

Textus Empiricus

**Selections from
the Major Writings
on Scepticism, Man, & God**

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PART THREE: *On God*

from OUTLINES OF PYRRHONISM, BOOK THREE

and AGAINST THE PHYSICISTS, BOOK ONE

CHAPTER III

On God

Now, since the majority have declared that God is the most efficient cause, let us first examine the question of God. We premise the remark that we conform to the ordinary view, in that we affirm undogmatically¹ the existence of gods, reverence gods, and affirm that they are possessed of foreknowledge. But in reply to the rashness of the dogmatists we have this to say.

When we form notions of objects, we ought to conceive of their substances²—for example, whether they are corporeal or incorporeal—and also of their forms, for no one would be able to conceive of a horse without first learning the form of a horse. And the object conceived must be conceived of as being somewhere. Now, some of the dogmatists assert that God is corporeal,³ while others say he is incorporeal,⁴ and some say he has human form,⁵ while others deny it,⁶ and some say he exists in a place, while others say he does not.⁷ And of those who assert his existence in a place, some place him within the world and others outside it.⁸ How then shall we be able to form a conception of God, when

1. "Undogmatically" means here: (1) without claiming something to be the non-relative, *absolute truth* for all men, (2) without *passionately* affirming something to be the truth, and (3) without *passionately denying* opposing beliefs.

2. Sextus is not saying that we can know the "substance" of anything, let alone God; he is simply introducing mutually conflicting dogmatic claims about the substance of God.

3. According to the Stoics, God is a fire-like being, and, by virtue of this similarity to fire, corporeal.

4. According to Aristotle, God is the incorporeal unmoved mover, pure of all matter.

5. The Epicureans thought of the gods as casual onlookers as far as human affairs are concerned.

6. The Stoics thought of God as a non-personal, non-human being.

7. The Epicureans and Stoics believed he had a place; and Aristotle thought of God as inhabiting no place.

8. The Stoics saw God as in the world; the Epicureans thought of him as outside the visible, everyday world.

neither his substance nor his form nor his whereabouts is agreed upon? Let them first reach agreement and harmony with themselves that God is of such and such a nature, and when they have presented us their sketch of that nature, then they can ask us to form a notion of God. But as long as their disagreement is unresolved, we have from them no agreed basis for forming a conception of God.⁹

But, they say, conceive of something imperishable and blessed,¹ and regard this as the Deity. But this is foolish. For just as the man who does not know Dion is also unable to conceive what properties belong to him qua Dion, so also when we are ignorant of the substance of God we shall be unable to learn and conceive of the properties belonging to him. And apart from this consideration, let them tell us what "the blessed" is, whether it is that which operates according to virtue and which takes thought for the things subject to itself, or that which is inactive and neither troubles itself about anything nor causes another any trouble. For by their unresolved disagreement on this head also, they have rendered inconceivable to us "the blessed" and therefore the Deity as well.

But granted that God can be conceived, it is necessary, as far as the dogmatists are concerned, to suspend judgement on the question of his existence or non-existence. For the existence of God is not self-evident. If the impression of him proceeded from himself, the dogmatists would have been in harmony with one another as to who he is, what he is like, and where he stays. But their unresolved disagreement has caused him to seem to us non-evident and in need of demonstration. Now, he who demonstrates the existence of God does so either by means of the self-evident or by means of the non-evident. He certainly cannot do so by means of the self-evident. For since that which is proved is conceived together with that which proves it,² and hence is also apprehended

9. Notice again the logical form of this whole argument: putting arguments in opposition and letting them counteract or cancel out each other.

1. Both the Stoics and the Epicureans believed this.

2. To *prove* that Socrates is mortal, one must conceive of man or all men as mortal, and one must conceive of Socrates as a man; moreover, one must think of the three statements involved in the argument (in-

together with it (as we have also stated), then, if what proves the existence of God were self-evident, God's existence would also be self-evident, it being apprehended together with the self-evident proof of it. But as we have shown, it is not self-evident. Therefore neither can it be proved by the self-evident. But neither can it be proved by the non-evident. For that non-evident fact which is demonstrative of God's existence requires proof. And if it should be said to be proved by means of something self-evident, it will no longer be non-evident but self-evident. Therefore the non-evident fact proving his existence is not proved by means of the self-evident. Nor is it proved by the non-evident. For whoever asserts this will be driven to infinity under our constant demands for proof of the non-evident fact brought out as proof of the one exhibited before it. Therefore the existence of God cannot be demonstrated from anything else. But if it is neither spontaneously self-evident nor proved from anything else, the existence of God will be inapprehensible.

One thing more. He who says that God exists either affirms or denies his forethought for the things in the world,³ and if he affirms it, he affirms it either for all things or for some things. But if he had forethought for all things, there would be neither any bad thing nor any evil in the world. But they say that all things are full of evil. Therefore, God will not be said to have forethought for all things. But if he has forethought for some things, why for some things and not for others? For either he has both the will and the power to think of all things beforehand, or he has the will but not the power, or the power but not the will, or neither the will nor the power. But if he had both the will and the power, he would have forethought for all things; but *ex hypothesi* he does not forethink all things; therefore he does not have both the will and the power to take thought for all things. And if he has the will but not the power, he is weaker than that which is the cause of his inability to extend his forethought to all things. But it is against our conception of God that he should be weaker than anything. But if

cluding the conclusion that Socrates is mortal) together, and with the same clarity. If one fails to do this, one is not proving the conclusion.

3. The Stoics believed that God was providential reason.

he has the power of forethought for all things, but not the will, he will be considered malicious. And if he has neither the will nor the power, he is both malicious and weak. But to say this about God is impiety. Therefore God has no forethought for the things in the world.⁴

But if he takes no thought for anything, and no work or product of his exists, a person will not be able to say where we get the idea that God exists, seeing that he neither appears of himself nor is apprehended by means of any of his products. For these reasons, then, it cannot be apprehended whether God exists. And our conclusion from all this is that those who positively assert the existence of God probably are necessarily guilty of impiety.⁵ For if they say that he takes thought of all things, they will be saying that God is responsible for what is evil, while if they say he takes forethought for some things, or even for nothing, they will necessarily be saying that God is either malicious or weak, which is manifest impiety.

4. The casual reader will think this claim queer in the light of the opening remarks of this section: previously he had said that the Sceptics affirm that the gods "are possessed of foreknowledge." And here he seems to be contradicting this claim. Of course, there is no contradiction at all here: in the first paragraph of this chapter Sextus was affirming something "undogmatically," and in this paragraph Sextus is juxtaposing one dogmatic claim against another (conflicting) dogmatic claim, just to let them cancel each other out. In the first paragraph, Sextus was affirming something without reasons, undogmatically, as part of the individual Sceptic's customary, habitual religion. The first paragraph was strictly in terms of experience and habits of upbringing, in terms of Recollective Signs. In this paragraph he is stating claims about Indicative Signs.

5. The reason this is supposed by Sextus to be a telling charge against the dogmatists is that Sextus is assuming that the reader, by virtue of his upbringing, etc., wishes to eschew impiety; certainly the Sceptics wished to eschew it because it could produce only trouble, charges and countercharges; piety is part of the Practical Criterion, which in turn is part of the Sceptic's program for attaining and keeping unperturbedness or ataraxy.

from Against the Physicists, *BOOK ONE*

On Gods

THE doctrine of gods seems to be quite the most indispensable one to the dogmatic philosophers. Hence they assert that "Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, and wisdom is the knowledge of divine and human things."⁶ It follows that if we show that their inquiry concerning gods is subject to question, we shall virtually have proved that neither is wisdom the knowledge of divine and human things nor philosophy the pursuit of wisdom.

Now, some have said⁷ that those who were the first leaders of mankind, and who first considered what is profitable for life, invented in their great sagacity both the notion of the gods and the belief in the mythical stories of Hades. For life long ago was brutish and uncivilized—as Orpheus says, there was a time

when men gained from one another their
Cannibal livelihood, and the stronger slew the weaker man—

6. This is a Stoic definition of wisdom—*sapientia est rerum humanarum divinarumque scientia*. The highest wisdom for Plato and Aristotle was the knowledge of divine things, forms and essences in their purity and relationships amongst themselves and with divinity; the Stoics included some of Aristotle's "practical wisdom," the knowledge of human things, in their definition of this crucial term. Still, for all, wisdom was not primarily an art of living, but was knowledge of unperceived causal forces. It is the claim to this sort of knowledge that Sextus is considering here, with reference especially to the ultimate cause, God, or the gods.

7. It is of great importance to see that Sextus is not naïve enough to propose the following aetiology as a true one—it, like the others, goes beyond the evident facts. He is proposing the following only as something to be put in the scales with opposing dogmatical views. The Sceptics did *not* deny that there are gods, nor did they propose an arbitrary, inconclusive account of the origin of the notion of godhead; they did *not* say that the notion of God is absolutely empty of reality, and a relative product of the needs, etc., of men. This is all dogmatism, to be put in antithesis with other dogmatisms. The nineteenth-century accounts of psycho-sociological origin of religion (especially Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, and works similar to it) are as arbitrary, as dogmatical, to a Sceptic as the Platonic, Aristotelian, or Stoical accounts reaching opposite conclusions.

and for this reason they wished to put a stop to wrongdoers. First they laid down laws providing for the punishment of those who were openly doing wrong, and after this they invented gods also as overseers of all the sinful and right actions of men, so that none would dare to do wrong even in secret, but would believe that the gods

Clad in mist go over all the earth,
Observing examples of violence and good order
among men.⁸

And Euhemerus,⁹ nicknamed "the Atheist," says:

When the life of mankind was unordered, some by reason of their strength and intelligence had prevailed over the others to such an extent that all had to live according to their commands. These men, being eager to win greater admiration and dignity, invented for themselves a kind of nimbus of surpassing and divine authority, and hence were acknowledged as gods by the people.

