

THE TAO OF  
**SENECA**

Practical Letters from a Stoic Master



BASED ON THE WRITINGS OF SENECA

Foreword by **Tim Ferriss**

FEATURING ESSAYS BY MODERN STOIC THINKERS

**VOLUME 2**



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## **The Tao of Seneca, Volume 2**

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translated by Richard Mott Gummere.

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**THESE VOLUMES ARE DEDICATED  
TO ALL WHO SEEK TO BETTER  
THEMSELVES AND, IN DOING SO,  
BETTER THE WORLD.**

*—Tim Ferriss*

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# SUGGESTED SHORT READING



If you ever feel overwhelmed by longer reads in this book, below are a few 5–10-minute options that punch above their weight.

Each of these blog posts explores how to apply practical philosophies in the real world, and the first is the most important to me personally:

Fear-Setting: The Most Valuable Exercise I Do Every Month

([tim.blog/fear-setting](http://tim.blog/fear-setting))

Stoicism 101: A Practical Guide for Entrepreneurs

([tim.blog/stoicism101](http://tim.blog/stoicism101))

On The Shortness of Life: An Introduction to Seneca

([tim.blog/shortness](http://tim.blog/shortness))

How to Use Philosophy as a Personal Operating System:

From Seneca to Musashi

([tim.blog/philosophy](http://tim.blog/philosophy))

Discovering Kindness In The Storm

([tim.blog/kindness](http://tim.blog/kindness))

Stoicism for Modern Stresses: 5 Lessons from Cato

([tim.blog/less-stress](http://tim.blog/less-stress))

是色  
空即



**Japanese:** *Shiki Soku Ze Ku*

**English:** Taken together, *Shiki Soku Ze Ku* suggests that color (a metaphor for form) is empty. Total meaning: form is emptiness, a common phrase in Buddhist teaching.

*(Read vertically from top right to bottom left.  
Each character is one word above.)*

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Calligrapher: Noriko Lake

*On Various Aspects of Virtue*

I have just seen my former school-mate Claranus for the first time in many years. You need not wait for me to add that he is an old man; but I assure you that I found him hale in spirit and sturdy, although he is wrestling with a frail and feeble body. For Nature acted unfairly when she gave him a poor domicile for so rare a soul; or perhaps it was because she wished to prove to us that an absolutely strong and happy mind can lie hidden under any exterior. Be that as it may, Claranus overcomes all these hindrances, and by despising his own body has arrived at a stage where he can despise other things also.

The poet who sang

*Worth shows more pleasing in a form that's fair,<sup>[1]</sup>*

is, in my opinion, mistaken. For virtue needs nothing to set it off; it is its own great glory, and it hallows the body in which it dwells. At any rate, I have begun to regard Claranus in a different light; he seems to me handsome, and as well-setup in body as in mind.

A great man can spring from a hovel; so can a beautiful and great soul from an ugly and insignificant body. For this reason Nature seems to me to breed certain men of this stamp with the idea of proving that virtue springs into birth in any place whatever. Had it been possible for her to produce souls by themselves

and naked, she would have done so; as it is, Nature does a still greater thing, for she produces certain men who, though hampered in their bodies, none the less break through the obstruction.

I think Claranus has been produced as a pattern, that we might be enabled to understand that the soul is not disfigured by the ugliness of the body, but rather the opposite, that the body is beautified by the comeliness of the soul.

Now, though Claranus and I have spent very few days together, we have nevertheless had many conversations, which I will at once pour forth and pass on to you.

The first day we investigated this problem: how can goods be equal if they are of three kinds?<sup>[2]</sup> For certain of them, according to our philosophical tenets, are primary, such as joy, peace, and the welfare of one's country. Others are of the second order, moulded in an unhappy material, such as the endurance of suffering, and self-control during severe illness. We shall pray outright for the goods of the first class; for the second class we shall pray only if the need shall arise. There is still a third variety, as, for example, a modest gait, a calm and honest countenance, and a bearing that suits the man of wisdom.

Now how can these things be equal when we compare them, if you grant that we ought to pray for the one and avoid the other? If we would make distinctions among them, we had better return to the First Good, and consider what its nature is: the soul that gazes upon truth, that is skilled in what should be sought and what should be avoided, establishing standards of value not according to opinion, but according to nature—the soul that penetrates the whole world and directs its contemplating gaze upon all its Phenomena, paying strict attention to thoughts and actions, equally great and forceful, superior alike to hardships and blandishments, yielding itself to neither extreme of fortune, rising above all blessings and tribulations, absolutely beautiful,

perfectly equipped with grace as well as with strength, healthy and sinewy,<sup>[3]</sup> unruffled, undismayed, one which no violence can shatter, one which acts of chance can neither exalt nor depress—a soul like this is virtue itself.

There you have its outward appearance, if it should ever come under a single view and show itself once in all its completeness. But there are many aspects of it. They unfold themselves according as life varies and as actions differ; but virtue itself does not become less or greater.<sup>[4]</sup> For the Supreme Good cannot diminish, nor may virtue retrograde; rather is it transformed, now into one quality and now into another, shaping itself according to the part which it is to play.

Whatever it has touched it brings into likeness with itself, and dyes with its own colour. It adorns our actions, our friendships, and sometimes entire households which it has entered and set in order. Whatever it has handled it forthwith makes lovable, notable, admirable.

Therefore the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is superlatively great. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate.

Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements. Constancy cannot advance further, any more than fidelity, or truthfulness, or loyalty. What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned.<sup>[5]</sup> What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also

belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect.

The good, in every instance, is subject to these same laws. The advantage of the state and that of the individual are yoked together; indeed it is as impossible to separate them as to separate the commendable from the desirable. Therefore, virtues are mutually equal; and so are the works of virtue, and all men who are so fortunate as to possess these virtues.

But, since the virtues of plants and of animals are perishable, they are also frail and fleeting and uncertain. They spring up, and they sink down again, and for this reason they are not rated at the same value; but to human virtues only one rule applies. For right reason is single and of but one kind. Nothing is more divine than the divine, or more heavenly than the heavenly.

Mortal things decay, fall, are worn out, grow up, are exhausted, and replenished. Hence, in their case, in view of the uncertainty of their lot, there is inequality; but of things divine the nature is one. Reason, however, is nothing else than a portion of the divine spirit set in a human body.<sup>[6]</sup> If reason is divine, and the good in no case lacks reason, then the good in every case is divine. And furthermore, there is no distinction between things divine; hence there is none between goods, either. Therefore it follows that joy and a brave unyielding endurance of torture are equal goods; for in both there is the same greatness of soul relaxed and cheerful in the one case, in the other combative and braced for action.

What? Do you not think that the virtue of him who bravely storms the enemy's stronghold is equal to that of him who endures a siege with the utmost patience? Great is Scipio when he invests Numantia,<sup>[7]</sup> and constrains and compels the hands of an enemy, whom he could not conquer, to resort to their own destruction. Great also are the souls of the defenders—men who know that, as long as the path to death lies open, the blockade is not complete,

men who breathe their last in the arms of liberty. In like manner, the other virtues are also equal as compared with one another: tranquillity, simplicity, generosity, constancy, equanimity, endurance. For underlying them all is a single virtue—that which renders the soul straight and unswerving.

“What then,” you say; “is there no difference between joy and unyielding endurance of pain?” None at all, as regards the virtues themselves; very great, however, in the circumstances in which either of these two virtues is displayed. In the one case, there is a natural relaxation and loosening of the soul; in the other there is an unnatural pain. Hence these circumstances, between which a great distinction can be drawn, belong to the category of indifferent things,<sup>[8]</sup> but the virtue shown in each case is equal.

Virtue is not changed by the matter with which it deals; if the matter is hard and stubborn, it does not make the virtue worse; if pleasant and joyous, it does not make it better. Therefore, virtue necessarily remains equal. For, in each case, what is done is done with equal uprightness, with equal wisdom, and with equal honour. Hence the states of goodness involved are equal, and it is impossible for a man to transcend these states of goodness by conducting himself better, either the one man in his joy, or the other amid his suffering. And two goods, neither of which can possibly be better, are equal.

For if things which are extrinsic to virtue can either diminish or increase virtue, then that which is honourable<sup>[9]</sup> ceases to be the only good. If you grant this, honour has wholly perished. And why? Let me tell you: it is because no act is honourable that is done by an unwilling agent, that is compulsory. Every honourable act is voluntary. Alloy it with reluctance, complaints, cowardice, or fear, and it loses its best characteristic—self-approval. That which is not free cannot be honourable; for fear means slavery.

The honourable is wholly free from anxiety and is calm; if it ever objects, laments, or regards anything as an evil, it becomes subject to disturbance and begins to flounder about amid great confusion. For on one side the semblance of right calls to it, on the other the suspicion of evil drags it back, therefore, when a man is about to do something honourable, he should not regard any obstacles as evils, even though he regard them as inconvenient, but he should will to do the deed, and do it willingly. For every honourable act is done without commands or compulsion; it is unalloyed and contains no admixture of evil.

I know what you may reply to me at this point: “Are you trying to make us believe that it does not matter whether a man feels joy, or whether he lies upon the rack and tires out his torturer?” I might say in answer: “Epicurus also maintains that the wise man, though he is being burned in the bull of Phalaris,<sup>[10]</sup> will cry out: “Tis pleasant, and concerns me not at all.” Why need you wonder, if I maintain that he who reclines at a banquet and the victim who stoutly withstands torture possess equal goods, when Epicurus maintains a thing that is harder to believe, namely, that it is pleasant to be roasted in this way?

But the reply which I do make, is that there is great difference between joy and pain; if I am asked to choose, I shall seek the former and avoid the latter. The former is according to nature, the latter contrary to it. So long as they are rated by this standard, there is a great gulf between; but when it comes to a question of the virtue involved, the virtue in each case is the same, whether it comes through joy or through sorrow.

Vexation and pain and other inconveniences are of no consequence, for they are overcome by virtue. Just as the brightness of the sun dims all lesser lights, so virtue, by its own greatness, shatters and overwhelms all pains, annoyances, and wrongs; and wherever its radiance reaches, all lights which shine without the



help of virtue are extinguished; and inconveniences, when they come in contact with virtue, play no more important a part than does a storm-cloud at sea.

This can be proved to you by the fact that the good man will hasten unhesitatingly to any noble deed; even though he be confronted by the hangman, the torturer, and the stake, he will persist, regarding not what he must suffer, but what he must do; and he will entrust himself as readily to an honourable deed as he would to a good man; he will consider it advantageous to himself, safe, propitious. And he will hold the same view concerning an honourable deed, even though it be fraught with sorrow and hardship, as concerning a good man who is poor or wasting away in exile.

Come now, contrast a good man who is rolling in wealth with a man who has nothing, except that in himself he has all things; they will be equally good, though they experience unequal fortune. This same standard, as I have remarked, is to be applied to things as well as to men; virtue is just as praiseworthy if it dwells in a sound and free body, as in one which is sickly or in bondage.

Therefore, as regards your own virtue also, you will not praise it any more, if fortune has favoured it by granting you a sound body, than if fortune has endowed you with a body that is crippled in some member, since that would mean rating a master low because he is dressed like a slave. For all those things over which Chance holds sway are chattels, money, person, position; they are weak, shifting, prone to perish, and of uncertain tenure. On the other hand, the works of virtue are free and unsubdued, neither more worthy to be sought when fortune treats them kindly, nor less worthy when any adversity weighs upon them.

Now friendship in the case of men corresponds to desirability in the case of things. You would not, I fancy, love a good man if he were rich any more than if he were poor, nor would you love

a strong and muscular person more than one who was slender and of delicate constitution. Accordingly, neither will you seek or love a good thing that is mirthful and tranquil more than one that is full of perplexity and toil.

Or, if you do this, you will, in the case of two equally good men, care more for him who is neat and well-groomed than for him who is dirty and unkempt. You would next go so far as to care more for a good man who is sound in all his limbs and without blemish, than for one who is weak or purblind; and gradually your fastidiousness would reach such a point that, of two equally just and prudent men, you would choose him who has long curling hair! Whenever the virtue in each one is equal, the inequality in their other attributes is not apparent. For all other things are not parts, but merely accessories.

Would any man judge his children so unfairly as to care more for a healthy son than for one who was sickly, or for a tall child of unusual stature more than for one who was short or of middling height? Wild beasts show no favouritism among their offspring; they lie down in order to suckle all alike; birds make fair distribution of their food. Ulysses hastens back to the rocks of his Ithaca as eagerly as Agamemnon speeds to the kingly walls of Mycenae. For no man loves his native land because it is great; he loves it because it is his own.<sup>[11]</sup>

And what is the purpose of all this? That you may know that virtue regards all her works in the same light, as if they were her children, showing equal kindness to all, and still deeper kindness to those which encounter hardships; for even parents lean with more affection towards those of their offspring for whom they feel pity. Virtue, too, does not necessarily love more deeply those of her works which she beholds in trouble and under heavy burdens, but, like good parents, she gives them more of her fostering care.

Why is no good greater than any other good? It is because nothing can be more fitting than that which is fitting, and nothing more level than that which is level. You cannot say that one thing is more equal to a given object than another thing; hence also nothing is more honourable than that which is honourable.

Accordingly, if all the virtues are by nature equal, the three varieties<sup>[12]</sup> of goods are equal. This is what I mean: there is an equality between feeling joy with self-control and suffering pain with self-control. The joy in the one case does not surpass in the other the steadfastness of soul that gulps down the groan when the victim is in the clutches of the torturer; goods of the first kind are desirable, while those of the second are worthy of admiration; and in each case they are none the less equal, because whatever inconvenience attaches to the latter is compensated by the qualities of the good, which is so much greater.

Any man who believes them to be unequal is turning away from the virtues themselves and is surveying mere externals; true goods have the same weight and the same width.<sup>[13]</sup> The spurious sort contain much emptiness; hence, when they are weighed in the balance, they are found wanting, although they look imposing and grand to the gaze.

Yes, my dear Lucilius, the good which true reason approves is solid and everlasting; it strengthens the spirit and exalts it, so that it will always be on the heights; but those things which are thoughtlessly praised, and are goods in the opinion of the mob merely puff us up with empty joy. And again, those things which are feared as if they were evils merely inspire trepidation in men's minds, for the mind is disturbed by the semblance of danger, just as animals are disturbed.

Hence it is without reason that both these things distract and sting the spirit; the one is not worthy of joy, nor the other of fear. It is reason alone that is unchangeable, that holds fast to its

decisions. For reason is not a slave to the senses, but a ruler over them. Reason is equal to reason, as one straight line to another; therefore virtue also is equal to virtue. Virtue is nothing else than right reason. All virtues are reasons. Reasons are reasons, if they are right reasons. If they are right, they are also equal.

As reason is, so also are actions; therefore all actions are equal. For since they resemble reason, they also resemble each other. Moreover, I hold that actions are equal to each other in so far as they are honourable and right actions. There will be, of course, great differences according as the material varies, as it becomes now broader and now narrower, now glorious and now base, now manifold in scope and now limited. However, that which is best in all these cases is equal; they are all honourable.

In the same way, all good men, in so far as they are good, are equal. There are, indeed, differences of age, one is older, another younger; of body—one is comely, another is ugly; of fortune—this man is rich, that man poor, this one is influential, powerful, and well-known to cities and peoples, that man is unknown to most, and is obscure. But all, in respect of that wherein they are good, are equal.

The senses<sup>[14]</sup> do not decide upon things good and evil; they do not know what is useful and what is not useful. They cannot record their opinion unless they are brought face to face with a fact; they can neither see into the future nor recollect the past; and they do not know what results from what. But it is from such knowledge that a sequence and succession of actions is woven, and a unity of life is created—a unity which will proceed in a straight course. Reason, therefore, is the judge of good and evil; that which is foreign and external she regards as dross, and that which is neither good nor evil she judges as merely accessory, insignificant and trivial. For all her good resides in the soul.

But there are certain goods which reason regards as primary, to which she addresses herself purposely; these are, for example, victory, good children, and the welfare of one's country. Certain others she regards as secondary; these become manifest only in adversity—for example, equanimity in enduring severe illness or exile. Certain goods are indifferent; these are no more according to nature than contrary to nature, as, for example, a discreet gait and a sedate posture in a chair. For sitting is an act that is not less according to nature than standing or walking.

The two kinds of goods which are of a higher order are different; the primary are according to nature—such as deriving joy from the dutiful behaviour of one's children and from the well-being of one's country. The secondary are contrary to nature—such as fortitude in resisting torture or in enduring thirst when illness makes the vitals feverish.

“What then,” you say; “can anything that is contrary to nature be a good?” Of course not; but that in which this good takes its rise is sometimes contrary to nature. For being wounded, wasting away over a fire, being afflicted with bad health—such things are contrary to nature; but it is in accordance with nature for a man to preserve an indomitable soul amid such distresses.

To explain my thought briefly, the material with which a good is concerned is sometimes contrary to nature, but a good itself never is contrary, since no good is without reason, and reason is in accordance with nature.

“What, then,” you ask, “is reason?” It is copying nature.<sup>[15]</sup> “And what,” you say, “is the greatest good that man can possess?” It is to conduct oneself according to what nature wills.

“There is no doubt,” says the objector, “that peace affords more happiness when it has not been assailed than when it has been recovered at the cost of great slaughter.” “There is no doubt also,” he continues, “that health which has not been impaired affords

more happiness than health which has been restored to soundness by means of force, as it were, and by endurance of suffering, after serious illnesses that threaten life itself. And similarly there will be no doubt that joy is a greater good than a soul's struggle to endure to the bitter end the torments of wounds or burning at the stake."

By no means. For things that result from hazard admit of wide distinctions, since they are rated according to their usefulness in the eyes of those who experience them, but with regard to goods, the only point to be considered is that they are in agreement with nature; and this is equal in the case of all goods. When at a meeting of the Senate we vote in favour of someone's motion, it cannot be said, "A. is more in accord with the motion than B." All alike vote for the same motion. I make the same statement with regard to virtues—they are all in accord with nature; and I make it with regard to goods also—they are all in accord with nature.

One man dies young, another in old age, and still another in infancy, having enjoyed nothing more than a mere glimpse out into life. They have all been equally subject to death, even though death has permitted the one to proceed farther along the pathway of life, has cut off the life of the second in his flower, and has broken off the life of the third at its very beginning.

Some get their release at the dinner-table. Others extend their sleep into the sleep of death. Some are blotted out during dissipation.<sup>[16]</sup> Now contrast with these persons individuals who have been pierced by the sword, or bitten to death by snakes, or crushed in ruins, or tortured piecemeal out of existence by the prolonged twisting of their sinews. Some of these departures may be regarded as better, some as worse; but the act of dying is equal in all. The methods of ending life are different; but the end is one and the same. Death has no degrees of greater or less; for it has the same limit in all instances—the finishing of life.

The same thing holds true, I assure you, concerning goods; you will find one amid circumstances of pure pleasure, another amid sorrow and bitterness. The one controls the favours of fortune; the other overcomes her onslaughts. Each is equally a good, although the one travels a level and easy road, and the other a rough road. And the end of them all is the same—they are goods, they are worthy of praise, they accompany virtue and reason. Virtue makes all the things that it acknowledges equal to one another.

You need not wonder that this is one of our principles; we find mentioned in the works of Epicurus<sup>[17]</sup> two goods, of which his Supreme Good, or blessedness, is composed, namely, a body free from pain and a soul free from disturbance. These goods, if they are complete, do not increase; for how can that which is complete increase? The body is, let us suppose, free from pain; what increase can there be to this absence of pain? The soul is composed and calm; what increase can there be to this tranquillity?

Just as fair weather, purified into the purest brilliancy, does not admit of a still greater degree of clearness; so, when a man takes care of his body and of his soul, weaving the texture of his good from both, his condition is perfect, and he has found the consummation of his prayers, if there is no commotion in his soul or pain in his body. Whatever delights fall to his lot over and above these two things do not increase his Supreme Good; they merely season it, so to speak, and add spice to it. For the absolute good of man's nature is satisfied with peace in the body and peace in the soul.

I can show you at this moment in the writings of Epicurus<sup>[18]</sup> a graded list of goods just like that of our own school. For there are some things, he declares, which he prefers should fall to his lot, such as bodily rest free from all inconvenience, and relaxation of the soul as it takes delight in the contemplation of its own goods. And there are other things which, though he would prefer that they did not happen, he nevertheless praises and approves, for

example, the kind of resignation, in times of ill-health and serious suffering, to which I alluded a moment ago, and which Epicurus displayed on that last and most blessed day of his life. For he tells us<sup>[19]</sup> that he had to endure excruciating agony from a diseased bladder and from an ulcerated stomach, so acute that it permitted no increase of pain; “and yet,” he says, “that day was none the less happy.” And no man can spend such a day in happiness unless he possesses the Supreme Good.

We therefore find mentioned, even by Epicurus,<sup>[20]</sup> those goods which one would prefer not to experience; which, however, because circumstances have decided thus, must be welcomed and approved and placed on a level with the highest goods. We cannot say that the good which has rounded out<sup>[21]</sup> a happy life, the good for which Epicurus rendered thanks in the last words he uttered, is not equal to the greatest.

Allow me, excellent Lucilius, to utter a still bolder word: if any goods could be greater than others, I should prefer those which seem harsh to those which are mild and alluring, and should pronounce them greater. For it is more of an accomplishment to break one’s way through difficulties than to keep joy within bounds.

It requires the same use of reason, I am fully aware, for a man to endure prosperity well and also to endure misfortune bravely. What man may be just as brave who sleeps in front of the ramparts without fear of danger when no enemy attacks the camp, as the man who, when the tendons of his legs have been severed, holds himself up on his knees and does not let fall his weapons; but it is to the blood-stained soldier returning from the front that men cry: “Well done, thou hero!”<sup>[22]</sup> And therefore I should bestow greater praise upon those goods that have stood trial and show courage, and have fought it out with fortune.



Should I hesitate whether to give greater praise to the maimed and shrivelled hand of Mucius<sup>[23]</sup> than to the uninjured hand of the bravest man in the world? There stood Mucius, despising the enemy and despising the fire, and watched his hand as it dripped blood over the fire on his enemy's altar, until Porsenna, envying the fame of the hero whose punishment he was advocating, ordered the fire to be removed against the will of the victim.

Why should I not reckon this good among the primary goods, and deem it in so far greater than those other goods which are unattended by danger and have made no trial of fortune, as it is a rarer thing to have overcome a foe with a hand lost than with a hand armed? "What then?" you say; "shall you desire this good for yourself?" Of course I shall. For this is a thing that a man cannot achieve unless he can also desire it.

Should I desire, instead, to be allowed to stretch out my limbs for my slaves to massage,<sup>[24]</sup> or to have a woman, or a man changed into the likeness of a woman, pull my finger-joints? I cannot help believing that Mucius was all the more lucky because he manipulated the flames as calmly as if he were holding out his hand to the manipulator. He had wiped out all his previous mistakes; he finished the war unarmed and maimed; and with that stump of a hand he conquered two kings.<sup>[25]</sup> Farewell.

---

#### Footnotes

1. Vergil, *Aeneid*, v. 344.
2. Seneca is not speaking here of the three generic virtues (physical, ethical, logical), nor of the three kinds of goods (based on bodily advantage) which were classified by the Peripatetic school; he is only speaking of three sorts of circumstances under which the good can manifest itself. And in §§ 36 ff. he shows that he regards only the first two classes as real goods. See Zeller, *Stoics*, p. 230, n. 3.
3. *Siccus* (not in the sense of Ep. xviii. 4) here means "vigorous," "healthy," "dry"; i.e., free from dropsy, catarrh, etc.
4. Cf., from among many passages, Ep. lxxi. 20 f. and xcii. 16 ff.
5. i.e., constancy, fidelity, etc.

6. *Ratio* (λόγος) is also defined as God, as Absolute Truth, Destiny, etc. The same idea is evident in the definition of *sapientia* (the object of philosophy) as *rerum divinarum et humanarum . . . scientia* (Cic. *Off.* ii. 2. 5, etc.), and *nosse divina et humana et horum causas*, etc.
7. A Spanish city, reduced and razed to the ground in 133 B.C. by Scipio Africanus, the conqueror of Carthage.
8. Cf. Ep. xxxi. 4 and footnote (Vol. I).
9. Cf. Cicero, *De Fin.* ii. 14 f. Rackham translates as “moral worth”—a reminiscence of τὸ καλόν.
10. One of the stock bits of heroism attributed to the ideal wise man. Cf. Epicurus (Frag. 601 Usener), Cicero, *Tusc.* ii. 7. 17, etc.
11. A slight variation of the idea in Cicero, *De Orat.* i. 196 *si nos . . . nostra patria delectat, cuius rei tanta est vis ac tanta natura, ut Ithacam illam in asperrimis saxulis tamquam nidulum adfixam sapientissimus vir immortalitati anteponeret.*
12. i.e., of the soul, of the body, and of external goods.
13. Buecheler thinks that this alliterative phrase of Seneca’s is an echo of some popular proverb or line taken from a play.
14. Here Seneca is reminding Lucillius, as he so often does in the earlier letters, that the evidence of the senses is only a stepping-stone to higher ideas—an Epicurean tenet.
15. Another definition, developing further the thought expressed in § 12.
16. *Transcriber’s Note: The Latin, which Gummere translates politely, is: “Aliquem concubitus extinxit,” i.e., “Others are extinguished during sex.”*
17. Frag. 434 Usener.
18. Frag. 449 Usener.
19. Frag. 138 Usener.
20. See above, § 47.
21. *Clausula* has, among other meanings, that of “a period” (Quintil. viii. 5), and “the rhythmic close of a period” (Cic. *De Orat.* iii. 192).
22. For a full discussion of this phrase see Conington, *Excursus to Vergil’s Aeneid*, ix. 641.
23. For the story see Livy, ii. 12 ff.
24. A rare word—sometimes spelled *malacisso*—used by Plautus (*Bacch.* 73) and Laberius, but not in a technical sense.
25. Porsenna and Tarquin.

LETTER 67

*On Ill-Health and Endurance of Suffering*



If I may begin with a commonplace remark,<sup>[1]</sup> spring is gradually disclosing itself; but though it is rounding into summer, when you would expect hot weather, it has kept rather cool, and one cannot yet be sure of it. For it often slides back into winter weather. Do you wish to know how uncertain it still is? I do not yet trust myself to a bath which is absolutely cold; even at this time I break its chill. You may say that this is no way to show the endurance either of heat or of cold; very true, dear Lucilius, but at my time of life one is at length contented with the natural chill of the body. I can scarcely thaw out in the middle of summer. Accordingly, I spend most of the time bundled up; and I thank old age for keeping me fastened to my bed.<sup>[2]</sup> Why should I not thank old age on this account? That which I ought not to wish to do, I lack the ability to do. Most of my converse is with books. Whenever your letters arrive, I imagine that I am with you, and I have the feeling that I am about to speak my answer, instead of writing it. Therefore let us together investigate the nature of this problem of yours, just as if we were conversing with one another.<sup>[3]</sup>

You ask me whether every good is desirable. You say: "If it is a good to be brave under torture, to go to the stake with a stout heart, to endure illness with resignation, it follows that these things are desirable. But I do not see that any of them is worth

praying for. At any rate I have as yet known of no man who has paid a vow by reason of having been cut to pieces by the rod, or twisted out of shape by the gout, or made taller by the rack.”

My dear Lucilius, you must distinguish between these cases; you will then comprehend that there is something in them that is to be desired. I should prefer to be free from torture; but if the time comes when it must be endured, I shall desire that I may conduct myself therein with bravery, honour, and courage. Of course I prefer that war should not occur; but if war does occur, I shall desire that I may nobly endure the wounds, the starvation, and all that the exigency of war brings. Nor am I so mad as to crave illness; but if I must suffer illness, I shall desire that I may do nothing which shows lack of restraint, and nothing that is unmanly. The conclusion is, not that hardships are desirable, but that virtue is desirable, which enables us patiently to endure hardships.

Certain of our school,<sup>[4]</sup> think that, of all such qualities, a stout endurance is not desirable—though not to be deprecated either—because we ought to seek by prayer only the good which is unalloyed, peaceful, and beyond the reach of trouble. Personally, I do not agree with them. And why? First, because it is impossible for anything to be good without being also desirable. Because, again, if virtue is desirable, and if nothing that is good lacks virtue, then everything good is desirable. And, lastly, because a brave endurance even under torture is desirable.

At this point I ask you: is not bravery desirable? And yet bravery despises and challenges danger. The most beautiful and most admirable part of bravery is that it does not shrink from the stake, advances to meet wounds, and sometimes does not even avoid the spear, but meets it with opposing breast. If bravery is desirable, so is patient endurance of torture; for this is a part of bravery. Only sift these things, as I have suggested; then there will be nothing

which can lead you astray. For it is not mere endurance of torture, but brave endurance, that is desirable. I therefore desire that “brave” endurance; and this is virtue.

“But,” you say, “who ever desired such a thing for himself?” Some prayers are open and outspoken, when the requests are offered specifically; other prayers are indirectly expressed, when they include many requests under one title. For example, I desire a life of honour. Now a life of honour includes various kinds of conduct; it may include the chest in which Regulus was confined, or the wound of Cato which was torn open by Cato’s own hand, or the exile of Rutilius,<sup>[5]</sup> or the cup of poison which removed Socrates from gaol to heaven. Accordingly, in praying for a life of honour, I have prayed also for those things without which, on some occasions, life cannot be honourable

*O thrice and four times blest were they*

*Who underneath the lofty walls of Troy*

*Met happy death before their parents’ eyes!*<sup>[6]</sup>

What does it matter whether you offer this prayer for some individual, or admit that it was desirable in the past?

Decius sacrificed himself for the State; he set spurs to his horse and rushed into the midst of the foe, seeking death. The second Decius, rivalling his father’s valour, reproducing the words which had become sacred<sup>[7]</sup> and already household words, dashed into the thickest of the fight, anxious only that his sacrifice might bring omen of success,<sup>[8]</sup> and regarding a noble death as a thing to be desired. Do you doubt, then, whether it is best to die glorious and performing some deed of valour?

