeared to anyone, awake or asleep? But so that not everything is referred back to primary notions, reason itself declares the same thing.

1.47 for since it seems fitting that the most excellent nature, either because it is blessed or because it is eternal, should also be the most beautiful, what arrangement of limbs, what shaping

34 Superstition (*superstitio*) is fearful, excessive religiosity; Balbus distinguishes it from religion at 2.72.

of features, what figure, what appearance can be more beautiful than the human? You Stoics, Balbus (for my friend Cotta says one thing one moment and another the next), usually describe, when you portray the craftsmanship and workmanship of the gods, how everything in the human figure is suited not only for use but also for beauty;

1.48 and if the human figure surpasses the form of all living beings, and god is a living being, then god certainly has the figure that is the most beautiful of all. And since it is agreed that the gods are supremely blessed, and no one can be blessed without virtue, nor can virtue exist without reason, nor reason be found anywhere except in human form, it must be admitted that the gods have human appearance.

1.49 Yet that appearance is not a body but a quasi-body; it has no blood, but quasi-blood. These points were discovered more acutely and expressed more subtly by Epicurus than just anyone could grasp; still, relying on your intelligence, I am discussing them more briefly than the subject demands. Epicurus, who not only sees hidden and deeply buried things with his mind but handles them as if with his hand, teaches that the power and nature of the gods is such that, first, it is discerned not by the senses but by the mind. It does not have solidity or numerical identity, like the things he calls στερέμνια [solids] because of their firmness; rather, it is perceived through images, by their likeness and their succession. Since an endless series of closely similar images arises from countless atoms and flows toward the gods, our mind, fixed intently upon those images with the greatest pleasure, grasps what a blessed and eternal nature is.

1.50 The supreme power of infinity, moreover, is most worthy of great and careful contemplation. In it we must understand that nature is such that all things correspond equally to their equals. Epicurus calls this ἰσονομίαν [equilibrium], that is, an even distribution. From this, then, it follows that if there is so great a multitude of mortals, there is no smaller number of immortals; and if the things that destroy are countless, the things that preserve must also be infinite.

And you Stoics, Balbus, are in the habit of asking us what the life of the gods is like, and how they spend their days.

1.51 it is, clearly, a life than which nothing more blessed, nothing more abounding in every good, can be imagined. For god does nothing, is entangled in no occupations, undertakes no labors. He rejoices in his own wisdom and virtue, and knows for certain that he will always be in pleasures that are both the greatest and eternal.

1.52 This god we may rightly call blessed; yours, on the other hand, is the most overworked of all. For if the world itself is god, what can be less restful than to revolve around the axis of the heavens at astonishing speed without a moment's pause? Yet nothing is blessed unless it is at rest. Or if there is some god within the world who rules and steers it, who maintains the courses of the stars, the changes of the seasons, and the alternations and orderly sequences of things, and who, surveying lands and seas, protects the interests and lives of human beings—then surely he is entangled in troublesome and laborious business.

1.53 We, by contrast, place the blessed life in tranquility of mind and freedom from all duties. For the same man who taught us everything else taught us that the world was made by nature; that there was no need of any construction; and that the thing you say cannot be done without divine skill is so easy that nature will make, is making and has made countless worlds. Because you do not see how nature could do this without some mind, you behave like tragic poets: when you cannot work out the ending of your plot, you take refuge in a god.[35]

1.54 You would certainly not need his help if you could see the vast extent of space, immense and unbounded in every direction. The mind throws itself into it and strains forward, traveling so far and wide that it never sees any final shore on which to come to rest. In this immensity of breadth, length and height there flies about an infinite quantity of countless atoms. Though separated by the void, they nevertheless cling together and,

35 The allusion is to the "god from the machine" who resolves the plot at the end of some Greek tragedies.

catching hold of one another, form continuous masses. From this arise those forms and shapes of things that you think cannot be produced without bellows and anvils. And so you have set over our necks an eternal master, for us to fear by day and by night. For who would not fear a god who foresees, considers and notices everything, who thinks everything is his concern—a meddlesome god, full of business?

1.55 From this came, first, that fated necessity of yours, which you call εἱμαρμένην [destiny], so that you say whatever happens has flowed from eternal truth and an unbroken chain of causes. But what value should be placed on a philosophy to which, as to old women—and uneducated ones at that—everything seems to happen by fate? Next comes your μαντικὴ [mantic art], which in Latin is called divination. If we were willing to listen to you, we would be steeped in so much superstition that we would have to revere soothsayers, augurs, fortune-tellers, prophets and interpreters of dreams.[36]

1.56 Released from these terrors by Epicurus and set free, we do not fear beings who, as we understand, neither create any trouble for themselves nor seek to cause it for another; and we worship with piety and holiness a nature that is excellent and supreme.

But I am afraid that, carried away by enthusiasm, I have gone on too long. Yet it was hard to leave so great and splendid a subject half-finished—though I ought to have been thinking less about speaking than about listening.

COTTA REPLIES

Easier to say what is false than what is true; is the universal belief in gods any proof?

COTTA 1.57 Then Cotta, in his usual friendly way, said: "Well, Velleius, if you had not said something, you certainly could not have heard anything from me. For I usually find it much easier

36 Soothsayers (*haruspices*) foretold the future by reading the entrails of sacrificed animals.

to see why a thing is false than why it is true; that has often happened to me, and it happened again just now as I was listening to you. If you asked me what I say the nature of the gods is, I might perhaps give no answer at all. If you asked whether I think it is such as you have just set out, I would say that nothing seems to me less likely."

But before I tackle the arguments you have made, I will tell you what I think of you yourself.

1.58 I often seem to have heard your close friend Lucius Crassus rank you, without hesitation, above every Roman, and say that only a few Epicureans from Greece could be compared with you. But since I knew he was extraordinarily fond of you, I thought his goodwill made him say it rather too generously. For my part, though I hesitate to praise a man to his face, I judge that you have spoken lucidly on an obscure and difficult subject, rich not only in ideas but also in language more elegant than your school usually uses.[37]

1.59 When I was in Athens I often went to hear Zeno, whom our Philo used to call the "coryphaeus" [chorus leader] of the Epicureans. I did so on Philo's own advice, I believe so that once I had learned from the leader of the Epicureans how those doctrines were stated, I could more easily judge how well they were refuted. He did not speak like most of them, then, but in your manner: clearly, weightily, elegantly. But what often happened to me with him happened again just now as I listened to you. I was vexed that so great a talent (you will pardon me for saying so) should have fallen into such trivial—not to say such foolish—opinions.[38]

1.60 Nor will I myself now offer anything better. For as I said a moment ago, in almost every subject, but most of all in natural philosophy, I could sooner say what is not the case than what is. Ask me what god is, or what god is like, and I shall take

37 Lucius Licinius Crassus (140–91 BC), the leading Roman orator of his generation.

38 Zeno of Sidon (c. 150–75 BC), a leading Epicurean in Athens, not the founder of Stoicism. Philo of Larissa was head of the Academy and teacher of both Cotta and Cicero.

Simonides as my authority. When the tyrant Hiero asked him this same question, he asked for one day to think it over. When Hiero asked him again the next day, he asked for two days. He kept doubling the number of days, and when Hiero in astonishment asked why he was doing this, he said, "Because the longer I consider it, the more obscure it seems to me." But I believe that Simonides—for tradition says he was not only a charming poet but also learned and wise in other respects—had so many clever and subtle ideas come into his mind that, unable to decide which of them was truest, he despaired of truth altogether.[39]

1.61 But your Epicurus (for I would rather argue with him than with you)—what does he say that would be worthy, I will not say of philosophy, but even of ordinary good sense?

The first question in the inquiry into the nature of the gods is whether the gods exist or not. "It is hard to deny it." I suppose so, if the question is put in a public assembly; but in a conversation of this kind, among friends gathered together, it is very easy. So I myself, a pontiff, who believe that the public rites and religious observances must be maintained with the utmost reverence—I would like to be persuaded of this first point, that the gods exist, not merely as a matter of opinion but as plain truth. For many things occur to me that are so disturbing that at times there seem to be no gods at all.[40]

1.62 But see how generously I am dealing with you: I will not touch on the points your school shares with the other philosophers, such as this very one. For almost all of them, and I myself above all, hold that the gods exist. So I do not dispute it; but I do not think the argument you offer is sound enough. You said that the fact that people of all nations and races believe it is a strong enough reason for us to admit that the gods exist. That argument is not only weak in itself but false as well. First, how do you know the beliefs of the nations? For my part, I think there are

39 Simonides of Ceos (c. 556–468 BC), lyric poet, spent his last years at the court of Hiero I, tyrant of Syracuse (478–467 BC).

40 Cotta belonged to the college of pontiffs, the body of priests that oversaw Rome's state religion.

many peoples so brutalized by savagery that they have no notion of gods at all.

1.63 What about Diagoras, who was called *Atheos* [the Atheist], and later Theodorus—did they not openly abolish the nature of the gods? As for Protagoras of Abdera, whom you mentioned just now, perhaps the greatest sophist of those times: he opened his book with the words "About the gods I cannot say either that they exist or that they do not exist," and for this he was banished by order of the Athenians from their city and its territory, and his books were burned in the assembly. That, I believe, has made many people slower to profess this view, since not even doubt had managed to escape punishment. What shall we say of temple-robbers, of the impious and of perjurers? "If ever Lucius Tubulus, / if Lupus or Carbo or Neptune's son," as Lucilius says, had believed that gods exist, would he have been such a perjurer, or so vile?[41]

1.64 So that argument of yours is not as well established a proof of what you want to show as it seems. But since it is an argument shared with other philosophers too, I will leave it aside for now; I prefer to turn to your school's own doctrines.

AGAINST ATOMS

Cotta attacks the atoms, the void and the infinite worlds of Democritus and Epicurus.

COTTA 1.65 I grant that the gods exist. Then teach me where they come from, where they are, and what they are like in body, mind and life; for that is what I want to know. For everything you exploit the reign and lawlessness of the atoms; out of them you mold and produce whatever turns up, as the saying goes. First of all, there are no such things. For there is nothing … that is empty of body, and every place is filled with bodies; so there can be no void and nothing indivisible.

1.66 I am now pouring forth these oracles of the natural philosophers. Whether they are true or false I do not know, but they

are nevertheless [probable and] closer to the truth than yours. Consider those outrageous notions of Democritus—or, even before him, of Leucippus: that there are certain tiny particles, some smooth, some rough, some round, some angular and hooked, some curved and, as it were, bent; and that from them the heavens and the earth were made, with no nature compelling it, but by a kind of chance collision. This view, Gaius Velleius, you have carried with you to your present time of life, and one could dislodge you from your whole way of life sooner than from that authority. For you decided you must be an Epicurean before you learned these doctrines. So you had no choice: either take these outrages into your mind or give up the name of the philosophy you had embraced.

1.67 for what would you take to stop being an Epicurean? "Nothing at all," you say, "would make me abandon the way to a blessed life, and the truth." Is that the truth, then? About the blessed life I raise no objection—though you think it does not exist even in a god unless he languishes in utter idleness. But where is the truth? In innumerable worlds, I suppose, some being born and others perishing at every tiniest moment of time? Or in indivisible particles producing such splendid works with no nature guiding them and no reason? But I am forgetting the generosity I had begun to show you a little while ago, and taking in too much. So I will concede that everything consists of indivisible particles; what has that to do with the point?

1.68 for it is the nature of the gods that is under inquiry. Suppose they are made of atoms; then they are not eternal. For whatever is made of atoms came into being at some time; if the gods came into being, there were no gods before they came into being; and if the gods had a beginning, they must also have an end, as you argued a little while ago about Plato's world. Where, then, is that "blessed and eternal" of yours, the two words by which you denote a god? When you try to make this out, you

41 Lucilius (c. 180–103 BC) was the Roman satirist; Lucius Hostilius Tubulus, a praetor, was notorious for taking bribes as a judge.

crawl into a thicket. For this is what you said: that a god has not a body but a quasi-body, not blood but quasi-blood.

1.69 You Epicureans do this very often. When you say something implausible and want to escape criticism, you put forward something utterly impossible, so that it would have been better to concede the very point in dispute than to resist so shamelessly. For example, Epicurus saw that if atoms were carried downward by their own weight, nothing would be in our power, since their motion would be fixed and necessary. So he discovered a way to escape necessity—something that had evidently escaped Democritus. He says that an atom, while it is carried straight down by its weight and heaviness, swerves very slightly.

1.70 to say this is more shameful than to be unable to defend what he wants. He does the same against the logicians. They teach that in every disjunction of the form "either yes or no," one of the two alternatives is true. He was terrified that if something like "Either Epicurus will be alive tomorrow or he will not" were granted, one or the other would become necessary; so he denied that the whole "either yes or no" is necessary. What could be more obtuse? Arcesilaus was pressing Zeno: he himself said that everything perceived by the senses was false, while Zeno said that some impressions were false, but not all. Epicurus feared that if a single impression were false, none would be true, so he declared that all the senses are messengers of truth. In none of this did he act other than very clumsily; for he took a heavier blow to ward off a lighter one.[42]

QUASI-BODY AND QUASI-BLOOD

Epicurus' evasions: the swerve, gods with quasi-bodies, and a founder who boasted he had no teacher.

COTTA 1.71 He does the same regarding the nature of the gods. While he avoids making them a compound of indivisible bodies,

42 Arcesilaus (316–241 BC), who turned the Academy toward skepticism, debated Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism.

for fear that destruction and dispersal would follow, he says that the gods do not have a body but a quasi-body, not blood but quasi-blood. It seems remarkable that one soothsayer does not laugh when he sees another; is it not more remarkable still that you Epicureans can keep a straight face among yourselves? "It is not a body but a quasi-body": I could understand what this meant if it were said of figures made of wax or clay; but what a quasi-body or quasi-blood is in a god, I cannot understand. Nor can you, Velleius, but you do not want to admit it.[43]

1.72 For you all recite, as if from dictation, the fantasies Epicurus dreamed up while yawning—though he boasted, as we see in his writings, that he had never had a teacher. I would easily have believed that even if he had not proclaimed it, just as I would believe the owner of a badly built house who boasted that he had not employed an architect. For there is no whiff of the Academy about him, none [even] of the Lyceum, not even of a schoolboy's education. He could have heard Xenocrates—what a man, by the immortal gods!—and some people think he did; he himself denies it, and I believe him more than anyone. He says he heard a certain Pamphilus, a pupil of Plato, at Samos (he lived there as a young man with his father and brothers, because his father Neocles had gone there as a settler in search of land; but since his little plot did not feed him well enough, I suppose, he became a schoolmaster);[44]

1.73 but Epicurus has an extraordinary contempt for this Platonist: so afraid is he of seeming ever to have learned anything. He is caught out in the case of Nausiphanes the Democritean: though he does not deny that he heard him, he still assails him with every kind of insult. And yet if he had not heard these Democritean doctrines, what had he heard? What is there in Epicurus' natural philosophy that does not come from Democritus? For though he changed some things—such as the swerve of the atoms I mentioned a moment ago—most of what he says is the

43 The quip goes back to Cato the Elder.

44 Xenocrates headed Plato's Academy from 339 to 314 BC; the Lyceum was Aristotle's school.

same: atoms, the void, images, the infinity of space and the countless number of worlds, their births and deaths—almost everything that makes up the account of nature.[45]

Now, what do you understand by that quasi-body and quasi-blood?

1.74 for I not only admit that you know these things better than I do, I am quite happy to accept it; but once they have been put into words, what is there that Velleius could understand and Cotta could not? So I understand what a body is and what blood is; what a quasi-body and quasi-blood are, I cannot understand in any way at all. And you are not concealing it from me, as Pythagoras used to with outsiders, nor are you deliberately speaking obscurely, like Heraclitus; but—just between ourselves—you do not understand it either.[46]

1.75 I see that what you contend is this: that there is a kind of appearance of the gods that has nothing compact, nothing solid, nothing sharply defined, nothing in relief, and is pure, light and translucent. So we shall say the same as of the Venus of Cos: that is not a body but the likeness of a body, and that blush, spread over her and mingled with whiteness, is not blood but a certain likeness of blood. In the same way, in the Epicurean god there is no reality, only likenesses of realities.[47]

Suppose I have been persuaded of something that cannot even be understood: show me the outlines and shapes of those shadowy gods of yours.

AGAINST HUMAN-SHAPED GODS

Cotta rejects the arguments for human form and asks what use limbs and organs would be to a god.

COTTA 1.76 There is no lack of arguments here with which you try to show that the gods have human form. First, that our

45 Nausiphanes of Teos (4th century BC), a follower of Democritus.
46 Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC) was nicknamed “the Obscure” for his riddling style.
47 The Venus of Cos was a celebrated painting by Apelles (4th century BC).

minds are so shaped and preconceived that when a human being thinks of a god, a human form comes to mind. Second, that since the divine nature surpasses all things, its form too must be the most beautiful, and no form is more beautiful than the human. As a third argument you put forward that the mind can have its home in no other shape.

1.77 so consider each of these in turn and what it is worth; for you seem to me to seize, as if by your own right, a proposition that is in no way plausible.

First of all, who has ever been so blind in contemplating things as not to see that these human forms were attributed to the gods either by some design of wise men, so that they might more easily turn the minds of the ignorant from a depraved life to the worship of the gods, or by superstition, so that there might be images which people could venerate in the belief that they were approaching the gods themselves? Poets, painters and craftsmen then reinforced these same notions; for it was not easy to portray gods doing things and undertaking great works while keeping to the likeness of other shapes.

Perhaps there was also the belief that nothing seems more beautiful to a human being than a human being. But do you, a natural philosopher, not see what a seductive matchmaker nature is—a procuress, as it were, on her own behalf? Or do you think there is any beast on land or sea that is not most delighted by a beast of its own kind? If that were not so, why would a bull not be aroused by contact with a mare, or a stallion with a cow? Or do you think an eagle or a lion or a dolphin prefers any shape to its own? What wonder is it, then, if nature has in the same way prescribed to human beings that they should think nothing more beautiful than a human being? ... that this was the reason we thought the gods were like human beings. What do you think —if beasts had reason, would each of them not have given first place to its own kind?

1.78 But by Hercules—I will say what I think—however much I love myself, I do not dare say that I am more beautiful than that bull that carried off Europa; for the question here is not about

our intellects or our speeches but about appearance and shape. And if we chose to invent and combine forms for ourselves, you would not want to look like the sea-god Triton as he is painted, borne along on swimming beasts joined to his human body. I am on difficult ground here; for the power of nature is so great that no human being wants to resemble anything but a human being —and indeed an ant wants to resemble an ant.

1.79 And yet—like which human being? How few are handsome!

> When I was in Athens, out of whole throngs of young men there was scarcely one here and there to be found— I see why you are smiling, but that is how things are. Besides, for those of us who, with the approval of the ancient philosophers, take pleasure in youths, even blemishes are often charming. Alcaeus was delighted by a mole on a boy's knuckle; yet a mole is a blemish on the body, but to him it seemed a beauty. Quintus Catulus, father of our colleague and friend here, loved your fellow townsman Roscius, and even wrote this poem about him: "I had stopped by chance to greet the rising Dawn,
>
> when suddenly on my left Roscius rises.
> Heavenly gods, by your leave let me say it:
> a mortal seemed more beautiful than a god." To him,
>
> Roscius was more beautiful than a god; yet he had then, as he still has today, a terrible squint. What does it matter, if this very feature seemed witty and charming to him?[48]

1.80 I return to the gods. Do we think some of them are, if not quite cross-eyed, at least slightly squint-eyed? Do some have a mole? Are some snub-nosed, flap-eared, beetle-browed or big-headed—features found among us—or is everything corrected in them? Grant you that; do they all have one and the same face? For if there are several faces, one must be more beautiful than

48 Quintus Lutatius Catulus (consul 102 BC) was the father of Cotta's fellow pontiff. Roscius, the famous comic actor, came from Lanuvium, like Velleius; Alcaeus was a Greek lyric poet of about 600 BC.

another, and so some god is not supremely beautiful. If they all have one face, the Academy must be flourishing in heaven: for if there is no difference between one god and another, there is no recognition among the gods, no perception.[49]

1.81 And what if, Velleius, it is entirely false that no other appearance comes to mind when we think of a god than that of a human being—will you still defend such absurdities? For us, perhaps, it does come to mind as you say; for from childhood we have known Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Neptune, Vulcan, Apollo and the other gods with the faces that painters and sculptors chose to give them—and not only the faces but their attributes, age and dress. But that is not so for the Egyptians or the Syrians, or for almost the entire foreign world. For you would find that their beliefs about certain animals are firmer than ours about our most sacred temples and images of the gods.

1.82 For we see many shrines plundered and images of the gods carried off from the most sacred places by our own people; but no one has ever so much as heard tell of a crocodile or an ibis or a cat being harmed by an Egyptian. What, then, do you think: does not Apis, that sacred bull of the Egyptians, seem a god to the Egyptians? As much, by Hercules, as that Sospita of yours seems to you. You never see her, even in your dreams, except with her goatskin, her spear, her little shield and her turned-up shoes. But that is not what the Argive Juno looks like, nor the Roman one. So the Argives have one form of Juno, the people of Lanuvium another. And indeed we have one form of Capitoline Jupiter, the Africans another of Jupiter Hammon.[50]

1.83 Is it not shameful, then, for a natural philosopher—that is, an observer and hunter of nature—to seek evidence of the truth from minds steeped in habit? On those terms it will be permissible to say that Jupiter is always bearded and Apollo always beardless, that Minerva has gray eyes and Neptune sea-blue ones. And indeed we admire the Vulcan at Athens made by Alca-

49 A joke on the Academic doctrine that nothing can be perceived with certainty.
50 Juno Sospita ("the Savior") was the patron goddess of Lanuvium, Velleius' hometown. Jupiter Hammon had a famous oracle at the oasis of Siwa in Libya.

menes: he is standing and clothed, and a slight limp shows through, not an unsightly one. So we shall have a lame god, since that is what we have been told about Vulcan. Come now—do we also hold that the gods have the very names by which we call them?[51]

1.84 But first, there are as many names for the gods as there are human languages. You are Velleius wherever you go, but Vulcan is not Vulcan alike in Italy, in Africa and in Spain. Next, there is no great number of names even in our pontifical books, but the number of gods is countless. Or are they without names? You at least are bound to say so; for what is the point of several names when there is a single face? How much better it would have been, Velleius, to admit that you do not know what you do not know, rather than babble all this until you feel queasy and are disgusted with yourself. Do you think a god looks like me, or like you? Surely you do not.

"What then? Shall I say that the sun or the moon or the heavens is a god? Then it is also blessed—but enjoying what pleasures? And wise—but how can there be wisdom in a lump like that?"

1.85 these are your school's words. So if the gods are neither in human form ..., as I have shown, nor in some such form as that, as you are convinced, why do you hesitate to deny that the gods exist? You do not dare. That is wise of you—though in this case it is not the people you fear but the gods themselves. I have known Epicureans who revere every little statuette. Yet I see that some people think Epicurus, to avoid offending the Athenians, kept the gods in words but abolished them in fact. And so in those selected brief maxims of his which you call κυρίας δόξας [principal doctrines], this, I think, is the first: "What is blessed and immortal neither has trouble itself nor causes trouble to anyone." Some people think that in phrasing this maxim as he did,

51 Alcamenes, an Athenian sculptor of the later 5th century BC, was a pupil of Phidias.

he acted deliberately, when in fact it came from sheer inability to express himself:[52]

1.86 they misjudge a man who was anything but crafty. For it is unclear whether he means that something blessed and immortal exists, or that if anything of that kind exists, this is what it is like. They fail to notice that his language is ambiguous here, but in many other places both he and Metrodorus speak as plainly as you did a little while ago. He really does believe that gods exist, and I have never seen anyone more afraid of the very things he said were not to be feared—I mean death and the gods. Ordinary people are not much troubled by them, yet he cries out that they have terrified the minds of all mortals. So many thousands turn to highway robbery although the penalty is death, and others plunder every shrine they can. No doubt fear of death terrifies the robbers, and fear of religion the plunderers![53]

But since you do not dare (for now I will address Epicurus himself) to deny that the gods exist, what is to stop you from counting the sun, or the world, or some eternal mind among the gods?

1.87 "I have never seen," he says, "a soul that shares in reason and judgment in any shape except the human one." Well, have you ever seen anything like the sun, or the moon, or the five wandering stars? The sun bounds its motion by the two outermost limits of a single orbit and completes its yearly courses. The moon, kindled by the sun's rays, completes this same circuit of the sun's in the space of a month. And the five stars keep to the same orbit, some nearer the earth and some farther away, and from the same starting points they cover the same distances in different times. Have you ever seen anything like that, Epicurus?

1.88 Then let there be no sun, no moon, no stars, since nothing can exist except what we have touched or seen! Well, have you

52 The *Principal Doctrines* are a collection of forty short maxims summarizing Epicurus' teaching.

53 Metrodorus of Lampsacus (c. 331–278 BC) was Epicurus' closest friend and disciple.

ever seen god himself? Then why do you believe he exists? So let us do away with everything new that history or reason brings us. That is how people who live inland come not to believe in the sea. This is narrowness of mind on such a scale that if you had been born on Seriphos and never left the island, where you had often seen little hares and little foxes, you would not believe that lions and panthers existed when someone described them to you; and if anyone told you about an elephant, you would even think you were being laughed at.[54]

1.89 And you, Velleius, compressed your view into a tight chain of argument, not in your school's manner but in that of the logicians—a tribe your people know nothing about. You assumed that the gods are blessed: we grant it. Next, that no one can be blessed without virtue: we grant that too, and gladly. Next, that virtue cannot exist without reason: that too must be agreed. Then you add that reason exists only in human shape. Who do you think will grant you that? For if it were so, why did you need to arrive at it step by step? You could simply have assumed it, as was your right. And what are these steps of yours? I see that you came from the blessed to virtue and from virtue to reason by steps; but how do you get from reason to human shape? That is not stepping down, it is falling headlong.

1.90 Nor do I understand why Epicurus preferred to say that gods resemble humans rather than that humans resemble gods. You will ask what the difference is, since if this is like that, then that is like this. I see that; but my point is that the outline of the form did not pass from humans to gods. For the gods have always existed and were never born—if, that is, they are to be eternal—whereas humans were born. So human form existed before humans, and the immortal gods had that form. Therefore we should not call their form human, but ours divine.

But have it as you like. What I want to know is this: what great stroke of luck was it (for you hold that nothing in the natural world

54 Seriphos, a small rocky island in the Cyclades, was proverbial for its insignificance.

1.91 was made by reason)—but still, what was this great chance, where did so fortunate a collision of atoms come from, that humans were suddenly born in the form of gods? Are we to suppose that seeds of the gods fell from heaven to earth, and that this is how humans came into being resembling their fathers? I wish you would say so; I would gladly acknowledge my kinship with the gods. You say nothing of the kind, only that it happened by chance that we are like the gods. And now arguments have to be found to refute this! I wish I could discover the truth as easily as I can expose falsehood.