And Prodicus of Ceos says:

Sun, moon, rivers, springs, and in general all things beneficial to our livelihood were regarded by the ancients as gods because of the advantages derived from them, just as the Nile is so regarded by the Egyptians.

And this, he says, is why bread was worshipped as Demeter, wine as Dionysus, water as Poseidon, fire as Hephaestus, and so on with each thing that is useful. And Democritus says that there are certain images which approach men, and that some of these are beneficent and others maleficent (hence also he used to pray that he might get "propitious images"). These images, he says, are great and enormous, and though hard to destroy, are not indestructible. They foretell the future to men, since they can be observed

8. Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 255, and Homer, *Odyssey* XVII 487. (—Tr.)

9. Euhemerus was a Sicilian who lived in Macedonia about 316 B.C. He held that the gods of Greek mythology were amplified and deified actual men and women. "Euhemerism" now means "a method of interpretation which treats myths and religious history in general as partially based upon actual history, upon real incidents."

and since they emit sounds. It was from the impressions they had received of these very images that the ancients formed the notion of the existence of God, there being besides these nothing else possessed of the indestructible nature of God. Aristotle said that the conception of gods arose among men from two sources, from events concerning the soul and from celestial phenomena. It arose from events concerning the soul because of the inspired states of soul occurring in sleep and because of prophecies. During sleep, he says, when the soul is alone, it recovers its own peculiar nature and prophesies and foretells the future. It is in this state also during its separation from bodies at death. Certainly, too, he accepts the poet Homer as having observed this fact; for Homer represents Patroclus when he is being killed as prophesying the slaying of Hector, and Hector as prophesying the death of Achilles.¹ Now, it was because of these things, he says, that men conceived of the existence of something divine, resembling in its aloneness the soul, and of all things the most knowing. But of course it was because of celestial phenomena also. For having beheld the revolution of the sun by day and the well-ordered motion of the other stars by night, they supposed that some god must be the one responsible for such motion and order.

Such was Aristotle's view. But there are others who say that the mind, keen and agile in the apprehension of its own nature, found also in itself a reflection of the universe, and formed the notion of some surpassing power of mind, analogous to itself but of divine nature. And there are some who have conjectured that we have arrived at the conception of gods from the marvellous occurrences in the world. Democritus also appears to be of this opinion. "For," says he, "when the men of ancient times saw the phenomena in the heavens, such as thunderings and flashes of lightning, thunderbolts and collisions of stars, and eclipses of sun and moon, they were frightened, and imagined that gods must be the cause of these things." Epicurus, on the other hand, believes that man's conception of God is drawn from the presentations seen in sleep. "For," he says, "when great images of human form came to them in sleep, they supposed that there must exist in reality some such

1. Homer, *Iliad* XVI 851ff., and XXII 358 ff. (—Tr.)

gods of human form." And some have recourse to the unalterable and well-ordered motion of the heavenly bodies, and say that it was from this that our notions of the gods first originated. For just as, if a man were seated on Trojan Mount Ida observing the host of the Greeks approaching over the plains with much discipline and order,

The knights first with their horses and chariots,
Behind them the foot-soldiers,²

such a man would certainly have arrived at the notion that there exists someone who draws up such a battle array and commands the soldiers marshalled under him, such as Nestor or some other hero who knew how to

Draw up horses and shield-bearing men,³

and just as a man familiar with ships is aware, as soon as he sees from a distance a ship being driven by a fair breeze and with all its sails well trimmed, that there is someone who steers its course and brings it into its appointed harbours—in the same way those who first looked up to heaven and beheld the sun running its courses from east to west, and the well-ordered dances, as it were, of the stars, inquired after the creator of this most beautiful arrangement.⁴ They calculated that it had not come about by acci-

2. Homer, *Iliad* IV 297 f. (—Tr.)

3. Homer, *Iliad* II 554. (—Tr.)

4. This whole argument is sometimes called the "argument from design." Kant sought to undermine all such arguments as those presented in this chapter in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the second division (Book II, Ch. III) of his Transcendental Dialectic. The argument from design is what Kant calls a "physico-theological proof," and is "the oldest, the clearest, and the most accordant with the common reason of mankind." Moreover, he says, it is the most useful, helping us as it does to see order, causal sequences, beauty, in the universe (Chapter III, Sec. VI, pp. 519–520). Moreover, while it is heuristically and aesthetically satisfactory, it cannot be contradicted by experience itself, since even catastrophes illustrate a deep causal orderliness in the universe. Still, on pp. 522–524 of the *Critique*, Kant seeks to undermine or tone down the "dogmatic language of the overweening sophist" who proposes this argument as conclusive. Among other things, he points out that the argument from design, order in the universe, does not prove, but rather assumes, that things in the world cannot of themselves without help from God be orderly and harmonious—what if things themselves, the processes of

dent but by the agency of some mightier, imperishable nature, which was God. And some of the later Stoics say that the first men, who were born of Earth, were in intelligence much superior to the present race, as one may see from a comparison of ourselves with older men and with those heroes who, possessed as they were of an extra organ of sense in their keenness of intellect, could apprehend the nature of Divinity and conceive of certain of its powers.

Such, then, are the statements of the dogmatic philosophers on the conception of the gods. But we do not suppose that they require refutation. For the variety of assertions displayed is confirmation of the fact that they are not acquainted with the whole truth, since many ways of conceiving God can exist when that which is true in them is not being perceived.⁵ And yet, even if we proceed to the particular suggestions, there will be found no certainty in any of their statements. For example, those who believe it was certain lawgivers and sagacious men who created in other men the notion of gods do not appear to attack the issue at all. The question was, after all, what was the original cause which brought men to a belief in gods? But these men miss the point when they say that certain lawgivers created in men the notion of gods. They do not see that

nature themselves, were intrinsically orderly? Notice how similar this argument is to that of Carneades, cited in the Introduction (p. 21). And, Kant goes on, if you question this assumption, you need to prove a cause of the intrinsically orderly stuff of the universe; this in turn leads you to talking vaguely about the "very great," "astounding," etc., nature of a being of whom we have only "relative representations," ideas derived from our own experience, ideas that get very vague when magnified to the size of a God and a universe. This proof then, like any other for Kant, moves "into the realm of mere possibilities" and is based on a hope that we may "upon the wings of ideas . . . draw near to the object—the object that has refused itself to all . . . empirical enquiries" (p. 524).

Despite Kant's obvious emphasis on refutation, on proved *denial*, and the Sceptic's emphasis on a suspension of judgement, the upshots of their two treatments of the argument from design are quite similar.

5. This is a dogmatic claim, a slip from Scepticism as Sextus has described Scepticism. Instead of suspending judgement simply, he is inferring from these antitheses the falsity (or at least the partial falsity or truth) of the claims that fall into these antitheses. If doubt is the suspension of judgement, no such inferences are appropriate. That is, true suspension of judgement always leaves it open or possible that a given claim be proved true or false, if an acceptable criterion should appear.

the original difficulty still awaits them whenever somebody asks, "But how did the lawgivers arrive at the conception of gods, if gods were not handed down to them by earlier tradition?" Further, all men have a conception of them; not, however, in the same way. On the contrary, the Persians actually deify fire, the Egyptians water, and other peoples some other such thing. It is improbable, too, to suppose that all men were assembled together by the lawgivers and then heard something about gods. The tribes of men were unmixed and at any rate unknown to each other, and as for sea voyages, history teaches us that the *Argo* was the first ship of any that sailed the seas. "Yes," perhaps someone will say, "but before all this the lawgivers and leaders of each tribe invented this idea, and that is why different peoples assumed the existence of different gods." But this is foolish. For the preconception men have about God is, again, one common to all. According to it he is some kind of a blessed living being, imperishable and perfect in happiness and non-receptive of all evil. And it is perfectly absurd that all men should hit upon the same characteristics by chance rather than being moved to apprehend them naturally. It was not, therefore, by conviction or because of any kind of legislation that the men of ancient times accepted the existence of gods.⁶

And there is an equal failure to understand the issue on the part of those who assert that the men who were mankind's first rulers and administrators of public affairs clothed themselves with greater power and honour for the submission of the multitude, and in time, when they had died, were regarded as gods. For suppose they did elevate themselves to the rank of gods. How did they themselves get a conception of gods under which to subsume themselves? This point, certainly, requires proof, but it is passed over. And not only that; what they maintain is improbable. For things made current by leaders—and especially if they are falsehoods—last only as long as the lifetime of the leaders, and are done away with when they are dead. Indeed, one might tell of many who were

6. Notice that Sextus is not himself making a claim about the cause of our belief in the existence of gods; he is making a counter-claim and defending it just so that we can suspend judgement on the whole problem. He is not dogmatizing here; he is developing conflicting arguments that have equal force.

made gods during their lifetime but were despised after their death, unless they had assumed some divine appellation, as did Heracles, the son of Zeus and Alcmena. For it is said that his name was originally Alcaeus, but that he usurped the appellation of Heracles, who was regarded as a god by the men of that time. Hence also the tradition about a peculiar statue of Heracles once found at Thebes, that it bore the inscription, "Alcaeus, son of Amphitryon, as a thank-offering to Heracles." And they say that the sons of Tyndareus assumed the glory of the Dioscuri, who, again, were thought to be gods, for the wise men of that time called the two hemispheres—that above the earth and that below—by the name "Dioscuri." This is also why the Poet says of them, hinting darkly at this fact:

They are now living, now dead, on alternate days
Each, and are honoured like gods.⁷

And they set felt caps upon them, and stars upon these, to symbolize the construction of the hemispheres. Those, then, who thus usurped the honours due to the gods somehow did better than they intended, but those who merely proclaimed themselves gods were, instead, despised.

