

Asclepius: A Dialogue on Initiation (from the *Corpus Hermeticum*)

THE ONE AND THE MANY

[Hermes Trismegistus and the initiates Asclepius, Ammon, and Tattius, all eager to enter the One Mind, enter the sanctuary, where Hermes immediately calls for a short devotional silence. At the right moment, he sets the topic for discussion:]

"Every human soul, Asclepius, is immortal; but this immortality is not uniform. It differs both in mode and in duration."

Asclepius: "It is because souls, Trismegistus, are not all of the same quality."

"How quickly you understand the reason of things, Asclepius! I have not yet said that all is one and that one is all, since all things were in the Creator before the creation and we can call Him all since all things are His members. Wherefore, throughout all this discourse, bear in mind Him who is One and All, the Creator of all things.

"Everything descends from heaven upon the Earth, into the Water, into the Air: only Fire is vivifying, because it tends upwards; that which tends downwards is subordinate to it. That which descends from above is generative; that which emanates and rises is nutritive. The Earth, alone self-supported, is the receptacle of all things, and reconstructs the types which she receives. That Universal Being that contains all and that is all, puts into motion the soul and the world, all that nature comprises. In the manifold unity of universal life, the innumerable individualities distinguished by their variations, are, nevertheless, united in such a manner that the whole is one, and that everything proceeds from unity.

"Now this unity, which constitutes the world, is formed of Four Elements: Fire, Water, Earth, and Air: one single world, one single soul, and one single God. Lend me now all the powers and all the penetration of your youth; for the idea of Divinity, which cannot be conceived save by divine assistance, resembles a rapid stream precipitating itself onwards with impetuosity, and often, therefore, outstrips the attention of the listeners, even of him who teaches.

"Heaven – God manifest – regulates all bodies. Their growth and their decline are determined by the Sun and the Moon. But He who directs heaven – the soul itself and all that exists in the world – is very God, the Creator.

"From the heights where He reigns descend innumerable influences that spread themselves throughout the world, into all souls both general and particular, and into the nature of things.

"The world has been prepared by God in order to receive all particular forms. Realizing these forms by means of Nature, He has updrawn the world to heaven through the Four Elements.

"Everything is in accordance with the designs of God; but that which originates from on high has been separated into individualities in the following manner. The types of all things follow their (representative) individualities in such way that the type is a whole; the individual is a part of the type.

"Thus the Gods or higher creative hierarchies constitute a type, the genii or angels also. Similarly, men, birds, and all beings that the world contains, constitute types producing individuals resembling them.

"There is yet another type, without sensation, but not without soul. It consists of those beings that sustain themselves by means of roots fixed in the Earth [i.e., plants]. Individualities of this type are found everywhere.

"Heaven is full of God. The types of which we have spoken have their habitation extending up to that of the beings whose individualities are immortal. For the individuality is a part of the type, as, for instance, man is a part of humanity; and each one follows the character of its type, hence it comes that, while all types are imperishable, individuals are not all imperishable.

"Divinity forms a type of which the individualizations are as immortal as itself. Among other beings eternity belongs only to the type; the individual perishes, and is perpetuated only by reproduction. There are, then, some mortal individualities. Thus man is mortal, humanity is immortal.

"Nevertheless, individuals of all the types mix with all the types. Some are primitive; others are produced by these, by God, by genii, by men, and all resemble their respective types.

"For bodies can be formed only by the divine will; individualities cannot be characterized without the aid of the genii; the education and training of animals cannot be conducted without men.

"All those genii who have forsaken their own type, and become joined in individuality to an individuality of the divine type, are regarded as neighbors and associates of the Gods.

"The genii who preserve the character of their type, and are properly called genii, love that which relates to mankind. The human type resembles, or even surpasses, theirs; for the individuality of the human is manifold and various, and results from the association mentioned above. It is the indispensable link between nearly all other individualities.

"The man who has affinity with the Gods through the intelligence that he shares with them, and through piety, is the neighbor of God. He who has affinity with the genii approximates himself to them. They who are satisfied with human mediocrity remain a part of the human type. Other human individualities will be neighbors of the types or individualities with which they shall be in affinity.

THE DUAL NATURE OF MAN

"Man, then, Asclepius, is a great marvel; a creature worthy of respect and adoration. For amid this divine Nature he moves as if he himself were a God. He knows the order of the genii, and, aware that he is of the same origin, he despises the human side of his being in order to attach himself exclusively to the divine element.

"How happily constituted and near to the Gods is humanity! In joining himself to the divine, man disdains that which he has in him of the Earthly; he connects himself by a bond of love to all other beings, and thereby feels himself necessary to the universal order. He contemplates heaven; and in this happy middle sphere in which he is placed, he loves all that is below him, he is beloved of all that is above. He cultivates the Earth; he borrows the speed of the elements; his piercing youth fathoms the deeps of the sea. Everything is clear for him. Heaven does not seem to him too high, for knowledge lifts him to it. The brightness of his mind is not obscured by the

thick mists of the air; the earth's gravitation is no obstacle to his efforts; the profundity of deep seas does not disturb him; he includes everything and remains everywhere the same.

"The soul of the world sustains itself by perpetual motion. The spirit that fills everything, mingles with everything, and vivifies everything, adds consciousness to the intelligence, which, by a peculiar privilege, man borrows from the fifth element – the ether. In man, the consciousness is raised to the knowledge of the divine order.

"Since I am led to speak of the consciousness, I will presently expound to you its function, which is great and holy as that of divinity itself. I was speaking of union with the Gods – a privilege that they accord only to humanity. A few men only have the happiness of rising to that perception of the Divine that subsists only in God and in the human intelligence."

Asclepius: "Are, then, not all men similarly conscious, Trismegistus?"

"All, Asclepius, have not the true intelligence. They are deceived when they suffer themselves to be drawn after the image of things, without seeking for the true reason of them. It is thus that evil is produced in man; and that the first of all creatures lowers himself almost to the level of the brutes.