When one endures torture bravely, one is using all the virtues. Endurance may perhaps be the only virtue that is on view and most manifest; but bravery is there too, and endurance and resignation and long-suffering are its branches. There, too, is foresight;

for without foresight no plan can be undertaken; it is foresight that advises one to bear as bravely as possible the things one cannot avoid. There also is steadfastness, which cannot be dislodged from its position, which the wrench of no force can cause to abandon its purpose. There is the whole inseparable company of virtues; every honourable act is the work of one single virtue, but it is in accordance with the judgment of the whole council. And that which is approved by all the virtues, even though it seems to be the work of one alone, is desirable.

What? Do you think that those things only are desirable which come to us amid pleasure and ease, and which we bedeck our doors to welcome?<sup>[9]</sup> There are certain goods whose features are forbidding. There are certain prayers which are offered by a throng, not of men who rejoice, but of men who bow down reverently and worship.

Was it not in this fashion, think you, that Regulus prayed that he might reach Carthage? Clothe yourself with a hero's courage, and withdraw for a little space from the opinions of the common man. Form a proper conception of the image of virtue, a thing of exceeding beauty and grandeur; this image is not to be worshipped by us with incense or garlands, but with sweat and blood.

Behold Marcus Cato, laying upon that hallowed breast his unspotted hands, and tearing apart the wounds which had not gone deep enough to kill him! Which, pray, shall you say to him: "I hope all will be as you wish," and "I am grieved," or shall it be "Good fortune in your undertaking!"?

In this connexion I think of our friend Demetrius, who calls an easy existence, untroubled by the attacks of Fortune, a "Dead Sea."<sup>[10]</sup> If you have nothing to stir you up and rouse you to action, nothing which will test your resolution by its threats and hostilities; if you recline in unshaken comfort, it is not tranquillity; it is merely a flat calm.

The Stoic Attalus was wont to say: “I should prefer that Fortune keep me in her camp rather than in the lap of luxury. If I am tortured, but bear it bravely, all is well; if I die, but die bravely, it is also well.” Listen to Epicurus; he will tell you that it is actually pleasant.<sup>[11]</sup> I myself shall never apply an effeminate word to an act so honourable and austere. If I go to the stake, I shall go unbeaten.

Why should I not regard this as desirable—not because the fire, burns me, but because it does not overcome me? Nothing is more excellent or more beautiful than virtue; whatever we do in obedience to her orders is both good and desirable. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. See Introduction (Vol. I. p. x), and the opening sentences of Epp. lxxvii., lxxxvii., and others.
2. Seneca had a delicate constitution (see Introduction). In the letters he speaks of suffering from asthma (liv.), catarrh (lxxviii.), and fever (civ.).
3. Cf. lxxv. 1 *qualis sermo meus esset, si una sederemus aut ambularem.*
4. i.e., the Stoics.
5. Banished from Rome in 92 B.C. Cf. Ep. xxiv. 4.
6. Vergil, *Aeneid*, i. 94 ff.
7. Cf. Livy, vii. 9. 6 ff. . . . *legiones auxiliaque hostium mecum deis manibus Tellurique devoveo.*
8. *Ut litaret*: i.e., that by his sacrifice he might secure an omen of success. Cf. Pliny, *N. H.* viii. 45, and Suetonius, *Augustus*, 96: “At the siege of Perugia, when he found the sacrifices were not favourable (*sacrificio non litanti*), Augustus called for more victims.”
9. *Donaria* at the doors of temples signified public rejoicing; cf. Tibullus, i. 15 f.  
*Flava Ceres, tibi sit nostro de rure corona*  
*Spicea, quae templi pendeat ante fores.*  
 Myrtle decorated the bridegroom’s house-door; garlands heralded the birth of a child (Juvenal, ix. 85).
10. Cf. Pliny, *N. H.* iv. 13. Besides the Dead Sea of Palestine, the term was applied to any sluggish body of water.
11. Cf. Ep. lxvi. 18.

*How To Be A Stoic:  
An Interview With Massimo Pigliucci*

Massimo Pigliucci (Twitter: [@mpigliucci](https://twitter.com/mpigliucci)) is the K.D. Irani Professor of Philosophy at the City College of New York. He holds PhDs in genetics, evolutionary biology, and philosophy. He has written for many outlets, including *The New York Times*, and has written or edited ten books, including his latest, [\*How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life\*](#). His ongoing essays about Stoicism and its applications to modern life can be found at [howtobeastoxic.org](http://howtobeastoxic.org).

**Your new book offers an exploration of Stoicism through conversations with Epictetus. How did you decide to take this approach? (People think it's a lot easier to write about the Stoics than it is, don't they? It's really quite hard to add anything new when Seneca and Marcus were such flawless writers.)**

Exactly. It's not just that Seneca and Marcus were flawless writers, it's that there are a number of very good books out there written by modern authors, including yours.<sup>1</sup> So I felt that the only reason for me to add a new entry to the canon was if I had something new to say, or a new way of saying it.

I picked Epictetus because today he is the least well known of the great Stoics, and also because I have been immediately fascinated by his wicked sense of humor and his bluntness. The other reason is that I have occasions to disagree with him in the



book (for instance, about his conception of God and Providence), which offered me the opportunity to put forth my own update of Stoicism for the 21st century.

Each chapter in the book begins with an imaginary dialogue between me and Epictetus, who plays the role of my personal “daimon,” as the ancient Greeks called it. We are walking down the streets of Rome—where he lived for some time, and where I was actually writing the book—and things happen to me, and I ask him how a Stoic would deal with them. It’s an interesting exercise of self-discovery, talking to your daimon, I highly recommend it. Just not in public, at least not if you talk out loud...

**How do you feel about the rise in popularity of Stoicism and the corresponding rise in critics? Obviously this is something your work has played a part in growing, but at the same time, I can’t imagine you think the audience is still quite small (compared to say Buddhism or even something silly like the Law of Attraction).**

Right, Stoicism is clearly growing, but we are not even in the ballpark of Buddhism. Though there is no reason we shouldn’t be. In fact, I think of Stoicism as the Western equivalent of Buddhism, with a lot of similarities between the two philosophies (and some differences, of course).

I actually tried to study Buddhism for a bit, but the parts I managed to get exposed to felt too alien, couched in cultural, linguistic, and conceptual terms that did not resonate with me. By contrast, when I picked up Epictetus, or Marcus, or Seneca, I immediately felt at home.

I think the same is potentially true for a lot of people who haven’t been exposed to Stoicism yet, which is why I wrote the book and I keep a very active blog (<http://howtobeastoc.org/>)

recounting my personal exploration of Stoicism. It has changed my life for the better, I think and hope it will change others as well.

But yes, there are critics, some of them fairly harsh, if not downright vicious. I'm not sure why they are so afraid of the (limited, really) success of Stoicism, but of course Stoics have dealt with critics for millennia, this is just one more iteration.

**What do you think Stoicism provides someone like you or me—or really anyone putting themselves out there and launching something—on the eve of a scary, intimidating thing like a book release? How have you used Stoicism as manage the process of publishing and now marketing?**

Good question. I keep reminding myself of the metaphor of the archer. As Cicero put it in the third volume of *De Finibus*, where he has Cato the Younger explain Stoic doctrines, an archer will do whatever he can in order to hit the target, but once the arrow leaves the bow, the actual outcome is not up to him. Hitting the target is, Cicero says, “to be chosen but not to be desired” (DF III.22)

That's the way I think about my book, or really anything else I try to accomplish in my life: I put forth my best effort, and I'm doing my best so to reach people who may benefit from it. But I regard the actual outcome in terms of sales, attention, etc., as a preferred indifferent. It really relieves a lot of pressure, you know...

**Aside from the Stoic canon, what books—or even movies and documentaries—would you recommend to our readers who want to live a meaningful life? What would be some good complements to the typical Stoic reading list?**

In terms of books or documentaries, I would say the biographies of people who have good qualities of character and may

therefore provide a role model against which to measure ourselves in order to improve. As Seneca says, “you can never straighten that which is crooked unless you use a ruler.” (*Letters to Lucilius*, XI, On the Blush of Modesty, 10) And I would particularly suggest to seek women role models, since the classic Stoic canon is lacking in that respect (not a particularly Stoic fault: pretty much every literature before the late 20th century was deficient in that department).

Specifically, off the top of my head: *The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank; *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi; *12 Years a Slave*, by Solomon Northup; *Man’s Search for Meaning*, by Viktor Frankl; *Mandela*, by Tom Lodge; *Tom Paine: A Political Life*, by John Keane; *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, by Plato, on the life of Socrates. There are, of course, many, many others.

In terms of movies, I actually have an occasional column on my blog dedicated to movie characters or situations that present a good occasion for a modern Stoic to reflect and learn from. For instance, Agent Foster in *Imperium*, with Daniel Radcliffe; Mark Watney, in *The Martian*, with Matt Damon; the Russian spy Rudolf Abel, played by Mark Rylance, in *Bridge of Spies*; Dalton Trumbo, played by Bryan Cranston, in *Trumbo*.

**You’ve interacted with many aspiring Stoic students over the years. What have you found are the most beneficial Stoic exercises that people really feel have changed their lives for the better?**

The philosophical diary, especially done in the way Seneca suggests: “The spirit ought to be brought up for examination daily. It was the custom of Sextius when the day was over, and he had betaken himself to rest, to inquire of his spirit: ‘What bad habit of yours have you cured to-day? What vice have you checked? In what respect are you better?’ Anger will cease, and become more

gentle, if it knows that every day it will have to appear before the judgment seat.... I make use of this privilege, and daily plead my cause before myself.... I conceal nothing from myself, and omit nothing: for why should I be afraid of any of my shortcomings, when it is in my power to say, 'I pardon you this time: see that you never do that anymore?' A good man delights in receiving advice: all the worst men are the most impatient of guidance." (On Anger, III.26)

It certainly helps me not just to reflect on what I've done during the day and prepare to do it better the next time, over time it also generates a kind of constant attitude of mindfulness throughout the day, since you know you'll have to face your conscience in writing every evening.

Also, the *premeditatio malorum*, thinking ahead to the possible bad stuff that can happen under whatever circumstances you will likely face during the day. Some people engage in dramatic versions of it, like envisaging one's death. But that, I think, ought to be left for advanced students, and even then only occasionally. It is much more useful when applied to mundane things, as Epictetus does in the *Enchiridion* (IV): "When you're about to embark on any action, remind yourself what kind of action it is. If you're going out to take a bath, set before your mind the things that happen at the baths, that people splash you, that people knock up against you, that people steal from you. And you'll thus undertake the action in a surer manner if you say to yourself at the outset, 'I want to take a bath and ensure at the same time that my choice remains in harmony with nature.'"

I do that every time I go to a movie theater, because almost invariably some jerk will whip out his cell phone thinking that he absolutely has to check his messages regardless of how much the glare interferes with other people's enjoyment of the movie going experience. It has been really useful in order to preemptively

cultivate the sort of inner calm that will not ruin my and my friends' evening.

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#### Footnotes

1. Massimo is interviewed by Ryan Holiday, author of *The Daily Stoic*.

*On Wisdom and Retirement*

I fall in with your plan; retire and conceal yourself in repose. But at the same time conceal your retirement also. In doing this, you may be sure that you will be following the example of the Stoics, if not their precept. But you will be acting according to their precept also; you will thus satisfy both yourself and any Stoic you please.

We Stoics<sup>[1]</sup> do not urge men to take up public life in every case, or at all times, or without any qualification. Besides, when we have assigned to our wise man that field of public life which is worthy of him—in other words, the universe—he is then not apart from public life, even if he withdraws; nay, perhaps he has abandoned only one little corner thereof and has passed over into greater and wider regions; and when he has been set in the heavens, he understands how lowly was the place in which he sat when he mounted the curule chair or the judgment-seat. Lay this to heart, that the wise man is never more active in affairs than when things divine as well as things human have come within his ken.

I now return to the advice which I set out to give you—that you keep your retirement in the background. There is no need to fasten a placard upon yourself with the words: “Philosopher and Quietist.” Give your purpose some other name; call it ill-health and bodily weakness, or mere laziness. To boast of our retirement is but idle self-seeking.

Certain animals hide themselves from discovery by confusing the marks of their foot-prints in the neighbourhood of their lairs. You should do the same. Otherwise, there will always be someone dogging your footsteps. Many men pass by that which is visible, and peer after things hidden and concealed; a locked room invites the thief. Things which lie in the open appear cheap; the house-breaker passes by that which is exposed to view. This is the way of the world, and the way of all ignorant men: they crave to burst in upon hidden things. It is therefore best not to vaunt one's retirement.

It is, however, a sort of vaunting to make too much of one's concealment and of one's withdrawal from the sight of men. So-and-so<sup>[2]</sup> has gone into his retreat at Tarentum; that other man has shut himself up at Naples; this third person for many years has not crossed the threshold of his own house. To advertise one's retirement is to collect a crowd.

When you withdraw from the world your business is to talk with yourself, not to have men talk about you. But what shall you talk about? Do just what people are fond of doing when they talk about their neighbours—speak ill of yourself when by yourself; then you will become accustomed both to speak and to hear the truth. Above all, however, ponder that which you come to feel is your greatest weakness.

Each man knows best the defects of his own body. And so one relieves his stomach by vomiting, another props it up by frequent eating, another drains and purges his body by periodic fasting. Those whose feet are visited by pain abstain either from wine or from the bath. In general, men who are careless in other respects go out of their way to relieve the disease which frequently afflicts them. So it is with our souls; there are in them certain parts which are, so to speak, on the sick-list,<sup>[3]</sup> and to these parts the cure must be applied.

What, then, am I myself doing with my leisure? I am trying to cure my own sores. If I were to show you a swollen foot, or an inflamed hand, or some shrivelled sinews in a withered leg, you would permit me to lie quiet in one place and to apply lotions to the diseased member.<sup>[4]</sup> But my trouble is greater than any of these, and I cannot show it to you. The abscess, or ulcer, is deep within my breast. Pray, pray, do not commend me, do not say: “What a great man! He has learned to despise all things; condemning the madnesses of man’s life, he has made his escape!” I have condemned nothing except myself.

There is no reason why you should desire to come to me for the sake of making progress. You are mistaken if you think that you will get any assistance from this quarter; it is not a physician that dwells here, but a sick man. I would rather have you say, on leaving my presence: “I used to think him a happy man and a learned one, and I had pricked up my ears to hear him; but I have been defrauded. I have seen nothing, heard nothing which I craved and which I came back to hear.” If you feel thus, and speak thus, some progress has been made. I prefer you to pardon rather than envy my retirement.

Then you say: “Is it retirement, Seneca, that you are recommending to me? You will soon be falling back upon the maxims of Epicurus!”<sup>[5]</sup> I do recommend retirement to you, but only that you may use it for greater and more beautiful activities than those which you have resigned; to knock at the haughty doors of the influential, to make alphabetical lists of childless old men,<sup>[6]</sup> to wield the highest authority in public life—this kind of power exposes you to hatred, is short-lived, and, if you rate it at its true value, is tawdry.

One man shall be far ahead of me as regards his influence in public life, another in salary as an army officer and in the position which results from this, another in the throng of his clients; but



it is worth while to be outdone by all these men, provided that I myself can outdo Fortune. And I am no match for her in the throng; she has the greater backing.<sup>[7]</sup>

Would that in earlier days you had been minded to follow this purpose! Would that we were not discussing the happy life in plain view of death! But even now let us have no delay. For now we can take the word of experience, which tells us that there are many superfluous and hostile things; for this we should long since have taken the word of reason.

Let us do what men are wont to do when they are late in setting forth, and wish to make up for lost time by increasing their speed—let us ply the spur. Our time of life is the best possible for these pursuits; for the period of boiling and foaming is now past.<sup>[8]</sup> The faults that were uncontrolled in the first fierce heat of youth are now weakened, and but little further effort is needed to extinguish them.

“And when,” you ask, “will that profit you which you do not learn until your departure, and how will it profit you?” Precisely in this way, that I shall depart a better man. You need not think, however, that any time of life is more fitted to the attainment of a sound mind than that which has gained the victory over itself by many trials and by long and oft-repeated regret for past mistakes, and, its passions assuaged, has reached a state of health. This is indeed the time to have acquired this good; he who has attained wisdom in his old age, has attained it by his years. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. Stoicism preached “world-citizenship,” and this was interpreted in various ways at different periods. The Greek teachers saw in it an opportunity for wider culture; the Romans, a more practical mission. For further discussion of this topic see Ep. lxxiii. 1 ff. Seneca’s arguments are coloured by the facts of his life at this time.
2. Cf. Ep. lv. §§ 3 ff. for the retirement of Vatia: *ille latere sciebat, non vivere.*
3. *Causarii* (Livy, vi. 6) were soldiers on sick leave.

4. For an argument of the same sort see Horace, *Epist.* i. 1. 93-104:  
*Si curatus inaequali tonsore capillos*  
 Occurri, rides . . .  
 . . . quid, mea cum pugnat sententia secum?
5. This is a reference to the saying of Epicurus, λαθὲ βιώσας, “live in retirement.”
6. Cf. Horace, *Sat.* ii. 5. 23 ff.: *captes astutus ubique senum and vivet uter locuples sine gnatis . . . illius esto defensor*. The *captator* was a well-known figure at Rome; cf. also Pliny’s notorious enemy Regulus, and Juvenal’s many words of scorn for those who practiced the art.
7. i.e., Fortune’s support comes from crowds.
8. Cf. *De Ira*, ii. 20 *ut nimius ille fervor despumet*.

*On Rest and Restlessness*

I do not like you to change your headquarters and scurry about from one place to another. My reasons are—first, that such frequent flitting means an unsteady spirit. And the spirit cannot through retirement grow into unity unless it has ceased from its inquisitiveness and its wanderings. To be able to hold your spirit in check, you must first stop the runaway flight of the body.

My second reason is, that the remedies which are most helpful are those which are not interrupted.<sup>[1]</sup> You should not allow your quiet, or the oblivion to which you have consigned your former life, to be broken into. Give your eyes time to unlearn what they have seen, and your ears to grow accustomed to more wholesome words. Whenever you stir abroad you will meet, even as you pass from one place to another, things that will bring back your old cravings.

Just as he who tries to be rid of an old love must avoid every reminder of the person once held dear (for nothing grows again so easily as love), similarly, he who would lay aside his desire for all the things which he used to crave so passionately, must turn away both eyes and ears from the objects which he has abandoned. The emotions soon return to the attack; at every turn they will notice before their eyes an object worth their attention. There is no evil that does not offer inducements. Avarice promises money;

luxury, a varied assortment of pleasures; ambition, a purple robe and applause, and the influence which results from applause, and all that influence can do.

Vices tempt you by the rewards which they offer; but in the life of which I speak, you must live without being paid. Scarcely will a whole life-time suffice to bring our vices into subjection and to make them accept the yoke, swollen as they are by long-continued indulgence; and still less, if we cut into our brief span by any interruptions. Even constant care and attention can scarcely bring any one undertaking to full completion.

If you will give ear to my advice, ponder and practice this—how to welcome death, or even, if circumstances commend that course, to invite it. There is no difference whether death comes to us, or whether we go to death. Make yourself believe that all ignorant men are wrong when they say: “It is a beautiful thing to die one’s own death.”<sup>[2]</sup> But there is no man who does not die his own death. What is more, you may reflect on this thought: No one dies except on his own day. You are throwing away none of your own time; for what you leave behind does not belong to you. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. Cf. Ep. ii. § 3 *nil aeque sanitatem impedit quam remediorum crebra mutatio.*
2. Perhaps the converse idea of “living one’s own life.” It means “dying when the proper time comes,” and is the common man’s argument against suicide. The thought perhaps suggests the subject matter of the next letter.

LETTER 70

*On the Proper Time to Slip the Cable*



After a long space of time I have seen your beloved Pompeii.<sup>[1]</sup> I was thus brought again face to face with the days of my youth. And it seemed to me that I could still do, nay, had only done a short time ago, all the things which I did there when a young man.

We have sailed past life, Lucilius, as if we were on a voyage, and just as when at sea, to quote from our poet Vergil,

*Lands and towns are left astern,*<sup>[2]</sup>

even so, on this journey where time flies with the greatest speed, we put below the horizon first our boyhood and then our youth, and then the space which lies between young manhood and middle age and borders on both, and next, the best years of old age itself. Last of all, we begin to sight the general bourne of the race of man.

Fools that we are, we believe this bourne to be a dangerous reef; but it is the harbour, where we must some day put in, which we may never refuse to enter; and if a man has reached this harbour in his early years, he has no more right to complain than a sailor who has made a quick voyage. For some sailors, as you know, are tricked and held back by sluggish winds, and grow weary and sick of the slow-moving calm; while others are carried quickly home by steady gales.

You may consider that the same thing happens to us: life has carried some men with the greatest rapidity to the harbour, the harbour they were bound to reach even if they tarried on the way, while others it has fretted and harassed. To such a life, as you are aware, one should not always cling. For mere living is not a good, but living well. Accordingly, the wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can.<sup>[3]</sup>

He will mark in what place, with whom, and how he is to conduct his existence, and what he is about to do. He always reflects concerning the quality, and not the quantity, of his life. As soon as there are many events in his life that give him trouble and disturb his peace of mind, he sets himself free. And this privilege is his, not only when the crisis is upon him, but as soon as Fortune seems to be playing him false; then he looks about carefully and sees whether he ought, or ought not, to end his life on that account. He holds that it makes no difference to him whether his taking-off be natural or self-inflicted, whether it comes later or earlier. He does not regard it with fear, as if it were a great loss; for no man can lose very much when but a driblet remains.

It is not a question of dying earlier or later, but of dying well or ill. And dying well means escape from the danger of living ill.

That is why I regard the words of the well-known Rhodian<sup>[4]</sup> as most unmanly. This person was thrown into a cage by his tyrant, and fed there like some wild animal. And when a certain man advised him to end his life by fasting, he replied: "A man may hope for anything while he has life."

This may be true; but life is not to be purchased at any price. No matter how great or how well-assured certain rewards may be I shall not strive to attain them at the price of a shameful confession of weakness. Shall I reflect that Fortune has all power over one who lives, rather than reflect that she has no power over one who knows how to die?

There are times, nevertheless, when a man, even though certain death impends and he knows that torture is in store for him, will refrain from lending a hand to his own punishment, to himself, however, he would lend a hand.<sup>[5]</sup> It is folly to die through fear of dying. The executioner is upon you; wait for him. Why anticipate him? Why assume the management of a cruel task that belongs to another? Do you grudge your executioner his privilege, or do you merely relieve him of his task?

Socrates might have ended his life by fasting; he might have died by starvation rather than by poison. But instead of this he spent thirty days in prison awaiting death, not with the idea “everything may happen,” or “so long an interval has room for many a hope” but in order that he might show himself submissive to the laws<sup>[6]</sup> and make the last moments of Socrates an edification to his friends. What would have been more foolish than to scorn death, and yet fear poison?<sup>[7]</sup>

Scribonia, a woman of the stern old type, was an aunt of Drusus Libo.<sup>[8]</sup> This young man was as stupid as he was well born, with higher ambitions than anyone could have been expected to entertain in that epoch, or a man like himself in any epoch at all. When Libo had been carried away ill from the senate-house in his litter, though certainly with a very scanty train of followers—for all his kinsfolk undutifully deserted him, when he was no longer a criminal but a corpse—he began to consider whether he should commit suicide, or await death. Scribonia said to him: “What pleasure do you find in doing another man’s work?” But he did not follow her advice; he laid violent hands upon himself. And he was right, after all; for when a man is doomed to die in two or three days at his enemy’s pleasure, he is really “doing another man’s work” if he continues to live.

No general statement can be made, therefore, with regard to the question whether, when a power beyond our control threatens us with death, we should anticipate death, or await it. For there are many arguments to pull us in either direction. If one death is accompanied by torture, and the other is simple and easy, why not snatch the latter? Just as I shall select my ship when I am about to go on a voyage or my house when I propose to take a residence, so I shall choose my death when I am about to depart from life.

Moreover, just as a long-drawn out life does not necessarily mean a better one, so a long-drawn-out death necessarily means a worse one. There is no occasion when the soul should be humoured more than at the moment of death. Let the soul depart as it feels itself impelled to go;<sup>[9]</sup> whether it seeks the sword, or the halter, or some drought that attacks the veins, let it proceed and burst the bonds of its slavery. Every man ought to make his life acceptable to others besides himself, but his death to himself alone. The best form of death is the one we like.

Men are foolish who reflect thus: "One person will say that my conduct was not brave enough; another, that I was too headstrong; a third, that a particular kind of death would have betokened more spirit." What you should really reflect is: "I have under consideration a purpose with which the talk of men has no concern!" Your sole aim should be to escape from Fortune as speedily as possible; otherwise, there will be no lack of persons who will think ill of what you have done.

You can find men who have gone so far as to profess wisdom and yet maintain that one should not offer violence to one's own life, and hold it accursed for a man to be the means of his own destruction; we should wait, say they, for the end decreed by nature. But one who says this does not see that he is shutting off the path to freedom. The best thing which eternal law ever



ordained was that it allowed to us one entrance into life, but many exits.

Must I await the cruelty either of disease or of man, when I can depart through the midst of torture, and shake off my troubles? This is the one reason why we cannot complain of life; it keeps no one against his will. Humanity is well situated, because no man is unhappy except by his own fault. Live, if you so desire; if not, you may return to the place whence you came.

You have often been cupped in order to relieve headaches.<sup>[10]</sup> You have had veins cut for the purpose of reducing your weight. If you would pierce your heart, a gaping wound is not necessary—a lancet will open the way to that great freedom, and tranquillity can be purchased at the cost of a pin-prick.

What, then, is it which makes us lazy and sluggish? None of us reflects that some day he must depart from this house of life; just so old tenants are kept from moving by fondness for a particular place and by custom, even in spite of ill-treatment.

Would you be free from the restraint of your body? Live in it as if you were about to leave it. Keep thinking of the fact that some day you will be deprived of this tenure; then you will be more brave against the necessity of departing. But how will a man take thought of his own end, if he craves all things without end?

And yet there is nothing so essential for us to consider. For our training in other things is perhaps superfluous. Our souls have been made ready to meet poverty; but our riches have held out. We have armed ourselves to scorn pain; but we have had the good fortune to possess sound and healthy bodies, and so have never been forced to put this virtue to the test. We have taught ourselves to endure bravely the loss of those we love; but Fortune has preserved to us all whom we loved.

It is in this one matter only that the day will come which will require us to test our training.

You need not think that none but great men have had the strength to burst the bonds of human servitude; you need not believe that this cannot be done except by a Cato—Cato, who with his hand dragged forth the spirit which he had not succeeded in freeing by the sword. Nay, men of the meanest lot in life have by a mighty impulse escaped to safety, and when they were not allowed to die at their own convenience, or to suit themselves in their choice of the instruments of death, they have snatched up whatever was lying ready to hand, and by sheer strength have turned objects which were by nature harmless into weapons of their own.

For example, there was lately in a training-school for wild-beast gladiators a German, who was making ready for the morning exhibition; he withdrew in order to relieve himself—the only thing which he was allowed to do in secret and without the presence of a guard. While so engaged, he seized the stick of wood, tipped with a sponge, which was devoted to the vilest uses, and stuffed it, just as it was, down his throat; thus he blocked up his windpipe, and choked the breath from his body. That was truly to insult death!

Yes, indeed; it was not a very elegant or becoming way to die; but what is more foolish than to be over-nice about dying? What a brave fellow! He surely deserved to be allowed to choose his fate! How bravely he would have wielded a sword! With what courage he would have hurled himself into the depths of the sea, or down a precipice! Cut off from resources on every hand, he yet found a way to furnish himself with death, and with a weapon for death. Hence you can understand that nothing but the will need postpone death. Let each man judge the deed of this most zealous fellow as he likes, provided we agree on this point—that the foulest death is preferable to the fairest slavery.

Inasmuch as I began with an illustration taken from humble life I shall keep on with that sort. For men will make greater demands upon themselves, if they see that death can be despised even by the most despised class of men. The Catos, the Scipios, and the others whose names we are wont to hear with admiration, we regard as beyond the sphere of imitation; but I shall now prove to you that the virtue of which I speak is found as frequently in the gladiators' training-school as among the leaders in a civil war.

Lately a gladiator, who had been sent forth to the morning exhibition, was being conveyed in a cart along with the other prisoners;<sup>[11]</sup> nodding as if he were heavy with sleep, he let his head fall over so far that it was caught in the spokes; then he kept his body in position long enough to break his neck by the revolution of the wheel. So he made his escape by means of the very wagon which was carrying him to his punishment.

When a man desires to burst forth and take his departure, nothing stands in his way. It is an open space in which Nature guards us. When our plight is such as to permit it, we may look about us for an easy exit. If you have many opportunities ready to hand, by means of which you may liberate yourself, you may make a selection and think over the best way of gaining freedom; but if a chance is hard to find, instead of the best, snatch the next best, even though it be something unheard of, something new. If you do not lack the courage, you will not lack the cleverness, to die.

See how even the lowest class of slave, when suffering goads him on, is aroused and discovers a way to deceive even the most watchful guards! He is truly great who not only has given himself the order to die, but has also found the means.

I have promised you, however, some more illustrations drawn from the same games.

During the second event in a sham sea-fight one of the barbarians sank deep into his own throat a spear which had been given

him for use against his foe. “Why, oh why,” he said, “have I not long ago escaped from all this torture and all this mockery? Why should I be armed and yet wait for death to come?” This exhibition was all the more striking because of the lesson men learn from it that dying is more honourable than killing.

What then? If such a spirit is possessed by abandoned and dangerous men, shall it not be possessed also by those who have trained themselves to meet such contingencies by long meditation, and by reason, the mistress of all things? It is reason which teaches us that fate has various ways of approach, but the same end, and that it makes no difference at what point the inevitable event begins.

Reason, too, advises us to die, if we may, according to our taste; if this cannot be, she advises us to die according to our ability, and to seize upon whatever means shall offer itself for doing violence to ourselves. It is criminal to “live by robbery”;<sup>[12]</sup> but, on the other hand, it is most noble to “die by robbery.” Farewell.