Again, those who say that the ancients supposed that all things beneficial to life were gods—such as sun and moon, rivers and lakes, and the like—are not only championing an improbable opinion but also pronouncing the ancients guilty of the utmost stupidity. For it is not likely that they were so foolish as to suppose that things they could see perishing before their very eyes were gods, or to bear witness to the divine power of such things as could be eaten or destroyed by themselves. Some views, perhaps, are reasonable, such as believing in the divinity of the Earth—not that substance which is cut into furrows or dug up, but the pervading power in it, and its fruit-bearing, and truly most divine, nature. As for lakes and rivers and various other things of a nature to be useful to us—to believe that these are gods is a madness second to none. For on this assumption one ought also to believe that men, and especially philosophers, are gods (for they contribute to the advan-

7. Homer, *Odyssey* XI 303 f. (—Tr.)

tages of our life), and most of the irrational animals (for they help to perform work for us), and our household effects and everything else of even humbler character. But this is, certainly, extremely ludicrous. Therefore we must say that the view expounded is not sound.

But there is no reliance on the view of Democritus either, as he tries to explain the less doubtful by the more doubtful. For nature gives us many clues of various kinds for the solution of the problem how men acquired the conception of God; but the idea that there are existent in the surrounding air overgrown images of an appearance like that of humans, and in general other fictions of the sort that Democritus likes to invent for himself, is altogether inadmissible.⁸

One may also make the same observations in reply to Epicurus. His belief was that gods were conceived from the presentations of images of human shape received in sleep. Well, why did there arise from these a conception of gods rather than a conception of overgrown men? And in reply to all the views set forth one may say in general that men do not form a conception of God on the basis merely of a manlike living being's size, but in conjunction with the idea of his being blessed and imperishable, and of his displaying the most power in the universe. But how, or from what source, these characteristics were conceived by those who first drew from them their conception of God, is not explained by those who allege as causes the presentations occurring in sleep and the orderliness of the heavenly bodies.

But their reply to this is that while the idea of God's existence arose from the images that appear in sleep or from the observed phenomena of the universe, the notion that God is eternal and imperishable and perfect in happiness came in by analogy as an inference from mankind. For just as by magnifying ordinary man in our imagination we acquired the idea of a Cyclops, who was not like

8. Again it must be noticed that Sextus is making these remarks not to express his own beliefs on these unprovable matters, but to put opposing claims into antithesis, and thus secure a suspension of judgement about these matters.

A man who eats bread, but like a wooded peak
Of high mountains, when it appears apart from others,⁹

just so, when we had conceived of a man happy and blessed and complete with all the good things, by augmenting these characteristics we conceived of the one who was highest in these very qualities as God. And again, having imagined some long-lived man, the ancients increased his lifetime to infinity, joining to the present both the past and the future; then, having arrived at the conception of eternity, they went on from there to say that God is eternal. Those who argue thus are indeed defending a plausible view, but they are falling slowly into the mode of circular reasoning,¹ which puts them in a most difficult position. For in order to conceive a happy man in the first place, and then God by analogy from him, we must conceive what happiness is, as it is by his participation in it that the happy man is conceived. But according to them happiness is "a certain daemonic and divine nature," and he who has a well-disposed daemon is called "happy."² Consequently, in order to determine human happiness we must previously have a notion of "God" and "daemon," and in order to conceive God we must have previously a conception of the happy man. And so each, while it waits for its conception to come from the other, becomes for us inconceivable.

This, then, is our reply to those who inquire how men of an earlier age acquired a conception of God. Let us next look into the question whether gods exist.

Do Gods Exist?

SINCE not everything that is conceived actually partakes in existence—on the contrary, a thing can be conceived and still not

9. Homer, *Odyssey* IX 191 f. (—Tr.)

1. See Agrippa's modes, above, p. 73, especially the one on circular reasoning. For the most part Sextus has hitherto been using the ten modes of Aenesidemus.

2. "Happiness" in Greek is expressed by the term *eudaimonia*, which word is made up of two major parts—*eu* signifying "well-disposed" or "good," and *daimonia*, which is based on the Greek word for divinity, *daimon*. And so "happy" in Greek literally means "having a well-disposed divinity."

exist, like a hippocentaur and like Scylla—it will also be necessary, after our inquiry about the conception of the gods, to consider the question of their existence. It will probably be found that the Sceptic, as compared with those whose philosophies differ, is on the safer ground for having followed his ancestral customs and the laws. For he declares that gods do exist, and he performs everything that conduces to their worship and veneration, while at the same time he is by no means hasty in the matter of philosophic inquiry concerning them.³

Of those, then, who have examined the question of the existence of God, we have some who assert his existence, some who assert his non-existence, and some who say that he is “no more” existent than non-existent. That he exists is the contention of most of the dogmatists and is the general preconception of ordinary men. That he does not exist is the contention of those who are nicknamed “atheists,” such as Euhemerus,

A boastful old man who scribbles wicked books,⁴

and Diagoras of Melos, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Theodorus, and multitudinous others. Of these, Euhemerus said that those who were believed to be gods were actually certain men of power who for this reason had been deified by the others, and then were thought to be gods. Prodicus said that whatever benefits life was understood to be God—things such as sun, moon, rivers, lakes, meadows, crops, and everything of that kind. And Diagoras of Melos, a dithyrambic poet, was at first, as they say, pre-eminently god-fearing. He began his poem, at any rate, in this manner: “By the favour of a god and by fortune all things are accomplished.” But after he had been wronged by a man who had committed perjury and suffered no punishment for it, he changed his tune and asserted that God does not exist. And Critias, one of the tyrants at Athens,⁵ seems to be from the ranks of the atheists when he says

3. Again the Practical Criterion appears, and the Sceptic absolves himself from the charge of being an atheist.

4. This verse quotation is from the *Iambi* of Callimachus, Greek poet of the third century B.C. (—Tr.)

5. Critias was one of the hated “Thirty” who ruled Athens for a time in 404 B.C., at the close of the Peloponnesian War. He was also a

that the lawgivers of ancient times invented God as a kind of overseer of the right and wrong actions of men. Their purpose was to prevent anyone from wronging his neighbour secretly, as he would incur the risk of vengeance at the hands of the gods. What he said goes like this:

There was a time when man's life was lawless
And brutish and subservient to force;
When there was no prize, either, for good men,
Nor yet punishment given to the bad.
And then, I think, men instituted laws
As punishers, that Right could be the lord
Of all alike, and keep Violence enslaved;
And whoever did any wrong was punished.
Then, since the laws would hinder them
From doing deeds of violence openly, while yet
They did them secretly—then, it seems to me,
Some shrewd man, wise in judgement, first
Invented for mortals the fear of gods,
To serve as terror for the bad, even though
Their actions, words, or thoughts be secret.
And then he brought in the Divinity,
Saying there was a God, thriving in deathless life,
Hearing and seeing with his mind, thinking much,
Both mindful of this world and a bearer of divine
Nature, who could hear all that mortals speak,
And have the power to see their every act.
And even if you plan some evil deed in silence,
This will not escape the gods; for that,
There's too much wisdom in them. With words
Like these he introduced this most alluring doctrine,
Concealing with his lying speech the truth.
He named, as being where the gods abide,
That place which would have terrified them most;
Whence, as he knew, mortals derive their fears,
And advantage also for their wretched life:
The vault revolving above, where he perceived
That lightnings were, and terrible claps
Of thunder, and the starry frame of heaven,
An embroidery of Time, the cunning builder,
And whence a glowing mass, a meteor, makes it way,
And the melting rain journeys down to earth.

kinsman of Plato. The following extensive fragment is from his satyr-play *Sisyphus*. (—Tr.)

With suchlike fears did he encircle men,
 And in his speech, by playing upon these fears,
 He established the Deity well, and in a fitting place,
 And by laws extinguished lawlessness.

And after he goes on a little more, he adds this:

And thus, I think, did some man first persuade
 Mortals to believe in a race of gods.