"But I will speak to you of the consciousness and all that belongs to it, when I come to my exposition of the mind. For man alone is a dual creature. One of the two parts of that he consists is single, and, as the Greeks say, essential; that is, formed after the divine likeness. The part that the Greeks call 'Cosmic,' that is, belonging to the whole world, is quadruple, and constitutes the body, which, in man, serves as an envelope to the divine principle. This divine principle, and that which belongs to it, the perceptions of the pure intelligence. conceal themselves behind the rampart of the body."

GOD, THE WORLD, AND MAN

Asclepius: "Why then, Trismegistus, was it necessary that man should be placed in the world, instead of where God is, to dwell with Him in supreme beatitude?"

"Your question is natural, Asclepius, and I pray God to assist me in replying to it, for everything depends upon His will, especially those great things that are at this moment the subject of our inquiry; listen, then, to me, Asclepius. The Lord and Author of all things, whom we call God, brought forth a second God, visible and sensible; I describe him thus, not because he himself has sensibility, for this is not the place to treat such a question, but because he is perceptible to the senses. Having then produced this unique Being who holds the first rank among creatures and the second after Himself, He found His offspring beautiful and filled with all manner of good, and He loved it as His own child, the Son of God, which is Mind the Maker of the visible universe. He willed, then, that another should be able to contemplate this Being so great and so perfect whom He had drawn forth from Himself, and to this end He created man, endowed with reason and intelligence.

"The will of God is absolute accomplishment; to will and to do are for Him the work of the selfsame instant. And, knowing that the essential could not apprehend all things unless enveloped by the world, He gave to man a body for a dwelling-place. He willed that man should have two natures; He united them intimately and blended them in just proportion.

"Thus, He formed man of spirit and of body; of an eternal nature and of a mortal nature, so that, a creature thus constituted, he might, by means of his double origin, admire and adore that which is

celestial and eternal; cultivate and govern that which is upon the Earth. I speak here of mortal things, not of the two elements subjected to man, to wit, Earth and Water, but of things coming from man, which are in him or depending on him, such as the culture of the soil, the pastures, the construction of buildings, of ports, navigation, commerce, and those reciprocal exchanges that are the strongest bond among men. Earth and Water form a part of the world, and this terrestrial part is sustained by the arts and sciences, without which the world would be imperfect in the eyes of God. For that which God wills is necessary, and the effect accompanies His will; nor can it be believed that anything that has seemed good to Him can cease to seem good to Him, because from the beginning He knew what should be and what should please Him.

THE REASON FOR MAN'S DUAL NATURE

"But I perceive, O Asclepius, that you art anxious to know in what manner heaven and those who inhabit it can be the object of the aspiration and adoration of man; learn, then, Asclepius, that to aspire after the God of heaven and all those who are therein is to render them frequent homage; for alone of all animated beings, divine and human, man is able to render it. The admiration, adoration, praise, and homage of man rejoice heaven and the celestial inhabitants; and the choir of the Muses has been sent among men by the supreme Divinity in order that the terrestrial world might not be without the sweet science of hymns; or rather that the human voice might celebrate Him who only is All, since He is the Father of all things, and that the tender harmonies of Earth might ever unite themselves with the celestial choirs. Only a few men, rarely endowed with a pure intelligence, are entrusted with this holy function of beholding heaven clearly. Those in whom the confusion of their two natures holds the intelligence captive under the weight of the body, are appointed to have communion with the inferior elements. Man is not, then, debased because he has a mortal part; on the contrary, this mortality augments his aptitudes and his power; his double functions are possible to him only by his double nature; he is constituted in such a manner that he can embrace alike the terrestrial and the divine. I desire, Asclepius, that you may bring to this exposition all the attention and all the ardor of your mind; for many are wanting in faith concerning these things. And now I am about to unfold true principles for the instruction of the holiest intelligences.

THE THREEFOLD NATURE OF GOD

"The Master of Eternity is the first God, the world is the second, man is the third. God, creator of the world and of all that it contains, governs all this universe and subjects it to the rule of man. And man makes of it the object of his special activity. So that the world and man become the appendage one of the other, and it is with reason that in Greek the world is called Cosmos. Man knows himself and knows the world; he should, therefore, distinguish that which is in accord with himself, that which is for his use and that which has a right to his worship. While addressing to God his praises and his acts of grace, he should venerate the world that is the image of God; remembering that he is himself the second image of God. For God has two similitudes: the world and man. The nature of man being complex, that part of him that is composed of soul, of consciousness, of mind, and of reason is divine, and from the superior elements seems able to mount to heaven; while his cosmic and mundane part, formed of Fire, Water, Earth, and Air, is mortal and remains upon the Earth; so that what is borrowed from the world may be restored to it.

"It is thus that mankind is composed of a divine part and of a mortal part, to wit, the body. The law of this dual being, man, is religion, whose effect is goodness. Perfection is attained when the virtue of man preserves him from desire, and causes him to despise all that is foreign to himself. For terrestrial things, of which the body desires the possession, are foreign to all parts of the divine Youth. Such things may indeed be called possessions, for they are not born with us, they are acquired later. They are then foreign to man, and even the body itself is foreign to man, in

such wise that man ought to disdain both the object of desire, and that whereby he is made accessible to desire.

"It is the duty of man to direct his soul by reason, so that the contemplation of the divine may lead him to take but small account of that mortal part that has been joined to him for the sake of the preservation of the lower world. In order that man should be complete in both his parts, observe that each of these possesses four binary subdivisions, to wit, the two hands and the two feet, which, with the other organs of the body, place him in relation with the inferior and terrestrial world. And, on the other hand, he possesses four faculties: sensibility, soul, memory, and foresight, which permit him to know and perceive divine things. He is able, therefore, to include in his investigations, differences, qualities, effects, and quantities. But if he be too much hindered by the weight of the body, he will be unable to penetrate into the true reason of things.

"When man, thus formed and constituted, having received for his function from the supreme God, the government of the world and the worship of the Divinity, acquits himself well of this double duty, and obeys the holy Will, what should be his recompense? For if the world is the work of God, he who by his care sustains and augments its beauty, is the auxiliary of the divine Will, employing his body and his daily labor in the service of the work produced by the hands of God. What should be his recompense, if not that which our ancestors have obtained? May it please divine goodness to accord this recompense also to us; all our aspirations and all our prayers tend toward its attainment; may we, delivered from the prison of the body, and from our mortal bonds, return, sanctified and pure, to the divine heritage of our nature!"

