

## Cicero *De Fato*

Cicero's treatise provides extremely valuable insight into the accounts and arguments concerning fate, freedom, and necessity put forward by Hellenistic philosophers such as Diodorus Cronus, Epicurus, and the Stoics (especially Chrysippus and Posidonius). Cicero's treatise has come down to us in a fragmented state. The translation below is adapted from those by H. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library, 1942) and R. W. Sharples (Liverpool University Press, 1992).

(1.1) ... because it relates to character, called in Greek *ethos* (ἦθος), while we usually term that part of philosophy 'concerning character' (*de moribus*), but the suitable course is to add to the Latin language by giving this subject the name of 'moral science' (*moralis*). It is also necessary to expound the meaning and the theory of propositions, called in Greek *axiomata* (ἀξιώματα); what validity these have when they make a statement about a future event and about something that may happen or may not is a difficult field of inquiry, entitled by philosophers 'Concerning Possibles' (περί δυνατῶν); and the whole subject is logic (λογική), which I call 'the theory of discourse' (*ratio disserendi*). The method which I pursued in other volumes, those concerning the nature of the gods, and also in those which I have published on divination, was that of setting out a continuous speech (*oratio perpetua*) should be set out on each side to enable each person to accept for the view that seems most probable; but I was prevented by accident from adopting it in the present discussion on the subject of Fate.

(1.2) For I was at my place at Puteoli, and my friend Hirtius, the consul-designate, a very close friend of mine and a devoted student of the subjects that have occupied my life from boyhood, was in the neighbourhood. Consequently we were a great deal together, being engrossed as we for our part were in seeking for a line of policy that might lead to peace and concord in the state. For since the death of Caesar it had seemed as if a search was being made for every possible means of causing fresh upheavals, and we thought that resistance must be offered to these tendencies. Consequently almost all our conversation was spent in considering those matters,—and this both on many other occasions and also, on a day less occupied by engagements than usual and less interrupted by visitors, Hirtius having come to my house, we began with our daily and regular topics of peace and tranquillity.

(2.3) These things being dealt with, Hirtius remarked, "What now? I hope you have not actually abandoned your oratorical exercises, though you have undoubtedly placed philosophy in front of them; well then, is it possible for me to hear something?"

"Well," I said, "you can either hear something or say something yourself; for you are right in supposing that I have not abandoned my old interest in oratory, — indeed I have

kindled it in you also, although you came to me an ardent devotee already; and moreover my oratorical powers are not diminished by the subjects that I now have in hand, but rather increased.

For there is a close alliance between the orator and the philosophical system of which I am a follower, since the orator borrows subtlety from the Academy and repays the loan by giving to it a copious and flowing style and rhetorical ornament. This being so," I said, "as both fields of study fall within our province, to-day it shall be for you to choose which you prefer to enjoy."

"That is most kind of you," rejoined Hirtius, "and exactly like what you do always; for your willingness never refuses anything to my inclination.

(2.4) But I am acquainted with the rhetorical discourses of your school, and have often heard and also often shall hear you in them; moreover your *Tusculan Disputations* show that you have adopted this Academic practice of arguing against something proposed; consequently I am willing to lay down some thesis in order that I may hear the counter-arguments, if this is not disagreeable to you."

"Can anything be disagreeable to me," I said, "that will be agreeable to you? But you will hear me speaking as a true Roman, as one who is nervous in entering on this kind of discussion, and who is returning to these studies after a long interval."

"I shall listen to your discourse in the same spirit as I read your writings; so begin. Let us sit down here."

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[Fr. 4] Cicero says that Hippocrates, the most distinguished doctor, left a record that, when two brothers began to be ill simultaneously and their illness grew more serious and was alleviated at the same time, he suspected that they were twins. Posidonius the Stoic, who was greatly devoted to astrology, used to assert that they were born and conceived under the same arrangement of the stars. So what the doctor thought was a matter of their very similar medical constitution, this the philosophical astrologer thought was a matter of the power and condition of the stars which had existed at the time when they were conceived and born. (Augustine *De Civitate Dei* 5.2)

(3.5) "... in some of these cases, for instance in the case of the poet Antipater, of persons born on the shortest day, or of brothers who are ill at the same time, in the cases of urine and finger-nails and other things of that kind, natural connection has an effect (*naturae contagio valet*) — I am not doing away with it — but there is no influence of fate (*vis est nulla fatalis*). However, in other cases, some things can be the results of chance (*in aliis autem fortuita quaedam esse possunt*), for instance with the shipwrecked sailor we spoke of,

or Icadus, or Daphitas. Some cases even seem (if the master will excuse my saying so) to be the invention of Posidonius; at all events they are ridiculous.

For consider: suppose it was Daphitas's destiny to fall off his horse and meet his end in that way, was it off this Horse [a rock], which as it was not a real horse had the name of something other than itself? Or was it against these little four-in-hands on the sword-hilt that Philip used to be warned to be on his guard? As if it was the hilt of a sword that killed him! Again, what is remarkable about that nameless shipwrecked sailor's having fallen into a stream? Although in his case indeed our authority [Posidonius] does write that he had been warned that he was to meet his end in the water. Even in the case of the pirate Icadus I swear I can't see any trace of destiny; for the story does not say that he had any warning,

(3.6) so what is surprising if a rock from the roof of a cave did fall on his legs? for I suppose that even if Icadus had not been in the cave at the time, that rock would have fallen all the same. For either nothing at all is a result of chance (*nihil omnino est fortuitum*) or this particular event could have been due to fortune (*aut hoc ipsum potuit evenire fortuna*). What I want to know therefore is (and this is a matter that will have a wide bearing), if there were no such word at all as 'fate', no such nature (*nulla natura*), no such power (*nulla vis*), and if either most things or all things took place by mere casual accident (*et forte temere casu aut pleraque fierent aut omnia*), would things happen differently than they do now? What is the point then of harping on fate (*fatum*), when everything can be explained by nature (*natura*) and fortune (*fortuna*) without bringing fate in?