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### Footnotes

1. Probably the birthplace of Lucilius.
2. *Aeneid*, iii. 72.
3. Although Socrates says (*Phaedo*, 61 f.) that the philosopher must, according to Philolaus, not take his own life against the will of God, the Stoics interpreted the problem in different ways. Some held that a noble purpose justified suicide; others, that any reason was good enough. Cf. Ep. lxxvii. 5 ff.
4. Telesphorus of Rhodes, threatened by the tyrant Lysimachus. On the proverb see Cicero, *Ad Att.* ix. 10. 3, and Terence, *Heauton.* 981 *modo liceat vivere, est spes*.
5. i.e., if he must choose between helping along his punishment by suicide, or helping himself stay alive under torture and practicing the virtues thus brought into play, he will choose the latter—*sibi commodare*.
6. See the imaginary dialogue in Plato’s *Crito* (50 ff.) between Socrates and the Laws—a passage which develops this thought.
7. And to commit suicide in order to escape poisoning.
8. For a more complete account of this tragedy see Tacitus, *Annals*, ii. 27 ff. Libo was duped by Firmius Catus (16 A.D.) into seeking imperial power, was detected, and finally forced by Tiberius to commit suicide.

9. When the “natural advantages” (τὰ κατὰ φύσιν) of living are outweighed by the corresponding disadvantages, the honourable man may, according to the general Stoic view, take his departure. Socrates and Cato were right in so doing, according to Seneca; but he condemns (Ep. xxiv. 25) those contemporaries who had recourse to suicide as a mere whim of fashion.
10. By means of the *cucurbita*, or cupping-glass. Cf. Juvenal, xiv. 58 *caput ventosa cucurbita quaerat*. It was often used as a remedy for insanity or delirium.
11. *Custodia* in the sense of “prisoner” (abstract for concrete) is a post-Augustan usage. See. Ep. v. 7, and Summers’ note.
12. i.e., by robbing oneself of life; but the antithesis to Vergil’s phrase (*Aen.* ix. 613) is artificial.

LETTER 71

*On the Supreme Good*



You are continually referring special questions to me, forgetting that a vast stretch of sea sunders us. Since, however, the value of advice depends mostly on the time when it is given, it must necessarily result that by the time my opinion on certain matters reaches you, the opposite opinion is the better. For advice conforms to circumstances; and our circumstances are carried along, or rather whirled along. Accordingly, advice should be produced at short notice; and even this is too late; it should “grow while we work,” as the saying is. And I propose to show you how you may discover the method.

As often as you wish to know what is to be avoided or what is to be sought, consider its relation to the Supreme Good, to the purpose of your whole life. For whatever we do ought to be in harmony with this; no man can set in order the details unless he has already set before himself the chief purpose of his life. The artist may have his colours all prepared, but he cannot produce a likeness unless he has already made up his mind what he wishes to paint.<sup>[1]</sup> The reason we make mistakes is because we all consider the parts of life, but never life as a whole.

The archer must know what he is seeking to hit; then he must aim and control the weapon by his skill. Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what

harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind. Chance must necessarily have great influence over our lives, because we live by chance.

It is the case with certain men, however, that they do not know that they know certain things. Just as we often go searching for those who stand beside us, so we are apt to forget that the goal of the Supreme Good lies near us.

To infer the nature of this Supreme Good, one does not need many words or any round-about discussion; it should be pointed out with the forefinger, so to speak, and not be dissipated into many parts. For what good is there in breaking it up into tiny bits, when you can say: the Supreme Good is that which is honourable?<sup>[2]</sup> Besides (and you may be still more surprised at this), that which is honourable is the only good; all other goods are alloyed and debased.

If you once convince yourself of this, and if you come to love virtue devotedly (for mere loving is not enough), anything that has been touched by virtue will be fraught with blessing and prosperity for you, no matter how it shall be regarded by others. Torture, if only, as you lie suffering, you are more calm in mind than your very torturer; illness, if only you curse not Fortune and yield not to the disease—in short, all those things which others regard as ills will become manageable and will end in good, if you succeed in rising above them.

Let this once be clear, that there is nothing good except that which is honourable, and all hardships will have a just title to the name of “goods,” when once virtue has made them honourable.

Many think that we Stoics are holding out expectations greater than our human lot admits of; and they have a right to think so. For they have regard to the body only. But let them turn back to the soul, and they will soon measure man by the standard of God. Rouse yourself, most excellent Lucilius, and leave off all

this word-play of the philosophers, who reduce a most glorious subject to a matter of syllables, and lower and wear out the soul by teaching fragments; then you will become like the men who discovered these precepts, instead of those who by their teaching do their best to make philosophy seem difficult rather than great.<sup>[3]</sup>

Socrates, who recalled<sup>[4]</sup> the whole of philosophy to rules of conduct, and asserted that the highest wisdom consisted in distinguishing between good and evil, said: “Follow these rules, if my words carry weight with you, in order that you may be happy; and let some men think you even a fool. Allow any man who so desires to insult you and work you wrong; but if only virtue dwells with you, you will suffer nothing. If you wish to be happy, if you would be in good faith a good man<sup>[5]</sup> let one person or another despise you.” No man can accomplish this unless he has come to regard all goods as equal, for the reason that no good exists without that which is honourable, and that which is honourable is in every case equal.

You may say: “What then? Is there no difference between Cato’s being elected praetor and his failure at the polls? Or whether Cato is conquered or conqueror in the battle-line of Pharsalia? And when Cato could not be defeated, though his party met defeat, was not this goodness of his equal to that which would have been his if he had returned victorious to his native land and arranged a peace?” Of course it was; for it is by the same virtue that evil fortune is overcome and good fortune is controlled. Virtue however, cannot be increased or decreased; its stature is uniform.

“But,” you will object, “Gnaeus Pompey will lose his army; the patricians, those noblest patterns of the State’s creation, and the front-rank men of Pompey’s party, a senate under arms, will be routed in a single engagement; the ruins of that great oligarchy will be scattered all over the world; one division will fall in Egypt,



another in Africa, and another in Spain!<sup>[6]</sup> And the poor State will not be allowed even the privilege of being ruined once for all!”

Yes, all this may happen; Juba’s familiarity with every position in his own kingdom may be of no avail to him, of no avail the resolute bravery of his people when fighting for their king; even the men of Utica, crushed by their troubles, may waver in their allegiance; and the good fortune which ever attended men of the name of Scipio may desert Scipio in Africa. But long ago destiny “saw to it that Cato should come to no harm.”<sup>[7]</sup>

“He was conquered in spite of it all!” Well, you may include this among Cato’s “failures”; Cato will bear with an equally stout heart anything that thwarts him of his victory, as he bore that which thwarted him of his praetorship. The day whereon he failed of election, he spent in play; the night wherein he intended to die, he spent in reading.<sup>[8]</sup> He regarded in the same light both the loss of his praetorship and the loss of his life; he had convinced himself that he ought to endure anything which might happen.

Why should he not suffer, bravely and calmly, a change in the government? For what is free from the risk of change? Neither earth, nor sky, nor the whole fabric of our universe, though it be controlled by the hand of God. It will not always preserve its present order; it will be thrown from its course in days to come.<sup>[9]</sup>

All things move in accord with their appointed times; they are destined to be born, to grow, and to be destroyed. The stars which you see moving above us, and this seemingly immovable earth to which we cling and on which we are set, will be consumed and will cease to exist. There is nothing that does not have its old age; the intervals are merely unequal at which Nature sends forth all these things towards the same goal. Whatever is will cease to be, and yet it will not perish, but will be resolved into its elements.

To our minds, this process means perishing, for we behold only that which is nearest; our sluggish mind, under allegiance to the

body, does not penetrate to bournes beyond. Were it not so, the mind would endure with greater courage its own ending and that of its possessions, if only it could hope that life and death, like the whole universe about us, go by turns, that whatever has been put together is broken up again, that whatever has been broken up is put together again, and that the eternal craftsmanship of God, who controls all things is working at this task.

Therefore the wise man will say just what a Marcus Cato would say, after reviewing his past life: “The whole race of man, both that which is and that which is to be, is condemned to die. Of all the cities that at any time have held sway over the world, and of all that have been the splendid ornaments of empires not their own, men shall some day ask where they were, and they shall be swept away by destructions of various kinds; some shall be ruined by wars, others shall be wasted away by inactivity and by the kind of peace which ends in sloth, or by that vice which is fraught with destruction even for mighty dynasties—luxury. All these fertile plains shall be buried out of sight by a sudden overflowing of the sea, or a slipping of the soil, as it settles to lower levels, shall draw them suddenly into a yawning chasm. Why then should I be angry or feel sorrow, if I precede the general destruction by a tiny interval of time?”

Let great souls comply with God’s wishes, and suffer unhesitatingly whatever fate the law of the universe ordains; for the soul at death is either sent forth into a better life, destined to dwell with deity amid greater radiance and calm, or else, at least, without suffering any harm to itself, it will be mingled with nature again, and will return to the universe.<sup>[10]</sup>

Therefore Cato’s honourable death was no less a good than his honourable life, since virtue admits of no stretching.<sup>[11]</sup> Socrates used to say that verity<sup>[12]</sup> and virtue were the same. Just as truth

does not grow, so neither does virtue grow; for it has its due proportions and is complete.

You need not, therefore, wonder that goods are equal,<sup>[13]</sup> both those which are to be deliberately chosen, and those which circumstances have imposed. For if you once adopt the view that they are unequal, deeming, for instance, a brave endurance of torture as among the lesser goods, you will be including it among the evils also; you will pronounce Socrates unhappy in his prison, Cato unhappy when he reopens his wounds with more courage than he allowed in inflicting them, and Regulus the most ill-starred of all when he pays the penalty for keeping his word even with his enemies. And yet no man, even the most effeminate person in the world, has ever dared to maintain such an opinion. For though such persons deny that a man like Regulus is happy, yet for all that they also deny that he is wretched.

The earlier Academics<sup>[14]</sup> do indeed admit that a man is happy even amid such tortures, but do not admit that he is completely or fully happy. With this view we cannot in any wise agree; for unless a man is happy, he has not attained the Supreme Good; and the good which is supreme admits of no higher degree, if only virtue exists within this man, and if adversity does not impair his virtue, and if, though the body be injured, the virtue abides unharmed. And it does abide. For I understand virtue to be high-spirited and exalted, so that it is aroused by anything that molests it.

This spirit, which young men of noble breeding often assume, when they are so deeply stirred by the beauty of some honourable object that they despise all the gifts of chance, is assuredly infused in us and communicated to us by wisdom. Wisdom will bring the conviction that there is but one good—that which is honourable; that this can neither be shortened nor extended, any more than a carpenter's rule, with which straight lines are tested, can be bent. Any change in the rule means spoiling the straight line.

Applying, therefore, this same figure to virtue, we shall say: virtue also is straight, and admits of no bending. What can be made more tense than a thing which is already rigid? Such is virtue, which passes judgment on everything, but nothing passes judgment on virtue. And if this rule, virtue, cannot itself be made more straight, neither can the things created by virtue be in one case straighter and in another less straight. For they must necessarily correspond to virtue; hence they are equal.

“What,” you say, “do you call reclining at a banquet and submitting to torture equally good?” Does this seem surprising to you? You may be still more surprised at the following—that reclining at a banquet is an evil, while reclining on the rack is a good, if the former act is done in a shameful, and the latter in an honourable manner. It is not the material that makes these actions good or bad; it is the virtue. All acts in which virtue has disclosed itself are of the same measure and value.

At this moment the man who measures the souls of all men by his own is shaking his fist in my face because I hold that there is a parity between the goods involved in the case of one who passes sentence honourably, and of one who suffers sentence honourably; or because I hold that there is a parity between the goods of one who celebrates a triumph, and of one who, unconquered in spirit, is carried before the victor’s chariot. For such critics think that whatever they themselves cannot do, is not done; they pass judgment on virtue in the light of their own weaknesses.

Why do you marvel if it helps a man, and on occasion even pleases him, to be burned, wounded, slain, or bound in prison? To a luxurious man, a simple life is a penalty; to a lazy man, work is punishment; the dandy pities the diligent man; to the slothful, studies are torture. Similarly, we regard those things with respect to which we are all infirm of disposition, as hard and beyond endurance, forgetting what a torment it is to many men to abstain

from wine or to be routed from their beds at break of day. These actions are not essentially difficult; it is we ourselves that are soft and flabby.

We must pass judgment concerning great matters with greatness of soul; otherwise, that which is really our fault will seem to be their fault. So it is that certain objects which are perfectly straight, when sunk in water appear to the onlooker as bent or broken off.<sup>[15]</sup> It matters not only what you see, but with what eyes you see it; our souls are too dull of vision to perceive the truth.

But give me an unspoiled and sturdy-minded young man; he will pronounce more fortunate one who sustains on unbending shoulders the whole weight of adversity, who stands out superior to Fortune. It is not a cause for wonder that one is not tossed about when the weather is calm; reserve your wonderment for cases where a man is lifted up when all others sink, and keeps his footing when all others are prostrate.

What element of evil is there in torture and in the other things which we call hardships? It seems to me that there is this evil—that the mind sags, and bends, and collapses. But none of these things can happen to the sage; he stands erect under any load. Nothing can subdue him; nothing that must be endured annoys him. For he does not complain that he has been struck by that which can strike any man. He knows his own strength; he knows that he was born to carry burdens.

I do not withdraw the wise man from the category of man, nor do I deny to him the sense of pain as though he were a rock that has no feelings at all. I remember that he is made up of two parts: the one part is irrational—it is this that may be bitten, burned, or hurt; the other part is rational—it is this which holds resolutely to opinions, is courageous, and unconquerable.<sup>[16]</sup> In the latter is situated man's Supreme Good. Before this is completely attained,

the mind wavers in uncertainty; only when it is fully achieved is the mind fixed and steady.

And so when one has just begun, or is on one's way to the heights and is cultivating virtue, or even if one is drawing near the perfect good but has not yet put the finishing touch upon it, one will retrograde at times and there will be a certain slackening of mental effort. For such a man has not yet traversed the doubtful ground; he is still standing in slippery places. But the happy man, whose virtue is complete, loves himself most of all when his bravery has been submitted to the severest test, and when he not only endures but welcomes that which all other men regard with fear, if it is the price which he must pay for the performance of a duty which honour imposes, and he greatly prefers to have men say of him: "how much more noble!" rather than "how much more lucky!"<sup>[17]</sup>

And now I have reached the point to which your patient waiting summons me. You must not think that our human virtue transcends nature; the wise man will tremble, will feel pain, will turn pale,<sup>[18]</sup> For all these are sensations of the body. Where, then, is the abode of utter distress, of that which is truly an evil? In the other part of us, no doubt, if it is the mind that these trials drag down, force to a confession of its servitude, and cause to regret its existence.

The wise man, indeed, overcomes Fortune by his virtue, but many who profess wisdom are sometimes frightened by the most unsubstantial threats. And at this stage it is a mistake on our part to make the same demands upon the wise man and upon the learner.<sup>[19]</sup> I still exhort myself to do that which I recommend; but my exhortations are not yet followed. And even if this were the case, I should not have these principles so ready for practice, or so well trained, that they would rush to my assistance in every crisis.

Just as wool takes up certain colours at once,<sup>[20]</sup> while there are others which it will not absorb unless it is soaked and steeped in them many times; so other systems of doctrine can be immediately applied by men's minds after once being accepted, but this system of which I speak, unless it has gone deep and has sunk in for a long time, and has not merely coloured but thoroughly permeated the soul, does not fulfil any of its promises.

The matter can be imparted quickly and in very few words: "Virtue is the only good; at any rate there is no good without virtue; and virtue itself is situated in our nobler part, that is, the rational part." And what will this virtue be? A true and never-swerving judgment. For therefrom will spring all mental impulses, and by its agency every external appearance that stirs our impulses will be clarified.

It will be in keeping with this judgment to judge all things that have been coloured by virtue as goods, and as equal goods.

Bodily goods are, to be sure, good for the body; but they are not absolutely good. There will indeed be some value in them; but they will possess no genuine merit, for they will differ greatly; some will be less, others greater.

And we are constrained to acknowledge that there are great differences among the very followers of wisdom. One man has already made so much progress that he dares to raise his eyes and look Fortune in the face, but not persistently, for his eyes soon drop, dazzled by her overwhelming splendour; another has made so much progress that he is able to match glances with her—that is, unless he has already reached the summit and is full of confidence.<sup>[21]</sup>

That which is short of perfection must necessarily be unsteady, at one time progressing, at another slipping or growing faint; and it will surely slip back unless it keeps struggling ahead; for if a man

slackens at all in zeal and faithful application, he must retrograde. No one can resume his progress at the point where he left off.

Therefore let us press on and persevere. There remains much more of the road than we have put behind us; but the greater part of progress is the desire to progress.

I fully understand what this task is. It is a thing which I desire, and I desire it with all my heart. I see that you also have been aroused and are hastening with great zeal towards infinite beauty. Let us, then, hasten; only on these terms will life be a boon to us; otherwise, there is delay, and indeed disgraceful delay, while we busy ourselves with revolting things. Let us see to it that all time belongs to us. This, however, cannot be unless first of all our own selves begin to belong to us.

And when will it be our privilege to despise both kinds of fortune? When will it be our privilege, after all the passions have been subdued and brought under our own control, to utter the words “I have conquered!”? Do you ask me whom I have conquered? Neither the Persians, nor the far-off Medes, nor any warlike race that lies beyond the Dahae;<sup>[22]</sup> not these, but greed, ambition, and the fear of death that has conquered the conquerors of the world. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. A similar argument is found in Ep. lxxv. §§ 5 ff., containing the same figure of thought.
2. For a definition of *honestum* see Cicero, *De Fin.* ii. 45 ff., and Rackham’s note, explaining it as “τὸ καλόν, the morally beautiful or good.”
3. See, for example, the syllogistic display which is ridiculed in Ep. xlvi. 6.
4. i.e., from being mere word-play.
5. Hense suggests that Seneca may be rendering the phrase of Simonides—ἀνὴρ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθός.
6. Egypt—47 B.C.; Africa (Thapsus)—46 B.C.; Spain (Munda)—45 B.C.
7. A sort of serious parody of the *senatus consultum ultimum*. For a discussion of the history and meaning of the phrase see W. Warde Fowler’s *Cicero*, pp. 151-158.
8. Plato’s *Phaedo*. Cato slew himself at Utica, 46 B.C., after Scipio’s defeat at Thapsus.



9. Cf. Ep. ix. 16 f. *resoluto mundo*, etc.
10. For a clear and full discussion regarding Stoic views of the immortality of the soul, and Seneca's own opinion thereon, see E. V. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, pp. 262 ff.
11. Cf. § 20 of this letter: *rigida re quid amplius intendi potest?*
12. i.e., knowledge of facts, as Seneca so often says. Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 87 C ἐπιστήμη τις ἢ ἀρετή, and Aristotle, *Eth.* vi. 13 Σωκράτης . . . λόγους τὰς ἀρετὰς ᾤετο εἶναι, ἐπιστήμας γὰρ εἶναι πάσας.
13. This is the accepted Stoic doctrine; see Ep. lxvi. 5. Goods are equal, absolute, and independent of circumstances; although, as Seneca here maintains, circumstances may bring one or another of them into fuller play.
14. e.g., Xenocrates and Speusippus; cf. Ep. lxxxv. 18. For another answer to the objection that the good depends upon outward circumstances cf. Ep. xcii. 14 f.
15. "An oar, though quite whole, presents the appearance of being broken when seen in clear shallow water."—Seneca, *N. Q.* 1. 3 (Clarke and Geikie).
16. This dualism of soul and body goes back to earlier religions, and especially to the Persian. The rational part (τὸ λογιστικόν), though held by most Stoics to be corporeal, or part of the world-stuff, is closely related to the ἡγεμονικόν, or "princimate."
17. i.e., because he has endured and conquered misfortune rather than escaped it.
18. For a similar thought, cf. Ep. xi. 6.
19. Three stages of progress (προκοπή) were defined by Chrysippus. Cf. also Sen. Epp. lxxii. 6 and lxxv. 8 f.
20. Ovid, *Metam.* vi. 9, speaks of *bibula lana*, and Horace, *Ep.* i. 10. 27, of *vellera potantia fucum*.
21. In which case, he would be completely superior to her.
22. A nomad Scythian tribe east of the Caspian Sea.

*On Business as the Enemy of Philosophy*

The subject<sup>[1]</sup> concerning which you question me was once clear to my mind, and required no thought, so thoroughly had I mastered it. But I have not tested my memory of it for some time, and therefore it does not readily come back to me. I feel that I have suffered the fate of a book whose rolls have stuck together by disuse; my mind needs to be unrolled, and whatever has been stored away there ought to be examined from time to time, so that it may be ready for use when occasion demands. Let us therefore put this subject off for the present; for it demands much labour and much care. As soon as I can hope to stay for any length of time in the same place, I shall then take your question in hand.

For there are certain subjects about which you can write even while travelling in a gig, and there are also subjects which need a study-chair, and quiet, and seclusion. Nevertheless I ought to accomplish something even on days like these—days which are fully employed, and indeed from morning till night. For there is never a moment when fresh employments will not come along; we sow them, and for this reason several spring up from one. Then, too, we keep adjourning our own cases<sup>[2]</sup> by saying: “As soon as I am done with this, I shall settle down to hard work,” or: “If I ever set this troublesome matter in order, I shall devote myself to study.”

But the study of philosophy is not to be postponed until you have leisure;<sup>[3]</sup> everything else is to be neglected in order that we may attend to philosophy, for no amount of time is long enough for it, even though our lives be prolonged from boyhood to the uttermost bounds of time allotted to man. It makes little difference whether you leave philosophy out altogether or study it intermittently; for it does not stay as it was when you dropped it, but, because its continuity has been broken, it goes back to the position in which it was at the beginning, like things which fly apart when they are stretched taut. We must resist the affairs which occupy our time; they must not be untangled, but rather put out of the way. Indeed, there is no time that is unsuitable for helpful studies; and yet many a man fails to study amid the very circumstances which make study necessary.

He says: "Something will happen to hinder me." No, not in the case of the man whose spirit, no matter what his business may be, is happy and alert. It is those who are still short of perfection whose happiness can be broken off; the joy of a wise man, on the other hand, is a woven fabric, rent by no chance happening and by no change of fortune; at all times and in all places he is at peace. For his joy depends on nothing external and looks for no boon from man or fortune. His happiness is something within himself; it would depart from his soul if it entered in from the outside; it is born there.

Sometimes an external happening reminds him of his mortality, but it is a light blow, and merely grazes the surface of his skin.<sup>[4]</sup> Some trouble, I repeat, may touch him like a breath of wind, but that Supreme Good of his is unshaken. This is what I mean: there are external disadvantages, like pimples and boils that break out upon a body which is normally strong and sound; but there is no deep-seated malady.

The difference, I say, between a man of perfect wisdom and another who is progressing in wisdom is the same as the difference

between a healthy man and one who is convalescing from a severe and lingering illness, for whom “health” means only a lighter attack of his disease. If the latter does not take heed, there is an immediate relapse and a return to the same old trouble; but the wise man cannot slip back, or slip into any more illness at all. For health of body is a temporary matter which the physician cannot guarantee, even though he has restored it; nay, he is often roused from his bed to visit the same patient who summoned him before. The mind, however, once healed, is healed for good and all.

I shall tell you what I mean by health: if the mind is content with its own self; if it has confidence in itself; if it understands that all those things for which men pray, all the benefits which are bestowed and sought for, are of no importance in relation to a life of happiness; under such conditions it is sound. For anything that can be added to is imperfect; anything that can suffer loss is not lasting; but let the man whose happiness is to be lasting, rejoice in what is truly his own. Now all that which the crowd gapes after, ebbs and flows. Fortune gives us nothing which we can really own.<sup>[5]</sup> But even these gifts of Fortune please us when reason has tempered and blended them to our taste; for it is reason which makes acceptable to us even external goods that are disagreeable to use if we absorb them too greedily.

Attalus used to employ the following simile: “Did you ever see a dog snapping with wide-open jaws at bits of bread or meat which his master tosses to him? Whatever he catches, he straightway swallows whole, and always opens his jaws in the hope of something more. So it is with ourselves; we stand expectant, and whatever Fortune has thrown to us we forthwith bolt, without any real pleasure, and then stand alert and frantic for something else to snatch.” But it is not so with the wise man; he is satisfied. Even if something falls to him, he merely accepts it carelessly and lays it aside.

The happiness that he enjoys is supremely great, is lasting, is his own. Assume that a man has good intentions, and has made progress, but is still far from the heights; the result is a series of ups and downs; he is now raised to heaven, now brought down to earth. For those who lack experience and training, there is no limit to the downhill course; such a one falls into the Chaos<sup>[6]</sup> of Epicurus—empty and boundless.

There is still a third class of men—those who toy with wisdom—they have not indeed touched it, but yet are in sight of it, and have it, so to speak, within striking distance. They are not dashed about, nor do they drift back either; they are not on dry land, but are already in port.

Therefore, considering the great difference between those on the heights and those in the depths, and seeing that even those in the middle are pursued by an ebb and flow peculiar to their state and pursued also by an enormous risk of returning to their degenerate ways, we should not give ourselves up to matters which occupy our time. They should be shut out; if they once gain an entrance, they will bring in still others to take their places. Let us resist them in their early stages. It is better that they shall never begin than that they shall be made to cease. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. The context furnishes no clue as to what the subject was.
2. Seneca is fond of legal figures; cf. Ep. lxxv. 15. For the *dilatatio* see Pliny, Ep. i. 18. 1 *rogas ut dilationem petam*.
3. Cf. Ep. liii. 9 (*philosophia*) *non est res subsiciva* (“a matter for spare time”), *ordinaria est; domina est, adesse iubet*.
4. Cf. Ep. xlv. 9 *intrepidus, quem aliqua vis movet, nulla perturbat, quem fortuna . . . pungit, non vulnerat, et hoc raro*.
5. Cf. Lucretius, iii. 971 *vita mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu*. Our lives are merely loaned to us; Nature retains the *dominium*. Cf. also Seneca’s frequent figure of life as an inn, contrasted with a house over which one has ownership.
6. The void (*inane*), or infinite space, as contrasted with the atoms which form new worlds in continuous succession.





*On Philosophers and Kings*<sup>[1]</sup>

It seems to me erroneous to believe that those who have loyally dedicated themselves to philosophy are stubborn and rebellious, scorners of magistrates or kings or of those who control the administration of public affairs. For, on the contrary, no class of man is so popular with the philosopher as the ruler is; and rightly so, because rulers bestow upon no men a greater privilege than upon those who are allowed to enjoy peace and leisure.

Hence, those who are greatly profited, as regards their purpose of right living, by the security of the State, must needs cherish as a father the author of this good; much more so, at any rate, than those restless persons who are always in the public eye, who owe much to the ruler, but also expect much from him, and are never so generously loaded with favours that their cravings, which grow by being supplied, are thoroughly satisfied. And yet he whose thoughts are of benefits to come has forgotten the benefits received; and there is no greater evil in covetousness than its ingratitude.

Besides, no man in public life thinks of the many whom he has outstripped; he thinks rather of those by whom he is outstripped. And these men find it less pleasing to see many behind them than annoying to see anyone ahead of them.<sup>[2]</sup> That is the trouble with

every sort of ambition; it does not look back. Nor is it ambition alone that is fickle, but also every sort of craving, because it always begins where it ought to end.

But that other man, upright and pure, who has left the senate and the bar and all affairs of state, that he may retire to nobler affairs,<sup>[3]</sup> cherishes those who have made it possible for him to do this in security; he is the only person who returns spontaneous thanks to them, the only person who owes them a great debt without their knowledge. Just as a man honours and reveres his teachers, by whose aid he has found release from his early wanderings, so the sage honours these men, also, under whose guardianship he can put his good theories into practice.

But you answer: "Other men too are protected by a king's personal power." Perfectly true. But just as, out of a number of persons who have profited by the same stretch of calm weather, a man deems that his debt to Neptune is greater if his cargo during that voyage has been more extensive and valuable, and just as the vow is paid with more of a will by the merchant than by the passenger, and just as, from among the merchants themselves, heartier thanks are uttered by the dealer in spices, purple fabrics, and objects worth their weight in gold, than by him who has gathered cheap merchandise that will be nothing but ballast for his ship; similarly, the benefits of this peace, which extends to all, are more deeply appreciated by those who make good use of it.

For there are many of our toga-clad citizens to whom peace brings more trouble than war. Or do those, think you, owe as much as we do for the peace they enjoy, who spend it in drunkenness, or in lust, or in other vices which it were worth even a war to interrupt? No, not unless you think that the wise man is so unfair as to believe that as an individual he owes nothing in return for the advantages which he enjoys with all the rest. I owe a great debt to the sun and to the moon; and yet they do not rise



for me alone. I am personally beholden to the seasons and to the god who controls them, although in no respect have they been apportioned for my benefit.

The foolish greed of mortals makes a distinction between possession and ownership,<sup>[4]</sup> and believes that it has ownership in nothing in which the general public has a share. But our philosopher considers nothing more truly his own than that which he shares in partnership with all mankind. For these things would not be common property, as indeed they are, unless every individual had his quota; even a joint interest based upon the slightest share makes one a partner.

Again, the great and true goods are not divided in such a manner that each has but a slight interest; they belong in their entirety to each individual. At a distribution of grain men receive only the amount that has been promised to each person; the banquet and the meat-dole,<sup>[5]</sup> or all else that a man can carry away with him, are divided into parts. These goods, however, are indivisible—I mean peace and liberty—and they belong in their entirety to all men just as much as they belong to each individual.

Therefore the philosopher thinks of the person who makes it possible for him to use and enjoy these things, of the person who exempts him when the state's dire need summons to arms, to sentry duty, to the defence of the walls, and to the manifold exactions of war; and he gives thanks to the helmsman of his state. This is what philosophy teaches most of all—honourably to avow the debt of benefits received, and honourably to pay them; sometimes, however, the acknowledgment itself constitutes payment.

Our philosopher will therefore acknowledge that he owes a large debt to the ruler who makes it possible, by his management and foresight, for him to enjoy rich leisure, control of his own time, and a tranquillity uninterrupted by public employments.