Asclepius: "What you say is just and true, Trismegistus! Such indeed is the price [reward] of piety toward God, and of care bestowed on the maintenance of the world. But return to the heavens is denied to those who have lived impiously; upon them is imposed a penance that holy souls escape, to wit, migration into other bodies. The end of this discourse, O Trismegistus, brings us to the hope of eternal future for the soul, as the result of her life in the world. But this future is for some difficult to believe; for others it is a fable; for others, again, perhaps a subject of derision. For it is a sweet thing to enjoy what one possesses in the corporeal life. Therein lies the evil, which, as one may say, turns the soul's head, attaches her to her mortal part, hinders her from knowing her divine part, and is envious of immortality. For I say unto you, by a prophetic inspiration, no man after us will choose the simple way of philosophy, which lies wholly in application to the study of divine things, and in holy religion. The majority of men obscure philosophy with diverse questions. How come they to encumber it with sciences that ought not to be comprehended in it, or after what manner do they mingle in it diverse questions?"

"Asclepius, they mingle in it, by means of subtleties, a diversity of sciences that belong not to it – arithmetic, music, geometry. But pure, philosophy, whose proper object is holy religion, ought to occupy itself with other sciences only in so far as to admire the regular phases of the stars, their positions and their courses, determined by calculation; the dimensions of the Earth, its qualities and quantities; the depth of the sea; the power of Fire; and to know the effects of all these things, and Nature; to adore Art, the artist, and his divine intelligence. As for music, that is apprehended when one apprehends reason and the divine order of things. For this order by which everything is ranged singly in the unity of the whole, is indeed an admirable harmony and a divine melody."

Asclepius: "What then, after us, will men become?"

"Misled by the subtleties of the sophists, they will turn aside from the true, pure and holy philosophy. To adore God in the simplicity of youth and of the soul, to venerate His works, to bless His will, which alone is the fullness of good. This is the only philosophy that is not profaned by the idle curiosity of the mind."

OF MIND AND SIMILAR THINGS

"Let us begin to speak of Mind and of other similar things. In the beginning were God and Hylè or the One Mind and the One Thing. It is thus that the Greek term 'Hylè' is the First Matter or substance of the universe. The Spirit was with the universe, but not in the same manner as with God. The things that constitute the universe are not God, therefore before their birth they were not in existence, but they were already contained in that from that they were produced. For besides and without created things is not only that which is not yet born, but that also which has no generative fecundity, and which can bring forth nothing. Everything that has the power of generating contains in germ all that can be born of it, for it is easy to that which is brought forth to bear that which shall bring forth. But the eternal God cannot and never could be born; He is, He has been, He will be always. The nature of God is to be His own Principle. But matter, or the nature of the world, and mind, although appearing to be brought forth from the beginning, possess the power of birth and of procreation, fecundative energy. For the beginning is in the quality of Nature, who possesses in herself the potentiality of conception and of production. She is then, without any foreign intervention, the principle of creation. It is otherwise with that which possesses only the power of conception by means of mixing with a second nature. The matrix of the universe and of all that it contains appears not to have been itself born, holding however, within it, potentially, all Nature. I call that the matrix that contains all things, for they could not have been without a vehicle to contain them. Everything that exists must exist in some place (or vehicle), neither qualities nor quantities, nor positions, nor effects could be distinguished in things having no place and being nowhere. Thus the world, although not having been born, has in it the principle of all birth; since it affords all things a fitting matrix for conception. It is, then, the sum-total of qualities and of matter susceptible of creation, although not yet created.

"Matter, being fecund in all attributes, is able also to engender evil. I put aside, therefore, Asclepius and Ammon, the question asked by many: 'Could not God hinder evil in the nature of things?' There is absolutely nothing to say to them; but for you I will pursue the discourse begun, and I will give the explanation. They affirm that God ought to have preserved the world from evil; now, evil is in the world as an integral part of it. The sovereign God indeed provided against it inasmuch as was reasonable and possible, when He bestowed upon humanity sentiment, knowledge, and intelligence. By these faculties solely, which place us above other animals, we may escape the snares of evil and vice. The man who is wise and protected by divine intelligence, knows how to preserve himself from such immediately he beholds them, and before he has been entrapped thereby. The foundation of knowledge is supreme goodness. Spirit governs and gives life to all that is in the world; it is an instrument employed by the will of the sovereign God. Thus we ought to comprehend, by intelligence alone, the supreme Intelligible called God. By Him is directed that secondary sensible God (the universe), who contains all spaces, all substances, the matter of all that engenders and produces – in a word, all that is.

"As for the spirit (or Mind), it moves and governs all individual beings in the world according to the nature that God has assigned to them. Matter – Hylè or the Cosmos – is the receptacle, the motion, the replication of everything that God directs, dispensing to each of them that which is necessary to it, and filling them with spirit according to their qualities.

"The form of the universe is that of a hollow sphere having in itself the cause of its quality or of its figure, wholly invisible; if, choosing any given point of its surface, one should seek to behold its depths, one would be unable to see anything. It appears visible only by means of those special forms whose images appear graven upon it, it shows itself only in effigy; but in reality it is always invisible in itself. Therefore, the center, the depths of this sphere – if indeed one may call it a place – is in Greek named Hades, the invisible, from *eidein*, to see, because the center of a

sphere cannot be seen from without. Moreover, the types or formative appearances were called Ideas, because they are the forms of the Invisible. This interior of the sphere that the Greeks call Hades, because it is invisible, the Romans name Hell (Inferno), on account of its profound position. These are the primordial principles, the first sources, of all things. Everything is in them, or by them, or comes forth from them."

Asclepius: "These principles are, then, Trismegistus, the universal substance of all individual appearances?"

