

B. Copenhagen (trans.) Hermetica  
Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992.

---

I

---

⟨Discourse⟩ of Hermes Trismegistus:  
Poimandres

[1] Once, when thought came to me of the things that are and my thinking soared high and my bodily senses were restrained, like someone heavy with sleep from too much eating or toil of the body, an enormous being completely unbounded in size seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: "What do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know from your understanding?"

[2] "Who are you?" I asked.

"I am Poimandres," he said, "mind of sovereignty; I know what you want, and I am with you everywhere."

[3] I said, "I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god. How much I want to hear!" I said.

Then he said to me: "Keep in mind all that you wish to learn, and I will teach you."

[4] Saying this, he changed his appearance, and in an instant everything was immediately opened to me. I saw an endless vision in which everything became light – clear and joyful – and in seeing the vision I came to love it. After a little while, darkness arose separately and descended – fearful and gloomy – coiling sinuously so that it looked to me like a ⟨snake⟩. Then the darkness changed into something of a watery nature, indescribably agitated and smoking like a fire; it produced an unspeakable wailing roar. Then an inarticulate cry like the voice of fire came forth from it. [5] But from the light . . . a holy word mounted upon the ⟨watery⟩ nature, and untempered fire leapt up from the watery nature to the height above. The fire was nimble and piercing and active as well, and because the air was light it followed after spirit and rose up to the fire away from earth and water so that it seemed suspended from the fire. Earth and water stayed behind, mixed with one another, so that ⟨earth⟩ could not be distinguished from water, but they were stirred to hear by the spiritual word that moved upon them.

[6] Poimandres said to me, "Have you understood what this vision means?"

"I shall come to know," said I.

"I am the light you saw, mind, your god," he said, "who existed before the watery nature that appeared out of darkness. The lightgiving word who comes from mind is the son of god."

"Go on," I said.

"This is what you must know: that in you which sees and hears is the word of the lord, but your mind is god the father; they are not divided from one another for their union is life."

"Thank you," I said.

"Understand the light, then, and recognize it." [7] After he said this, he looked me in the face for such a long time that I trembled at his appearance. But when he raised his head, I saw in my mind the light of powers beyond number and a boundless cosmos that had come to be. The fire, encompassed by great power and subdued, kept its place fixed. In the vision I had because of the discourse of Poimandres, these were my thoughts. [8] Since I was terrified, out of my wits, he spoke to me again. "In your mind you have seen the archetypal form, the preprinciple that exists before a beginning without end." This was what Poimandres said to me.

"The elements of nature – whence have they arisen?" I asked.

And he answered: "From the counsel of god which, having taken in the word and having seen the beautiful cosmos, imitated it, having become a cosmos through its own elements and its progeny of souls. [9] The mind who is god, being androgyne and existing as life and light, by speaking gave birth to a second mind, a craftsman, who, as god of fire and spirit, crafted seven governors; they encompass the sensible world in circles, and their government is called fate."

[10] "From the elements [ ] that weigh downwards, the word of god leapt straight up to the pure craftwork of nature and united with the craftsman-mind (for the word was of the same substance). The weighty elements of nature were left behind, bereft of reason, so as to be mere matter. [11] The craftsman-mind, together with the word, encompassing the circles and whirling them about with a rush, turned his craftworks

about, letting them turn from an endless beginning to a limitless end, for it starts where it stops. Revolving as mind wished them to, the circles brought forth from the weighty elements living things without reason (for they no longer kept the word with them); and the air brought forth winged things; the water things that swim. Earth and water had been separated from one another as mind wished, and (earth) brought forth from herself the living things that she held within, four-footed beasts (and) crawling things, wild animals and tame."

[12] "Mind, the father of all, who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child. The man was most fair: he had the father's image; and god, who was really in love with his own form, bestowed on him all his craftworks. [13] And after the man had observed what the craftsman had created with the father's help, he also wished to make some craftwork, and the father agreed to this. Entering the craftsman's sphere, where he was to have all authority, the man observed his brother's craftworks; the governors loved the man, and each gave a share of his own order. Learning well their essence and sharing in their nature, the man wished to break through the circumference of the circles to observe the rule of the one given power over the fire."

[14] "Having all authority over the cosmos of mortals and unreasoning animals, the man broke through the vault and stooped to look through the cosmic framework, thus displaying to lower nature the fair form of god. Nature smiled for love when she saw him whose fairness brings no surfeit (and) who holds in himself all the energy of the governors and the form of god, for in the water she saw the shape of the man's fairest form and upon the earth its shadow. When the man saw in the water the form like himself as it was in nature, he loved it and wished to inhabit it; wish and action came in the same moment, and he inhabited the unreasoning form. Nature took hold of her beloved, hugged him all about and embraced him, for they were lovers."

[15] "Because of this, unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold – in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man. Even though he is immortal and has authority over all things, mankind is affected by mortality because he is subject to fate; thus, although man is above the cosmic framework, he became a slave within it. He is androgyne because he comes from an androgyne father, and he never sleeps because he comes from one who is sleepless. (Yet love and sleep are his) masters."

[16] And after this: "... , o my mind. I love the word also."

Poimandres said: "This is the mystery that has been kept hidden until this very day. When nature made love with the man, she bore a wonder most wondrous. In him he had the nature of the cosmic framework of the seven, who are made of fire and spirit, as I told you, and without delay nature at once gave birth to seven men, androgyne and exalted, whose natures were like those of the seven governors."

And after this: "O Poimandres, now I have come into a great longing, and I yearn to hear; so do not digress."

And Poimandres said, "Be silent; I have not yet unfolded to you the first discourse."

"As you see, I am silent," said I.

[17] "As I said, then, the birth of the seven was as follows. (Earth) was the female. Water did the fertilizing. Fire was the maturing force. Nature took spirit from the ether and brought forth bodies in the shape of the man. From life and light the man became soul and mind; from life came soul, from light came mind, and all things in the cosmos of the senses remained thus until a cycle ended (and) kinds of things began to be."

[18] "Hear the rest, the word you yearn to hear. When the cycle was completed, the bond among all things was sundered by the counsel of god. All living things, which had been androgyne, were sundered into two parts – humans along with them – and part of them became male, part likewise female. But god immediately spoke a holy speech: 'Increase in increasing and multiply in multitude, all you creatures and craftworks, and let him (who) is mindful recognize that he is immortal, that desire is the cause of death, and let him recognize all that exists.'"

[19] "After god said this, providence, through fate and through the cosmic framework, caused acts of intercourse and set in train acts of birth; and all things were multiplied according to kind. The one who recognized himself attained the chosen good, but the one who loved the body that came from the error of desire goes on in darkness, errant, suffering sensibly the effects of death."

[20] "Those who lack knowledge, what great wrong have they done," I asked, "that they should be deprived of immortality?"

"You behave like a person who has not given thought to what he has heard. Did I not tell you to think?"

"I am thinking; I remember; and I am grateful as well."

"If you have understood, tell me: why do they deserve death who are in death?"

"Because what first gives rise to each person's body is the hateful darkness, from which comes the watery nature, from which the body was constituted in the sensible cosmos, from which death drinks."

[21] "Truly you have understood. But why is it that 'he who has understood himself advances toward god,' as god's discourse has it?"

"Because," I said, "the father of all things was constituted of light and life, and from him the man came to be."

"You say your speech well. Life and light are god and father, from whom the man came to be. So if you learn that you are from light and life and that you happen to come from them, you shall advance to life once again." This is what Poimandres said.

"But tell me again," I asked, "how shall I advance to life, O my mind? For god says, 'Let the person who is mindful recognize himself.' [22] All people have mind, do they not?"

"Hold your tongue, fellow. Enough talk. I myself, the mind, am present to the blessed and good and pure and merciful – to the reverent – and my presence becomes a help; they quickly recognize everything, and they propitiate the father lovingly and give thanks, praising and singing hymns affectionately and in the order appropriate to him. Before giving up the body to its proper death, they loathe the senses for they see their effects. Or rather I, the mind, will not permit the effects of the body to strike and work their results on them. As gatekeeper, I will refuse entry to the evil and shameful effects, cutting off the anxieties that come from them. [23] But from these I remain distant – the thoughtless and evil and wicked and envious and greedy and violent and irreverent – giving way to the avenging demon who {wounds the evil person}, assailing him sensibly with the piercing fire and thus arming him the better for lawless deeds so that greater vengeance may befall him. Such a person does not cease longing after insatiable appetites, struggling in the darkness without satisfaction. {This} tortures him and makes the fire grow upon him all the more."