Indeed, you listed from memory and at length—so that I was quite moved to admire such learning in a Roman—the opinions of the philosophers on the nature of the gods, starting all the way back with Thales of Miletus.

1.92 Did all of them seem mad to you, those who decided that a god could exist without hands and feet?

Are you not moved even by this—when you consider what use and what advantage the limbs have in a human being—to conclude that the gods have no need of human limbs? What need is there for feet without walking, or for hands if there is nothing to grasp, or for the whole arrangement of the body's parts, in which nothing is empty, nothing without purpose, nothing superfluous, so that no art can imitate nature's skill? So a god will have a tongue and not speak; he will have teeth, palate, and throat for no use; and the parts that nature attached to the body for procreation a god will have to no purpose. And this applies not only to the outer parts but to the inner ones too—heart, lungs, liver, and the rest. Take away their usefulness, and what beauty do they have (since you want these things to be in a god for the sake of beauty)?

1.93 Was it trusting in dreams like these that not only Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Hermarchus argued against Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles, but even that little courtesan Leontium dared to write against Theophrastus? Her style, to be sure, is clever and good Attic Greek, but still—such was the license of Epicurus' Garden. And yet you people are always complaining. Zeno even

used to pick quarrels. Why mention Albucius? As for Phaedrus, no one was more refined or more courteous, but the old man would grow irritated if I said anything too harsh—and this when Epicurus attacked Aristotle with the utmost insolence, abused Phaedo the Socratic most shamefully, and tore apart in whole volumes Timocrates, the brother of his companion Metrodorus, because he disagreed with him on some point of philosophy or other; when he was ungrateful to Democritus himself, whom he followed, and treated his own teacher Nausiphanes, from whom he had learned a good deal, so badly.[55] Zeno, for his part, not only pelted his contemporaries—Apollodorus, Silus, and the rest—with abuse, but said that Socrates himself, the father of philosophy, had been an Attic buffoon (he used the Latin word *scurra*), and he never called Chrysippus anything but Chrysippa.[56]

1.94 You yourself, a little while ago, when you were reading out what amounted to the roll of a senate of philosophers, said that the greatest men were deluded, deranged, demented. If none of them saw the truth about the nature of the gods, there is a danger that there is no such nature at all.[57]

For what you people say is pure fiction, hardly worthy of old women at their work by lamplight. You do not realize how much you would have to take on if you got us to concede that humans and gods have the same shape. All the care and attention given to a human body will have to be given to a god as well: walking, running, reclining, leaning, sitting, grasping, and finally even conversation and speech.

1.95 As for your saying that there are both male and female gods, you see what follows. For my part, I cannot wonder enough how that founder of yours arrived at such opinions.

But you never stop shouting that we must hold fast to this: that a god is blessed and immortal. Yet what prevents him from

55 Leontium belonged to Epicurus' circle; Theophrastus succeeded Aristotle as head of the Peripatetic school. Zeno of Sidon and Phaedrus were Epicurean teachers whom Cicero had heard in Athens.
56 "Chrysippa" turns the name of the Stoic Chrysippus into a woman's name.
57 The image is of the censors' public reading of the senate roll, at which unworthy members were struck off.

being blessed if he is not two-legged? Or this "blessedness"—whether we should call it *beatitas* or *beatitudo* (both are certainly harsh, but words have to be softened by use)—whatever it is, why can it not apply to that sun there, or to this world, or to some eternal mind free of shape and bodily limbs?[58]

1.96 All you say is: "I have never seen a blessed sun or a blessed world." Well, have you ever seen any world besides this one? You will say no. Then why did you dare to say that there are not six hundred thousand worlds but innumerable ones? "Reason taught me." Then will reason not teach you this as well? When we look for the most excellent nature, one that is blessed and eternal—and this alone is divine nature—then just as that nature surpasses us in immortality, so it surpasses us in excellence of mind, and as in mind, so in body. Why then, when we are inferior in everything else, are we its equals in form? Human virtue would come closer to resembling the gods than human shape does.

1.97 Can anything so childish be said (to press the same point a little longer) as if we were to claim that the kinds of beasts born in the Red Sea or in India do not exist? Yet not even the most inquisitive people, however much they ask around, can hear of as many things as actually live on land, in the sea, in marshes, and in rivers. Are we to deny that these exist because we have never seen them?

And how utterly irrelevant is that resemblance which delights you so much! Isn't a dog like a wolf (and, as Ennius says, "how similar to us the simian, that ugliest of beasts")? Yet the two differ in character. No beast is wiser than the elephant;[59]

1.98 which is more ungainly in shape? I am speaking of animals. But among humans themselves, do we not find very similar forms with different characters, and the same character in dissimilar shapes?

58 Cicero coins these abstract nouns from *beatus*, "blessed"; *beatitudo* survived and gave English "beatitude."
59 Ennius (239–169 BC), the early Roman poet; his line puns on *simia*, "ape," and *similis*, "like."

Indeed, Velleius, once we accept this kind of argument, see where it creeps. You assumed that reason can exist only in human shape. Someone else will assume: only in a creature that lives on land; only in one that was born; only in one that has grown up; only in one that has been taught; only in one composed of a mind and a perishable, frail body; and finally only in a human and mortal being. If you resist on all these points, why does form alone trouble you? You saw reason and mind in a human being together with all the attributes I have listed; take those away, and yet you say you recognize a god, so long as the outlines remain. That is not thinking things through; it is more like drawing lots for what to say.

1.99 Unless perhaps you have not even noticed that, not only in a human being but even in a tree, anything superfluous or useless is a hindrance. How awkward it is to have one finger too many! Why so? Because five fingers need nothing more, either for appearance or for use. But your god has more than an extra finger: he has a superfluous head, neck, nape, sides, belly, back, knees, hands, feet, thighs, and legs. If these are there to make him immortal, what do these limbs have to do with life—what does the face itself? Those other parts matter more—brain, heart, lungs, liver—for these are the dwelling places of life; the look of the face contributes nothing to keeping life secure.

1.100 And you found fault with those who looked at magnificent and splendid works—the world itself, its parts the heavens, lands, and seas, and their adornments the sun, moon, and stars—and who came to know the ripenings, changes, and alternations of the seasons, and so surmised that there was some excellent and superior nature that had made these things and set them in motion, that ruled and steered them. Even if they go astray in their guess, I still see what they are after. But you—what great and remarkable work can you point to that seems to have been made by a divine mind, from which you might surmise that gods exist? "I had," you say, "a certain idea of god imprinted in my mind." Yes, and of a bearded Jupiter and a helmeted Minerva. Do you then think they are like that?

1.101 How much better the ignorant crowd does here! They attribute to a god not only human limbs but also the use of those limbs. They give the gods bows, arrows, spears, shields, tridents, thunderbolts; and even if they do not see what the gods' actions are, they still cannot conceive of a god doing nothing. Even the Egyptians, whom people laugh at, deified no beast except for some benefit they derived from it. Ibises, for instance, destroy vast numbers of snakes, being tall birds with stiff legs and a long horny beak. They ward off plague from Egypt by killing and eating the flying serpents carried in from the Libyan desert by the southwest wind, so that these do no harm either by their bite while alive or by their stench when dead. I could speak of the usefulness of ichneumons, of crocodiles, of cats, but I do not want to go on too long.[60] So I will conclude: foreigners at least deified beasts because of the benefits they brought, whereas from your gods not only does no benefit appear, but no deed of any kind.

1.102 "He has nothing to occupy him," he says. Evidently Epicurus, like spoiled children, thinks nothing better than idleness. Yet even children, when they are idle, enjoy some playful activity. Do we want a god to be so sluggish in his holiday idleness that, if he stirs, we fear he cannot be blessed? This argument not only robs the gods of divine motion and activity; it also makes humans lazy, if indeed not even a god can be blessed while doing something.

IDLE GODS

Where do Epicurus' gods live and what do they do? A god who does nothing cannot be happy or worshiped.

COTTA 1.103 But let it be granted, as you wish, that a god is the likeness and image of a human being. What is his home, his dwelling, his place? And then what is his activity in life? By what means is he blessed, as you claim? For whoever is to be blessed

60 The ichneumon is the Egyptian mongoose, prized for killing snakes and destroying crocodile eggs.

must use and enjoy his own good things. Even natures without souls each have a place of their own: earth holds the lowest, water floods over it, the region above is assigned to air, and the highest region to the fires of the ether. Of animals, some live on land and some in water, and some are double, as it were, living in both habitats; there are even some that are thought to be born from fire, and they are often seen fluttering about in blazing furnaces.

1.104 So I ask, first, where your god lives. Next, what moves him from his place, if he ever moves at all. Then, since it is characteristic of living creatures to seek something suited to their nature, what a god seeks. Further, for what purpose he uses the motion of his mind and reason. Finally, how he is blessed and how he is eternal. Whichever of these points you touch, you touch a sore: an argument so badly founded can find no way out.

1.105 For this is what you were saying. The appearance of a god is grasped by thought, not by the senses. It has no solidity and does not remain numerically the same. The vision of it is such that it is perceived through likeness and succession, and a fresh supply of similar images never fails, drawn from the infinite number of atoms. As a result our mind, intent on these images, believes that nature to be blessed and eternal. In the name of the very gods we are talking about, what sort of thing is this? If they act only on thought and have no solidity or depth, what difference does it make whether we think of a hippocentaur or of a god? Every other philosopher calls any such mental picture an empty movement of the mind; you call it the arrival and entry of images into our minds.

1.106 So when I seem to see Tiberius Gracchus addressing the people on the Capitol and bringing out the voting urn for the motion against Marcus Octavius, I say that this is an empty movement of the mind. You say that the images of both Gracchus and Octavius persist, and that when they have reached the Capitol they are carried to my mind—and that the same thing happens with a god, whose repeated appearance strikes our

minds, so that from it the gods are understood to be blessed and eternal.[61]

1.107 Grant that there are images that strike our minds: all that is presented is an appearance of some kind. Does it also show why that being is blessed, why it is eternal?

But what are these images of yours, and where do they come from? This whole license comes from Democritus. Yet he too has been criticized by many, and you cannot find a way out: the whole thing totters and limps. For what could be less convincing than that the images of everyone come drifting into me—Homer, Archilochus, Romulus, Numa, Pythagoras, Plato—and not even in the form those men actually had? How then are they those men? And whose images are they? Aristotle teaches that the poet Orpheus never existed, and the Pythagoreans say that this Orphic poem was the work of a certain Cercops. Yet Orpheus—that is, his image, as you would have it—often comes running into my mind.[62]

1.108 What about the fact that different images of the same man come into my mind and into yours? What about images of things that never existed at all and never could, like Scylla or the Chimaera? What about images of people, places, and cities we have never seen? What about the image being there the moment I take a fancy to it? What about images coming even to a sleeper, unbidden? The whole thing, Velleius, is nonsense. And you force images not only on our eyes but on our minds as well—so complete is your freedom to chatter unpunished. And with what license!

1.109 "There is a frequent succession of flowing visions, so that out of many, one is seen." I would be ashamed to say I don't understand this, if you who defend it understood it yourselves. How do you prove that the images move in an unbroken stream—or, if unbroken, how they do so eternally? "The countless num-

61 In 133 BC the tribune Tiberius Gracchus had the people vote his fellow tribune Marcus Octavius out of office; the urn was used to draw lots for the order of voting.
62 Cercops was an early Pythagorean poet to whom some ascribed the poems circulating under Orpheus' name; Aristotle's remark survives only here.

ber of atoms," he says, "supplies them." Will that same countlessness, then, make everything eternal? You take refuge in "equilibrium" (for that, if you like, is what we may call ἰσονομία [isonomia, "equal distribution"]), and you say that, since there is a mortal nature, there must also be an immortal one. On that reasoning, since human beings are mortal, let there be some who are immortal; and since they are born on land, let some be born in water. "And because there are things that destroy, there must be things that preserve." By all means let there be—but let them preserve things that exist; I am not aware that those gods of yours exist.[63]

1.110 And how, in any case, does this whole likeness of things arise from atoms? Even if atoms existed—and they do not—they might perhaps push one another and be jostled about by collision; they could not give things form, shape, color, and life. So in no way do you make your god immortal.

Now let us look at blessedness. Without virtue there can certainly be none; but virtue is active; and your god does nothing; so he has no share in virtue;

1.111 and so he is not blessed either. What sort of life does he have, then? "An abundance of good things," you say, "with no admixture of bad." What good things, pray? Pleasures, I suppose—and bodily ones, of course; for you recognize no pleasure of the mind except one that starts from the body and returns to the body. I don't suppose you want to be like the other Epicureans, who are ashamed of certain sayings of Epicurus. In them he declares that he cannot even conceive of any good apart from voluptuous and indecent pleasures—and without a blush he goes through them all, one by one, by name.

1.112 So what food, what drink, what variety of sounds or flowers, what touches, what scents will you offer the gods, to steep them in pleasures? The poets, at least, lay on nectar, ambrosia, and banquets, with Juventas or Ganymede to serve the cups. But you, Epicurus, what will you do? I see neither

63 Isonomia is the Epicurean principle that, in an infinite universe, opposing kinds of things balance one another out.

where your god is to get such things nor how he is to use them. Human nature, then, is better equipped for a blessed life than the nature of the gods, since it enjoys more kinds of pleasure.[64]

1.113 But you consider these pleasures rather trivial—the ones by which the senses are, so to speak, "tickled" (the word is Epicurus' own). How long will you keep up this game? Even our friend Philo could not bear to hear the Epicureans disown soft and luxurious pleasures. With his excellent memory he used to recite many of Epicurus' sayings in the very words in which they were written. And he would read out many still more shameless sayings of Metrodorus, Epicurus' colleague in wisdom. Metrodorus reproaches his brother Timocrates for hesitating to measure everything that belongs to the blessed life by the belly—and he says it not once but repeatedly. I see you nodding, for you know these passages; I would produce the books if you denied it. I am not now criticizing the idea that everything is to be referred to pleasure (that is another question). I am showing that your gods have no share in pleasure, and so, by your own judgment, are not blessed either. "But they are free from pain."[65]

1.114 Is that enough for that supremely blessed life overflowing with good things? "He thinks constantly," they say, "that he is blessed; for he has nothing else to occupy his mind." Then picture it in your mind and set it before your eyes: a god thinking, through all eternity, of nothing but "Things are splendid for me" and "I am blessed." And yet I do not see how this blessed god of yours can help fearing that he will perish, since he is battered and shaken without any respite by an everlasting onslaught of atoms, and since images are constantly streaming off him. So your god is neither blessed nor eternal.

64 Juventas, the Roman goddess of youth (the Greek Hebe), and Ganymede, the Trojan boy carried off by Jupiter, were cupbearers of the gods.
65 Metrodorus of Lampsacus was Epicurus' closest disciple; his brother Timocrates broke with the school and attacked it.

EPICURUS ABOLISHES RELIGION

Without care for us there is no piety; Epicurus left the name of gods but took away the gods.

COTTA 1.115 "But Epicurus also wrote books on holiness and on piety toward the gods." Yes, but how does he speak in them? You would think you were listening to Tiberius Coruncanius or Publius Scaevola, chief pontiffs—not to the man who did away with all religion root and branch, and overturned the temples and altars of the immortal gods not with his hands, like Xerxes, but with his arguments. For what reason is there to say that the gods should be worshiped by human beings, when the gods not only pay no heed to human beings but care for nothing and do nothing at all?[66]

1.116 "But their nature is so outstanding and supreme that by its very excellence it ought to draw the wise man to worship it." Can there be anything outstanding in a nature that, delighting in its own pleasure, never will do anything, does nothing now, and never has done anything? Further, what piety is owed to one from whom you have received nothing? Or what can be owed at all to one who has done nothing to deserve it? For piety is justice toward the gods; and what bond of justice can there be between us and them, when a human being has nothing in common with a god? Holiness, again, is the knowledge of how the gods are to be worshiped; and I do not understand why they are to be worshiped at all, when we have neither received nor hope to receive any good from them.

1.117 And what reason is there to revere the gods out of admiration for a nature in which we see nothing remarkable?

As for freeing people from superstition, which you so often boast about, that is easy once you have abolished all the power of the gods. Unless perhaps you think that Diagoras or

66 Tiberius Coruncanius (chief pontiff from 254 BC) and Publius Mucius Scaevola (from 130 BC) were famous holders of Rome's highest priesthood; Xerxes, king of Persia, burned the temples of Athens in 480 BC.

Theodorus, who denied outright that gods exist, could have been superstitious. I don't think even Protagoras could have been, who allowed himself neither view—that gods exist or that they do not. The views of all these men abolish not only superstition, which involves an empty fear of the gods, but also religion, which consists in the pious worship of the gods.

1.118 What about those who said that the whole belief in the immortal gods was invented by wise men for the good of the state, so that religion might lead to their duty those whom reason could not? Did they not abolish all religion root and branch? And Prodicus of Ceos, who said that things beneficial to human life had been counted among the gods—what religion, pray, did he leave?[67]

1.119 And what of those who teach that brave, famous, or powerful men joined the gods after death, and that these are the very gods we customarily worship, pray to, and revere—are they not wholly without religion? This theory was worked out most fully by Euhemerus, whom our own Ennius, more than anyone, translated and followed. Euhemerus even points out the deaths and burials of gods. Does he seem, then, to have strengthened religion, or to have done away with it utterly and completely? I say nothing of holy and august Eleusis, "where the farthest peoples of the earth are initiated"; I pass over Samothrace, and those rites on Lemnos "worshiped in secret, approached by night, thick with woodland hedges." When these are explained and reduced to reason, it is the nature of things, rather than that of the gods, that comes to be understood.[68]

1.120 Even Democritus, a truly great man, from whose springs Epicurus watered his little gardens, seems to me to waver about the nature of the gods. At one moment he holds that there are images endowed with divinity within the universe; at another he says that the elements of mind in that same universe are

67 Prodicus of Ceos was a fifth-century BC sophist, a contemporary of Socrates.
68 Euhemerus of Messene (about 300 BC) argued that the gods were deified mortals, and Ennius translated his *Sacred History* into Latin; Eleusis, Samothrace, and Lemnos were famous centers of mystery cults.

gods; at another, that living images, which are apt to help or harm us, are gods; at yet another, certain huge images, so vast that they embrace the whole world from outside. All of this is more worthy of Democritus' native city than of Democritus himself;[69]

1.121 for who can grasp such images in his mind, who can admire them, who can judge them worthy of worship or reverence?

Epicurus, for his part, tore religion out of human minds by the roots when he took from the immortal gods both their power to help and their goodwill. For while he says that the nature of a god is supremely good and excellent, he also denies that a god has any goodwill—and so removes what is most characteristic of a supremely good and excellent nature. What is better or more excellent than kindness and beneficence? When you insist that a god lacks it, you are insisting that no one, god or human, is dear to a god, that no one is loved or cherished by him. And so it follows that not only are humans neglected by the gods, but the gods themselves are neglected by one another. How much better the Stoics, whom you criticize! They hold that wise men are friends to wise men even when they do not know one another; for nothing is more lovable than virtue, and whoever has attained it will be loved by us wherever in the world he may be.

1.122 But what harm you do when you locate kindness and goodwill in weakness! Leaving aside the power and nature of the gods, do you really think that not even human beings would have been beneficent and kind if they were not weak? Is there no natural affection between good people? "Dear" is itself a word of love, and from love (*amor*) the name of friendship (*amicitia*) is derived. If we make friendship serve our own profit, not the advantage of the one we love, it will not be friendship but a kind of trade in one's own interests. Meadows and fields and herds of cattle are valued in that way, because we draw profit from them;

69 Epicurus' school was known as the Garden; Democritus' birthplace, Abdera in Thrace, was proverbial for the dullness of its people.

but human affection and friendship are freely given. How much more, then, is this true of the gods, who lack nothing, yet love one another and look after human beings. If that were not so, why do we revere the gods and pray to them? Why do pontiffs preside over sacred rites and augurs over the auspices? Why do we ask for things from the immortal gods, why do we make vows to them? "But Epicurus has even written a book on holiness."

1.123 He is making fools of us—a man not so much witty as free with the liberties he takes in writing. For what holiness can there be if the gods take no interest in human affairs? And what kind of living nature is it that cares for nothing? So no doubt the truer view is the one our common friend Posidonius set out in the fifth book of his *On the Nature of the Gods*: that Epicurus does not believe in gods at all, and that what he said about the immortal gods he said to ward off hostility. For he would not have been so foolish as to imagine a god resembling a little man —a mere outline with no solid substance, equipped with all a man's limbs but without the slightest use for them, a thin, transparent sort of being who grants nothing to anyone, does no one a kindness, and cares for nothing and does nothing at all. In the first place, such a nature cannot exist; and Epicurus, seeing this, keeps the gods in words and abolishes them in fact;

1.124 and in the second place, even granting that a god is precisely the kind of being bound by no goodwill and no affection for human beings, then good-bye to him—for why should I say "may he be gracious"? He cannot be gracious to anyone, since, as you say, all goodwill and affection spring from weakness.

Book II

The Stoic case
Balbus argues that gods exist, what they are, that they govern the world, and that they care for humankind.

BALBUS AGREES TO SPEAK

Velleius and Cotta urge Balbus to set out the Stoic case.

VELLEIUS 2.1 When Cotta had said this, Velleius replied: "How reckless I was to take on an Academic who is also a trained orator! I would not have been afraid of an Academic with no gift for speaking, nor of an orator without that philosophy of yours, however eloquent he was. A flood of empty words does not throw me, and neither does subtle thinking when the delivery is dry. But you, Cotta, were strong in both. All you lacked was a ring of spectators and a jury. But more of that another time. Now let us hear Balbus, if it suits him."

BALBUS 2.2 Then Balbus said: "For my part I would rather hear Cotta again, provided he uses the same eloquence to bring in the true gods that he used to do away with the false ones. A philosopher, a pontiff, and a Cotta ought to hold a view of the immortal gods that is not wandering and unsettled, like the Academics', but firm and definite, like ours. Enough has been said against Epicurus, and more than enough. But I am eager to hear, Cotta, what you yourself think."

COTTA "Have you forgotten," he said, "what I said at the start? I said that I could more easily say what I did not think than what I did, especially on subjects like these. And even if I had reached

some clear conclusion, I would still want to hear you in turn, since I have already said so much myself."

BALBUS 2.3 Then Balbus said: "I will do as you wish and be as brief as I can. Now that Epicurus' errors have been refuted, much of the length of my discussion has been cut away. In general, our school divides the whole question of the immortal gods into four parts. First they show that the gods exist; next, what they are like; then, that the world is governed by them; and finally, that they take thought for human affairs. In this conversation let us take up the first two. The third and fourth are larger, and I think they should be put off to another time."

COTTA "Not at all," said Cotta. "We have time to spare, and the subject we are discussing deserves to come before even our business."

THAT GODS EXIST

The sky itself, the consent of all peoples, appearances of the gods, divination and the order of nature.

BALBUS 2.4 Then Balbus said: "The first part hardly seems to need discussion at all. When we have looked up at the sky and contemplated the heavenly bodies, what can be so plain and obvious as that there is some divine power of surpassing intelligence by which all this is ruled? If it were not so, how could Ennius have said, with everyone's agreement, 'Behold this lofty, gleaming vault, which all invoke as Jupiter'? Jupiter indeed: lord of the universe, ruling all things by his motion, and, as the same Ennius says, 'father of gods and men,' a god present and all-powerful. If anyone doubts this, I really do not see why he could not equally doubt whether the sun exists or not;"[1]

2.5 for how is the sun any more evident than this? Unless we held this knowledge firmly grasped in our minds, the belief would not remain so stable. It would not be strengthened by the

1 The Latin narration calls Balbus by his family name, Lucilius, here and often elsewhere; this translation calls him Balbus throughout.

passage of time, nor could it have taken deeper root along with the centuries and generations of humankind. Indeed, we see that other beliefs, invented and empty, have withered away with time. Who thinks that the hippocentaur or the Chimaera ever existed? What old woman can be found so witless as to dread those monsters of the underworld that people once believed in? Time wipes out the fictions of opinion, but it confirms the judgments of nature.

2.6 And so, among our own people and among others, the worship of the gods and the holiness of religious observance grow greater and better day by day. This happens not at random or by chance, but because the gods often show their power in person. At Lake Regillus, in the war with the Latins, the dictator Aulus Postumius was fighting a battle against Octavius Mamilius of Tusculum, and Castor and Pollux were seen fighting on horseback in our battle line. Within more recent memory, the same sons of Tyndareus announced the defeat of Perseus. Publius Vatinius, the grandfather of the young Vatinius of today, was coming to Rome by night from the prefecture of Reate when two young men on white horses told him that King Perseus had been captured that day. When he reported this to the senate, he was at first thrown into prison for speaking rashly about affairs of state. Later a letter arrived from Paullus, and the date was confirmed. The senate then rewarded him with a grant of land and exemption from military service.[2] and again, when the Locrians defeated the people of Croton in a great battle at the river Sagra, it is recorded that news of the battle was heard at the Olympic Games on that very day. Often the voices of Fauns have been heard, and often the forms of gods have been seen. These have compelled anyone who is not dull-witted or impious to admit that the gods are present among us.[3]

2.7 As for predictions and forebodings of future events, what do they show except that what is to come is shown, pointed out,

2 The battle of Lake Regillus (traditionally 496 BC) secured Rome against the Latins. Perseus, the last king of Macedon, was defeated by Lucius Aemilius Paullus at Pydna in 168 BC.

portended, and foretold to human beings? That is why we call them omens, signs, portents, and prodigies. Suppose we believe that Mopsus, Tiresias, Amphiaraus, Calchas, and Helenus were inventions of poetic license. Even the myths would not have adopted them as augurs if they rejected the thing altogether. But even so, shall we not be taught by examples from our own history to acknowledge the divine power of the gods? Will we be unmoved by the recklessness of Publius Clodius in the First Punic War? He mocked the gods, even in jest. When the sacred chickens were let out of their coop and would not eat, he ordered them thrown into the water to drink, since they refused to eat. After his fleet was defeated, that laugh brought many tears to himself and a great disaster to the Roman people. And what of his colleague Lucius Junius in the same war? Did he not lose his fleet in a storm after disobeying the auspices?[4] and so Clodius was condemned by the people, and Junius took his own life.

2.8 Coelius writes that Gaius Flaminius neglected religion and fell at Trasimene, dealing a great wound to the state. The ruin of these men shows that the state grew great under the command of those who obeyed religion. And if we choose to compare ourselves with foreign peoples, we shall find that we are equal or even inferior to them in other respects. In religion, however, that is, in the worship of the gods, we are far superior.[5]

2.9 Or is the famous augur's staff of Attus Navius to be scorned, with which he marked out the regions of a vineyard to find his pig? I would think so, had not King Hostilius waged his greatest wars under his augury. But the nobility has been negligent, and the discipline of augury has been abandoned. The truth of the auspices is scorned, and only the outward show is kept. So the

3 Locri and Croton were Greek cities in southern Italy; the battle took place in the sixth century BC.

4 The Latin nouns ostenta, monstra, portenta, prodigia are derived, as Cicero takes it, from the verbs just before them. Publius Claudius Pulcher (Cicero writes Clodius) was defeated at sea off Drepana in Sicily in 249 BC.