"The world nourishes bodies, the spirit nourishes souls. Youth, the heavenly gift that is the happy privilege of humanity, nourishes intelligence, but few men only have an intelligence capable of receiving such a benefit. Youth is a light that illuminates the intelligence, as the Sun illuminates the world. And even more, for the light of the Sun may be intercepted by the Moon, or by the Earth when night comes; but when youth has once penetrated into the human soul, it mingles intimately with her nature, and the intelligence can never again be obscured by any cloud. Therefore, with reason, it has been said that the souls of the Gods are intelligences. As for me, I say not this of all of them, but of the great supernal Gods."

THE PRIMORDIAL PRINCIPLES OF THINGS

Asclepius: "What, O Trismegistus, are the primordial principles of things?"

"I reveal to you great and divine mysteries, and in beginning this initiation I implore the favor of heaven.

"There are many orders of the Gods; and in all there is an intelligible part. It is not to be supposed that they do not come within the range of our senses; on the contrary, we perceive them, better even than those which are called visible, as this discussion will inform you.

"You wilt apprehend this fact if you lend all your attention to our discourse; for this order of ideas, so sublime, so divine, so elevated above the intelligence of man, demands an uninterrupted attention without that speech merely flits across the mind and flees away, or rather, returns to its source and is lost therein.

"There are, then, Gods superior to all appearances; after them come the Gods whose principle is spiritual; these Gods being sensible, in conformity with their double origin, manifest all things by a sensible nature, each of them illuminating his works one by another. The supreme Being of heaven, or of all that is comprehended under this name, is Zeus, for it is by heaven that Zeus gives life to all things. The supreme Being of the Sun is light, for it is by the disk of the Sun that we receive the benefit of the light. The thirty-six horoscopes of the fixed stars have for supreme Being or prince, him whose name is *Pantomorphos*, or having all forms, because he gives divine forms to diverse types. The seven planets, or wandering spheres, have for supreme Spirits Fortune and Destiny, who uphold the eternal stability of the laws of Nature throughout incessant transformation and perpetual agitation. The ether is the instrument or medium by which all is produced.

"Thus, from the center to the uttermost parts, everything moves, and relations are established according to natural analogies. That which is mortal approximates to that which is mortal, that which is sensible to that which is sensible. The supreme direction belongs to the supreme Master, in such wise that diversity is resolved into unity. For all things depend from unity or develop from it, and because they appear distant from one another it is believed that they are many, whereas, in their collectivity they form but one, or rather two Principles. These two Principles, whence all

things proceed, and by which all exist, are the substance of which things are formed, and the Will of Him who differentiates them."

Asclepius: "What is the reason of this, Trismegistus?"

"It is this, Asclepius. God is the Father, the universal Ruler – or whatever other name yet more holy and religious may be given to Him – and which, because of our intelligence, ought to be held sacred between us; but, in considering His divinity, we cannot define Him by any such name. For the voice is a sound resulting from the concussion of the Air, and declaring the will of man, or the impression that his mind has received through the senses. This name, composed of a determined number of syllables, serving as a token between the voice and the ear, and, moreover, sensation, breath, Air, all that is concerned with, and belonging to its expression – these convey this name of God, and I do not think that a name, however complex it may be, is able to designate the Principle of all majesty, the Father and Lord of all things. Nevertheless, it is necessary to give Him a name, or rather every name, since He is one and all; therefore we must say either that All is His name, or we must call Him by the names of all things. He, then, who is one and all, possessing the full and entire of both sexes, ever impregnated by His own Will, brings forth all that He has willed to beget. His Will is universal goodness, the selfsame goodness that exists in all things. Nature is born of His divinity, in such wise that all things should be as they are, and as they have been, and that Nature may suffice to generate of herself all that in the future is to be born. This, O Asclepius, is why and how all things are of two sexes."

Asclepius: "Say you this also of God, Trismegistus?"

"Not only of God, but of all beings, whether animated or inanimate. For it is impossible that anything that exists should be barren. Were we to suppress the fecundity of existing things, it would be impossible for them to remain what they are. For I say that this law of generation is contained in Nature, in intellect, in the universe, and preserves all that is brought forth. The two sexes are full of procreation, and their union, or rather their incomprehensible at-one-ment, may be known as Eros, or as Aphrodite, or by both names at once. If the mind can perceive any one truth more certainly and clearly than another, it is this duty of procreation, which God of universal Nature has imposed for ever upon all beings, and to which He has attached the most supreme charity, joy, delight, longing, and divine love. It would be needful to demonstrate the power and necessity of this law, if everyone were not able to recognize and perceive it by interior sentiment. Behold, indeed, how at the moment when from the brain the tide of life descends, the two natures lose themselves each in each, and one eagerly seizes and hides within itself the seed of the other! At this moment, by means of this mutual enchainment, the feminine nature receives the virtue of the male, and the male reposes on the bosom of its mate. This mystery, so sweet and so necessary, is enacted in secret, lest the divinity of the two natures should be constrained to blush before the railleries of the ignorant, were the union of the sexes exposed to irreligious observation. For pious men are not numerous in the world; they are, even, rare, and one might easily count them. In the majority of men malice abides, for lack of prudence and of knowledge of things of the universe.

"The understanding of divine religion, the basis of all things, leads to the contempt of all vices in the world, and supplies the remedy against them; but when ignorance asserts itself, then vices develop and inflict upon the soul an incurable hurt. Infected by vices, the soul is, as it were, swollen with poison, and can be healed only by knowledge and understanding. Let us then continue this teaching, even youth but a small number should profit by it; and learn you, O Asclepius, why to man only God has given a part of His intelligence and of His knowledge. Wherefore, hearken.

"God the Father and the Ruler, after the Gods, formed men by the union in equal proportions of the corruptible part of the universe and of its divine part, and thus it happened that the imperfections of the universe remained mingled in the flesh. The need of nourishment that we have in common with all creatures, subjects us to desire and to all other vices of the soul. The Gods, constituted of the purest part of Nature, have no need of the aid of reasoning or of study; immortality and eternal youth are for them wisdom and knowledge. Nevertheless, seeing the unity of Order, and that they might not be strangers to these things, God bestowed on them for their reason and their intelligence, the eternal law of Necessity.

