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Critical Review: De Divinatione

The works known as *De Divinatione* (*On Divination*) by Marcus Tullius Cicero are compiled into two books, each presenting an opinion on the validity of divination. While both books are written by Cicero himself, Book I is framed as though his brother, Quintus Cicero, is speaking, defending divination as a legitimate means of understanding the divine will.¹ In contrast, Book II presents Cicero's own skeptical perspective, questioning the reliability and logic behind divinatory practices.²

Written in 44 BCE, in the final years of Cicero's life, *De Divinatione* is more than just a philosophical debate; it is a reflection of the political and religious turmoil of the late Roman Republic.³ As Rome faced internal strife following the assassination of Julius Caesar, debates over religion, governance, and tradition took on heightened significance. Divination, a cornerstone of Roman religious practice, played a key role in political decision-making, and Cicero's critique of it was, in part, a response to the manipulation of religious institutions for political gain.⁴ The dialogue format allows Cicero to examine both sides of the argument while ultimately steering the reader toward his own rationalist critique of religious prophecy.⁵

This paper will critically review Cicero's arguments against divination, considering his rhetorical strategies, philosophical reasoning, and broader implications for Roman society. It will also explore the effectiveness of the dialogue format and how modern scholarship assesses Cicero's skepticism—whether it was purely philosophical or a political statement aimed at dismantling religious institutions.⁶

Cicero's Background and Philosophical Position

¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, trans. by Arthur Stanley Pease (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), I.1.

² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.5.

³ Mary Beard, 'Cicero and Divination: The Formation of a Latin Discourse', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 76 (1986), 33-47 (p. 35)

⁴ Robert Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 99 (1968), 241-248 (p. 243).

⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.10.

⁶ Michael A. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 112.

Marcus Tullius Cicero was a highly educated statesman, orator, and philosopher, deeply influenced by Academic Skepticism, a school of thought that rejected certainty and embraced critical inquiry.⁷ He was also a trained augur, and elected in a position that involved interpreting the will of the gods through omens, particularly in political and military matters.⁸ However, despite his formal training in divination and office held, Cicero was deeply skeptical of it, seeing it as a useful political tool rather than a genuine form of divine communication.⁹

As Beard (1986) points out, Cicero's skepticism was not merely philosophical but also rhetorical, as he sought to redefine Rome's religious discourse in a more rationalist framework.¹⁰ His arguments against divination speak to his broader commitment to empirical reasoning, a perspective that put him at odds with Stoic determinism and traditional Roman religious practices.¹¹ While Stoicism held that the universe was governed by a rational divine order, Academic Skepticism urged individuals to question the validity of knowledge that could not be proven through empirical observation.¹² Cicero's critique of divination, then, can be seen as part of his broader philosophical agenda, aimed at dismantling superstition and irrational belief in favor of reason and political pragmatism.¹³

Quintus' Defense of Divination (Book I)

In Book I of *De Divinatione*, Quintus Cicero presents a Stoic argument in favor of divination, asserting that it serves as a direct channel of communication between the gods and mortals.¹⁴ He frames his argument around the belief that divination is an integral part of human civilization, emphasizing its long-standing presence across cultures and time periods.¹⁵ According to Quintus, divination has been practiced for centuries, not just in Rome but also in Greece, Persia, and among the Etruscans, who were particularly

⁷ Edward E. Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', *Classical Weekly*, 17.13 (1924), 101-103 (p. 102).

⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.39.

⁹ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 245.

¹⁰ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 40.

¹¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.55.

¹² Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 120.

¹³ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 103.

¹⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.12.

¹⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.15.

renowned for their expertise in reading omens.¹⁶ By citing historical examples of prophetic messages and fulfilled predictions, he attempts to prove that divination is not only valid but also essential to the spiritual and political stability of Rome.¹⁷

Quintus further argues that divination is woven into the very fabric of Roman identity, shaping key decisions in warfare, governance, and religious rituals.¹⁸ He asserts that if divination were not a true means of accessing divine will, the Roman Republic would not have relied so heavily on it for centuries.¹⁹ He references military commanders consulting augurs before battles, senators deferring major state decisions based on the interpretation of celestial signs, and priests performing sacrificial rites to ensure the gods' favor.²⁰ These practices, he contends, are not mere superstitions but sacred duties that have ensured Rome's success and longevity. His argument is clear: if divination were fraudulent, the gods would not have allowed it to persist as a vital institution within Roman society for so long.²¹

A key aspect of Quintus' defense is his classification of divination into two distinct forms: natural and artificial.²² Natural divination is described as prophetic visions, dreams, and intuitive insights, which are believed to be spontaneous messages from the gods.²³ This form, he argues, is beyond human control and occurs when the divine chooses to communicate directly with individuals.²⁴ Examples include oracular pronouncements at Delphi, prophetic dreams experienced by rulers and generals, and moments of divine inspiration that guide decision-making.²⁵ Quintus argues that such phenomena cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence, as there are countless recorded instances where dreams and visions have led to accurate predictions.²⁶

¹⁶ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 42.