*Shepherd! a god this leisure gave to me,*

*For he shall be my god eternally.*<sup>[6]</sup>

And if even such leisure as that of our poet owes a great debt to its author, though its greatest boon is this:

*As thou canst see,*

*He let me turn my cattle out to feed,  
And play what fancy pleased on rustic reed;*<sup>[7]</sup>

how highly are we to value this leisure of the philosopher, which is spent among the gods, and makes us gods?

Yes, this is what I mean, Lucilius; and I invite you to heaven by a short cut.

Sextius used to say that Jupiter had no more power than the good man. Of course, Jupiter has more gifts which he can offer to mankind; but when you are choosing between two good men, the richer is not necessarily the better, any more than, in the case of two pilots of equal skill in managing the tiller, you would call him the better whose ship is larger and more imposing.

In what respect is Jupiter superior to our good man? His goodness lasts longer; but the wise man does not set a lower value upon himself, just because his virtues are limited by a briefer span. Or take two wise men; he who has died at a greater age is not happier than he whose virtue has been limited to fewer years: similarly, a god has no advantage over a wise man in point of happiness,<sup>[8]</sup> even though he has such an advantage in point of years. That virtue is not greater which lasts longer.

Jupiter possesses all things, but he has surely given over the possession of them to others; the only use of them which belongs to him is this: he is the cause of their use to all men. The wise man surveys and scorns all the possessions of others as calmly as does Jupiter, and regards himself with the greater esteem because,

while Jupiter cannot make use of them, he, the wise man, does not wish to do so.

Let us therefore believe Sextius when he shows us the path of perfect beauty, and cries: “This is ‘the way to the stars’<sup>[9]</sup>; this is the way, by observing thrift, self-restraint, and courage!”

The gods are not disdainful or envious; they open the door to you; they lend a hand as you climb.

Do you marvel that man goes to the gods? God comes to men; nay, he comes nearer—he comes into men.<sup>[10]</sup> No mind that has not God, is good. Divine seeds are scattered throughout our mortal bodies; if a good husbandman receives them, they spring up in the likeness of their source and of a parity with those from which they came. If, however, the husbandman be bad, like a barren or marshy soil, he kills the seeds, and causes tares to grow up instead of wheat. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. This letter is especially interesting because of its autobiographical hints, and its relation to Seneca's own efforts to be rid of court life and seek the leisure of the sage. See the Introduction to Vol. I. pp. viii f.
2. Cf. Horace, *Sat.* i. 1. 115f. -  
*Instat equis auriga snos vincentibus, illum  
Praeteritum temnens extremos inter euntem.*
3. For an interesting account of philosophy and its relation to Roman history see E. V. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, chap. xvi. This subject is discussed fully by Cicero, *De Off.* i. 71 f., and by Seneca, Ep. xc.
4. For this figure cf. Ep. lxxii. 7 and note; see also the similar language of lxxxviii. 12 *hoc, quod tenes, quod tuum dicis, publicum est et quidem generis humani.*
5. During certain festivals, either cooked or raw meat was distributed among the people.
6. Vergil, *Eclogue*, i. 6 f. Vergil owes a debt to the Emperor, and regards him as a “god” because of the bestowal of earthly happiness; how much greater is the debt of the philosopher, who has the opportunity to study heavenly things!
7. Vergil, *Eclogue*, i. 9 f.
8. In the Christian religion, God is everything; among the Stoics, the wise man is equal to the gods. Cf., for example, Ep. xli. 4.
9. Vergil, *Aeneid*, ix. 641.
10. Cf. Ep. xli. §§ 1 f. *prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est.*

LETTER 74

*On Virtue as a Refuge  
From Worldly Distractions*



Your letter has given me pleasure, and has roused me from sluggishness. It has also prompted my memory, which has been for some time slack and nerveless.

You are right, of course, my dear Lucilius, in deeming the chief means of attaining the happy life to consist in the belief that the only good lies in that which is honourable.<sup>[1]</sup> For anyone who deems other things to be good, puts himself in the power of Fortune, and goes under the control of another; but he who has in every case defined the good by the honourable, is happy with an inward happiness.

One man is saddened when his children die; another is anxious when they become ill; a third is embittered when they do something disgraceful, or suffer a taint in their reputation. One man, you will observe, is tortured by passion for his neighbour's wife, another by passion for his own. You will find men who are completely upset by failure to win an election, and others who are actually plagued by the offices which they have won.

But the largest throng of unhappy men among the host of mortals are those whom the expectation of death, which threatens them on every hand, drives to despair. For there is no quarter from which death may not approach. Hence, like soldiers scouting

in the enemy's country, they must look about in all directions, and turn their heads at every sound; unless the breast be rid of this fear, one lives with a palpitating heart.

You will readily recall those who have been driven into exile and dispossessed of their property. You will also recall (and this is the most serious kind of destitution) those who are poor in the midst of their riches.<sup>[2]</sup> You will recall men who have suffered shipwreck, or those whose sufferings resemble shipwreck; for they were untroubled and at ease, when the anger or perhaps the envy of the populace—a missile most deadly to those in high places<sup>[3]</sup>—dismantled them like a storm which is wont to rise when one is most confident of continued calm, or like a sudden stroke of lightning which even causes the region round about it to tremble. For just as anyone who stands near the bolt is stunned and resembles one who is struck so in these sudden and violent mishaps, although but one person is overwhelmed by the disaster, the rest are overwhelmed by fear, and the possibility that they may suffer makes them as downcast as the actual sufferer.

Every man is troubled in spirit by evils that come suddenly upon his neighbour. Like birds, who cower even at the whirr of an empty sling, we are distracted by mere sounds as well as by blows. No man therefore can be happy if he yields himself up to such foolish fancies. For nothing brings happiness unless it also brings calm; it is a bad sort of existence that is spent in apprehension.

Whoever has largely surrendered himself to the power of Fortune has made for himself a huge web of disquietude, from which he cannot get free; if one would win a way to safety, there is but one road—to despise externals and to be contented with that which is honourable. For those who regard anything as better than virtue, or believe that there is any good except virtue, are spreading their arms to gather in that which Fortune tosses abroad, and are anxiously awaiting her favours.

Picture now to yourself that Fortune is holding a festival, and is showering down honours, riches, and influence upon this mob of mortals; some of these gifts have already been torn to pieces in the hands of those who try to snatch them, others have been divided up by treacherous partnerships, and still others have been seized to the great detriment of those into whose possession they have come. Certain of these favours have fallen to men while they were absent-minded;<sup>[4]</sup> others have been lost to their seekers because they were snatching too eagerly for them, and, just because they are greedily seized upon, have been knocked from their hands. There is not a man among them all, however—even he who has been lucky in the booty which has fallen to him—whose joy in his spoil has lasted until the morrow.

The most sensible man, therefore, as soon as he sees the dole being brought in,<sup>[5]</sup> runs from the theatre; for he knows that one pays a high price for small favours. No one will grapple with him on the way out, or strike him as he departs; the quarrelling takes place where the prizes are.

Similarly with the gifts which Fortune tosses down to us; wretches that we are, we become excited, we are torn asunder, we wish that we had many hands, we look back now in this direction and now in that. All too slowly, as it seems, are the gifts thrown in our direction; they merely excite our cravings, since they can reach but few and are awaited by all.

We are keen to intercept them as they fall down. We rejoice if we have laid hold of anything; and some have been mocked by the idle hope of laying hold; we have either paid a high price for worthless plunder with some disadvantage to ourselves, or else have been defrauded and are left in the lurch. Let us therefore withdraw from a game like this, and give way to the greedy rabble; let them gaze after such “goods,” which hang suspended above them, and be themselves still more in suspense.<sup>[6]</sup>

Whoever makes up his mind to be happy should conclude that the good consists only in that which is honourable. For if he regards anything else as good, he is, in the first place, passing an unfavourable judgment upon Providence because of the fact that upright men often suffer misfortunes,<sup>[7]</sup> and that the time which is allotted to us is but short and scanty, if you compare it with the eternity which is allotted to the universe.

It is a result of complaints like these that we are unappreciative in our comments upon the gifts of heaven; we complain because they are not always granted to us, because they are few and unsure and fleeting. Hence we have not the will either to live or to die; we are possessed by hatred of life, by fear of death. Our plans are all at sea, and no amount of prosperity can satisfy us. And the reason for all this is that we have not yet attained to that good which is immeasurable and unsurpassable, in which all wishing on our part must cease, because there is no place beyond the highest.

Do you ask why virtue needs nothing? Because it is pleased with what it has, and does not lust after that which it has not. Whatever is enough is abundant in the eyes of virtue.

Dissent from this judgment, and duty and loyalty will not abide. For one who desires to exhibit these two qualities must endure much that the world calls evil; we must sacrifice many things to which we are addicted, thinking them to be goods.

Gone is courage, which should be continually testing itself; gone is greatness of soul, which cannot stand out clearly unless it has learned to scorn as trivial everything that the crowd covets as supremely important; and gone is kindness and the repaying of kindness, if we fear toil, if we have acknowledged anything to be more precious than loyalty, if our eyes are fixed upon anything except the best.

But to pass these questions by: either these so-called goods are not goods, or else man is more fortunate than God, because God has no enjoyment of the things which are given to us.<sup>[8]</sup> For lust pertains not to God, nor do elegant banquets, nor wealth, nor any of the things that allure mankind and lead him on through the influence of degrading pleasure. Therefore, it is, either not incredible that there are goods which God does not possess, or else the very fact that God does not possess them is in itself a proof that these things are not goods. Besides, many things which are wont to be regarded as goods are granted to animals in fuller measure than to men. Animals eat their food with better appetite, are not in the same degree weakened by sexual indulgence, and have a greater and more uniform constancy in their strength. Consequently, they are much more fortunate than man. For there is no wickedness, no injury to themselves, in their way of living. They enjoy their pleasures and they take them more often and more easily, without any of the fear that results from shame or regret.

This being so, you should consider whether one has a right to call anything good in which God is outdone by man. Let us limit the Supreme Good to the soul; it loses its meaning if it is taken from the best part of us and applied to the worst, that is, if it is transferred to the senses; for the senses are more active in dumb beasts. The sum total of our happiness must not be placed in the flesh; the true goods are those which reason bestows, substantial and eternal; they cannot fall away, neither can they grow less or be diminished.

Other things are goods according to opinion, and though they are called by the same name as the true goods, the essence of goodness is not in them. Let us therefore call them “advantages,” and, to use our technical term, “preferred” things.<sup>[9]</sup> Let us, however, recognize that they are our chattels, not parts of ourselves; and let us have them in our possession, but take heed to remember that



they are outside ourselves. Even though they are in our possession, they are to be reckoned as things subordinate and poor, the possession of which gives no man a right to plume himself. For what is more foolish than being self-complacent about something which one has not accomplished by one's own efforts?

Let everything of this nature be added to us, and not stick fast to us, so that, if it is withdrawn, it may come away without tearing off any part of us. Let us use these things, but not boast of them, and let us use them sparingly, as if they were given for safe-keeping and will be withdrawn. Anyone who does not employ reason in his possession of them never keeps them long; for prosperity of itself, if uncontrolled by reason, overwhelms itself. If anyone has put his trust in goods that are most fleeting, he is soon bereft of them, and, to avoid being bereft, he suffers distress. Few men have been permitted to lay aside prosperity gently. The rest all fall, together with the things amid which they have come into eminence, and they are weighted down by the very things which had before exalted them.

For this reason foresight must be brought into play, to insist upon a limit or upon frugality in the use of these things, since license overthrows and destroys its own abundance. That which has no limit has never endured, unless reason, which sets limits, has held it in check. The fate of many cities will prove the truth of this; their sway has ceased at the very prime because they were given to luxury, and excess has ruined all that had been won by virtue. We should fortify ourselves against such calamities. But no wall can be erected against Fortune which she cannot take by storm; let us strengthen our inner defences. If the inner part be safe, man can be attacked, but never captured.

Do you wish to know what this weapon of defence is?

It is the ability to refrain from chafing over whatever happens to one, of knowing that the very agencies which seem to bring

harm are working for the preservation of the world, and are a part of the scheme for bringing to fulfilment the order of the universe and its functions. Let man be pleased with whatever has pleased God; let him marvel at himself and his own resources for this very reason, that he cannot be overcome, that he has the very powers of evil subject to his control, and that he brings into subjection chance and pain and wrong by means of that strongest of powers—reason.

Love reason! The love of reason will arm you against the greatest hardships. Wild beasts dash against the hunter's spear through love of their young, and it is their wildness and their unpremeditated onrush that keep them from being tamed; often a desire for glory has stirred the mind of youth to despise both sword and stake; the mere vision and semblance of virtue impel certain men to a self-imposed death. In proportion as reason is stouter and steadier than ally of these emotions, so much the more forcefully will she make her way through the midst of utter terrors and dangers.

Men say to us: "You are mistaken if you maintain that nothing is a good except that which is honourable; a defence like this will not make you safe from Fortune and free from her assaults. For you maintain that dutiful children, and a well-governed country, and good parents, are to be reckoned as goods; but you cannot see these dear objects in danger and be yourself at ease. Your calm will be disturbed by a siege conducted against your country, by the death of your children, or by the enslaving of your parents."

I will first state what we Stoics usually reply<sup>[10]</sup> to these objectors, and then will add what additional answer should, in my opinion, be given.

The situation is entirely different in the case of goods whose loss entails some hardship substituted in their place; for example, when good health is impaired there is a change to ill-health; when

the eye is put out, we are visited with blindness; we not only lose our speed when our leg-muscles are cut, but infirmity takes the place of speed. But no such danger is involved in the case of the goods to which we referred a moment ago. And why if I have lost a good friend, I have no false friend whom I must endure in his place; nor if I have buried a dutiful son, must I face in exchange unfilial conduct.

In the second place, this does not mean to me the taking-off of a friend or of a child; it is the mere taking-off of their bodies. But a good can be lost in only one way, by changing into what is bad; and this is impossible according to the law of nature, because every virtue, and every work of virtue, abides uncorrupted. Again, even if friends have perished, or children of approved goodness who fulfil their father's prayers for them, there is something that can fill their place. Do you ask what this is? It is that which had made them good in the first place, namely, virtue.

Virtue suffers no space in us to be unoccupied; it takes possession of the whole soul and removes all sense of loss. It alone is sufficient; for the strength and beginnings of all goods exist in virtue herself. What does it matter if running water is cut off and flows away, as long as the fountain from which it has flowed is unharmed? You will not maintain that a man's life is more just if his children are unharmed than if they have passed away, nor yet better appointed, nor more intelligent, nor more honourable; therefore, no better, either. The addition of friends does not make one wiser, nor does their taking away make one more foolish; therefore, not happier or more wretched, either. As long as your virtue is unharmed, you will not feel the loss of anything that has been withdrawn from you.

You may say, "Come now; is not a man happier when girt about with a large company of friends and children?" Why should this be so? For the Supreme Good is neither impaired nor increased

thereby; it abides within its own limits, no matter how Fortune has conducted herself. Whether a long old age falls to one's lot, or whether the end comes on this side of old age—the measure of the Supreme Good is unvaried, in spite of the difference in years.

Whether you draw a larger or a smaller circle, its size affects its area, not its shape. One circle may remain as it is for a long time while you may contract the other forthwith, or even merge it completely with the sand in which it was drawn;<sup>[11]</sup> yet each circle has had the same shape. That which is straight is not judged by its size, or by its number, or by its duration; it can no more be made longer than it can be made shorter. Scale down the honourable life as much as you like from the full hundred years, and reduce it to a single day; it is equally honourable.<sup>[12]</sup>

Sometimes virtue is widespread, governing kingdoms, cities, and provinces, creating laws, developing friendships, and regulating the duties that hold good between relatives and children; at other times it is limited by the narrow bounds of poverty, exile, or bereavement. But it is no smaller when it is reduced from prouder heights to a private station, from a royal palace to a humble dwelling, or when from a general and broad jurisdiction it is gathered into the narrow limits of a private house or a tiny corner.

Virtue is just as great, even when it has retreated within itself and is shut in on all sides. For its spirit is no less great and upright, its sagacity no less complete, its justice no less inflexible. It is, therefore, equally happy. For happiness has its abode in one place only, namely, in the mind itself, and is noble, steadfast, and calm; and this state cannot be attained without a knowledge of things divine and human.

The other answer, which I promised<sup>[13]</sup> to make to your objection, follows from this reasoning. The wise man is not distressed by the loss of children or of friends. For he endures their death in the same spirit in which he awaits his own. And he fears the one

as little as he grieves for the other. For the underlying principle of virtue is conformity;<sup>[14]</sup> all the works of virtue are in harmony and agreement with virtue itself. But this harmony is lost if the soul, which ought to be uplifted, is cast down by grief or a sense of loss. It is ever a dishonour for a man to be troubled and fretted, to be numbed when there is any call for activity. For that which is honourable is free from care and untrammelled, is unafraid, and stands girt for action.

“What,” you ask, “will the wise man experience no emotion like disturbance of spirit? Will not his features change colour,<sup>[15]</sup> his countenance be agitated, and his limbs grow cold? And there are other things which we do, not under the influence of the will, but unconsciously and as the result of a sort of natural impulse.” I admit that this is true; but the sage will retain the firm belief that none of these things is evil, or important enough to make a healthy mind break down.

Whatever shall remain to be done virtue can do with courage and readiness. For anyone would admit that it is a mark of folly to do in a slothful and rebellious spirit whatever one has to do, or to direct the body in one direction and the mind in another, and thus to be torn between utterly conflicting emotions. For folly is despised precisely because of the things for which she vaunts and admires herself, and she does not do gladly even those things in which she prides herself. But if folly fears some evil, she is burdened by it in the very moment of awaiting it, just as if it had actually come—already suffering in apprehension whatever she fears she may suffer.

Just as in the body symptoms of latent ill-health precede the disease—there is, for example, a certain weak sluggishness,<sup>[16]</sup> a lassitude which is not the result of any work, a trembling, and a shivering that pervades the limbs—so the feeble spirit is shaken

by its ills a long time before it is overcome by them. It anticipates them, and totters before its time.

But what is greater madness than to be tortured by the future and not to save your strength for the actual suffering, but to invite and bring on wretchedness? If you cannot be rid of it, you ought at least to postpone it.

Will you not understand that no man should be tormented by the future? The man who has been told that he will have to endure torture fifty years from now is not disturbed thereby, unless he has leaped over the intervening years, and has projected himself into the trouble that is destined to arrive a generation later. In the same way, souls that enjoy being sick and that seize upon excuses for sorrow are saddened by events long past and effaced from the records. Past and future are both absent; we feel neither of them. But there can be no pain except as the result of what you feel. Farewell.

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### Footnotes

1. A doctrine often expressed in the letters; cf., for example, lxxi. 4.
2. Cf. Horace, *Carm.* iii. 16. 28 *magnas inter opes inops*.
3. For the same thought cf. Ep. iv. 7 *Neminem eo fortuna provexit, ut non tantum illi minaretur, quantum permiserat. Noli huic tranquillitati confidere; momento mare evertitur. Eodem die ubi luserunt navigia, sorbentur*.
4. i.e., engaged upon something else. Cf. Ep. i. 1.
5. A distribution of coins, etc., at the public games. Food was also doled out to the populace on similar occasions.
6. This figure of the dole as applied to Fortune is sustained to an extent which is unusual in Seneca.
7. This phrase recalls the title of one of Seneca's philosophical essays: *De Providentia*, or *Quare Bonis Viris Mala Accidant cum sit Providentia*.
8. Cf. Ep. lxxiii. § 14 *Iuppiter uti illis non potest*.
9. *Producta* is a translation of the Stoic term προηγγμένα. For a clear exposition of this topic see Cicero, *De Fin.* iii. 52 ff.
10. See Ep. lxvi. 6. The Stoics, unlike the Academics and the Peripatetics, maintained that the good must have "an unconditional value" (Zeller).
11. Cf. *Itane in geometriae pulvere haerebo?*, Ep. lxxxviii. 39 and note.
12. See the argument in Ep. xii. 6 f., and often elsewhere.

13. See § 23.

14. Called by the early Stoics *ὁμολογία*; the idea of “conformity with nature” is a fundamental doctrine of the school. See Rackham on Cicero, *De Fin.* iii. 21.

15. Cf. Epp. xi. 6 and lxxi. 29.

16. Perhaps a sort of malaria.

LETTER 75

*On the Diseases of the Soul*



You have been complaining that my letters to you are rather carelessly written. Now who talks carefully unless he also desires to talk affectedly?<sup>[1]</sup> I prefer that my letters should be just what my conversation<sup>[2]</sup> would be if you and I were sitting in one another's company or taking walks together, spontaneous and easy; for my letters have nothing strained or artificial about them.

If it were possible, I should prefer to show, rather than speak, my feelings. Even if I were arguing a point, I should not stamp my foot, or toss my arms about, or raise my voice; but I should leave that sort of thing to the orator, and should be content to have conveyed my feelings to you without having either embellished them or lowered their dignity.

I should like to convince you entirely of this one fact—that I feel whatever I say, that I not only feel it, but am wedded to it. It is one sort of kiss which a man gives his mistress and another which he gives his children; yet in the father's embrace also, holy and restrained as it is, plenty of affection is disclosed.

I prefer, however, that our conversation on matters so important should not be meagre and dry; for even philosophy does not renounce the company of cleverness. One should not, however, bestow very much attention upon mere words.



Let this be the kernel of my idea: let us say what we feel, and feel what we say; let speech harmonize with life.<sup>[3]</sup> That man has fulfilled his promise who is the same person both when you see him and when you hear him.

We shall not fail to see what sort of man he is and how large a man he is, if only he is one and the same. Our words should aim not to please, but to help. If, however, you can attain eloquence without painstaking, and if you either are naturally gifted or can gain eloquence at slight cost, make the most of it and apply it to the noblest uses. But let it be of such a kind that it displays facts rather than itself. It and the other arts are wholly concerned with cleverness;<sup>[4]</sup> but our business here is the soul.

A sick man does not call in a physician who is eloquent; but if it so happens that the physician who can cure him likewise discourses elegantly about the treatment which is to be followed, the patient will take it in good part. For all that, he will not find any reason to congratulate himself on having discovered a physician who is eloquent. For the case is no different from that of a skilled pilot who is also handsome.

Why do you tickle my ears? Why do you entertain me? There is other business at hand; I am to be cauterized, operated upon, or put on a diet. That is why you were summoned to treat me!

You are required to cure a disease that is chronic and serious—one which affects the general weal. You have as serious a business on hand as a physician has during a plague. Are you concerned about words? Rejoice this instant if you can cope with *things*. When shall you learn all that there is to learn? When shall you so plant in your mind that which you have learned, that it cannot escape? When shall you put it all into practice? For it is not sufficient merely to commit these things to memory, like other matters; they must be practically tested. He is not happy who only knows them, but he who does them.

You reply: “What? Are there no degrees of happiness below your ‘happy’ man? Is there a sheer descent immediately below wisdom?” I think not. For though he who makes progress is still numbered with the fools, yet he is separated from them by a long interval. Among the very persons who are making progress there are also great spaces intervening. They fall into three classes,<sup>[5]</sup> as certain philosophers believe.

First come those who have not yet attained wisdom but have already gained a place near by. Yet even that which is not far away is still outside. These, if you ask me, are men who have already laid aside all passions and vices, who have learned what things are to be embraced; but their assurance is not yet tested. They have not yet put their good into practice, yet from now on they cannot slip back into the faults which they have escaped. They have already arrived at a point from which there is no slipping back, but they are not yet aware of the fact; as I remember writing in another letter, “They are ignorant of their knowledge.”<sup>[6]</sup> It has now been vouchsafed to them to enjoy their good, but not yet to be sure of it.

Some define this class, of which I have been speaking—a class of men who are making progress—as having escaped the diseases of the mind, but not yet the passions, and as still standing upon slippery ground; because no one is beyond the dangers of evil except him who has cleared himself of it wholly. But no one has so cleared himself except the man who has adopted wisdom in its stead.

I have often before explained the difference between the diseases of the mind and its passions. And I shall remind you once more: the diseases are hardened and chronic vices, such as greed and ambition; they have enfolded the mind in too close a grip, and have begun to be permanent evils thereof. To give a brief definition: by “disease” we mean a persistent perversion of the judgment, so that things which are mildly desirable are thought

to be highly desirable. Or, if you prefer, we may define it thus: to be too zealous in striving for things which are only mildly desirable or not desirable at all, or to value highly things which ought to be valued but slightly or valued not at all.

“Passions” are objectionable impulses of the spirit, sudden and vehement; they have come so often, and so little attention has been paid to them, that they have caused a state of disease; just as a catarrh,<sup>[7]</sup> when there has been but a single attack and the catarrh has not yet become habitual, produces a cough, but causes consumption when it has become regular and chronic. Therefore we may say that those who have made most progress are beyond the reach of the “diseases”; but they still feel the “passions” even when very near perfection.

The second class is composed of those who have laid aside both the greatest ills of the mind and its passions, but yet are not in assured possession of immunity.<sup>[8]</sup> For they can still slip back into their former state.

The third class are beyond the reach of many of the vices and particularly of the great vices, but not beyond the reach of all. They have escaped avarice, for example, but still feel anger; they no longer are troubled by lust, but are still troubled by ambition; they no longer have desire, but they still have fear. And just because they fear, although they are strong enough to withstand certain things, there are certain things to which they yield; they scorn death, but are in terror of pain.

Let us reflect a moment on this topic. It will be well with us if we are admitted to this class. The second stage is gained by great good fortune with regard to our natural gifts and by great and unceasing application to study. But not even the third type is to be despised. Think of the host of evils which you see about you; behold how there is no crime that is not exemplified, how far wickedness advances every day, and how prevalent are sins

in home and commonwealth. You will see, therefore, that we are making a considerable gain, if we are not numbered among the basest.

“But as for me,” you say, “I hope that it is in me to rise to a higher rank than that!” I should pray, rather than promise, that we may attain this; we have been forestalled. We hasten towards virtue while hampered by vices. I am ashamed to say it; but we worship that which is honourable only in so far as we have time to spare.<sup>[9]</sup> But what a rich reward awaits us if only we break off the affairs which forestall us and the evils that cling to us with utter tenacity!

Then neither desire nor fear shall rout us. Undisturbed by fears, unspoiled by pleasures, we shall be afraid neither of death nor of the gods; we shall know that death is no evil and that the gods are not powers of evil. That which harms has no greater power than that which receives harm, and things which are utterly good have no power at all to harm.<sup>[10]</sup>

There await us, if ever we escape from these low dregs to that sublime and lofty height, peace of mind and, when all error has been driven out, perfect liberty. You ask what this freedom is? It means not fearing either men or gods; it means not craving wickedness or excess; it means possessing supreme power over oneself. And it is a priceless good to be master of oneself. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. For *putidum* (that which offends the taste, i.e., is too artificially formal) see Cic. *De Orat.* iii. 41 *nolo exprimi litteras putidius, nolo obscurari neglegentius.*
2. Cf. Ep. lxvii. 2 *si quando intervenerunt epistulae tuae, tecum esse mihi videor*, etc.
3. Cf. Ep. cxiv. 1 *talis hominibus fuit oratio qualis vita*, and passim in Epp. xl., lxxv. and cxiv.
4. Eloquence and other arts please mainly by their cleverness; nor does philosophy abjure such cleverness as style; but here in these letters, wherein we are discussing the soul, the graces of speech are of no concern.

5. Chrysippus, however, recognised only the first two classes, as did Epictetus (iv. 2).
6. Ep. lxxi. 4.
7. For Seneca's own struggles with this disease cf. Ep. lxxviii. 1.
8. The difference between the first and second classes is well described in Ep. lxxii. 6 *hoc interest inter consummatae sapientiae virum et alium procedentis, quod inter sanum et ex morbo gravi ac diutino emergentem.*
9. This idea is a favourite with Seneca; cf. Ep. liii. 8 *non est quod precario philosopheris*, and § 9 (*philosophia*) *non est res subsiciva*, "an occupation for one's spare time."
10. Therefore death has no power to harm, since man is not harmed thereby, and the gods, who are utterly good, cannot be the source of evil.



**Japanese:** *Wa*.

**English:** Peace or harmony.

It can also refer to Japan or Japanese,  
as in *wagyu* beef, which is literally  
*wa-* (Japanese) *-gyu* (beef).

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Calligrapher: Noriko Lake

*On Learning Wisdom in Old Age*

You have been threatening me with your enmity, if I do not keep you informed about all my daily actions. But see, now, upon what frank terms you and I live: for I shall confide even the following fact to your ears. I have been hearing the lectures of a philosopher; four days have already passed since I have been attending his school and listening to the harangue, which begins at two o'clock. "A fine time of life for that!" you say. Yes, fine indeed! Now what is more foolish than refusing to learn, simply because one has not been learning for a long time?

"What do you mean? Must I follow the fashion set by the fops<sup>[1]</sup> and youngsters?" But I am pretty well off if this is the only thing that discredits my declining years. Men of all ages are admitted to this class-room. You retort: "Do we grow old merely in order to tag after the youngsters?" But if I, an old man, go to the theatre, and am carried to the races, and allow no duel in the arena to be fought to a finish without my presence, shall I blush to attend a philosopher's lecture?

You should keep learning as long as you are ignorant—even to the end of your life, if there is anything in the proverb. And the proverb suits the present case as well as any: "As long as you live, keep learning how to live." For all that, there is also something

which I can teach in that school. You ask, do you, what I can teach? That even an old man should keep learning.

But I am ashamed of mankind, as often as I enter the lecture-hall. On my way to the house of Metronax<sup>[2]</sup> I am compelled to go, as you know, right past the Neapolitan Theatre. The building is jammed; men are deciding, with tremendous zeal, who is entitled to be called a good flute-player; even the Greek piper and the herald draw their crowds. But in the other place, where the question discussed is: “What is a good man?” and the lesson which we learn is “How to be a good man,” very few are in attendance, and the majority think that even these few are engaged in no good business; they have the name of being empty-headed idler. I hope I may be blessed with that kind of mockery; for one should listen in an unruffled spirit to the railings of the ignorant; when one is marching toward the goal of honour, one should scorn scorn itself.