"Alone, among all creatures, whether to avoid or to overcome the evils of the flesh, man has the aid of reason and of intelligence, and the hope of immortality. Man, created good, and capable of immortal life, has been formed of two natures: one divine, the other mortal; and in thus forming him, the Divine Will rendered him superior to the Gods, who have an immortal nature only, as well as to all mortal beings. For this reason, man, united in close affinity with the Gods, pays them religious service, and the Gods, in their turn, watch with a tender affection over human affairs. But I speak here only of pious men; as for the wicked, I will say nothing concerning them, in order that I may not, by pausing to talk about them, sully the holiness of this discourse."

THE RELATIONSHIP AND RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN MEN AND GODS

"And since we are brought to speak of the relationship and of the resemblance between men and Gods, behold, O Asclepius, the power and capacity of man! Even as the Ruler and Father, or to give Him the loftiest name (God), is the creator of the firmamental Gods, so is man the creator of the Gods who dwell in temples, pleased with human proximity, and not only themselves illumined, but illuminating. And this both profits man and strengthens the Gods. Dost you marvel, Asclepius? Dost you lack faith as do many?"

Asclepius: "I am confounded, Trismegistus; but yielding myself willingly to your words, I judge man to be happy in that he has obtained such felicity."

"Certes, he deserves admiration, being the greatest of all the Gods! For the race of the Gods is formed of the purest part of Nature, without admixture of other elements, and their visible signs are, as it were, only heads. But the Gods that mankind makes, possess two natures: one divine, which is the first and by far the purest, the other belonging to humanity, which is the matter of which these Gods are composed, so that they have not only heads, but entire bodies, with all their limbs. Thus mankind, remembering its nature and its origin, persists in this matter, in the imitation of Deity, for even as the Father and Lord has made the eternal Gods after the similitude of Himself, so also has humanity made its Gods in its own image."

Asclepius: "Do you speak of the statues, Trismegistus?"

"Yes, of the statues, Asclepius. See how wanting you art in faith! Of what else should I speak but of the statues, so full of life, of feeling, and of aspiration, which do so many wonderful things; the prophetic statues that predict the future by bestowing dreams and by all manner of other ways; which strike us with maladies, or heal our pains according to our deserts? Art you not aware, Asclepius, that Egypt is the image of heaven, or rather, that it is the projection below of the order of things above? If the truth must be told, this land is indeed the temple of the world. Nevertheless, since sages ought to foresee all things, there is one thing you must know; a time will come when it will seem that the Egyptians have adored the Gods so piously in vain, and that all their holy invocations have been barren and unheeded. Divinity will quit the Earth and return to heaven, forsaking Egypt, its ancient abode, and leaving the land widowed of religion and bereft of the presence of the Gods. Strangers will fill the Earth, and not only will sacred things be

neglected, but – more dreadful still – religion, piety, and the adoration of the Gods will be forbidden and punished by the laws. Then, this Earth, hallowed by so many shrines and temples, will be filled with sepulchers and with the dead. O Egypt! Egypt! there will remain of your religions only vague legends that posterity will refuse to believe; only words graven upon stones will witness to your devotion! The Scythian, the Indian, or some other neighboring barbarian will possess Egypt! Divinity will return to heaven; humanity, thus abandoned, will wholly perish, and Egypt will be left deserted, forsaken of men and of Gods!

"To you I cry, O most sacred River, to you I announce the coming doom! Waves of blood, polluting your divine Waters, shall overflow your banks; the number of the dead shall surpass that of the living; and if, indeed, a few inhabitants of the land remain, Egyptians by speech, they will in manners be aliens! You weep, Asclepius! But yet sadder things than these will come to pass. Egypt will fall into apostasy, the worst of all evils. Egypt, once the holy land beloved of the Gods and full of devotion for their worship, will become the instrument of perversion, the school of impiety, the type of all violence. Then, filled with disgust for everything, man will no longer feel either admiration or love for the world. He will turn away from this beautiful work, the most perfect alike in the present, the past, and the future. Nor will the languor and weariness of souls permit anything to remain save disdain of the whole universe, this immutable work of God, this glorious and perfect edifice, this manifold synthesis of forms and images, wherein the will of the Lord, lavish of marvels, has united all things in a harmonious and single whole, worthy for ever of veneration, of praise and love! Then darkness will be preferred to light, and death will be deemed better than life, nor will any man lift his eyes to heaven.

"In those days the religious man will be youth mad; the impious man will be hailed as a sage; savage men will be deemed valiant; the evil-hearted will be applauded as the best of men. The Soul, and all that belongs thereto, whether born mortal or able to attain eternal life, all those things that I have herein expounded to you, will be but matters for ridicule, and will be esteemed foolishness. There will even be peril of death, believe me, for those who remain faithful to religion and intelligence. New rights will be instituted, new laws, nor will there be left one holy word, one sacred belief, religious and worthy of heaven and of celestial things. O lamentable separation between the Gods and men! Then there will remain only evil demons who will mingle themselves with the miserable human race, their hand will be upon it impelling to all kinds of wicked enterprise; to war, to rapine, to falsehood, to everything contrary to the nature of the soul. The Earth will no longer be in equilibrium, the sea will no longer be navigable, in the heavens the regular course of the stars will be troubled. Every holy voice will be condemned to silence; the fruits of the Earth will become corrupt, and she will be no more fertile; the very Air will sink into lugubrious torpor. Such will be the old age of the world; irreligion and disorder, lawlessness, and the confusion of good men.

"When all these things shall be accomplished, O Asclepius, then the Lord and Father, the sovereign God who rules the wide world, beholding the evil ways and actions of men, will arrest these misfortunes by the exercise of His divine will and goodness. And, in order to put an end to error and to the general corruption, He will drown the world with a deluge or consume it by Fire, or destroy it by wars and epidemics, and thereafter He will restore to it its primitive beauty; so that once more it shall appear worthy of admiration and worship, and again a chorus of praise and of blessing shall celebrate Him Who has created and redeemed so beautiful a work. This rebirth of the world, this restoration of all good things, this holy and sacred rehabilitation of Nature will take place when the time shall come that is appointed by the divine and ever-eternal will of God, without beginning and always the same."