5 Lucius Coelius Antipater was a Roman historian of the war with Hannibal. Hannibal defeated Flaminius at Lake Trasimene in 217 BC.

most important affairs of state, including wars, on which the safety of the state depends, are conducted without any auspices. No auspices are observed at river crossings, none from the points of weapons, and no men are called. As a result, wills made in battle order have died out. For our generals begin to wage war only once they have laid the auspices aside.[6]

2.10 But among our ancestors the force of religion was so great that some commanders even devoted themselves to the immortal gods on behalf of the state, with veiled heads and in fixed words. I could recall many things from the Sibylline prophecies, and many from the responses of the soothsayers, that confirm what ought to be doubtful to no one. And indeed, in the consulship of Publius Scipio and Gaius Figulus, events themselves proved the discipline of both our augurs and the Etruscan soothsayers. Tiberius Gracchus, consul for the second time, was holding the election for them. Just as the first vote-teller was reporting their names, he dropped dead on the spot. Gracchus nonetheless completed the election. But he sensed that the incident had become a matter of religious scruple for the people, so he referred it to the senate. The senate decided that it should be referred to those who usually dealt with such matters. The soothsayers were brought in and answered that the man who had put the question to the assembly had not been properly qualified. Then Gracchus, as I used to hear from my father, flared up in anger:[7]

2.11 "Is that so? Am I not properly qualified, I who put the question as consul, as augur, and after taking the auspices? Do you Etruscans and foreigners hold the law of the auspices of the Roman people? Can you act as interpreters of our elections?" And so he ordered them out. Later, however, he sent a letter from his province to the college of augurs. He wrote that while

6 Attus Navius was a legendary augur who divided a vineyard with his curved staff to find a lost pig. A will "in battle order" was declared orally before the army as it stood ready to fight.

7 In the ritual of devotio a commander offered his own life to the gods in exchange for victory. The election took place in 163 BC; Gracchus was the father of the reformers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus.

reading the books he had remembered a ritual flaw in the site he had taken for his augural tent, the gardens of Scipio. He had afterward crossed the city's sacred boundary to hold a meeting of the senate, and on his way back, when he crossed the same boundary again, he had forgotten to take the auspices. And so the consuls had been improperly elected. The augurs referred the matter to the senate; the senate ruled that the consuls should resign; they resigned. What greater examples are we looking for? A man of the greatest wisdom, perhaps the most outstanding of all, preferred to confess his own error, which could have been concealed, rather than let a religious taint cling to the state. And the consuls preferred to lay down supreme power at once rather than hold it for a moment against religion.

2.12 great is the authority of the augurs. And is not the soothsayers' art divine? Anyone who sees these and countless other things of the same kind must surely be compelled to admit that the gods exist. If there are interpreters of certain beings, those beings themselves must certainly exist. But there are interpreters of the gods. Therefore let us admit that the gods exist. But perhaps not everything that is predicted comes to pass. Nor does it follow that medicine is no art because not all the sick recover. The gods show signs of future events. If some people have gone wrong in reading them, it is not the nature of the gods that erred but human guesswork.

And so all people of all nations agree on the main point. It is inborn in everyone, and engraved, as it were, on the mind, that gods exist. What they are like is disputed; that they exist no one denies.

2.13 Our own Cleanthes said that notions of the gods were formed in human minds for four reasons. The first he gave was the one I have just mentioned, which arises from foreknowledge of future events. The second is the one we have derived from the greatness of the benefits we enjoy: a temperate climate, a fertile earth, and an abundance of many other good things;

2.14 the third is the one that terrified people's minds. Lightning, storms, rain clouds, snow, hail, devastation, plague, earth-

quakes and frequent rumblings, showers of stones and raindrops that seemed to be blood; then landslides and sudden chasms in the earth; then monstrous births of humans and animals contrary to nature; then torches seen in the sky; then the stars that the Greeks call κομήτας [comets, "long-haired ones"] and we call "curly-haired," which recently, in the Octavian war, heralded great disasters; then the double sun, which, as I heard from my father, appeared in the consulship of Tuditanus and Aquilius, the very year in which Publius Africanus, a second sun, was extinguished. Terrified by these things, people suspected that there was some heavenly and divine power;[8]

2.15 the fourth reason, and the most important, is the regularity of motion and the perfectly constant revolution of the heavens, together with the distinctness, usefulness, beauty, and order of the sun, the moon, and all the stars. The very sight of these things, he said, shows clearly enough that they are not the work of chance. Suppose someone enters a house, or a gymnasium, or a forum, and sees the method, measure, and discipline of everything. He cannot judge that all this happens without a cause, but understands that someone is in charge and is obeyed. All the more, then, amid such great motions and changes, amid the ordered courses of so many vast things, in which boundless and infinite ages have never once played false, he must conclude that these great motions of nature are governed by some mind.

2.16 Chrysippus, for all the sharpness of his intellect, says things that seem to have been learned from nature herself rather than discovered by him. "If there is anything in nature," he says, "that the human mind, human reason, human strength or power cannot produce, then what produces it is certainly better than a human being. But the heavenly bodies, and all those things whose order is eternal, cannot be made by a human being. Therefore that by which they are made is better than a

8 The Octavian war was the civil conflict of 87 BC between the consuls Gnaeus Octavius and Cinna. Tuditanus and Aquilius were consuls in 129 BC, the year Scipio Africanus the Younger died.

human being. And what would you call that rather than a god? Indeed, if there are no gods, what in nature can be better than a human being? Reason is found in humans alone, and nothing can be more excellent than reason. But for a human being to think that there is nothing in the whole world better than himself is senseless arrogance. Therefore there is something better. Therefore there certainly is a god."

2.17 If you saw a large and beautiful house, could anyone persuade you that it had been built by mice and weasels, even if you could not see its master? Then if you thought that the world in all its splendor, the heavenly bodies in all their variety and beauty, and the sea and land in all their force and extent were your dwelling rather than that of the immortal gods, would you not plainly seem to be out of your mind? Or do we not even understand that everything above is better, while the earth is lowest, wrapped round by the thickest air? We see that in certain regions and cities people's minds are duller because the air is denser. For the same reason, the same thing has happened to the human race, because it has been placed on the earth, that is, in the densest region of the world.

2.18 And yet human ingenuity itself should lead us to conclude that there is some mind, and a sharper and divine one at that. For where did man "pick up" his mind, as Socrates asks in Xenophon? If anyone asks where we get the moisture and heat spread through the body, the earthy solidity of our flesh, and finally the breathing soul within us, the answer is obvious. We took one from earth, another from water, another from fire, and another from the air that we call breath. But that which surpasses all these—I mean reason, or, if you want more words for it, mind, judgment, thought, wisdom—where did we find it? Where did we take it from? Will the world have everything else and lack this one thing, which is worth the most?[9] yet surely nothing in all existence is better than the world, nothing more excellent, nothing more beautiful. Not only is there nothing better, but nothing better can even be imagined. And if nothing is better than

9 Socrates asks this in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (1.4.8).

reason and wisdom, these must be present in what we grant to be the best.

2.19 Then again, whom will this vast kinship of things, harmonious, breathing together, and continuous, not compel to accept what I am saying? Could the earth flower at one time and then lie stiff with cold in turn? Could the sun's approach and retreat at the summer and winter solstices be recognized by the changes in things themselves? Could the tides of the sea and the currents in narrow straits be moved by the rising or setting of the moon? Could the unequal courses of the stars be preserved within the single revolution of the whole heavens? With all the parts of the world in harmony with one another, these things surely could not happen unless they were held together by a single divine and continuous breath.

2.20 When these arguments are set out more fully and expansively, as I intend to do, they escape the cavils of the Academics more easily. But when they are compressed into short, tight syllogisms, as Zeno used to do, they lie more open to attack. A flowing river is hardly polluted, or not at all, while enclosed water is easily spoiled. In the same way, a critic's abuse is washed away by the stream of speech, whereas a compressed argument, in its narrow confines, cannot easily defend itself. Zeno pressed home the points I am expanding like this:

2.21 "That which uses reason is better than that which does not. But nothing is better than the world. Therefore the world uses reason." In the same way it can be proved that the world is wise, likewise that it is blessed, likewise that it is eternal. All these qualities are better than their absence, and nothing is better than the world. From this it will follow that the world is a god.

2.22 He also argued as follows: "No part of something that lacks sensation can be sentient. But parts of the world are sentient. Therefore the world does not lack sensation." He goes on and presses the point more tightly: "Nothing that lacks mind and reason can produce from itself a living being that possesses reason. But the world produces living beings that possess

reason. Therefore the world is a living being possessing reason." And, as he often does, he completed the argument with a comparison: "If flutes playing in tune grew on an olive tree, would you doubt that the olive had some knowledge of flute playing? What if plane trees bore lyres that played in rhythm? You would of course think that there was music in plane trees too. Why then should the world not be judged living and wise, when it produces from itself beings that are living and wise?"

THE WORLD IS DIVINE

Heat sustains all life; the world, which holds all things, must have reason and so be a god.

BALBUS 2.23 Although I have begun to proceed differently from what I said at the outset (I said that this first part needed no discussion, since it was plain to all that the gods exist), I still want to confirm this very point with physical, that is, natural, arguments. The fact is that everything that is nourished and grows contains within it a force of heat, without which it could neither be nourished nor grow. Everything hot and fiery is stirred and set going by its own motion, and what is nourished and grows makes use of a certain regular and even motion. As long as this motion remains in us, sensation and life remain. But when the heat has cooled and gone out, we ourselves die and are extinguished.

2.24 Cleanthes also uses the following arguments to show how great a force of heat is present in every body. He says that no food is so heavy that it is not digested within a night and a day, and that heat is present even in the remains that nature has rejected. Moreover, the veins and arteries never stop throbbing, as if with a kind of fiery motion. It has often been observed that when the heart of some animal is torn out, it throbs so rapidly that it imitates the swiftness of fire. Everything that lives, therefore, whether animal or plant, lives because of the heat enclosed within it. From this we should understand that the nature of

heat has in itself a vital force that extends through the whole world.

2.25 We shall see this more easily once we have explained more precisely this whole fiery element that permeates everything. All the parts of the world, then (I will touch only on the largest), are supported and sustained by heat. This can be seen first in the element of earth. We see that fire is struck from stones by collision and rubbing. We see that freshly dug earth steams with warmth, and that warm water is drawn from ever-flowing wells, especially in winter. This is because a great force of heat is held in the caverns of the earth, and in winter the earth is denser and so holds its innate heat in more tightly.

2.26 it would take a long discourse and many arguments to show that this tempering of heat is what makes all things arise and grow: every seed the earth conceives, and everything it has generated from itself and holds rooted within it. That heat is mixed with water too is shown, first of all, by the very fluidity of water and its flowing. Water would not freeze in the cold or harden into snow and frost unless it were the admixture of heat that made it liquid and let it spread and flow. So under north winds and other cold, water hardens, and in turn it softens when warmed and melts with heat. The seas, too, grow warm when stirred by the winds, so that one can easily see that heat is enclosed in those great masses of water. That warmth must not be thought to come from outside. It is stirred up by agitation from the innermost parts of the sea, just as our bodies grow warm again through movement and exercise. Air itself, which is by nature extremely cold, is by no means without heat;

2.27 in fact it is mixed with a great deal of heat. Air arises from the exhalation of waters; it should be regarded as a sort of vapor from them, and this vapor is produced by the motion of the heat contained in the waters. We can see something similar in water that boils when fire is put under it. Now there remains the fourth part of the world. It is entirely fiery by nature, and it imparts healthy and life-giving heat to all the other elements.

2.28 From this it follows that, since all the parts of the world are sustained by heat, the world itself is also preserved through so long a span by a like and equal nature. This is all the more so because we must understand that this hot and fiery element is diffused through all nature in such a way that it holds within it the power of procreation and the cause of generation. From it all living creatures, and all things whose roots are held in the earth, must be born and grow.

2.29 It is nature, then, that holds the whole world together and protects it, and a nature that is not without sensation and reason. For every nature that is not solitary or simple, but joined and connected with something else, must have some ruling part within it. In a human being this is the mind. In a beast it is something like a mind, from which its appetites for things arise. In trees and the things that grow from the earth, the ruling part is thought to lie in the roots. By "ruling part" I mean what the Greeks call ἡγεμονικόν [the governing part], and nothing in any kind of thing can or should be more excellent than it. So the thing in which the ruling part of all nature resides must also be the best of all things, and the most worthy of power and dominion over all.[10]

2.30 Now we see that sensation and reason are present in the parts of the world (for there is nothing in the whole world that is not part of the universe). They must therefore be present in that part in which the world's ruling part resides, and present in a keener and greater degree. Therefore the world must be wise, and the nature that holds all things in its embrace must excel in the perfection of reason. And so the world is a god, and all the world's power is held together by divine nature.

Moreover, the world's fiery glow is far purer, more translucent and more mobile than this heat of ours, by which the things familiar to us are sustained and kept vigorous. For those reasons it is far better suited to stirring sensation.

2.31 It is absurd, then, to say that the world is without sensation. Humans and beasts are sustained by this heat of ours, and

that is why they move and perceive. The world is sustained by a fire that is whole, free and pure, and also supremely keen and mobile. This is especially true because the world's fire is not driven by something else or by an external impulse, but moves of itself and of its own accord. For what could be stronger than the world, to push and move the heat by which the world is sustained?

2.32 Let us listen to Plato, who is a kind of god among philosophers. He holds that there are two kinds of motion, one self-caused and the other external. What moves of itself, of its own accord, is more divine than what is driven by an impulse from elsewhere. This self-motion he places in minds alone, and he thinks the origin of all motion derives from them. All motion arises from the world's fire, and that fire moves not by an impulse from elsewhere but of its own accord. It must therefore be a mind, and from this it follows that the world is a living being.

There is a further reason to understand that there is intelligence in the world: the world is certainly better than any other nature. There is no part of our body that is not of less worth than we ourselves are. In the same way, the universe as a whole must be of more worth than any part of the universe. If that is so, the world must be wise. If it were not, then a human being, who is part of the world, would have to be of more worth than the whole world, since a human being shares in reason.

2.33 Again, if we want to proceed from the first, rudimentary natures to the last and perfect ones, we must arrive at the nature of the gods. First, we observe that the things that grow from the earth are sustained by nature. Nature has given them nothing more than this: it preserves them by nourishing them and making them grow.

2.34 To beasts, however, nature gave sensation and movement, and also a kind of appetite by which they approach what is wholesome and withdraw from what is harmful. To human

10 The Stoic *hēgemonikon* was the command center of a living being, the seat of perception, impulse and thought.

beings it gave more, for it added reason. By reason the mind's appetites are governed, now given rein, now held in check. The fourth and highest level belongs to beings born good and wise by nature. Right and steadfast reason is innate in them from the beginning. This reason must be considered above humanity and attributed to god, that is, to the world, in which that perfect and complete reason must reside.

2.35 For it cannot be said that any ordered system of things lacks some final and perfect stage. We see in a vine or in a farm animal that nature follows its own path to completion, unless some force obstructs it. Painting, building and the other arts likewise achieve a finished work. In the same way, and much more so, something in nature as a whole must be brought to completion and perfection. Other natures can be kept from reaching perfection by many external obstacles. Nothing, however, can hinder nature as a whole, because nature itself holds together and contains all natures. Therefore that fourth and highest level must exist, which no force can reach.

2.36 and that is the level at which the nature of all things is placed. This nature is over all things, and nothing can hinder it. The world must therefore be intelligent, and indeed wise.

What could be more ignorant than to say that the nature that embraces all things is not the best? Or, granting that it is the best, to deny that it is, first, a living being, next, possessed of reason and judgment, and finally wise? How else could it be the best? If it were like plants, or even like beasts, it would have to be thought the worst rather than the best. Nor, if it shared in reason but was not wise from the beginning, would the world's condition be anything but worse than humanity's. For a human being can become wise. But if the world was unwise through the eternal span of past time, it will surely never attain wisdom, and so it will be worse than a human being. Since that is absurd, the world must be regarded as wise from the beginning, and as a god.

2.37 For there is nothing besides the world that lacks nothing and is fitted and perfect in every respect, complete in all its

measures and parts. Chrysippus put it cleverly. A cover is made for the sake of a shield and a sheath for the sake of a sword. In the same way, everything except the world was made for the sake of other things. The crops and fruits that the earth produces exist for the sake of animals, and animals for the sake of humans: the horse for riding, the ox for plowing, the dog for hunting and guarding. Humankind itself was born to contemplate and imitate the world. It is by no means perfect, but it is a small particle of what is perfect.

2.38 But the world embraces everything, and there is nothing that is not in it, so it is perfect in every respect. How, then, can it lack what is best? Nothing is better than mind and reason, so the world cannot lack them. Chrysippus again puts it well. Using comparisons, he shows that everything is better in what is fully grown and mature: in a horse than in a foal, in a dog than in a puppy, in a man than in a boy. Likewise, he argues, what is best in the whole world must reside in something perfect and complete;

2.39 but nothing is more perfect than the world, and nothing better than virtue. Therefore virtue belongs properly to the world. Human nature is not perfect, and yet virtue is achieved in a human being. How much more easily, then, in the world! So there is virtue in it. The world is therefore wise, and therefore a god.

Once we have perceived the divinity of the world, we must attribute the same divinity to the stars. They are born from the most mobile and purest part of the ether, are mixed with no other nature, and are entirely hot and translucent. So they too are quite rightly said to be living beings, and to perceive and understand.

2.40 Cleanthes thinks that the stars are shown to be entirely fiery by the testimony of two senses, touch and sight. The sun's heat and brightness are more brilliant than those of any fire, since it shines so far and wide across the immense world. Its touch not only warms but often even burns, and it would do neither unless it were fiery. "Therefore," he says, "since the sun

is fiery and is fed by the moisture of Ocean" (because no fire can last without some fuel), "it must resemble either the fire we use for practical purposes and for preparing food, or the fire contained in the bodies of living creatures."

2.41 "But this fire of ours, which the needs of life require, destroys and consumes everything, and wherever it spreads it throws all into disorder and scatters it. The fire in our bodies, on the other hand, which gives life and health, preserves, nourishes, increases and sustains all things and endows them with sensation." So he says there is no doubt which of these fires the sun resembles, since the sun too makes all things flourish and brings each to maturity after its kind. Since the sun's fire is like the fires in the bodies of living creatures, the sun too must be a living being. So must the other stars that arise in the heavenly blaze called the ether or the heavens.

2.42 Some living creatures originate on land, some in water, some in air. Aristotle therefore thinks it absurd to suppose that no living creature is born in the region best suited for generating living creatures. The stars occupy the region of the ether. That region is very fine and is always in motion and full of vigor, so any creature born in it must have the keenest perception and the swiftest motion. Therefore, since the stars are born in the ether, it is reasonable that there is perception and intelligence in them. From this it follows that the stars must be counted among the gods. Indeed, one can see that people who live in lands where the air is pure and thin have sharper wits and greater understanding than those who live in a thick and heavy atmosphere.[11]

2.43 It is even thought that the food one eats makes some difference to the sharpness of the mind. It is probable, then, that there is surpassing intelligence in the stars. They inhabit the ethereal region of the world, and they are nourished by the moisture of sea and land, refined by its long passage. But the stars' perception and intelligence are shown most clearly by

11 The argument probably comes from Aristotle's lost dialogue *On Philosophy*, which presented a more theological picture than his surviving works.

their order and regularity, in which there is nothing random, nothing variable, nothing accidental (for nothing can move by reason and measure without planning). The order of the stars and their regularity through all eternity point neither to nature, for that order is full of reason, nor to fortune, which loves variety and spurns regularity. It follows, then, that the stars move of their own accord, by their own perception and divinity.

2.44 Aristotle, too, deserves praise for holding that everything that moves does so by nature, by force or by will. The sun, the moon and all the stars move. Things that move by nature are carried either downward by their weight or upward by their lightness. Neither applies to the stars, because their motion is circular, revolving around. Nor can it be said that some greater force makes the stars move against nature, for what force could be greater? It remains, then, that the motion of the stars is voluntary.

Anyone who sees this would act not only ignorantly but impiously if he denied that the gods exist. And it makes little difference whether he denies it or strips them of all care and activity, for to me whatever does nothing seems not to exist at all. That the gods exist, then, is so evident that I would scarcely consider anyone who denies it to be of sound mind.

WHAT THE GODS ARE LIKE

The world is a sphere, and the sun, moon and planets are gods moving by their own will.

BALBUS 2.45 It remains to consider what their nature is like. Here nothing is harder than to draw the mind's eye away from the habits of the eyes. This difficulty has led both the ignorant masses and philosophers who resemble the ignorant to think of the immortal gods only in fixed human shapes. Cotta has refuted the shallowness of that opinion, and it needs no speech of mine. We have a definite mental notion anticipating what a god is like: first, that it is a living being; next, that nothing in all nature is more excellent. I see nothing that fits this preconcep-

tion and notion of ours better than to judge, first, that this very world is a living being and a god, since nothing more excellent than the world can exist.

2.46 Here Epicurus may joke as much as he likes, though he is a man not at all suited to joking and has little of the flavor of his native land. Let him say that he cannot understand what a rotating, spherical god would be like. He will still never move me from this point, which even he accepts. He holds that the gods exist because there must be some surpassing nature than which nothing is better. But certainly nothing is better than the world. And there is no doubt that what is alive and has sensation, reason and mind is better than what lacks them.[12]

2.47 So it follows that the world is a living being possessed of sensation, mind and reason. By this argument we conclude that the world is a god. But these points will be understood more easily a little later, from the very things the world brings about. Meanwhile, Velleius, please do not parade the fact that your school is entirely without learning. You say that a cone, a cylinder and a pyramid seem to you more beautiful than a sphere. You people even have a new sense of sight. But suppose those shapes are more beautiful, at least to look at—though I do not think even that. For what is more beautiful than the shape that alone encloses and contains all other shapes? It can have nothing rough and nothing jarring, nothing cut by angles or broken by bends, nothing jutting out and nothing hollowed in. There are two outstanding forms: among solids, the globe (for so I choose to render σφαῖραν [sphere]), and among plane figures, the circle or orb, called κύκλος [circle] in Greek. These two forms alone have the property that all their parts are exactly alike and that the edge is equally distant from the center at every point,

2.48 and nothing could be more fitting than that. But if you do not see this, because you have never touched that learned dust, could you not, as natural philosophers, at least understand that

12 Epicurus was an Athenian citizen, and Athenians were proverbial for their wit. The Latin *resipiens* ("tasting of") is a gibe at his lack of it.

this uniformity of motion and regularity of order could not have been preserved in any other shape? So nothing could be more ignorant than what you Epicureans usually assert. You do not even say for certain that this very world is round. You say it may have some other shape, and that there are countless other worlds of other forms.[13]

2.49 If Epicurus had learned what two times two makes, he would certainly not say these things. But while he was judging with his palate what is best, he never looked up at the "palate of the heavens," as Ennius calls it.[14]

For there are two kinds of stars. One kind travels from east to west on unchanging paths and never deviates at all from its course. The other completes two continuous revolutions on the same paths and courses. From both facts we learn two things: that the world revolves, which it could not do unless it were spherical, and that the stars move in circular orbits.

First, the sun, which holds first place among the stars, moves in such a way that after filling the lands with abundant light it darkens them, now in these parts, now in those. For it is the earth's own shadow, blocking the sun, that produces night. The nights have the same regularity as the days. And the same sun, by its measured approaches and withdrawals, regulates the extremes of cold and heat. The sun's circuits of three hundred and sixty-five days, with about a quarter of a day added, complete its yearly revolution. By bending its course now toward the north, now toward the south, it produces summers and winters. It also produces the two seasons that are joined, the one to aging winter, the other to summer. So from the changes of the four seasons come the beginnings and causes of all that is produced on land and sea.

2.50 Next, the moon covers in monthly spans the course the sun takes a year to run. Its light is faintest when it comes closest

13 Geometers drew their figures in fine dust spread on a board or on the ground.
14 Latin *palatum* means both "palate" and "vault." Ennius used it of the dome of the sky, and Cicero turns it against Epicurus' supposed devotion to the pleasures of taste.

to the sun, and fullest each time it is farthest away. Not only do its appearance and shape change, as it now waxes and now wanes back to its starting point, but its position changes as well. When it lies in the north or the south, there is in the moon's course too something like a winter and a summer solstice. And many influences flow and stream from it. By them animals are nourished and grow, and the things that spring from the earth come to their prime and reach maturity.

2.51 But most wonderful of all are the movements of the five stars that are falsely called "wandering." For nothing wanders that maintains its forward and backward motions and all its other movements constant and fixed through all eternity. This is all the more remarkable in these stars because now they are hidden, now they reappear; now they approach, now they recede; now they go ahead, now they follow behind; now they move faster, now slower; and now they do not move at all, but stand still for a time. From their unequal motions the astronomers have named the "Great Year." It is completed when the sun, the moon and the five wandering stars have all finished their courses and returned to the same positions relative to one another;[15]

2.52 how long that takes is a great question, but it must be fixed and definite. The star called Saturn's, which the Greeks name Φαίνων [the Shining One], is farthest from the earth and completes its course in about thirty years. In that course it does many wonderful things. Now it goes ahead and now it falls behind; now it disappears at evening and now it reappears at dawn. Yet through endless ages it changes nothing, but does the same things at the same times. Below it, nearer to the earth, moves Jupiter's star, called Φαέθων [the Radiant]. It completes the same circle of the twelve signs in twelve years and shows the same variations in its course as Saturn's star.

2.53 The next circle below belongs to Πυρόεις [the Fiery], which is called the star of Mars. It travels the same circle as the two

15 The Greek word for the planets, *planētes*, means "wanderers." Ancient estimates of the length of the Great Year varied widely.

above it in twenty-four months, less six days, I think. Below this is the star of Mercury, which the Greeks call Στίλβων [the Twinkler]. It travels the circle of the zodiac in about a year and never moves more than one sign's distance from the sun, now going ahead of it, now following. Lowest of the five wandering stars and nearest the earth is the star of Venus. When it goes before the sun it is called Φωσφόρος [Light-bringer] in Greek and Lucifer in Latin, and when it follows the sun it is called Ἕσπερος [Evening Star]. It completes its course in a year, traveling both the width and the length of the zodiac, as the higher stars also do. It never moves more than two signs' distance from the sun, now going ahead, now following.