¹⁷ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 126.

¹⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.18..

¹⁹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.5.

²⁰ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 112.

²¹ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 128.

²² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.60.

²³ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 103..

²⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.28.

²⁵ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 41

²⁶ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.55..

In contrast, artificial divination consists of structured, ritualized practices such as augury, astrology, and the interpretation of omens through sacrificial readings.²⁷ These methods, Quintus argues, require skilled practitioners who are trained to interpret divine signs correctly.²⁸ Augury, for instance, involves observing the flight patterns and behaviors of birds, which the Romans believed provided insight into the gods' will regarding future events.²⁹ Astrology, another significant form, relies on the positions of celestial bodies to determine fate, a practice that was widely respected in both Rome and Hellenistic cultures.³⁰ The reading of animal entrails, known as haruspicy, was particularly revered among the Etruscans, who taught the Romans how to interpret liver markings and abnormalities as divine messages.³¹ Quintus emphasizes that these artificial methods of divination are not arbitrary but rather refined and perfected traditions passed down through generations to ensure accurate interpretations of divine will.³²

A fundamental pillar of Quintus' argument is his devotion to Stoic philosophy, particularly Plato's belief in fate and divine determinism.³³ According to Stoicism, the universe operates according to a rational, predetermined order, and everything that happens is already set in motion by a divine, cosmic intelligence.³⁴ Since everything unfolds according to this predetermined plan, the gods, in their wisdom, provide glimpses of future events through divination.³⁵ Quintus asserts that denying divination would mean rejecting the very foundation of Stoic belief—namely, that the universe is governed by divine reason and that human beings are given tools to understand their fate.³⁶ He presents divination as a gift from the gods, an instrument through which mortals can navigate uncertainty and align themselves with the divine plan.³⁷ To deny divination, he suggests, would not only be philosophically inconsistent but also an act of impiety.³⁸

²⁷ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 130.

²⁸ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 102.

²⁹ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 247.

³⁰ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.75.

³¹ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 128.

³² Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 47..

³³ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II.55.

³⁴ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 248.

³⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.65.

³⁶ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 140.

³⁷ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.1.

³⁸ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 37.

Beyond its philosophical justifications, Quintus emphasizes the political and religious necessity of divination and maintaining order within Roman society.³⁹ He argues that divination is not merely a spiritual practice but a critical institution that shapes governance and reinforces Roman values.⁴⁰ He asserts that Rome's greatest leaders—Romulus, Numa, and even Julius Caesar—have all consulted divination before making important decisions.⁴¹ The very legitimacy of Roman rule, he argues, is intertwined with the idea that leaders act with divine guidance.⁴² If divination were dismissed as fraudulent, it would undermine the authority of religious officials, weaken the credibility of the Senate, and erode public trust in Rome's institutions.⁴³

Quintus also draws attention to the consequences of ignoring divine warnings.⁴⁴ He recounts famous instances in which rulers and generals ignored omens at their own peril, resulting in military disasters and political upheaval.⁴⁵ One such example is Cicero's story of King Croesus of Lydia, who misunderstood an oracle's prophecy and miscalculated his campaign against Persia, leading to his downfall.⁴⁶ Closer to Rome, the disastrous defeat of Crassus at Carrhae in 53 BCE is often cited as an event foretold by negative omens, which Crassus ignored to his detriment.⁴⁷ Quintus uses such cases to argue that rejecting divination is not only foolish but also dangerous, as it blinds leaders to the warnings that could prevent catastrophe.⁴⁸

Ultimately, Quintus presents divination as a cornerstone of Roman religious political identity, warning that rejecting it would mean abandoning Rome's sacred traditions.⁴⁹ He argues that faith in divination has been essential to Rome's expansion and stability, and its removal would destabilize the Republic by severing its connection to the

³⁹ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.48.

⁴¹ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 246.

⁴² David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 76.

⁴³ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 38.