Theodorus, "the Atheist," is also in agreement with these men, and according to some, Protagoras of Abdera. The former, in his treatise *On Gods*, demolished with various arguments the theological beliefs of the Greeks, while Protagoras in one passage wrote expressly: "In regard to gods I can say neither whether they exist nor of what sort they are, for many are the things that prevent me." The Athenians condemned him to death for this, but he escaped, and then perished, lost at sea. Timon of Phlius⁶ also mentions this story in this passage of the second book of his *Lampoons*:

Prince of all sophists then, and of all thereafter,
 Lacking neither clearness of speech, nor insight, nor
 volubility,
 Protagoras. They wished to make ashes of his writings,
 Because he wrote that he neither knew nor was able
 To perceive of what sort or who the gods might be,
 Paying all heed to fairness. But this was of no
 Avail. Instead, he took to flight, unwilling thus
 To sink to Hades, drinking the cold Socratic drink.

And Epicurus, according to some, leaves God undisputed when addressing himself to the public, but not where the real nature of things is the issue. And the Sceptics have said that because of the equal weight of the opposing arguments gods are existent "no more" than they are non-existent. This we shall see when we have briefly run over the arguments advanced on each side of the question.

Now, those who claim that gods exist try to prove their thesis by four modes. These are, first, the agreement of all mankind; second, the ordered arrangement of the universe; third, the absurdity of the consequences of denying divinity; and their fourth and last mode

6. See Introduction, pp. 15-17.

is that of the refutation of the opposing arguments. Arguing from the conception common to all men, they claim that practically all men, both Greeks and barbarians, believe in the existence of divinity and for this reason are agreed in offering sacrifices and prayers and in raising temples to gods. And they differ in their methods of doing these things, as though they possessed a common faith regarding the existence of some divinity, but did not all have the same preconception regarding its nature. But at any rate, if this preconception were false, they would not all be in agreement as they are. Therefore gods exist. And besides, false opinions and occasional utterances are not kept up indefinitely, but die off with those for whose sake they were maintained. For example, men pay honour to kings with sacrifices and with all the other religious rites with which they worship gods. But they observe these rites only during the lifetime of the kings themselves, and when they are dead they omit them as being rather unlawful and impious. But the conception of the gods both existed from eternity and continues to eternity, attested as it in all likelihood is by events themselves. Moreover, even if we ought to pass over the conjecture of the vulgar and believe, instead, those men who are wise and of the highest order of genius, we can readily see that poetry produces no great or illustrious work in which God is not the one vested with the authority and power over the events taking place, just as he was by the poet Homer in the war he recorded between the Greeks and the barbarians. And we can also readily perceive that the majority of the physicists are in accord with poetry, for Pythagoras and Empedocles and the Ionians and Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics, and perhaps also the philosophers of the Garden⁷ (as Epicurus testifies *expressis verbis*), leave God undisputed. Therefore, just as, if our inquiry were concerned with some visible object, it would be reasonable for us to rely on those with the sharpest vision, and if it were concerned with some audible object, to rely on those with the sharpest hearing, just so, when we are examining an object observed by reason, we ought not to rely on any but those of acute intellect and reason, such as were the philosophers.

But to this the opposite party have their standard rejoinder.

7. I.e., the Epicureans. (—Tr.)

They argue that all men also have a common conception in regard to what the legends say about Hades, and that they have the poets in agreement with them, and even more so in this regard than in the case of the gods. Nevertheless, they say, we would not assert that the stories told of Hades are factually true. If we did, it would be because we fail to understand in the first place that it is an attribute not only of the fiction about Hades but in general of every legend to contain inconsistencies and to be impossible, as this one was:

And I saw Tityus, son of glorious Earth
Lying on the ground, and he covered nine roods.
A pair of vultures, sitting on either side, tore his liver,
Deep inside. And his hands could not ward them off,
For he had dishonoured Leto, renowned consort of Zeus.⁸

For if Tityus was lifeless and had no consciousness, how was he amenable to punishment? And if he had life, how was he dead? And again, when it is said:

Yes, and I beheld Tantalus suffering great pain
Standing in a lake that was laving his chin,
Eager to quench his thirst, but unable to reach his drink.
For each time the old man bent forward, eager to drink,
His drink was lost as the water receded, and at his feet
Black earth would appear, parched by a god.⁹

For if he never tasted any liquid or food, how did he survive, instead of perishing from a lack of the necessities of life? And if he was immortal, how could he be in such a state? An immortal nature is inconsistent with pains and torments, since everything that feels pain is mortal.

Of course,¹⁰ the myth did thus contain within itself its own refutation, but the notion of gods is not of this kind, nor was there a suggestion of inconsistency in it; on the contrary, it appeared to be in accord with the facts. Nor is it possible, for that matter, to suppose that souls move downwards; for since they are composed of fine particles, and are of a fiery no less than an airy nature, they

8. Homer, *Odyssey* XI 576 ff. (—Tr.)

9. Homer, *Odyssey* XI 582 ff. (—Tr.)

10. This is the reply of the Stoics. (—Tr.)

are borne upwards to the higher regions instead.¹ They also continue in their own existence, and are not (as Epicurus said) "dissipated like smoke when released from their bodies." Nor was it the body that controlled them previously, but it was they that were the causes of the body's coherence, as they also were, much earlier, of their own. For when they have left the dwelling of the sun, they inhabit the region below the moon. There, because of the purity of the air, they take more time for remaining, having like the other stars suitable nourishment in the steam exhaled from the earth, and having nothing in those regions which would dissolve them. If, then, souls live on, they are the same as daemons, and if daemons exist, we must also say that gods exist, and that to their existence the pre-conception regarding what the stories say about Hades is by no means prejudicial.

Such, then, is the argument from the belief in God common to and agreed on by all. But let us also examine the argument from the orderly arrangement of the surrounding universe. Now, the substance of existing things, they say, is of itself motionless and formless, and must be given motion and form by some cause. On this account, just as when we have seen a very beautiful work of bronze we are anxious to learn who the craftsman is, inasmuch as the material by itself is motionless, so also when we behold the matter of the universe in motion and possessing form and orderly arrangement, we might with good reason look into the cause of its motion and of the many kinds of form it possesses. And it is probable that this is nothing other than some power which pervades it, just as our soul pervades us. This power, then, is either self-moved or it is moved by another power. And if it is moved by a different power, it will be impossible for that different power to be moved unless it is moved by still another power, which is absurd. There exists, therefore, some power which is of itself self-moved. This would, then, be divine and eternal. For it will have been in motion either from eternity or from some definite point of time. But it will not have been

1. Again, Sextus is not to be read as defending this claim—he is simply putting in opposing, equally plausible claims to counterbalance the ones he is trying to cast doubt upon. He has no doctrine of soul, let alone one so close to the Stoics' notion of a soul made up of *pneuma*, or a fiery substance.

in motion from some definite time, for there will exist no cause why it should be in motion from some definite time. Therefore the power which moves matter and brings on ordered forms of generation and change in it must be eternal, and from this it would follow that it is God.—Moreover, that which is productive of what is rational and wise is in any case itself both rational and wise. But the power spoken of above is at any rate of such a nature as to construct man. Therefore it must be rational and wise, and this is a characteristic of divine nature. Gods, therefore, exist.

Also, bodies are divided into those which are unified, those which are composed of things joined together, and those which are composed of separate things. Now, unified bodies are those dominated by a single "cohesion,"² as are plants and animals. Bodies composed of things joined together are those composed of elements which are nearly alike and which tend to make up some one thing which is the total of them, such as chains and cupboards and ships. Bodies composed of separate things are those composed of things which are disjointed and separate and exist by themselves, such as armies and flocks and choruses. Since, now, the universe too is a body, it is either a unified body, or one composed of things joined together, or one composed of separate things. But it is composed neither of things joined together nor of separate things, as we show from the "sympathies"³ connected with it. For it is in accordance with the waxings and wanings of the moon that many of our land and sea animals perish and increase, and that ebb-tides and flood-tides occur in certain parts of the sea. And likewise it is in accordance with certain risings and settings of the stars that changes of the surrounding atmosphere as well as all kinds of changes in the weather take place, sometimes for the better, sometimes with pestilential results. From these facts it is evident that the universe is a unified body. For where bodies are composed of things joined together, or of things which are separate, the parts do not "sympathize" with each other, since, for example, if all the soldiers in an army have been killed, one who may have survived appears to have no ill effects

2. The Stoics believed in a principle or force that held inorganic bodies together, and they called this force *hexis*, "attraction," or "holding."

3. The explanation of this term immediately follows.

communicated to him. But in the case of unified bodies there exists a certain "sympathy," since when a finger is cut the whole body is affected sympathetically. And so the universe too is a unified body.

But since bodies are divided into those which are held together by mere "cohesion," those held together by "nature," and those held together by "soul" (such as stones and sticks by cohesion, plants by nature, and animals by soul)—then certainly the universe too is controlled by one of these. And it will not be held together by mere cohesion, for the things dominated by cohesion (such as sticks and stones) do not admit of any change or mutation to speak of, but merely undergo a condition produced by their own expansion or compression. The universe, on the other hand, admits of considerable changes, the atmosphere sometimes becoming icy and sometimes hot, and sometimes dry, sometimes damp, and sometimes undergoing alterations in some other way in accordance with the motions of the celestial bodies. The universe, then, is not held together by mere cohesion. But if not held together by this, then certainly by nature. For even the things controlled by soul were, long before that, held together by nature. Necessarily, therefore, it must be held together by the best nature, since it embraces the natures of all things. But that nature which embraces the natures of all things must have enclosed within it those natures which are rational. But that nature which embraces the rational natures is in any case rational also. For it is not possible for the whole to be inferior to the part. But if that nature which governs the universe is the best, it will be intelligent and good and immortal. And if it is such, it is God. Gods therefore exist.