2.54 This regularity in the stars, then, this great harmony of timing kept through all eternity in such varied courses, I cannot understand without mind, reason and planning. And since we see these qualities in the heavenly bodies, we cannot fail to count them among the gods.

The stars called fixed also show the same mind and wisdom. Their daily revolution is harmonious and constant. They do not travel along with the ether, nor are they fastened to the sky, as most people ignorant of natural science claim. The ether is not of such a nature that it could embrace the stars and whirl them round by its own force: being thin, transparent and suffused with uniform heat, the ether does not seem well suited to holding the stars;

2.55 so the fixed stars have their own sphere, separate from the ether and free of any attachment to it. Their everlasting, unbroken courses, with their wonderful and incredible regularity, declare that there is divine power and mind in them. Anyone who does not perceive that these very stars possess the power of gods would seem incapable of perceiving anything at all.

2.56 In the heavens, then, there is no chance, no randomness, no wandering, no emptiness. On the contrary, there is complete order, truth, reason and constancy. The things that lack these—things counterfeit and false and full of error—are found around the earth, below the moon, which is the last of all the heavenly

bodies, and on the earth itself. So anyone who thinks that the wonderful order and incredible constancy of the heavens, from which arises all the preservation and safety of all things, is devoid of mind must himself be considered devoid of mind.

2.57 I shall not go wrong, I think, if I take the first principle of this discussion from the first among those who investigated the truth. Zeno, then, defines nature as a craftsmanlike fire proceeding methodically to generation. He holds that creating and generating is what is most characteristic of a craft, and that what the hand achieves in the works of our crafts, nature achieves with far greater craft. Nature, that is, is, as I said, a craftsmanlike fire, the teacher of all the other crafts. On this account every nature is craftsmanlike, because it has, so to speak, a certain path and method to follow;

2.58 but the nature of the world itself, which holds and contains all things in its embrace, is said by the same Zeno to be not only craftsmanlike but an actual craftsman, planning and providing for every benefit and advantage. All other natures are each generated, grow and are sustained by their own seeds; in the same way the nature of the world has all its motions voluntary, and has endeavors and desires (which the Greeks call ὁρμὰς [impulses]), and performs actions in harmony with them, just as we ourselves do, who are moved by minds and senses. Such, then, is the mind of the world, and for that reason it can rightly be called prudence or providence (in Greek it is called πρόνοια [forethought]). It provides above all for these things and is most occupied with them: first, that the world be as fit as possible to endure; next, that it lack nothing; and most of all, that there be in it surpassing beauty and every adornment.

2.59 I have spoken of the world as a whole, and also of the heavenly bodies. So it is now almost evident that there is a multitude of gods who are neither idle nor perform their tasks with laborious and troublesome toil. They are not held together by veins, sinews and bones. They do not eat food and drink of a kind that makes them collect humors either too sharp or too thick. Nor do they have bodies of a kind that would make them dread falls or

blows, or fear diseases brought on by exhaustion of the limbs. It was fear of these things that led Epicurus to invent gods who are mere sketches and do nothing;

2.60 but these gods, endowed with the most beautiful form and set in the purest region of the sky, move and guide their courses in such a way that they seem to have agreed together to preserve and protect all things.

GODS OF BENEFIT AND MYTH

Gods named for their gifts, deified benefactors, and the natural meaning hidden in the myths.

BALBUS Many other divine natures too have been established and named—not without reason—both by the wisest of the Greeks and by our ancestors, on account of the great benefits they confer. For whatever brought great advantage to the human race, they believed, could not come about without divine goodness toward humankind. And so sometimes they called what a god had produced by the name of the god himself, as when we call grain Ceres and wine Liber. Hence that line of Terence:[16]

2.61 "Without Ceres and Liber, Venus grows cold." At other times the thing itself in which some greater power resides is named in such a way that this very power is called a god, as with Faith and Mind, which we see dedicated on the Capitol, most recently by Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, though Faith had been consecrated earlier by Aulus Atilius Calatinus. You see the temple of Virtue, and the temple of Honor restored by Marcus Marcellus, which had been dedicated many years before by Quintus Maximus during the Ligurian war. What of Wealth, Safety, Concord, Liberty, Victory? Because the power of all these things was so great that it could not be governed without a god, the thing itself acquired the name of a god. To this class belong the consecrated names of Cupid, Pleasure and Venus Lubentina —things that are vicious and not natural (though Velleius thinks

16 Terence (died 159 BC), Roman comic playwright; the line comes from his *Eunuch*.

otherwise); but even so, these very vices often strike hard at our nature.[17]

2.62 So the gods who produced particular benefits were established because of the greatness of those benefits, and the names I have just mentioned declare what power resides in each god.

Human life and common custom have also adopted the practice of raising to heaven, in reputation and affection, men outstanding for their benefactions. Hence Hercules, hence Castor and Pollux, hence Aesculapius, hence Liber too. I mean Liber the son of Semele, not the Liber whom our ancestors solemnly and devoutly consecrated together with Ceres and Libera; what that signifies can be understood from the mysteries. But because we call our offspring *liberi*, the children of Ceres were named Liber and Libera—a meaning still kept in Libera's case but not in Liber's. Hence also Romulus, whom some think to be the same as Quirinus. Since their minds lived on and enjoyed eternity, they were rightly considered gods, being both the best of beings and eternal.[18]

2.63 Another great multitude of gods has flowed from another line of reasoning, a scientific one. Clothed in human form, these gods have supplied the poets with stories and filled human life with every kind of superstition. This topic was treated by Zeno and later set out at greater length by Cleanthes and Chrysippus. An old belief filled all Greece: that Caelus was castrated by his son Saturn, and that Saturn himself was put in chains by his son Jupiter.[19]

2.64 In these impious tales lies enclosed a scientific idea that is not without elegance. They meant that the celestial nature—the highest, the ethereal, that is, the fiery—which generates all things by itself, lacks the bodily part that needs union with another in order to procreate. And they meant Saturn to be the

17 Venus Lubentina was Venus as goddess of sensual delight. Scaurus was consul in 115 BC and Calatinus in 258 BC; Quintus Fabius Maximus and Marcus Marcellus were leading generals of the late third century BC.
18 Liber and Libera were old Italian deities worshipped with Ceres at Rome; Liber was later identified with Bacchus, son of Semele.
19 Caelus ("Sky") is the Latin counterpart of the Greek Ouranos.

one who maintains the course and revolution of periods and seasons. This god's Greek name says exactly that: he is called Κρόνος [Kronos], which is the same as χρόνος [chronos], that is, a span of time. He was called Saturn because he was sated (*saturaretur*) with years. He is imagined to have been in the habit of eating his own children, because time devours the spans of the seasons and is insatiably filled with the years that are past. He was put in chains by Jupiter so that his courses would not be unrestrained, and so that Jupiter might bind him with the bonds of the stars; but Jupiter himself—that is, *iuvans pater*, "helping father," whom, changing the case-forms, we call Jove from *iuvare*, "to help"—is called by the poets "father of gods and men," and by our ancestors "Best and Greatest." Indeed "Best," that is, most beneficent, comes before "Greatest," because it is a greater thing, and certainly a more welcome one, to benefit everyone than to possess great

2.65 wealth. It is this god, then, whom Ennius, as I said above, names in these words: "Behold this lofty, gleaming vault, which all invoke as Jupiter." He does so more plainly than in another passage: "To this shining thing, whatever it may be, I will call down curses with all my strength." Our augurs, too, mean him when they say "when Jupiter lightens and thunders," for what they mean is "when the sky lightens and thunders." Euripides, who said many things splendidly, said this briefly: "You see this boundless ether spread on high,
which holds the earth in its soft embrace:
count this the highest of the gods, call this Jupiter."[20]

2.66 Air, as the Stoics argue, lying between the sea and the sky, is deified under the name of Juno, the sister and wife of Jupiter, because it resembles the ether and is very closely joined with it. They made air female and assigned it to Juno because nothing is softer. But I believe Juno is named from *iuvare*, "to help." Water

20 The lines come from a lost play of Euripides, rendered by Cicero into Latin verse.

and earth remained, so that, as in the stories, there would be three kingdoms divided up. So the second kingdom, the whole realm of the sea, was given to Neptune, Jupiter's brother as we have it. His name was lengthened: just as Portunus comes from *porta*, "gate," so Neptunus comes from *nare*, "to swim," with the first letters slightly altered. All the power and nature of the earth was dedicated to Father Dis, who is "rich" (*dives*), just as among the Greeks he is Πλούτων [Pluto, "the Wealthy One"], because all things fall back into the earth and arise from the earth. To him they give Proserpina as wife (this is a Greek name, for she is the one called Περσεφόνη [Persephone] in Greek). They take her to be the seed of the crops, and imagine that she was hidden away and sought by her mother.

2.67 Her mother is Ceres, named from bearing (*gerere*) crops, as if "Geres," the first letter having been changed by chance, just as among the Greeks: they too named her Δημήτηρ [Demeter] as if γῆ μήτηρ [earth mother]. Again, the one who overturns great things (*magna verteret*) is Mavors, while Minerva is the one who either diminishes (*minueret*) or threatens (*minaretur*). Since in all things the first and the last have the greatest force, they made Janus first in sacrifice; his name is derived from *ire*, "to go," and hence open passageways are called *iani*, and the doors at the thresholds of ordinary buildings are called *ianuae*. The name of Vesta comes from the Greeks, for she is the one they call Ἑστία [Hestia]. Her power extends to altars and hearths, and so, since she is the guardian of all that is innermost, every prayer and every sacrifice ends with this goddess.

2.68 Not far removed from her power are the Penates. Their name comes either from *penus*, for *penus* is everything people eat, or from the fact that they dwell deep within (*penitus*); hence the poets also call them *penetrales*, "gods of the inner chambers." Apollo's name, again, is Greek. They take him to be the sun, and they consider Diana to be the same as the moon. The sun (*sol*) is so called either because it alone (*solus*) of all the heavenly bodies is so great, or because when it has risen, all the rest are obscured and it alone appears; the moon (*luna*) is named from

shining (*lucere*). She is the same as Lucina, and so, just as among the Greeks women in childbirth call on Diana as Light-bringer, so among our people they call on Juno Lucina. This same Diana is called Wide-wandering, not from her hunting but because she is counted among the seven "wandering" stars, as they are called;

2.69 she is called Diana because at night she makes a kind of day (*dies*). She is called upon at childbirth because babies come to term sometimes in seven, generally in nine, courses of the moon; these are called months (*menses*) because they complete measured (*mensa*) spaces. Timaeus put it neatly, as he did many things. In his history he said that on the very night Alexander was born the temple of Diana at Ephesus burned down, and added that this was not at all surprising: Diana, wanting to attend Olympias in labor, had been away from home. The goddess who comes (*veniret*) to all things our people named Venus; and charm (*venustas*) comes from her, rather than Venus from charm.[21]

2.70 Do you see, then, how reasoning was drawn away from discoveries about nature, made well and usefully, to gods that are invented and fictitious? This produced false beliefs, confused errors and superstitions worthy of old wives. We know the gods' looks and ages, their clothing and adornments, and also their families, marriages and kinships, and everything about them has been fashioned in the likeness of human weakness. They are even represented with troubled minds: we hear of the gods' lusts, griefs and fits of anger. Nor, according to the stories, have they been free of wars and battles—not only, as in Homer, when two armies faced each other and different gods defended each side, but also when they waged wars of their own, as against the Titans and the Giants. These things are said and believed most foolishly, and are full of nonsense and the utmost frivolity.

2.71 Yet if we reject and repudiate these stories, we will be able to understand the god who pervades the nature of each thing—

21 Timaeus of Tauromenium (about 350–260 BC), Greek historian of Sicily; Olympias was the mother of Alexander the Great.

Ceres through the lands, Neptune through the seas, others through other parts—and who and what kind of gods they are, and by what name custom has called each of them. These gods we ought to revere and worship. The best worship of the gods, and also the most chaste, the holiest and the fullest of piety, is to revere them always with a mind and a voice that are pure, whole and uncorrupted. Not only philosophers but our ancestors too distinguished superstition from religion;

2.72 for those who spent whole days praying and sacrificing so that their children might survive them (*superstites*) were called superstitious (*superstitiosi*), a word that later acquired a wider meaning. But those who carefully went back over everything pertaining to the worship of the gods, and so to speak "re-read" it (*relegerent*), were called religious (*religiosi*) from *relegere*—just as "elegant" comes from *eligere*, "to choose," [just as] "diligent" comes from *diligere*, "to value," and "intelligent" from *intellegere*, "to understand"; for in all these words there is the same force of *legere*, "to gather" or "to read," as in "religious." So it came about that of "superstitious" and "religious" the one became a term of reproach, the other of praise. And now I think I have shown sufficiently both that the gods exist and what they are like.[22]

PROVIDENCE RULES THE WORLD

Nothing is greater than the gods, so the world is governed by their providence.

BALBUS 2.73 Next I must show that the world is governed by the providence of the gods. This is certainly a large topic, and one your school, Cotta, has attacked; and naturally the whole contest is with you. You Epicureans, Velleius, have little idea how each thing is meant. You read only your own books and love only your own, and you condemn everyone else without a hearing. For instance, you yourself said yesterday that the Stoics bring on stage a fortune-telling old woman, Pronoia, that is,

22 Cicero's etymologies (both disputed) mark his distinction between religion, careful and proper worship, and superstition, anxious and excessive devotion.

Providence. You said this out of a mistake: you think they imagine providence as a kind of goddess in her own right, who steers and rules the whole world.

2.74 But this is a shortened expression. If someone said that the Athenian state is governed by its council, the words "of the Areopagus" would be missing. In the same way, when we say that the world is governed by providence, you should take the words "of the gods" to be missing, and understand that the full and complete expression is this: the world is governed by the providence of the gods. So do not waste on mocking us that wit of yours, which your tribe lacks; and, by Hercules, if you take my advice, do not even try. It does not suit you, it has not been granted to you, you cannot do it. This does not apply to you alone, polished as you are by the manners of your family and the urbanity of our fellow Romans, but to the rest of your school, and above all to the man who gave birth to these ideas—a man without art, without letters, abusive toward everyone, without any acuteness, without authority, without charm.[23]

2.75 I say, then, that the world and all its parts were set in order at the beginning and are governed at every moment by the providence of the gods. Our school generally divides this argument into three parts. The first is drawn from the reasoning that shows the gods exist; once that is granted, it must be admitted that the world is governed by their planning. The second shows that all things are subject to a sentient nature, and that by it everything is carried on most beautifully; once this is established, it follows that nature was generated from living first principles. The third topic is drawn from wonder at things in the heavens and on earth.

2.76 First, then: either one must deny that the gods exist—as, in a sense, Democritus with his images and Epicurus with his do—or those who grant that the gods exist must admit that they do something, and something splendid. But nothing is more splendid than the governance of the world; therefore it is governed by the planning of the gods. If it is otherwise, there must surely be

23 The Areopagus ("Hill of Ares") was the ancient council of Athens.

something better than a god and endowed with greater power, whatever it may be—whether inanimate nature or necessity driven by great force—that produces these most beautiful works we see;

2.77 in that case the nature of the gods is neither supremely powerful nor preeminent, since it is subject to that necessity or nature by which the sky, the seas and the lands are governed. But nothing is more excellent than a god; therefore the world must be governed by a god; therefore a god is obedient or subject to no nature; therefore he himself governs all nature. Indeed, if we grant that the gods have intelligence, we grant also that they exercise foresight, and over the greatest matters. Are we to say, then, that they do not know which matters are greatest and how these are to be handled and protected, or that they lack the power to sustain and manage such great things? But ignorance is alien to the nature of the gods, and difficulty in sustaining a task through weakness is wholly incompatible with the majesty of the gods. From this follows what we want to prove: that the world is governed by the providence of the gods.

2.78 Moreover, since the gods exist (if indeed they exist, as they certainly do), they must be living beings—and not only living beings but possessed of reason, and bound together in a kind of civic fellowship and community, governing the one world as their shared commonwealth and city;

2.79 it follows that the same reason exists in them as in the human race, that the same truth is found in both, and the same law, which commands what is right and repels what is wrong. From this we understand that wisdom and mind, too, have come to humans from the gods. (For this reason, by the institutions of our ancestors, Mind, Faith, Virtue and Concord have been consecrated and publicly dedicated. How can it be consistent to deny that these exist among the gods, when we worship their majestic and holy images? And if mind, faith, virtue and concord are present in the human race, from where could they have flowed down to earth except from the gods above?) And since there are in us planning, reason and wisdom, the gods must pos-

sess these same qualities in greater measure, and not only possess them but use them in the greatest and best of matters;

2.80 but nothing is greater or better than the world; therefore it must be governed by the planning and providence of the gods. Finally, we have sufficiently shown that those are gods whose remarkable power and brilliant appearance we see—I mean the sun and moon, the wandering stars and the fixed stars, the sky, the world itself, and the power of those things present throughout the world to the great use and benefit of the human race. It follows that all things are governed by divine mind and wisdom. And that is enough about the first part.

NATURE, THE CRAFTSMAN

A reasoning nature holds the world together; the sundial and the planetary sphere show design.

BALBUS 2.81 Next I must show that all things are subject to nature and that by it everything is carried on most beautifully. But first I must briefly explain what nature itself is, so that what I want to teach can be more easily understood. Some think that nature is a kind of force without reason that stirs necessary motions in bodies. Others think it is a force that shares in reason and order, proceeding methodically, so to speak, and making clear what it brings about for the sake of each thing and what it aims at—a skill that no art, no hand, no craftsman could match by imitation. For the power of a seed, they say, is so great that, tiny as it is, if it falls into a nature that conceives and takes hold of it, and finds material by which it can be nourished and grow, it shapes and produces each thing after its kind: some so that they are nourished only through their roots, others so that they can also move, perceive and desire, and generate offspring like themselves.

2.82 Some people, however, apply the name "nature" to everything. Epicurus, for instance, divides things this way: the nature of all that exists consists of bodies, the void and whatever happens to them. But when we say that the world is held

together and governed by nature, we do not mean it in the sense one might use of a clod of earth, a chip of stone or something of that kind, which has no nature that holds it together. We mean it as one would of a tree or an animal, in which there is no haphazardness but order, and a kind of likeness to art.

2.83 And if the things that are held to the earth by their roots live and flourish by nature's art, then surely the earth itself is held together by the same power, by nature's art. Pregnant with seeds, it gives birth to everything and pours it out from itself. It embraces the roots, nourishes them and makes them grow, and it is nourished in turn by the natures above and outside it. Its exhalations nourish the air, the ether and everything above. So if the earth is sustained and flourishes by nature, the same reasoning holds for the rest of the world. Plants cling to the earth, and animals are kept alive by breathing the air. The air itself sees with us, hears with us and makes sounds with us, since none of these things can happen without it. It even moves with us: wherever we go and wherever we move, it seems to make way for us and give place.

2.84 and the things that are carried toward the center of the world, which is its lowest point, those carried from the center upward, and those that travel around the center in a circular revolution, together make the world continuous and a single nature. And since there are four kinds of bodies, the nature of the world is kept continuous by their passing into one another. From earth comes water, from water air, from air ether. Then, in reverse, from ether comes air, from air water, and from water earth, the lowest. So as these elements, of which all things are composed, travel up and down and back and forth, the connection between the world's parts is held together.

2.85 This connection must either be eternal, in the same ordered beauty that we see, or at the very least extremely long-lasting, enduring for a vast and almost immeasurable span of time. Whichever of the two is true, it follows that the world is governed by nature. What voyage of a fleet, what marshaling of an army, or again, to compare the works of nature, what growth

of a vine or a tree, what shape and structure of an animal's limbs reveals such skill on nature's part as the world itself? So either nothing is governed by a nature that perceives, or we must admit that the world is so governed.

2.86 Indeed, how can the world, which contains all other natures and their seeds, not itself be governed by nature? Anyone who said that teeth and puberty come about by nature, but that the human being in whom they come about is not constituted by nature, would fail to understand that things which produce something from themselves have more perfect natures than the things produced from them. Now the world is the sower and planter and, so to speak, the parent, rearer and nourisher of all the things that are governed by nature. It nourishes and holds together everything as its own limbs and parts. If the parts of the world are governed by nature, then the world itself must be governed by nature. And its governance has nothing in it that could be faulted. Out of the natures that existed, the best that could be made has been made.

2.87 so let someone show that it could have been done better. But no one ever will. Anyone who wants to correct something will either make it worse or be wishing for something that could not have been done.

Now, if all the parts of the world are so arranged that they could be neither better for use nor more beautiful to look at, let us consider whether they are the product of chance, or whether they are in a condition in which they could not possibly hold together without the guidance of a perceiving mind and divine providence. If, then, the things nature has perfected are better than those art has perfected, and art makes nothing without reason, then nature too must not be considered devoid of reason. When you look at a statue or a painting, you know that art has been applied. When you see the course of a ship in the distance, you do not doubt that it is moved by reason and art. When you study a sundial, or a water clock, you understand that it tells the hours by art and not by chance. How can it make sense, then, to think that the world, which embraces these very

arts, their makers and everything else, lacks purpose and reason?

2.88 Suppose someone were to carry to Scythia or to Britain the sphere recently made by our friend Posidonius, each revolution of which produces in the sun, the moon and the five wandering stars the same movements that take place in the sky each day and night. Who in that barbarous land would doubt that the sphere was the product of reason? Yet these people are unsure whether the world, from which all things arise and come into being, was itself produced by chance, by some necessity, or by reason and a divine mind. They think Archimedes showed more power in imitating the revolutions of the sphere than nature did in producing them, and this when the originals are made with many times more skill than the imitations.[24]

24 Posidonius of Apamea (c. 135–51 BC), Stoic philosopher at Rhodes and Cicero's teacher. Archimedes of Syracuse (3rd century BC) built a celebrated planetary sphere, brought to Rome after Syracuse fell in 212 BC.

2.89 Think of the shepherd in Accius who had never seen a ship before. When from a mountain he caught sight, far off, of the strange and divine vessel of the Argonauts, at first, in wonder and terror, he speaks like this: "So huge a mass glides on,
roaring from the deep with mighty noise and blast;
it rolls the waves before it, stirs up eddies with its force,
rushes headlong, spatters and blows back the sea;
so that now you might think a torn storm cloud was rolling on,
now that a rock, flung aloft by the winds, was being swept up
or by the gales, or that round whirlwinds
were rising, struck by clashing waves—
unless the sea is stirring up some havoc on the land,
or Triton perhaps, overturning caves with his trident
deep beneath their roots in the surging strait,
is heaving a rocky mass from the depths up to the sky." At first he is unsure what this unknown thing he sees can be. Then, when he sees the young men and hears the sailors' song, he says: "Like dolphins, swift and eager, they roar with their snouts"—and much else besides—"it brings to my ears a song
just like the melody of Silvanus"—[25]

2.90 well, just as this man at first sight thinks he is looking at something lifeless and without sensation, but later, from clearer signs, begins to suspect what the thing he was unsure of really is, so too the philosophers ought to have done. If the first sight of the world perhaps confused them, they should afterward have seen its movements, defined and regular, and everything governed in fixed order and with unchanging constancy. Then they should have understood that in this heavenly and divine house

25 Lucius Accius (170–c. 86 BC), Roman tragic poet; the lines come from a lost tragedy, probably his *Medea*, in which a shepherd sees the Argo, the first ship.

there is not only an inhabitant but also a ruler and director, an architect, as it were, of so great a work and so great a creation.

As it is, though, they seem to me not even to suspect how wonderful the things of heaven and earth are.

2.91 To begin with, the earth, set in the central part of the world, is surrounded on every side by that living, breathable nature whose name is air. The word is Greek, admittedly, but our people have now taken it over through use; it is as well worn as a Latin word. The air in turn is embraced by the immeasurable ether, which consists of the highest fires. (Let us borrow this word too, and let *aether* be said in Latin just as *aer* is—although Pacuvius translates it: "This thing I speak of, our people call *caelum*, the Greeks *aethera*"—as if the speaker were not a Greek! "But he is speaking Latin." Yes, provided we do not hear him as if he were speaking Greek; and the same poet tells us elsewhere:[26]

2.92 "Greek-born: my speech itself reveals it")—but let us return to greater matters. From the ether, then, arise the countless flames of the stars. Chief among them is the sun, which lights up everything with its brilliant light and is many times greater and larger than the whole earth; then come the other stars, of immense size. These fires, so great and so many, not only do no harm to the earth and earthly things but are so beneficial that, if they were moved from their place, the earth would inevitably be consumed by such great heat, once its moderation and balance were removed.

2.93 Should I not be amazed, at this point, that anyone can persuade himself that certain solid and indivisible bodies are carried along by their own force and weight, and that a world of the greatest order and beauty is produced by the chance collision of those bodies? Anyone who thinks this could have happened might as well think that if countless copies of the twenty-one letters of the alphabet, in gold or any material you like, were thrown together somewhere and shaken out onto the ground, they could form the *Annals* of Ennius, ready to be read straight

26 Marcus Pacuvius (c. 220–130 BC), Roman tragic poet.

through. I doubt whether chance could manage this even in a single line.[27]

2.94 and these people, for their part, insist that the world was made out of tiny bodies endowed with no color, no quality of any kind (what the Greeks call ποιότητα [quality]) and no sensation, but colliding at random and by chance. Or rather they say that countless worlds come into being, some born and others perishing at every moment of time. Well, if a collision of atoms can make a world, why can it not make a colonnade, a temple, a house or a city, things that take less labor and are indeed much easier? Certainly they babble so recklessly about the world that they seem to me never to have looked up at this wonderful ordered beauty of the sky, which is my next topic.

2.95 So Aristotle puts it brilliantly: "Suppose there were people who had always lived underground, in good and splendid dwellings adorned with statues and paintings and furnished with everything that those reckoned blessed possess in abundance, but who had never come up above the earth. Suppose they had learned by report and hearsay that there exists a divine power, a might of gods. Then, at some point, the jaws of the earth opened and they were able to escape from those hidden abodes and come out into these regions where we live. Suddenly they would see the earth, the seas and the sky. They would learn the size of the clouds and the force of the winds. They would look at the sun and come to know not only its size and beauty but also its power, how it makes the day by spreading its light over the whole sky. And when night had darkened the earth, they would see the whole sky studded and adorned with stars, the varying light of the moon, now waxing, now waning, and the risings and settings of all these bodies, and their courses, fixed and unchanging for all eternity. When they saw all this, they would surely believe both that the gods exist and that these great works are the works of the gods."[28]

27 The *Annals* of Ennius (239–169 BC) was the great Latin epic of Roman history; the Latin alphabet then had twenty-one letters.

28 Probably from Aristotle's lost dialogue *On Philosophy*.

2.96 that, then, is what he says. But let us imagine a darkness as great as the one which, they say, once covered the neighboring regions during an eruption of Etna's fires. For two days no one could recognize anyone else, and when on the third day the sun shone again, people felt they had come back to life. If the same thing happened to us after an eternal darkness, so that we suddenly saw the light, how would the sky appear to us? But our minds grow used to things through daily repetition and the habit of our eyes. They neither wonder at nor ask the reasons for the things they always see, as though it were novelty, rather than the greatness of things, that ought to rouse us to seek out causes.