[24] "You have taught me all things well, o mind, just as I wanted. But tell me again (about) the way up; tell me how it happens."

To this Poimandres said: "First, in releasing the material body you give the body itself over to alteration, and the form that you used to have vanishes. To the demon you give over your temperament, now

inactive. The body's senses rise up and flow back to their particular sources, becoming separate parts and mingling again with the energies. And feeling and longing go on toward irrational nature. [25] Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth the ruler's arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush. [26] And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human enters the region of the ogdoad; he has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father. Those present there rejoice together in his presence, and, having become like his companions, he also hears certain powers that exist beyond the ogdoadic region and hymn god with sweet voice. They rise up to the father in order and surrender themselves to the powers, and, having become powers, they enter into god. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god. Why do you still delay? Having learned all this, should you not become guide to the worthy so that through you the human race might be saved by god?"

[27] As he was saying this to me, Poimandres joined with the powers. Then he sent me forth, empowered and instructed on the nature of the universe and on the supreme vision, after I had given thanks to the father of all and praised him. And I began proclaiming to mankind the beauty of reverence and knowledge: "People, earthborn men, you who have surrendered yourselves to drunkenness and sleep and ignorance of god, make yourselves sober and end your drunken sickness, for you are bewitched in unreasoning sleep."

[28] When they heard, they gathered round with one accord. And I said, "Why have you surrendered yourselves to death, earthborn men, since you have the right to share in immortality? You who have journeyed with error, who have partnered with ignorance, think again: escape the shadowy light; leave corruption behind and take a share in immortality."

[29] Some of them, who had surrendered themselves to the way of death, resumed their mocking and withdrew, while those who desired to be taught cast themselves at my feet. Having made them rise, I became guide to my race, teaching them the words – how to be saved and in what manner – and I sowed the words of wisdom among them, and they were nourished from the ambrosial water. When evening came and the sun's light began to disappear entirely, I commanded them to give thanks

to god, and when each completed the thanksgiving, he turned to his own bed.

[30] Within myself I recorded the kindness of Poimandres, and I was deeply happy because I was filled with what I wished, for the sleep of my body became sobriety of soul, the closing of my eyes became true vision, my silence became pregnant with good, and the birthing of the word became a progeny of goods. This happened to me because I was receptive of mind – of Poimandres, that is, the word of sovereignty. I have arrived, inspired with the divine breath of truth. Therefore, I give praise to god the father from my soul and with all my might:

[31] Holy is god, the father of all;

Holy is god, whose counsel is done by his own powers;  
 Holy is god, who wishes to be known and is known by his own people;  
 Holy are you, who by the word have constituted all things that are;  
 Holy are you, from whom all nature was born as image;  
 Holy are you, of whom nature has not made a like figure;  
 Holy are you, who are stronger than every power;  
 Holy are you, who surpass every excellence;  
 Holy are you, mightier than praises.

You whom we address in silence, the unspeakable, the unsayable, accept pure speech offerings from a heart and soul that reach up to you. [32] Grant my request not to fail in the knowledge that befits our essence; give me power; and with this gift I shall enlighten those who are in ignorance, brothers of my race, but your sons. Thus I believe and I bear witness; I advance to life and light. Blessed are you, father. He who is your man wishes to join you in the work of sanctification since you have provided him all authority.

always contains within him the limit of his own eminence, who is immortal, who encompasses within himself the endless portion allotted to him, who always keeps flowing from the energy there above to the cosmos here below and makes the promise that leads to the praise that saves. . . . There above, then, beings are not different from one another, nor does inconstancy exist there above. All think one thought, and all have the same foreknowledge; they have one mind, the father. One sense works in them, and the charm that brings them together is love, the same love that makes one harmony act in all things.

[15] Therefore, let us praise god, but next let us descend to those who have received their sceptres from him. We began with kings, and the practice we had with them also accustomed us to giving panegyrics and singing reverent hymns to the almighty, so we must first begin our praise with god and use it as training and then exercise the training through god; the purpose is to have in us the exercise of reverence for god as well as praise for kings. [16] We must also render them compensation for spreading before us the prosperity that comes of such great peace. A king's virtue – indeed, his name alone – is the arbiter of peace. For a king is so called from the light step with which he sets his foot even upon the highest authority, because he achieves dominion over the discourse that brings peace, and because he was born to outdo barbarian kingship inasmuch as his name is the token of peace. Accordingly, a king's challenge has often caused the enemy's withdrawal. Even statues of the king are havens of peace for the tempest-tost; the sight alone of a king's image has brought quick victory and, if it stands unthreatened and undamaged, has protected those who stand by it.

## ASCLEPIUS

### *To me this Asclepius is like the sun.* A Holy Book of Hermes Trismegistus addressed to Asclepius

[1] "God, Asclepius, god has brought you to us so that you might join in a divine discourse, such a discourse as, in justice, seems more divine in its reverent fidelity than any we have had before, more than any that divine power inspired in us. If you are seen to understand it, your whole mind will be completely full of all good things – assuming that there are many goods and not one good in which all are. Admittedly, the one is consistent with the other: all are of one or all are one, for they are linked so that one cannot be separated from the other. But you will learn this by careful concentration from the discourse to come. Now go out for a moment, Asclepius, and call Tat to join us."

When Tat came in, Asclepius suggested that Hammon also join them. Trismegistus said: "No jealousy keeps Hammon from us; indeed, we recall having written many things in his name, as we have also written so much on physical and popular topics for Tat, our dearest and most loving son. But this treatise I shall write in your name. Call no one but Hammon lest the presence and interference of the many profane this most reverent discourse on so great a subject, for the mind is irreverent that would make public, by the awareness of the many, a treatise so very full of the majesty of divinity."

When Hammon had also come into the sanctuary, the reverence of the four men and the divine presence of god filled that holy place; duly silent, the minds and thoughts of each of them waited respectfully for a word from Hermes, and then divine love began to speak.

[2] "Every human soul is immortal, Asclepius, but not all in the same way; some differ in manner and time from others."

"Is it not true, Trismegistus, that every soul is of the same quality?"

"Asclepius, how quickly you have lapsed from reason's true restraint! Did I not say that all are one and one all inasmuch as all were in the

creator before he created them all? Not unjustly was he called all, whose members are all. In this whole discussion, then, take care to remember him who alone is all or who is himself the creator of all."

"From the heavens all things come into earth and water and air. Only the fire that moves upward is lifegiving; what moves down is subservient to it. But whatever descends from on high is a breeder; what diffuses upward is a feeder. Earth, who alone stands still in herself, is the receptacle of all and the renewer of all the kinds that she takes in. Therefore, this is the whole – as you remember – because it is all and consists of all. Soul and matter, embraced by nature, are so stirred by the varied multiform quality of all images that, in the discontinuity of their qualities, the forms are known to be infinite, yet they are united to this end: that the whole might seem to be one and that all might seem to be from one. [3] The elements by which the whole of matter has been formed, then, are four: fire, water, earth, air. One matter, one soul and one god."

"Now give me your whole attention, all your strength of mind, all your clever ingenuity. Giving an account of divinity, whose knowing needs a godlike concentration of consciousness, is most like a river running in torrent from a height, sweeping, plunging, so that its rapid rush outraces our concentration, not only as we listen but even as we teach."

"The heavens, a perceptible god, administer all bodies whose growth and decline have been charged to the sun and moon. But god, who is their maker, is himself governor of heaven and of soul itself and of all things that are in the world. From all these, all governed by the same god, a continuous influence carries through the world and through the soul of all kinds and all forms throughout nature. God prepared matter as a receptacle for omniform forms, but nature, imaging matter with forms by means of the four elements, causes all things to reach as far as heaven so that they will be pleasing in the sight of god."