Proceed, then, Lucilius, and hasten, lest you yourself be compelled to learn in your old age, as is the case with me. Nay, you must hasten all the more, because for a long time you have not approached the subject, which is one that you can scarcely learn thoroughly when you are old. “How much progress shall I make?” you ask. Just as much as you try to make.

Why do you wait? Wisdom comes haphazard to no man. Money will come of its own accord; titles will be given to you; influence and authority will perhaps be thrust upon you; but virtue will not fall upon you by chance. Either is knowledge thereof to be won by light effort or small toil; but toiling is worth while when one is about to win all goods at a single stroke.

For there is but a single good—namely, that which is honourable; in all those other things of which the general opinion approves, you will find no truth or certainty. Why it is, however, that there is but one good, namely, that which is honourable, I



shall now tell you, inasmuch as you judge that in my earlier letter<sup>[3]</sup> I did not carry the discussion far enough, and think that this theory was commended to you rather than proved. I shall also compress the remarks of other authors into narrow compass.

Everything is estimated by the standard of its own good. The vine is valued for its productiveness and the flavour of its wine, the stag for his speed. We ask, with regard to beasts of burden, how sturdy of back they are; for their only use is to bear burdens. If a dog is to find the trail of a wild beast, keenness of scent is of first importance; if to catch his quarry, swiftness of foot; if to attack and harry it, courage. In each thing that quality should be best for which the thing is brought into being and by which it is judged.

And what quality is best in man? It is reason; by virtue of reason he surpasses the animals, and is surpassed only by the gods. Perfect reason is therefore the good peculiar to man; all other qualities he shares in some degree with animals and plants. Man is strong; so is the lion. Man is comely; so is the peacock. Man is swift; so is the horse. I do not say that man is surpassed in all these qualities. I am not seeking to find that which is greatest in him, but that which is peculiarly his own. Man has body; so also have trees. Man has the power to act and to move at will; so have beasts and worms. Man has a voice; but how much louder is the voice of the dog, how much shriller that of the eagle, how much deeper that of the bull, how much sweeter and more melodious that of the nightingale!

What then is peculiar to man? Reason. When this is right and has reached perfection, man's felicity is complete. Hence, if everything is praiseworthy and has arrived at the end intended by its nature, when it has brought its peculiar good to perfection, and if man's peculiar good is reason; then, if a man has brought his reason to perfection, he is praiseworthy and has readied the end

suited to his nature. This perfect reason is called virtue, and is likewise that which is honourable.

Hence that in man is alone a good which alone belongs to man. For we are not now seeking to discover what is a good, but what good is man's. And if there is no other attribute which belongs peculiarly to man except reason, then reason will be his one peculiar good, but a good that is worth all the rest put together. If any man is bad, he will, I suppose, be regarded with disapproval; if good, I suppose he will be regarded with approval. Therefore, that attribute of man whereby he is approved or disapproved is his chief and only good.

You do not doubt whether this is a good; you merely doubt whether it is the sole good. If a man possess all other things, such as health, riches, pedigree,<sup>[4]</sup> a crowded reception-hall, but is confessedly bad, you will disapprove of him. Likewise, if a man possess none of the things which I have mentioned, and lacks money, or an escort of clients, or rank and a line of grandfathers and great-grandfathers, but is confessedly good, you will approve of him. Hence, this is man's one peculiar good, and the possessor of it is to be praised even if he lacks other things; but he who does not possess it, though he possess everything else in abundance is condemned and rejected.

The same thing holds good regarding men as regarding things. A ship is said to be good not when it is decorated with costly colours, nor when its prow is covered with silver or gold or its figure-head<sup>[5]</sup> embossed in ivory, nor when it is laden with the imperial revenues<sup>[6]</sup> or with the wealth of kings, but when it is steady and staunch and taut, with seams that keep out the water, stout enough to endure the buffeting of the waves' obedient to its helm, swift and caring naught for the winds.

You will speak of a sword as good, not when its sword-belt is of gold, or its scabbard studded with gems, but when its edge is fine

for cutting and its point will pierce any armour. Take the carpenter's rule: we do not ask how beautiful it is, but how straight it is. Each thing is praised in regard to that attribute which is taken as its standard, in regard to that which is its peculiar quality.

Therefore in the case of man also, it is not pertinent to the question to know how many acres he ploughs, how much money he has out at interest, how many callers attend his receptions, how costly is the couch on which he lies, how transparent are the cups from which he drinks, but how good he is. He is good, however, if his reason is well-ordered and right and adapted to that which his nature has willed.

It is this that is called virtue; this is what we mean by "honourable";<sup>[7]</sup> it is man's unique good. For since reason alone brings man to perfection, reason alone, when perfected, makes man happy. This, moreover, is man's only good, the only means by which he is made happy. We do indeed say that those things also<sup>[8]</sup> are goods which are furthered and brought together by virtue—that is, all the works of virtue; but virtue itself is for this reason the only good, because there is no good without virtue.

If every good is in the soul, then whatever strengthens, uplifts, and enlarges the soul, is a good; virtue, however, does make the soul stronger, loftier, and larger. For all other things, which arouse our desires, depress the soul and weaken it, and when we think that they are uplifting the soul, they are merely puffing it up and cheating it with much emptiness. Therefore, that alone is good which will make the soul better.

All the actions of life, taken as a whole, are controlled by the consideration of what is honourable or base; it is with reference to these two things that our reason is governed in doing or not doing a particular thing. I shall explain what I mean: A good man will do what he thinks it will be honourable for him to do, even if it involves toil; he will do it even if it involves harm to him; he

will do it even if it involves peril; again, he will not do that which will be base, even if it brings him money, or pleasure, or power. Nothing will deter him from that which is honourable, and nothing will tempt him into baseness.

Therefore, if he is determined invariably to follow that which is honourable, invariably to avoid baseness, and in every act of his life to have regard for these two things, deeming nothing else good except that which is honourable, and nothing else bad except that which is base; if virtue alone is unperverted in him and by itself keeps its even course, then virtue is that man's only good, and nothing can thenceforth happen to it which may make it anything else than good. It has escaped all risk of change; folly may creep upwards towards wisdom, but wisdom never slips back into folly.

You may perhaps remember my saying<sup>[9]</sup> that the things which have been generally desired and feared have been trampled down by many a man in moments of sudden passion. There have been found men who would place their hands in the flames, men whose smiles could not be stopped by the torturer, men who would shed not a tear at the funeral of their children, men who would meet death unflinchingly. It is love, for example, anger, lust, which have challenged dangers. If a momentary stubbornness can accomplish all this when roused by some goad that pricks the spirit, how much more can be accomplished by virtue, which does not act impulsively or suddenly, but uniformly and with a strength that is lasting!

It follows that the things which are often scorned by the men who are moved with a sudden passion, and are always scorned by the wise, are neither goods nor evils. Virtue itself is therefore the only good; she marches proudly between the two extremes of fortune, with great scorn for both.

If, however, you accept the view that there is anything good besides that which is honourable, all the virtues will suffer. For it will never be possible for any virtue to be won and held, if there is anything outside itself which virtue must take into consideration. If there is any such thing, then it is at variance with reason, from which the virtues spring, and with truth also, which cannot exist without reason. Any opinion, however, which is at variance with truth, is wrong.

A good man, you will admit, must have the highest sense of duty toward the gods. Hence he will endure with an unruffled spirit whatever happens to him; for he will know that it has happened as a result of the divine law, by which the whole creation moves. This being so, there will be for him one good, and only one, namely, that which is honourable; for one of its dictates is that we shall obey the gods and not blaze forth in anger at sudden misfortunes or deplore our lot, but rather patiently accept fate and obey its commands.

If anything except the honourable is good, we shall be hounded by greed for life, and by greed for the things which provide life with its furnishings—an intolerable state, subject to no limits, unstable. The only good, therefore, is that which is honourable, that which is subject to bounds.

I have declared<sup>[10]</sup> that man's life would be more blest than that of the gods, if those things which the gods do not enjoy are goods—such as money and offices of dignity. There is this further consideration: if only it is true that our souls, when released from the body, still abide, a happier condition is in store for them than is theirs while they dwell in the body. And yet, if those things are goods which we make use of for our bodies' sake, our souls will be worse off when set free; and that is contrary to our belief, to say that the soul is happier when it is cabined and confined than when it is free and has betaken itself to the universe.

I also said<sup>[11]</sup> that if those things which dumb animals possess equally with man are goods, then dumb animals also will lead a happy life; which is of course impossible. One must endure all things in defence of that which is honourable; but this would not be necessary if there existed any other good besides that which is honourable.

Although this question was discussed by me pretty extensively in a previous letter,<sup>[12]</sup> I have discussed it summarily and briefly run through the argument.

But an opinion of this kind will never seem true to you unless you exalt your mind and ask yourself whether, at the call of duty, you would be willing to die for your country, and buy the safety of all your fellow-citizens at the price of your own; whether you would offer your neck not only with patience, but also with gladness. If you would do this, there is no other good in your eyes. For you are giving up everything in order to acquire this good. Consider how great is the power of that which is honourable: you will die for your country, even at a moment's notice, when you know that you ought to do so.

Sometimes, as a result of noble conduct, one wins great joy even in a very short and fleeting space of time; and though none of the fruits of a deed that has been done will accrue to the doer after he is dead and removed from the sphere of human affairs, yet the mere contemplation of a deed that is to be done is a delight, and the brave and upright man, picturing to himself the guerdons of his death—guerdons such as the freedom of his country and the deliverance of all those for whom he is paying out his life—partakes of the greatest pleasure and enjoys the fruit of his own peril.

But that man also who is deprived of this joy, the joy which is afforded by the contemplation of some last noble effort, will leap to his death without a moment's hesitation, content to act rightly and dutifully. Moreover, you may confront him with many

discouragements; you may say: "Your deed will speedily be forgotten," or "Your fellow-citizens will offer you scant thanks." He will answer: "All these matters lie outside my task. My thoughts are on the deed itself. I know that this is honourable. Therefore, whithersoever I am led and summoned by honour, I will go."

This, therefore, is the only good, and not only is every soul that has reached perfection aware of it, but also every soul that is by nature noble and of right instincts; all other goods are trivial and mutable. For this reason we are harassed if we possess them. Even though, by the kindness of Fortune, they have been heaped together, they weigh heavily upon their owners, always pressing them down and sometimes crushing them.

None of those whom you behold clad in purple is happy, any more than one of these actors<sup>[13]</sup> upon whom the play bestows a sceptre and a cloak while on the stage; they strut their hour before a crowded house, with swelling port and buskined foot; but when once they make their exit the foot-gear is removed and they return to their proper stature. None of those who have been raised to a loftier height by riches and honours is really great. Why then does he seem great to you? It is because you are measuring the pedestal along with the man. A dwarf is not tall, though he stand upon a mountain-top; a colossal statue will still be tall, though you place it in a well.

This is the error under which we labour; this is the reason why we are imposed upon: we value no man at what he is, but add to the man himself the trappings in which he is clothed. But when you wish to inquire into a man's true worth, and to know what manner of man he is, look at him when he is naked; make him lay aside his inherited estate, his titles, and the other deceptions of fortune; let him even strip off his body. Consider his soul, its quality and its stature, and thus learn whether its greatness is borrowed, or its own.

If a man can behold with unflinching eyes the flash of a sword, if he knows that it makes no difference to him whether his soul takes flight through his mouth or through a wound in his throat,<sup>[14]</sup> you may call him happy; you may also call him happy if, when he is threatened with bodily torture, whether it be the result of accident or of the might of the stronger, he can without concern hear talk of chains, or of exile, or of all the idle fears that stir men's minds, and can say:

*“O maiden, no new sudden form of toil*

*Springs up before my eyes; within my soul  
I have forestalled and surveyed everything.”<sup>[15]</sup>*

Today it is you who threaten me with these terrors; but I have always threatened myself with them, and have prepared myself as a man to meet man's destiny.”

If an evil has been pondered beforehand, the blow is gentle when it comes. To the fool, however, and to him who trusts in fortune, each event as it arrives “comes in a new and sudden form,” and a large part of evil, to the inexperienced, consists in its novelty. This is proved by the fact that men endure with greater courage, when they have once become accustomed to them, the things which they had at first regarded as hardships.

Hence, the wise man accustoms himself to coming trouble, lightening by long reflection the evils which others lighten by long endurance. We sometimes hear the inexperienced say: “I knew that this was in store for me.” But the wise man knows that all things are in store for him. Whatever happens, he says: “I knew it.” Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. A mock-heroic nickname for the knights, derived from the town of Trossulum in Etruria, which they captured by a sensational charge. See Persius, i. 82, and Seneca, Ep. lxxxvii. 9.
2. See also Ep. xciii.



3. Ep. lxxiv.
4. Literally “many masks” of his ancestors. These were placed in the *atrium*.
5. Literally “the guardian deity”; cf. Horace, *Od.* i. 14. 10. These were images of the gods, carried and invoked by the ancients, in the same manner as St. Nicholas today.
6. The  *fiscus*  was the private treasury of the Roman Emperor, as contrasted with the  *aerarium* , which theoretically was controlled by the Senate.
7. i.e., “moral worth.”
8. i.e., peace, the welfare of one’s country, dutiful children, etc.
9. Cf. Ep. lxxiv. 21.
10. Cf. Ep. lxxiv. 14  *aut ista bona non sunt, quae vocantur, aut homo felicior deo est, quoniam quidem quae parata nobis sunt, non habet in usu deus.*
11. eg., Ep. lxxiv. 16  *summum bonum . . . obsolescit, si ab optima nostri parte ad pessimam transit et transfertur ad sensus, qui agiliores sunt animalibus mutis.*
12. Ep. lxxiv., esp § 14.
13. Compare the argument in Ep. lxxx. § 7, “This farce of living, in which we act our parts so ill”; § 8, the loudmouthed impersonator of heroes, who sleeps on rags; and § 9  *hominem involutum aestimas?*
14. As the world-soul is spread through the universe, so the human soul (as fire, or breath) is diffused through the body, and may take its departure in various ways.
15. Vergil,  *Aeneid* , vi. 103 ff. (The answer of Aeneas to the Sibyl’s prophecy.)

LETTER 77

*On Taking One's Own Life*



Suddenly there came into our view today the “Alexandrian” ships—I mean those which are usually sent ahead to announce the coming of the fleet; they are called “mail-boats.” The Campanians are glad to see them; all the rabble of Puteoli<sup>[1]</sup> stand on the docks, and can recognize the “Alexandrian” boats, no matter how great the crowd of vessels, by the very trim of their sails. For they alone may keep spread their topsails, which all ships use when out at sea, because nothing sends a ship along so well as its upper canvas; that is where most of the speed is obtained. So when the breeze has stiffened and becomes stronger than is comfortable, they set their yards lower; for the wind has less force near the surface of the water. Accordingly, when they have made Capreae and the headland whence

*Tall Pallas watches on the stormy peak,*<sup>[2]</sup>

all other vessels are bidden to be content with the mainsail, and the topsail stands out conspicuously on the “Alexandrian” mail-boats.

While everybody was bustling about and hurrying to the waterfront, I felt great pleasure in my laziness, because, although I was soon to receive letters from my friends, I was in no hurry to know how my affairs were progressing abroad, or what news the letters were bringing; for some time now I have had no losses, nor gains

either. Even if I were not an old man, I could not have helped feeling pleasure at this; but as it is, my pleasure was far greater. For, however small my possessions might be, I should still have left over more travelling-money than journey to travel, especially since this journey upon which we have set out is one which need not be followed to the end.

An expedition will be incomplete if one stops half-way, or anywhere on this side of one's destination; but life is not incomplete if it is honourable. At whatever point you leave off living, provided you leave off nobly, your life is a whole.<sup>[3]</sup> Often, however, one must leave off bravely, and our reasons therefore need not be momentous; for neither are the reasons momentous which hold us here.

Tullius Marcellinus,<sup>[4]</sup> a man whom you knew very well, who in youth was a quiet soul and became old prematurely, fell ill of a disease which was by no means hopeless; but it was protracted and troublesome, and it demanded much attention; hence he began to think about dying. He called many of his friends together. Each one of them gave Marcellinus advice—the timid friend urging him to do what he had made up his mind to do; the flattering and wheedling friend giving counsel which he supposed would be more pleasing to Marcellinus when he came to think the matter over; but our Stoic friend, a rare man, and, to praise him in language which he deserves, a man of courage and vigour<sup>[5]</sup> admonished him best of all, as it seems to me. For he began as follows: “Do not torment yourself, my dear Marcellinus, as if the question which you are weighing were a matter of importance. It is not an important matter to live; all your slaves live, and so do all animals; but it is important to die honourably, sensibly, bravely. Reflect how long you have been doing the same thing: food, sleep, lust—this is one's daily round. The desire to die may be felt, not

only by the sensible man or the brave or unhappy man, but even by the man who is merely surfeited.”

Marcellinus did not need someone to urge him, but rather someone to help him; his slaves refused to do his bidding. The Stoic therefore removed their fears, showing them that there was no risk involved for the household except when it was uncertain whether the master’s death was self-sought or not; besides, it was as bad a practice to kill one’s master as it was to prevent him forcibly from killing himself.

Then he suggested to Marcellinus himself that it would be a kindly act to distribute gifts to those who had attended him throughout his whole life, when that life was finished, just as, when a banquet is finished,<sup>[6]</sup> the remaining portion is divided among the attendants who stand about the table. Marcellinus was of a compliant and generous disposition, even when it was a question of his own property; so he distributed little sums among his sorrowing slaves, and comforted them besides.

No need had he of sword or of bloodshed; for three days he fasted and had a tent put up in his very bedroom.<sup>[7]</sup> Then a tub was brought in; he lay in it for a long time, and, as the hot water was continually poured over him, he gradually passed away, not without a feeling of pleasure, as he himself remarked—such a feeling as a slow dissolution is wont to give. Those of us who have ever fainted know from experience what this feeling is.

This little anecdote into which I have digressed will not be displeasing to you. For you will see that your friend departed neither with difficulty nor with suffering. Though he committed suicide, yet he withdrew most gently, gliding out of life. The anecdote may also be of some use; for often a crisis demands just such examples. There are times when we ought to die and are unwilling; sometimes we die and are unwilling.

No one is so ignorant as not to know that we must at some time die; nevertheless, when one draws near death, one turns to flight, trembles, and laments. Would you not think him an utter fool who wept because he was not alive a thousand years ago? And is he not just as much of a fool who weeps because he will not be alive a thousand years from now? It is all the same; you will not be, and you were not. Neither of these periods of time belongs to you.

You have been cast upon this point of time,<sup>[8]</sup> if you would make it longer, how much longer shall you make it? Why weep? Why pray? You are taking pains to no purpose.

*Give over thinking that your prayers can bend*

*Divine decrees from their predestined end.*<sup>[9]</sup>

These decrees are unalterable and fixed; they are governed by a mighty and everlasting compulsion. Your goal will be the goal of all things. What is there strange in this to you? You were born to be subject to this law; this fate befell your father, your mother, your ancestors, all who came before you; and it will befall all who shall come after you. A sequence which cannot be broken or altered by any power binds all things together and draws all things in its course.

Think of the multitudes of men doomed to death who will come after you, of the multitudes who will go with you! You would die more bravely, I suppose, in the company of many thousands; and yet there are many thousands, both of men and of animals, who at this very moment, while you are irresolute about death, are breathing their last, in their several ways. But you—did you believe that you would not some day reach the goal towards which you have always been travelling? No journey but has its end.

You think, I suppose, that it is now in order for me to cite some examples of great men. No, I shall cite rather the case of a boy. The story of the Spartan lad has been preserved: taken captive while

still a stripling, he kept crying in his Doric dialect, “I will not be a slave!” and he made good his word; for the very first time he was ordered to perform a menial and degrading service—and the command was to fetch a chamber-pot—he dashed out his brains against the wall.<sup>[10]</sup>

So near at hand is freedom, and is anyone still a slave? Would you not rather have your own son die thus than reach old age by weakly yielding? Why therefore are you distressed, when even a boy can die so bravely? Suppose that you refuse to follow him; you will be led. Take into your own control that which is now under the control of another. Will you not borrow that boy’s courage, and say: “I am no slave!”? Unhappy fellow, you are a slave to men, you are a slave to your business, you are a slave to life. For life, if courage to die be lacking, is slavery.

Have you anything worth waiting for? Your very pleasures, which cause you to tarry and hold you back, have already been exhausted by you. None of them is a novelty to you, and there is none that has not already become hateful because you are cloyed with it. You know the taste of wine and cordials. It makes no difference whether a hundred or a thousand measures<sup>[11]</sup> pass through your bladder; you are nothing but a wine-strainer.<sup>[12]</sup> You are a connoisseur in the flavour of the oyster and of the mullet;<sup>[13]</sup> your luxury has not left you anything untasted for the years that are to come; and yet these are the things from which you are torn away unwillingly.

What else is there which you would regret to have taken from you? Friends? But who can be a friend to you? Country? What? Do you think enough of your country to be late to dinner? The light of the sun? You would extinguish it, if you could; for what have you ever done that was fit to be seen in the light? Confess the truth; it is not because you long for the senate chamber or the forum, or even for the world of nature, that you would fain put off

dying; it is because you are loth to leave the fish-market, though you have exhausted its stores.<sup>[14]</sup>

You are afraid of death; but how can you scorn it in the midst of a mushroom supper?<sup>[15]</sup> You wish to live; well, do you know how to live? You are afraid to die. But come now: is this life of yours anything but death? Gaius Caesar was passing along the Via Latina, when a man stepped out from the ranks of the prisoners, his grey beard hanging down even to his breast, and begged to be put to death. "What!" said Caesar, "are you alive now?" That is the answer which should be given to men to whom death would come as a relief. "You are afraid to die; what! are you alive now?"

"But," says one, "I wish to live, for I am engaged in many honourable pursuits. I am loth to leave life's duties, which I am fulfilling with loyalty and zeal." Surely you are aware that dying is also one of life's duties? You are deserting no duty; for there is no definite number established which you are bound to complete.

There is no life that is not short. Compared with the world of nature, even Nestor's life was a short one, or Sattia's,<sup>[16]</sup> the woman who bade carve on her tombstone that she had lived ninety and nine years. Some persons, you see, boast of their long lives; but who could have endured the old lady if she had had the luck to complete her hundredth year? It is with life as it is with a play—it matters not how long the action is spun out, but how good the acting is. It makes no difference at what point you stop. Stop whenever you choose; only see to it that the closing period is well turned.<sup>[17]</sup> Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. Puteoli, in the bay of Naples, was the head-quarters in Italy of the important grain-trade with Egypt, on which the Roman magistrates relied to feed the populace.
2. Author unknown.
3. This thought, found in Ep. xii. 6 and often elsewhere, is a favourite with Seneca.

4. It is not likely that this Marcellinus is the same person as the Marcellinus Ep. xxix., because of their different views on philosophy (Summers). But there is no definite evidence for or against.
5. A Roman compliment; the Greeks would have used καλὸς κάγαθός; cf. Horace, *Ep.* i. 7. 46  
*Strenuus et fortis causisque Philippus agendis  
 Clarus.*
6. For this frequent “banquet of life” simile see Ep. xcvi. 15 *ipse vitae plenus est*, etc.
7. So that the steam might not escape. One thinks of Seneca’s last hours: Tac. *Ann.* xv. 64 *stagnum calidae aquae introiit . . . exin balneo inlatus et vapore eius exanimatus*.
8. For the same thought cf. Ep. xlix. 3 *punctum est quod vivimus et adhuc puncto minus*.
9. Vergil, *Aeneid*, vi. 376.
10. See Plutarch, *Mor.* 234 b, for a similar act of the Spartan boy captured by King Antigonus. Hense (*Rhein. Mus.* xlvii. pp. 220 f.) thinks that this story may be taken from Bion, the third-century satirist and moral philosopher.
11. About 5¾ gallons.
12. Cf. Pliny, xiv. 22 *quin immo ut plus capiamus, sacco frangimus vires*. Strained wine could be drunk in greater quantities without intoxication.
13. Cf. Dio Cassius, xl. 54, for the exiled Milo’s enjoyment of the mullets of Marseilles.
14. Probably the strong tone of disapproval used in this paragraph is directed against the Roman in general rather than against the industrious Lucilius. It is characteristic of the diatribe.
15. Seneca may be recalling the death of the Emperor Claudius.
16. A traditional example of old age, mentioned by Martial and the elder Pliny.
17. Compare the last words of the Emperor Augustus: *amicos percontatus ecquid iis videretur mimum vitae commode transegisse* (Suet. *Aug.* 99).



*On the Healing Power of the Mind*

That you are frequently troubled by the snuffling of catarrh and by short attacks of fever which follow after long and chronic catarrhal seizures, I am sorry to hear; particularly because I have experienced this sort of illness myself, and scorned it in its early stages. For when I was still young, I could put up with hardships and show a bold front to illness. But I finally succumbed, and arrived at such a state that I could do nothing but snuffle, reduced as I was to the extremity of thinness.<sup>[1]</sup>

I often entertained the impulse of ending my life then and there; but the thought of my kind old father kept me back. For I reflected, not how bravely I had the power to die, but how little power he had to bear bravely the loss of me. And so I commanded myself to live. For sometimes it is an act of bravery even to live.

Now I shall tell you what consoled me during those days, stating at the outset that these very aids to my peace of mind were as efficacious as medicine. Honourable consolation results in a cure; and whatever has uplifted the soul helps the body also. My studies were my salvation. I place it to the credit of philosophy that I recovered and regained my strength. I owe my life to philosophy, and that is the least of my obligations!

My friends, too, helped me greatly toward good health; I used to be comforted by their cheering words, by the hours they spent

at my bedside, and by their conversation. Nothing, my excellent Lucilius, refreshes and aids a sick man so much as the affection of his friends; nothing so steals away the expectation and the fear of death. In fact, I could not believe that, if they survived me, I should be dying at all. Yes, I repeat, it seemed to me that I should continue to live, not with them, but through them. I imagined myself not to be yielding up my soul, but to be making it over to them.

All these things gave me the inclination to succour myself and to endure any torture; besides, it is a most miserable state to have lost one's zest for dying, and to have no zest in living.

These, then, are the remedies to which you should have recourse. The physician will prescribe your walks and your exercise; he will warn you not to become addicted to idleness, as is the tendency of the inactive invalid; he will order you to read in a louder voice and to exercise your lungs<sup>[2]</sup> the passages and cavity of which are affected; or to sail and shake up your bowels by a little mild motion; he will recommend the proper food, and the suitable time for aiding your strength with wine or refraining from it in order to keep your cough from being irritated and hacking. But as for me, my counsel to you is this—and it is a cure, not merely of this disease of yours, but of your whole life—“Despise death.” There is no sorrow in the world, when we have escaped from the fear of death.

There are these three serious elements in every disease: fear of death, bodily pain, and interruption of pleasures. Concerning death enough has been said, and I shall add only a word: this fear is not a fear of disease, but a fear of nature. Disease has often postponed death, and a vision of dying has been many a man's salvation.<sup>[3]</sup> You will die, not because you are ill, but because you are alive; even when you have been cured, the same end awaits you; when you have recovered, it will be not death, but ill-health, that you have escaped.

Let us now return to the consideration of the characteristic disadvantage of disease: it is accompanied by great suffering. The suffering, however, is rendered endurable by interruptions; for the strain of extreme pain must come to an end.<sup>[4]</sup> No man can suffer both severely and for a long time; Nature, who loves us most tenderly, has so constituted us as to make pain either endurable or short.<sup>[5]</sup>

The severest pains have their seat in the most slender parts of our body; nerves, joints, and any other of the narrow passages, hurt most cruelly when they have developed trouble within their contracted spaces. But these parts soon become numb, and by reason of the pain itself lose the sensation of pain, whether because the life-force, when checked in its natural course and changed for the worse, loses the peculiar power through which it thrives and through which it warns us, or because the diseased humours of the body, when they cease to have a place into which they may flow, are thrown back upon themselves, and deprive of sensation the parts where they have caused congestion.

So gout, both in the feet and in the hands, and all pain in the vertebrae and in the nerves, have their intervals of rest at the times when they have dulled the parts which they before had tortured; the first twinges,<sup>[6]</sup> in all such cases, are what cause the distress, and their onset is checked by lapse of time, so that there is an end of pain when numbness has set in. Pain in the teeth, eyes, and ears is most acute for the very reason that it begins among the narrow spaces of the body—no less acute, indeed, than in the head itself. But if it is more violent than usual, it turns to delirium and stupor.

This is, accordingly, a consolation for excessive pain—that you cannot help ceasing to feel it if you feel it to excess. The reason, however, why the inexperienced are impatient when their bodies suffer is, that they have not accustomed themselves to be contented in spirit. They have been closely associated with the body.

Therefore a high-minded and sensible man divorces soul from body, and dwells much with the better or divine part, and only as far as he must with this complaining and frail portion.

“But it is a hardship,” men say, “to do without our customary pleasures—to fast, to feel thirst and hunger.” These are indeed serious when one first abstains from them. Later the desire dies down, because the appetites themselves which lead to desire are wearied and forsake us; then the stomach becomes petulant, then the food which we craved before becomes hateful. Our very wants die away. But there is no bitterness in doing without that which you have ceased to desire.

Moreover, every pain sometimes stops, or at any rate slackens; moreover, one may take precautions against its return, and, when it threatens, may check it by means of remedies. Every variety of pain has its premonitory symptoms; this is true, at any rate, of pain that is habitual and recurrent. One can endure the suffering which disease entails, if one has come to regard its results with scorn.

But do not of your own accord make your troubles heavier to bear and burden yourself with complaining. Pain is slight if opinion has added nothing to it; but if, on the other hand, you begin to encourage yourself and say, “It is nothing—a trifling matter at most; keep a stout heart and it will soon cease”; then in thinking it slight, you will make it slight. Everything depends on opinion; ambition, luxury, greed, hark back to opinion. It is according to opinion that we suffer.