(4.7) "But let us give Posidonius the polite dismissal that he deserves and return to the subtleties of Chrysippus. And first let us answer him on the actual influence of connection (*contagio*); the other points we will go on to afterwards. We see the wide difference between the natural characters of different localities: we notice that some are healthy, others unhealthy, that the inhabitants of some are phlegmatic and as it were overcharged with moisture, those of others parched and dried up; and there are a number of other very wide differences between one place and another. Athens has a rarefied climate, which is thought also to cause sharpness of wit above the average in the population; at Thebes the climate is dense, and so the Theban are stout and sturdy. All the same the rarefied air of Athens will not enable a student to choose between the lectures of Zeno, Arcesilas and Theophrastus, and the dense air of Thebes will not make a man try to win a race at Nemea rather than at Corinth.

(4.8) Carry the distinction further: tell me, can the nature of the locality cause us to take our walk in Pompey's Porch rather than in the Campus? in your company sooner than in someone else's? on the 15th of the month rather than on the 1st? Well then, just as the nature of the locality has some effect on some things but none on others (*ad quasdam ... pertinet aliquid, ad quadam autem nihil*), so the condition of the heavenly bodies may if you like influence some things, but it certainly will not influence everything.

You will say that inasmuch as there are differences in the natures of human beings that cause some to like sweet things, others slightly bitter things, and make some licentious and others prone to anger or cruel or proud, while others shrink in horror from vices of

that sort, therefore, we are told, inasmuch as there is so wide a difference between one nature and another, what is there surprising in the view that these points of unlikeness result from different causes?

(5.9) “In putting forward this view Chrysippus fails to see the question at issue and the point with which the argument is dealing. For it does not follow that if differences in men’s propensities are due to natural and antecedent causes (*causas naturalis et antecedentis*), therefore our wills (*voluntates*) and desires (*appetitiones*) are also due to natural and antecedent causes; for if that were the case, nothing would be in our power (*nihil esset in nostra potestate*).

But as it is, though we admit that it does not depend on us (*non esse id in nobis*) whether we are quick-witted or dull, strong or weak. However, the person who, on account of this, thinks that whether we sit or walk is not a matter of our will (*ne ut sedeamus quidem aut ambulemus voluntatis esse*) does not see what follows from each thing. For granted that clever people and stupid people are born like that due to antecedent causes (*antecedentibus causis*), and that the same is true of the strong and the weak, nevertheless it does not follow that our sitting and walking and performing some action are also settled and fixed by primary causes (*principalibus causis definitum et constitutum sit*).

(5.10) The Megarian philosopher Stilpo, we are informed, was undoubtedly a clever person and highly esteemed in his day. Stilpo is described in the writings of his own associates as having been fond of liquor and of women, and they do not record this as a reproach but rather to add to his reputation, for they say that he had so completely mastered and suppressed his vicious nature by study that no one ever saw him the worse for liquor or observed in him a single trace of licentiousness. Again, do we not read how Socrates was stigmatized by the ‘physiognomist’ Zopyrus, who professed to discover men’s entire characters (*mores*) and natures from their body, eyes, face and brow? He said that Socrates was stupid and thick-witted because he had not got hollows in the neck above the collarbone — he used to say that these portions of his anatomy were blocked and stopped up; he also added that he was addicted to women — at which Alcibiades is said to have given a loud guffaw!

(5.11) It is possible that these defects are due to natural causes (*ex naturalibus causis*), but their eradication and entire removal, so that the man inclined to such faults is called from back them, does not rest with natural causes (*non est positum in naturalibus causis*), but with will (*voluntas*), application (*studio*), and training (*disciplina*). All of this is done away with if the explanation of divination is going to confirm the natural influence of fate (*si vis natura fati ex divinationis ratione firmabitur*).

(6.11) “Indeed, if divination exists, from which scientific observations — I use the term ‘observations’ to render *θεωρήματα* — which are its source? For I do not believe that those who practise divination dispense entirely with the use of observation in foretelling future events, any more than do the practitioners of all the other sciences in pursuing their own function.

(6.12) The observations of the astrologers are like this: ‘If someone has been born with the Dogstar [Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky] rising, that person will not die at

sea.’ Take care Chrysippus, that you do not desert our own cause, over which there is a great struggle between you and the powerful dialectician Diodorus. For if the conditional / what has thus been connected (*si enim est verum quod ita conectitur*) — ‘If anyone was born at the rising of the Dogstar, he will not die at sea’ — is true, then so too is: ‘If Fabius was born at the rising of the Dogstar, Fabius will not die at sea’. So these things are incompatible, namely that Fabius has been born with the Dogstar rising and that Fabius will die at sea; and since it is supposed as certain in the case of Fabius that he has been born with the Dogstar rising, these things are also incompatible, namely that Fabius exists and that he will die at sea. So the following conjunction, to, is a combination of things that are incompatible: ‘Fabius exists, and Fabius will die at sea’. Put forward in this way, this cannot actually happen. So ‘Fabius will die at sea’ belongs to the class of what cannot happen. Therefore everything which is said to be false in the future cannot happen.