2.97 Who would call a man human if, having seen such certain movements in the sky, such fixed orders of the stars, and everything so connected and fitted together, he denied that there is any reason in them and said they happen by chance? These things are managed with such design that no design of ours can grasp how great it is. When we see something moved by a mechanism, like a sphere, a clock or many other things, we do not doubt that they are works of reason. Yet when we see the sweep of the heavens moving and turning with wonderful speed, completing the yearly changes of the seasons with perfect constancy, for the safety and preservation of all things, do we doubt that this is done not only by reason but by an outstanding and divine reason?

THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD

Earth, sea, air and sky, and the sun, moon and planets in their courses.

BALBUS 2.98 For we may now set aside subtle argument and gaze, as it were, with our own eyes at the beauty of the things that we say were established by divine providence.

First let us look at the whole earth. It is placed in the central seat of the world, solid and round, drawn together into a globe on every side by its own tendency toward the center, and

clothed with flowers, grasses, trees and crops, all of them in incredible abundance and set off by an inexhaustible variety. Add to this the cool, never-failing springs, the clear waters of the rivers, the vivid green clothing of their banks, the hollow depths of caves, the ruggedness of rocks, the heights of overhanging mountains and the immensity of the plains. Add, too, the hidden veins of gold and silver and the boundless quantity of marble.

2.99 and then what kinds of animals there are, and how varied, both tame and wild! What flights and songs of birds, what grazing herds, what life in the woods! And what am I to say of the human race? Appointed, as it were, to cultivate the earth, humans do not allow it to grow savage with monstrous beasts or be laid waste by rough, wild growth; and through their works the fields, islands and shores shine, studded with houses and cities. If we could see these things with our eyes as we can with our minds, no one who surveyed the whole earth would doubt the existence of divine reason.

2.100 And how great is the beauty of the sea! What a sight its whole expanse is, what a number and variety of islands, what charm in its coasts and shores! How many kinds of creatures, and how different: some living beneath the surface, some floating and swimming, some clinging to the rocks by their natural shells! The sea itself, reaching for the land, plays so along the shores that the two natures seem to be fused into one.

2.101 Next to the sea comes the air, divided into day and night. At times it is diffused and thinned and rises aloft. At other times it condenses and gathers into clouds, and, collecting moisture, enriches the earth with rain. At still other times it flows this way and that and produces winds. It also brings about the yearly variations of cold and heat. It supports the flight of birds, and, drawn in as breath, it nourishes and sustains living creatures.

Last remains the embrace of the heavens, the outermost and highest from our dwellings, encircling and enclosing everything. It is also called the ether, the farthest border and

boundary of the world, and in it fiery shapes, to our greatest wonder, trace out their ordered courses.

2.102 Among these the sun, which exceeds the earth in size many times over, revolves around the earth itself. By rising and setting it makes day and night. Now approaching, now withdrawing, it makes two turnings each year in opposite directions from its farthest points. In the interval between them it at one time makes the earth contract, as if in a kind of sadness, and at another, in turn, gladdens it, so that the earth seems to rejoice along with the sky.

2.103 The moon, which is more than half the size of the earth, as the mathematicians show, wanders along the same paths as the sun. Now converging with the sun, now moving away from it, it sends to the earth the light it has received from the sun and itself undergoes various changes of light. Sometimes, too, when it passes beneath the sun and in front of it, it obscures the sun's rays and light. At other times it falls into the shadow of the earth, when it is directly opposite the sun, and with the earth placed in between, it is suddenly eclipsed. Along the same paths the stars we call wandering travel around the earth, and they rise and set in the same way. Their movements now speed up, now slow down,

2.104 and often they even stand still—and nothing could be a more wonderful or beautiful sight. Next comes the vast multitude of the fixed stars. Their arrangement has been so mapped out that they have been given names from their resemblance to familiar figures.

THE CONSTELLATIONS

Balbus tours the night sky in the verses of Aratus that Cicero translated as a young man.

BALBUS At this point he looked at me and said: "I will use the verses of Aratus. You translated them when you were quite a young man, and because they are in Latin they delight me so much that I know many of them by heart. Well, as we see con-

stantly with our own eyes, without any change or variation, 'the other heavenly bodies glide on with swift motion / and are carried night and day along with the sky,'"[29]

2.105 and no mind that longs to see the constancy of nature can ever have its fill of contemplating them. "And the topmost end of the axis, at either hinge,
is called the pole." Around it the two Bears move, never setting. Of these, "one is called Cynosura among the Greeks,
the other is said to be Helice." Her very bright stars we see all night long, the ones "our people are used to calling the Seven Plow-Oxen";[30]

2.106 and little Cynosura, with an equal number of stars arranged in the same way, circles the same top of the sky.
"Trusting her guidance, the Phoenicians sail the deep by night.
But the other, picked out more richly with stars, shines brighter
and is seen far and wide as soon as night begins;
this one is small, but sailors find her useful,
for she turns on an inner course in a narrow circle." And to make the sight of these stars more wonderful, "between them, like a river with a rushing current,
the fierce Dragon creeps, writhing below and above,
and twisting his body into winding coils."

29 Aratus of Soli (3rd century BC) described the constellations in his poem *Phaenomena*; Cicero's youthful Latin version, the *Aratea*, is quoted in what follows.
30 Cynosura is the Little Bear and Helice the Great Bear; the Romans called the seven bright stars of the Great Bear the Septentriones, "seven plow-oxen."

2.107 and while the whole of him is a splendid sight, the shape of his head and the blaze of his eyes are especially worth seeing: "here not just one star shines, adorning his head,
but his temples are marked with a double gleam,
and from his fierce eyes two burning lights blaze,
and his chin glows with a single radiant star;
his head is bent, and with his rounded neck turned back
you would say he fixes his gaze on the tail of the Greater Bear."

2.108 and while we see the rest of the Dragon's body all night long, "here this head dips briefly and suddenly out of sight,
where its rising and its setting merge in a single point." Touching this head, "the figure of a weary man, as if in mourning,
turns; the Greeks call him Engonasin, because he travels on bended knee.
Here is placed the Crown, with its outstanding brilliance." These lie behind him; near his head is "the Serpent-Holder, whom the Greeks call by the famous name of Ophiuchus."[31]

2.109 "He grips the Serpent in the double pressure of his palms,
and is himself held fast, bound by its twisted body;
for the Serpent girds the man around the middle, beneath his chest.
Yet he, straining hard, plants his feet firmly
and presses down with them on the Scorpion's eyes and chest." After the Plow-Oxen comes "Arctophylax [Bear-Guard], commonly called Boötes,
because he drives the Bear before him as if it were yoked to a pole." Then come the lines that follow:

31 Engonasin, Greek for "the Kneeler," is the constellation later called Hercules.

2.110 "for beneath his"—Boötes', that is—"chest there seems to be fixed
a star flashing with rays, Arcturus by its famous name"; and beneath his feet moves "the Virgin, holding the bright Ear of Grain, her body shining." The constellations are so measured out that divine skill is evident in such vast designs: "and you would see the Twins beneath the Bear's head;
below her middle is the Crab, and beneath her feet
the great Lion, shaking a quivering flame from his body."
"The Charioteer will be carried along, hidden beneath the left side of the Twins;
facing him, the fierce head of Helice gazes.
But the bright Goat holds his left shoulder." Then come these lines: "but she is endowed with a great and splendid star,
while the Kids cast only a faint fire for mortals." Beneath his feet is "the horned Bull, straining with his mighty body." His head is thickly sprinkled with stars;

2.111 the Greeks have long called these stars the Hyades, from raining (the Greek ὕειν [hyein] means "to rain"), while our people ignorantly call them Suculae [Piglets], as if they were named after pigs and not after showers. Behind the Lesser Bear follows Cepheus with outspread hands, "for he turns right behind the back of Cynosura, the Bear." Ahead of him goes "Cassiepia, with her dim-looking stars.

Near her turns Andromeda, with her shining body,
fleeing, sorrowful, from the sight of her mother.
Then the Horse, shaking his mane with flashing brightness,
touches the top of her head with his belly, and a single star,
joining them, holds the double figures with a shared light,
eager to tie an eternal knot out of the stars.
Next the Ram clings on, with his twisted horns." Near him are "the Fishes, one of which glides a little ahead of the other
and is touched more by the shuddering blasts of the north wind."

2.112 At Andromeda's feet Perseus is drawn, "buffeted by the blasts of the north wind from its topmost region." "Near his left knee
you will see the Pleiades with their faint light.
Then the Lyre is seen, lightly set and curved." "Then there is the winged Bird beneath the broad canopy of the sky." Next to the Horse's head is the right hand of Aquarius, and then the whole of Aquarius in turn. "Then, breathing icy cold from his powerful chest,
Capricorn, half a beast in body, in the great circle;
and when the Titan Sun has clothed him in his unceasing light,
he turns and wheels his chariot around at the season of midwinter."

2.113 Here, too, "showing itself to view, the Scorpion rises on high,
dragging the curved Bow behind it with the force of its body." "Near it the Bird wheels, shining on its wings;
and near it the Eagle bears itself along with burning body." Then the Dolphin. Next "Orion, shining with slanting body."

2.114 Following him, "the famous blazing Dog shines out with the light of its stars." Behind comes the Hare, "never resting from its course, its body never tired;
and at the Dog's tail the Argo glides along, creeping.
It is covered by the Ram and by the Fishes with their scaly bodies,
as it touches with its bright body the banks of the River." You will see the River far off, "snaking" and flowing, and "you will see the long Bonds
that hold the Fishes, set at the end of their tails.
Then you will make out, near the sting of the shining Scorpion,
the Altar, which the breath of the south wind gently caresses." Near these "the Centaur moves on, hurrying to bring his horse parts up beneath the Claws.
Stretching out his right hand, where the huge four-footed Beast is held,
he reaches out and, fierce, moves on toward the bright Altar.
Here the Hydra rises from the lower regions"; its body is stretched out far, "and in the middle of its coil the shining Bowl gleams

/ the Raven, shining with feathered body, pecks at its far end
with its beak; and here, just beneath the Twins themselves,
is 'Before the Dog,' which goes by the Greek name Procyon."

2.115 Can anyone in his right mind believe that this whole arrangement of the stars and this vast adornment of the heavens

could have been produced by bodies rushing this way and that, by chance and at random? Or could any other nature, lacking mind and reason, have produced these things—things that not only required reason in order to come into being, but cannot even be understood for what they are without the highest reason?

Nor are these the only wonders. Nothing is greater than the fact that the world is so stable and holds together so well that nothing better suited to lasting can even be imagined. For all its parts, seeking the center from every side, press toward it equally. And bodies joined together endure best when they are bound by something like a chain wrapped around them. This is the work of that nature which, accomplishing all things by mind and reason, is diffused through the whole world, draws its outermost parts toward the center and turns them inward.

2.116 Therefore, if the world is spherical, and for that reason all its parts, evenly balanced on every side, are held together by themselves and with one another, the same must hold for the earth. Since all its parts tend toward the center (and in a sphere the center is the lowest point), nothing interrupts so great a tension of gravity and weight in a way that could make it totter. By the same principle the sea, though it lies above the earth, still seeks the earth's center, and so is rounded evenly on every side; it never overflows or spills out.

2.117 Adjoining the sea is the air, which is carried upward by its lightness and yet spreads itself in every direction. So it is both continuous and joined with the sea and borne by its nature toward the heavens; and tempered by their thinness and heat, it provides living creatures with breath that gives life and health. The air is embraced by the highest part of the heavens, called the ethereal region, which both keeps its own fine heat, thickened by no admixture, and is joined to the outer edge of the air. In the ether the stars revolve. They hold themselves together, rounded into balls by their own pressure, and sustain their motions by their very shape and form. For they are round,

and round shapes, as I believe I said earlier, are the least liable to harm.

2.118 The stars are fiery by nature. For this reason they are nourished by the vapors of the earth, the sea and the other waters, which the sun raises from fields it has warmed and from waters. Fed and renewed by these, the stars and the whole ether pour them out again and draw them back again from the same source, so that almost nothing is lost, or only very little, to be consumed by the fire of the stars and the flame of the ether. From this our school believes there will follow the event about which, they used to say, Panaetius had his doubts: that in the end the whole world would burst into flame, when the moisture was used up and the earth could no longer be nourished, nor the air return, since air cannot arise once all water is exhausted. So nothing would be left but fire; and from this fire, a living being and a god, the renewal of the world would come about again, and the same ordered beauty would arise.[32]

2.119 I do not want to seem long-winded to you about the system of the stars, especially those said to wander. Their harmony, arising from the most dissimilar motions, is such that while the highest, Saturn's star, cools, the middle one, Mars', heats, and the one placed between them, Jupiter's, gives light and tempers; below Mars two obey the sun; the sun itself fills the whole world with its light; and the moon, lit by it, brings pregnancies and births and the ripening for birth. Whoever is not moved by this linking of things, by this joining-together of nature in a kind of concord for the world's safety, has never, I know for certain, given a thought to any of these matters.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Plants and beasts are equipped to feed, defend and preserve themselves and their kind.

BALBUS 2.120 Come, then—to pass from the things of the heavens to those of the earth—what is there among these in which the

reason of an intelligent nature does not appear? To begin with the things that grow from the earth: their stems give stability to what they support, and draw from the earth the sap that nourishes what the roots hold; and the trunks are covered with bark or rind, to make them safer against cold and heat. Then again, vines grasp their props with their tendrils as if with hands, and so raise themselves up like living creatures. Indeed, it is said that if they are planted near cabbages they shrink away from them as from something harmful and poisonous, and will not touch them at any point.

2.121 And what variety there is among animals, and what power to ensure that each remains in its own kind! Some are covered with hides, some clothed in shaggy hair, some bristling with spines; some we see covered with feathers, others with scales, some armed with horns, some with wings to escape on. For animals nature has provided food abundantly and plentifully—the food that suited each. I could list how skillful and precise is the arrangement of parts in the shapes of animals for seizing and digesting that food, and how wonderful the construction of their limbs. For all of them—at least the parts enclosed within—are so formed and so placed that none is superfluous, none unnecessary for sustaining life.

2.122 The same nature has given beasts both sensation and appetite: the one so that they would strive to seize their natural food, the other so that they could tell what is harmful from what is wholesome. Again, some animals approach their food by walking, some by creeping, some by flying, some by swimming. Some seize their food with gaping mouth and the teeth themselves, others snatch it with the grip of their claws, others with their hooked beaks; some suck, some nibble, some gulp, some chew. Then again, some are so low to the ground that they easily reach food on the earth with their beaks; while the taller ones, such as geese, swans, cranes and camels, are helped by the length of their necks;

32 Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 185–109 BC), head of the Stoic school, who doubted the doctrine of the world's periodic conflagration.

2.123 the elephant, too, was given a hand, because the size of its body made it hard for it to get at its food. To those beasts whose diet was to feed on creatures of other kinds, nature gave either strength or speed. Some have even been given a kind of ingenuity and cunning. Among little spiders, for example, some weave a sort of net, so as to finish off anything that gets caught in it, while others ... keep watch, ready to strike without warning, and if anything falls in, they seize and devour it. The pina (for that is its Greek name), opening wide its two large shells, forms a sort of partnership with a little shrimp for getting food. So when little fish have swum into the gaping shell, the pina, alerted by the shrimp, snaps its shells shut. In this way creatures utterly unlike each other seek their food in common;[33]

2.124 and here one may wonder whether they came together through some meeting, or were joined by nature itself right from birth. There is also something wonderful in those water creatures that are born on land. Crocodiles, for instance, and river turtles and certain snakes, born out of the water, make for the water as soon as they are first able to move. Indeed, we often set ducks' eggs under hens. The chicks hatched from them are at first reared by the hens as by mothers, since the hens hatched and warmed them; then, as soon as they first catch sight of water, as if it were their natural home, they abandon the hens and flee from them when they try to follow. So great is the instinct for self-preservation that nature has implanted in living creatures. I have also read that there is a bird called the platalea, which gets its food by flying at birds that dive into the sea: when these have come up with a fish they have caught, it presses their heads with its bill until they let go of their catch, which it then pounces on. It is also written that this same bird usually fills itself with shellfish, and when it has digested them with the heat of its stomach, it vomits them up and so picks out from them the parts that are edible.[34]

2.125 Sea frogs are said to bury themselves in the sand and stir near the water; when fish come up to them as if to bait, they are

33 The pina is the fan mussel, a large Mediterranean shellfish.

killed and devoured by the frogs. Between the kite and the raven there is a sort of natural war; so each breaks the other's eggs wherever it finds them. And who can fail to marvel at this (observed by Aristotle, from whom most of these examples come): when cranes cross the seas in search of warmer places, they form the shape of a triangle. With its apex they push aside the air in front of them; then gradually, on either side, the birds' course is eased by their wings as if by oars; and the base of the triangle that the cranes form is helped along by the winds, as if from the stern. They rest their necks and heads on the backs of those flying ahead; and since the leader cannot do this, having nothing to lean on, he flies back so that he too may rest, and one of those that have rested takes his place. This alternation is kept up throughout the whole journey.

2.126 I could cite many examples of this kind, but you see the general pattern. Better known still is how carefully beasts guard themselves: how they look around while feeding, how they hide in their lairs. And this too is wonderful: dogs treat themselves by vomiting, and Egyptian ibises by purging their bowels—remedies discovered by the ingenuity of physicians only recently, that is, a few centuries ago. It has been reported that panthers, which in foreign lands are caught with poisoned meat, have a certain remedy that keeps them from dying once they have used it; and that the wild goats of Crete, when they have been pierced by poisoned arrows, look for an herb called dittany, and when they have tasted it, the arrows, they say, drop out of their bodies;

2.127 and does, shortly before giving birth, purge themselves thoroughly with a little herb called seselis. Then we see how each creature defends itself against violence and fear with its own weapons: bulls with horns, boars with tusks, lions with their charge; some protect themselves by flight, some by hiding, cuttlefish by squirting ink, numbfish by numbing; and many even drive off their pursuers with the unbearable foulness of their smell.

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34 Probably the spoonbill.

So that the world's ordered beauty might last forever, the providence of the gods has taken great care that there should always be kinds of beasts and of trees and of all things held to the earth by roots. All of these have in them such power of seed that from one many are generated. That seed is enclosed in the innermost part of the fruits that each plant puts forth; and on these same seeds human beings feed abundantly, while the earth is filled anew with plants of the same kind.

2.128 Need I say how much rational design appears in beasts for the perpetual preservation of their kind? First, some are male and some female, which nature contrived for the sake of perpetuity. Then there are the parts of the body perfectly suited both to begetting and to conceiving, and in male and female a wonderful desire for the union of bodies. When the seed has settled in its place, it draws almost all the food to itself and, enclosed there, shapes a living creature. When this has slipped out of the womb and been born, in those animals that are nourished by milk almost all the mothers' food begins to turn to milk; and the newborns, with no teacher but nature as their guide, seek the teats and are filled by their abundance. and so that we may understand that none of this is accidental, and that all of it is the work of a provident and skillful nature, those that produce many young, such as pigs and dogs, have been given many teats, while beasts that bear few young have few.

2.129 Need I tell how great is the love of beasts in rearing and guarding their offspring, right up to the point when these can defend themselves? Fish, it is true, as they say, abandon their eggs once they have laid them, for these are easily supported by the water and hatch their young there. Turtles and crocodiles, they say, when they have laid their eggs on land, bury them and then go away; so the young are both born and reared on their own. Hens and other birds, on the other hand, look for a quiet place to lay, build themselves beds and nests and line them as softly as they can, so that the eggs may be kept as easily as possible. When they have hatched their chicks, they protect them by warming them with their wings so that the cold does not

harm them, and by shielding them if there is heat from the sun. When the chicks can use their little wings, the mothers accompany their flights, and are then freed from any further care.

2.130 Besides, the skill and diligence of human beings also contribute to the preservation and safety of certain animals and of the things the earth produces. For there are many domestic animals and many plants that cannot survive without human care.

Great resources for human livelihood and plenty are also found, different ones in different places. The Nile irrigates Egypt; and when it has kept the land buried and flooded all summer, it recedes and leaves the fields softened and covered with silt for sowing. The Euphrates makes Mesopotamia fertile, bringing into it new fields, as it were, every year. And the Indus, the greatest of all rivers, not only gladdens and softens the fields with its water but even sows them; for it is said to carry along with it a great quantity of seeds resembling grain.

2.131 I could cite many other remarkable things in other places, many fields fertile in various crops. But how great is nature's kindness in producing so many things to eat, so varied and so pleasant, and not at one season of the year only, so that we may always delight in both novelty and abundance! And how timely, how healthful—not only for the human race but for herds as well, and indeed for everything that grows from the earth—are the Etesian winds she has given! Their breath tempers excessive heat, and by them, too, swift and sure voyages at sea are steered. Much must be passed over, and yet much is being said.[35]

2.132 for it is impossible to list the advantages of rivers, the tides of the sea flowing in and out, the mountains clothed in forest, the salt deposits far from the seacoast, the lands full of healing drugs, and finally the countless arts needed for livelihood and for life. Then the alternation of day and night preserves living creatures, giving them one time for activity and another for rest.

35 The Etesian winds are the steady northerly winds that blow over the eastern Mediterranean in summer.

So from every side and by every argument the conclusion is reached that all things in this world are wonderfully governed by divine mind and plan for the safety and preservation of all.

THE MAKING OF MAN

The body's design, the senses, the hand, reason and speech: the world was made for gods and humans.

BALBUS 2.133 But suppose someone asks for whose sake this vast work was undertaken. For the trees and plants, which, though without sensation, are sustained by nature? That is absurd. For the beasts? It is no more plausible that the gods went to so much trouble for mute creatures that understand nothing. For whose sake, then, would anyone say the world was made? Surely for those living beings that use reason—that is, gods and humans. Nothing, certainly, is better than they, for it is reason that surpasses all things. So it becomes credible that the world, and everything in that world, was made for the sake of gods and humans.

And it will be easier to understand that the immortal gods have provided for human beings if we examine the whole construction of the human being and the entire form and perfection of human nature.

2.134 Since the life of living creatures depends on three things—food, drink and breath—the mouth is perfectly suited to taking in all of them. With the nostrils joined to it, it is supplied with more breath, while the food is chewed by the teeth set in the mouth and is broken down and softened by them. The front teeth, which are sharp, bite and divide the food; the back teeth, called molars, grind it up; and this grinding seems to be helped by the tongue as well.

2.135 the tongue, at its root, is met by the gullet, into which whatever has been taken into the mouth first slides. Touching the tonsils on either side, the gullet ends at the farthest, innermost part of the palate; and when it has received the food driven and, as it were, thrust down by the agitation and movements of

the tongue, it pushes it on. The parts of the gullet below what is being swallowed widen, while those above contract.

2.136 But the windpipe (the "rough artery," as physicians call it) has its opening joined to the root of the tongue, a little above the point where the gullet is attached to the tongue; it extends all the way to the lungs, receiving the air drawn in by breathing and breathing it out again from the lungs and returning it. So it is covered by a kind of lid, given for this reason: so that if any food happened to fall into it, the breathing would not be obstructed. Since the stomach, set beneath the gullet, is the receptacle for food and drink, while the lungs and heart draw in breath from outside, many wonderful things have been accomplished in the stomach, which consists mostly of sinews. It is manifold and winding, and it confines and holds whatever it has received, dry or moist, so that it can be transformed and digested. It now tightens, now relaxes, and compresses and mixes everything it has received, so that by its heat, of which it has a great deal, by the grinding of the food, and also by breath, everything is digested and worked up and then distributed to the rest of the body. In the lungs there is a certain porousness and a sponge-like softness perfectly suited to drawing in breath. They contract as they breathe out and expand when breath comes in, so that the food of the breath, by which living creatures are chiefly nourished, is drawn in again and again.

2.137 From the intestines and the stomach, the juice by which we are nourished, once it has been separated from the rest of the food, seeps through to the liver along certain passages that run straight from the middle of the intestine to the gates of the liver (as they are called), reaching the liver and attached to it. From there other passages … extend, through which the food flows down after it has passed through the liver. When the bile and the fluids discharged from the kidneys have been separated from this food, the rest turns into blood and flows to those same gates of the liver to which all its passages lead. Through these the food glides, and at this very place pours into the vein called the vena cava, the "hollow vein"; through it, now worked up and

digested, it flows down to the heart; and from the heart it is distributed through the whole body by a great many veins reaching every part of the body.

2.138 How the remains of food are expelled, as the intestines now contract and now relax, would not be hard to describe. But I must pass over it, so that my speech has nothing unpleasant in it. Let me explain instead this incredible piece of nature's workmanship. The air drawn into the lungs by breathing is warmed first by the breathing itself and then by contact with the lungs. Part of it is given back as we breathe out. Part is taken in by a certain part of the heart which they call the ventricle of the heart. Joined to it is a second, similar one, into which the blood flows from the liver through that vena cava. In this way, from these parts, the blood is spread through the veins into the whole body, and the breath through the arteries. Both are numerous and closely woven through the whole body, and they bear witness to an incredible power of craftsmanlike and divine work.

2.139 What should I say of the bones? Set beneath the body as its framework, they have marvelous joints, suited for stability, adapted to marking off the limbs, and fit for movement and for every action of the body. Add to these the sinews, which hold the limbs together, and their interweaving, which extends through the whole body. Like the veins and arteries, they start out from the heart and are drawn into the whole body.

2.140 To this providence of nature, so careful and so skillful, many things can be added. From them one may understand how great and how outstanding are the gifts the gods have bestowed on human beings. First, humans were raised from the ground and made tall and upright, so that by gazing at the heavens they could gain knowledge of the gods. For human beings are on earth not as its inhabitants and residents but as spectators, so to speak, of the things above and in the heavens—a spectacle that concerns no other kind of living creature. The senses, the interpreters and messengers of things, have been made and placed in the head, as in a citadel, in a wonderful way for the uses they

must serve. The eyes, like lookouts, occupy the highest place, from which they can see the most and so perform their task;

2.141 and the ears, since they must catch sound, which by nature travels upward, are rightly placed in the high parts of the body. Likewise the nostrils: since every smell travels upward, they rightly point up, and since they play a large part in judging food and drink, it is not without reason that they have sought the neighborhood of the mouth. Taste, which was to perceive the kinds of things we eat, lives in that part of the mouth where nature has opened a passage for food and drink. Touch is spread evenly over the whole body, so that we can feel every blow and every excessive onset of cold and heat. And just as architects in buildings keep away from the eyes and noses of the owners whatever must drain off and would inevitably be somewhat foul, so nature has banished similar things far from the senses.