And inasmuch as there exist on land and in the sea, in spite of the density of their parts, a variety of animals which share in the faculties of soul and of the senses, it is all the more probable that there exist some animals with soul and intelligence in the air, which in comparison with land and water possesses a high degree of purity and clearness. And in agreement with this is the saying that the Dioscuri are good daemons, "saviours of well-benched ships," and this one:

For on the bounteous earth are thrice ten thousand
Of Zeus's immortal watchers of mortal men.⁴

4. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 252 f. (—Tr.)

But if it is probable that animals exist in the air, it is at any rate reasonable to suppose that animal life should exist in the ether also, which, since men derived their faculty of intellect from it, is also the source of man's share in that faculty. And granted that ethereal animals exist, and are thought to be far superior to terrestrial animals because they are imperishable and ungenerated, it will be granted that gods also exist, since they do not differ from these.

And Cleanthes⁵ used to argue thus:

If one nature is better than another nature, there must exist some best nature; if one soul is better than another soul, there must exist some best soul; and if, again, one animal is better than another, there must exist some best animal; for such things do not lend themselves to an extension *ad infinitum*. And so even as neither nature nor soul is capable of becoming better and better to infinity, so the animal is not capable of this, either. But one animal is, nevertheless, superior to another. A horse, for example, is stronger than a tortoise, a bull stronger than a horse, and a lion stronger than a bull. And of all, no doubt, of the terrestrial animals man is pre-eminent and superior in disposition both of body and of soul. Therefore there must exist an animal which is the most excellent and the best. And yet man can hardly be the very best of animals. For one thing, he lives in evil all his life, and if not that, for the greater part of it (for if he ever attains goodness, he attains it late, and at the sunset of life). Also, he is a thing which is subject to death, is feeble, and is in need of any number of aids, such as food and coverings and all the other things necessary for the care of the body, which stands over us like some hateful tyrant, demands its daily tribute, and threatens us with disease and death if we should fail to provide for washing it, anointing it, clothing it, and feeding it. Consequently man is not a perfect animal, but incomplete and far removed from perfect. That animal which is perfect and best will be better than man and will be completely supplied with all the virtues and not receptive of any evil. And this animal will not differ from God. Therefore God exists.⁶

5. See Introduction, p. 18.

6. This argument was to be used most effectively by St Thomas in his *Summa Theologica* (Part I, Question 2, Article 3), and was called by him the argument "from the gradation to be found in things." St Thomas wrote:

Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus, as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things. . . . Therefore there must also be something which is to

Well, such is the argument of Cleanthes. But Xenophon, the Socratic, has also propounded an argument for the existence of gods. He attributes the proof to Socrates, whose words in the course of his examination of Aristodemus I quote:

Tell me, Aristodemus, are there any persons whom you hold in admiration on account of their skill? Why, yes, he said. Who are they then? Well, I admire Homer for his poetry, and Polycletus for his statuary, and Zeuxis because of his painting. You approve these then, do you not, because of the fact that the works they turned out were products of extraordinary craftsmanship? Why, yes, he said. If, therefore, the statue of Polycletus should take on the added excellence of animation, would you not approve of the artist far more? I certainly should. Now, when you see a statue you say it has been wrought by some artist; but when you see a man with an agile soul and a well-arranged body, and when you then see the position of his parts and the use made of them, and that in the first place he was made to stand upright, and was given eyes to see visible things, and hearing to hear audible things—do you not believe that he is the handiwork of some extraordinary mind? And what would be the use of smell, if nostrils had not been added, and likewise what would be the use of flavours, if a tongue to judge them had not been placed in him? And (he says), when you know that you have in your body a small part of the great quantity of earth that exists, and a little of the great quantity of water existing, and the same with fire and air, well then, if mind is the only thing nowhere existent, where in the world do you think you were lucky enough to get hold of yours?⁷

Such, then, is the argument of Xenophon, the inductive force of which is as follows: "Of the great quantity of earth existing in the universe you possess a small part, and of the great quantity of water existing in the universe you possess a small part. Therefore of the great quantity of mind existing in the universe you also possess a small part. The universe is therefore intelligent, and consequently is God." But some seek to obviate the argument by remarking its

all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

The argument in this form occurred in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (this was Aquinas' source), and was to be used a great deal in Italian Platonic philosophy (especially in the writing of Marsilio Ficino).

7. Cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I 4, 2 ff. (—Tr.)

premisses, thus: "Of the great quantity of earth existing in the universe you possess a small part. And of the great quantity of water existing in the universe you also possess a small part, and of air and fire as well. You also possess, therefore, some small part of the great quantity of gall existing in the universe, as well as phlegm and blood." It will follow that the universe is both gall-producing and productive of blood—an absurd conclusion. But the defenders of the argument claim that the parallel argument is dissimilar to that of Xenophon. For he bases his inquiry on simple and primary bodies such as earth and water and air and fire, but those who employ the parallel argument have made a side-leap to compounds. For gall, blood, and all other fluids in the body are not primary and simple but compounded of primary and elemental bodies.

The same argument can also be propounded in this form: "If there were not something earthy in the universe, there would not be anything earthy in you either, and if there were not something wet in the universe, there would not be anything wet in you either, and so likewise with air and fire. Hence, also, if there were not some mind in the universe, there would not be any mind in you either. But there is some mind in you; therefore there is mind in the universe also, and as a consequence the universe is intelligent. But if it is intelligent, it is God." The argument which takes the following form serves the same function: "Now, if you were to see a well-wrought statue, could you be in doubt as to whether it was the work of a skilled mind? Or would you not be so far removed from any suspicions on this account that you would even go on to admire its excellence of workmanship and its artistic quality? Now, in this case you observe the statue, which is external to you, and ascribe it to an artificer, asserting that there must exist some craftsman who made it. Is it consistent, then, when you consider the mind inside you, which in its so great diversity excels any statue or any painting, to suppose that, if generated, it is the creation of chance? Is it not rather the creation of some craftsman possessed of surpassing power and intelligence? He could reside nowhere else but in the universe, as he governs and generates and increases the things in it. But this craftsman is a god. Therefore gods exist."⁸

8. This argument is related to the argument from design (see above, p. 182, fn. 4).

And Zeno of Citium, taking his cue from Xenophon, argues thus:

That which sends forth a seed of a rational thing is itself also rational; but the universe sends forth a seed of a rational thing; therefore the universe is rational. And in this conclusion its existence is included *a fortiori*.

The plausibility of his line of argument is obvious. For the beginning of motion in all that is "nature" or "soul" seems to come from the "ruling part" of the soul, and all the powers sent out to the parts of the whole are sent out from the ruling part as from a well-spring, so that every power existing in a part exists also in the whole, because it is distributed from its ruling part. Hence the power that the part has must have existed much earlier in the whole. For this reason, if the universe sends forth a seed of a rational animal, it does not do this by throwing off superfluities, as man does; rather, in so far as it contains seeds of rational animals, it contains the whole of them—and this not as we might say of a vine, that it "contains" grape-stones, that is to say individually, but because generative principles of rational animals are contained in it. What he is saying, then, is this: "The universe contains generative principles of rational animals. Therefore the universe is rational."

And again Zeno says:

The rational is better than the non-rational. But nothing is better than the universe. Therefore the universe is rational. And it is the same with the intelligent and that which partakes of animation. For the intelligent is better than the non-intelligent, and the animate better than the non-animate. But nothing is better than the universe. Therefore the universe is intelligent and animate.

Virtually the same argument is found in a passage⁹ of Plato, where he writes as follows (I quote):

Let us, then, state the reason why the creator created this whole world of becoming. He was good, and in him who is good there cannot be any jealousy about anything. Being himself free of jealousy, he wished all things to be as much like himself as possible. And one would do best to accept the view of wise men that it is this, above all, which is the supreme originating cause of becoming and of the universe.

9. *Timaeus* 29 D ff. (Jowett's translation, pp. 13-14).

Then he goes on a little farther to add:

It was this reflection, no doubt, that led him, when he was fashioning the universe, to put reason in soul, and soul in the body, so that the work he produced might be by nature the fairest and best. Thus, then, if we are to credit the likely account, we must say that this universe is in truth a living being with soul and intelligence that came to be by the providence of God.

He was expounding virtually the same argument as Zeno, for the latter also declares that the universe is most fair, as it is a work produced according to nature and, according to the likely account, a living being with a soul, intelligent and rational.

But Alexinus matched Zeno's argument with one of his own in this form:

The poetic is better than the non-poetic and the grammatical better than the non-grammatical, and so with the other arts: that which is considered to be in accordance with their rules is better than that which is not. But there is not a single thing better than the universe. Therefore the universe is poetic and grammatical.