⁴⁴ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 150.

⁴⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.15.

⁴⁶ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 248.

⁴⁷ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 104.

⁴⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.30.

⁴⁹ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 155.

gods.⁵⁰ For Quintus, divination is not just about foreseeing the future; it is about maintaining the moral and spiritual order that has made Rome the greatest civilization of its time.⁵¹ By defending divination, he is defending the religious and political integrity of the Republic itself.⁵²

Cicero's Skeptical Response (Book II)

In Book II of *De Divinatione*, Cicero systematically dismantles Quintus' defense of divination, arguing that it is inherently unreliable, inconsistent, and lacks any rational justification.⁵³ While he acknowledges the deep roots of divination in the Roman tradition, he challenges the assumption that divinatory practices offer any real insight into future events.⁵⁴ His critique is rooted in logical reasoning and empirical skepticism, targeting both the theoretical foundation of divination and the practical failures of its application.⁵⁵

At the heart of Cicero's argument is the lack of a causal connection between divinatory signs and real-world events.⁵⁶ He questions why random occurrences—such as bird flights, lightning strikes, or the arrangement of animal entrails—should be seen as predictors of the future.⁵⁷ Drawing from empirical observation and common sense, he asserts that correlation does not imply causation: just because an event follows an omen does not mean the omen caused the event.⁵⁸ Cicero mocks the idea that celestial movements or sacrificial rituals could determine the outcome of wars, personal fates, or political decisions, presenting it as a superstitious and irrational belief.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 42.

⁵¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.60

⁵² Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 250.

⁵³ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.35.

⁵⁴ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 105..

⁵⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.45.

⁵⁶ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.47

⁵⁷ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 78.

⁵⁸ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 160.

⁵⁹ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II.70.

Cicero also highlights the contradictions and inconsistencies within divinatory practices.⁶⁰ He argues that if the gods truly communicated through omens, their messages would be clear and universally interpretable.⁶¹ Instead, different diviners frequently provide conflicting interpretations of the same omens, which undermines their reliability.⁶² Cicero points out that one haruspex might interpret an animal's liver markings as a good omen, while another might declare the same sign as a warning of impending disaster.⁶³ If divination were truly a science or divine gift, he argues, it would be consistent, repeatable, and universally agreed upon, much like natural laws or mathematical principles.⁶⁴ The fact that two diviners might reach completely different conclusions from the same set of signs exposes the subjectivity and arbitrariness of the practice.⁶⁵

One of Cicero's sharpest critiques targets the political use of divination as a tool of manipulation.⁶⁶ He argues that religious officials—particularly augurs, haruspices, and oracular priests—often fabricate or manipulate omens to justify political decisions, sway public opinion, or consolidate power.⁶⁷ He accuses Rome's ruling elite of exploiting superstition to maintain control, noting that a well-timed prophecy could be used to justify war, prevent elections, or suppress dissent.⁶⁸ Goar (1968) supports this view, arguing that Cicero saw divination not as a genuine religious practice but as a means of political control.⁶⁹ Cicero suggests that the manipulation of augury and haruspicy was a strategy Rome's religious authorities used to maintain their influence over the state.⁷⁰

Beyond political exploitation, Cicero attacks the fundamental assumptions of astrology and fate, arguing that they fail to account for free will and external

⁶⁰ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 251.

⁶¹ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 46.

⁶² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.50.

⁶³ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 106.

⁶⁴ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 165.

⁶⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.55.

⁶⁶ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 253.

⁶⁷ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.35.

⁶⁸ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 48.

⁶⁹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.35.

⁷⁰ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 106.

circumstances.⁷¹ He famously challenges the logic of astrology by presenting a thought experiment:

*If a hundred soldiers, born under different stars, die on the same day in battle, how does astrology explain this?*⁷²

According to astrologers, one's fate is determined at birth by the alignment of the stars.⁷³ However, if this were true, how could so many men—each with unique astrological charts—share the same fate?⁷⁴ If celestial bodies controlled life events, shouldn't their fates be different?⁷⁵ The reality of war, Cicero argues, disproves the deterministic worldview of astrologers.⁷⁶ The deaths of soldiers on the battlefield are dictated by strategy, chance, and human agency—not by the stars under which they were born.⁷⁷