(7.13) But this is a view that you, Chrysippus, will not allow at all, and there is a great struggle between you and Diodorus on this very point. He says that only what either is true or will be true can happen [i.e. is possible], and he says that whatever is going to happen [i.e. is possible] must necessarily happen, and that whatever will not happen [i.e. is not possible] cannot happen (*Ille enim id solum fieri posse dicit, quod aut sit verum aut futurum sit verum, et, quicquid futurum sit, id dicit fieri necesse esse et, quicquid non sit futurum, id negat fieri posse*). You say that things that will not happen *can happen* [i.e. are possible]; for instance, it could happen [i.e. it is possible] that this precious stone should break even if this is never going to happen; and it was not necessary for Cypselus to rule in Corinth although this had been declared by the oracle of Apollo a thousand years before (*Tu, et quae non sint futura, posse fieri dicis, ut frangi hanc gemmam, etiamsi id numquam futurum sit, neque necesse fuisse Cypselum regnare Corinthi, quamquam id millennio ante anno Apollinis oraculo editum esset*). But if you accept those divine predications, you will have false statements about future events in such cases, with the result that it will be impossible for those things to happen. For example, if it were said that Scipio will not capture Carthage. And if a true statement were made about the future and that thing were going to happen in that way, you would have to say that it is necessary. But all this is the view of Diodorus, which is opposed to you. (*At si ista conprobabis divina praedicta, et quae falsa in futuris dicentur, in eis habebis ut ea fieri non possint — ut si dicatur Africanum Karthagine non esse potiturum — et si vere dicatur de futuro, idque ita futurum sit, dicas esse necessarium est; quae est tota Diodori vobis inimica sententia*).

(7.14) For if this is a true conditional (*si illud vere conectitur*), ‘If you were born at the rising of the Dogstar you will not die at sea,’ and if the first proposition in the conditional, ‘You were born at the rising of the Dogstar,’ is necessary — for all past truths are necessary, as Chrysippus holds, in disagreement with his master Cleanthes, because they are unchangeable and because what is past cannot turn from true into false (*omnia enim vera in praeteritis necessaria sunt, ut Chrysippo placet dissentienti a magistro Cleanthe, quia sunt immutabilia nec in falsum e vero praeterita possunt convertere*) — well, then, if the first proposition [i.e. the antecedent] in the conditional is necessary, what follows also becomes necessary. Although Chrysippus does not think that this applies universally; but all the same, if there is a natural cause (*causa naturalis*) why Fabius should not die at sea, then Fabius *cannot* die at sea.

(8.15) “At this point Chrysippus gets nervous and expresses a hope that the Chaldaeans and the rest of the prophets are mistaken, and that they will not employ conditionals but rather conjunctions, so that they will not declare their observations as follows: ‘If anyone was born at the rising of the Dogstar he will not die at sea,’ but rather will say ‘It is not the case both that some person was born at the rising of the Dogstar and that that person will die at sea’. What amusing presumption! To avoid falling into the hands of Diodorus himself he tutors the Chaldaeans as to the proper form in which to set out their observations! For I ask you, if the Chaldaeans adopt the procedure of setting forth negations of indefinite conjunctions (*negationes infinitarum coniunctionum*) rather than indefinite sequences, why should it not be possible for doctors and geometricians and the other professions to do likewise? Take a doctor to begin with: he will not set forth a scientific principle that he has ascertained in this form, ‘If a person’s pulse is so and so, he has got a fever,’ but rather as follows, ‘It is not the case both that a person’s pulse is so and so and that he has not got a fever.’ And similarly a geometrician will not speak as follows, ‘The greatest circles on a sphere bisect each other,’ but rather as follows, ‘It is not the case both that there are certain circles on the surface of a sphere that are the greatest and that these circles do not bisect each other.’

(8.16) What is there that cannot be transformed from a conditional to the negation of a conjunction? And in fact we can express the same thing in other ways. Just now I said ‘The greatest circles on a sphere bisect each other’; but it is possible for me to say ‘If certain circles on a sphere are the greatest,’ and it is possible for me to say ‘Because certain circles on a sphere will be the greatest.’ There are many ways of stating a proposition, and none is more twisted round than this one, which Chrysippus hopes that the Chaldaeans will accommodate the Stoics by accepting. Yet none of the Chaldaeans really use that sort of language, for it is a bigger task to familiarize oneself with these contorted modes of expression than with the risings and settings of the constellations.