[4] "All things that depend from above, however, are divided into forms in the way that I am about to explain. Forms of all things follow kinds, so that the kind is the entirety while the form is a smaller part of the kind. Thus, the kind made up of gods will produce from itself the forms of gods. The kind made up of demons, as that of humans and likewise birds and all things that the world contains, breeds forms resembling itself. There is another kind of living thing, a kind without soul yet not lacking senses; it thus finds joy in good treatment, harm and weakness in adversity. I am speaking of all those things that come

to life in the earth when their roots and stems are undamaged; their forms have been scattered all over the earth. Heaven itself is full of god. The aforesaid kinds, however, dwell as far as the places that belong to its forms, and the forms of all these things are immortal. Now a form is part of a kind, as a human is of humanity, and it must follow the quality of its kind. Whence, although all kinds are immortal, it happens that not all forms are immortal. In the case of divinity, both kind and form are immortal. The fertility of coming to be preserves the kinds of other things, where eternity belongs to the kind even though the forms perish. Thus, there are mortal forms, (but not kinds,) so that a human is mortal and humanity immortal."

[5] "However, the forms of all kinds combine with all kinds; some were made before; some are made from those that were made. Those made by gods or by demons or by humans are all forms closely resembling their kinds. It is impossible for bodies to be shaped without divine assent, for forms to be figured without the aid of demons, and without humans soulless things cannot be started and kept going. Therefore, because they are conjoined to some form of a divine kind, any demons who by chance drop down from their kind into a form are considered godlike by nearness and association. But those demons are called friendly to humans whose forms persist in the quality of their kind. For humans the pattern is similar but broader. The form of humankind is multiform and various: coming down from association with the (higher form) just described, it makes many conjunctions with all other forms and, of necessity, makes them with almost everything. Hence, one who has joined himself to the gods in divine reverence, using the mind that joins him to the gods, almost attains divinity. And one who has been joined to the demons attains their condition. Human are they who remain content with the middle status of their kind, and the remaining forms of people will be like those kinds to whose forms they adjoin themselves."

[6] "Because of this, Asclepius, a human being is a great wonder, a living thing to be worshipped and honored: for he changes his nature into a god's, as if he were a god; he knows the demonic kind inasmuch as he recognizes that he originated among them; he despises the part of him that is human nature, having put his trust in the divinity of his other part. How much happier is the blend of human nature! Conjoined to the gods by a kindred divinity, he despises inwardly that part of him in which he is earthly. All others he draws close to him in a bond of affection, recognizing his relation to them by heaven's disposition. He looks up to heaven. He has been put in the happier place of middle

status so that he might cherish those beneath him and be cherished by those above him. He cultivates the earth; he swiftly mixes into the elements; he plumbs the depths of the sea in the keenness of his mind. Everything is permitted him: heaven itself seems not too high, for he measures it in his clever thinking as if it were nearby. No misty air dims the concentration of his thought; no thick earth obstructs his work; no abysmal deep of water blocks his lofty view. He is everything, and he is everywhere."

"Of all these kinds, the ensouled have roots reaching them from on high to below, but living things without soul branch from a root that grows from beneath to above. Some things are nourished on composite food, others on simple food. The types of food are two: one for the soul, the other for the body – the two substances of which living things consist. Soul feeds on the ever restless stirring of the world. Bodies grow on water and earth, foods of the lower world. The spirit that fills all mixes with everything and enlivens everything. And in humans consciousness is added to understanding: only this fifth part, granted to humanity, comes from the aether. Of all living things, consciousness equips only the human, exalts it, raises it up to understand the divine plan. But since I am reminded to speak about consciousness, I shall also set forth an account of it for you a little later. It is a great subject and very holy, no less than an account of divinity itself."

"But now let me finish for you what I began. [7] At the very beginning I was speaking of that conjunction with the gods which only humans enjoy fully because the gods esteem them – those humans who have gained so much happiness that they grasp the divine consciousness of understanding, the diviner consciousness that is only in god and in human understanding."

"Is consciousness not uniform in all people, Trismegistus?"

"Not all have gained true understanding, Asclepius. They are deceived, pursuing, on rash impulse and without due consideration of reason, an image that begets malice in their minds and transforms the best of living things into a beastly nature with brutal habits. When I speak about spirit, I will give you a full account of consciousness and related topics."

"Mankind is the only living thing that is twofold: one part of him is simple, what the Greeks call *ousiōdēs*, what we call a form of divine likeness. What the Greeks call *hulikos* and we call earthly is fourfold. From it is made the body that covers over what we have already termed divine in mankind; it covers the divinity of pure mind, which rests alone

with its kindred, the thoughts of pure mind, at peace with itself as if sheltered by a wall of body."

"Why then, Trismegistus, should humans have been put in the world? Why do they not live in the highest happiness in the region where god is?"

"You are right to ask, Asclepius. Indeed, we beseech god to grant us the strength to find a reason for it. Although everything depends on god's will, those things especially depend on it that concern the summit of the all, the all whose reason we seek in our present inquiry."

[8] "Listen, then, Asclepius. When the master and shaper of all things, whom rightly we call god, made a god next after himself who can be seen and sensed (I call this second god sensible not because he senses but because he impinges on the senses of those who see him; at another time we shall discuss whether he senses or not), then, having made this god as his first production and second after himself, it seemed beautiful to him since it was entirely full of the goodness of everything, and he loved it as the progeny of his own divinity. Then, so great and good was he that he wanted there to be another to admire the one he had made from himself, and straightaway he made mankind, imitator of his reason and attentiveness. God's will is itself perfect achievement since willing and achievement are complete for him at one and the same moment of time. After he (had made) mankind *ousiōdēs* and noticed that he could not take care of everything unless he was covered over with a material wrapping, god covered him with a bodily dwelling and commanded that all humans be like this, mingling and combining the two natures into one in their just proportions. Thus god shapes mankind from the nature of soul and of body, from the eternal and the mortal, in other words, so that the living being so shaped can prove adequate to both its beginnings, wondering at heavenly beings and worshipping them, tending earthly beings and governing them."

"Just now, in speaking about mortal things, I mean to speak not about water and earth, those two of the four elements that nature has made subject to humans, but about what humans make of those elements or in them – agriculture, pasturage, building, harbors, navigation, social intercourse, reciprocal exchange – the strongest bond among humans or between humanity and the parts of the world that are water and earth. Learning the arts and sciences and using them preserves this earthly part of the world; god willed it that the world would be incomplete without them. Necessity follows god's pleasure; result attends upon his will. That anything agreed by god should become disagreeable to him

is incredible since he would have known long before that he would agree and that it was to be."

[9] "But I notice, Asclepius, that mind's quick desire hastens you to learn how mankind can cherish heaven (or the things in it) and tend to its honor. Listen, then, Asclepius. Cherishing the god of heaven and all that heaven contains means but one thing: constant assiduous service. Except for mankind alone, no living thing, neither divine nor (mortal), has done this service. Heaven and heavenly beings take delight in wonderment, worship, praise and service from humans. Rightly the supreme divinity sent the chorus of Muses down to meet mankind lest the earthly world lack sweet melody and seem thereby less civilized; instead, with songs set to music, humans praised and glorified him who alone is all and is father of all, and thus, owing to their praise of heaven, earth has not been devoid of the charms of harmony. Some very small number of these humans, endowed with pure mind, have been allotted the honored duty of looking up to heaven. But those who lagged behind (at) a lower reach of understanding, under the body's bulk and because theirs is a mingled twofold nature, have been appointed to care for the elements and these lower objects. Mankind is a living thing, then, but none the lesser for being partly mortal; indeed, for one purpose his composition seems perhaps fitter and abler, enriched by mortality. Had he not been made of both materials, he would not have been able to keep them both, so he was formed of both, to tend to earth and to cherish divinity as well."

[10] "Asclepius, I want you to grasp the theory that follows, not only through thoughtful concentration but also with an energetic attitude. The theory seems incredible to most, but holier minds should grasp it as sound and true. Now let me begin."