The Stoics meet this parallel argument with the observation that Zeno has taken what is absolutely better, that is, the rational over the non-rational, the intelligent over the non-intelligent, and the animate over the non-animate, while Alexinus has not. For the poetic is not in an absolute sense better than the non-poetic, nor the grammatical better than the non-grammatical. There is, consequently, a great difference to be observed in their arguments. For—consider—Archilochus, who is poetical, is not better than Socrates, who is non-poetical; and Aristarchus, who is grammatical, is not better than Plato, who is non-grammatical.

Furthermore, the Stoics and those who agree with them also try to demonstrate the existence of the gods from the motion of the universe. For that the universe is in motion, everyone will admit, as there are many things which lead to this conviction. It is moved, then, either by nature or by deliberate choice or by a vortex¹⁰ and

10. The vortex, or *dine*, of Democritus was an aspect of the mechanical necessity that holds in his material universe; the material of the world is atoms and the void in which the atoms move; now, these atoms move about in complexes, or vortices, and the lighter parts of these swirl-

of necessity. But it is not reasonable to suppose it is moved by a vortex and of necessity. For the vortex is either disorderly or well ordered. And if it is disorderly, it will not be able to move anything in an orderly manner. But if it moves anything with order and harmony, it will be divine and marvellous. For it would never be moving the whole in an orderly and preserving way if it were not intelligent and divine. And if it were this, it would no longer be a vortex, for a vortex is disorderly and short-lived. Consequently the universe will not be moved, as Democritus said, of necessity and by a vortex. It will not be moved by a non-perceptive nature, either, inasmuch as the intelligent nature is superior to this. And such natures are seen to be contained in the universe. It too, then, must necessarily possess an intelligent nature by which it is moved in an orderly way, and this, naturally, is God.

Again, mechanisms with automatic movement are more marvellous than those without. We are struck with admiration, for example, when we behold the sphere of Archimedes, in which sun and moon and the rest of the stars are in motion. Not that we are astonished at the wooden parts, or at their movement—no, it is the craftsman and the causes of the motion that we admire. Hence, in the degree that the percipients are more marvellous than the things perceived, in that degree the causes of the motion of the former are the more marvellous. For since a horse is more marvellous than a plant, the cause of the horse's motion is also more marvellous than the cause of the plant's. Also, since the elephant is more marvellous than a horse, so also the cause of the elephant's motion, which enables him to carry so large a weight, is more marvellous than that of the horse's motion. Also, more marvellous than all these—to apply the highest analogy—is the moving cause of the sun, and of moon and stars; and above these, as being their cause, is the nature of the universe. For the cause of the part does not extend to the whole, nor is it the cause of the whole. Rather, the cause of the whole is extended down into the parts, for which reason it is also

ing complexes are forced outward, while the heavier parts cluster in the middle; the ultimate nature of everything in the universe, mind included, is determined by the density or proximity of these atoms with each other in an atom-complex, or vortex. See Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, pp. 109–116.

more marvellous than the cause of the part. Consequently, since the nature of the universe is the cause of the orderly arrangement of the whole universe, it will be the cause of the parts also. And if this is so, it is the most excellent. And if it is the most excellent, it is both rational and intelligent and, what is more, it will be eternal. But such a nature is the same as God. There exists, therefore, something which is God.

Moreover, in every body which consists of many parts and which is controlled by "nature,"¹ there exists some part which is the dominant one, just as in the case of ourselves this part is variously claimed to exist in the heart or in the brain or in some other part of the body, and in the case of plants—somewhat differently—is said in some to be in the roots, in others in the foliage, and in others in the heart-wood. Consequently, since the universe too is multipartite and is controlled by nature, there will exist in it some part which is the dominant one and which first begins its motions. And this can be nothing, they say, but the nature of existing things, which is God. God therefore exists.

But perhaps some will say: "From this argument it results that the earth is the most authoritative and most dominant element in the universe, and that the air is even more authoritative and dominant. For without these it is not possible for the universe to exist. Consequently we shall say that both the earth and the air are God." But this is foolish, and like saying that the wall is the most dominant and authoritative thing in a house, "for without it the house cannot exist." For just as in this case, while the house cannot indeed exist without a wall, the wall is certainly not pre-eminent over and better than the master of the house, so it is in the case of the universe. It is impossible for the structure of the whole to exist without earth and air, yet these are not pre-eminent over the nature controlling the universe, and this is not different from God. Therefore God exists.

This, then, is the type of argument they have on this head. Let us consider next the mode concerned with the absurdities consequent upon abolishing the Divinity. If gods do not exist, piety does

1. By "nature," or *physis*, is meant "the total structure," which has many parts but is dominated by its total structural pattern.

not exist, as it exists only in relation to gods.² For piety is "the science of service to the gods," and there can be no service to things which do not exist; hence there will also be no science concerning this service. And just as there cannot be a science concerned with service to hippocentaurs, since they are non-existent, so also, if the gods are non-existent, there will be no science concerned with service to them. Consequently, if gods do not exist, piety is non-existent. But piety does exist, so we must say that gods exist. And again, if gods do not exist, holiness is non-existent, since it is "a kind of justice toward gods." But according to the common notions and preconceptions of all men, holiness exists. On this account there must be something holy. And therefore the Divinity exists.—Assuming however, that gods do not exist, wisdom is abolished, since it is "the science of things divine and human." And just as there exists no science of things human and hippocentaurean because of the fact that humans exist but hippocentaurs do not exist, by the same token there will also be no science of things divine and human,³ because while men exist, gods do not. But it is in any case absurd to say that wisdom does not exist; therefore it is also absurd to claim that the gods are non-existent.

And furthermore, since there has also been brought up the matter of justice in the intercourse of men with one another and with the gods, if gods do not exist, justice will not exist either, which is absurd. Now, Pythagoras and Empedocles and the whole crowd of the Italian philosophers declare that we have a certain community of interest not only with one another and with the gods but also with the irrational animals. For there is one spirit which pervades all the universe like a soul, and which also makes us one with those animals. Hence, if we kill them and eat their flesh we shall be doing wrong and committing a sacrilege, because we are destroying our kin. And it was for this reason that these philosophers recommended abstinence from animal food, and declared those men were impious who

Stain the altar of the Blessed with the warm blood of victims.

2. This last clause is corrupt in the MSS., and no satisfactory emendation has been offered. The context would seem to require something like what is here given. (—Tr.)

3. This is the Stoic's definition of wisdom, but was rather widely held at the time of this writing.

And Empedocles says somewhere:

Will you not cease from the evil sound of murder? Do you not see
That you are devouring one another in the carelessness of your
minds?

And:

A father, lifting his son now changed in form,
Slaughters him with a prayer, the fool! The sacrificers wonder
At his cries for mercy. But he, again deaf to reproaches,
Prepares an evil banquet in his halls after the slaughter.
Likewise, a son takes his father and children their mother,
And, robbing them of life, devour their own flesh and blood.

This, then, was the advice of Pythagoras, but he was mistaken.⁴ For it does not at once follow that, if some spirit exists which pervades both us and the irrational animals, there must exist some kind of justice between us and them. Consider this, that there is also a spirit running through stones and through plants so as to unite us to them, yet there is no such thing as justice between us and plants and stones. We certainly commit no injustice when we cut and saw bodies of this kind. Why then do the Stoics assert that men have a certain relationship of justice and intercourse with one another and with the gods? Not on the grounds that there exists a spirit that runs through all things—since that would be retaining a relationship of justice between us and the irrational animals—but because we possess a reason which extends both to one another and to gods. In this the irrational animals have no share and thus will have no claim to a relationship of justice with us. Consequently, if the conception of justice hinges on any community feeling between men and between men and gods, then if gods do not exist, justice will necessarily be non-existent also. But justice is existent. We must affirm, then, that gods exist.

Further, if gods do not exist, prophecy does not exist either, as it is “the science of observing and interpreting the signs given by gods to men,” and inspiration and astrology do not exist either, nor

4. Remember that here and in the whole context, Sextus is not necessarily stating his own beliefs; rather, he is pitting one dogmatic argument against its opposite, and trying to show how, equally plausible, they cancel each other out.

divination, nor prediction by dreams. But it is absurd to abolish such a multitude of things which are already believed in by all men. Therefore gods exist.

Zeno used to propound this argument also: “One may reasonably honour the gods. But if they are non-existent, one may not reasonably honour them. Therefore gods exist.” But to this argument some construct a parallel argument: “One may reasonably honour wise men. But if they are non-existent, one may not reasonably honour them. Therefore wise men exist.” This was not pleasing to the Stoics, as their “wise man” has remained undiscovered up to now. But Diogenes, the Babylonian, says in reply to this parallel argument that the second premiss of Zeno’s argument really means this: “But those whose nature does not imply existence one may not reasonably honour.” For when it is accepted in this meaning, it is plain that gods are of such a nature as to exist.⁵ And if this is so, then they actually do exist. For once granted they ever were existent, they are also now existent, just as, if atoms existed, they exist now also, for it is implied in the conception of such bodies that they are imperishable and uncreated. Hence the conclusion deduced by the argument will also be consistent. But it does not follow that wise men actually exist just because they are of such a nature as to exist. Others, however, say that Zeno’s first premiss, that “one may reasonably honour the gods,” is ambiguous, for while it means in the first place “One may reasonably honour⁶ the gods,” it also means “One may respect” them. It is the first, they say, which is taken as premiss, and this, in the case of wise men, is false.