(9.17) “But let us go back to the argument of Diodorus already mentioned, which they call ‘Concerning Possibles’, in which the meaning of the term ‘what can happen’ [i.e. ‘possible’] is investigated (*in qua quid valeat id quod fieri possit anquiritur*). Well, Diodorus holds that only what either is true or will be true can happen [i.e. is possible] (*id solum fieri posse, quod aut verum sit aut verum futurum sit*). This position is connected with the argument that nothing happens which was not necessary, and that whatever can happen [i.e. is possible] either is now or will be, and that it is no more possible for things that will be to turned from true to false than those that have happened; but that whereas in the things that have happened this unchangeability is manifest, in some things that are going to happen, because their unchangeability is not manifest, it does not appear to be there at all (*nihil fieri quod non necesse fuerit, et, quicquid fieri possit, id aut esse iam aut futurum esse, nec magis commutari ex veris in falsa posse ea, quae futura, quam ea, quae facta sunt; sed in factis inmutabilitatem apparere, in futuris quibusdam, quia non apparet, ne inesse quidem videri*). Thus, the statement ‘This man will die of this disease’ is true in the case of a man who is suffering from a deadly disease, but if this same statement is made truly in the case of a man in whom the power of the illness is not yet evident to so great an extent, it will happen nonetheless. It follows that no change from true to false can occur even in the case of the future (*Ita fit, ut commutatio ex vero in falsum ne in futuro quidem ulla fieri possit*). For ‘Scipio will die’ has such a force (*talem vim habet*) that

although it is a statement about the future it cannot be converted into a falsehood, for it is a statement about a human being, who must inevitably die.

(9.18) If someone were to say ‘Scipio will die by violence in his bedroom at night,’ the statement in that form would have been a true one, for it would have been a statement that what was going to happen was going to happen, and that it was going to happen should be understood from the fact that it did happen (*id enim fore diceretur, quod esset futurum; futurum autem fuisse ex eo, quia factum est, intellegi debet*). Neither was ‘Scipio will die’ any truer than ‘Scipio will die in that manner,’ nor was it more inevitable for Scipio to die than it was for him to die in that manner, nor was it more impossible for the statement ‘Scipio has been murdered’ to change from a truth to a falsehood than for the statement ‘Scipio will be murdered’; nor, these things being so, is there any reason for Epicurus to stand in fear of fate and to seek help from the atoms and make them swerve out of the perpendicular, and for him to commit himself to two things that cannot be proved: first, that something takes place without a cause (*sine causa fiat aliquid*) — from which it will follow that something comes out of nothing (*de nihilo quippiam fiat*), which neither Epicurus nor any natural philosopher allows — and second that, when two atoms through the void, one moves in a straight line and the other swerves.

(9.19) For it is possible for Epicurus to grant that every proposition (*enuntiatum*) is either true or false, without fearing that it will be necessary for all things to come about by fate. For a proposition like ‘Carneades will go down to the Academy’ is not true due to eternal causes, deriving from natural necessity (*non enim aeternis causis naturae necessitate manantibus verum est*), and yet nevertheless it is not without causes (*nec tamen sine causis*), but there is a difference between causes that precede by chance and those that contain within themselves a natural effectiveness (*sed interest inter causas fortuito antegressas et inter causas cohibentis in se efficientiam naturalem*). Thus it is the case both that the statement ‘Epicurus will die in the archonship of Pytharatus, at the age of seventy-two,’ was always true, and also that nevertheless there were no fated causes (*causae fatales*) why it should so happen, but, because it did so fall out, it was certainly going to happen just as it did happen (*cur ita accideret, sed, quod ita cecidit, certe casurum sicut cecidit fuit*). (9.20) Moreover those who say that things that are going to be are unchangeable and that a future truth cannot be changed into a falsehood, are not establishing the necessity of fate but explaining the meaning of words; whereas those who bring in an eternal series of causes (*causarum seriem sempiternam*) rob the human mind of freewill and bind it in the necessity of fate (*ei mentem hominis voluntate libera spoliata necessitate fati devinciunt*).

(10.20) “But enough of these subjects; let us examine others. For Chrysippus argues thus: If uncaused motion exists, it will not be the case that every proposition (*enuntiatio*) (termed by the dialecticians an ἀξίωμα) is either true or false, for a thing not possessing efficient causes (*causas efficientis*) [that bring it about] will be neither true nor false; but every proposition is either true or false; therefore there is no motion without a cause.

(10.21) If this is so, all things that take place take place by antecedent causes (*omnia quae fiunt caussi fiunt antegressis*); if this is so, all take place by fate; it therefore follows that all things that take place take place by fate.’ At this point, in the first place if I chose to agree with Epicurus and to say that not every proposition is either true or false, I would rather

suffer that nasty knock than agree that all events are caused by fate; for the former opinion has something to be said for it, but the latter is intolerable.

So, Chrysippus exerts every effort to prove the view that every ἀξίωμα is either true or false. Epicurus is afraid that, if he grants this, he will have to grant that whatever comes about does so through fate; for if either the assertion or the denial is true from eternity, it will also be certain, and if certain, also necessary; thus he thinks that both necessity and fate will be confirmed. Just so Chrysippus fears that, if he does not maintain that every proposition that is made is either true or false, he will not uphold his claim that all things come about through fate and through eternal causes (*ex causis aeternis*) of the things that are going to be.

(10.22) But Epicurus thinks that the necessity of fate is avoided by the swerve of the atom (*sed Epicurus declinatione atomi vitari necessitatem fati putat*); and so in addition to gravity/weight (*pondus*) and impact (*plaga*) there arises a third form of motion, when the atom swerves by a very small distance (termed by Epicurus ἐλάχιστον [a minimum]). Also he is compelled to admit, if not by his own words by the facts themselves, that this swerve takes place without cause (*Quam declinationem sine causa fieri si minus verbis, recogitur confiteri*); for the atom does not swerve in consequence of being struck by another atom, since how can impact between them take place if they are indivisible bodies travelling perpendicularly in straight lines by the force of gravity, as Epicurus holds (*Non enim atomus ab atomo pulsa declinat. Nam qui potest pelli alia ab alia, si gravitate feruntur ad perpendiculum corpora individua rectis lineis, ut Epicuro placet*)? For if one is never driven aside by another, one will never even meet another; the consequence is that, even granting that the atom exists and that it swerves, the swerve is uncaused.