"The master of eternity is the first god, the world is second, mankind is third. God is maker of the world and all it contains, governing all things along with mankind, who governs what is composite. Taking responsibility for the whole of this – the proper concern of his attentiveness – mankind brings it about that he and the world are ornaments to one another so that, on account of mankind's divine composition, it seems right to call him a well-ordered world, though *kosmos* in Greek would be better. Mankind knows himself and knows the world: thus, it follows that he is mindful of what his role is and of what is useful to him; also, that he recognizes what interests he should serve, giving greatest thanks and praise to god and honoring his image but not ignoring that he, too, is the second image of god, who has two images, world and

mankind. Whence, though mankind is an integral construction, it happens that in the part that makes him divine, he seems able to rise up to heaven, as if from higher elements – soul and consciousness, spirit and reason. But in his material part – consisting of fire (and earth,) water and air – he remains fixed on the ground, a mortal, lest he disregard all the terms of his charge as void and empty. Thus, humankind is divine in one part, in another part mortal, residing in a body."

[11] "For him – for mankind, that is – and for the sum of his parts, the ultimate standard is reverence, from which goodness follows. Goodness is deemed perfect only when fortified by the virtue of disdain, which repels desire for every alien thing. Any earthly possessions owned out of bodily desire are all alien to every part of his divine kinship. To name such things 'possessions' is correct because they do not come to be *with* us but come to be possessed *by* us later on, wherefore we call them by the name 'possessions.' Everything of this kind, then, is alien to mankind, even the body, and we should despise both the things we yearn for and the source within us of the vice of yearning. The aim of the argument leads me to think that mankind was bound to be (human) only to this extent, that by contemplating divinity he should scorn and despise that mortal part joined to him by the need to preserve the lower world. Now in order for mankind in both his parts to have all that he can, note that he was formed with a quaternary of elements in either part: with pairs of hands and feet and other bodily members to serve the lower or earthly world; and with those four faculties of thought, consciousness, memory and foresight by means of which he knows all things divine and looks up to them. Hence, searching warily, mankind hunts in things for variations, qualities, effects and quantities, and yet, because the heavy and excessive vice of body slows him down, he cannot rightly discern the true causes of their nature.

Therefore, given that mankind was made and shaped in this way and that the supreme god appointed him to such duty and service, if he observes the worldly order in an orderly way, if he adores god faithfully, complying duly and worthily with god's will in both its aspects, with what prize do you believe such a being should be presented? (Seeing that the world is god's work, one who attentively preserves and enriches its beauty conjoins his own work with god's will when, lending his body in daily work and care, he arranges the scene formed by god's divine intention.) Is it not the prize our parents had, the one we wish – in most faithful prayer – may be presented to us as well if it be agreeable to divine fidelity: the prize, that is, of discharge and release from worldly



custody, of loosing the bonds of mortality so that god may restore us, pure and holy, to the nature of our higher part, to the divine?"

[12] "What you say is right and true, Trismegistus."

"Yes, this is the payment for those who live faithfully under god, who live attentively with the world. For the unfaithful it goes differently: return to heaven is denied them, and a vile migration unworthy of a holy soul puts them in other bodies."

"As the pattern of your discourse has developed, Trismegistus, it seems that souls run a great risk in this earthly life regarding hope of eternity to come."

"Of course, but some find this incredible, others fictitious, others laughable perhaps. For in this bodily life the pleasure one takes from possessions is a delight, but this delight, as they say, is a noose round the soul's neck that keeps mankind tied to the part that makes him mortal, nor does the malice that begrudges immortality let him acknowledge the part of divinity in him. Speaking as a prophet, I will tell you that after us will remain none of that simple regard for philosophy found only in the continuing reflection and holy reverence by which one must recognize divinity. The many make philosophy obscure in the multiplicity of their reasoning."

"What is it that the many do to make philosophy incomprehensible? How do they obscure it in the multiplicity of their reasoning?"

[13] "In this way, Asclepius: by combining it through ingenious argument with various branches of study that are not comprehensible – *arithmētikē* and music and geometry. Pure philosophy that depends only on reverence for god should attend to these other matters only to wonder at the recurrence of the stars, how their measure stays constant in prescribed stations and in the orbit of their turning; it should learn the dimensions, qualities and quantities of the land, the depths of the sea, the power of fire and the nature and effects of all such things in order to commend, worship and wonder at the skill and mind of god. Knowing music is nothing more than being versed in the correct sequence of all things together as allotted by divine reason. By divine song, this sequencing or marshalling of each particular thing into a single whole through reason's craftwork produces a certain concord – very sweet and very true."

[14] "Accordingly, the people who will come after us, deceived by the ingenuity of sophists, will be estranged from the true, pure and holy philosophy. To adore the godhead with simple mind and soul and to

honor his works, also to give thanks to god's will (which alone is completely filled with good), this is a philosophy unprofaned by relentlessly curious thinking."

"And this is our account of these topics. From this point let us begin the treatment of spirit and related matters."

"There was god and *hulē* (which we take as the Greek for 'matter'), and attending matter was spirit, or rather spirit was in matter, but it was not in matter as it was in god nor as the things from which the world came were in god. Because these things had not come to be, they were not as yet, but by then they already were in that from which they had their coming to be. Not only of those that have not yet come to be, but also of those that lack the fertility for breeding so that nothing can come to be from them, is it said that they do not produce being. Therefore, things can breed that have in them a nature capable of breeding; something can come to be from them even though they have come to be from themselves (for there is no doubt that the things from which all come to be can easily come to be from those that have come to be from themselves). The everlasting god, god eternal, neither can nor could have come to be – that which is, which was, which always will be. This is the nature of god, then, which is wholly from itself."

"But *hulē* (or the nature of matter) and spirit, though from the beginning they seem not to have come to be, nonetheless possess in themselves the power and nature of coming to be and procreating. For the beginning of fertility is in the quality of nature, which possesses in itself the power and the material for conceiving and giving birth. Nature, therefore, can breed alone without conceiving by another."

[15] "By contrast, things that have the power to conceive only by coupling with natures outside themselves must be divided in such a way that the place of the world along with its contents are seen not to have come to be – which place in any event has in itself the power of the whole of nature. 'Place' I call that in which all things are, for none of them could have been, lacking a place to keep them all (a place must be provided for everything that is to be); the fact is, that if things were nowhere, one could not distinguish their qualities, quantities, positions or effects."

"Therefore, although matter did not come to be, it nonetheless has in itself the natures of all things inasmuch as it furnishes them most fertile wombs for conceiving. The whole of matter's quality, then, is to be creative, even though it was not created. Just as there is a fertile

quality in the nature of matter, so also is the same matter equally fertile in malice."

[16] "Thus, Asclepius and Hammon, I have not said what the many say: 'Was god not able to put an end to evil and banish it from nature?' One need not respond to them at all, but for your sake I shall pursue this question as well since I have opened it, and I will give you an answer. Now these people say that god should have freed the world of every kind of evil, yet evil is so much in the world that it seems almost to be an organ of the world. Acting as reasonably as possible, the supreme god took care to provide against evil when he deigned to endow human minds with consciousness, learning and understanding, for it is these gifts alone, by which we surpass other living things, that enable us to avoid the tricks, snares and vices of evil. He that avoids them on sight, before they entangle him, that person has been fortified by divine understanding and foresight, for the foundation of learning resides in the highest good."

"Spirit supplies and invigorates all things in the world; like an instrument or a mechanism it is subject to the will of the supreme god. For now let this be our understanding of these issues."

"Understood by mind alone, the god called 'supreme' is ruler and governor of that sensible god who encloses within him all place, all the substance of things, all the matter of things that produce and procreate, all that there is whatsoever and however much there is. [17] But spirit stirs and governs all the forms in the world, each according to the nature allotted it by god. *Hulē* or matter, however, receives them all, (spirit) stirs and concentrates them all, and god governs them, apportioning to all things in the world as much as each one needs. He fills them all with spirit, breathing it into each thing according to the quality of its nature."

"This hollow of the world, round like a sphere, cannot itself, because of its quality or shape, be wholly visible. Choose any place high on the sphere from which to look down, and you cannot see bottom from there. Because of this, many believe that it has the same quality as place. They believe it is visible after a fashion, but only through shapes of the forms whose images seem to be imprinted when one shows a picture of it. In itself, however, the real thing remains always invisible. Hence, the bottom – {if it is a part or a place} in the sphere – is called *Haidēs* in Greek because in Greek 'to see' is *idein*, and there is no-seeing the bottom of a sphere. And the forms are called 'ideas' because they are visible forms. The (regions) called *Haidēs* in Greek because they are deprived

of visibility are called 'infernal' in Latin because they are at the bottom of the sphere."

