

Cicero – Scipio’s Dream Adaptation

In book SIX of Cicero’s Republic, he has his main character, Scipio, tell a story about a dream he had. The story begins with Africanus, a famous general, visiting Scipio. He tells him that he will defeat Carthage, a city under Roman influence but currently trying to exert its own power. After Scipio defeats Carthage, he will receive an “honor of triumph”, be given a prominent position in Roman government and visit Egypt, Syria, Asia, and Greece as an esteemed ambassador.

However, Africanus then warns that the Roman Republic will go through difficult times and its people will turn to Scipio. He says,

...then shall the whole city have recourse to you alone, and place its hopes in your auspicious name. On you the senate, all good citizens, the allies, the people of Latium, shall cast their eyes; on you the preservation of the state shall entirely depend. In a word, if you escape the impious machinations of your relatives, you will, in the quality of dictator, establish order and tranquility in the commonwealth.

These predictions scare Scipio. But Africanus reassured him that

for all those who have in any way conduced to the preservation, defense, and enlargement of their native country, there is a certain place in heaven, where they shall enjoy an eternity of happiness. For nothing on earth is more agreeable to God, the Supreme Governor of the universe, than the assemblies and societies of men united together by laws, which are called States. It is from heaven their rulers and preservers came, and there they return.

This talk of heaven made Scipio wonder if his father, Paulus, was alive in heaven. At that moment, his father appeared. Scipio’s eyes welled up with tears and his father held him, urging him not to be sad.

When Scipio gathered himself, he asked why he couldn’t join his father. Paulus responded,

That is impossible; unless that God, whose temples is all that vast expanse you behold, shall free you from the fetters of the body, you can have no admission into this place. Mankind have received their being on this very condition, that they should labor for the preservation of that globe, which is situated, as you see, in the midst of this temple, and is called earth.

It is your duty, and that of all who have any veneration for the gods, to preserve this wonderful union of soul and body; nor without the express command of him who gave you a soul, should the least thought be entertained of quitting human life, lest you seem to desert the post assigned to you by God himself.

But Paulus said that Scipio could enter heaven if he was a good man and brought justice to his country. When he said this, they were transported to heaven and he asked Scipio to look around. Scipio describes heaven.

This was a shining circle, or zone, whose remarkable brightness distinguishes it among the constellations, and which, after the Greeks, you call the Milky Way. From thence, as I took a view of the universe, everything appeared beautiful and admirable; for there, those stars are to be seen that are never visible from our globe, and everything appears of such magnitude as we could not have imagined. The least of all the stars, was that removed furthest from heaven, and situated next to earth; I mean our moon, which shines with a borrowed light. Now the globes of the stars far surpass the magnitude of our earth, which at that distance appeared so exceedingly small, that I could not but be sensibly affected on seeing our whole empire no larger than if we touched the earth with a point.

Scipio then says that the earth was at the center of revolving spheres. Heaven is furthest from the earth, then Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury and the Moon, lowest of all of the spheres.

Then Scipio heard a sound, like a persistent hum all around him. He asked

Pray what is this sound that strikes my ears in so loud and agreeable a manner? To which Paulus replied It is that which is called the *music of the spheres*, being produced by their motion and impulse; and being formed by unequal intervals, but such as are divided according to the most just proportion, it produces, by duly tempering acute with grave sounds, various concerts of *harmony*. For it is impossible that motions so great should be performed without any noise

This celestial harmony has been imitated by learned musicians, both on stringed instruments and with the voice, whereby they have opened to themselves a way to return to the celestial regions, as have likewise many others who have employed their sublime genius while on earth in cultivating the divine sciences.

By the amazing noise of this sound, the ears of mankind have been in some degree deafened, and indeed, hearing is the dullest of all the human senses.

As Scipio continued to look around in awe, Africanus says

I perceive that you are still employed in contemplating the seat and residence of mankind. But if it appears to you so small, as in fact it really is, then despise its vanities, and fix your attention forever on these heavenly objects. Is it possible that you should attain any human applause or glory that is worth the contending for? The earth, you see, is peopled but in a very few places, and those too of small extent; and they appear like so many little spots of green scattered through vast uncultivated deserts. And those who inhabit the earth are not only so remote from each other as to be cut off from all mutual correspondence, but their situation being in oblique or contrary parts of the globe, or perhaps in those diametrically opposite to yours, all expectation of universal fame must fall to the ground.

Besides all this, if the progeny of any future generation should wish to transmit to their posterity the praises of any one of us which they have heard from their forefathers, yet the deluges and combustions of the earth which must necessarily happen at their destined periods will prevent our obtaining, not only an eternal, but even a durable glory. And after all, what does it signify, whether those who shall hereafter be born talk of you, when those who have lived before you, whose

number was perhaps not less, and whose merit certainly greater, were not so much as acquainted with your name?

After adding this perspective, Africanus tells Scipio how to get to heaven and why.

...exercise this mind of yours in the best pursuits. And the best pursuits are those which consist in promoting the good of your country. Such employments will speed the flight of your mind to this its proper abode; and its flight will be still more rapid, if, even while it is enclosed in the body, it will look abroad, and disengage itself as much as possible from its bodily dwelling, by the contemplation of things which are external to itself.

This it should do to the utmost of its power. For the minds of those who have given themselves up to the pleasures of the body, paying as it were a servile obedience to their lustful impulses, have violated the laws of God and man; and therefore, when they are separated from their bodies, flutter continually round the earth on which they lived, and are not allowed to return to this celestial region, till they have been purified by the revolution of many ages.

Thus saying he vanished, and I awoke from my dream.

Cicero – Scipio’s Dream Questions

Name: _____ Period: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions using the *Scipio’s Dream* reading.

1. How would you describe Scipio? What type of a person is he?

2. How does God feel about government, according to Africanus?

3. Why can’t people live in heaven? Why must they live on earth?

4. Describe the universe according to Cicero.

5. What is the music of the spheres? Why don’t people on earth hear it?

6. What does Africanus say about fame?

7. What are the best pursuits according to Africanus? What happens if you follow “lustful impulses” instead?