(10.22) The reason why Epicurus brought in this theory was his fear lest, if the atom were always carried along by the natural and necessary force of weight/gravity, we should have no freedom whatever (*nihil lebrum nobis esset*), since the movement of the mind was controlled by the movement of the atom (*cum ita moveretur animus, ut atomorum motu cogeretur*). The author of the atomic theory, Democritus, preferred to accept the view that all things occur due to necessity, rather than to deprive the atoms of their natural motions (*Id Democritus, auctor atomorum, accipere maluit, necessitate omnia fieri, quam a corporibus individuis naturalis motus avellere*).

(11.23) Carneades showed greater insight: his doctrine was that the school of Epicurus could have maintained their view without this fictitious swerve. For it would have been better for the dogma of the possibility of some voluntary movement of the mind to be maintained than for them to introduce the swerve, especially as they were unable to invent a cause for it; and by maintaining that dogma they could easily have withstood Chrysippus, for in admitting that no motion is uncaused they would not have been admitting that all things are due to antecedent causes, as they would have said that there are no external and antecedent causes of our will (*Cum enim concessissent motum nullum esse sine causa, non concederent omnia, quae fierent, fieri causis antecedentibus; voluntatis enim nostrae non esse causas externas et antecedentis*).

(11.24) Therefore when we say that somebody wishes (or does not wish) something 'without cause' (*sine causa*), we are perverting the accepted convention of language; for we are using the phrase 'without cause' to mean without an external and antecedent cause, not without some cause (*sine externa et antecedente causa, non sine aliqua*). Just as



when we say that a vessel is empty we do not use the expression [i.e. 'empty' (*inane*)] in the sense in which it is used by the natural philosophers, who hold that emptiness is absolutely nothing (*inane esse nihil*), but we employ it to mean that the vessel has (for example) no water in it, or wine, or oil, similarly when we say that the mind moves without cause we mean that it moves without an antecedent external cause (*sine antecedente et externa causa*), not without any cause at all. OF the atom itself, it can be said, when it is moved through the void by heaviness and weight, that it is moved without a cause because no cause comes to it from outside (*De ipsa atomo dici potest, cum per inane moveatur gravitate et pondere, sine causa moveri, quia nulla causa accedat extrinsecus*).

(11.25) On the other hand, for fear lest we all be laughed at by the natural philosophers if we say that anything happens without a cause, a distinction must be made, and the matter must be put in this way, that it is the nature of the atom itself to be kept in motion by weight and gravity, and that its nature is itself the cause of its travelling in this manner (*ipsius individui hanc esse naturam, ut pondere et gravitate moveatur, eamque ipsam esse causam, cur ita feratur*). Similarly no external cause need be sought to explain the voluntary motions of the mind; for voluntary motion has in itself the property of being in our power and of obeying us, and its obedience is not uncaused, for its nature is itself the cause of this (*Similiter ad animorum motus voluntarios non est requirenda externa causa; motus enim voluntarius eam naturam in se ipse continet, ut sit in nostra potestate nobisque pareat, nec id sine causa; eius rei enim causa ipsa natura est*).

(11.26) This being so, what reason is there why every proposition (*pronuntiatio*) should not be either true or false, if we do not allow that whatever takes place is caused by fate? 'Because', he says, 'those things cannot be true in the future that do not have causes for their future being; so those things that are true necessarily have causes; and thus when they have come about, they will have done so through fate' (*non possunt esse ea, quae causas, cur futura sint, non habent; habeant igitur causas necesse est ea, quae vera sunt; ita, cum evenerint, fato evenerint*). (12.26) That ends the business, inasmuch as you are bound to admit either that everything takes place by fate or that something can take place without a cause.

(12.27) Can the proposition (*enuntiatio*) 'Scipio will take Numantia' be true unless one cause sowing another from eternity was going to bring this about (*nisi ex aeternitate causa causam serens hoc erit effectura*)? Could it have been false [given that it happened] if it had been said innumerable ages ago? And if the statement 'Scipio will take Numantia' had not been true then, even after Numantia has fallen, the proposition 'Scipio has taken Numantia' is not true either. Therefore is it possible for anything to have happened that was not previously going to be true? For just as we say those past things are true which truly occurred at an earlier time, so too we will say that those future things are true that will truly occur in future time.

(12.28) Yet it does not immediately follow from the fact that every proposition is either true or false that there are immutable causes (*causas immutabiles*), eternally existing, that prohibit anything from coming about in a different way from that in which it will in fact come about. The causes which make propositions of the form 'Cato will come into the Senate' true are fortuitous, they are not inherent in the nature of things and the order of

the universe. Nevertheless, it is as unchangeable that he will come, when it is true that he will come, as that he *has* come; and fate or necessity should not for that reason be feared. And indeed, if the following proposition, ‘Hortensius will come to his villa at Tusculum’ is not true, it will be necessary to admit that it follows that it is false. They want neither of these to apply; but that is impossible.

And we shall not be hindered, either, by the so-called ‘Lazy Argument’ (*ignava ratio*) — for one argument is named by the philosophers the ἀργὸς λόγος [Lazy Argument], because if we yielded to it we should live a life of absolute inaction. For they argue as follows: ‘If it is fated for you to recover from this illness, you will recover whether you call in a doctor or do not; (12.29) similarly, if it is fated for you not to recover from this illness, you will not recover whether you call in a doctor or do not; and either your recovery or your non-recovery is fated; therefore there is no point in calling in a doctor’.