2.142 What craftsman other than nature, than which nothing can be more ingenious, could have achieved such skill in the senses? First, she clothed and fenced the eyes with very thin membranes. She made these transparent, so that one could see through them, but firm, so that the eyes would be held in place. She made the eyes slippery and mobile, so that they could turn away from anything harmful and easily direct their gaze wherever they wished. The very point of sight with which we see, called the pupil, is so small that it easily avoids things that could harm it. The eyelids, which are the coverings of the eyes, are very soft to the touch so as not to hurt the pupil. They are perfectly made both for closing the pupils, so that nothing falls in, and for opening them; and nature has provided that this can happen again and again with the greatest speed.

2.143 The eyelids are fortified with a palisade, as it were, of hairs. When the eyes are open, these drive off anything that falls in. When the eyes close in sleep and we do not need them for seeing, the hairs let them rest as if wrapped up. Besides, the eyes are usefully recessed and fenced in by raised parts on every side. First, the parts above, covered by the eyebrows, ward off the sweat running down from the head and forehead. Then the

cheeks, set below and projecting slightly, protect them from beneath. And the nose is placed so that it seems like a wall set between the eyes.

2.144 Hearing, however, is always open, for we need this sense even when asleep: when it has received a sound, we are roused even from sleep. It has a winding passage, so that nothing can get in, as it could if the passage were simple and straight. Provision has also been made that if some tiny creature tries to break in, it gets stuck in the earwax as if in birdlime. On the outside project what are called the ears. They were made both to cover and protect the sense and to keep the voices that reach them from slipping away and wandering off before the sense has been struck by them. Their entrances are hard and almost horny, with many windings, because in materials of this kind sound is reflected and amplified. That is why in stringed instruments the resonance comes from tortoiseshell or horn, and why sounds come back louder from winding and enclosed places.

2.145 Similarly the nostrils, which are always open because of their necessary functions, have narrower entrances, so that nothing harmful can get into them. They always contain a moisture that is quite useful for keeping out dust and much else. Taste is splendidly fenced in: it is enclosed in the mouth, an arrangement well suited both to its use and to keeping it safe.

And all the senses of human beings far surpass those of animals. First, in the arts that the eyes judge—painted, modeled, and engraved forms—and in the movement and gesture of bodies too, our eyes discern many things more finely. The eyes also judge the beauty, order, and, if I may call it so, the propriety of colors and shapes. They judge greater things besides, for they recognize virtues and vices: they recognize the angry and the kindly, the glad and the grieving, the brave and the cowardly, the bold and the timid.

2.146 The ears, likewise, have a wonderful and skilled power of judgment. In the voice and in the music of pipes and strings, they judge the variety of sounds, the intervals, and the distinctions. They also judge very many kinds of voice—resonant and

dull, smooth and rough, deep and high, flexible and hard—and only human ears can judge these. Smell, taste, and to some extent touch also have great powers of judgment. To capture and enjoy these senses, even more arts have been invented than I would like; for it is obvious how far the blending of perfumes, the seasoning of foods, and the allurements of the body have gone.

2.147 And as for the mind and intellect of a human being, with its reason, judgment, and good sense: anyone who does not see that they were perfected by divine care seems to me to lack these very things. While discussing this, I wish I were given your eloquence, Cotta. How you would describe, first, how great our understanding is, and then our capacity to link consequences with their premises and grasp them together! By this, of course, we judge what follows from each thing and draw conclusions by reasoning. We define individual things and grasp them in precise outline. From this we understand what power knowledge has and what it is like—and not even in a god is there anything more excellent. And how great are those things that you Academics weaken and abolish: that we perceive and grasp external things both with the senses and with the mind;

2.148 and from these, gathered and compared with one another, we also create arts, needed partly for the practical uses of life and partly for enjoyment. And then the power of speech, the "queen of all things," as you like to call it—how splendid it is, and how divine! First, it enables us to learn what we do not know and to teach others what we do know. Then, with it we exhort, with it we persuade; with it we console the afflicted, with it we lead the terrified away from fear; with it we restrain the overexcited, with it we quench desires and fits of anger. It is speech that has bound us together in a community of justice, laws, and cities. It is speech that has separated us from a savage and brutish life.

2.149 It is incredible, unless you look closely, how much work nature has contrived for the use of speech. First, the windpipe runs from the lungs right up to the back of the mouth. Through

it the voice, which takes its origin from the mind, is caught and poured out. Next, the tongue is set in the mouth, bounded by the teeth. It shapes and limits the voice, which would otherwise pour out without measure, and produces distinct and clipped vocal sounds when it strikes the teeth and other parts of the mouth. That is why our people say the tongue is like the plectrum, the teeth like the strings, and the nostrils like the horns that resonate to the strings in music.

2.150 And how well adapted are the hands nature has given to humans, and how serviceable to many arts! Thanks to the supple joints and limbs, the fingers bend easily and straighten easily, with no strain in any movement. So the hand, by the movement of the fingers, is fit for painting, for modeling, for carving, and for drawing sounds from strings and from pipes. These things are for enjoyment. The others are for necessity—I mean the tilling of fields, the building of houses, clothing for the body, whether woven or sewn, and all work in bronze and iron. From this we understand that we have obtained everything by applying the hands of craftsmen to what the mind invented and the senses perceived. In this way we could have shelter, clothing, and safety, and could possess cities, walls, homes, and temples.

2.151 Moreover, by human work, that is, by our hands, we also obtain variety and abundance of food. The fields yield many things won by hand, to be eaten at once or stored and preserved for later. Besides, we feed on animals of the land, the water, and the air, partly by catching them and partly by raising them. By taming four-footed beasts we also gain the means of riding, and their speed and strength give us strength and speed. We put loads on some animals, yokes on others. We exploit the keen senses of elephants and the sharp noses of dogs for our own benefit. We draw iron, a thing necessary for tilling the fields, from the caverns of the earth. We find deeply hidden veins of copper, silver, and gold, suitable for use and beautiful as ornament. We use the felling of trees and all timber, both cultivated and wild, partly to warm our bodies and soften our food by

applying fire, and partly to build, so that, sheltered by roofs, we may keep off cold and heat;

2.152 but timber is also of great use in building ships, whose voyages bring supplies for life from every quarter. Over the most violent things nature has produced, the sea and the winds, we alone have control, thanks to our knowledge of seamanship; and we enjoy and use a great many products of the sea. Likewise, all mastery over the benefits of the land lies with humans. We enjoy the plains, we enjoy the mountains; the rivers are ours, the lakes are ours; we sow grain, we plant trees; we make the land fertile by irrigation; we dam rivers, straighten them, divert them. In short, with our hands we try to create, as it were, a second nature within the natural world.

2.153 And where has human reason not penetrated, even into the heavens? We alone of living creatures have learned the risings, settings, and courses of the stars. The human race has defined the day, the month, and the year. Eclipses of the sun and moon have been understood and predicted for all future time: what kind they will be, how great, and when they will occur. Contemplating these things, the mind arrives at knowledge of the gods, and from this piety arises. Joined to piety are justice and the other virtues, and from them arises a blessed life, equal and similar to that of the gods. It yields to the heavenly beings in nothing except immortality, which has nothing to do with living well.

Having set out these points, I think I have shown well enough how far human nature surpasses all living creatures. From this it should be understood that neither the shape and arrangement of our limbs nor such power of intellect and mind could have been produced by chance.

CARE FOR HUMANKIND

Everything in the world serves us, and the gods care for nations and for individuals.

BALBUS 2.154 It remains for me to show—and then at last to conclude—that everything in this world that human beings use was made and provided for the sake of human beings.

First, the world itself was made for the sake of gods and humans, and the things in it were provided and devised for human use. For the world is, as it were, a common home of gods and humans, or a city belonging to both; for they alone use reason and live by justice and law. We must suppose that Athens and Sparta were founded for the sake of the Athenians and the Spartans, and everything in those cities is rightly said to belong to those peoples. In the same way, whatever is in the whole world must be regarded as belonging to gods and humans.

2.155 The circuits of the sun, the moon, and the other stars also serve the cohesion of the world, but they nevertheless provide a spectacle for human beings. For no sight is more inexhaustible, none more beautiful, none more conducive to reason and skill. By measuring their courses we have come to know the ripening of the seasons and their variations and changes. And if these things are known to humans alone, we must judge that they were made for the sake of humans.

2.156 As for the earth, teeming with grain and every kind of legume, which she pours out in the greatest abundance—does she seem to bring these forth for the sake of wild beasts or of humans? What should I say of vines and olive groves, whose rich and abundant fruits have nothing whatever to do with animals? For no beast has any knowledge of sowing or tending, or of reaping and gathering the harvest in season, or of storing and laying it up. The use and care of all these things belong to humans.

2.157 So, just as we must say that lyres and pipes were made for the sake of those who could use them, we must admit that the things I have mentioned were provided only for those who use

them. If some animals steal or snatch some of them, we shall not say that these things were produced for the animals' sake too. People do not store grain for the sake of mice or ants, but for their wives, their children, and their households. So the animals, as I said, enjoy these things by stealth, while the owners enjoy them openly and freely;

2.158 we must therefore admit that this abundance of things was provided for the sake of humans. Unless perhaps such richness and variety of fruits, delightful not only to taste but also to smell and to look at, leaves any doubt that nature has bestowed them on humans alone. These things are so far from having been provided for animals as well that we see the animals themselves were created for the sake of humans. For what do sheep offer, except that their wool, dressed and woven, clothes human beings? Indeed, without human care and tending they could not have been fed or kept alive or yielded any product. And dogs—their faithful watchfulness, their loving fawning on their masters, their hatred of strangers, the incredible keenness of their noses in tracking, their eagerness in hunting—what does all this signify except that they were created for human convenience?

2.159 What should I say of oxen? Their very backs show that they were not shaped to carry loads, but their necks were born for the yoke, and the strength and breadth of their shoulders for drawing the plow. Since it was with their help that the earth was broken up by splitting the clods, that golden race, as the poets put it, never did them any violence: "But then the iron brood sprang up all at once,
and first dared to forge the deadly sword
and to taste the bullock yoked and tamed by hand." So great was the benefit thought to be gained from oxen that to eat their flesh was considered a crime. It would take too long to go through the uses of mules and donkeys, which were certainly provided for human service.[36]

36 The lines come from Cicero's own verse translation of Aratus' *Phaenomena*, describing the end of the golden age.

2.160 And what does the pig have to offer except food? Chrysippus even says that its soul was given to it in place of salt, to keep it from going rotten. Since this animal was fit for humans to eat, nature made none more prolific. What should I say of the multitude and delicacy of fish, or of birds? So much pleasure is gained from them that our Pronoia sometimes seems to have been an Epicurean. And even these could not be caught except by human reason and skill. Yet we think some birds, the "flyers" and the "singers," as our augurs call them, were born for the purpose of taking auguries.[37]

2.161 Then there are the huge and savage beasts, which we obtain by hunting. We hunt them to eat them, to train ourselves in a way that resembles military discipline, and to use them once they are tamed and trained, as with elephants. From their bodies we also select many remedies for diseases and wounds, as we do from certain roots and herbs whose benefits we have learned through long use and testing. You may survey the whole earth and all the seas with the mind, as if with the eyes. You will see vast, fruitful stretches of plain, mountains densely clothed with forest, pastures for cattle, and ships making their voyages across the sea with incredible speed.

2.162 And not only on the earth's surface but also in its innermost darkness lies hidden the usefulness of many things. These came into being for human use, and humans alone discover them.

There is one point that each of you will perhaps seize on to criticize. Cotta will, because Carneades loved attacking the Stoics; Velleius will, because Epicurus mocks nothing so much as the prediction of the future. Yet to me it seems to confirm more strongly than anything that the providence of the gods looks after human affairs. For divination certainly exists. It appears in many places, matters, and times, both in private affairs and, above all, in public ones:

2.163 soothsayers see many things, augurs foresee many, many are revealed by oracles, many by prophecies, many by dreams,

many by portents. When these are understood, many things have often turned out as people wished and to their advantage, and many dangers have been averted. This power, then, or art, or natural gift for knowing the future has certainly been given by the immortal gods to humans and to no one else.

Even if these arguments taken one by one perhaps do not move you, taken all together, connected and joined with one another, they surely ought to have moved you.

2.164 And the immortal gods regularly look after and provide not only for the human race as a whole but also for individuals. For we may narrow down the totality of the human race and bring it down step by step to smaller groups, and finally to individuals. We believe, for the reasons given earlier, that the gods take care of all human beings everywhere, on whatever coast or in whatever region of the earth they live, even those separated from the continuous land we inhabit. If so, they also take care of those who share with us these lands from east to west.

2.165 And if they take care of those who inhabit what we call the circle of the earth, a kind of great island, then they also take care of those who occupy the parts of that island: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Therefore they also love the parts of these, such as Rome, Athens, Sparta, and Rhodes. And within these cities they love individual men, apart from the whole community: in the war with Pyrrhus, Curius, Fabricius, and Coruncanius; in the First Punic War, Calatinus, Duilius, Metellus, and Lutatius; in the Second, Maximus, Marcellus, and Africanus; after them, Paullus, Gracchus, and Cato; or, in our fathers' time, Scipio and Laelius. Besides these, both our own state and Greece have produced many outstanding men, none of whom, we must believe, became what he was without the help of a god.[38]

2.166 It was this reasoning that led the poets, and Homer above all, to give the chief heroes—Ulysses, Diomedes, Agamemnon,

37 Balbus turns Velleius' mocking name for providence (1.18) on his own school, since pleasure is the Epicurean good.

38 Roman leaders of the third and second centuries BC, from the war against Pyrrhus (280–275 BC) to Scipio Aemilianus and his friend Gaius Laelius.

Achilles—particular gods as companions in their trials and dangers. Moreover, the frequent appearances of the gods themselves, such as I mentioned earlier, show that they care for [those in] cities and for individual people. This is also understood from the signs of future events that are shown to us sometimes while we sleep, sometimes while we are awake. We are also warned by many portents, by many signs in the entrails, and by many other things, which long experience has observed so carefully that it has created an art of divination.

2.167 So no great man ever existed without some divine inspiration. But this is not to be refuted by the argument that, if a storm has damaged someone's crops or vineyards, or if some accident has taken away one of life's comforts, we should judge that the person it happened to is hated or neglected by a god. The gods care for great things; they neglect small ones. For great men, however, all things always go well—if, that is, enough has been said by our school and by Socrates, the prince of philosophy, about the riches and abundance of virtue.

2.168 These, roughly, are the things that occurred to me as worth saying about the nature of the gods. As for you, Cotta, if you would listen to me, you would plead the same cause and remember that you are both a leading citizen and a pontiff. You Academics are allowed to argue on either side, so you would choose this side instead. You would devote to it the skill in argument that you gained from rhetorical exercises and that the Academy has enlarged. For it is an evil and impious habit to argue against the gods, whether one does it sincerely or as a pretense.

Book III

The Academic reply
Cotta, a priest who keeps the ancestral religion, shows that the Stoics have proved none of it.

COTTA REPLIES TO BALBUS

A priest who keeps the ancestral rites asks the philosopher for his reasons.

COTTA 3.1 When Balbus had finished, Cotta smiled and said, "You are too late, Balbus, in telling me what to defend. While you were speaking I was turning over in my mind what I might say against you, not so much to refute you as to ask about the points I did not quite understand. And since each of us must use his own judgment, it is hard for me to think what you would like me to think."

VELLEIUS 3.2 Here Velleius said, "You have no idea, Cotta, how eagerly I am waiting to hear you. Your speech against Epicurus gave our friend Balbus pleasure, so now it is my turn to be your attentive listener against the Stoics. I hope you come well prepared, as you usually do."

COTTA 3.3 Then Cotta said, "I do indeed, by Hercules, Velleius. My task with Balbus is not the same as it was with you."

VELLEIUS "How so, may I ask?" he said.

COTTA "Because it seems to me that your Epicurus does not put up much of a fight about the immortal gods. He merely lacks the nerve to deny that the gods exist, so as not to incur any odium or accusation. But when he asserts that the gods do nothing and care for nothing, and that they are equipped with human limbs

but have no use for those limbs, he seems to be joking, and to think it enough to have said that there is some blessed and eternal nature."

3.4 But you noticed, I think, how much Balbus said, and how consistent and coherent it was, even if not quite true. So, as I said, I intend not so much to refute his speech as to ask about the points I did not fully understand. Therefore, Balbus, I leave the choice to you: would you rather answer me point by point as I ask you about what I have not properly grasped, or hear my whole speech straight through?

BALBUS Then Balbus said: "For my part, if you want something explained to you, I would rather answer. But if you are questioning me not so much to understand as to refute, I will do whichever you like: either I will answer each point you raise at once, or I will answer them all when you have finished."

COTTA 3.5 Then Cotta said, "Excellent. So let us proceed as the argument itself leads us. But before I speak of the subject, a few words about myself. I am more than a little moved by your authority, Balbus, and by the close of your speech, which urged me to remember that I am both Cotta and a pontiff. That, I suppose, was meant to make me defend the beliefs about the immortal gods that we have received from our ancestors—the sacred observances, the rites, the religious duties. I will indeed defend them always, and I always have; and no one's speech, learned or unlearned, will ever move me from the belief about the worship of the immortal gods that I received from our ancestors. But when religion is in question, I follow the chief pontiffs Tiberius Coruncanius, Publius Scipio, and Publius Scaevola, not Zeno or Cleanthes or Chrysippus; and I have Gaius[1] Laelius, an augur and also a wise man, whom I would rather hear speaking about religion in that famous speech of his than any of the leading Stoics. The whole religion of the Roman people is divided into sacred rites and auspices, with a third

1 Like Coruncanius and Scaevola (see 1.115), Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica was a chief pontiff and an authority on sacred law.

part added: whatever warnings the interpreters of the Sibyl or the soothsayers have given, for the sake of prediction, on the basis of portents and prodigies. I have never thought that any of these religious observances should be despised. I have convinced myself that Romulus, by establishing the auspices, and Numa, by establishing the rites, laid the foundations of our state —which surely could never have become so great if the immortal gods had not been appeased to the utmost."[2]

3.6 There you have it, Balbus: what Cotta thinks, and what the pontiff thinks. Now let me understand what you think. From you, a philosopher, I ought to receive a reasoned account of religion; but our ancestors I ought to believe even when no reason is given.

BALBUS Then Balbus said, "What account, then, Cotta, do you want from me?"

COTTA And he said, "Your division had four parts: first, you meant to show that the gods exist; next, what they are like; then, that the world is governed by them; and finally, that they take care of human affairs. That, if I remember rightly, was your outline."

BALBUS "Quite right," said Balbus, "but I am waiting to hear what you want to ask."

DO THE GODS EXIST?

Cotta believes it on his ancestors' authority; Balbus' proofs only make it doubtful.

COTTA 3.7 Then Cotta said, "Let us take each point in turn. The first point is one on which everyone agrees except the utterly impious, and for my part it cannot be burned out of my mind: that the gods exist. Yet about this very thing, of which the

2 Gaius Laelius, called "the Wise," friend of Scipio Aemilianus, spoke in 145 BC against a bill to make priesthoods elective. The interpreters of the Sibyl were the priestly board that consulted the Sibylline Books.

authority of our ancestors has persuaded me, you teach me nothing as to why it is so."

BALBUS "But if you are persuaded," said Balbus, "why do you want to learn it from me?"

COTTA Then Cotta said, "Because I am approaching this discussion as if I had never heard anything about the immortal gods, never given them a thought. Take me as a raw, untouched pupil, and teach me what I ask."

BALBUS 3.8 "Tell me, then," he said, "what you are asking."

COTTA "Me? First this: why, when you had said that this part [, being obvious,] did not even need discussion—since it was obvious and agreed by everyone that the gods exist—did you say so much about that very point?"

BALBUS "Because," he said, "I have noticed that you too, Cotta, when speaking in the Forum, often load the judge with as many arguments as you can, provided the case gives you the opportunity. Philosophers do the same, and I have done it as well as I could. But in asking this you are behaving just as if you asked me why I look at you with both eyes instead of closing one, since I could see the same with one."

COTTA 3.9 Then Cotta said, "How apt that comparison is, you must judge. In lawsuits, if something is evident and agreed on by everyone, I do not usually argue for it, for clarity is only diminished by argument; and even if I did so in cases in the Forum, I would not do the same in a discussion as subtle as this. As for closing one eye, there would be no reason for it, since both have the same view, and since nature, which you claim is wise, wanted us to have two lights pierced through from the mind to the eyes. But because you were not as confident that the point was obvious as you would like it to be, you wanted to prove with many arguments that the gods exist. For me a single argument was enough: that our ancestors handed it down to us. But you despise authorities and fight with reason;"

3.10 so allow my reasoning to contend with yours.

You bring all these arguments for the existence of the gods, and by arguing you make doubtful a matter that in my view is not doubtful at all. I have committed to memory not only the number of your arguments but also their order. The first was that as soon as we look up at the sky we understand that there is some divine power by which all this is governed. From this came that line too: "Behold this lofty, gleaming vault, which all invoke as Jupiter":

3.11 as if any of us would call that Jupiter rather than Jupiter of the Capitol, or as if it were obvious and agreed by everyone that those things are gods which Velleius, and many others besides, would not even grant you are living beings! You also thought it a weighty argument that belief in the immortal gods is shared by all and grows every day. Do you think, then, that questions of such importance should be decided by the opinion of fools—especially you Stoics, who say that fools are mad? "But we see gods present in person, as Postumius did at Lake Regillus, and Vatinius on the Via Salaria"—and something too about the battle of the Locrians at the Sagra. So those whom you called the Tyndaridae—that is, men born of a man—and whom Homer, who lived not long after their time, says were buried in Lacedaemon: do you think they came to meet Vatinius on white nags, without any grooms, and announced the Roman people's victory to Vatinius, a country fellow, rather than to Marcus[3] Cato, who was then the leading man of the state? Do you also believe, then, that the mark in the rock at Regillus, which can still be seen today and looks like a hoofprint, was made by Castor's horse?

3.12 Would you not rather believe what can be proved—that the souls of outstanding men, such as those Tyndaridae were, are divine and eternal—than that men who had once been cremated could ride horses and fight in battle? Or, if you say this could happen, you must show how, and not trot out old wives' tales.

BALBUS 3.13 Then Balbus said, "Do you think they are tales? Do you not see the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum, dedic-

3 Homer says the sons of Tyndareus lie buried in Lacedaemon (*Iliad* 3.243).

ated by Aulus Postumius? Do you not see the senate's decree about Vatinius? As for the Sagra, there is even a common saying among the Greeks: when they assert something, they say it is more certain than what happened at the Sagra. Should such authorities not move you?"

COTTA Then Cotta said, "You fight me with rumors, Balbus, whereas I ask you for reasons ... what is to come follows its course;"

3.14 for no one can escape what is to come. And often it is not even useful to know what is to come. It is wretched to be tormented to no purpose, and to be without even the last comfort, which yet all share—hope. This is especially so since you Stoics also say that everything happens by fate, and that fate is whatever has always been true from all eternity. So what is the good of knowing that something will happen, or how does it help us guard against it, when it is certainly going to happen? Then again, where does this divination of yours come from? Who discovered the cleft in the liver? Who first took note of the crow's cry, or of lots? I believe in them, and I cannot despise the augur's staff of Attus Navius, whom you mentioned; but I ought to learn from philosophers how these things came to be understood, especially since those diviners of yours lie about a great many things.

3.15 "But doctors too," you said, "are often mistaken." What resemblance is there between medicine, whose rational basis I can see, and divination, whose origin I do not understand? You even think that the gods were appeased by the self-sacrifice of the Decii. How could the gods be so unjust that they could not be reconciled to the Roman people unless such men had died? That was a commander's plan—what the Greeks call στρατήγημα [a stratagem]—but the plan of commanders who cared for their country and did not spare their own lives. They reckoned that the army would follow its commander as he spurred his horse and hurled himself at the enemy—and that is what happened. As for the voice of Faunus, I for my part have never heard it; if you say you have heard it, I will believe you, though I have no idea at

all what Faunus is. So far, then, Balbus, as far as it depends on you, I do not understand that the gods exist. I do believe that they exist, but the Stoics teach me nothing.[4]

3.16 Cleanthes, as you said, thinks that our notions of the gods have been formed in human minds in four ways. The first is the one I have said enough about, which arises from foreknowledge of future events; the second from disturbances of the weather and other upheavals; the third from the usefulness and abundance of the things we receive; the fourth from the order of the stars and the regularity of the heavens. We have spoken about foreknowledge. As for disturbances in the sky, the sea, and the earth, we cannot deny that when they occur there are many who fear them and think they are caused by the immortal gods;

3.17 but the question is not whether there are some who think that gods exist; the question is whether gods exist or not. The other causes that Cleanthes puts forward—one concerning the abundance of benefits we enjoy, the other concerning the order of the seasons and the regularity of the heavens—will be dealt with when we discuss the providence of the gods, on which you, Balbus, said a great deal;

3.18 and to the same point we will also postpone what you said Chrysippus argued: that since there is something in nature that a human being cannot produce, there is something better than a human being. The same goes for your comparison of the things in a beautiful house with the beauty of the world, and for your appeal to the harmony and concord of the whole world. Zeno's short and rather clever syllogisms we will put off to the part of the discussion I have just mentioned. At the same time, everything you said as a natural philosopher about the fiery force, and about the heat from which you said all things are generated, will be examined in its proper place. And everything you said the day before yesterday, when you wanted to show that the

4 Publius Decius Mus and his son of the same name each "devoted" himself to the gods of the underworld and charged to his death in battle (340 and 295 BC) to win victory for Rome. Faunus was an Italian woodland god whose voice was said to be heard before battles.

gods exist—why the whole world, and the sun, moon, and stars, have sensation and mind—I will reserve for the same occasion.

3.19 But I will ask you the same thing again and again: by what reasoning do you convince yourself that the gods exist?

BALBUS Then Balbus said: "I think I have produced my reasons. But you refute them in such a way that, just when you seem about to question me and I have got ready to answer, you suddenly turn the discussion aside and give me no chance to reply. And so the most important subjects have passed by in silence—divination and fate. You yourself touch on these questions only briefly, while our school usually says a great deal about them; but they are separate from the question we now have in hand. So, if you agree, do not proceed in a confused way, so that in this discussion we may clear up the question before us."

IS THE WORLD A GOD?

Zeno's syllogisms, the heat of nature and the reason of the world, rejected one by one.

COTTA 3.20 "Excellent," said Cotta. "So, since you divided the whole question into four parts and we have spoken about the first, let us consider the second. It seems to me to have turned out like this: in trying to show what the gods are like, you showed that there are none. You said that it was very difficult to draw the mind away from what the eyes are used to; but since nothing is more excellent than god, you had no doubt that the world is a god, since there is nothing in nature better than it—if only we could conceive of it as a living being, or rather see this with the mind as we see other things with the eyes."