Asclepius: "Indeed, Trismegistus, the nature of God is Will reflected; that is, absolute goodness and wisdom."

"Asclepius, Will is the result of reflection, and to will is itself an act of willing. For He Who is the fullness of all things and Who possesses all that He will, wills nothing by caprice. But everything He wills is good, and He has all that He wills; all that is good He thinks and wills. Such is God, and the World is the image of His righteousness."

Asclepius: "Is the world then good, Trismegistus?"

"Yes, the world is good, Asclepius, as I will inform you. Even as God accords to all beings and to all orders in the world benefits of divers kinds, such as youth, soul, and life, so likewise the world itself divides and distributes good things among mortals, changing seasons, the fruits of the Earth, birth, increase, maturity, and other similar gifts. And thus God is above the summit of heaven, yet everywhere present and beholding all things. For beyond the heavens is a sphere without stars, transcending all corporeal things. Between heaven and Earth he reigns who is the dispenser of life, and whom we call Zeus (Jupiter). Over the Earth and the sea he reigns who nourishes all mortal creatures, the plants and fruit-bearing trees, and whose name is Zeus Sarapis (Jupiter Plutonium). And those to whom it shall be given to dominate the Earth shall be sent forth and established at the extremity of Egypt, in a city built towards the west, whither, by sea and by land, shall flow all the race of mortals."

Asclepius: But where are they now, Trismegistus ?

"They are established in a great city, upon the mountain of Libya. Enough of this."

CONTRAST BETWEEN THE IMMORTAL AND THE MORTAL

"Let us speak now of that which is immortal and of that which is mortal. The multitude, ignorant of the reason of things, is troubled by the approach and the fear of death. Death occurs by the dissolution of the body, wearied with its toil. When the number that maintains unity is complete – for the binding-power of the body is a number – the body dies. And this happens when it can no longer support the burdens of life. Such, then, is death; the dissolution of the body, and the end of corporeal sensations. It is superfluous to trouble oneself about such a matter. But there remains another necessary law that human ignorance and unbelief despise."

Asclepius: "What law is this that is thus ignored or unregarded?"

"Hearken, Asclepius. When the soul is separated from the body, she passes under the supreme power of Deity, to be Judged according to her merits. If found pious and just she is allowed to dwell in the divine abodes, but if she appears defiled with vice she is precipitated from height to depth, and delivered over to the tempests and adverse hurricanes of the Air, the Fire, and the Water. Ceaselessly tossed about between heaven and Earth by the billows of the universe, she is driven from side to side in eternal penance, her immortal nature gives endless duration to the judgment pronounced against her. How greatly must we fear so dreadful a fate! They who now refuse to believe in such things will then be convinced against their will, not by words, but by beholding; not by menaces, but by the pains they will endure."

Asclepius: "The faults of men, Trismegistus, are not then punished only by human laws?"

"Asclepius, all that is terrestrial is mortal. Those who live according to the corporeal state, and who fall short during their life of the laws imposed on this condition, are subjected after death to chastisement so much the more severe as the faults committed by them have remained hidden; for the universal prescience of God will render the punishment proportional to the transgression."

Asclepius: "Who are they who deserve the greatest penalties, Trismegistus?"

"Those who, condemned by human laws, die a violent death, in such wise that they appear not to have paid the debt they owe to Nature, but to have received only the reward of their actions. The just man, on the contrary, finds in religion and in piety a great help, and God protects him against all evils. The Father and Lord of all things, Who alone is all, manifests Himself willingly to all; not that He shows any man His abode, nor His splendor, nor His greatness, but He enlightens man by intelligence alone, whereby the darkness of error is dissipated, and the glories of the truth revealed. By such means man is united to the Divine Intelligence; aspiring thither he is delivered from the mortal part of his nature, and conceives the hope of everlasting life. Herein is the difference between the good and the wicked. He who is illumined by piety, religion, wisdom, the service and veneration of God, sees, as with open eyes, the true reason of things; and, through the confidence of this faith, surpasses other men even as the Sun the other Fires of heaven. For if the Sun enlightens the rest of the stars, it is not so much by his greatness and power as by his divinity and sanctity. You must see in him, Asclepius, a secondary God, who rules the rest of the world, and illumines all its inhabitants, animate and inanimate.

"If the world is an animated being which is, which has been, and which will be always living, nothing in it is mortal. Each of its parts is alive, for in a single creature always living there is no room for death. Thus is God the plenitude of life and of eternity, for He necessarily lives eternally; the Sun is lasting as the universe, and governs perpetually all living creatures, being the fount and distributor of all vitality. God is, then, the everlasting Ruler of all things that receive life, and of all that give it, the eternal dispenser of the being of the universe. Now, He has once for all bestowed life on all living creatures by an immutable law that I will expound to you. The movement of the universe is the life of eternity; the sphere of this motion is the eternity of life. The universe will never cease from movement, nor will it ever become corrupt; the permanence of eternal life surrounds it and protects it as a rampart. It dispenses life to all that is in its bosom; it is the bond of all things ordained under the Sun. The effect of its motion is double; it is vivified by the eternity that encompasses it, and, in its turn, it vivifies all that it contains, diversifying everything according to certain fixed and determined numbers and seasons. All things are ordained in time by the action of the Sun and the stars, according to a Divine law. Terrestrial periods are distinguished by the condition of the atmosphere, by the alternatives of heat and cold; celestial periods by the revolutions of the constellations, which return at fixed intervals of time to the same places in the heavens. The universe is the stage of time, the course and movement of which maintain Life. Order and time produce the renewal of all things in the world by recurring seasons.