(13.29) This kind of argument is rightly called lazy and idle, because the same train of reasoning will lead to the entire abolition of action from life. It is even possible to alter the form by not introducing the word ‘fate’ and yet to retain the same meaning, thus If it has been true from eternity that “You will recover from that illness”, you will recover whether you call in a doctor or do not; and similarly if “You will recover from that illness” has been false from all eternity, you will not recover whether you call in a doctor or not; the conclusion following as before.

(13.30) This argument is criticized by Chrysippus. For, he says, there are certain items in things that are simple, and others complex. A simple one is: ‘Socrates will die on that day’; in this case, whether he does some action or does not do it, the day of his death has been determined. But if it is fated that ‘Laius will have a son Oedipus,’ it will not be possible for the words ‘whether Laius mates with woman or does not’ to be added, for the matter is complex and co-fated (*copulata enim res est et confatalis*)’ — he gives that name to it because he thinks it is fated both that Laius will lie with a wife and that he will beget Oedipus by her: in the same way as, supposing it were said that ‘Milo will wrestle at Olympia’ and somebody replied ‘If so, he will wrestle whether he has an opponent or not,’ he would be wrong; for ‘will wrestle’ is complex, because there can be no wrestling without an opponent. Therefore all captious arguments of that sort can be refuted in the same way. ‘You will recover whether you call in a doctor or do not’ is captious, for calling in a doctor is just as much fated as recovering. These connected events, as I said, are termed by Chrysippus ‘co-fated’.

(14.31) “Carneades refused to accept this class of things entirely, and held the view that the line of argument in question was not quite accurately thought out. In consequence he used to put his case in another manner, and did not employ any trickery; his argument ran like this: If everything takes place with antecedent causes, all events take place in a closely knit web of natural interconnection; if this is so, all things are caused by necessity; if this is true, nothing is in our power. But something is in our power. Yet if all events take place by fate, there are antecedent causes of all events. Therefore it is not the case that whatever events take place take place by fate.’

(14.32) This argument cannot be made more rigidly conclusive. For if anybody chose to repeat the same point and to put it thus, ‘If all that will be is from eternity true, so that it

must certainly turn out as it will be, events necessarily take place in a closely knit web of natural connection (*conligatione naturali*),’ he would be talking nonsense. For it makes a great deal of difference whether a natural cause, existing from all eternity, renders future things true, or things that are going to be in the future can be understood to be true even without any natural eternity. Accordingly Carneades used to say that not even Apollo could tell any future events except those things whose causes were contained in nature in such a way that it was necessary for them to come to be (*ea quorum causas natura ita contineret, ut ea fieri necesse esset*).

(14.33) For what consideration could lead the god himself to say that the Marcellus who was three times consul was going to die at sea? This had indeed been true from all eternity, but it had no efficient causes (*sed causas id efficientis non habebat*). Therefore Carneades held the view that Apollo had no knowledge even of these past events which had left behind them no trace of their passage — how much less had he knowledge of future events, for only by knowing the efficient causes of all things was it possible to know the future; therefore it was impossible for Apollo to foretell the fate of Oedipus when there were no causes fore-ordained in the nature of things making it necessary for him to murder his father, nor could he foretell anything of the sort.

(15.33) Hence it is appropriate for the Stoics, who say that all things happen by fate, to accept oracles of this sort and all the other things connected with divination, yet the same position cannot be held by those who say that the things which are going to happen in the future have been true from all eternity [whether there have been antecedent causes of them or not]. Observe then that their case is not the same as that of the Stoics; for their position is more limited and narrow, whereas the Stoic theory is untrammelled and free.

(15.34) Even if it be admitted that nothing can come about without an antecedent cause (*causa antecedente*), what good would that be unless it be maintained that the cause in question is a link in an eternal chain of causation (*ea causa non ex aeternis causis*)? But a cause is that which makes the thing of which it is the cause come about (*causa autem ea est, quae id efficit, cuius est causa*) — as a wound is the cause of death, failure to digest one’s food of illness, fire of heat.

Accordingly ‘cause’ is not to be understood in such a way as to make what precedes a thing the cause of that thing, but what efficiently precedes it (*Itaque non sic causa intellegi debet, ut, quod cuique antecedit, id ei causa sit, sed quod cuique efficienter antecedit*): the cause of my playing ball was not my going down into the Campus (*nec, quod in campum descenderim, id fuisse causae, cur pila luderem*), nor did Hecuba’s giving birth to Alexander make her the cause of the death of Trojans, nor was Tyndareus the cause of Agamemnon’s death because he was the father of Clytemnestra. For on those lines a well-dressed traveller also will be said to have been the cause of the highwayman’s robbing him of his clothes (*Hoc enim modo viator quoque bene vestitus causa grassatori fuisse dicetur, cur ab eo spoliaretur*).

(15.35) To this class of expression belongs the phrase of Ennius -

Would that in Pelius’ glade the pine-tree beams  
Had never fallen to earth by axes hewn!

He might have gone even further back, ‘Would that no tree had ever grown on Pelius!’ and even further, ‘Would that no Mount Pelius existed!’ and similarly one may go on recalling preceding events in infinite regress (*similiterque superiora repentem regredi infinite licet*).

Nor thence had made inception of the task  
Of laying down a ship.