These arguments, then, are fairly typical of the arguments brought forward by the Stoics and by representatives of the other schools to prove the existence of gods. It will be our next task to point out that on the other hand those arguments which prove the non-existence of gods are themselves not inferior to these as far as the equal validity of their persuasiveness is concerned. And so, now, if gods exist, they are living beings. And using the same argument with which the Stoics tried to prove that the universe is a living

5. This argument is a first cousin or ancestor to St Anselm of Bec’s “ontological argument,” according to which the very nature of God implies that it is impossible for him not to exist.

6. I.e., actively, by means of worship. (—Tr.)

being, one might go on to prove that God too is a living being. For a living being is better than what is not a living being. But nothing is better than God. God, therefore, is a living being, since, incidentally, we have in support of this argument also the common conception of mankind, seeing that the ordinary man, the poets, and the majority of the best philosophers testify to the fact that God is a living being—so as to confirm the logic of our conclusion. For if gods exist, they are living beings. But if they are living beings, they have sensation, for every living being is conceived qua living being by its participation in sensation. But if they have sensation, they also taste bitter and sweet. For they do not perceive objects of sense through some other sense without perceiving them through the sense of taste as well. Hence, too, simply to prune away from God this or any other of his senses is an altogether unconvincing procedure. For if man has a greater number of senses than God, man will be superior to him. What we really ought to do, instead of robbing him of the five senses—as Carneades said—is rather to ascribe to him, together with these five which are present in all, a number of additional ones, so that he will be able to apprehend a greater number of objects.⁷ We must declare, then, that God possesses a sense of taste, and that by means of this sense he perceives things that can be tasted. But if he perceives by means of a sense of taste, he perceives sweet and bitter. And if he perceives sweet and bitter, he will be well pleased with certain things and displeased at others. And if he is displeased at certain things he will also be receptive of vexation and of change for the worse. But if this is so, he is perishable. Consequently, if gods exist, they are perishable. Therefore gods do not exist.

If, however, God exists, he is a living being. If he is a living being, he also possesses sensation. For it is precisely the fact of possessing sensation that differentiates a living being from what is not a living being. But if he possesses sensation, he hears and sees and smells and touches. And if this is so, there are certain things in the realm of each sense which attract or repel him, for example in the realm of sight, things which are symmetrical rather than otherwise,

7. See above, pp. 57-59, where this possibility is used in explaining the ten modes or tropes of Aenesidemus.

and in the realm of hearing, sounds which are harmonious rather than those which are not, and so on with the other senses. But if this is so, there must be certain things which are vexatious to God; and if there are certain things which are vexatious to God, God is subject to change for the worse, hence also to destruction. Therefore God is perishable. But this is in violation of what was the common conception of him. Therefore the Divinity does not exist.

The argument is still more effective if based on a single sense, sight, for instance. For if the Divinity exists, it is a living being. And if it is a living being, it sees, for

He is all eye, all mind, all ear.⁸

And if he sees, he also sees both white and black things. But since white is what makes vision “divided” while black is what makes vision “confused,”⁹ God has his vision made divided and confused. And if he is receptive of division and confusion, he is also receptive of destruction.¹ Therefore if the Divinity exists, it is perishable. But it is not perishable; therefore it does not exist.

Again, sensation is a kind of alteration. For it is impossible for a thing which apprehends by means of a sense to escape alteration and remain, instead, in the condition it was in before the apprehension. And so if God has sensation, he also undergoes alteration. But if he undergoes alteration, he is receptive of alteration and change. And if he is receptive of change, he will at all events be receptive of change for the worse. And if this is so, he is also perishable. Therefore it is also absurd to claim that he exists.

An additional argument is this. If a Divinity exists, it is either limited or unlimited. And it cannot be unlimited, as in that case it would be both motionless and inanimate. For if the unlimited moves, it goes from place to place. But if it goes from place to place,

8. A verse of Xenophanes. (—Tr.)

9. This passage alludes to the doctrine of the *Timaeus* Sec. 67, according to which white objects divide the stream that flows from the eyes, while black objects compress and confuse this stream.

1. The words translated as “divided” and “confused” would in such a context normally mean “piercing” (or “discerning”) and “blurred.” The argument, however, is a verbal one, and hinges on the use of the abstract nouns “division” and “confusion,” which suggest destructibility. (—Tr.)

it is in place; and if it is in place, it is limited. Therefore, if there is anything unlimited, it is motionless; or, if it moves, it is not unlimited. In the same manner, it is inanimate also. For if it is held together by soul, this involves at all events a movement from the central parts to the ends and from the ends to the central parts. But in the unlimited there is no centre or end. Consequently, the unlimited is not animate either. And hence if the Divinity is unlimited, it neither moves nor is animate. But the Divinity does move, and is thought to participate in animation. The Divinity is not, therefore, unlimited.—Nor, again, is it limited. For since the limited is a part of the unlimited, and the whole is better than the part, it is evident that the unlimited will be better than the Divinity and will have control of the divine nature. But it is absurd to say that anything is better than God and has control of the nature of God. Therefore the Divinity is not limited either. But if it is neither unlimited nor limited, and no third possibility besides these can be conceived, the Divinity will be nothing.

Again, if the Divinity is anything, either it is a body or it is incorporeal. But neither is it incorporeal, since the incorporeal is inanimate and without senses and capable of no activity, nor is it a body, since every body is both subject to change and perishable, while the Divinity is imperishable. Therefore the Divinity does not exist.

If, however, the Divinity exists, it is in any case a living being. If it is a living being, it is at all events all-virtuous and happy (and happiness cannot subsist apart from virtue). But if it is all-virtuous, it also possesses all the virtues. But it cannot possess all the virtues without possessing both self-control and endurance. And it cannot possess these virtues unless there exist certain things which for God are hard to abstain from and hard to endure. For self-control is "a disposition not to overstep the usual bounds of right reason, or a virtue which enables us to rise above those things which seem hard to abstain from." For a man is exercising self-control, they say, not when he abstains from a moribund old woman, but when he has it in his power to enjoy a Laïs or a Phryne or some such woman and then abstains from her. And endurance is "the knowledge of things endurable and not endurable, or a virtue which enables us to rise above those things which seem hard to endure."

For it is the man who holds out under the knife and the cautery who shows endurance, not the man who is drinking honeyed wine. There will, then, exist certain things which for God are hard to endure and hard to abstain from; otherwise he will not possess these virtues, I mean self-control and endurance. And if he does not possess these virtues, since there is no middle ground between virtue and vice, he will possess the vices which are opposed to these virtues, such as moral weakness and incontinence. For just as a person who does not possess health has a disease, so he who does not possess self-control and endurance has the opposite vices, which is an absurd thing to say in the case of God. And if there exist certain things which for God are hard to abstain from and hard to endure, there also exist certain things which can change him for the worse and cause him vexation. But if this is so, God is receptive of vexation and of change for the worse, and hence also of destruction. Consequently, if God exists, he is perishable. But the second is not so; therefore neither is the first.

Further, in addition to the preceding arguments, if the Deity is all-virtuous, he also possesses courage. And if he possesses courage, he possesses "knowledge of things fearful and not fearful and intermediate." And if this is so, there must exist something which to God is fearful. For manifestly, the courageous man is not courageous because he has a knowledge of what sort of things are fearful to his neighbor, but because he knows what is fearful to himself, and this is not exactly the same as what is fearful to his neighbour. Consequently, since God is courageous, there exists something which to him is fearful. If there exists something fearful to God, there exists something which causes God vexation. And if this is so, he is capable of vexation, and thus also of destruction. Hence, if the Divinity exists, it is perishable. But it is not perishable, therefore it does not exist.

Again, if the Divinity is all-virtuous, it possesses also greatness of soul. And if it possess greatness of soul, it possesses "knowledge which causes it to rise above events." If this is so, it must occur that the Divinity sometimes rises above contingencies. And if this is so, there exist certain contingencies which are vexatious to it, and thus it will be perishable. But this is not so, therefore the original proposition is not so, either.

Another argument. Since God possesses all the virtues, he possesses also wisdom. If he possesses wisdom, he possesses also "knowledge of what is good and bad and indifferent." And if he possesses knowledge of these things, he knows what sort of things good things and bad things and indifferent things are. Now, since pain is one of the indifferent things,² he knows both pain and what its real nature is. And if this is so, he must have experienced it, for if he had not experienced it, he would not have acquired a notion of it. On the contrary, just as a man without experience of white and black colour owing to congenital blindness cannot possess a notion of colour, so likewise God cannot possess a notion of pain either, without having experienced it. For when we, who have had frequent experience of pain, are unable to gain a clear conception of the specific quality of the pain suffered by gouty persons, or to conjecture how it is from their descriptions, or even to hear consistent accounts of it from the sufferers themselves, because they all explain it differently and some say they feel it is like a twist, others like a fracture, and others like a stabbing—this being so, surely if God has no experience of pain at all, he cannot possess a notion of pain. "Heavens!" they say, "it is not pain he has experienced, but pleasure; and it is from the latter that he has the conception of the former." But this is foolish. In the first place, it is impossible to form a notion of pleasure without having experienced pain. For it is the nature of pleasure to exist proportionately to the removal of everything that gives pain. In the second place, even if this point is conceded, it again follows that God is perishable. For if God is receptive of such relaxation,³ he will also be receptive of change for the worse, and is thus perishable. But this is not so; consequently the original proposition is not so either.