3.21 But when you say that nothing is better than the world, what do you mean by "better"? If you mean more beautiful, I agree; if better suited to our needs, I agree to that too. But if you mean that nothing is wiser than the world, I do not agree at all. This is not because it is hard to withdraw the mind from the eyes; rather, the more I withdraw it, the less I can grasp with my mind what you want. "There is nothing in nature better than the

world." Nor is there anything on earth better than our city; do you therefore think that our city has reason, thought, and mind? Or, since it does not, do you think that an ant should be ranked above this most beautiful city, because a city has no sensation at all, while an ant has not only sensation but also mind, reason, and memory? You must see, Balbus, what is granted to you, and not simply assume whatever you like.

3.22 For it was that old syllogism of Zeno's, short and—as you thought—sharp, that opened up this whole topic .... Zeno argues as follows: "What uses reason is better than what does not use reason; but nothing is better than the world; therefore the world uses reason."

3.23 If you accept this, you will soon prove that the world is an excellent reader of books. Following in Zeno's footsteps, you will be able to frame the argument this way: "What is literate is better than what is not literate; but nothing is better than the world; therefore the world is literate." In the same way it will also be eloquent—indeed a mathematician, a musician, learned in every branch of knowledge, and finally a philosopher. You have often said that nothing comes about without god, and that nature has no power to produce things unlike itself. Shall I grant, then, that the world is not only a living and wise being but also a lyre player and a trumpeter, since people skilled in those arts too are produced from it? So that father of the Stoics offers no reason for us to think that the world uses reason, nor even that it is a living being. The world, then, is not a god. And yet nothing is better than it: for nothing is more beautiful, nothing more beneficial to us, nothing more splendid to look at or more regular in its motion.

And if the world as a whole is not a god, neither are the stars, countless as they are, which you counted among the gods. You were delighted by their even and eternal courses—and not without reason, by Hercules, for they move with an admirable and incredible regularity.

3.24 But not everything, Balbus, that has fixed and regular courses should be attributed to a god rather than to nature.

What do you think could be more regular than the Euripus at Chalcis, with its constant ebb and flow, or the Strait of Sicily, or the surging of the Ocean in those parts "where the rushing wave divides Europe from Libya"? What of the tides on the coasts of Spain or Britain, flowing in and ebbing out at fixed times—can they not happen without a god? Consider, please: if we call divine every motion and everything that keeps its order at fixed times, we may have to call tertian and quartan fevers divine as well, for what could be more regular than their recurrence and movement? But a rational account must be given of all such things;[5]

3.25 and since you Stoics cannot give one, you take refuge in a god, as if at an altar.

And Chrysippus seemed to you to argue sharply—undoubtedly a versatile and crafty man (I call *versatile* those whose minds turn quickly, and *crafty* those whose minds have grown hardened by practice, as hands do by work). He, then, says: "If there is something that a human being cannot produce, whoever produces it is better than a human being; but a human being cannot produce the things that are in the world; therefore whoever could produce them is superior to a human being; and who could be superior to a human being except a god? Therefore a god exists." All this involves the same error as those arguments of Zeno.[6]

3.26 For he does not distinguish what is better from what is more excellent, or nature from reason. He also says that, if there are no gods, there is nothing in all nature better than a human being; and he holds that for any human being to think that nothing is better than a human being is the height of arrogance. Granted, it may be arrogant to value oneself above the world; but it is not arrogant—rather it is wise—to understand that one has sensation and reason, and that Orion and the Dog Star do

5 The Euripus, the narrow strait between Euboea and the Greek mainland at Chalcis, was famous for its frequently reversing currents.

6 Cicero derives *versutus* ("versatile") from *versari*, "to turn," and *callidus* ("crafty") from *callum*, "callus" or hardened skin.

not. And he says, "If a house is beautiful, we would understand that it was built for its owners, not for mice; in the same way, then, we ought to regard the world as the home of the gods." I would certainly think so, if I thought the world had been built, and not—as I shall show—shaped by nature.

3.27 But, you say, Socrates in Xenophon asks where we got our mind from if there was none in the world. And I ask where we got speech, where numbers, where song—unless we think that the sun converses with the moon when it comes closer to it, or that the world sings in harmony, as Pythagoras believes. These are the works of nature, Balbus—not of nature proceeding in craftsmanlike fashion, as Zeno says (we will soon see what that amounts to), but of nature setting everything in motion and stirring it by its own movements and changes.[7]

3.28 So I liked what you said about the harmony and concord of nature, which you said breathes together as one, held continuous as if by kinship. What I did not accept was your claim that this could not have happened unless nature were held together by a single divine breath. In fact, nature holds together and endures by its own powers, not by those of the gods; and there is in it that quasi-concord which the Greeks call συνπάθειαν [sympathy]. But the greater it is of its own accord, the less we should think that it comes about by divine reason.

CAN A GOD BE ETERNAL?

Every living body can suffer and perish; virtue and pleasure would make a god mortal.

COTTA 3.29 But how do you Stoics answer the arguments Carneades used to put forward? If no body is immortal, no body is eternal; but there is no immortal body, not even one that is indivisible or cannot be split or pulled apart. And since every living creature has a nature that can be acted upon, none of them escapes the necessity of receiving something from outside —that is, so to speak, of bearing and suffering it; and if every liv-

7 Pythagoras taught that the heavenly bodies produce a harmony as they move.

ing creature is of that kind, none is immortal. Likewise, then, if every living creature can be cut and divided, none of them is indivisible, none eternal. But every living creature is liable to receive and bear force from outside; therefore every living creature must be mortal, dissoluble, and divisible.

3.30 Take wax. If all wax were changeable, nothing made of wax could be unchangeable. Likewise nothing made of silver or bronze could be unchangeable, if the nature of silver and bronze were changeable. In the same way, then, if all the things that exist ... the things of which everything is made are changeable, no body can be unchangeable. And the things of which everything is made are changeable, as you yourselves hold. Therefore every body is changeable. Yet if some body were immortal, not every body would be changeable. So it follows that every body is mortal. For every body is either water or air or fire or earth, or something compounded of these or of some part of them.

3.31 but none of these is exempt from perishing. Everything earthy can be divided. Moisture is so soft that it is easily pressed and crushed. Fire and air are driven very easily by every impulse, and by nature they are extremely yielding and easily scattered. Moreover, all these perish when they are converted into another nature. This happens when earth turns into water, when air arises from water and ether from air, and when the same things travel back again in turn. And if the things of which every living being is composed perish in this way, no living being is eternal.

3.32 But leave all that aside: still, no living being can be found that was never born and will exist forever. Every living being has senses. It therefore perceives hot and cold, sweet and bitter, and it cannot take in what is pleasant through any sense without also taking in its opposite. If, then, it is capable of feeling pleasure, it is capable of feeling pain too; and whatever is open to pain must also be open to death. So we must admit that every living being is mortal. Further, if there is something that feels neither pleasure nor pain, it cannot be a living being;

3.33 but if whatever is a living being must necessarily feel these things, and what feels them cannot be eternal, and every living being feels, then no living being is eternal. Further, there can be no living being without a natural impulse to seek some things and avoid others. What accords with nature is sought, and its opposite avoided. Every living being seeks certain things and flees from others; what it flees from is contrary to nature, and what is contrary to nature has the power to destroy. Therefore every living being must perish.

3.34 There are countless arguments from which it can be inferred and proved that nothing with sensation escapes perishing. The very things that are perceived—cold, heat, pleasure, pain and the rest—destroy when they are intensified. And there is no living being without sensation. Therefore no living being is eternal. Again, the nature of a living being is either simple or compound. If simple, it is earth alone, or fire, or air, or moisture—something whose nature cannot even be conceived. If compound, it is made of several natures, each of which has its own place to which it is carried by the force of nature: one to the lowest place, another to the highest, another to the middle. These can hold together for a certain time, but they cannot possibly do so forever, for each must be swept by nature to its own place. Therefore no living being is eternal.

3.35 But your people, Balbus, usually trace everything back to the force of fire, following Heraclitus, I think. Not everyone interprets him in the same way, but since he did not want to be understood, let us leave aside what he meant. You Stoics, at any rate, put it like this: all power is fire. That is why living beings die when their heat fails, and why throughout the whole of nature whatever is warm is what lives and thrives. But I do not understand why bodies should perish when their heat is extinguished, yet not perish when they lose moisture or breath—especially since they also perish from too much heat.

3.36 So what you say about heat applies to the other elements as well; but let us see where your argument leads. You hold, I think, that in nature and the world outside us there is no living

being except fire. Why fire rather than air (*anima*), of which the minds (*animus*) of living creatures are also made, and from which a creature is called an "animal"? And how do you take it as though it were granted that the mind is nothing but fire? It seems more plausible that the mind is a blend of fire and air. "But if fire is a living being in its own right, with no other nature mixed in, then since, when it is present in our bodies, it makes us feel, it cannot itself be without sensation." Again, the same arguments apply: whatever has sensation must feel both pleasure and pain, and whatever pain reaches, death reaches too. and so it turns out that you cannot prove even fire to be eternal.

3.37 Well then, do you Stoics not also hold that all fire needs fuel and cannot last at all unless it is fed? And that the sun, moon and other stars are fed by waters, some by fresh, some by salt? Cleanthes even gives this as the reason why the sun turns back and goes no farther than the summer tropic or the winter one: so as not to stray too far from its food. What all this amounts to, we shall see shortly. For now let us draw this conclusion: what can perish is not eternal by nature; fire will perish unless it is fed; therefore fire is not eternal by nature.

3.38 And what sort of god can we conceive of who has no virtue at all? Shall we attribute prudence to a god? It consists in knowing what is good, what is bad, and what is neither. For a being to whom nothing bad happens or can happen, what need is there to choose between good and bad? What need of reason or intelligence, which we use to reach the obscure from the evident? But nothing can be obscure to a god. Justice, which gives each his due—what has that to do with the gods? Human society and community, as you yourselves say, gave birth to justice. Self-control consists in forgoing bodily pleasures; if there is room for it in heaven, there is room for pleasures too. And how can a god be conceived of as brave? In pain? In toil? In danger?

3.39 none of which touches a god. How, then, can we conceive of a god who neither uses reason nor has any virtue?

WHERE DOES DEIFICATION STOP?

If the stars and deified humans are gods, so are Nymphs, clouds, rivers and every abstraction.

COTTA Indeed, when I consider what the Stoics say, I cannot look down on the ignorance of the common people and the uneducated. For these are the beliefs of the uneducated: the Syrians worship a fish; the Egyptians have deified almost every kind of beast; and in Greece, again, they have many gods who were once human—Alabandus at Alabanda, Tenes on Tenedos, Leucothea, who was once Ino, and her son Palaemon throughout Greece—and Hercules, Aesculapius, the sons of Tyndareus, our own Romulus and many others, who they think have been received into heaven like new citizens added to the rolls.[8]

3.40 So much for the uneducated. What about you philosophers, who claim to know better? I pass over your doctrines—they are splendid indeed. By all means let the world itself be a god. This, I suppose, is "that lofty, gleaming vault which all invoke as Jupiter." Why, then, do we add more gods? And how great their number is! To me, at least, they seem very many. You count individual stars as gods, and you call them either by the names of beasts—the She-Goat, the Scorpion, the Bull, the Lion—or by the names of lifeless things—the Argo, the Altar, the Crown.

3.41 But even if these are granted, how on earth can the rest be granted, or even understood at all? When we call grain Ceres and wine Liber, we are using a familiar figure of speech. But do you think anyone is so mad as to believe that what he eats is a god? As for those who you say passed from being human to being gods, you will explain how that could have happened, or why it has stopped happening, and I shall gladly learn. As things stand, I do not see how the man for whom, as Accius says, "torches were set to the pyre on Mount Oeta" passed from that

8 Alabandus was the legendary founder of Alabanda in Caria, and Tenes the eponymous hero of the island of Tenedos; the sons of Tyndareus are Castor and Pollux.

blaze "into his father's eternal home." And yet Homer has Ulysses meet him in the underworld, like the others who had departed this life.[9]

3.42 And yet I should very much like to know which Hercules we ought to worship above all, for those who search out esoteric and recondite writings tell us of several. The oldest is a son of Jupiter—but again of the oldest Jupiter, for in the ancient writings of the Greeks we find several Jupiters as well. That Jupiter and Lysithoe, then, were the parents of the Hercules who, we are told, fought with Apollo over the tripod. A second, an Egyptian, is said to be the son of the Nile; they say he wrote down the Phrygian writings. The third is one of the Idaean Dactyls, to whom they bring offerings for the dead. The fourth is the son of Jupiter and Asteria, sister of Latona; he is worshiped chiefly at Tyre, and they say Carthage was his daughter. The fifth, in India, is called Belus. The sixth is our own, the son of Alcmena, fathered by Jupiter—but by the third Jupiter, since, as I shall presently show, we have records of several Jupiters too.[10]

3.43 Since my argument has brought me to this topic, I shall show that I have learned more about the worship of the immortal gods from pontifical law, from ancestral custom, and from those little sacrificial bowls that Numa left us—of which Laelius speaks in that little golden speech of his—than from the reasonings of the Stoics. For if I follow you, tell me how I should answer someone who questions me like this: "If there are gods …, are the Nymphs goddesses too? If the Nymphs are, then so are the little Pans and the Satyrs. But they are not; so the Nymphs are not [goddesses] either. Yet temples to them have been vowed and dedicated by the state. So neither are the other gods to whom temples have been dedicated. Go on: you count Jupiter and Neptune as gods; then their brother Orcus is a god too, and the rivers said to flow in the underworld—Acheron, Cocytus,

9 Hercules burned himself on a pyre on Mount Oeta; Ulysses meets his shade in the underworld in *Odyssey* 11.

10 The Idaean Dactyls ("Fingers") were mythical smiths and wonder-workers of Mount Ida.

Pyriphlegethon—and then Charon and Cerberus must be considered gods."[11]

3.44 "But that must be rejected; so Orcus is not a god either. Then what do you say about his brothers?" This was how Carneades used to argue—not to abolish the gods (what could be less fitting for a philosopher?), but to prove that the Stoics could explain nothing about them. And so he would press on: "Well then," he would say, "if these brothers are counted among the gods, can it be denied of their father Saturn, who is worshiped most widely in the West? And if he is a god, we must admit that his father Caelus is a god too. If so, the parents of Caelus must be considered gods—Ether and Day—and their brothers and sisters, whom the ancient genealogists name as follows: Love, Guile, Fear, Toil, Envy, Fate, Old Age, Death, Darkness, Misery, Lament, Favor, Fraud, Obstinacy, the Fates, the Hesperides, Dreams—all of whom, they say, were born of Erebus and Night. so either these monstrosities must be accepted, or those first gods must be abolished."

3.45 What? Will you say that Apollo, Vulcan, Mercury and the rest are gods, and have doubts about Hercules, Aesculapius, Liber, Castor and Pollux? But these are worshiped just as much as those, and in some places much more. So they must be considered gods, though born of mortal mothers. What about Aristaeus, son of Apollo, who is said to have discovered the olive, or Theseus, son of Neptune, and the rest whose fathers were gods—will they not be counted among the gods? And what about those whose mothers were goddesses? Even more so, I think. Just as [in] civil law the child of a free mother is free, so by the law of nature the child of a goddess must be a god. And so the islanders of Astypalaea worship Achilles with the greatest devotion. If he is a god, then Orpheus and Rhesus are gods, being born of a Muse—unless perhaps marriages at sea rank

11 Numa, Rome's second king, was credited with founding its rites; for Laelius' speech see 3.5.

above marriages on land. If these are not gods, because they are worshiped nowhere, how can those be?[12]

3.46 so consider whether these honors are paid to human virtues rather than to immortality—which you too, Balbus, seemed to say. And if you think Latona a goddess, how can you not think Hecate one, whose mother Asteria is Latona's sister? Or is she a goddess too? For we have seen her altars and shrines in Greece. But if she is a goddess, why not the Eumenides? And if they are goddesses—they have a temple at Athens, and here at Rome, if I interpret it correctly, the grove of Furina—then the Furies are goddesses, presumably as watchers over crime and wickedness and avengers of it.[13]

3.47 And if the gods are such as to take part in human affairs, then Natio too must be considered a goddess. We customarily sacrifice to her when we make the round of the shrines in the territory of Ardea; she is named Natio from *nascentes* ("those being born"), because she watches over married women in childbirth. If she is a goddess, then so are all those you mentioned—Honor, Faith, Mind, Concord—and so also Hope, Moneta and everything we can invent in our own imaginations. If that is not plausible, neither is the source from which these flowed. And what do you say to this: if the gods we worship and have inherited are gods, why should we not count Serapis and Isis in the same class? And if we do, why should we reject the gods of foreigners? Then we shall add to the number of the gods oxen and horses, ibises and hawks, asps, crocodiles and fish, dogs, wolves and cats, and many other beasts besides.[14] and if we reject these, we shall also reject the things from which they sprang.

3.48 Next, will Ino be regarded as a goddess, called Λευκοθέα [Leucothea, "the White Goddess"] by the Greeks and Matuta by us, though she is Cadmus' daughter, while Circe, Pasiphae and

12 Achilles' mother was the sea goddess Thetis; Orpheus and Rhesus were sons of Muses.

13 Furina was an obscure old Roman goddess with a grove across the Tiber; Cotta connects her name with the Furies.

14 Natio was a Latin birth goddess worshiped at Ardea, south of Rome.

Aeetes, born of Perseis, daughter of Oceanus, with the Sun as their father, are not counted among the gods? And yet our colonists at Circeii worship Circe devoutly too. So you regard her as a goddess. What, then, will you answer Medea, whose two grandfathers were gods, the Sun and Oceanus, and whose father was Aeetes and mother Idyia? What will you answer her brother Absyrtus (in Pacuvius he is Aegialeus, but the other name is more common in the old writers)? If they are not gods, I fear for Ino, for all these flowed from the same source.

3.49 Or will Amphiaraus be a god, and Trophonius? Our tax collectors, at any rate, when lands in Boeotia belonging to the immortal gods were exempted under the censors' contract, denied that anyone who had once been human was immortal. But if those two are gods, then Erechtheus certainly is; we have seen both his shrine and his priest at Athens. And if we make him a god, how can we doubt about Codrus, or the others who fell fighting for their country's freedom? If that is not plausible, neither should those earlier claims from which these flow be accepted.[15]

3.50 In most states, one can see, the memory of brave men has been hallowed with the honors of the immortal gods in order to encourage virtue, so that the best men would face danger more willingly for the commonwealth. For this very reason Erechtheus and his daughters are numbered among the gods at Athens, and there is likewise at Athens the shrine of the daughters of Leos, called the Λεωκόριον [Leocorion]. The people of Alabanda, indeed, worship Alabandus, the founder of their city, more devoutly than any of the famous gods. It was there that Stratonicus—wittily, as so often—was pestered by someone insisting that Alabandus was a god and Hercules was not. "Very well,"[16]

15 Amphiaraus and Trophonius were legendary heroes with oracle shrines in Boeotia, whose lands the tax collectors wished to tax. Codrus was the legendary king of Athens who gave his life to save the city.

16 The Leocorion honored the daughters of Leos, said to have been sacrificed to save Athens. Stratonicus was an Athenian musician of the fourth century BC, famous for his wit.

3.51 he said, "then let Alabandus be angry with me, and Hercules with you." And as for the arguments you drew from the heavens and the stars, Balbus, do you not see how far they creep? You say the sun and moon are gods; the Greeks take the one for Apollo, the other for Diana. But if the moon is a goddess, then the Morning Star and the other wandering stars will also hold a place among the gods—and so will the stars that do not wander. And why should the rainbow not be placed among the gods? It is beautiful, and because of that beauty, since its cause is a wonder, it is said to be the daughter of Thaumas. If it has a divine nature, what will you do with the clouds? For the rainbow itself is formed from clouds colored in a certain way, and one of them is even said to have given birth to the Centaurs. And if you count the clouds among the gods, you will certainly have to count the storms too, which have been consecrated in the rites of the Roman people.[17] so rain showers, storm clouds, gales and whirlwinds must be thought gods; and our generals, at any rate, when putting to sea, have been accustomed to sacrifice a victim to the waves.

3.52 Again, if Ceres comes from *gerere* ("to bear"), as you said, then the earth itself is a goddess (and so it is regarded—for what else is Tellus?). And if the earth is, so is the sea, which you said was Neptune; and therefore rivers and springs too. So it was that Maso dedicated a shrine to Fons after his Corsican campaign, and in the augurs' prayer we find Tiberinus, Spino, Anemo, Nodinus and the names of other nearby rivers. So either this will creep on endlessly, or we shall accept none of it. Nor will that boundless system of superstition be approved. Therefore none of it should be approved.[18]

17 The name Thaumas suggests Greek *thauma*, "wonder."
18 Gaius Papirius Maso, consul in 231 BC, won a victory in Corsica; Fons was the Roman god of springs.

THE THEOLOGIANS' MANY GODS

Three Jupiters, five Suns, four Vulcans, five Mercuries: the genealogies multiply every god.

COTTA 3.53 We ought also, then, Balbus, to answer those who say that these gods, carried up from the human race into heaven—gods whom we all worship with reverence and devotion—exist not in reality but in belief. To begin with, those called theologians count three Jupiters. Of these the first and second were born in Arcadia: one had Ether as his father, and Proserpina and Liber are said to be his children; the other had Caelus as his father and is said to have begotten Minerva, whom they call the originator and inventor of war. The third is the Cretan, son of Saturn, whose tomb is shown on that island. The Dioscuri, too, are named in many ways among the Greeks. The first three, who are called the Anactes ("Lords") at Athens, were sons of the most ancient king Jupiter and Proserpina: Tritopatreus, Eubuleus and Dionysus. The second were sons of the third Jupiter and Leda: Castor and Pollux. The third are said by some to be Alco, Melampus and Eumolus, sons of Atreus, the son of Pelops.[19]

3.54 Next, the first Muses are four, [born] of the second Jupiter: Thelxinoe, Aoede, Arche and Melete. The second, nine in number, were born of the third Jupiter and Mnemosyne. The third were born of [the third Jupiter] Pierus and Antiopa; the poets usually call them Pierides and Pierians, and they have the same names and the same number as the ones just mentioned. And though you say the sun (*sol*) got its name because it is alone (*solus*), how many Suns the theologians bring forward! One of them is the son of Jupiter and grandson of Ether; another, the son of Hyperion; the third, the son of Vulcan, son of the Nile—the Egyptians claim that his city is the one called Heliopolis; the fourth is the one whom Acantho is said to have borne at Rhodes in the heroic age, father of Ialysus, Camirus and Lindus, from whom the Rhodians descend; the fifth is the one said to have

19 The "theologians" were Greek writers who compiled genealogies of the gods.

fathered Aeetes and Circe at Colchis. There are likewise several Vulcans:

3.55 the first, son of Caelus, who by Minerva was father of the Apollo whom the ancient historians declared to be the guardian of Athens; the second, born [in] the Nile, whom the Egyptians call Opas and regard as the protector of Egypt; the third, son of the third Jupiter and Juno, who is said to have been master of the forges on Lemnos; the fourth, son of Maemalius, who ruled the islands near Sicily that used to be called the Vulcanian Islands.[20]

3.56 One Mercury is the son of Caelus and Dies. The story goes that his nature was roused rather indecently because he was stirred by the sight of Proserpina. The second, son of Valens and Phoronis, is the one believed to dwell beneath the earth, and he is the same as Trophonius. The third, son of the third Jupiter and Maia, is the one by whom, they say, Penelope bore Pan. The fourth had the Nile as his father; the Egyptians consider it sacrilege to speak his name. The fifth, worshiped by the people of Pheneus, is said to have killed Argus, to have fled to Egypt for that reason, and to have given the Egyptians their laws and their letters. The Egyptians call him Theyt, and the first month of their year goes by the same name.[21]

3.57 Of the Aesculapiuses, the first is the son of Apollo and is worshiped by the Arcadians. He is said to have invented the surgical probe and to have been the first to bandage a wound. The second is the brother of the second Mercury; he is said to have been struck by lightning and buried at Cynosura. The third, son of Arsippus and Arsinoe, was the first, they say, to devise purging of the bowels and the pulling of teeth. His tomb and grove are shown in Arcadia, not far from the river Lusius. Of the Apollos, the oldest is the one I mentioned a little earlier as the son of Vulcan and the guardian of Athens. The second, son of Corybas, was born in Crete; he is said to have fought Jupiter himself for that island. The third, son of the third Jupiter and Latona, is said

20 Opas is probably Ptah, the Egyptian craftsman god.
21 Theyt is Thoth, the Egyptian god credited with inventing writing.

to have come to Delphi from the Hyperboreans. The fourth is in Arcadia; the Arcadians call him Nomios, because they say they received their laws from him.[22]

3.58 There are likewise several Dianas. The first, daughter of Jupiter and Proserpina, is said to have given birth to the winged Cupid. The second, better known, is by tradition the daughter of 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, after her father's name. We have many Dionysuses. The first is the son of Jupiter and Proserpina. The second is the son of the Nile and is said to have killed Nysa. The third had Cabirus as his father; they say he ruled as king of Asia, and the Sabazian rites were founded in his honor. The fourth is the son of Jupiter and the Moon; the Orphic rites are thought to be performed for him. The fifth, son of Nysus and Thyone, is thought to have established the biennial festivals.[23]

3.59 The first Venus is the daughter of Caelus and Dies; I have seen her shrine at Elis. The second was born from the sea foam; by tradition she bore the second Cupid to Mercury. The third, daughter of Jupiter and Dione, married Vulcan, but Anteros is said to be her son by Mars. The fourth was conceived in Syria and Cyprus; she is called Astarte, and she is recorded to have married Adonis. The first Minerva is the one I said above was the mother of Apollo. The second sprang from the Nile; the Egyptians worship her at Sais. The third is the one I said above was begotten by Jupiter. The fourth, daughter of Jupiter and Coryphe, the daughter of Oceanus, is called Κορίαν [Koria] by the Arcadians, and they say she invented the four-horse chariot. The fifth is the daughter of Pallas; she is said to have killed her father when he tried to violate her chastity. She is shown with winged sandals fastened to her ankles.

3.60 The first Cupid is said to be the son of Mercury and the first Diana; the second, of Mercury and the second Venus; the

22 The Greek name *Nomios* suggests *nomos*, "law" (it can also mean "of the pastures").

third, who is the same as Anteros, of Mars and the third Venus. These and other tales of the kind have been gathered from the ancient lore of Greece. You understand that they must be resisted, so that religion is not thrown into confusion. Your school, however, not only fails to refute them but actually confirms them, by interpreting what each one refers to.

But let us now go back to the point from which we digressed. Do you really think a subtler argument is needed to refute these things?