What is the point of recounting these past events? because what follows is this:

For were it so, my roving royal mistress,  
Medea, from her home had ne’er set forth,  
Heartsick and by love’s cruel weapon wounded.

It was not the case that those events brought the cause of love.

(16.36) But they declare that there is a difference whether a thing is of such a kind that something cannot be brought about without it, or such that something must be brought about along with it (*Interesse autem aiunt, utrum eius modi quid sit, sine quo effici aliquid non possit, an eius modi, cum quo effici aliquid necesse sit*). So none of those things is a cause, because none of them brings about by its own power that of which it is said to be a cause (*ulla igitur earum est causa, quoniam nulla eam rem sua vi efficit, cuius causa dicitur*); nor is that, without which something does not come about, a cause, but rather a cause is that which, when it comes to apply, necessarily brings about that of which it is the cause (*nec id, sine quo quippiam non fit, causa est, sed id, quod cum accessit, id, cuius est causa, efficit necessario*). For at the time when the snake-bite had not yet caused Philoctetes to be afflicted with a sore, what cause was contained in the nature of things that would bring it to pass that he would be marooned on the Isle of Lemnos? Afterwards, however, the cause was nearer and more closely connected with his death.

(16.37) Therefore it was the principle underlying the result that reveals the cause (*ratio igitur eventus aperuit causam*); but the proposition ‘Philoctetes will be marooned on an island’ had been true from all eternity, and this could not be turned from a truth into a falsehood. For it is necessary that of two opposed things (*in rebus contrariis duabus*) — by ‘opposed’ I here mean those one of which affirms something and the other denies it — it is necessary, against Epicurus, that one should be true and the other false; for example, ‘Philoctetes will be wounded’ was true, and ‘Philoctetes will not be wounded’ false, for the whole of the ages of the past; unless perhaps we choose to follow the opinion of the Epicureans, who say that propositions (*enuntiationes*) of this sort are neither true nor false, or else, when ashamed of that, they nevertheless make the still more impudent assertion that disjunctions consisting of opposed propositions are true, but that neither of the propositions contained in them are true.

(16.38) What marvellous effrontery and pitiable ignorance of logical method! For if anything stated is neither true nor false, it certainly is not true; but how can something that is not true not be false, or how can something that is not false not be true? We shall therefore hold to the position maintained by Chrysippus, that every proposition is either true or false; reason itself will insist both that certain things are true from all eternity and

that they are not involved in a nexus of eternal causes but are free from the necessity of fate (*ea non esse nexa causis aeternis et a fati necessitate esse libera*).

(17.39) I see things as follows. There were two opinions among the ancient philosophers, on the one hand the opinion of those who deemed that everything takes place by fate in the sense that this fate exercises the force of necessity (*omnia ita fato fieri, ut id fatum vim necessitatis adferret*) — the opinion to which Democritus, Heraclitus, Empedocles and Aristotle adhered — and on the other hand the opinion of those who held that the movements of the mind are voluntary and not at all controlled by fate (*sine ullo fato esse animorum motus voluntarii*), Chrysippus stood as unofficial umpire and wished to strike a compromise, — though as a matter of fact he inclines to adhere to those who hold that the movements of the mind are released from all necessity (*necessitate motus animorum liberatos volunt*); but in employing expressions peculiar to himself he slips into such difficulties that against his will he lends support to the necessity of fate.

(17.40) And let us if you please examine how things are in assents (*in adsensionibus*), which I treated in my first speech. Those old philosophers who held that everything takes place by fate used to say that assent is given perforce as the result of necessity (*quibus omnia fato fieri videbantur, vi effici et necessitate dicebant*). On the other hand those who disagreed with them released assent from bondage to fate, and maintained that if assent were made subject to fate it would be impossible to dissociate it from necessity (*Qui autem ab eis dissentiebant, fato adsensiones liberabant negabantque fato adsensionibus adhibito necessitatem ab his posse removeri*). They argued as follows:

“If all things take place by fate, all things come about by means of an antecedent cause; and if impulse (*adpetitus*) is caused, those things which follow impulse are also caused; therefore assent is also caused. But if the cause of impulse is not situated within us, even impulse itself is also not in our power; and if this is so, those things which are caused by impulse also do not rest with us. It follows therefore that neither assent nor action is in our power. From this it results that there is no justice in either praise or blame, either honours or punishments. But as this is erroneous, they hold that it is a valid inference that not everything that takes place takes place by fate.”

(18.41) But Chrysippus, since he refused on the one hand to accept necessity and held on the other hand that nothing happens without fore-ordained causes, distinguishes different kinds of causes, to enable himself at the same time to escape necessity and retain fate. “Some causes”, he says, “are perfect and primary (*perfectae et principales*), others auxiliary and proximate (*adiuvantes et proximae*). Hence when we say that everything takes place by fate owing to antecedent causes (*omnia fato fieri causis antecedentibus*) [cf. 10.23, 14.31], what we wish to be understood is not perfect and principal causes but auxiliary and proximate causes”. Accordingly he counters the argument that I set out a little time ago by saying that, if everything takes place by fate, it does indeed follow that everything takes place from antecedent causes, but not from principal and perfect but auxiliary and proximate causes. And if these causes themselves are not in our power, it does not follow that impulse also is not in our power (*in nostra potestate*). On the other hand if we were to say that all things happen from perfect and principal causes, it would then follow that, as those causes are not in our power, impulse would not be in our power either.