A man is as wretched as he has convinced himself that he is. I hold that we should do away with complaint about past sufferings and with all language like this: “None has ever been worse off than I. What sufferings, what evils have I endured! No one has thought that I shall recover. How often have my family bewailed me, and the physicians given me over! Men who are placed on the rack are not torn asunder with such agony!” However, even if all

this is true, it is over and gone. What benefit is there in reviewing past sufferings, and in being unhappy, just because once you were unhappy? Besides, every one adds much to his own ills, and tells lies to himself. And that which was bitter to bear is pleasant to have borne; it is natural to rejoice at the ending of one's ills.

Two elements must therefore be rooted out once for all—the fear of future suffering, and the recollection of past suffering; since the latter no longer concerns me, and the former concerns me not yet.

But when set in the very midst of troubles one should say:

*Perchance some day the memory of this sorrow*

*Will even bring delight.*<sup>[7]</sup>

Let such a man fight against them with all his might: if he once gives way, he will be vanquished; but if he strives against his sufferings, he will conquer. As it is, however, what most men do is to drag down upon their own heads a falling ruin which they ought to try to support. If you begin to withdraw your support from that which thrusts toward you and totters and is ready to plunge, it will follow you and lean more heavily upon you; but if you hold your ground and make up your mind to push against it, it will be forced back.

What blows do athletes receive on their faces and all over their bodies! Nevertheless, through their desire for fame they endure every torture, and they undergo these things not only because they are fighting but in order to be able to fight. Their very training means torture. So let us also win the way to victory in all our struggles—for the reward is not a garland or a palm or a trumpeter who calls for silence at the proclamation of our names, but rather virtue, steadfastness of soul, and a peace that is won for all time, if fortune has once been utterly vanquished in any combat. You say, "I feel severe pain."

What then; are you relieved from feeling it, if you endure it like a woman? Just as an enemy is more dangerous to a retreating army, so every trouble that fortune brings attacks us all the harder if we yield and turn our backs. “But the trouble is serious.” What? Is it for this purpose that we are strong—that we may have light burdens to bear? Would you have your illness long-drawn-out, or would you have it quick and short? If it is long, it means a respite, allows you a period for resting yourself, bestows upon you the boon of time in plenty; as it arises, so it must also subside. A short and rapid illness will do one of two things: it will quench or be quenched. And what difference does it make whether it is not or I am not? In either case there is an end of pain.

This, too, will help—to turn the mind aside to thoughts of other things and thus to depart from pain. Call to mind what honourable or brave deeds you have done; consider the good side of your own life.<sup>[8]</sup> Run over in your memory those things which you have particularly admired. Then think of all the brave men who have conquered pain: of him who continued to read his book as he allowed the cutting out of varicose veins; of him who did not cease to smile, though that very smile so enraged his torturers that they tried upon him every instrument of their cruelty. If pain can be conquered by a smile, will it not be conquered by reason?

You may tell me now of whatever you like—of colds, bad coughing-spells that bring up parts of our entrails, fever that parches our very vitals, thirst, limbs so twisted that the joints protrude in different directions; yet worse than these are the stake, the rack, the red-hot plates, the instrument that reopens wounds while the wounds themselves are still swollen and that drives their imprint still deeper.<sup>[9]</sup> Nevertheless there have been men who have not uttered a moan amid these tortures. “More yet!” says the torturer; but the victim has not begged for release. “More yet!” he says again; but no answer has come. “More yet!” the victim

has smiled, and heartily, too. Can you not bring yourself, after an example like this, to make a mock at pain?

“But,” you object, “my illness does not allow me to be doing anything; it has withdrawn me from all my duties.” It is your body that is hampered by ill-health, and not your soul as well. It is for this reason that it clogs the feet of the runner and will hinder the handiwork of the cobbler or the artisan; but if your soul be habitually in practice, you will plead and teach, listen and learn, investigate and meditate. What more is necessary? Do you think that you are doing nothing if you possess self-control in your illness? You will be showing that a disease can be overcome, or at any rate endured.

There is, I assure you, a place for virtue even upon a bed of sickness. It is not only the sword and the battle-line that prove the soul alert and unconquered by fear; a man can display bravery even when wrapped in his bed-clothes. You have something to do: wrestle bravely with disease. If it shall compel you to nothing, beguile you to nothing, it is a notable example that you display. O what ample matter were there for renown, if we could have spectators of our sickness! Be your own spectator; seek your own applause.

Again, there are two kinds of pleasures. Disease checks the pleasures of the body, but does not do away with them. Nay, if the truth is to be considered, it serves to excite them; for the thirstier a man is, the more he enjoys a drink; the hungrier he is, the more pleasure he takes in food. Whatever falls to one's lot after a period of abstinence is welcomed with greater zest. The other kind, however, the pleasures of the mind, which are higher and less uncertain, no physician can refuse to the sick man. Whoever seeks these and knows well what they are, scorns all the blandishments of the senses.

Men say, “Poor sick fellow!” But why? Is it because he does not mix snow with his wine, or because he does not revive the chill of his drink—mixed as it is in a good-sized bowl—by chipping ice

into it? Or because he does not have Lucrine<sup>[10]</sup> oysters opened fresh at his table? Or because there is no din of cooks about his dining-hall, as they bring in their very cooking apparatus along with their viands? For luxury has already devised this fashion—of having the kitchen accompany the dinner, so that the food may not grow luke-warm, or fail to be hot enough for a palate which has already become hardened.

“Poor sick fellow!”—he will eat as much as he can digest. There will be no boar lying before his eyes,<sup>[11]</sup> banished from the table as if it were a common meat; and on his sideboard there will be heaped together no breast-meat of birds, because it sickens him to see birds served whole. But what evil has been done to you? You will dine like a sick man, nay, sometimes like a sound man.<sup>[12]</sup>

All these things, however, can be easily endured—gruel, warm water, and anything else that seems insupportable to a fastidious man, to one who is wallowing in luxury, sick in soul rather than in body—if only we cease to shudder at death. And we shall cease, if once we have gained a knowledge of the limits of good and evil; then, and then only, life will not weary us, neither will death make us afraid.

For surfeit of self can never seize upon a life that surveys all the things which are manifold, great, divine; only idle leisure is wont to make men hate their lives. To one who roams<sup>[13]</sup> through the universe, the truth can never pall; it will be the untruths that will cloy.

And, on the other hand, if death comes near with its summons, even though it be untimely in its arrival, though it cut one off in one's prime, a man has had a taste of all that the longest life can give. Such a man has in great measure come to understand the universe. He knows that honourable things do not depend on time for their growth; but any life must seem short to those who measure its length by pleasures which are empty and for that reason unbounded.



Refresh yourself with such thoughts as these, and meanwhile reserve some hours for our letters. There will come a time when we shall be united again and brought together; however short this time may be, we shall make it long by knowing how to employ it. For, as Posidonius says:<sup>[14]</sup> “A single day among the learned lasts longer than the longest life of the ignorant.”

Meanwhile, hold fast to this thought, and grip it close: yield not to adversity; trust not to prosperity; keep before your eyes the full scope of Fortune’s power, as if she would surely do whatever is in her power to do. That which has been long expected comes more gently. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. To such a degree that Seneca’s enemy Caligula refrained from executing him, on the ground that he would soon die.
2. Cf. Ep. xv. 7 f.
3. i.e., men have become healthier after passing through serious illness.
4. Cf. Epicurus, Frag. 446 Usener.
5. Compare, from among many parallels, Ep. xxiv. 14 (*dolor*) *levis es, si ferre possum, brevis es, si ferre non possum*.
6. See also Ep. xcv. 17. The word literally means “maggots,” “bots,” in horses or cattle.
7. Vergil, *Aeneid*, i. 203.
8. Literally, perhaps, “the noble rôles which you have played.” Summers compares Ep. xiv. 13 *ultimas partes Catonis*—“the closing scenes of Cato’s life.”
9. Cf. Ep. xiv. 4 f. and the *crucibus adfixi, flamma usti*, etc., of Tac. *Ann.* xv. 44.
10. The *lacus Lucrinus* was a salt-water lagoon, near Baiae in Campania.
11. i.e., to be looked at; there are better dainties on the table.
12. *Sanus* is used (1) as signifying “sound in body” and (2) as the opposite of *insanus*.
13. Perhaps a reminiscence of Lucretius i. 74 *omne immensum peragravit mente animoque*.
14. Seneca often quotes Posidonius, as does Cicero also. These words may have been taken from his Προτρεπτικά (or Λόγοι προτρεπτικοί), *Exhortations*, a work in which he maintained that men should make a close study of philosophy, in spite of the varying opinions of its expositors.

*On the Rewards of Scientific Discovery*

I have been awaiting a letter from you, that you might inform me what new matter was revealed to you during your trip round Sicily,<sup>[1]</sup> and especially that you might give me further information regarding Charybdis itself.<sup>[2]</sup> I know very well that Scylla is a rock—and indeed a rock not dreaded by mariners; but with regard to Charybdis I should like to have a full description, in order to see whether it agrees with the accounts in mythology; and, if you have by chance investigated it (for it is indeed worthy of your investigation), please enlighten me concerning the following: Is it lashed into a whirlpool by a wind from only one direction, or do all storms alike serve to disturb its depths? Is it true that objects snatched downwards by the whirlpool in that strait are carried for many miles under water, and then come to the surface on the beach near Tauromenium?<sup>[3]</sup>

If you will write me a full account of these matters, I shall then have the boldness to ask you to perform another task—also to climb Aetna at my special request. Certain naturalists have inferred that the mountain is wasting away and gradually settling, because sailors used to be able to see it from a greater distance. The reason for this may be, not that the height of the mountain is decreasing, but because the flames have become dim and the eruptions less strong and less copious, and because for the same

reason the smoke also is less active by day. However, either of these two things is possible to believe: that on the one hand the mountain is growing smaller because it is consumed from day to day, and that, on the other hand, it remains the same in size because the mountain is not devouring itself, but instead of this the matter which seethes forth collects in some subterranean valley and is fed by other material, finding in the mountain itself not the food which it requires, but simply a passage-way out.

There is a well-known place in Lycia—called by the inhabitants “Hephaestion”<sup>[4]</sup>—where the ground is full of holes in many places and is surrounded by a harmless fire, which does no injury to the plants that grow there. Hence the place is fertile and luxuriant with growth, because the flames do not scorch but merely shine with a force that is mild and feeble.

But let us postpone this discussion, and look into the matter when you have given me a description just how far distant the snow lies from the crater—I mean the snow which does not melt even in summer, so safe is it from the adjacent fire. But there is no ground for your charging this work to my account; for you were about to gratify your own craze for fine writing, without a commission from anyone at all.

Nay, what am I to offer you *not* merely to describe<sup>[5]</sup> Aetna in your poem, and *not* to touch lightly upon a topic which is a matter of ritual for all poets? Ovid<sup>[6]</sup> could not be prevented from using this theme simply because Vergil<sup>[7]</sup> had already fully covered it; nor could either of these writers frighten off Cornelius Severus. Besides, the topic has served them all with happy results, and those who have gone before seem to me not to have forestalled all what could be said, but merely to have opened the way.

It makes a great deal of difference whether you approach a subject that has been exhausted, or one where the ground has merely been broken; in the latter case, the topic grows day by

day, and what is already discovered does not hinder new discoveries. Besides, he who writes last has the best of the bargain; he finds already at hand words which, when marshalled in a different way, show a new face. And he is not pilfering them, as if they belonged to someone else, when he uses them, for they are common property.

Now if Aetna does not make your mouth water, I am mistaken in you. You have for some time been desirous of writing something in the grand style and on the level of the older school. For your modesty does not allow you to set your hopes any higher; this quality of yours is so pronounced that, it sees to me, you are likely to curb the force of your natural ability, if there should be any danger of outdoing others; so greatly do you reverence the old masters.

Wisdom has this advantage, among others—that no man can be outdone by another, except during the climb. But when you have arrived at the top, it is a draw;<sup>[8]</sup> there is no room for further ascent, the game is over. Can the sun add to his size? Can the moon advance beyond her usual fullness? The seas do not increase in bulk. The universe keeps the same character, the same limits.

Things which have reached their full stature cannot grow higher. Men who have attained wisdom will therefore be equal and on the same footing. Each of them will possess his own peculiar gifts<sup>[9]</sup>—one will be more affable, another more facile, another more ready of speech, a fourth more eloquent; but as regards the quality under discussion—the element that produces happiness—it is equal in them all.

I do not know whether this Aetna of yours can collapse and fall in ruins, whether this lofty summit, visible for many miles over the deep sea, is wasted by the incessant power of the flames; but I do know that virtue will not be brought down to a lower plane either by flames or by ruins. Hers is the only greatness that knows

no lowering; there can be for her no further rising or sinking. Her stature, like that of the stars in the heavens, is fixed. Let us therefore strive to raise ourselves to this altitude.

Already much of the task is accomplished; nay, rather, if I can bring myself to confess the truth, not much. For goodness does not mean merely being better than the lowest. Who that could catch but a mere glimpse of the daylight would boast his powers of vision? One who sees the sun shining through a mist may be contented meanwhile that he has escaped darkness, but he does not yet enjoy the blessing of light.

Our souls will not have reason to rejoice in their lot until, freed from this darkness in which they grope, they have not merely glimpsed the brightness with feeble vision, but have absorbed the full light of day and have been restored to their place in the sky—until, indeed, they have regained the place which they held at the allotment of their birth. The soul is summoned upward by its very origin. And it will reach that goal even before it is released from its prison below, as soon as it has cast off sin and, in purity and lightness, has leaped up into celestial realms of thought.

I am glad, beloved Lucilius, that we are occupied with this ideal, that we pursue it with all our might, even though few know it, or none. Fame is the shadow of virtue; it will attend virtue even against her will. But, as the shadow sometimes precedes and sometimes follows or even lags behind, so fame sometimes goes before us and shows herself in plain sight, and sometimes is in the rear, and is all the greater in proportion as she is late in coming, when once envy has beaten a retreat.

How long did men believe Democritus<sup>[10]</sup> to be mad! Glory barely came to Socrates. And how long did our state remain in ignorance of Cato! They rejected him, and did not know his worth until they had lost him. If Rutilius<sup>[11]</sup> had not resigned himself to wrong, his innocence and virtue would have escaped notice;

the hour of his suffering was the hour of his triumph. Did he not give thanks for his lot, and welcome his exile with open arms? I have mentioned thus far those to whom Fortune has brought renown at the very moment of persecution; but how many there are whose progress toward virtue has come to light only after their death! And how many have been ruined, not rescued, by their reputation?

There is Epicurus, for example; mark how greatly he is admired, not only by the more cultured, but also by this ignorant rabble. This man, however, was unknown to Athens itself, near which he had hidden himself away. And so, when he had already survived by many years his friend Metrodorus, he added in a letter these last words, proclaiming with thankful appreciation the friendship that had existed between them: "So greatly blest were Metrodorus and I that it has been no harm to us to be unknown, and almost unheard of, in this well-known land of Greece."<sup>[12]</sup>

Is it not true, therefore, that men did not discover him until after he had ceased to be? Has not his renown shone forth, for all that? Metrodorus also admits this fact in one of his letters:<sup>[13]</sup> that Epicurus and he were not well known to the public; but he declares that after the lifetime of Epicurus and himself any man who might wish to follow in their footsteps would win great and ready-made renown.

Virtue is never lost to view; and yet to have been lost to view is no loss. There will come a day which will reveal her, though hidden away or suppressed by the spite of her contemporaries. That man is born merely for a few, who thinks only of the people of his own generation. Many thousands of years and many thousands of peoples will come after you; it is to these that you should have regard. Malice may have imposed silence upon the mouths of all who were alive in your day; but there will come men who will judge you without prejudice and without favour. If there is any

reward that virtue receives at the hands of fame, not even this can pass away. We ourselves, indeed, shall not be affected by the talk of posterity; nevertheless, posterity will cherish and celebrate us even though we are not conscious thereof.

Virtue has never failed to reward a man, both during his life and after his death, provided he has followed her loyally, provided he has not decked himself out or painted himself up, but has been always the same, whether he appeared before men's eyes after being announced, or suddenly and without preparation. Pretence accomplishes nothing. Few are deceived by a mask that is easily drawn over the face. Truth is the same in every part. Things which deceive us have no real substance. Lies are thin stuff; they are transparent, if you examine them with care. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. Ellis suggests that the poem *Aetna*, of uncertain authorship, may have been written by Lucilius in response to this letter. His view is plausible, but not universally accepted.
2. See Ep. xiv. § 8 and note (Vol. I.).
3. The modern Taormina.
4. Another description of this region is given by Pliny, *N. H.* ii. 106, who says that the stones in the rivers were red-hot! The phenomenon is usually explained by supposing springs of burning naphtha.
5. i.e., merely as an episode, instead of devoting a whole poem to the subject.
6. *Metam.* xv. 340 ff.
7. *Aeneid*, iii. 570 ff.
8. The usual meaning of *paria esse*, or *paria facere* (a favourite phrase with Seneca—see for example Ep. ci. 7), is “to square the account,” “balance even.”
9. “Qualities desirable in themselves, but not essential for the possession of wisdom, the προηγμένα of the Stoics,” (Summers).
10. There is an unauthenticated story that the men of Abdera called in Hippocrates to treat his malady.
11. Cf. Ep. xxiv. 4 *exilium . . . tulit Rutilius etiam libenter*.
12. Frag. 188 Usener.
13. Frag. 43 Körte.





*On Worldly Deceptions*

Today I have some free time, thanks not so much to myself as to the games, which have attracted all the bores to the boxing-match. <sup>[1]</sup> No one will interrupt me or disturb the train of my thoughts, which go ahead more boldly as the result of my very confidence. My door has not been continually creaking on its hinges nor will my curtain be pulled aside; <sup>[2]</sup> my thoughts may march safely on—and that is all the more necessary for one who goes independently and follows out his own path. Do I then follow no predecessors? Yes, but I allow myself to discover something new, to alter, to reject. I am not a slave to them, although I give them my approval.

And yet that was a very bold word which I spoke when I assured myself that I should have some quiet, and some uninterrupted retirement. For lo, a great cheer comes from the stadium, and while it does not drive me distracted, yet it shifts my thought to a contrast suggested by this very noise. How many men, I say to myself, train their bodies, and how few train their minds! <sup>[3]</sup> What crowds flock to the games, spurious as they are and arranged merely for pastime—and what a solitude reigns where the good arts are taught! How feather-brained are the athletes whose muscles and shoulders we admire!

The question which I ponder most of all is this; if the body can be trained to such a degree of endurance that it will stand the blows and kicks of several opponents at once and to such a degree that a man can last out the day and resist the scorching sun in the midst of the burning dust, drenched all the while with his own blood—if this can be done, how much more easily might the mind be toughened so that it could receive the blows of Fortune and not be conquered, so that it might struggle to its feet again after it has been laid low, after it has been trampled under foot?

For although the body needs many things in order to be strong, yet the mind grows from within, giving to itself nourishment and exercise. Yonder athletes must have copious food, copious drink, copious quantities of oil, and long training besides; but you can acquire virtue without equipment and without expense. All that goes to make you a good man lies within yourself.

And what do you need in order to become good? To wish it. But what better thing could you wish for than to break away from this slavery, a slavery that oppresses us all, a slavery which even chattels of the lowest estate, born amid such degradation, strive in every possible way to strip off? In exchange for freedom they pay out the savings which they have scraped together by cheating their own bellies; shall *you* not be eager to attain liberty at any price, seeing that you claim it as your birthright?

Why cast glances toward your strong-box? Liberty cannot be bought. It is therefore useless to enter in your ledger<sup>[4]</sup> the item of “Freedom,” for freedom is possessed neither by those who have bought it, nor by those who have sold it. You must give this good to yourself, and seek it from yourself.

First of all, free yourself from the fear of death, for death puts the yoke about our necks; then free yourself from the fear of poverty.

If you would know how little evil there is in poverty, compare the faces of the poor with those of the rich; the poor man smiles more often and more genuinely; his troubles do not go deep down; even if any anxiety comes upon him, it passes like a fitful cloud. But the merriment of those whom men call happy is feigned, while their sadness is heavy and festering, and all the heavier because they may not meanwhile display their grief, but must act the part of happiness in the midst of sorrows that eat out their very hearts.

I often feel called upon to use the following illustration, and it seems to me that none expresses more effectively this drama of human life, wherein we are assigned the parts which we are to play so badly. Yonder is the man who stalks upon the stage with swelling port and head thrown back, and says:

*Lo, I am he whom Argos hails as lord,  
Whom Pelops left the heir of lands that spread  
From Hellespont and from th' Ionian sea  
E'en to the Isthmian straits.*<sup>[5]</sup>

And who is this fellow? He is but a slave; his wage is five measures of grain and five denarii.

Yon other who, proud and wayward and puffed up by confidence in his power, declaims:

*Peace, Menelaus, or this hand shall slay thee!*<sup>[5]</sup>

receives a daily pittance and sleeps on rags. You may speak in the same way about all these dandies whom you see riding in litters above the heads of men and above the crowd; in every case their happiness is put on like the actor's mask. Tear it off, and you will scorn them.

When you buy a horse, you order its blanket to be removed; you pull off the garments from slaves that are advertised for sale,

so that no bodily flaws may escape your notice; if you judge a man, do you judge him when he is wrapped in a disguise? Slave dealers hide under some sort of finery any defect which may give offence,<sup>[6]</sup> and for that reason the very trappings arouse the suspicion of the buyer. If you catch sight of a leg or an arm that is bound up in cloths, you demand that it be stripped and that the body itself be revealed to you.

Do you see yonder Scythian or Sarmatian king, his head adorned with the badge of his office? If you wish to see what he amounts to, and to know his full worth, take off his diadem; much evil lurks beneath it. But why do I speak of others? If you wish to set a value on yourself, put away your money, your estates, your honours, and look into your own soul. At present, you are taking the word of others for what you are. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. Probably a contest in which the participants attached leaden weights to their hands in order to increase the force of the blows.
2. Compare Pliny's "den" (Ep. ii. 17. 21): *quae specularibus et velis obductis reductisve modo adicitur cubiculo modo aufertur*.
3. Compare the ideas expressed in Ep. xv. 2 f.
4. For this figure see the "lucellum," "diurna mercedula," etc., of the opening letters of the correspondence (Vol. I.).
5. Authors unknown; Ribbeck, *Frag. Trag.* pp. 289 and 276. The first passage (with one change) is also quoted by Quintilian, ix. 4. 140. See, however, Tyrrell, *Latin Poetry*, p.39, who calls this passage the beginning of Attius's *Atreus*.
6. A favourite trick; cf. Quintil. ii. 15. 25 *mangones, qui colorem fuco et verum robur inani sagina mentiuntur*.

LETTER 81

*On Benefits*<sup>[1]</sup>



You complain that you have met with an ungrateful person. If this is your first experience of that sort, you should offer thanks either to your good luck or to your caution. In this case, however, caution can effect nothing but to make you ungenerous. For if you wish to avoid such a danger, you will not confer benefits; and so, that benefits may not be lost with another man, they will be lost to yourself.

It is better, however, to get no return than to confer no benefits. Even after a poor crop one should sow again; for often losses due to continued barrenness of an unproductive soil have been made good by one year's fertility.

In order to discover one grateful person, it is worth while to make trial of many ungrateful ones. No man has so unerring a hand when he confers benefits that he is not frequently deceived; it is well for the traveller to wander, that he may again cleave to the path. After a shipwreck, sailors try the sea again. The banker is not frightened away from the forum by the swindler. If one were compelled to drop everything that caused trouble, life would soon grow dull amid sluggish idleness; but in your case this very condition may prompt you to become more charitable. For when the outcome of any undertaking is unsure, you must try again and again, in order to succeed ultimately.

I have, however, discussed the matter with sufficient fullness in the volumes which I have written, entitled “On Benefits.”<sup>[2]</sup>

What I think should rather be investigated is this—a question which I feel has not been made sufficiently clear: “Whether he who has helped us has squared the account and has freed us from our debt, if he has done us harm later.” You may add this question also, if you like: “when the harm done later has been more than the help rendered previously.”

If you are seeking for the formal and just decision of a strict judge, you will find that he checks off one act by the other, and declares: “Though the injuries outweigh the benefits, yet we should credit to the benefits anything that stands over even after the injury.” The harm done was indeed greater, but the helpful act was done first. Hence the time also should be taken into account.

Other cases are so clear that I need not remind you that you should also look into such points as: How gladly was the help offered, and how reluctantly was the harm done—since benefits, as well as injuries, depend on the spirit. “I did not wish to confer the benefit; but I was won over by my respect for the man, or by the importunity of his request, or by hope.”

Our feeling about every obligation depends in each case upon the spirit in which the benefit is conferred; we weigh not the bulk of the gift, but the quality of the good-will which prompted it. So now let us do away with guess-work; the former deed was a benefit, and the latter, which transcended the earlier benefit, is an injury. The good man so arranges the two sides of his ledger<sup>[3]</sup> that he voluntarily cheats himself by adding to the benefit and subtracting from the injury.

The more indulgent magistrate, however (and I should rather be such a one), will order us to forget the injury and remember the accommodation.

“But surely,” you say, “it is the part of justice to render to each that which is his due—thanks in return for a benefit, and retribution,<sup>[4]</sup> or at any rate ill-will, in return for an injury!” This, I say, will be true when it is one man who has inflicted the injury, and a different man who has conferred the benefit; for if it is the same man, the force of the injury is nullified by the benefit conferred. Indeed, a man who ought to be pardoned, even though there were no good deeds credited to him in the past, should receive something more than mere leniency if he commits a wrong when he has a benefit to his credit.

I do not set an equal value on benefits and injuries. I reckon a benefit at a higher rate than an injury. Not all grateful persons know what it involves to be in debt for a benefit; even a thoughtless, crude fellow, one of the common herd, may know, especially soon after he has received the gift; but he does not know how deeply he stands in debt therefor. Only the wise man knows exactly what value should be put upon everything; for the fool whom I just mentioned, no matter how good his intentions may be, either pays less than he owes, or pays it at the wrong time or the wrong place. That for which he should make return he wastes and loses.

There is a marvellously accurate phraseology applied to certain subjects,<sup>[5]</sup> a long-established terminology which indicates certain acts by means of symbols that are most efficient and that serve to outline men’s duties. We are, as you know, wont to speak thus: “A. has made a return for the favour bestowed by B.” Making a return means handing over of your own accord that which you owe. We do not say, “He has paid back the favour”; for “pay back” is used of a man upon whom a demand for payment is made, of those who pay against their will. Of those who pay under any circumstances whatsoever, and of those who pay through a third party. We do not say, “He has ‘restored’ the benefit,” or ‘settled’ it;

we have never been satisfied with a word which applies properly to a debt of money.

Making a return means offering something to him from whom you have received something. The phrase implies a voluntary return; he who has made such a return has served the writ upon himself.

The wise man will inquire in his own mind into all the circumstances: how much he has received, from whom, when, where, how. And so we<sup>[6]</sup> declare that none but the wise man knows how to make return for a favour; moreover, none but the wise man knows how to confer a benefit—that man, I mean, who enjoys the giving more than the recipient enjoys the receiving.

Now some person will reckon this remark as one of the generally surprising statements such as we Stoics are wont to make and such as the Greeks call “paradoxes,”<sup>[7]</sup> and will say: “Do you maintain, then, that only the wise man knows how to return a favour? Do you maintain that no one else knows how to make restoration to a creditor for a debt? Or, on buying a commodity, to pay full value to the seller?” In order not to bring any odium upon myself, let me tell you that Epicurus says the same thing. At any rate, Metrodorus remarks<sup>[8]</sup> that only the wise man knows how to return a favour.

Again, the objector mentioned above wonders at our saying: “The wise man alone knows how to love, the wise man alone is a real friend.” And yet it is a part of love and of friendship to return favours; nay, further, it is an ordinary act, and happens more frequently than real friendship. Again, this same objector wonders at our saying, “There is no loyalty except in the wise man,” just as if he himself does not say the same thing! Or do you think that there is any loyalty in him who does not know how to return a favour?

These men, accordingly, should cease to discredit us, just as if we were uttering an impossible boast; they should understand that



the essence of honour resides in the wise man, while among the crowd we find only the ghost and the semblance of honour. None but the wise man knows how to return a favour. Even a fool can return it in proportion to his knowledge and his power; his fault would be a lack of knowledge rather than a lack of will or desire. To will does not come by teaching.

The wise man will compare all things with one another; for the very same object becomes greater or smaller, according to the time, the place, and the cause. Often the riches that are spent in profusion upon a palace cannot accomplish as much as a thousand *denarii* given at the right time. Now it makes a great deal of difference whether you give outright, or come to a man's assistance, whether your generosity saves him, or sets him up in life. Often the gift is small, but the consequences great. And what a distinction do you imagine there is between taking something which one lacks—something which was offered—and receiving a benefit in order to confer one in return?

But we should not slip back into the subject which we have already sufficiently investigated. In this balancing of benefits and injuries, the good man will, to be sure, judge with the highest degree of fairness, but he will incline towards the side of the benefit; he will turn more readily in this direction.

Moreover, in affairs of this kind the person concerned is wont to count for a great deal. Men say: "You conferred a benefit upon me in that matter of the slave, but you did me an injury in the case of my father" or, "You saved my son, but robbed me of a father." Similarly, he will follow up all other matters in which comparisons can be made, and if the difference be very slight, he will pretend not to notice it. Even though the difference be great, yet if the concession can be made without impairment of duty and loyalty, our good man will overlook that is, provided the injury exclusively affects the good man himself.

To sum up, the matter stands thus: the good man will be easy-going in striking a balance; he will allow too much to be set against his credit. He will be unwilling to pay a benefit by balancing the injury against it. The side towards which he will lean, the tendency which he will exhibit, is the desire to be under obligations for the favour, and the desire to make return therefor. For anyone who receives a benefit more gladly than he repays it is mistaken. By as much as he who pays is more light-hearted than he who borrows, by so much ought he to be more joyful who unburdens himself of the greatest debt—a benefit received—than he who incurs the greatest obligations.

For ungrateful men make mistakes in this respect also: they have to pay their creditors both capital and interest,<sup>[9]</sup> but they think that benefits are currency which they can use without interest. So the debts grow through postponement, and the later the action is postponed the more remains to be paid. A man is an ingrate if he repays a favour without interest. Therefore, interest also should be allowed for, when you compare your receipts and your expenses.