THE ETERNAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND BEING OF DEITY

"Since such is the state of the universe, there is nothing immutable, nothing stable, nothing unchanging in nature, either in the heavens or on the Earth. God alone, and rightly alone, is wholly full and perfect in Himself, of Himself, and around Himself. He is His own firm stability, nor can He be moved by any impulsion, since all things are in Him, and He alone is all. Unless, indeed, we should dare to say, that His movement is in eternity, but this eternity itself is motionless, since all the motion of time revolves in eternity and takes its form therein. God, then, has ever been and is forever immutable; with Him likewise is the immutable eternity, bearing within it, as the image of God, the uncreated universe not yet manifest. Hence, the created universe constitutes the imitation of this eternal universe. Time, despite its perpetual movement, possesses, by means of its necessary revolutions on itself, the force and nature of stability. Thus, although eternity is fixed and immutable, nevertheless, since the motion of time unfolds itself in eternity, and this mobility is the very condition of time, it appears that eternity, immutable in

itself, yet revolves by means of the time that is within it, and that contains all motion. Thence it results that the stability of eternity appears mobile, and the mobility of time, stable, by the fixed law of their course. And thus it might seem even that God moves in His own immutability. For there is in the immensity of the equilibrium an unchangeable movement; the law of His immensity is unchangeable.

"That, therefore, which is not subject to sense – the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Immeasurable – can not be sustained, nor carried, nor sought out; neither can we know whence it comes, whither it goes, where it is, how it is, nor what it is. It is contained in its own supreme stability, and its stability in it; whether God be in eternity, or eternity in God, or both one and the other in the two. Eternity is indefinable by time; and time, which may be defined by number, by alternative, or by periodical revolutions, is eternal. Thus both appear equally infinite and eternal. Stability being the fixed point that serves as the basis of Movement, must because of this stability, hold the principal place. God and Eternity are, therefore, the principle of all things; but the world, which is mutable, cannot be considered the principle. The mutability of the world takes precedence of its stability, by means of the law of eternal movement in equilibrium. The whole consciousness of Divinity is then immutable, and moves only in equilibrium; it is holy, incorruptible, eternal; or to define it better, it is eternity, consisting in the very truth of the Supreme God, the plenitude of all feeling and knowledge, or indeed, so to speak, in God Himself. The consciousness of the natural universe includes all sensible things and species; the consciousness of humanity involves memory, by which man remembers his acts performed.

"Now, the consciousness of Divinity descends even to the human creature. God has not seen fit to extend to all beings this supreme and divine consciousness, lest, were it common to all animals, the glory of it should be diminished. The intelligence of the human mind, whatever may be its quality and quantity, lies wholly in the memory, and it is by means of this tenacity of memory that man has become the lord of the Earth. The intelligence of nature, the quality and consciousness of the universe, may be understood by means of the sensible things it contains. Eternity, in the next place, is understood as to its consciousness and its quality, according to the sensible world.

"But the intelligence of the Divine Being, the consciousness of the Supreme God, is the only truth, and this truth cannot be discovered, nor so much as its shadow, in this world full of illusion, of changeful appearances, and of error, where things are known only in the dimension of time.

"You see, Asclepius, what lofty matters we dare to treat! I thank You, O most high God, Who hast illumined me with the light of Your Grace! As for you, Tat, Asclepius, and Ammon, keep these Divine mysteries in the secret place of your hearts, and conceal them in silence. Intellect differs from perception in this: intellect, by means of study is competent to understand and to know the nature of the universe.

"The intellect of the universe penetrates to the consciousness of eternity, and of the supermundane Gods. And as for us who are men, we perceive heavenly things as it were darkly through a mist, for thus only does the condition of our human sense permit us to behold them. Feeble, indeed, is our strength to penetrate things so Divine; but, when at last we attain to them, we are indeed blessed by the joy of our inward consciousness.

FORM, PLACE AND THE NON-EXISTENCE OF A VOID

"Concerning the Void, to which so much importance is attached, my judgment is that it does not exist, that it never has existed, and that it never will exist. For all the various parts of the universe are filled, as the Earth also is complete and full of bodies, differing in quality and in form, having

their species and their magnitude one larger, one smaller, one solid, one tenuous. The larger and more solid are easily perceived; the smaller and more tenuous are difficult to apprehend or altogether invisible. We know only of their existence by the sensation of feeling, wherefore many persons deny such entities to be bodies, and regard them as simply spaces, but it is impossible there should be such spaces. For if indeed there should be anything outside the universe, which I do not believe, then it would be a space occupied by intelligible beings analogous to its Divinity, in such wise that the world, which we call the sensible world, would be filled with bodies and creatures appropriate to its nature and quality. We do not behold all the aspects of the world; some of these indeed are very vast, others very small, or else they appear small to us by reason of their remoteness, or the imperfection of our sight; their extreme tenacity may even cause us to be wholly ignorant of their existence. I speak of the genii, for I hold they dwell with us, and of the heroes who dwell above us, between the Earth and the higher Airs; wherein are neither clouds nor any tempest.

"For in truth, Asclepius, it cannot be said that there is anywhere a void, unless care be taken to define what is signified by void; as, for instance, void of Fire, or Water, or of some other such thing. And even if this or that space, small or great, be empty of these elements, nothing can be empty of the spirit and aerial fluid. The same thing may be said of place; this word alone cannot be understood, unless it is applied to something. By omitting the chief term, the sense intended is lost; thus, it is correct to say, "the place of Water," "the place of Fire," or of any other similar thing. For as it is impossible that there should be space void of everything, so also it is impossible there should be place by itself. If a place is supposed without its contents, then it is an empty place, and, in my judgment, such a place does not exist in the universe. But if nothing be void, then there can be no such thing as place in itself, unless it be qualified by length, breadth, and depth, even as human bodies have distinguishing signs.