(18.42) For this reason, those who introduce fate in such a way that they add necessity to it will have to accept that conclusion, but against those who are not going to speak of antecedent causes that are perfect or primary it will have no force. For they think that they can easily explain the meaning of the statement that assent takes place from pre-ordained causes (*causis antepositis*); for although assent cannot take place unless prompted by an appearance (*nisi commota viso*), nevertheless since that appearance supplies a proximate and not a principal cause (*cum id visum proximam causam habeat, non principalem*), this, according to Chrysippus, is explained by the theory which we stated just now, not indeed proving that assent can take place without being aroused by any external force (for assent must necessarily be actuated by our seeing an object) (*non ut illa quidem fieri possit nulla vi extrinsecus excitata — necesse est enim adsensionem viso commoveri*), but Chrysippus goes back to his cylinder and spinning-top, which cannot begin to move unless they are pushed or struck, but which when this has happened, he thinks, they continue to move due to their own nature, the cylinder rolling forward and the top spinning round.

(19.43) ‘In the same way therefore,’ he says, ‘as a person who has pushed a cylinder forward has given it a beginning of motion, but has not given it the capacity to roll (*qui protrusit cylindrum, dedit ei principium motionis, volubilitatem autem non dedit*), so too an appearance when it impinges will impress and as it were seal its form on the mind (*sic visum obiectum inprimet illud quidem et quasi signabit in animo suam speciem*), but the act of assent will be in our power, and as we said in the case of the roller, though given a push from without, as to the rest will move by its own force (*vis*) and nature (*natura*). If some event were produced without antecedent cause, it would not be true that all things take place by fate; but if it is probable that everything which happens is preceded by a cause, what reason will it be possible to adduce why we should not have to admit that all things take place by fate? —provided that the nature of the distinction and difference between causes is understood’.

(19.44) As this is the form in which these doctrines are set out by Chrysippus, if the people who deny that acts of assent take place by fate nevertheless would admit that those acts take place without an antecedent appearance, it is a different theory; but if they allow that appearances come first, yet nevertheless acts of assent do not take place by fate, because assent is not prompted by the proximate and contiguous cause stated, surely this comes to the same thing. For Chrysippus, while admitting that the proximate and contiguous cause (*proximam et continentem causam*) of assent is situated in a perceived object, will not admit that this a necessitating cause (*causa necessaria*) for the act of assenting, so that if all things take place by fate all things take place from antecedent and necessary causes (*omnia causis fiant antecedentibus et necessariis*); and also the thinkers who disagree with him in admitting that assent does not take place without the previous passage of sensory images will similarly say that, if everything were caused by fate in such a manner that nothing did take place without a cause having preceded it (*praegressione causae*), it would have to be admitted that all things take place by fate; and from this it is easy to understand that since both parties, when their opinion has been developed and unfolded, come to the same ultimate position, the difference between them is one of words and not of fact.

(19.45) And putting it broadly, inasmuch as the distinction can be made that whereas in some things it can truly be said that when certain antecedent causes have occurred it is not in our power to prevent certain results of which they were the causes from happening (*cum hae causae antecessae sint, non esse in nostra potestate, quin illa eveniant, quorum causae fuerint, quibusdam autem in rebus causis antecessis in nostra tamen esse potestate*), yet in some things, although antecedent causes have occurred, it is nevertheless within our power to make the event turn out otherwise, — this distinction is approved by both sides; but one of the two schools holds that although fate does govern those matters in which when antecedent causes have occurred it is not in our power to make the results turn out otherwise, yet fate is not present in the case of matters which are in our power.

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(20.46) “This is the proper method of discussing this question, — one should not seek assistance from atoms that roam and swerve out of their path. ‘The atom does swerve,’ he says. In the first place what causes the swerve? For the motive force that they will get from Democritus is a different one, a driving force termed by him a ‘blow’; from you, Epicurus, they will get the force of gravity or weight (*aliam enim quandam vim motus habebant a Democrito impulsione, quam plagam ille appellat, a te, Epicure, gravitatis et ponderis*). What fresh cause therefore exists in nature to make the atom swerve (or do the atoms cast lots among them which is to swerve and which not?) or to serve as the reason for their making a very small swerve and not a large one, or for their making one very small swerve and not two or three swerves?

(20.47) This is wishful thinking, not investigation. For you do not say that the atom moves its position and swerves owing to being driven by an external force (*Nam neque extrinsecus impulsam atomum loco moveri et declinare dicis*), nor that there has been any factor in the void through which the atom travels to cause it not to travel in a straight line, nor that any change has taken place in the atom itself to cause it not to retain the natural motion of its own weight. Accordingly although he introduced no cause to occasion this swerve of yours, nevertheless he thinks that he is talking sense when he is saying something that all men’s minds scornfully reject.

(20.48) And in truth no one in my opinion has done more to uphold not only fate but also an all-controlling necessity, or to abolish voluntary movements of the mind, than has this philosopher who confesses that he has been unable to withstand fate in any other way than by taking refuge in these fictitious swerves. For if one granted the existence of the atoms, although I for my part find it entirely impossible to accept that they do exist, nevertheless there would never be any explanation of those swerves that you talk of; for if it is owing to a necessity of nature that the atoms are assigned the property of travelling by force of gravity, because every heavy body must necessarily move and travel when nothing hinders it, is that alleged swerve also necessary for some atoms, or, if they choose, for all, in the order of nature? . . .”