"Such, then, are the original things, the primeval things, the sources or beginnings of all, as it were, for all are in them or through them or from them."

[18] "All these of which you speak, Trismegistus, what are they?"

"The whole substance of all the forms in the world and of each one of them in its normal state is, if I may say so, 'material.' Matter nourishes bodies; spirit nourishes souls. But consciousness, the heavenly gift that is happiness for humanity alone (not all humans, but only the few who have the mind to contain so great a bounty – as the sun lights up the world, so the human mind shines with the light of consciousness, but it is greater, for whatever the sun illuminates is sometimes deprived of its light by the interposition of earth and moon and the intervening night), consciousness, once coupled with the human soul, becomes one material in the closely joined coupling, so that minds of this sort are never obstructed by the errors of darkness. They are right who have said that the soul of the gods is consciousness, though I say it is the soul not of all gods but only of the great and original gods."

[19] "Which gods do you call the sources of things or the first beginnings, Trismegistus?"

"Longing for heaven's favor, I begin by disclosing great things to you and exposing divine mysteries."

"There are many kinds of gods, of whom one part is intelligible, the other sensible. Gods are not said to be intelligible because they are considered beyond the reach of our faculties; in fact, we are more conscious of these intelligible gods than of those we call visible, as you will be able to see from our discussion if you pay attention. For my discourse is indeed a lofty one, all the more divine for remaining beyond human thought and effort, and, unless your ears take in the words I speak and do heedful service, my discourse will fly past you and flow by you or rather flow back within itself, mixing with the streaming of its source."

"The heads of all classes are gods, after whom come gods who have a head-(of)-ousia; these are the sensible gods, true to both their origins, who produce everything throughout sensible nature, one thing through another, each god illuminating his own work. The *ousiarchēs* of heaven (whatever one means by that word) is Jupiter, for Jupiter supplies life

through heaven to all things. Light is the *ousiarchēs* of the sun, for the blessing of light pours down on us through the orb of the sun. The thirty-six (the term is 'horoscopes'), the stars that are always fixed in the same place, have as their head or *ousiarchēs* the one called *Pantomorphos* or *Omni-form*, who makes various forms within various classes. The so-called seven spheres have the *ousiarchai* or heads called *Fortune* and *Heimarmenē*, whereby all things change according to nature's law and a steadfast stability that stirs in everlasting variation. Air is the instrument or mechanism of all the gods, that through which all things are made; its *ousiarchēs* is the second. . . ."

"... to mortals the mortal and to them their like. Given such conditions, all things from bottom to top {reach out to one another and link together in mutual connections. But . . .} mortals are attached to immortals and sensibles to insensibles. And the whole of it complies with that supreme governor, the master, so that really there are not many, but rather one. In fact, all depend from one and flow from it though they seem separated and are believed to be many. Taken together, however, they are one or rather two, whence all are made and by which they are made – out of the matter, in other words, of which they are made, and from the will of him whose assent makes them different."

[20] "Once more, Trismegistus, what does this explanation say?"

"This, Asclepius: God, father, master of all, whatever name people use to call him something holier or more reverent, a name that should be sacred among us because of the understanding we have (given the greatness of this divinity, none of these titles will name him precisely; if a word is this – the sound of spirit striking the air and declaring a person's whole wish or meaning as his mind happens to grasp it from the senses, a name, its whole content defined and circumscribed, composed of a few syllables, providing the necessary exchange between human voice and ears – then the whole of god's name also includes meaning and spirit and air and everything at once that is in them or through them or from them; no, I cannot hope to name the maker of all majesty, the father and master of everything, with a single name, even a name composed of many names; he is nameless or rather he is all-named since he is one and all, so that one must call all things by his name or call him by the names of everything), god, the only and the all, completely full of the fertility of both sexes and ever pregnant with his own will, always begets whatever he wishes to procreate. His will is all goodness. From his divinity the same goodness that is in all things came to be naturally so that all might be as they are and were, so that to all things to come hereafter they might provide the power to come

to be of themselves. This is the explanation given to you, Asclepius, why and how all things are made."

[21] "Do you say that god is of both sexes, Trismegistus?"

"Not only god, Asclepius, but all things ensouled and soulless, for it is impossible for any of the things that are to be infertile. Take away fertility from all the things that now exist, and it will be impossible for them to be forever. I say {that sensation and growth are also in the nature of things, that the world} contains growth within it and preserves all that have come to be. For each sex is full of fecundity, and the linking of the two or, more accurately, their union is incomprehensible. If you call it Cupid or Venus or both, you will be correct."

"Grasp this in your mind as truer and plainer than anything else: that god, this master of the whole of nature, devised and granted to all things this mystery of procreation unto eternity, in which arose the greatest affection, pleasure, gaiety, desire and love divine. One should explain how great is the force and compulsion of this mystery, were it not that each individual already knows from contemplation and inward consciousness. For if you take note of that final moment to which we come after constant rubbing when each of the two natures pours its issue into the other and one hungrily snatches (love) from the other and buries it deeper, finally at that moment from the common coupling females gain the potency of males and males are exhausted with the lethargy of females. Therefore, the act of this mystery, so sweet and vital, is done in secret so that the divinity that arises in both natures from the sexual coupling should not be forced to feel the shame that would come from the laughter of the ignorant if it happened in public or, much worse, if it were open to the sight of irreverent people."

[22] "The reverent are not many, in any case, no more than a few whose number in the world can be counted, whence it happens that evil remains in the many because they lack wisdom and knowledge of all the things that are. Scorn for the vices of the whole world – and a cure for those vices – comes from understanding the divine plan upon which all things have been based. But when ignorance and folly persist, all vices thrive and wound the soul with incurable disorders. Tainted and corrupted by them, the soul grows inflamed as if poisoned – except the souls of those who have the sovereign remedy of learning and understanding."

"Therefore, since my help is only for the few, it will be worthwhile to follow and finish this treatise, which tells why divinity deigned to impart its understanding and learning to humans alone. Hear me, then."

"God, the father and master, made gods first and then humans, taking equal portions from the more corrupt part of matter and from the divine;

thus it happened that the vices of matter remained coupled with bodies, along with other vices caused by the foods and sustenance that we are obliged to share with all living things. Hence it is inevitable that the longings of desire and the other vices of mind sink into human souls. Even though immortality and unaging vigor were wisdom and learning enough for the gods, who were made of nature's cleanest part and had no need of help from reason and learning, nonetheless, because god's plan was a unity, he established in eternal law an order of necessity framed in law, which stood in place of learning and understanding lest the gods be detached from them, for among all living things god recognized mankind by the unique reason and learning through which humans could banish and spurn the vices of bodies, and he made them reach for immortality as their hope and intention. In short, god made mankind good and capable of immortality through his two natures, divine and mortal, and so god willed the arrangement whereby mankind was ordained to be better than the gods, who were formed only from the immortal nature, and better than all other mortals as well. Consequently, since he is conjoined to them in kinship, mankind honors the gods with reverent and holy mind; the gods also show concern for all things human and watch over them in faithful affection. [23] But one may say this only of the few people endowed with faithful mind. Of the vice-ridden say nothing, lest we profane this most holy discourse by considering them."

"And since this discourse proclaims to us the kinship and association between humans and gods, Asclepius, you must recognize mankind's power and strength. Just as the master and father – or god, to use his most august name – is maker of the heavenly gods, so it is mankind who fashions the temple gods who are content to be near to humans. Not only is mankind glorified; he glorifies as well. He not only advances toward god; he also makes the gods strong. Are you surprised, Asclepius? Surely you do not lack confidence, as the many do."

"I am confused, Trismegistus, but I gladly agree to what you say, and I find mankind most fortunate to have attained such happiness."