We should try by all means to be as grateful as possible.

For gratitude is a good thing for ourselves, in a sense in which justice, that is commonly supposed to concern other persons, is not; gratitude returns in large measure unto itself. There is not a man who, when he has benefited his neighbour, has not benefited himself—I do not mean for the reason that he whom you have aided will desire to aid you, or that he whom you have defended will desire to protect you, or that an example of good conduct returns in a circle to benefit the doer, just as examples of bad conduct recoil upon their authors, and as men find no pity if they suffer wrongs which they themselves have demonstrated the possibility of committing; but that the reward for all the virtues lies

in the virtues themselves. For they are not practiced with a view to recompense; the wages of a good deed is to have done it.<sup>[10]</sup>

I am grateful, not in order that my neighbour, provoked by the earlier act of kindness, may be more ready to benefit me, but simply in order that I may perform a most pleasant and beautiful act; I feel grateful, not because it profits me, but because it pleases me. And, to prove the truth of this to you, I declare that even if I may not be grateful without seeming ungrateful, even if I am able to retain a benefit only by an act which resembles an injury; even so, I shall strive in the utmost calmness of spirit toward the purpose which honour demands, in the very midst of disgrace. No one, I think, rates virtue higher or is more consecrated to virtue than he who has lost his reputation for being a good man in order to keep from losing the approval of his conscience.

Thus, as I have said, your being grateful is more conducive to your own good than to your neighbour's good. For while your neighbour has had a common, everyday experience—namely, receiving back the gift which he had bestowed—you have had a great experience which is the outcome of an utterly happy condition of soul—to have felt gratitude. For if wickedness makes men unhappy and virtue makes men blest, and if it is a virtue to be grateful, then the return which you have made is only the customary thing, but the thing to which you have attained is priceless—the consciousness of gratitude, which comes only to the soul that is divine and blessed. The opposite feeling to this, however, is immediately attended by the greatest unhappiness; no man, if he be ungrateful, will be unhappy in the future. I allow him no day of grace; he is unhappy forthwith.

Let us therefore avoid being ungrateful, not for the sake of others but for our own sakes. When we do wrong, only the least and lightest portion of it flows back upon our neighbour; the worst and, if I may use the term, the densest portion of it stays at home

and troubles the owner.<sup>[11]</sup> My master Attalus used to say: “Evil herself drinks the largest portion of her own poison.” The poison which serpents carry for the destruction of others, and secrete without harm to themselves, is not like this poison; for this sort is ruinous to the possessor.

The ungrateful man tortures and torments himself; he hates the gifts which he has accepted, because he must make a return for them, and he tries to belittle their value, but he really enlarges and exaggerates the injuries which he has received. And what is more wretched than a man who forgets his benefits and clings to his injuries?

Wisdom, on the other hand, lends grace to every benefit, and of her own free will commends it to her own favour, and delights her soul by continued recollection thereof.

Evil men have but one pleasure in benefits, and a very short-lived pleasure at that; it lasts only while they are receiving them. But the wise man derives therefrom an abiding and eternal joy. For he takes delight not so much in receiving the gift as in having received it; and this joy never perishes; it abides with him always. He despises the wrongs done him; he forgets them, not accidentally, but voluntarily.

He does not put a wrong construction upon everything, or seek for someone whom he may hold responsible for each happening; he rather ascribes even the sins of men to chance. He will not misinterpret a word or a look; he makes light of all mishaps by interpreting them in a generous way.<sup>[12]</sup> He does not remember an injury rather than a service. As far as possible, he lets his memory rest upon the earlier and the better deed, never changing his attitude towards those who have deserved well of him, except in climes where the bad deeds far outdistance the good, and the space between them is obvious even to one who closes his eyes to it; even then only to this extent, that he strives, after receiving the

preponderant injury, to resume the attitude which he held before he received the benefit. For when the injury merely equals the benefit, a certain amount of kindly feeling is left over.

Just as a defendant is acquitted when the votes are equal, and just as the spirit of kindness always tries to bend every doubtful case toward the better interpretation, so the mind of the wise man, when another's merits merely equal his bad deeds, will, to be sure, cease to feel an obligation, but does not cease to desire to feel it, and acts precisely like the man who pays his debts even after they have been legally cancelled.<sup>[13]</sup>

But no man can be grateful unless he has learned to scorn the things which drive the common herd to distraction; if you wish to make return for a favour, you must be willing to go into exile—or to pour forth your blood, or to undergo poverty, or—and this will frequently happen—even to let your very innocence be stained and exposed to shameful slanders. It is no slight price that a man must pay for being grateful.

We hold nothing dearer than a benefit, so long as we are seeking one; we hold nothing cheaper after we have received it. Do you ask what it is that makes us forget benefits received? It is our extreme greed for receiving others. We consider not what we have obtained, but what we are to seek. We are deflected from the right course by riches, titles, power, and everything which is valuable in our opinion but worthless when rated at its real value.

We do not know how to weigh matters;<sup>[14]</sup> we should take counsel regarding them, not with their reputation but with their nature; those things possess no grandeur wherewith to enthrall our minds, except the fact that we have become accustomed to marvel at them. For they are not praised because they ought to be desired, but they are desired because they have been praised; and when the error of individuals has once created error on the

part of the public, then the public error goes on creating error on the part of individuals.

But just as we take on faith such estimates of values, so let us take on the faith of the people this truth that nothing is more honourable than a grateful heart. This phrase will be echoed by all cities, and by all races, even those from savage countries. Upon this point—good and bad will agree.

Some praise pleasure, some prefer toil; some say that pain is the greatest of evils, some say it is no evil at all; some will include riches in the Supreme Good, others will say that their discovery meant harm to the human race, and that none is richer than he to whom Fortune has found nothing to give. Amid all this diversity of opinion all men will yet with one voice, as the saying is, vote “aye” to the proposition that thanks should be returned to those who have deserved well of us. On this question the common herd, rebellious as they are, will all agree, but at present we keep paying back injuries instead of benefits, and the primary reason why a man is ungrateful is that he has found it impossible to be grateful enough.

Our madness has gone to such lengths that it is a very dangerous thing to confer great benefits upon a person; for just because he thinks it shameful not to repay, so he would have none left alive whom he should repay. “Keep for yourself what you have received; I do not ask it back—I do not demand it. Let it be safe to have conferred a favour.”<sup>[15]</sup> There is no worse hatred than that which springs from shame at the desecration of a benefit.<sup>[16]</sup> Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. The reader will be interested to compare this letter with the treatise (or essay) On Benefits, *De Beneficiis*, which was dedicated to Aebutius Liberalis, the subject of Ep. xci.
2. See *De Ben.* i. 1. 9 f. *non est autem quod tardiores faciat ad bene merendum turba ingratorum.*
3. *Calculi* were counters, spread out on the *abacus*, or counting-board; they ran in columns, by millions, hundred thousands, etc.

4. *Talio* (from *talis*, “just so much”) is the old Roman law of “eye for eye and tooth for tooth.” As law became less crude, it gave way to fines.
5. This “long-established terminology” applies to the *verborum proprietas* of philosophic diction, with especial reference to τὰ καθήκοντα, the appropriate duties of the philosopher and the seeker after wisdom. Thus, *referre* is distinguished from *reddere*, *reponere*, *solvere*, and other financial terms.
6. i.e., the Stoics.
7. e.g., “Only the wise man is king,” “there is no mean between virtue and vice,” “pain is no evil,” “only the wise man is free,” “riches are not a good” etc.
8. Frag. 54 Körte.
9. Literally, “more than the capital and in addition to the rate of interest.”
10. Beneficence is a subdivision of the second cardinal virtue of the Stoics, Justice. Cicero discusses this topic at length in *De Off.* i. 42 ff.
11. Perhaps a figure from the vintage. For the same metaphor, though in a different connexion, see Ep. i. 5, and Ep. cviii. 26: *quemadmodum ex amphora primum, quod est sincerissimum, effluit, gravissimum quodque turbidumque subsidit, sic in aetate nostra quod est optimum, in primo est.*
12. Cf. § 6: “The good man so arranges the two sides of his ledger that he voluntarily cheats himself by adding to the benefit and subtracting from the injury.” Cf. also § 17: “The good man will be easy-going in striking a balance; he will allow too much to be set against his credit.”
13. When by law or special enactment *novae tabellae* were granted to special classes of debtors, their debts, as in our bankruptcy courts, were cancelled.
14. Cf. Ep. xxxi. 6 *quid ergo est bonum? rerum scientia.*
15. The words are put into the mouth of an imaginary benefactor who fears for his own life.
16. Cf. Tac. *Agric.* 42 *proprium humani ingenii est odisse quem laeseris.*

*On the Natural Fear of Death*

I have already ceased to be anxious about you. “Whom then of the gods,” you ask, “have you found as your voucher?”<sup>[1]</sup> A god, let me tell you, who deceives no one—a soul in love with that which is upright and good. The better part of yourself is on safe ground. Fortune can inflict injury upon you; what is more pertinent is that I have no fears lest you do injury to yourself. Proceed as you have begun, and settle yourself in this way of living, not luxuriously, but calmly.

I prefer to be in trouble rather than in luxury; and you had better interpret the term “in trouble” as popular usage is wont to interpret it: living a “hard,” “rough,” “toilsome” life. We are wont to hear the lives of certain men praised as follows, when they are objects of unpopularity: “So-and-So lives luxuriously”; but by this they mean: “He is softened by luxury.” For the soul is made womanish by degrees, and is weakened until it matches the ease and laziness in which it lies. Lo, is it not better for one who is really a man even to become hardened?<sup>[2]</sup> Next, these same dandies fear that which they have made their own lives resemble. Much difference is there between lying idle and lying buried!<sup>[3]</sup>

“But,” you say, “is it not better even to lie idle than to whirl round in these eddies of business distraction?” Both extremes are to be deprecated—both tension and sluggishness. I hold that



he who lies on a perfumed couch is no less dead than he who is dragged along by the executioner's hook.

Leisure without study is death; it is a tomb for the living man.

What then is the advantage of retirement? As if the real causes of our anxieties did not follow us across the seas! What hiding-place is there, where the fear of death does not enter? What peaceful haunts are there, so fortified and so far withdrawn that pain does not fill them with fear? Wherever you hide yourself, human ills will make an uproar all around. There are many external things which compass us about, to deceive us or to weigh upon us; there are many things within which, even amid solitude, fret and ferment.

Therefore, gird yourself about with philosophy, an impregnable wall. Though it be assaulted by many engines, Fortune can find no passage into it. The soul stands on unassailable ground, if it has abandoned external things; it is independent in its own fortress; and every weapon that is hurled falls short of the mark. Fortune has not the long reach with which we credit her; she can seize none except him that clings to her.

Let us then recoil from her as far as we are able. This will be possible for us only through knowledge of self and of the world<sup>[4]</sup> of Nature. The soul should know whither it is going and whence it came, what is good for it and what is evil, what it seeks and what it avoids, and what is that Reason which distinguishes between the desirable and the undesirable, and thereby tames the madness of our desires and calms the violence of our fears.

Some men flatter themselves that they have checked these evils by themselves even without the aid of philosophy; but when some accident catches them off their guard, a tardy confession of error is wrung from them. Their boastful words perish from their lips when the torturer commands them to stretch forth their hands, and when death draws nearer! You might say to such a man: "It

was easy for you to challenge evils that were not near-by; but here comes pain, which you declared you could endure; here comes death, against which you uttered many a courageous boast! The whip cracks, the sword flashes:

*Ah now, Aeneas, thou must needs be stout*

*And strong of heart!”<sup>[5]</sup>*

This strength of heart, however, will come from constant study, provided that you practice, not with the tongue but with the soul, and provided that you prepare yourself to meet death. To enable yourself to meet death, you may expect no encouragement or cheer from those who try to make you believe, by means of their hair-splitting logic, that death is no evil. For I take pleasure, excellent Lucilius, in poking fun at the absurdities of the Greeks, of which, to my continual surprise, I have not yet succeeded in ridiculing myself.

Our master Zeno<sup>[6]</sup> uses a syllogism like this: “No evil is glorious; but death is glorious; therefore death is no evil.” A cure, Zeno! I have been freed from fear; henceforth I shall not hesitate to bare my neck on the scaffold. Will you not utter sterner words instead of rousing a dying man to laughter? Indeed, Lucilius, I could not easily tell you whether he who thought that he was quenching the fear of death by setting up this syllogism was the more foolish, or he who attempted to refute it, just as if it had anything to do with the matter!

For the refuter himself proposed a counter-syllogism, based upon the proposition that we regard death as “indifferent,”—one of the things which the Greeks call ἀδιάφορα.<sup>[7]</sup> “Nothing,” he says, “that is indifferent can be glorious; death is glorious; therefore death is not indifferent.” You comprehend the tricky fallacy which is contained in this syllogism.—mere death is, in fact, not glorious; but a brave death is glorious. And when you say,

“Nothing that is indifferent is glorious,” I grant you this much, and declare that nothing is glorious except as it deals with indifferent things. I classify as “indifferent,”—that is, neither good nor evil—sickness, pain, poverty, exile, death.

None of these things is intrinsically glorious; but nothing can be glorious apart from them. For it is not poverty that we praise, it is the man whom poverty cannot humble or bend. Nor is it exile that we praise, it is the man who withdraws into exile in the spirit in which he would have sent another into exile. It is not pain that we praise, it is the man whom pain has not coerced. One praises not death, but the man whose soul death takes away before it can confound it.

All these things are in themselves neither honourable nor glorious; but any one of them that virtue has visited and touched is made honourable and glorious by virtue; they merely lie in between,<sup>[8]</sup> and the decisive question is only whether wickedness or virtue has laid hold upon them. For instance, the death which in Cato’s case is glorious, is in the case of Brutus<sup>[9]</sup> forthwith base and disgraceful. For this Brutus, condemned to death, was trying to obtain postponement; he withdrew a moment in order to ease himself; when summoned to die and ordered to bare his throat, he exclaimed: “I will bare my throat, if only I may live!” What madness it is to run away, when it is impossible to turn back! “I will bare my throat, if only I may live!” He came very near saying also: “even under Antony!” This fellow deserved indeed to be consigned to *life!*

But, as I was going on to remark, you see that death in itself is neither an evil nor a good; Cato experienced death most honourably, Brutus most basely. Everything, if you add virtue, assumes a glory which it did not possess before. We speak of a sunny room, even though the same room is pitch-dark at night.

It is the day which fills it with light, and the night which steals the light away; thus it is with the things which we call indifferent and “middle,”<sup>[10]</sup> like riches, strength, beauty, titles, kingship, and their opposites—death, exile, ill-health, pain, and all such evils, the fear of which upsets us to a greater or less extent; it is the wickedness or the virtue that bestows the name of good or evil. An object is not by its own essence either hot or cold; it is heated when thrown into a furnace, and chilled when dropped into water. Death is honourable when related to that which is honourable; by this I mean virtue and a soul that despises the worst hardships.

Furthermore, there are vast distinctions among these qualities which we call “middle.” For example, death is not so indifferent as the question whether your hair should be worn evenly or unevenly. Death belongs among those things which are not indeed evils, but still have in them a semblance of evil; for there are implanted in us love of self, a desire for existence and self-preservation, and also an abhorrence of dissolution, because death seems to rob us of many goods and to withdraw us from the abundance to which we have become accustomed. And there is another element which estranges us from death, we are already familiar with the present, but are ignorant of the future into which we shall transfer ourselves, and we shrink from the unknown. Moreover, it is natural to fear the world of shades, whither death is supposed to lead.

Therefore, although death is something indifferent, it is nevertheless not a thing which we can easily ignore. The soul must be hardened by long practice, so that it may learn to endure the sight and the approach of death.

Death ought to be despised more than it is wont to be despised. For we believe too many of the stories about death. Many thinkers have striven hard to increase its ill repute; they have portrayed the

prison in the world below and the land overwhelmed by everlasting night, where

*Within his blood-stained cave Hell's warder huge*

*Doth sprawl his ugly length on half-crunched bones,*

*And terrifies the disembodied ghosts*

*With never-ceasing bark.<sup>[11]</sup>*

Even if you can win your point and prove that these are mere stories and that nothing is left for the dead to fear, another fear steals upon you. For the fear of going to the underworld is equalled by the fear of going nowhere.

In the face of these notions, which long-standing opinion has dinned in our ears, how can brave endurance of death be anything else than glorious, and fit to rank among the greatest accomplishments of the human mind? For the mind will never rise to virtue if it believes that death is an evil; but it will so rise if it holds that death is a matter of indifference. It is not in the order of nature that a man shall proceed with a great heart to a destiny which he believes to be evil; he will go sluggishly and with reluctance. But nothing glorious can result from unwillingness and cowardice; virtue does nothing under compulsion.

Besides, no deed that a man does is honourable unless he has devoted himself thereto and attended to it with all his heart, rebelling against it with no portion of his being. When, however, a man goes to face an evil, either through fear of worse evils or in the hope of goods whose attainment is of sufficient moment to him that he can swallow the one evil which he must endure—in that case the judgment of the agent is drawn in two directions. On the one side is the motive which bids him carry out his purpose; on the other, the motive which restrains him and makes him flee from something which has aroused his apprehension or leads to danger. Hence he is torn in different directions; and if this

happens, the glory of his act is gone. For virtue accomplishes its plans only when the spirit is in harmony with itself. There is no element of fear in any of its actions.

*Yield not to evils, but, still braver, go*

*Where'er thy fortune shall allow.<sup>[12]</sup>*

You cannot “still braver go,” if you are persuaded that those things are the real evils. Root out this idea from your soul; otherwise your apprehensions will remain undecided and will thus check the impulse to action. You will be pushed into that towards which you ought to advance like a soldier.

Those of our school, it is true, would have men think that Zeno’s syllogism<sup>[13]</sup> is correct, but that the second<sup>[13]</sup> I mentioned, which is set up against his, is deceptive and wrong. But I for my part decline to reduce such questions to a matter of dialectical rules or to the subtleties of an utterly worn-out system. Away, I say, with all that sort of thing, which makes a man feel, when a question is propounded to him, that he is hemmed in, and forces him to admit a premiss, and then makes him say one thing in his answer when his real opinion is another.<sup>[14]</sup> When truth is at stake, we must act more frankly; and when fear is to be combated, we must act more bravely.

Such questions, which the dialecticians involve in subtleties, I prefer to solve and weigh rationally, with the purpose of winning conviction and not of forcing the judgment.

When a general is about to lead into action an army prepared to meet death for their wives and children, how will he exhort them to battle? I remind you of the Fabii,<sup>[15]</sup> who took upon a single clan a war which concerned the whole state. I point out to you the Lacedaemonians in position at the very pass of Thermopylae! They have no hope of victory, no hope of returning. The place where they stand is to be their tomb.

In what language do you encourage them to bar the way with their bodies and take upon themselves the ruin of their whole tribe, and to retreat from life rather than from their post? Shall you say: "That which is evil is not glorious; but death is glorious; therefore death is not an evil"? What a powerful discourse! After such words, who would hesitate to throw himself upon the serried spears of the foemen, and die in his tracks? But take Leonidas: how bravely did he address his men! He said: "Fellow-soldiers, let us to our breakfast, knowing that we shall sup in Hades!"<sup>[16]</sup> The food of these men did not grow lumpy in their mouths, or stick in their throats, or slip from their fingers; eagerly did they accept the invitation to breakfast, and to supper also!

Think, too, of the famous Roman general,<sup>[17]</sup> his soldiers had been dispatched to seize a position, and when they were about to make their way through a huge army of the enemy, he addressed them with the words: "You must go now, fellow-soldiers, to yonder place, whence there is no 'must' about your returning!"

You see, then, how straightforward and peremptory virtue is; but what man on earth can your deceptive logic make more courageous or more upright? Rather does it break the spirit, which should never be less straitened or forced to deal with petty and thorny problems than when some great work is being planned.

It is not the Three Hundred<sup>[18]</sup>—it is all mankind that should be relieved of the fear of death. But how can you prove to all those men that death is no evil? How can you overcome the notions of all our past life— notions with which we are tinged from our very infancy? What succour can you discover for man's helplessness? What can you say that will make men rush, burning with zeal, into the midst of danger? By what persuasive speech can you turn aside this universal feeling of fear, by what strength of wit can you turn aside the conviction of the human race which steadfastly opposes you? Do you propose to construct catchwords for me,

or to string together petty syllogisms? It takes great weapons to strike down great monsters.

You recall the fierce serpent in Africa, more frightful to the Roman legions than the war itself, and assailed in vain by arrows and slings; it could not be wounded even by “Pythius,”<sup>[19]</sup> since its huge size, and the toughness which matched its bulk, made spears, or any weapon hurled by the hand of man, glance off. It was finally destroyed by rocks equal in size to millstones. Are you, then, hurling petty weapons like yours even against death? Can you stop a lion’s charge by an awl?<sup>[20]</sup> Your arguments are indeed sharp; but there is nothing sharper than a stalk of grain. And certain arguments are rendered useless and unavailing by their very subtlety. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. One who incurs liability by taking upon himself the debt of another. It is part of the process known as *intercessio*.
2. Rather than *mollis*.
3. *Conditivum* (more frequently and properly *conditorium*) is a grim jest. The word is mostly found in an adjectival sense applying to fruits and grain stored for later use.
4. Compare Arnold’s nineteenth-century definition of culture.
5. Vergil, *Aeneid*, vi. 261.
6. Frag. 196 von Arnim.
7. Defined by the Greeks as “things which have no direct connexion either with happiness or unhappiness.” See Cicero, *De Finibus*, iii. 50 ff.
8. i.e., are “indifferent” (cf. § 14 *indifferentia ac media dicuntur*).
9. Presumably D. Junius Brutus, who finally incurred the enmity of both Octavian and Antony. He was ignominiously put to death by a Gaul while fleeing to join M. Brutus in Macedonia.
10. *media*: a technical word in Stoic philosophy, meaning neither good or bad.
11. See Vergil, *Aeneid*, vi. 400 f. and viii. 296 f.
12. Vergil, *Aeneid*, vi. 95 f., the advice of the Sibyl to Aeneas.
13. Cf. §§ 9 and 10.
14. Cf. Ep. xviii. 4 ff.
15. Cf. Livy, ii. 49. 1 *familiam unam subisse civitatis onus*.
16. Οὐτως ἀριστᾶτε ὡς ἐν ἄδου δειπνήσοντες—quoted by Stobaeus, Plutarch, and Diodorus. Cicero says (*Tusc. i. 101*) *hodie apud inferos fortasse cenabimus*.



17. Calpurnius, in Sicily, during the first Punic war. Cf. Livy, xxii. 60. 11.
18. The soldiers of Leonidas.
19. An especially large machine for assaulting walls; a nickname, like the modern "Long Tom."
20. Cf. Ep. lxxxv. 1 *puget in aciem descendere pro dis hominibusque susceptam subula armatum.*

LETTER 83

*On Drunkenness*



You bid me give you an account of each separate day, and of the whole day too; so you must have a good opinion of me if you think that in these days of mine there is nothing to hide. At any rate, it is thus that we should live—as if we lived in plain sight of all men; and it is thus that we should think—as if there were someone who could look into our inmost souls; and there is one who can so look. For what avails it that something is hidden from man? Nothing is shut off from the sight of God. He is witness of our souls,<sup>[1]</sup> and he comes into the very midst of our thoughts—comes into them, I say, as one who may at any time depart.

I shall therefore do as you bid, and shall gladly inform you by letter what I am doing, and in what sequence. I shall keep watching myself continually, and—a most useful habit—shall review each day.<sup>[2]</sup> For this is what makes us wicked: that no one of us looks back over his own life. Our thoughts are devoted only to what we are about to do. And yet our plans for the future always depend on the past.

Today has been unbroken; no one has filched the slightest part of it from me. The whole time has been divided between rest and reading. A brief space has been given over to bodily exercise, and on this ground I can thank old age—my exercise costs very little

effort; as soon as I stir, I am tired. And weariness is the aim and end of exercise, no matter how strong one is.

Do you ask who are my pacemakers? One is enough for me—the slave Pharius, a pleasant fellow, as you know; but I shall exchange him for another. At my time of life I need one who is of still more tender years. Pharius, at any rate, says that he and I are at the same period of life; for we are both losing our teeth.<sup>[3]</sup> Yet even now I can scarcely follow his pace as he runs, and within a very short time I shall not be able to follow him at all; so you see what profit we get from daily exercise. Very soon does a wide interval open between two persons who travel different ways. My slave is climbing up at the very moment when I am coming down, and you surely know how much quicker the latter is. Nay, I was wrong; for now my life is not coming down; it is falling outright.

Do you ask, for all that, how our race resulted today? We raced to a tie,<sup>[4]</sup>—something which rarely happens in a running contest. After tiring myself out in this way (for I cannot call it exercise), I took a cold bath; this, at my house, means just short of hot. I, the former cold-water enthusiast, who used to celebrate the new year by taking a plunge into the canal, who, just as naturally as I would set out to do some reading or writing, or to compose a speech, used to inaugurate the first of the year with a plunge into the Virgo aqueduct,<sup>[5]</sup> have changed my allegiance, first to the Tiber, and then to my favourite tank, which is warmed only by the sun, at times when I am most robust and when there is not a flaw in my bodily processes. I have very little energy left for bathing.

After the bath, some stale bread and breakfast without a table; no need to wash the hands after such a meal. Then comes a very short nap. You know my habit; I avail myself of a scanty bit of sleep—unharnessing, as it were.<sup>[6]</sup> For I am satisfied if I can just stop staying awake. Sometimes I know that I have slept; at other times, I have a mere suspicion.

Lo, now the din of the Races sounds about me! My ears are smitten with sudden and general cheering. But this does not upset my thoughts or even break their continuity. I can endure an uproar with complete resignation. The medley of voices blended in one note sounds to me like the dashing of waves,<sup>[7]</sup> or like the wind that lashes the tree-tops, or like any other sound which conveys no meaning.

What is it, then, you ask, to which I have been giving my attention? I will tell you, a thought sticks in my mind, left over from yesterday—namely, what men of the greatest sagacity have meant when they have offered the most trifling and intricate proofs for problems of the greatest importance—proofs which may be true, but none the less resemble fallacies.

Zeno, that greatest of men, the revered founder of our brave and holy school of philosophy, wishes to discourage us from drunkenness. Listen, then, to his arguments proving that the good man will not get drunk: “No one entrusts a secret to a drunken man; but one will entrust a secret to a good man; therefore, the good man will not get drunk.”<sup>[8]</sup> Mark how ridiculous Zeno is made when we set up a similar syllogism in contrast with his. There are many, but one will be enough: “No one entrusts a secret to a man when he is asleep; but one entrusts a secret to a good man; therefore, the good man does not go to sleep.”<sup>[9]</sup>

Posidonius pleads the cause of our master Zeno in the only possible way; but it cannot, I hold, be pleaded even in this way. For Posidonius maintains that the word “drunken” is used in two ways—in the one case of a man who is loaded with wine and has no control over himself; in the other, of a man who is accustomed to get drunk, and is a slave to the habit. Zeno, he says, meant the latter—the man who is accustomed to get drunk, not the man who is drunk; and no one would entrust to this person any secret, for it might be blabbed out when the man was in his cups.

This is a fallacy. For the first syllogism refers to him who is actually drunk and not to him who is about to get drunk. You will surely admit that there is a great difference between a man who is drunk and a drunkard. He who is actually drunk may be in this state for the first time and may not have the habit, while the drunkard is often free from drunkenness. I therefore interpret the word in its usual meaning, especially since the syllogism is set up by a man who makes a business of the careful use of words, and who weighs his language. Moreover, if this is what Zeno meant, and what he wished it to mean to us, he was trying to avail himself of an equivocal word in order to work in a fallacy; and no man ought to do this when truth is the object of inquiry.

But let us admit, indeed, that he meant what Posidonius says; even so, the conclusion is false, that secrets are not entrusted to an habitual drunkard. Think how many soldiers who are not always sober have been entrusted by a general or a captain or a centurion with messages which might not be divulged! With regard to the notorious plot to murder Gaius Caesar—I mean the Caesar who conquered Pompey and got control of the state—Tillius Cimber was trusted with it no less than Gaius Cassius. Now Cassius throughout his life drank water; while Tillius Cimber was a sot as well as a brawler. Cimber himself alluded to this fact, saying: “*I carry a master? I cannot carry my liquor!*”

So let each one call to mind those who, to his knowledge, can be ill trusted with wine, but well trusted with the spoken word; and yet one case occurs to my mind, which I shall relate, lest it fall into oblivion. For life should be provided with conspicuous illustrations. Let us not always be harking back to the dim past.

Lucius Piso, the director of Public Safety at Rome, was drunk from the very time of his appointment. He used to spend the greater part of the night at banquets, and would sleep until noon. That was the way he spent his morning hours. Nevertheless,

he applied himself most diligently to his official duties, which included the guardianship of the city. Even the sainted Augustus trusted him with secret orders when he placed him in command of Thrace.<sup>[10]</sup> Piso conquered that country. Tiberius, too, trusted him when he took his holiday in Campania, leaving behind him in the city many a critical matter that aroused both suspicion and hatred.

I fancy that it was because Piso's drunkenness turned out well for the Emperor that he appointed to the office of city prefect Cossus, a man of authority and balance, but so soaked and steeped in drink that once, at a meeting of the Senate, whither he had come after banqueting, he was overcome by a slumber from which he could not be roused, and had to be carried home. It was to this man that Tiberius sent many orders, written in his own hand—orders which he believed he ought not to trust even to the officials of his household. Cossus never let a single secret slip out, whether personal or public.

So let us abolish all such harangues as this: "No man in the bonds of drunkenness has power over his soul. As the very vats are burst by new wine, and as the dregs at the bottom are raised to the surface by the strength of the fermentation; so, when the wine effervesces, whatever lies hidden below is brought up and made visible. As a man overcome by liquor cannot keep down his food when he has over-indulged in wine, so he cannot keep back a secret either. He pours forth impartially both his own secrets and those of other persons."

This, of course, is what commonly happens, but so does this—that we take counsel on serious subjects with those whom we know to be in the habit of drinking freely. Therefore this proposition, which is laid down in the guise of a defence of Zeno's syllogism, is false—that secrets are not entrusted to the habitual drunkard.

