There are two difficulties in the received text of this paragraph: *primum* seems to have no correlate, and *nihil est enim* . . . . *individuum potest* is a curiously oblique and elliptical way of refuting the atomic theory. Editors from Lambinus to A. S. Pease have therefore assumed a lacuna after *enim*, and many suggestions as to its length and content have been made 1). The object of the present note is to show that the manuscript text is in fact sound and that the unusual form of the argument as it stands is of special significance.

Firstly, with reference to *primum*; Mayor’s suggestion, in his note on the passage, that its correlate is to be found in *concedam igitur* . . . of § 67 is certainly attractive 2). Cotta’s objection to the Epicurean account of the composition of the gods is twofold: first and foremost the premiss is invalid, since there are no atoms (*quae primum nullae sunt*); secondly, even if there were atoms, it would not follow that the gods are eternal (*concedam igitur . . . sint sane ex atomis [sc: dei]; non igitur aeterni—*).

As for the elliptical nature of the argument, we can expand it as follows:

1) If there is no void there can be no atoms (*major premiss*).

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1) The neatest and most convincing is still Lambinus’s: *nihil est enim minimum, deinde non est inane; nihil est enim quod* . . .

2) For a similar use of *primum* cf. I 62-64 and also *Acad*. II 13-16.
(2) (a) nihil est quod nacet corpore: Everything that exists has body, i.e. has the basic property ascribed to the atom in Epicurean physics.

(b) corporibus autem omnis obsidetur locus: Every place in the universe is occupied by body, so that there is no room left for the Epicurean void.

Therefore there is no void (minor premiss) 1).

(3) Therefore there can be no atoms.

As the passage stands, the major premiss is not explicitly stated, so that the argument appears to be directed only at one half of the Epicurean theory, namely the doctrine of void.

The concept of void has often puzzled philosophers, and in Antiquity seemed a much more vulnerable target to critics of the atomic theory than the correlative concept of the atom, since it was open to the objection first formulated by the Eleatics, and apparently used by them against Leucippian atomism, that void was τὸ μὴ δόν and so could not exist 2). We are told that the Stoics included a discussion of void in their physics 3) and that Cleanthes and Sphaerus both wrote treatises against Atomism 4). Although the content of these works is not known, it seems probable that they developed their attack on the atomic doctrine, as the Eleatics had before them, directly from their own teachings about void.

Adopting the Aristotelian distinction between τόπος and κενὸν 5) the Stoics maintained that within the universe there could be no space —τόπος—that was not occupied by body-σῶμα 6). Empty space

1) A. S. Pease in his note on the passage appears to take corporibus autem ... locus as a minor premiss, which is surely mistaken.

2) Parmenides, F.V. 28 B 2, 6, & 8, Melissus, F.V. 30 B 7. The systematically misleading character of the phrase τὸ μὴ δόν makes it an easy prey to this purely verbal objection, which however still seemed convincing even to Descartes: cf. his Principia Philosophiae, II, 16.

3) Diog. Laert. VII 132. Some specific accounts of this topic are mentioned ib. 140.

4) Ib. 134 and 178.


6) For the Stoic doctrine that all existents are material (σῶματα, corpora) cf. Cicero Acad. I 39; Diog. Laert. VII 150; S.V.F. II, 387 (Aetius); S.V.F. II, 359 (Clem. Alex.).