"Mankind certainly deserves admiration, as the greatest of all beings. All plainly admit that the race of gods sprang from the cleanest part of nature and that their signs are like heads that stand for the whole being. But the figures of gods that humans form have been formed of both natures – from the divine, which is purer and more divine by far, and from the material of which they are built, whose nature falls short of the human – and they represent not only the heads but all the limbs and

the whole body. Always mindful of its nature and origin, humanity persists in imitating divinity, representing its gods in semblance of its own features, just as the father and master made his gods eternal to resemble him."

[24] "Are you talking about statues, Trismegistus?"

"Statues, Asclepius, yes. See how little trust you have! I mean statues ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds; statues that foreknow the future and predict it by lots, by prophecy, by dreams and by many other means; statues that make people ill and cure them, bringing them pain and pleasure as each deserves."

"Do you not know, Asclepius, that Egypt is an image of heaven or, to be more precise, that everything governed and moved in heaven came down to Egypt and was transferred there? If truth were told, our land is the temple of the whole world."

"And yet, since it befits the wise to know all things in advance, of this you must not remain ignorant: a time will come when it will appear that the Egyptians paid respect to divinity with faithful mind and painstaking reverence – to no purpose. All their holy worship will be disappointed and perish without effect, for divinity will return from earth to heaven, and Egypt will be abandoned. The land that was the seat of reverence will be widowed by the powers and left destitute of their presence. When foreigners occupy the land and territory, not only will reverence fall into neglect but, even harder, a prohibition under penalty prescribed by law (so-called) will be enacted against reverence, fidelity and divine worship. Then this most holy land, seat of shrines and temples, will be filled completely with tombs and corpses."

"O Egypt, Egypt, of your reverent deeds only stories will survive, and they will be incredible to your children! Only words cut in stone will survive to tell your faithful works, and the Scythian or Indian or some such neighbor barbarian will dwell in Egypt. For divinity goes back to heaven, and all the people will die, deserted, as Egypt will be widowed and deserted by god and human. I call to you, most holy river, and I tell your future: a torrent of blood will fill you to the banks, and you will burst over them; not only will blood pollute your divine waters, it will also make them break out everywhere, and the number of the entombed will be much larger than the living. Whoever survives will be recognized as Egyptian only by his language; in his actions he will seem a foreigner."

[25] "Asclepius, why do you weep? Egypt herself will be persuaded to deeds much wickeder than these, and she will be steeped in evils far

worse. A land once holy, most loving of divinity, by reason of her reverence the only land on earth where the gods settled, she who taught holiness and fidelity will be an example of utter (un)belief. In their weariness the people of that time will find the world nothing to wonder at or to worship. This all – a good thing that never had nor has nor will have its better – will be endangered. People will find it oppressive and scorn it. They will not cherish this entire world, a work of god beyond compare, a glorious construction, a bounty composed of images in multiform variety, a mechanism for god's will ungrudgingly supporting his work, making a unity of everything that can be honored, praised and finally loved by those who see it, a multiform accumulation taken as a single thing."

"They will prefer shadows to light, and they will find death more expedient than life. No one will look up to heaven. The reverent will be thought mad, the irreverent wise; the lunatic will be thought brave, and the scoundrel will be taken for a decent person. Soul and all teachings about soul (that soul began as immortal or else expects to attain immortality) as I revealed them to you will be considered not simply laughable but even illusory. But – believe me – whoever dedicates himself to reverence of mind will find himself facing a capital penalty. They will establish new laws, new justice. Nothing holy, nothing reverent nor worthy of heaven or heavenly beings will be heard of or believed in the mind."

"How mournful when the gods withdraw from mankind! Only the baleful angels remain to mingle with humans, seizing the wretches and driving them to every outrageous crime – war, looting, trickery and all that is contrary to the nature of souls. Then neither will the earth stand firm nor the sea be sailable; stars will not cross heaven nor will the course of the stars stand firm in heaven. Every divine voice will grow mute in enforced silence. The fruits of the earth will rot; the soil will no more be fertile; and the very air will droop in gloomy lethargy."

[26] "Such will be the old age of the world: irreverence, disorder, disregard for everything good. When all this comes to pass, Asclepius, then the master and father, the god whose power is primary, governor of the first god, will look on this conduct and these willful crimes, and in an act of will – which is god's benevolence – he will take his stand against the vices and the perversion in everything, righting wrongs, washing away malice in a flood or consuming it in fire or ending it by spreading pestilential disease everywhere. Then he will restore the world to its beauty of old so that the world itself will again seem deserving of

worship and wonder, and with constant benedictions and proclamations of praise the people of that time will honor the god who makes and restores so great a work. And this will be the geniture of the world: a reformation of all good things and a restitution, most holy and most reverent, of nature itself, reordered in the course of time (but through an act of will,) which is and was everlasting and without beginning. For god's will has no beginning; it remains the same, everlasting in its present state. God's nature is deliberation; will is the supreme goodness."

"Deliberation (is will), Trismegistus?"

"Will comes to be from deliberation, Asclepius, and the very act of willing comes from will. God wills nothing in excess since he is completely full of all things and wills what he has. He wills all that is good, and he has all that he wills. All things are good that he considers and wills. Such is god, and the world is his image – (good) from good."

[27] "Good, Trismegistus?"

"Good, Asclepius, as I shall teach you. For just as god dispenses and distributes his bounty – consciousness, soul and life – to all forms and kinds in the world, so the world grants and supplies all that mortals deem good, the succession of seasons, fruits emerging, growing and ripening, and other such things. And thus, seated atop the summit of the highest heaven, god is everywhere and surveys everything all around. For there is a starless place beyond heaven remote from all bodily objects. The one who dispenses (life,) whom we call Jupiter, occupies the place between heaven and earth. But Jupiter Plutonium rules over earth and sea, and it is he who nourishes mortal things that have soul and bear fruit. The powers of these gods invigorate crops, trees and soil, but powers and effects of other gods will be distributed through all things that are. The gods who rule the earth will (withdraw), and they will be stationed in a city founded at Egypt's farthest border toward the setting sun, where the whole race of mortals will hasten by land and sea."

"But tell me where these gods of yours are now, Trismegistus?"

"Stationed in the great city on the Libyan mountain. And, for the time being, let that be their story."

"We must talk now about the immortal and the mortal, for anticipation and fear of death torture the many who do not know the true account of it. Death results from the disintegration of a body worn out with work, after the time has passed when the body's members fit into a single mechanism with vital functions. The body dies, in fact, when it can no longer support a person's vital processes. This is death, then: the body's disintegration and the extinction of bodily consciousness.

Worrying about it is pointless. But there is another problem worth worrying about, though people disregard it out of ignorance or disbelief."

"What is it that they ignore, Trismegistus, or whose possibility they question?"

[28] "Listen then, Asclepius. When soul withdraws from the body, it passes to the jurisdiction of the chief demon who weighs and judges its merit, and if he finds it faithful and upright, he lets it stay in places suitable to it. But if he sees the soul smeared with the stains of wrongdoing and dirtied with vice, he sends it tumbling down from on high to the depths below and consigns it to the storms and whirlpools of air, fire and water in their ceaseless clashing – its endless punishment to be swept back and forth between heaven and earth in the streams of matter. Then the soul's bane is its own eternity, for an undying sentence oppresses it with eternal torment. To escape this snare, let us recognize what we must fear, dread and avoid. After they have done wrong, the unbelievers will be forced to believe, not by words but by example, not threats but real suffering of punishment."

"Is it not human law only that punishes the wrongs that humans do, Trismegistus?"

"In the first place, Asclepius, everything earthly is mortal, as are also those beings that live in a bodily state and fade from life in that same bodily state. They are all subject to penalties for the right or wrong they have done in life, and the penalties after death are more severe in so far as their wrongdoing may have been hidden during life. The divinity foreknows all of it, so one pays the penalty precisely in proportion to one's wrongdoing."

[29] "Who deserve the greater penalties, Trismegistus?"