3.61 For we see that mind, good faith, hope, virtue, honor, victory, safety, concord and the rest of this kind have the force of things, not of gods. Either they are within us—mind, hope, good faith, virtue, concord—or they are things we must wish for—honor, safety, victory. I see the usefulness of these things; I also see the statues consecrated to them. But why the power of gods resides in them I will understand when I have found out. In this class Fortune above all must be counted, and no one will separate her from inconstancy and rashness—qualities certainly unworthy of a god.

3.62 Then again, why do you take such delight in explaining myths and untangling names? Caelus castrated by his son, Saturn likewise put in chains by his son—these and other stories of the same kind you defend in such a way that the people who made them up seem not only not to have been mad but even to have been wise. And in untangling names you go to pitiable lengths: "Saturn, because he is sated (*saturat*) with years; Mavors, because he overturns great things (*magna vertit*); Minerva, because she diminishes (*minuit*) or because she threatens (*minatur*); Venus, because she comes (*venit*) to all things; Ceres, from bearing (*gerendo*)." What a dangerous habit! You will get stuck on a great many names. What will you do with Vejovis? What with Vulcan? Though since you think Neptune is named from swimming (*nando*), there will be no name whose origin you cannot explain by a single letter. In this, at any rate, you

23 The biennial festivals (*trieterides*, "every third year" by Greek inclusive counting) were Dionysiac celebrations held every other year.

seemed to me to be swimming about more than Neptune himself.[24]

3.63 Zeno first, then Cleanthes, and after him Chrysippus took on a great and wholly unnecessary burden: to give an account of invented myths and to explain the reasons behind names—why each thing is called what it is. When you do this, you are surely admitting that the truth is far different from what people believe: that those who are called gods are the natures of things, not the figures of gods. This error went so far that even harmful things were not only given the name of gods but even had rites established for them. For we see a shrine of Fever on the Palatine, a shrine of Orbona near the temple of the Lares, and an altar consecrated to Bad Fortune on the Esquiline.[25]

3.64 So let all such error be driven out of philosophy, so that when we discuss the immortal gods we say things worthy of the immortal gods. On that subject I have my own view; what I do not have is anything on which to agree with you. You say Neptune is a mind endowed with intelligence that pervades the sea, and you say the same of Ceres. But this intelligence of the sea or of the earth I cannot grasp with my mind, nor can I even touch it with a guess. So I must look elsewhere in order to learn both that the gods exist and what kind of beings they are; the kind you would have them be ...

PROVIDENCE AND THE GIFT OF REASON

After a gap in the text: reason serves crime as often as good, so it proves no divine care.

COTTA 3.65 ... let us look at what follows: first, whether the world is governed by the foresight of the gods; then, whether the gods take care of human affairs. These are the two points that remain for me from your division of the subject. If you both agree, I think they need to be discussed with special care.

24 Vejovis was an obscure, ancient Roman god with a temple on the Capitol.
25 Orbona was the goddess of bereavement, invoked by parents who had lost children.

VELLEIUS "I certainly agree," said Velleius, "and heartily. For I am expecting weightier matters still, and I strongly agree with what has been said so far."

BALBUS Then Balbus said, "I do not want to interrupt you, Cotta, but we will choose another time; I will certainly bring you to admit it. But ..."

COTTA ... First, then, it is not plausible that the matter of things, from which everything arose, was created by divine providence. Rather, it has, and always has had, a force and nature of its own. A builder, when he is about to put something up, does not make his materials himself but uses what is ready to hand; a modeler likewise uses wax. In the same way, your divine providence must have had matter available—not matter it had made itself, but matter it found ready. And if matter was not made by a god, then neither were earth, water, air and fire made by a god. ...[26]

"That will not go the way you think; there is a great struggle in it.
For why would I have pleaded with him in such flattering words,
unless to some purpose"—[27]

3.66 does she seem to be short of reasoning, as she contrives a monstrous disaster on her own account? And this—with what cunning reasoning: "Whoever wants what he wants, things will turn out as he works for them"—a line that sows every evil. "He, with his mind gone astray, has today handed me the bolts
with which I shall unlock all my anger and bring ruin on him—
grief for me, mourning for him; death for him, exile for me." This reason, of course, which you say was granted to man alone by divine favor, the beasts do not possess;

26 A long section of Cotta's argument is lost here; this passage survives only as a quotation in the Christian writer Lactantius.
27 From Ennius' tragedy *Medea*: Medea explains why she begged King Creon for one more day before her exile.

3.67 so do you see what a great gift the gods have bestowed on us? And the same Medea, fleeing her father and her fatherland: "when her father
draws near and is now almost ready to seize her,
she meanwhile butchers the boy, cuts him apart limb by limb,
and scatters the body far and wide across the fields—all to this end:
that while the parent gathered up his son's scattered limbs,
she meanwhile might escape, that grief might slow his pursuit,
that she might win safety for herself by murdering her own kin."[28]

3.68 she lacked reason no more than she lacked crime. And what of the man preparing a deadly feast for his brother? Does he not turn his reasoning this way and that in his thoughts: "A greater effort is needed, a greater evil must be brewed,
to crush and quell that bitter heart of his." Nor should we pass over that man himself, who was not content to lure his brother's wife into adultery, and of whom Atreus speaks rightly and most truly: "What I consider, in matters of the highest state, the highest
danger: that royal mothers be defiled,
the stock polluted, the bloodline mixed." And how cunningly he went about that very thing, seeking the throne through adultery! "I add this," says Atreus, "that the father of the heavenly gods sent me as a portent"
"a prodigy, the mainstay of my reign—"
"a lamb among the flocks, bright with golden fleece—"
"and that Thyestes once dared to steal it from the palace,"
"taking my wife to help him in the deed."[29]

28 Lines from Accius' tragedy *Medea*: the boy is her young brother Absyrtus, killed to delay their father Aeetes.
29 From Accius' tragedy *Atreus*: Atreus served his brother Thyestes his own sons at a banquet, in revenge for Thyestes' seduction of his wife.

3.69 does he not seem, while practicing the utmost wickedness, to have used the utmost reason as well? And it is not only the stage that is crammed with these crimes; ordinary life is crammed with crimes almost far greater. Every household feels it, the Forum feels it; the senate house, the Campus, the allies, the provinces feel it—so that just as right actions are done by reason, so are wrongs: the one by few and rarely, the other always and by very many. It would have been better, then, for the immortal gods to have given us no reason at all than to have given it with such ruinous results. just as with wine for the sick: since it rarely helps and very often harms, it is better not to give it at all than to rush into obvious ruin in the hope of an uncertain recovery. In the same way, I rather think it would have been better for the human race not to have been given at all that quick movement of thought, that sharpness, that ingenuity which we call reason—since it is deadly to many and beneficial to very few—than to have been given it so generously and so lavishly.

3.70 Therefore, if the divine mind and will took care of human beings by bestowing reason on them, it took care only of those it endowed with good reason—and these, we see, are very few, if there are any at all. But you do not accept that the immortal gods took care of only a few. It follows, then, that they took care of no one.

You usually meet this point as follows: the gods have provided for us no less than excellently just because many people misuse their gift; many misuse their inheritances too, yet that does not mean they have received no benefit from their fathers. Does anyone deny that? But what likeness is there in that comparison? Deianira did not mean to harm Hercules when she gave him the tunic dipped in the Centaur's blood. Nor did the man who opened Jason of Pherae's abscess with a sword—an abscess the doctors had been unable to cure—mean to help him. Many people have done good when they meant to do harm, and harm when they meant to do good. So the gift itself does not

reveal the intention of the giver; nor, if the recipient uses it well, does it follow that the giver gave it in friendship.[30]

3.71 For what lust, what greed, what crime is either undertaken without a plan being formed, or carried out without the mind's activity and thought—that is, without reason? For every belief is a form of reason: good reason if the belief is true, bad reason if it is false. But from god we have only reason itself, if indeed we have it; whether it is good reason or bad comes from ourselves. For reason was not given to man by the favor of the gods the way an inheritance is bequeathed. What could the gods have given humans in preference to it if they had wanted to harm them? And what seeds would there be of injustice, intemperance and cowardice, if reason did not underlie these vices?

I mentioned Medea and Atreus a moment ago—heroic figures plotting unspeakable crimes after working out and totting up their reckoning.

3.72 what about the frivolities of comedy—are they not forever busy with reasoning? Does not that fellow in *The Eunuch* argue subtly enough: "What shall I do, then?

She shut me out, she calls me back; shall I go back? Not if she begs me." And the young man in *The Young Comrades* does not hesitate, in the manner of the Academics, to fight against common opinion with reason, when he says that "in the height of love and the depth of poverty" it is "pleasant" to have "a father who is stingy, ungracious to his children,

and difficult, who neither loves you nor takes any interest in you,"[31]

30 Jason was tyrant of Pherae in Thessaly in the 4th century BC; an assassin's sword reportedly lanced his abscess and cured him.

31 *The Eunuch* is a comedy by Terence; *The Young Comrades* (*Synephebi*) a comedy by Caecilius Statius.

3.73 and he supplies some petty reasons for this incredible view:

> "Either you can cheat him of his income, or by a forged document
> divert some debt, or through a slave boy
> give the timid man a fright; and finally, from a stingy father,
> what you take, how much more gladly you squander it!"

And the same man argues that an easygoing, generous father is a nuisance to a son in love: "I have no idea how to cheat him, or what to get out of him,

> or what trick or device to work up against him—
> none at all: so completely have all my tricks, my deceits,
> my sleights of hand been foiled by my father's good nature."

Well then, these tricks, these devices, these deceits and sleights of hand—could they have existed without reason? What a splendid gift of the gods—so that Phormio can say: "Bring me the old man; all my plans are now drawn up in my mind."[32]

3.74 But let us leave the theater and come to the Forum. The praetor goes to take his seat. To try what? Who set fire to the Record Office. What crime could be more secret? Yet Quintus Sosius, a distinguished Roman knight from the Picene district, confessed that he had done it. Who falsified the public records? Lucius Alenus did that too, when he forged the handwriting of the six chief clerks. What could be more ingenious than that man? Consider other inquiries: into the gold of Toulouse, into the Jugurthine conspiracy. Go back to earlier ones: that of Tubulus, for taking money to give a verdict. Later ones: the inquiry into unchastity under the Peducaean bill. Then these everyday ones: daggers, poisons, embezzlement, and also the inquiries into wills under the new law.[33] hence that legal formula: "I declare that a theft was committed with your help and counsel"; hence all the trials for bad faith—in guardianship, commissions,

32 Phormio is the scheming parasite in Terence's comedy of that name.
33 Notorious trials: the temple gold looted at Toulouse in 106 BC, Jugurtha of Numidia's bribery of Roman officials, the corrupt praetor Lucius Hostilius Tubulus (142 BC), and the Vestal Virgins tried in 113 BC under Sextus Peducaeus' bill.

partnerships and trusts—and the other breaches of faith in buying or selling, in hiring or letting; hence the public trial of a private matter under the Laetorian law; hence that dragnet for every kind of malice, the action for fraud, which our friend Gaius Aquillius introduced. And this same Aquillius holds that fraud has taken place when one thing is pretended and another done.[34]

3.75 Are we to think, then, that this vast sowing of evils was done by the immortal gods? For if the gods gave humans reason, they gave them malice, since malice is a crafty and deceitful reasoning aimed at doing harm. The same gods also gave fraud, crime and all the rest, none of which can be either undertaken or carried out without reason. If only, then—as that old woman wishes "that in the grove of Pelion, by axes / felled, the fir-wood timbers had never crashed to the ground"—so the gods had never given humans that cunning of yours! Very few use it well, and even they are often crushed by those who use it badly, while countless people use it wickedly. So this divine gift of reason and deliberation seems to have been bestowed on humans for fraud, not for goodness.[35]

3.76 But you insist again and again that the fault lies with humans, not with the gods. That is as if a doctor were to blame the severity of the disease, or a helmsman the force of the storm. They are only poor mortals, yet even they would be ridiculous: "Who would have called you in," someone might say, "if those things did not exist?" Against a god one may argue more freely: "You say the fault lies in human vices. You should have given humans a reason that would rule out vice and fault." Where, then, was there room for the gods to make a mistake? We leave our estates in the hope of handing them on well, and in that hope we can be deceived; but how could a god be deceived? Or was it the way the Sun was deceived when he lifted his son

34 The Laetorian law (about 200 BC) protected young people under twenty-five against being defrauded. Gaius Aquillius Gallus was an eminent jurist, later Cicero's colleague as praetor in 66 BC.

35 The old woman is Medea's nurse in the opening lines of Ennius' *Medea*, wishing the timber for the ship Argo had never been cut.

Phaethon into his chariot, or Neptune when Theseus destroyed Hippolytus, after receiving from his father Neptune the power to make three wishes:

3.77 these are the poets' stories, but we want to be philosophers, dealing in facts, not in fables. And yet even these gods of poetry, had they known that their gifts would be ruinous to their sons, would be thought to have erred in their kindness. Aristo of Chios used to say that philosophers do harm to those of their hearers who misinterpret what was well said—for profligates could come out of Aristippus' school, and harsh men out of Zeno's. If that is true, then surely, if their hearers were going to leave corrupted because they misinterpreted the philosophers' teaching, it would be better for philosophers to keep silent than to harm those who had listened to them;[36]

3.78 so too, if people turn reason, which the immortal gods gave with good intent, into fraud and malice, it would have been better for it not to be given to the human race than to be given. A doctor who knew that a patient told to take wine would take it too undiluted and die at once would be much to blame. In the same way, that Providence of yours deserves blame for giving reason to those it knew would use it perversely and wickedly. Unless perhaps you say she did not know. I wish you would! But you will not dare, for I am well aware how highly you value her name.

THE GOOD SUFFER, THE WICKED THRIVE

Regulus tortured, Dionysius untouched: the gods do not reward the good or punish the wicked.

COTTA 3.79 But this topic can now be brought to a close. By the agreement of all philosophers, folly is a greater evil than all the evils of fortune and of the body placed together on the other side of the scale. If that is so, and no one attains wisdom, then we are all in the depths of misery—we for whom, you say, the

36 Aristo of Chios was a pupil of Zeno, founder of Stoicism; Aristippus founded the Cyrenaic school, which made pleasure the highest good.

immortal gods have provided excellently. For just as it makes no difference whether no one is healthy or no one can be healthy, so I do not see what difference it makes whether no one is wise or no one can be wise.

And I have said far too much on a perfectly obvious matter. Telamon, though, settles the whole question of why the gods neglect humans in a single line: "for if they cared, it would go well for the good and badly for the bad"—which is not the case now. They ought, of course, to have made everyone good, if they really cared for the human race;[37]

3.80 or failing that, they certainly ought to have cared for the good. Why, then, did the Carthaginian crush the two Scipios, men of the greatest courage and virtue, in Spain? Why did Maximus have to bury his son, a former consul? Why did Hannibal kill Marcellus? Why did Cannae carry off Paulus? Why was Regulus' body handed over to the cruelty of the Carthaginians? Why did the walls of his own home fail to protect Africanus? But these are old cases, and there are a great many others; let us look at more recent ones. Why is my uncle Publius Rutilius, a man of perfect integrity and great learning, in exile? Why was my friend Drusus murdered in his own house? Why was the chief pontiff Quintus Scaevola, the very model of self-control and good judgment, butchered before the statue of Vesta? Why, even before that, were so many leading citizens killed by Cinna? Why was Gaius Marius, the most treacherous of all men, able to order the death of Quintus Catulus, a man of the highest standing?[38]

3.81 The day would run out if I tried to list the good people who fared badly, and no less if I recounted the wicked who fared extremely well. Why did Marius die so happily, an old man in his own home, consul for the seventh time? Why did Cinna, the cruelest of all men, rule for so long? "But he paid the penalty." It

37 Telamon, father of Ajax, speaks this line in a tragedy by Ennius.

38 Africanus here is Scipio Aemilianus, found mysteriously dead at home in 129 BC. Rutilius Rufus was unjustly exiled in 92 BC; the tribune Marcus Livius Drusus was assassinated in 91 BC; Catulus was driven to suicide in 87 BC and Scaevola killed in 82 BC.

would have been better for him to be stopped and prevented from killing so many great men than to pay the penalty himself in the end. Quintus Varius, a thoroughly ruthless man, died in extreme torment and punishment. If that was because he had killed Drusus with the sword and Metellus with poison, it would have been better for them to be saved than for Varius to pay for his crime. Dionysius was tyrant of a very rich and prosperous city for thirty-eight years;[39]

3.82 and how many years before him, in the very flower of Greece, did Pisistratus rule! "But Phalaris and Apollodorus paid the penalty." Yes—after torturing and killing many people first. Pirates, too, are often punished, yet we cannot say that more captives have not died cruel deaths than pirates. We are told that Anaxarchus, the follower of Democritus, was butchered by the tyrant of Cyprus, and that Zeno of Elea was put to death under torture. And what am I to say of Socrates, whose death I cannot read about in Plato without tears? Do you see, then, that the judgment of the gods, if they do observe human affairs, has done away with any distinction between good and bad?[40]

3.83 Diogenes the Cynic used to say that Harpalus, who in those days was considered a lucky robber, was a standing witness against the gods, because he lived so long in such good fortune. Dionysius, whom I mentioned before, had plundered the temple of Proserpina at Locri and was sailing back to Syracuse. As he held his course with a perfectly favorable wind, he laughed and said: "Do you see, my friends, what a fine voyage the immortal gods grant to the sacrilegious?" And the shrewd fellow, having grasped this point clearly and well, persisted in the same view. When he had brought his fleet to the Peloponnese and entered the temple of Olympian Jupiter, he stripped from the god a golden cloak of great weight, with which the tyrant Gelo had adorned Jupiter out of the spoils taken from the Carthaginians.

39 Dionysius I ruled Syracuse from 405 to 367 BC. Quintus Varius, tribune in 90 BC, set up a court that prosecuted Roman leaders and was later condemned under his own law.

40 Pisistratus was tyrant of Athens in the 6th century BC; Phalaris (of Acragas) and Apollodorus (of Cassandreia) were tyrants proverbial for cruelty.

He even joked about it, saying that a golden cloak was heavy in summer and cold in winter, and he threw a woolen cloak over the statue, saying that this suited every season of the year.[41] He also ordered the golden beard of Aesculapius at Epidaurus to be removed, saying it was not fitting for the son to wear a beard when his father was beardless in every temple.[42]

3.84 Next he ordered the silver tables to be carried off from all the shrines. Since these bore the inscription "Property of the good gods," in the custom of ancient Greece, he said he wished to make use of their goodness. He also took away without hesitation the little golden Victories, the bowls and the crowns that the statues held in their outstretched hands, and he said he was not taking them but accepting them: it was folly, he said, to refuse to take good things from those to whom we pray for them, when they hold them out and offer them. They say, too, that he brought these things he had removed from the temples into the marketplace and had them sold by auction; then, once he had collected the money, he issued an edict that whatever anyone had from the sacred places must be returned to its own temple before a fixed day. So to impiety toward the gods he added injustice toward human beings. Well, this man was neither struck by the thunderbolt of Olympian Jupiter, nor did Aesculapius make him waste away and die of some wretched, lingering disease. He died in his own bed, was carried to his pyre with a tyrant's honors, and handed on to his son, as an inheritance, the power he had gained by crime, as though it were just and lawful.

3.85 My argument dwells on this topic reluctantly, for it seems to lend authority to wrongdoing. And so it rightly would, were it not that conscience itself, even without any divine government, carries great weight in matters of virtue and vice; take conscience away, and everything collapses. For just as neither a

41 Harpalus, Alexander the Great's treasurer, absconded with a vast sum of the royal funds.

42 Aesculapius was the son of Apollo, who was always represented as a beardless youth.

household nor a state would seem to be organized on any rational system and discipline if it offered no rewards for right actions and no punishments for wrongdoing, so surely there is no divine government of the world over human beings if it makes no distinction between the good and the wicked.

3.86 "But the gods neglect smaller matters. They do not attend to the little fields and little vines of individuals, and if blight or hail has harmed someone, that is not something Jupiter was obliged to notice. Not even in kingdoms do kings look after every smallest thing"—for that is what you say. As if a little while ago I had been complaining about Publius Rutilius' estate at Formiae, and not about the loss of his civic existence! And indeed all mortals take this view: that their external advantages —vineyards, cornfields, olive groves, abundant crops and fruits, in short every comfort and prosperity of life—come to them from the gods. But no one has ever credited a god with his virtue.

3.87 And no doubt rightly so; for it is on account of virtue that we are justly praised, and in virtue that we rightly take pride, which would not be the case if we had it as a gift from a god and not from ourselves. But when we have been advanced in office or in wealth, or have come by some other chance good or warded off some evil, then we thank the gods, and then we think nothing has been added to our own credit. Has anyone ever thanked the gods for being a good man? No—but for being rich, honored, safe, yes. And people call Jupiter "Best and Greatest" for these reasons—not because he makes us just, temperate and wise, but because he makes us safe, secure, wealthy and well supplied;

3.88 and no one has ever vowed a tenth to Hercules in return for becoming wise. True, Pythagoras is said to have sacrificed an ox to the Muses when he had discovered something new in geometry; but I do not believe it, since he would not sacrifice a victim even to Apollo at Delos, for fear of spattering the altar with blood. But to return to the point: this is the judgment of all mortals, that fortune must be sought from a god, but wisdom must

be acquired by oneself. We may dedicate shrines to Mind, to Virtue and to Good Faith, but we still see that these reside within ourselves; it is the gift of hope, safety, help and victory that must be sought from the gods.[43]

The prosperity and success of the wicked, then, as Diogenes used to say, refute all the force and power of the gods.

3.89 "But sometimes good people come to a good end." Yes, and we seize on those cases and, without any reason, attribute them to the immortal gods. But when Diagoras—the one they call "the Atheist"—came to Samothrace, a friend said to him: "You who think the gods neglect human affairs, don't you notice from all these painted tablets how many people have escaped the violence of a storm by their vows and reached harbor safely?" "That is because," he replied, "there are no paintings anywhere of those who were shipwrecked and drowned at sea." On another occasion, when he was on a voyage and the passengers, frightened and terrified by a storm, said they deserved what was happening to them for having taken him on board the same ship, he pointed out many other ships on the same course in difficulties and asked whether they thought Diagoras was aboard those ships too. That is how things are: what sort of person you are, or how you have lived, makes no difference to your good or bad fortune.[44]

43 Romans commonly vowed a tenth of their gains to Hercules.
44 The sanctuary of the Great Gods on Samothrace was famed for protecting sailors, who dedicated painted tablets there after escaping shipwreck.

3.90 "The gods do not notice everything," he says, "and neither do kings." What comparison is there? If kings knowingly pass things over, that is a serious fault; but a god does not even have the excuse of ignorance. And you defend him splendidly when you say that the power of the gods is such that, even if someone has escaped the penalty for his crime by dying, that penalty is exacted from his children, his grandchildren, his descendants. What marvelous fairness on the part of the gods! Would any state tolerate the proposer of a law like that—that a son or grandson should be condemned if his father or grandfather had done wrong? "What end shall be devised for the slaughter of Tantalus' line,
or when, for the death of Myrtilus,
will enough punishment ever be paid?"[45]

3.91 Whether the poets have corrupted the Stoics or the Stoics have lent authority to the poets, I could not easily say; for both tell monstrous and shameful tales. The man stung by Hipponax's iambics or wounded by a verse of Archilochus was not nursing a pain sent by a god; he had conceived it himself. Nor, when we see the lust of Aegisthus or of Paris, do we look for its cause in a god, since we can almost hear the voice of their guilt. Nor do I judge that the recovery of many sick people was granted by Aesculapius rather than by Hippocrates; nor will I ever say that the Spartan system of discipline was given to Sparta by Apollo rather than by Lycurgus. It was Critolaus, I say, who overthrew Corinth, and Hasdrubal who overthrew Carthage. These two men gouged out those two eyes of the coastline—not some angry god, who, you say, cannot be angry at all.[46]

3.92 But surely he could have come to the rescue and preserved cities so great and so splendid. For you yourselves regularly say

45 Pelops, son of Tantalus, killed his charioteer Myrtilus, whose dying curse fell on the whole house of Tantalus.
46 Hipponax and Archilochus were Greek iambic poets notorious for invective. Critolaus led the Achaean League and Hasdrubal commanded Carthage in the wars that ended with both cities destroyed by Rome in 146 BC.

that there is nothing a god cannot accomplish, and without any effort at all. Just as human limbs are moved without strain by the mind and will alone, so, you say, everything can be shaped, moved and changed by the divine power of the gods. And you say this not in a superstitious, old-womanish way, but on a consistent scientific account. For the matter of things, from which and in which everything exists, is entirely pliable and changeable, so that there is nothing that cannot be shaped and transformed out of it, however suddenly; and the shaper and governor of all this matter is divine providence. So providence, wherever it moves, can accomplish whatever it wishes. Therefore either it does not know what it can do, or it neglects human affairs, or it cannot judge what is best.

3.93 "It does not care for individual human beings." No wonder —it does not care for cities either. Not for cities? Not even for nations and peoples. And if it is going to despise even these, what wonder is it that the whole human race has been despised by it?

But how can you say that the gods do not attend to everything, and at the same time hold that the immortal gods distribute and allot dreams to human beings—I put this to you, Balbus, because it is your school that believes dreams come true —and also say that vows ought to be made? Of course, it is individuals who make vows, so the divine mind hears even about individuals; you see, then, that it is not as busy as you thought. Suppose it is fully occupied—turning the heavens, watching over the earth, governing the seas. Why does it allow so many gods to do nothing and sit idle? Why does it not put some of these idle gods in charge of human affairs—the countless gods you set out for us, Balbus?

This is roughly what I had to say about the nature of the gods —not in order to abolish it, but so that you might understand how obscure it is and how hard to explain.

ENDING

Balbus will reply another day; Velleius and Cicero give their verdicts.

BALBUS 3.94 With these words Cotta finished. But Balbus said: "You have attacked rather vehemently, Cotta, the Stoic account of the providence of the gods, which they have established most reverently and most wisely. But since evening is coming on, you will grant us another day to answer what you have said. For my fight with you is for altars and hearths, for the temples and shrines of the gods, and for the walls of the city—walls that you pontiffs declare sacred, and you gird the city more carefully with religion than with the walls themselves. To abandon these, as long as I have breath in me, I hold to be an impiety."

COTTA 3.95 Then Cotta said: "For my part, Balbus, I actually wish to be refuted. I preferred to discuss the points I raised rather than to pass judgment on them, and I am quite sure you can easily defeat me."

VELLEIUS "Naturally," said Velleius, "since he is a man who thinks that even dreams are sent to us by Jupiter—though dreams themselves are not as flimsy as the Stoics' discourse on the nature of the gods."

CICERO When this had been said, we parted. Velleius thought Cotta's argument the truer; to me, Balbus' seemed to come closer to the likeness of truth.[47]

47 "Likeness of truth" (veritatis similitudo) echoes the Academic standard of the probable, which stops short of claiming certainty.