Cicero's critique extends beyond astrology, targeting Stoic determinism as a whole.⁷⁸ The Stoics believed that everything in the universe is preordained by a rational, divine order and that divination merely reveals this predetermined fate.⁷⁹ Cicero rejects this notion outright, arguing that such a worldview negates human agency and moral responsibility.⁸⁰ If everything is already fated, he asks, why should anyone bother making decisions or taking precautions?⁸¹ He sarcastically suggests that if fate has already decided the outcome of battles, generals should abandon military strategy altogether and simply wait for the stars to dictate victory or defeat.⁸² His critique is not only philosophical but also practical, exposing the absurdity of relying on predestination over reasoned action.⁸³

⁷¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.45

⁷² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.47

⁷³ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 78

⁷⁴ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 160

⁷⁵ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II.70

⁷⁶ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 251

⁷⁷ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 46

⁷⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.50

⁷⁹ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 106

⁸⁰ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 165

⁸¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.55

⁸² Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 48

⁸³ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 253

Additionally, Cicero turns to empirical examples to refute divination's effectiveness. He asks:

*If divination is real, why do so many prophecies fail?*⁸⁴

*Why do some omens lead to correct predictions while others do not?*⁸⁵

*If divine messages were truly reliable, why do Romans continue to experience military defeats and disasters?*⁸⁶

He cites examples of failed prophecies, such as generals who followed divinatory guidance only to suffer catastrophic losses in battle.⁸⁷ These cases, he argues, demonstrate that divination is nothing more than guesswork, where believers remember the few instances where predictions seem accurate while ignoring the countless times they fail.⁸⁸ This, in modern terms, is an example of confirmation bias—believers in divination selectively remember successes while disregarding failures.⁸⁹ Cicero's skepticism anticipates modern psychological critiques of superstition, highlighting how human cognition is wired to find patterns even where none exist.⁹⁰

In challenging divination, Cicero also aims to redefine the proper relationship between religion and reason. He does not reject the gods entirely, nor does he deny that divine forces might influence the universe.⁹¹ However, he argues that true wisdom lies in rational thought, not in blindly following superstitions.⁹² He presents philosophy and reason as superior guides to decision-making, advocating for critical inquiry over unquestioning faith in omens.⁹³

⁸⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.24-25

⁸⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.49

⁸⁶ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.51

⁸⁷ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.46

⁸⁸ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 250

⁸⁹ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 78

⁹⁰ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 46

⁹¹ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.60

⁹² Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 160

⁹³ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 106

Ultimately, Cicero's Book II is not merely a rejection of divination—it is a broader statement about how humans should approach knowledge, belief, and decision-making.⁹⁴ His critique exposes the flaws in superstition, the inconsistencies in religious

practices, and the dangers of allowing irrational beliefs to dictate policy.⁹⁵ By doing so, he aligns himself with the tradition of Academic Skepticism, which prioritizes evidence-based reasoning over unfounded traditions.⁹⁶ His arguments remain highly relevant today, influencing scientific skepticism, secular philosophy, and modern critiques of pseudoscience.⁹⁷

By dismantling divination with logic, empirical observation, and philosophical reasoning, Cicero presents one of the most enduring critiques of superstition in the ancient world—a critique that continues to resonate in debates over religion, science, and belief systems today.⁹⁸

The Use of Dialogue as a Literary Tool

One of the most interesting aspects of *De Divinatione* is its dialogue format, which allows Cicero to present both perspectives while subtly steering the reader toward his own conclusions.⁹⁹ This method follows the tradition of Plato's Socratic dialogues, where ideas are tested through structured debate.¹⁰⁰ However, as Schofield (2013) argues, Quintus is not an intellectually equal opponent but rather a rhetorical device designed to make Cicero's arguments appear stronger.¹⁰¹

Unlike genuine philosophical dialogues that encourage open-ended debate, *De Divinatione* is structured so that Cicero's counter-arguments seem inevitable.¹⁰² This

⁹⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.65

⁹⁵ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 48

⁹⁶ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 165

⁹⁷ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 253

⁹⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.70

⁹⁹ Malcolm Schofield, *Cicero and Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 132

¹⁰⁰ Plato, *Republic*, trans. by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), II.376b

¹⁰¹ Schofield, *Cicero and Stoic Philosophy*, p. 135

¹⁰² Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 47

raises an important question: Was Cicero truly engaging with Stoic arguments, or was he constructing a convenient opponent to dismantle?¹⁰³ This strategic use of dialogue demonstrates how *De Divinatione* is not just a philosophical work but also a carefully

crafted rhetorical exercise.¹⁰⁴ This dialogue exchange approach to the works is thorough and relatable. While based on the evidence he provides, one may feel akin to Quidus's beliefs in Book I, Cicero, in Book II, presents a compelling case that gives pause to any solid agreement one may have had.¹⁰⁵

