



## On the Existence of the Gods

Marcus Tullius Cicero

XVI. ...Aristotle also deserves high commendation for his observation that everything that moves is either put in motion by natural impulse, or by some external force, or of its own accord; and that the sun, and moon, and all the stars move; but that those things which are moved by natural impulse are either borne downward by their weight, or upward by their lightness; neither of which things could be the case with the stars, because they move in a regular circle and orbit. Nor can it be said that there is some superior force which causes the stars to be moved in a manner contrary to nature. For what superior force can there be? It follows, therefore, that their motion must be voluntary. And whoever is convinced of this must discover not only great ignorance, but great impiety likewise, if he denies the existence of the Gods; nor is the difference great whether a man denies their existence, or deprives them of all design and action; for whatever is wholly inactive seems to me not to exist at all. Their existence, therefore, appears so plain that I can scarcely think that man in his senses who denies it.

XVII. It now remains that we consider what is the character of the Gods. Nothing is more difficult than to divert our thoughts and judgment from the information of our corporeal sight, and the view of objects which our eyes are accustomed to; and it is this difficulty which has had such an influence on the unlearned, and on philosophers also who resembled the unlearned multitude, that they have been unable to form any idea of the immortal Gods except under the clothing of the human figure; the weakness of which opinion Cotta has so well confuted that I need not add my thoughts upon it. But as the previous idea which we have of the Deity comprehends two things — first of all, that he is an animated being; secondly, that there is nothing in all nature superior to him — I do not see what can be more consistent with this idea and preconception than to attribute a mind and divinity to the world, the most excellent of all beings.

Epicurus may be as merry with this notion as he pleases; a man not the best qualified for a joker, as not having the wit and sense of his country. Let him say that a voluble round Deity is to him incomprehensible; yet he shall never dissuade me from a principle which he himself approves, for he is of opinion there are Gods when he allows that there must be a nature excellently perfect. But it is certain that the world is most excellently perfect: nor is it to be doubted that whatever has life, sense, reason, and understanding must excel that which is destitute of these things. It follows, then, that the world has life, sense, reason, and understanding, and is consequently a Deity. But this shall soon be made more manifest by the operation of these very things which the world causes.

XVIII. In the mean while, Velleius, let me entreat you not to be always saying that we are utterly destitute of every sort of learning. The cone, you say, the cylinder, and the pyramid, are more beautiful to you than the sphere. This is to have different eyes from other men. But suppose they are more beautiful to the sight only, which does not appear to me, for I can see nothing more beautiful than that figure which contains all others, and which has nothing rough in it, nothing offensive, nothing cut into angles, nothing broken, nothing swelling, and nothing hollow; yet as there are two forms most esteemed, the globe

in solids (for so the Greek word ‘sphaira’, I think, should be construed), and the circle, or orb, in planes (in Greek, ‘kuklos’); and as they only have an exact similitude of parts in which every extreme is equally distant from the centre, what can we imagine in nature to be more just and proper? But if you have never raked into this learned dust to find out these things, surely, at all events, you natural philosophers must know that equality of motion and invariable order could not be preserved in any other figure. Nothing, therefore, can be more illiterate than to assert, as you are in the habit of doing, that it is doubtful whether the world is round or not, because it may possibly be of another shape, and that there are innumerable worlds of different forms; which Epicurus, if he ever had learned that two and two are equal to four, would not have said. But while he judges of what is best by his palate, he does not look up to the “palace of heaven,” as Ennius calls it.

XIX. For as there are two sorts of stars, one kind of which measure their journey from east to west by immutable stages, never in the least varying from their usual course, while the other completes a double revolution with an equally constant regularity; from each of these facts we demonstrate the volubility of the world (which could not possibly take place in any but a globular form) and the circular orbits of the stars. And first of all the sun, which has the chief rank among all the stars, is moved in such a manner that it fills the whole earth with its light, and illuminates alternately one part of the earth, while it leaves the other in darkness. The shadow of the earth interposing causes night; and the intervals of night are equal to those of day. And it is the regular approaches and retreats of the sun from which arise the regulated degrees of cold and heat. His annual circuit is in three hundred and sixty-five days, and nearly six hours more. At one time he bends his course to the north, at another to the south, and thus produces summer and winter, with the other two seasons, one of which succeeds the decline of winter, and the other that of summer. And so to these four changes of the seasons we attribute the origin and cause of all the productions both of sea and land.

The moon completes the same course every month which the sun does in a year. The nearer she approaches to the sun, the dimmer light does she yield, and when most remote from it she shines with the fullest brilliancy; nor are her figure and form only changed in her wane, but her situation likewise, which is sometimes in the north and sometimes in the south. By this course she has a sort of summer and winter solstices; and by her influence she contributes to the nourishment and increase of animated beings, and to the ripeness and maturity of all vegetables.