"If, then, these things be so, Asclepius and you who are also present, know that the Intelligible World, that is to say, God, Who is perceived only by the eye of intelligence, is incorporeal, and that nothing corporeal can be mingled with His nature, nor anything that can be defined by quality, quantity, or numeration, for there is nothing of such a kind in Him. This world, which is called the sensible world, is the receptacle of all sensible appearances, qualities, and bodies, nor can this universe exist without God. For God is all, and all come forth from Him, and depend on His Will; He contains everything that is good, orderly, wise, perfect, perceptible for Him alone, and intelligible for Him alone. Apart from Him nothing has been, nothing is, nothing will be; for all proceed from Him, are in Him, and by Him; whether manifold qualities, vast quantities, magnitudes exceeding measurement, species of all forms. If you understand these things, Asclepius, render thanks to God; and, observing the universe, comprehend clearly that this sensible world, and all that it contains, is enfolded, as in a garment, by the supernal world. O Asclepius, beings of every kind, whether mortals, immortals, reasonable, animate, inanimate, to whatever class they may belong, bear the impress of that class, and although each of them has the general appearance of its kind, there are yet among them special differences. Even so, the human kind is uniform, and man may be defined by his type; nevertheless, under this general likeness, men present many dissimilarities. For the character that proceeds from God is incorporeal, as is all that is comprehended in intelligence. Since the two principles that determine form are corporeal and incorporeal, it is impossible that they should generate a form wholly resembling something else, at whatever distance of time or of place. Forms, nevertheless, are as changeful as the moments in an hour's space, in the moveable circle wherein is that omniform God of whom we have spoken. Therefore the type persists, producing as many images of itself as the revolution of the world has instants of time. The world has changes in its revolution, but species (individuality) has neither period nor change. Thus the forms of every species are permanent, and yet various in the same species."

Asclepius: "And does the world also vary in its species, Trismegistus?"

"Why then, Asclepius, hast you been asleep all the while we have been discoursing? What is the world, or of what is it composed, if not of all that is generated in it? Or dost you speak of heaven, of the Earth, and of the elements, for other beings continually change in appearance? But even so the heaven, now rainy, now dry, now hot, now cold, now clear, now covered with clouds, has many successive changes of aspect beneath its apparent uniformity. So also the Earth constantly changes its aspect, for now it brings forth its fruits, now it hides them in its bosom, bearing products of diverse quality and quantity; here is repose, there is movement, and every variety of trees, flowers, seeds, properties, odors, savors, forms. Fire, likewise, has its manifold and divine transformations, for the Sun and the Moon have all manner of aspects comparable to the multitude of images beheld in mirrors. And now we have discoursed enough of these things.

MAN AND THE DIVINE GIFT OF REASON

"Let us return to man, and inquire concerning the divine gift of reason that entitles him to be called a reasonable creature. Among all the wonders we have noted in man, that which above all commands admiration is this: man has discovered the divinity of nature, and has made it efficient to his designs.

"Our ancestors, wandering astray in matters of faith concerning the Gods, and unable to lift their minds to the Divine knowledge and religion, discovered the art of making Gods; and, having discovered it, they invested their products with appropriate virtues drawn from the nature of the world. And, as they could not make souls, they evoked the spirits of genii and angels, and endowed with them the holy images and sacraments, thus enabling their idols to exercise powers for good or ill. In such wise your ancestor, Asclepius, the inventor of medicine, has a temple on the Libyan mountain by the shores of the crocodile-frequented river, where also lies enshrined all of him that belonged to the Earth – that is, his body. For the rest of him (his better part, or rather, indeed, himself), because the principle of consciousness and of life is the whole man, is restored to heaven. And now, by his divinity, he lends help to men in their sicknesses, who once instructed them in the art of healing. So also, Hermes, my own ancestor, whose name I bear, now enshrined in the country that is called after him, hears the prayers of those who come thither from all parts of the land to obtain of him assistance and health. Behold, again, what blessings Isis, the spouse of Osiris, confers upon men when she is favorable to them, and what ills she inflicts when she is angered! For these mundane and Earthly Gods are accessible to wrath, being formed and composed by men out of Nature. Of such sort in Egypt is the adoration paid to animals; and thus also do cities honor the souls of those men who, in their lifetime, gave them laws and whose names they preserve. And for this reason, Asclepius, those deities that are adored in some places, receive in others no worship; whence arise many wars between the cities of Egypt."

Asclepius: "And of what kind, Trismegistus, is the divinity of these Gods who inhabit the Earth?"

"It consists in the divine virtue, which naturally subsists in herbs, rocks, and aromatic principles, wherefore these deities love frequent sacrifices, hymns, and praises, and sweet music resembling the celestial harmony, which heaven-like rite, attractive to their sacred nature, draws them and retains them in their shrines, so that they patiently endure their long sojourn among men. It is thus that men make Gods. Neither must you suppose, Asclepius, that the acts of these terrestrial deities are controlled by hazard. For while the supernal Gods abide in the heights of heaven, keeping each the order that belongs to him, these Gods of ours have also their special functions. Some predict by means of lots and divination the events of the future; others preside, in various ways, over things depending on their care, or come to our assistance as allies, as kinsmen, or as friends."

THE ROLE OF DESTINY OR FATE IN THE GRAND SCHEME

Asclepius: "Trismegistus, what is the part taken in the order of things by Destiny or Fate? If the heavenly Gods rule the universe, and the mundane deities control special events, where is the part of Destiny?"

"Asclepius, Destiny is the necessity that compels all things that happen, the chain that binds together all events. It is thus the cause of things, the supreme deity, or rather the second God created by God, that is the law of all things in heaven and Earth established upon divine ordinances. Destiny and Necessity are bound together indissolubly: Destiny produces the beginning of all things, Necessity enforces the effect that ensues from these beginnings. And hence arises Order, that is, the sequence and disposition of things accomplished in Time; for nothing is performed without Order. And thus the world is perfected; for the world is founded on Order, and in Order the universe consists. Therefore these three, Destiny (which is Fate), Necessity, and Order, depend absolutely on the will of God who governs the world by His divine law and reason. These three principles have no will in themselves; inflexible and inaccessible to favor as to anger, they are but the instruments of the eternal Reason, which is immutable, invariable, unalterable, indissoluble. First comes Destiny, containing, like newly-sown soil, the germs of future events. Necessity follows, urging them to their consummation. Lastly, Order maintains the fabric of things established by Destiny and Necessity. For all this is an everlasting sequence without beginning or end, sustained by its immutable law in the continuity of eternity. It rises and falls alternately, and as time rolls onward, that which had disappeared, again rises uppermost. For such is the condition of the circular movement; all things are interchained in such wise that neither beginning nor end can be distinguished, and they appear to precede and follow each other unceasingly. But as for accident and chance, they pervade all mundane affairs."