"Those condemned by human laws who lose their lives violently so that they seem to have been penalized deservedly and not to have paid their debt to nature with a soul. On the other hand, the upright person's defence lies in reverence for god and supreme fidelity. God protects such people from all evils. For the father and master of all, who alone is all, shows himself freely to all – not *where* as in a place nor *how* as through some quality nor *how much* as in a quantity but by illuminating people with the understanding that comes only through mind. And when the shadows of error have been scattered from a person's soul and he has perceived the light of truth, he couples himself with divine understanding in his whole consciousness, and when his love of it has freed him from the part of nature that makes him mortal, he conceives

confidence in immortality to come. This is what will separate the good from the wicked. When he has seen the light of reason as if with his eyes, every good person is enlightened by fidelity, reverence, wisdom, worship and respect for god, and the confidence of his belief puts him as far from humanity as the sun outshines the stars. In fact, the sun illuminates the other stars not so much by the intensity of its light as by its divinity and holiness. The sun is indeed a second god, Asclepius, believe it, governing all things and shedding light on all that are in the world, ensouled and soulless."

"For if the world was and is and will be a living thing that lives forever, nothing in the world is mortal. Since each part of it, as such in its actual state, lives forever and also lives in a world which is itself a single living thing that lives forever, there is no place in it for mortality, so if the world must always live, the world must be completely full of life and eternity. Just as the world is everlasting, then, so the sun is ever the governor of things that have life and of all their power to live, dispensing and continuing it. Hence, god is the everlasting governor of things living in the world and of those that have life, and he dispenses this life eternally. He dispensed it all at once, however: life is supplied by eternal law to all that have it, in the way that I shall describe."

[30] "Eternity's lifegiving power stirs the world, and the place of the world is in living eternity itself; since everlasting life hedges it about and, in a manner of speaking, holds it together, the world will never stop moving nor be destroyed. The world itself dispenses life to everything in it, and it is the place of all things governed under the sun. The world's motion is a twofold activity: eternity enlivens the world from without, and the world enlivens all within it, dispersing them all according to numbers and times fixed and appointed by the action of the sun and the movements of the stars, the whole chronological scheme framed in divine law. On earth one tells time by the quality of the air and the change of hot seasons and cold, but in heaven time runs by the return of the coursing stars to the same places in chronological cycles. The world is time's receptacle; the cycling and stirring of time invigorate it. Yet time works by orderly rule: order and time cause the renewal of everything in the world through alternation. Nothing in this situation is stable, nothing fixed, nothing immobile among things that come to be in heaven and earth: the lone exception is god, and rightly he alone, for he is whole, full and perfect in himself and by himself and about himself. He is his own steadfast stability, and no external impulse can move him from his place since everything is in him and he alone in

everything – unless one ventures to say that his motion is *in* eternity. But eternity, toward which all the stirring of time recedes and from which all the stirring of time takes its rise, is itself immobile.”

[31] “Therefore, god has (always) been stable, and eternity likewise has always stood still along with him, holding within it a world that had not come to be, the one we correctly call sensible. This sensible world, which imitates eternity, was made in the image of that god. Though it always stirs, time in its own way still has the power and character of stability by the very necessity of recurring upon itself. Thus, although eternity is stable, immobile and fixed, yet because the stirring of time (which moves) always comes back to eternity and because the movement turns in a temporal pattern, it happens that eternity (which in itself does not move) seems to be stirred through the time in which it is, and it is in time that all the stirring goes on. So it happens that eternity’s stability is moved and that time’s mobility becomes stable by the fixed law of its cycle. Thus may one also believe that god stirs within himself – but in the same immobility, for because of its immensity the stirring of his stability is in fact immobile. The law of immensity itself is immobile. This being, then, which is not of a kind to be accessible to the senses, lies beyond limitation, comprehension and calculation. It cannot be carried or fetched or hunted down. Where it is, whither it goes, whence it came, how it acts, what it is – uncertain. It carries on in exalted stability, and its stability acts within it: god, eternity, both, one in the other or both in both. Consequently, eternity has no limitation within time. But time, granted that it can be limited by number or alternation or periodic return through recurrence, is eternal. Both are infinite, then; both seem eternal. For stability, firmly fixed to sustain the things that can be stirred, rightly takes first place owing to its steadfastness.”

[32] “The beginnings of everything, then, are god and eternity. But because it is mobile the world does not hold first place; mobility exceeds stability in it even though, conforming to the law that keeps it ever stirring, it has a steadfastness free of motion.”

“The total consciousness that resembles divinity, immobile in itself, moves itself in its own stability. It is holy, uncorrupted, everlasting and whatever one can say better of it – if anything can be better than the eternity of the supreme god that rests in truth itself – completely full of all sensible forms and of the whole ordering, resting, so to speak, with god. The world’s consciousness is the receptacle of all sensible forms and orderings. But to be mindful of all that it has done, human (consciousness depends on) memory’s tenacity. In its descent, the divinity of

consciousness reaches down only as far as the human animal, for the supreme god did not want the divine consciousness to mingle with every living thing. He did not want it to be ashamed from coupling with the other living things. The understanding of human consciousness, what it is and how great it is, comes entirely from memory of past events. (Because of his tenacity of memory, he was even made governor of earth.) The understanding of nature, however, and the quality of the world’s consciousness can be fully perceived from all the things in the world that sense can detect. Eternity’s understanding, which comes next, is a consciousness gained from the sensible world, from which its quality can be discerned. But the quality of consciousness in the supreme god and the understanding of that quality is truth alone. Not a shadow, not even the faintest trace of this truth can be discerned in the world, for there is falsehood wherever one discerns anything by measuring time, and where there is geniture one finds error.”

“So you see the depth of the subjects we deal with, Asclepius, and what we venture to achieve. But to you, supreme god, I give thanks for enlightening me with the light by which divinity can be seen. And you, Tat and Asclepius and Hammon, hide these divine mysteries among the secrets of your heart and shield them with silence.”

“Understanding differs from consciousness in this, however: that our understanding comes to understand and discern the quality of the consciousness of the world by concentrating the mind, while the world’s understanding comes to know eternity and the gods who are above the world. And thus it comes about that we humans see the things that are in heaven as if through a mist, to the extent that we can, given the condition of human consciousness. When it comes to seeing great things, our concentration is quite confined, but once it has seen, the happiness of our awareness is vast.”

[33] “On the void that so many consider an important topic now, I hold the following: there is no such thing as a void, nor can there have been, nor will there ever be. For all the members of the world are completely full so that the world itself is complete and filled with bodies diverse in quality and form, each having its own shape and size. Some are larger than others, some smaller, and they differ in density and rarity. The denser, like the larger, are easier to see, but the smaller and rarer are very difficult or altogether impossible to see, and we can detect them only by touch. Hence, many believe that these are not bodies and that they are empty places – which is impossible. For just as that which is said to be ‘beyond the world’ (if there is any such thing, I do not believe

that (it is void)) is full of intelligible things resembling it in divinity, as I take it, so also is this world that we call 'sensible' completely full of bodies and living things that conform to its nature and quality. We do not see them all in their true aspects, but some as far too large, others as much too tiny; they look like this to us either because they are far away from us or because our eyes have gone bad. Or else, because they are so very tiny, many believe that they do not exist at all. (I am speaking now of the demons who always stay near us, so I believe, and the heroes who dwell between the purest part of the air above us and the place where there are no fogs or clouds or disturbance from the stirring of the signs.) Consequently, Asclepius, you are to call nothing 'void' unless you mean to say that what you call 'void' is 'void-of' something – void of fire or void of water and so on. Thus, though one may see something that can be void of such things as these, in no event can it be empty of spirit and air, no matter how small or large the thing that seems void."

[34] "One must say the same about place, which lacks meaning as a term in isolation. For the evidence of place is from that whose place it is; indeed, take away this most important feature, and you truncate the sense of the word. This is why we may speak correctly of the place of water, the place of fire, and so on. Just as it is impossible for anything to be void, so the meaning of place in isolation is indiscernible. If you assume a place apart from that of which it is the place, it would seem to be an empty place, which, I believe, cannot exist in the world. If nothing is void, it is also evident that nothing is place as such, except as you add visible marks to it – length, breadth, height – as you would to human bodies."

"Asclepius and the rest of you here: given these conditions, know that the intelligible world, discernible only through mind's intuition, is incorporeal and that nothing corporeal can be combined with its nature, nothing discernible by quality, quantity and number, for there is no such thing in it."