XX. But most worthy our admiration is the motion of those five stars which are falsely called wandering stars; for they cannot be said to wander which keep from all eternity their approaches and retreats, and have all the rest of their motions, in one regular constant and established order. What is yet more wonderful in these stars which we are speaking of is that sometimes they appear, and sometimes they disappear; sometimes they advance towards the sun, and sometimes they retreat; sometimes they precede him, and sometimes follow him; sometimes they move faster, sometimes slower, and sometimes they do not stir in the least, but for a while stand still. From these unequal motions of the planets, mathematicians have called that the “great year “ in which the sun, moon, and five wandering stars, having finished their revolutions, are found in their original situation. In how long a time this is effected is much disputed, but it must be a certain and definite period. For the planet Saturn (called by the Greeks ‘Phainon’), which is farthest from the earth, finishes his course in about thirty years; and in his course there is something very singular, for sometimes he moves before the sun, sometimes he keeps behind it; at one time lying hidden in the night, at another again appearing in the morning; and ever performing the same motions in the same space of time without any alteration, so as to be for infinite ages regular in these courses. Beneath this planet, and nearer the earth, is Jupiter, called ‘Phaethon’, which passes the same orbit of the twelve signs in twelve years, and goes through exactly the same variety in its course that the star of Saturn does. Next to Jupiter is the planet Mars (in

Greek, 'Puroeis'), which finishes its revolution through the same orbit as the two previously mentioned, in twenty-four months, wanting six days, as I imagine. Below this is Mercury (called by the Greeks 'Stilbon'), which performs the same course in little less than a year, and is never farther distant from the sun than the space of one sign, whether it precedes or follows it. The lowest of the five planets, and nearest the earth, is that of Venus (called in Greek 'Phosphoros'). Before the rising of the sun, it is called the morning-star, and after the setting, the evening-star. It has the same revolution through the zodiac, both as to latitude and longitude, with the other planets, in a year, and never is more than two signs from the sun, whether it precedes or follows it.

XXI. I cannot, therefore, conceive that this constant course of the planets, this just agreement in such various motions through all eternity, can be preserved without a mind, reason, and consideration; and since we may perceive these qualities in the stars, we cannot but place them in the rank of Gods. Those which are called the fixed stars have the same indications of reason and prudence. Their motion is daily, regular, and constant. They do not move with the sky, nor have they an adhesion to the firmament, as they who are ignorant of natural philosophy affirm. For the sky, which is thin, transparent, and suffused with an equal heat, does not seem by its nature to have power to whirl about the stars, or to be proper to contain them. The fixed stars, therefore, have their own sphere, separate and free from any conjunction with the sky. Their perpetual courses, with that admirable and incredible regularity of theirs, so plainly declare a divine power and mind to be in them, that he who cannot perceive that they are also endowed with divine power must be incapable of all perception whatever.

In the heavens, therefore, there is nothing fortuitous, unadvised, inconstant, or variable: all there is order, truth, reason, and, constancy; and all the things which are destitute of these qualities are counterfeit, deceitful, and erroneous, and have their residence about the earth beneath the moon, the lowest of all the planets. He, therefore, who believes that this admirable order and almost incredible regularity of the heavenly bodies, by which the preservation and entire safety of all things is secured, is destitute of intelligence, must be considered to be himself wholly destitute of all intellect whatever.

I think, then, I shall not deceive myself in maintaining this dispute upon the principle of Zeno, who went the farthest in his search after truth.

XXII. Zeno, then, defines nature to be "an artificial fire, proceeding in a regular way to generation;" for he thinks that to create and beget are especial properties of art, and that whatever may be wrought by the hands of our artificers is much more skillfully performed by nature, that is, by this artificial fire, which is the master of all other arts.

According to this manner of reasoning, every particular nature is artificial, as it operates agreeably to a certain method peculiar to itself; but that universal nature which embraces all things is said by Zeno to be not only artificial, but absolutely the artificer, ever thinking and providing all things useful and proper; and as every particular nature owes its rise and increase to its own proper seed, so universal nature has all her motions voluntary, has affections and desires (by the Greeks called 'hormas') productive of actions agreeable to them, like us, who have sense and understanding to direct us. Such, then, is the intelligence of the universe; for which reason it may be properly termed prudence or providence (in Greek, 'pronoia'), since her chiefest care and employment is to provide all things fit for its duration, that it may want nothing, and, above all, that it may be adorned with all perfection of beauty and ornament.

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