There is ongoing debate over whether Cicero's skepticism was a genuine philosophical stance or a rhetorical tool. Some scholars, like Burriss (1924), argue that Cicero was not completely rejecting religion but rather attempting to redefine it in a way that aligned with his rationalist beliefs.¹⁰⁶ Others, like Flower (2007), suggest that Cicero's critique was part of a larger intellectual movement in the late Republic, where traditional beliefs were being challenged by a growing emphasis on empirical reasoning.¹⁰⁷

Ultimately, Cicero's position in *De Divinatione* is both a philosophical critique and a strategic challenge to Rome's religious institutions.¹⁰⁸ His skepticism is rooted in logic, but it also serves a political function in questioning the authority of those who used divination for state control.¹⁰⁹ Cicero's critique of divination in *De Divinatione* is a masterclass in rhetorical argumentation, blending philosophical skepticism with political critique. His systematic dismantling of divinatory practices is grounded in logic and empirical reasoning, yet the dialogue structure makes it clear that his goal was not just inquiry but persuasion.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 170

¹⁰⁴ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 255

¹⁰⁵ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.10

¹⁰⁶ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 104

¹⁰⁷ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 170

¹⁰⁸ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 48

¹⁰⁹ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 253

¹¹⁰ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.30

Divination, by nature, cannot stand up to scientific questioning nor be defined or explained to satisfy logic. Cicero knows this yet presents his argument as valid by imposing laws of nature to a practice that is widely accepted to defy said laws.¹¹¹ By accepting the existence of a God, as Cicero does in the final pages of Book II, we see that

he does indeed believe in a higher power.¹¹² However, he argues against the possibility of its interference in human affairs. By asking questions like *why would the gods send messages through birds when they are all powerful*, he is assigning human interpretations of the god's intentions to a divine being.¹¹³

Cicero's skepticism in *De Divinatione* resonated with later intellectual movements that sought to challenge superstition and unfounded religious claims. During the Enlightenment, philosophers like Voltaire and David Hume built upon Cicero's critiques, arguing that belief in omens and prophecy was incompatible with rational thought.¹¹⁴ Voltaire, in particular, admired Cicero's logical approach and echoed his arguments against superstitious interpretations of natural events.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Hume's works on empiricism and causality reflect Cicero's insistence that correlation does not imply causation, especially regarding prophetic claims.¹¹⁶

While Cicero's arguments remain compelling, they raise deeper questions about the nature of belief, the limits of human knowledge, and the role of religious tradition in society.¹¹⁷ His critique forces readers to confront whether faith in divine signs is merely an extension of human psychology—an attempt to impose order on an uncertain world—or if there is indeed a higher force guiding human affairs.¹¹⁸ By challenging the assumptions underlying divination, Cicero indirectly critiques broader religious practices, questioning how much of human belief is shaped by tradition rather than evidence.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 47

¹¹² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.72

¹¹³ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 175

¹¹⁴ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 80

¹¹⁵ Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. by Theodore Besterman (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 112

¹¹⁶ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 82

¹¹⁷ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II.60

¹¹⁸ Beard, 'Cicero and Divination', p. 49

¹¹⁹ Goar, 'The Purpose of *De Divinatione*', p. 254

This skepticism remains relevant today, particularly in debates surrounding science, religion, and the limits of rational inquiry.¹²⁰

Furthermore, *De Divinatione* reflects the delicate balance between reason and tradition, a theme that has resurfaced in various intellectual and political movements

throughout history.¹²¹ In the context of ancient Rome, Cicero's skepticism was as much a political statement as it was a philosophical one, calling into question the legitimacy of religious figures who wielded power through divine interpretation.¹²² This challenge to authority has resonated with later thinkers, including Enlightenment philosophers and modern scientific rationalists, who have used Cicero's arguments to critique astrology, supernatural claims, and pseudoscience.¹²³

Whether seen as a rejection of divine influence or a strategic attempt to reshape Roman religious thought, *De Divinatione* remains one of the most influential and enduring critiques of religious prophecy in the ancient world, continuing to inspire discussions on faith, reason, and human perception in the modern era.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, p. 180

¹²¹ Burriss, 'Cicero's Religious Unbelief', p. 107

¹²² Schofield, *Cicero and Stoic Philosophy*, p. 145

¹²³ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 84

¹²⁴ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.75

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