"The world called 'sensible' is the receptacle of all the sensible forms or qualities of bodies, none of which can be invigorated without god. For god is everything; everything comes from him; everything depends on his will. And the whole of it is good, fair, wise, inimitable, to god alone sensible and intelligible. Without god there was nothing, nor is, nor will be, for all things are from him, in him and through him: qualities multiform and various, great quantities, all immeasurable magnitudes and omniform forms. If you come to understand them, Asclepius, you will thank god. And if you consider the whole, you will learn that the

sensible world itself and all it contains are in truth covered over by that higher world as if by a garment."

[35] "Each kind of living thing, Asclepius, no matter whether mortal or immortal, rational (or irrational), whether ensouled or soulless, every one has the appearance of its kind in keeping with its relation to the kind. And although each kind of living thing possesses the whole form of its kind, within that same form each of them differs from the other: for example, although man-kind is one in form, so that a human can be distinguished on sight, each person within the same form differs from the others. For the class is divine and incorporeal, as is anything apprehended by the mind. Therefore, since these two components that make up forms are bodies (and) the non-bodily, it is impossible for any form to come to be in close similarity with another at distant points of time and latitude. The forms change as often as the hour has moments in the turning circle where the god resides whom we have called Omniform. The class persists, begetting copies of itself as often, as many and as diverse as the rotation of the world has moments. As it rotates the world changes, but the class neither changes nor rotates. Thus, the forms of each kind persist, though within the same form there are differences."

[36] "And does the world change its form, Trismegistus?"

"You see, Asclepius: it is as if I had been telling you all this in your sleep. What is the world, really? Of what does it consist if not of all the things that have come to be? What you mean to ask about, then, is heaven, earth and the elements. What else changes its form more continually? Heaven becomes wet or dry, cold or hot, clear or foul; these forms keep changing into one another under the one form of heaven. Earth is always undergoing many transformations in form as it begets its fruits, as it promotes the growth of what it has begotten, and as it produces the various qualities and different quantities of all its fruits, their stages or courses of growth, and especially the qualities, odors, tastes and forms of trees, flowers and shrubs. Fire causes many alterations that are divine. Indeed, the appearances of sun and moon are omniform, rather like our mirrors that reproduce likenesses through reflections comparable in brilliance. [37] But now enough has been said of such things."

"Let us turn again to mankind and reason, that divine gift whereby a human is called a rational animal. What we have said of mankind is wondrous, but less wondrous than this: it exceeds the wonderment of



all wonders that humans have been able to discover the divine nature and how to make it. Our ancestors once erred gravely on the theory of divinity; they were unbelieving and inattentive to worship and reverence for god. But then they discovered the art of making gods. To their discovery they added a conformable power arising from the nature of matter. Because they could not make souls, they mixed this power in and called up the souls of demons or angels and implanted them in likenesses through holy and divine mysteries, whence the idols could have the power to do good and evil."

"Take your ancestor, for example: he was the first to discover medicine, Asclepius. They dedicated a temple to him on the Libyan mountain near the shore of the crocodiles. There lies his material person – his body, in other words. The rest, or rather, the whole of him (if the whole person consists in consciousness of life) went back happier to heaven. Even now he still provides help to sick people by his divine power, as he used to offer it through the art of medicine. And Hermes, whose family name I bear, does he not dwell in his native city that was named for him, where mortals come from all around for his aid and protection? Isis, wife of Osiris: we know how much good she can do when well disposed, when angered how much harm! Anger comes easily to earthly and material gods because humans have made and assembled them from both natures. Whence it happens that these are called holy animals by the Egyptians, who throughout their cities worship the souls of those deified while alive, in order that cities might go on living by their laws and calling themselves by their names. For this reason, Asclepius, because what one group worships and honors another group treats differently, Egypt's cities constantly assail one another in war."

[38] "And the quality of these gods who are considered earthly – what sort of thing is it, Trismegistus?"

"It comes from a mixture of plants, stones and spices, Asclepius, that have in them a natural power of divinity. And this is why those gods are entertained with constant sacrifices, with hymns, praises and sweet sounds in tune with heaven's harmony: so that the heavenly ingredient enticed into the idol by constant communication with heaven may gladly endure its long stay among humankind. Thus does man fashion his gods."

"Do not suppose that these earthly gods act aimlessly, Asclepius. Heavenly gods inhabit heaven's heights, each one heading up the order assigned to him and watching over it. But here below our gods render aid to humans as if through loving kinship, looking after some things

individually, foretelling some things through lots and divination, and planning ahead to give help by other means, each in his own way."

[39] "Then what part of the plan belongs to *Heimarmenē* or the Fates, Trismegistus? The heavenly gods rule universals, but singulars belong to the earthly gods – correct?"

"What we call *Heimarmenē*, Asclepius, is the necessity in all events, which are always bound to one another by links that form a chain. She is the maker of everything, then, or else the supreme god, or the second god made by the supreme god, or the ordering of all things in heaven and earth made steadfast by divine laws. Therefore, this *Heimarmenē* and Necessity are bound to one another by an unbreakable glue, and, of the two, *Heimarmenē* comes first, begetting the sources of all things, but the things that depend on her beginning them are forced into activity by Necessity. What follows them both is Order, the structure and temporal arrangement of the things that must be brought about. For without the fitting together of an order, there is nothing, and in everything the world's order is complete. Order is the vehicle of the world itself, and the whole consists of order."

[40] "These three, then – *Heimarmenē*, Necessity and Order – are in the very fullest sense the products of god's assent, who governs the world by his own law and divine plan, and god has barred them altogether from every act of willing or willing-not. Not disturbed by anger nor swayed by kindness, they subject themselves to the necessity of the eternal plan. And the plan is eternity itself: irresistible, immovable, indestructible. First comes *Heimarmenē*, then, who provides progeny enough for all to come with the seed she has sown, as it were, and Necessity follows, forcing them all into activity by compulsion. Order comes third to preserve the structure of the things that *Heimarmenē* and Necessity arrange. This is eternity, then, which can neither begin to be nor cease being, which turns round and round in everlasting motion under the fixed and unchanging law of its cycle, its parts rising and falling time and again so that as time changes the same parts that had fallen rise anew. Circularity gives the turning a pattern that crowds everything together so that you cannot know where the turning starts (assuming that it starts) since everything always seems to follow and also to precede itself. But accident and chance are also mixed into everything material in the world."

"I have told you everything that a human being could say, with god's willingness and permission. Blessing god and praying, it remains for us

only to return to the care of the body. We have dealt enough with theology, and we souls have eaten our fill, so to speak."

[41] As they left the sanctuary, they began praying to god and turning to the south (for when someone wants to entreat god at sunset, he should direct his gaze to that quarter, and likewise at sunrise toward the direction they call east), and they were already saying their prayer when in a hushed voice Asclepius asked: "Tat, do you think we should suggest that your father tell them to add frankincense and spices as we pray to god?"

When Trismegistus heard him, he was disturbed and said: "A bad omen, Asclepius, very bad. To burn incense and such stuff when you entreat god smacks of sacrilege. For he wants nothing who is himself all things or in whom all things are. Rather let us worship him by giving thanks, for god finds mortal gratitude to be the best incense."

"We thank you, supreme and most high god, by whose grace alone we have attained the light of your knowledge; holy name that must be honored, the one name by which our ancestral faith blesses god alone, we thank you who deign to grant to all a father's fidelity, reverence and love, along with any power that is sweeter, by giving us the gift of consciousness, reason and understanding:

consciousness, by which we may know you;  
reason, by which we may seek you in our dim suppositions;  
knowledge, by which we may rejoice in knowing you.

And we who are saved by your power do indeed rejoice because you have shown yourself to us wholly. We rejoice that you have deigned to make us gods for eternity even while we depend on the body. For this is mankind's only means of giving thanks: knowledge of your majesty.

We have known you, the vast light perceived only by reason.

We have understood you, true life of life, the womb pregnant with all coming-to-be.

We have known you, who persist eternally by conceiving all coming-to-be in its perfect fullness.

Worshipping with this entire prayer the good of your goodness, we ask only this, that you wish us to persist in the love of your knowledge and that we never be cut off from such a life as this."

"With such hopes we turn to a pure meal that includes no living thing."