And if the Divinity is all-virtuous and possesses wisdom, it also possesses good counsel, inasmuch as "Good counsel is wisdom in matters requiring deliberation." And if it possesses good counsel, it deliberates. And if it deliberates, there must be something that is non-evident to it. For if there is nothing non-evident to it, it does

2. According to the Stoics. (—Tr.)

3. I.e., of such pleasure. The word *diachysis* means "merriment," "cheerfulness," as well as "diffusion," "relaxation," "dissolution." This argument is at least partly a verbal one. (—Tr.)

not deliberate, and also possesses no good counsel, since deliberation pertains to something non-evident, being "a search for the right course of action in the present circumstances." But it is absurd for God not to deliberate or possess good counsel. He does possess it, therefore, and there is something non-evident to him. And if there is something non-evident to God, it could hardly be anything else, primarily, but something like this—namely, whether there exist in the infinite any things capable of causing his destruction. But if this is non-evident to him, he will at all events be afraid, on account of his anxiety concerning these things which tend to his destruction and which cause him to be in a state of alarm and commotion. And if he gets to be in this kind of a commotion, he will be receptive also of change for the worse, and hence he will be perishable. From this it follows that he does not exist at all.

And besides, if nothing is non-evident to God, but he from his nature is *ipso facto* capable of apprehending all things, he does not possess art. Rather, just as we would not say of the frog or the dolphin, animals which swim naturally, that they possess the art of swimming, in the same way we would not say of God, whose nature it is to apprehend all things, that he possesses art, since art appertains to things which are non-evident⁴ and not immediately apprehended. But if God possesses no art, he will not possess the art of living either, and if this is so, neither will he possess virtue. But if God does not possess virtue, he is non-existent. And again, God being rational, if he does not possess virtue, he possesses at all events its opposite, vice. But he does not possess vice, its opposite. Therefore God possesses art, and there exists something which is non-evident to God. From this it follows that he is perishable, as we concluded previously. But he is not perishable, therefore he does not exist.

Also, if (as we have shown) he does not possess wisdom, he does not possess temperance either. For "temperance is a state which preserves the decisions of wisdom in the matter of preferences and aversions." And besides, if there is nothing that will set in motion God's desires, and nothing that will attract God, how

4. See above, p. 100, for the distinction between kinds of evidence; Sextus is not here referring to the eternally hidden, but only to the temporarily out-of-sight.

shall we, as long as our conception of temperance corresponds more or less to this definition of it, say that he is temperate? For just as we would not say that a pillar possesses temperance, in the same way we cannot rightfully say that God is temperate. And if these virtues are stripped from him, justice is also, and the remaining virtues as well. But if God possesses no virtue, he is non-existent. And the antecedent is true; therefore the consequent⁵ is true.⁶

Again, if the Divinity exists, either it possesses virtue or it does not. And if it does not, the Divinity is worthless and unhappy, which is absurd. But if it does possess it, there will exist something which is better than God, for just as the virtue of a horse is better than the horse itself and the virtue of a man is better than its possessor, in the same way the virtue of God will also be better than God himself. But if it is better than God, it is plain that, as he is found wanting, he will be in a bad state, and will be perishable. But if there is no intermediate alternative between the opposites, and God is seen to fall under neither of the opposites, we must say that God does not exist.

Further, if he exists, he is either endowed with speech or dumb. But to say that God is dumb is perfectly absurd and is in conflict with the common notions of him. But if he is endowed with speech, he employs utterance and possesses organs of speech, such as lungs and windpipe and tongue and mouth. But this is absurd, and comes close to the story-telling of Epicurus. Therefore we must say that God does not exist. For of course if he employs speech, he converses. And if he converses, he assuredly converses in some language or other. But if this is so, why does he use the Greek tongue

5. The "antecedent" (clause) and the "consequent" (clause) are technical terms of Stoic logic, and designate the two clauses of the major premiss of the typical Stoic hypothetical syllogism: "If it is day, it is light." (—Tr.)

6. A slight change of logical form occurs here. Previously Sextus has been using the form *modus tollens* (If A, then B; it is not the case that B; therefore it is not the case that A; if it is raining, then it is cloudy; it is not cloudy; therefore it is not raining). Now he uses *modus ponens*: If A, then B; A; therefore B: if it is raining, then it is cloudy; it is raining; therefore it is cloudy. Both types of argumentation are valid: given the truth of the first "If . . . then . . ." assertion, the conclusion or last remark must be true.

rather than the non-Greek? And if the Greek, why the Ionian dialect rather than Aeolic or any of the others? He certainly does not use them all; therefore he uses none. For if he uses Greek, how will he use the non-Greek, unless somebody has taught him? And if he uses the non-Greek, how will he converse with us, unless he has interpreters similar to the men we have who are capable of interpreting? We must declare, then, that the Divinity does not employ speech, and is consequently non-existent.

Again, if the Divinity exists, it is either corporeal or incorporeal. But it will not be incorporeal, for the reasons stated in the foregoing. And if it is corporeal, it is either a compound formed from the simple elements or it is a simple and elementary body. And if it is a compound, it is perishable, for everything that is a product of a combination of things must necessarily be dissolved and perish.⁷ And if it is a simple body, it is either fire or air or water or earth. However, no matter which of these it is, it is inanimate and irrational, which is absurd. If, therefore, God is neither a compound nor a simple body, and there is no further alternative, one must declare that God is nothing.

Such, then, is the character of these arguments. And some have also been propounded in the form of a sorites⁸ by Carneades. These his pupil Clitomachus has placed on record as being the most excellent and effective. They are like this. If Zeus is a god, Poseidon is also a god:

For we are three brothers, by Kronos, and Rhea bore us,
Zeus and myself, and Hades the third, ruler of those below.
All was divided three ways, and each got his share of
honour.⁹

So if Zeus is a god, Poseidon will also be a god, since he is his brother. And if Poseidon is a god, the Acheloüs also will be a god. And if the Acheloüs, then the Nile also. If the Nile, then every river as well. If every river, the streams also will be gods. If the

7. This claim, that the composite is necessarily transient, had even then a long history, but it is by no means self-evidently clear or valid.

8. A sorites is a chain of arguments, the conclusion of one forming the premiss of the next — in effect, a chain argument which links the first premiss to the last conclusion, if it is validly done.

9. Homer, *Iliad* XV 187 ff. (—Tr.)

streams, then the torrents also. But the streams are not gods; therefore Zeus is not a god, either. But if gods existed, Zeus too would be a god; therefore there are no gods.

Further, if the sun is a god, day also will be a god. For "day" is nothing other than sun above the earth. And if day is a god, the month will be a god too, for it is a whole compounded of days. And if the month is a god, the year too will be a god, for the year is a whole compounded of months. But this is not so; therefore the original proposition is not so, either. Apart from this, they say, it is absurd to say that day is a god, but that morning and midday and afternoon are not.—If, again, Artemis is a goddess, Enodia too will be a goddess, for the latter is supposed to be a goddess equally with the former. And if Enodia is a goddess, so are Prothyridia and Epimylios and Epiklibanios.¹ But this is not so; therefore the original proposition is not so, either.—If, again, we say that Aphrodite is a goddess, Eros too will be a god, as he is a son of Aphrodite. But if Eros is a god, Eleos too will be a god, for both are affections of the soul, and Eleos is an object of worship just as Eros is. The Athenians, for example, have several altars to Eleos.² And if Eleos is a god, Phobos is too:

I am the unsightliest god to look at,
for my name is Fear,
And of all the gods I share least in beauty.³

And if Phobos is a god, then the rest of the affections of the soul are too. But these are not gods; therefore Aphrodite is not a goddess either. But if gods existed, Aphrodite too would be a goddess; therefore there are no gods.—Again, if Demeter is a goddess, Ge too is a goddess; for Demeter, they say, is nothing else than "Ge-meter."⁴ If Ge is a goddess, the mountains too and the peaks and every stone will be a god. But this is not so; therefore the original proposition is not so either.—Carneades also propounds other such

1. Enodia, Prothyridia, Epimylios, and Epiklibanios are epithets of Artemis meaning "of the wayside," "of the vestibule," "of the mill," and "of the oven." (—Tr.)

2. Eros (Amor), "Love"; Eleos, "Pity." Phobos (next sentence) is "Fear." (—Tr.)

3. This is a fragment from a comedy, author unknown. (—Tr.)

4. Ge is "Earth," meter is "mother." (—Tr.)

sortes-arguments for the non-existence of gods, but the general character of these is sufficiently revealed in those set forth above.

Well now, such are the arguments attempted on both sides, for the existence of gods and for the non-existence of gods. Their logical consequence is the Sceptics' suspension of judgement, especially since in addition to them there is also the diversity of views on the part of ordinary people about gods. For different people have differing and discordant notions about them, with the result that it is possible neither to believe all of them, as they are conflicting, nor to believe some of them, on account of their being of equal force. Further confirmation of this is furnished by the myth-making of the theologians and poets, which is full of all kinds of impiety. Hence Xenophanes too, in his criticism of Homer and Hesiod, says:

Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods everything
That is, with men, disgraceful and blameworthy:
Stealing, adultery, and deceiving one another.