How much better it is to arraign drunkenness frankly and to expose its vices! For even the middling good man avoids them, not to mention the perfect sage, who is satisfied with slaking his thirst; the sage, even if now and then he is led on by good cheer which, for a friend's sake, is carried somewhat too far, yet always stops short of drunkenness.

We shall investigate later the question whether the mind of the sage is upset by too much wine and commits follies like those of the toper; but meanwhile, if you wish to prove that a good man ought not to get drunk, why work it out by logic? Show how base it is to pour down more liquor than one can carry, and not to know the capacity of one's own stomach; show how often the drunkard does things which make him blush when he is sober; state that drunkenness<sup>[11]</sup> is nothing but a condition of insanity purposely assumed. Prolong the drunkard's condition to several days; will you have any doubt about his madness? Even as it is, the madness is no less; it merely lasts a shorter time.

Think of Alexander of Macedon,<sup>[12]</sup> who stabbed Clitus, his dearest and most loyal friend, at a banquet; after Alexander understood what he had done, he wished to die, and assuredly he ought to have died.

Drunkenness kindles and discloses every kind of vice, and removes the sense of shame that veils our evil undertakings.<sup>[13]</sup> For more men abstain from forbidden actions because they are ashamed of sinning than because their inclinations are good.

When the strength of wine has become too great and has gained control over the mind, every lurking evil comes forth from its hiding-place. Drunkenness does not create vice, it merely brings it into view; at such times the lustful man does not wait even for the privacy of a bedroom, but without postponement gives free play to the demands of his passions; at such times the unchaste man proclaims and publishes his malady; at such times your

cross-grained fellow does not restrain his tongue or his hand. The haughty man increases his arrogance, the ruthless man his cruelty, the slanderer his spitefulness. Every vice is given free play and comes to the front.

Besides, we forget who we are, we utter words that are halting and poorly enunciated, the glance is unsteady, the step falters, the head is dizzy, the very ceiling moves about as if a cyclone were whirling the whole house, and the stomach suffers torture when the wine generates gas and causes our very bowels to swell. However, at the time, these troubles can be endured, so long as the man retains his natural strength; but what can he do when sleep impairs his powers, and when that which was drunkenness becomes indigestion?

Think of the calamities caused by drunkenness in a nation! This evil has betrayed to their enemies the most spirited and warlike races; this evil has made breaches in walls defended by the stubborn warfare of many years; this evil has forced under alien sway peoples who were utterly unyielding and defiant of the yoke; this evil has conquered by the wine-cup those who in the field were invincible.

Alexander, whom I have just mentioned, passed through his many marches, his many battles, his many winter campaigns (through which he worked his way by overcoming disadvantages of time or place), the many rivers which flowed from unknown sources, and the many seas, all in safety; it was intemperance in drinking that laid him low, and the famous death-dealing bowl of Hercules.<sup>[14]</sup>

What glory is there in carrying much liquor? When you have won the prize, and the other banqueters, sprawling asleep or vomiting, have declined your challenge to still other toasts; when you are the last survivor of the revels; when you have vanquished every one by your magnificent show of prowess and there is no



man who has proved himself of so great capacity as you, you are vanquished by the cask.

Mark Antony was a great man, a man of distinguished ability; but what ruined him and drove him into foreign habits and un-Roman vices, if it was not drunkenness and—no less potent than wine—love of Cleopatra? This it was that made him an enemy of the state; this it was that rendered him no match for his enemies; this it was that made him cruel, when as he sat at table the heads of the leaders of the state were brought in; when amid the most elaborate feasts and royal luxury he would identify the faces and hands of men whom he had proscribed;<sup>[15]</sup> when, though heavy with wine, he yet thirsted for blood. It was intolerable that he was getting drunk while he did such things; how much more intolerable that he did these things while actually drunk!

Cruelty usually follows wine-bibbing; for a man's soundness of mind is corrupted and made savage. Just as a lingering illness makes men querulous and irritable and drives them wild at the least crossing of their desires, so continued bouts of drunkenness bestialize the soul. For when people are often beside themselves, the habit of madness lasts on, and the vices which liquor generated retain their power even when the liquor is gone.

Therefore you should state why the wise man ought not to get drunk. Explain by facts, and not by mere words, the hideousness of the thing, and its haunting evils. Do that which is easiest of all—namely, demonstrate that what men call pleasures are punishments as soon as they have exceeded due bounds. For if you try to prove that the wise man can souse himself with much wine and yet keep his course straight, even though he be in his cups, you may go on to infer by syllogisms that he will not die if he swallows poison, that he will not sleep if he takes a sleeping-potion, that he will not vomit and reject the matter which clogs his stomach when you give him hellebore.<sup>[16]</sup> But, when a man's feet totter and

his tongue is unsteady, what reason have you for believing that he is half sober and half drunk? Farewell.

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### Footnotes

1. Cf. Ep. xli. 2 *sacer intra nos spiritus, . . . malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et custos.*
2. Cf. Ep. i. 4 *ratio constat impensae* (referring to his attempt to employ his time profitably).
3. See Ep. xii. 3 for a similar witticism.
4. *Hieran (coronam)*, as Lipsius thinks, when the result was doubtful, the garland was offered to the gods. From the Greek ἱερός, sacred.
5. Constructed by Marcus Agrippa; now the fountain of Trevi.
6. The same word is used by Seneca in *De Tranq. An.* xvii. 7 *quidam medio die interiunxerunt et in postmeridianas horas aliquid levioris operae distulerunt.*
7. Cf. Ep. lvi. 3 *istum fremitum non magis curo quam fluctum aut deiectum aquae.*
8. Zeno, Frag. 229 von Arnim—quoting also Philo's εἰ τῷ μεθύοντι οὐκ ἂν τις εὐλόγως λόγον ἀπόρρητον παρακατάθοιτο . . . οὐκ ἄρα μεθύει ὁ ἀστεῖος.
9. Cf. Ep. xlix. 8 *quod non perdidisti, habes; cornua autem non perdidisti; cornua ergo habes*—and the syllogisms given in Ep. xlvi.
10. In 11 B.C., when the Thracians were attacking Macedonia. The campaign lasted for three years, and Piso was rewarded with a triumph at its close.
11. Like anger, which was interpreted by the ancients as “short-lived madness.”
12. For a dramatic account of the murder see Plutarch's *Alexander*, ch. 51.
13. This is the firm conviction of Seneca, himself a most temperate man. §§ 14 and 15 admit that natural genius may triumph over drunkenness; § 17 may allow (with Chrysippus) a certain amount of hilarity; but the general conclusion is obvious.
14. Lipsius quotes Athenaeus as saying that Boeotian silver cups of large size were so called because the Boeotian Hercules drank from them; Servius, however, on Verg. *Aen.* viii. 278, declared that the name was derived from the large wooden bowl brought by Hercules to Italy and used for sacrificial purposes.
15. “Antony gave orders to those that were to kill Cicero, to cut off his head and right hand . . . ; and, when they were brought before him, he regarded them joyfully, actually bursting out more than once into laughter, and when he had satiated himself with the sight of them, ordered them to be hung up . . . in the forum” (Clough's translation of Plutarch's *Antony*, p. 172).
16. A plant which possessed cathartic properties and was widely used by the ancients. It was also applied in cases of mental derangement. The native Latin term is *veratrum*.

*A Guide to the Good Life:  
A Short Interview Excerpt From  
William B. Irvine*

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**Who do you consider the most influential stoic philosopher to you personally? Why? Do you have a favorite stoic quote?**

I like all the Roman Stoics, but for different reasons. When I am dealing on an ongoing basis with annoying people, I turn to Marcus Aurelius. As Roman emperor, he had lots of experience dealing with annoying people. When I have an important decision to make, I turn to Epictetus and remind myself that there are things I can control and things I can't. When I find myself lusting for consumer goods, I turn to Musonius Rufus, who managed quite well on being banished to the desolate island of Gyaros. And when I am feeling sorry for myself, I turn to Seneca. He reminds us that no matter how bad things are, they could be much worse.

As far as favorite quotes are concerned, I have a hundred of them. The Roman Stoics are wonderfully quotable. This one comes from Marcus Aurelius: "The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing."

LETTER 84

*On Gathering Ideas*<sup>[1]</sup>



The journeys to which you refer—journeys that shake the laziness out of my system—I hold to be profitable both for my health and for my studies. You see why they benefit my health: since my passion for literature makes me lazy and careless about my body, I can take exercise by deputy; as for my studies, I shall show you why my journeys help them, for I have not stopped my reading in the slightest degree. And reading, I hold, is indispensable—primarily, to keep me from being satisfied with myself alone, and besides, after I have learned what others have found out by their studies, to enable me to pass judgment on their discoveries and reflect upon discoveries that remain to be made. Reading nourishes the mind and refreshes it when it is wearied with study; nevertheless, this refreshment is not obtained without study.

We ought not to confine ourselves either to writing or to reading; the one, continuous writing, will cast a gloom over our strength, and exhaust it; the other will make our strength flabby and watery. It is better to have recourse to them alternately, and to blend one with the other, so that the fruits of one's reading may be reduced to concrete form by the pen.

We should follow, men say, the example of the bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing honey,

and then arrange and assort in their cells all that they have brought in; these bees, as our Vergil says,

*pack close the flowing honey,*

*And swell their cells with nectar sweet.*<sup>[2]</sup>

It is not certain whether the juice which they obtain from the flowers forms at once into honey, or whether they change that which they have gathered into this delicious object by blending something therewith and by a certain property of their breath. For some authorities believe that bees do not possess the art of making honey, but only of gathering it; and they say that in India honey has been found on the leaves of certain reeds, produced by a dew peculiar to that climate, or by the juice of the reed itself, which has an unusual sweetness, and richness.<sup>[3]</sup> And in our own grasses too, they say, the same quality exists, although less clear and less evident; and a creature born to fulfil such a function could hunt it out and collect it. Certain others maintain that the materials which the bees have culled from the most delicate of blooming and flowering plants is transformed into this peculiar substance by a process of preserving and careful storing away, aided by what might be called fermentation—whereby separate elements are united into one substance.

But I must not be led astray into another subject than that which we are discussing. We also, I say, ought to copy these bees, and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading, for such things are better preserved if they are kept separate; then, by applying the supervising care with which our nature has endowed us—in other words, our natural gifts—we should so blend those several flavours into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from that whence it came. This is what we see nature doing in our own bodies without any labour on our part;

the food we have eaten, as long as it retains its original quality and floats, in our stomachs as an undiluted mass, is a burden;<sup>[4]</sup> but it passes into tissue and blood only when it has been changed from its original form. So it is with the food which nourishes our higher nature—we should see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will be no part of us.

We must digest it; otherwise it will merely enter the memory and not the reasoning power. Let us loyally welcome such foods and make them our own, so that something that is one may be formed out of many elements, just as one number is formed of several elements whenever, by our reckoning, lesser sums, each different from the others, are brought together. This is what our mind should do: it should hide away all the materials by which it has been aided, and bring to light only what it has made of them.

Even if there shall appear in you a likeness to him who, by reason of your admiration, has left a deep impress upon you, I would have you resemble him as a child resembles his father, and not as a picture resembles its original; for a picture is a lifeless thing.

“What,” you say, “will it not be seen whose style you are imitating, whose method of reasoning, whose pungent sayings?” I think that sometimes it is impossible for it to be seen who is being imitated, if the copy is a true one; for a true copy stamps its own form upon all the features which it has drawn from what we may call the original, in such a way that they are combined into a unity.

Do you not see how many voices there are in a chorus? Yet out of the many only one voice results. In that chorus one voice takes the tenor another the bass, another the baritone. There are women, too, as well as men, and the flute is mingled with them. In that chorus the voices of the individual singers are hidden; what we hear is the voices of all together.

To be sure, I am referring to the chorus which the old-time philosophers knew; in our present-day exhibitions<sup>[5]</sup> we have a larger number of singers than there used to be spectators in the theatres of old. All the aisles are filled with rows of singers; brass instruments surround the auditorium; the stage resounds with flutes and instruments of every description; and yet from the discordant sounds a harmony is produced.

I would have my mind of such a quality as this; it should be equipped with many arts, many precepts, and patterns of conduct taken from many epochs of history; but all should blend harmoniously into one.

“How,” you ask, “can this be accomplished?” By constant effort, and by doing nothing without the approval of reason. And if you are willing to hear her voice, she will say to you: “Abandon those pursuits which heretofore have caused you to run hither and thither. Abandon riches, which are either a danger or a burden to the possessor. Abandon the pleasures of the body and of the mind; they only soften and weaken you. Abandon your quest for office; it is a swollen, idle, and empty thing, a thing that has no goal, as anxious to see no one outstrip it as to see no one at its heels. It is afflicted with envy, and in truth with a twofold envy; and you see how wretched a man’s plight is if he who is the object of envy feels envy also.”

Do you behold yonder homes of the great, yonder thresholds uproarious with the brawling of those who would pay their respects? They have many an insult<sup>[6]</sup> for you as you enter the door, and still more after you have entered. Pass by the steps that mount to rich men’s houses, and the porches rendered hazardous by the huge throng; for there you will be standing, not merely on the edge of a precipice but also on slippery ground. Instead of this, direct your course hither to wisdom, and seek her ways, which are ways of surpassing peace and plenty.

Whatever seems conspicuous in the affairs of men—however petty it may really be and prominent only by contrast with the lowest objects—is nevertheless approached by a difficult and toilsome pathway. It is a rough road that leads to the heights of greatness; but if you desire to scale this peak, which lies far above the range of Fortune, you will indeed look down from above upon all that men regard as most lofty, but none the less you can proceed to the top over level ground. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. A considerable part of this letter is found in the preface to the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, without any acknowledgement of indebtedness.
2. *Aeneid*, i. 432 f.
3. Cf. *mel in harundinibus collectum* (from India) in Pliny, *N. H.* xii. 32 (Summers).
4. The same figure is used in reference to reading, in Ep. ii. 2 f., *non prodest cibus nec corpori accedit, qui statim sumptus emittitur*, etc.
5. *Commissio* means an entertainment, or a concert; cf. Pliny, *Panegyric* 54, *ludis et commissionibus*.
6. For such treatment cf. Juvenal iii. 152 f.—  
*Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se*  
*Quam quod ridiculos homines facit, etc.*



*On Some Vain Syllogisms*

I had been inclined to spare you, and had omitted any knotty problems that still remained undiscussed; I was satisfied to give you a sort of taste of the views held by the men of our school, who desire to prove that virtue is of itself sufficiently capable of rounding out the happy life. But now you bid me include the entire bulk either of our own syllogisms or of those which have been devised<sup>[1]</sup> by other schools for the purpose of belittling us. If I shall be willing to do this, the result will be a book, instead of a letter. And I declare again and again that I take no pleasure in such proofs. I am ashamed to enter the arena and undertake battle on behalf of gods and men armed only with an awl.<sup>[2]</sup>

“He that possesses prudence is also self-restrained; he that possesses self-restraint is also unwavering; he that is unwavering is unperturbed; he that is unperturbed is free from sadness; he that is free from sadness is happy. Therefore, the prudent man is happy, and prudence is sufficient to constitute the happy life.”

Certain of the Peripatetics<sup>[3]</sup> reply to this syllogism by interpreting “unperturbed,” “unwavering,” and “free from sadness” in such a way as to make “unperturbed” mean one who is rarely perturbed and only to a moderate degree, and not one who is never perturbed. Likewise, they say that a person is called “free from sadness” who is not subject to sadness, one who falls into

this objectionable state not often nor in too great a degree. It is not, they say, the way of human nature that a man's spirit should be exempt from sadness, or that the wise man is not overcome by grief but is merely touched by it, and other arguments of this sort, all in accordance with the teachings of their school.

They do not abolish the passions in this way; they only moderate them. But how petty is the superiority which we attribute to the wise man, if he is merely braver than the most craven, happier than the most dejected, more self-controlled than the most unbridled, and greater than the lowliest! Would Ladas boast his swiftness in running by comparing himself with the halt and the weak?

*For she could skim the topmost blades of corn*

*And touch them not, nor bruise the tender ears;*

*Or travel over seas, well-poised above*

*The swollen floods, nor dip her flying feet*

*In ocean's waters.<sup>[4]</sup>*

This is speed estimated by its own standard, not the kind which wins praise by comparison with that which is slowest. Would you call a man well who has a light case of fever? No, for good health does not mean moderate illness.

They say, "The wise man is called unperturbed in the sense in which pomegranates are called mellow—not that there is no hardness at all in their seeds, but that the hardness is less than it was before." That view is wrong; for I am not referring to the gradual weeding out of evils in a good man, but to the complete absence of evils; there should be in him no evils at all, not even any small ones. For if there are any, they will grow, and as they grow will hamper him. Just as a large and complete cataract<sup>[5]</sup> wholly blinds the eyes, so a medium-sized cataract dulls their vision.

If by your definition the wise man has any passions whatever, his reason will be no match for them and will be carried swiftly along, as it were, on a rushing stream—particularly if you assign to him, not one passion with which he must wrestle, but all the passions. And a throng of such, even though they be moderate, can affect him more than the violence of one powerful passion.

He has a craving for money, although in a moderate degree. He has ambition, but it is not yet fully aroused. He has a hot temper, but it can be appeased. He has inconstancy, but not the kind that is very capricious or easily set in motion. He has lust, but not the violent kind. We could deal better with a person who possessed one full-fledged vice, than with one who possessed all the vices, but none of them in extreme form.

Again, it makes no difference how great the passion is; no matter what its size may be, it knows no obedience, and does not welcome advice.<sup>[6]</sup> Just as no animal, whether wild or tamed and gentle, obeys reason, since nature made it deaf to advice; so the passions do not follow or listen, however slight they are. Tigers and lions never put off their wildness; they sometimes moderate it, and then, when you are least prepared, their softened fierceness is roused to madness. Vices are never genuinely tamed.

Again, if reason prevails, the passions will not even get a start; but if they get under way against the will of reason, they will maintain themselves against the will of reason. For it is easier to stop them in the beginning than to control them when they gather force. This half-way ground is accordingly misleading and useless; it is to be regarded just as the declaration that we ought to be “moderately” insane, or “moderately” ill.

Virtue alone possesses moderation; the evils that afflict the mind do not admit of moderation. You can more easily remove than control them. Can one doubt that the vices of the human mind, when they have become chronic and callous (“diseases” we

call them), are beyond control, as, for example, greed, cruelty, and wantonness? Therefore the passions also are beyond control; for it is from the passions that we pass over to the vices.

Again, if you grant any privileges to sadness, fear, desire, and all the other wrong impulses, they will cease to lie within our jurisdiction. And why? Simply because the means of arousing them lie outside our own power. They will accordingly increase in proportion as the causes by which they are stirred up are greater or less. Fear will grow to greater proportions, if that which causes the terror is seen to be of greater magnitude or in closer proximity; and desire will grow keener in proportion as the hope of a greater gain has summoned it to action.

If the existence of the passions is not in our own control, neither is the extent of their power; for if you once permit them to get a start, they will increase along with their causes, and they will be of whatever extent they shall grow to be. Moreover, no matter how small these vices are, they grow greater. That which is harmful never keeps within bounds. No matter how trifling diseases are at the beginning, they creep on apace; and sometimes the slightest augmentation of disease lays low the enfeebled body!

But what folly it is, when the beginnings of certain things are situated outside our control, to believe that their endings are within our control! How have I the power to bring something to a close, when I have not had the power to check it at the beginning? For it is easier to keep a thing out than to keep it under after you have let it in.

Some men have made a distinction as follows, saying: "If a man has self-control and wisdom, he is indeed at peace as regards the attitude and habit of his mind, but not as regards the outcome. For, as far as his habit of mind is concerned, he is not perturbed, or saddened, or afraid; but there are many extraneous causes which strike him and bring perturbation upon him."

What they mean to say is this: “So-and-so is indeed not a man of an angry disposition, but still he sometimes gives way to anger,” and “He is not, indeed, inclined to fear, but still he sometimes experiences fear”; in other words, he is free from the fault, but is not free from the passion of fear. If, however, fear is once given an entrance, it will by frequent use pass over into a vice;<sup>[7]</sup> and anger, once admitted into the mind, will alter the earlier habit of a mind that was formerly free from anger.

Besides, if the wise man, instead of despising all causes that come from without, ever fears anything, when the time arrives for him to go bravely to meet the spear, or the flames, on behalf of his country, his laws, and his liberty, he will go forth reluctantly and with flagging spirit. Such inconsistency of mind, however, does not suit the character of a wise man.

Then, again, we should see to it that two principles which ought to be tested separately should not be confused. For the conclusion is reached independently that that alone is good which is honourable, and again independently the conclusion that virtue is sufficient for the happy life. If that alone is good which is honourable, everyone agrees that virtue is sufficient for the purpose of living happily; but, on the contrary, if virtue alone makes men happy, it will not be conceded that that alone is good which is honourable.

Xenocrates<sup>[8]</sup> and Speusippus<sup>[8]</sup> hold that a man can become happy even by virtue alone, not, however, that that which is honourable is the only good. Epicurus also decides<sup>[9]</sup> that one who possesses virtue is happy, but that virtue of itself is not sufficient for the happy life, because the pleasure that results from virtue, and not virtue itself, makes one happy. This is a futile distinction. For the same philosopher declares that virtue never exists without pleasure; and therefore, if virtue is always connected with pleasure and always inseparable therefrom, virtue is of itself sufficient. For

virtue keeps pleasure in its company, and does not exist without it, even when alone.

But it is absurd to say that a man will be happy by virtue alone, and yet not absolutely happy. I cannot discover how that may be, since the happy life contains in itself a good that is perfect and cannot be excelled. If a man has this good, life is completely happy.

Now if the life of the gods contains nothing greater or better, and the happy life is divine, then there is no further height to which a man can be raised.

Also, if the happy life is in want of nothing, then every happy life is perfect; it is happy and at the same time most happy. Have you any doubt that the happy life is the Supreme Good? Accordingly, if it possesses the Supreme Good, it is supremely happy. Just as the Supreme Good does not admit of increase (for what will be superior to that which is supreme?), exactly so the happy life cannot be increased either; for it is not without the Supreme Good. If then you bring in one man who is “happier” than another, you will also bring in one who is “much happier”; you will then be making countless distinctions in the Supreme Good; although I understand the Supreme Good to be that good which admits of no degree above itself.

If one person is less happy than another, it follows that he eagerly desires the life of that other and happier man in preference to his own. But the happy man prefers no other man’s life to his own. Either of these two things is incredible: that there should be anything left for a happy man to wish for in preference to what is, or that he should not prefer the thing which is better than what he already has. For certainly, the more prudent he is, the more he will strive after the best, and he will desire to attain it by every possible means. But how can one be happy who is still able, or rather who is still bound, to crave something else?

I will tell you what is the source of this error: men do not understand that the happy life is a unit; for it is its essence, and not its extent, that establishes such a life on the noblest Plane. Hence there is complete equality between the life that is long and the life that is short, between that which is spread out and that which is confined, between that whose influence is felt in many places and in many directions, and that which is restricted to one interest. Those who reckon life by number, or by measure, or by parts, rob it of its distinctive quality. Now, in the happy life, what is the distinctive quality? It is its fulness.<sup>[10]</sup>

Satiety, I think, is the limit to our eating or drinking. A eats more and B eats less; what difference does it make? Each is now sated. Or A drinks more and B drinks less; what difference does it make? Each is no longer thirsty. Again, A lives for many years and B for fewer; no matter, if only A's many years have brought as much happiness as B's few years. He whom you maintain to be "less happy" is not happy; the word admits of no diminution.

"He who is brave is fearless; he who is fearless is free from sadness; he who is free from sadness is happy." It is our own school which has framed this syllogism; they attempt to refute it by this answer, namely, that we Stoics are assuming as admitted a premiss which is false and distinctly controverted—that the brave man is fearless. "What!" they say, "will the brave man have no fear of evils that threaten him? That would be the condition of a madman, a lunatic, rather than of a brave man. The brave man will, it is true, feel fear in only a very slight degree; but he is not absolutely free from fear."

Now those who assert this are doubling back to their old argument, in that they regard vices of less degree as equivalent to virtues.<sup>[11]</sup> For indeed the man who does feel fear, though he feels it rather seldom and to a slight degree, is not free from wickedness, but is merely troubled by it in a milder form. "Not so," is the

reply, “for I hold that a man is mad if he does not fear evils which hang over his head.” What you say is perfectly true, if the things which threaten are really evils; but if he knows that they are not evils and believes that the only evil is baseness, he will be bound to face dangers without anxiety and to despise things which other men cannot help fearing. Or, if it is the characteristic of a fool and a madman not to fear evils, then the wiser a man is the more he will fear such things!

“It is the doctrine of you Stoics, then,” they reply, “that a brave man will expose himself to dangers.” By no means; he will merely not fear them, though he will avoid them. It is proper for him to be careful, but not to be fearful.<sup>[12]</sup> “What then? Is he not to fear death, imprisonment, burning, and all the other missiles of Fortune?” Not at all; for he knows that they are not evils, but only seem to be. He reckons all these things as the bugbears of man’s existence.

Paint him a picture of slavery, lashes, chains, want, mutilation by disease or by torture—or anything else you may care to mention; he will count all such things as terrors caused by the derangement of the mind. These things are only to be feared by those who are fearful. Or do you regard as an evil that to which some day we may be compelled to resort of our own free will?

What then, you ask, is an evil? It is the yielding to those things which are called evils; it is the surrendering of one’s liberty into their control, when really we ought to suffer all things in order to preserve this liberty. Liberty is lost unless we despise those things which put the yoke upon our necks. If men knew what bravery was, they would have no doubts as to what a brave man’s conduct should be. For bravery is not thoughtless rashness, or love of danger, or the courting of fear-inspiring objects; it is the knowledge which enables us to distinguish between that which is evil and that which is not.<sup>[13]</sup> Bravery takes the greatest care of



itself, and likewise endures with the greatest patience all things which have a false appearance of being evil.

“What then?” is the query; “if the sword is brandished over your brave man’s neck, if he is pierced in this place and in that continually, if he sees his entrails in his lap, if he is tortured again after being kept waiting in order that he may thus feel the torture more keenly, and if the blood flows afresh out of bowels where it has but lately ceased to flow, has he no fear? Shall you say that he has felt no pain either?” Yes, he has felt pain; for no human virtue can rid itself of feelings. But he has no fear; unconquered he looks down from a lofty height upon his sufferings. Do you ask me what spirit animates him in these circumstances? It is the spirit of one who is comforting a sick friend.

“That which is evil does harm; that which does harm makes a man worse. But pain and poverty do not make a man worse; therefore they are not evils.” “Your proposition,” says the objector, “is wrong; for what harms one does not necessarily make one worse. The storm and the squall work harm to the pilot, but they do not make a worse pilot of him for all that.”

Certain of the Stoic school reply to this argument as follows: “The pilot becomes a worse pilot because of storms or squalls, inasmuch as he cannot carry out his purpose and hold to his course; as far as his art is concerned, he becomes no worse a pilot, but in his work he does become worse.” To this the Peripatetics retort: “Therefore, poverty will make even the wise man worse, and so will pain, and so will anything else of that sort. For although those things will not rob him of his virtue, yet they will hinder the work of virtue.”

This would be a correct statement, were it not for the fact that the pilot and the wise man are two different kinds of person. The wise man’s purpose in conducting his life is not to accomplish at all hazards what he tries, but to do all things rightly; the pilot’s

purpose, however, is to bring his ship into port at all hazards. The arts are handmaids;<sup>[14]</sup> they must accomplish what they promise to do. But wisdom is mistress and ruler. The arts render a slave's service to life; wisdom issues the commands.

For myself, I maintain that a different answer should be given: that the pilot's art is never made worse by the storm, nor the application of his art either. The pilot has promised you, not a prosperous voyage, but a serviceable performance of his task—that is, an expert knowledge of steering a ship. And the more he is hampered by the stress of fortune, so much the more does his knowledge become apparent. He who has been able to say, “Neptune, you shall never sink this ship except on an even keel,”<sup>[15]</sup> has fulfilled the requirements of his art; the storm does not interfere with the pilot's work, but only with his success.

“What then,” you say, “is not a pilot harmed by any circumstance which does not permit him to make port, frustrates all his efforts, and either carries him out to sea, or holds the ship in irons, or strips her masts?” No, it does not harm him as a pilot, but only as a voyager; otherwise, he is no pilot. It is indeed so far from hindering the pilot's art that it even exhibits the art; for anyone, in the words of the proverb, is a pilot on a calm sea. These mishaps obstruct the voyage but not the steersman *qua* steersman.

A pilot has a double rôle: one he shares with all his fellow-passengers, for he also is a passenger; the other is peculiar to him, for he is the pilot. The storm harms him as a passenger, but not as a pilot.

Again, the pilot's art is another's good—it concerns his passengers just as a physician's art concerns his patients. But the wise man's good is a common good—it belongs both to those in whose company he lives, and to himself also. Hence our pilot may perhaps be harmed, since his services, which have been promised to others, are hindered by the storm; but the wise man is not harmed

by poverty, or by pain, or by any other of life's storms. For all his functions are not checked, but only those which pertain to others; he himself is always in action, and is greatest in performance at the very time when fortune has blocked his way. For then he is actually engaged in the business of wisdom; and this wisdom I have declared already to be, both the good of others, and also his own.

Besides, he is not prevented from helping others, even at the time when constraining circumstances press him down. Because of his poverty he is prevented from showing how the State should be handled; but he teaches, none the less, how poverty should be handled. His work goes on throughout his whole life.

Thus no fortune, no external circumstance, can shut off the wise man from action. For the very thing which engages his attention prevents him from attending to other things. He is ready for either outcome: if it brings goods, he controls them; if evils, he conquers them.

So thoroughly, I mean, has he schooled himself that he makes manifest his virtue in prosperity as well as in adversity, and keeps his eyes on virtue itself, not on the objects with which virtue deals. Hence neither poverty, nor pain, nor anything else that deflects the inexperienced and drives them headlong, restrains him from his course.

Do you suppose that he is weighed down by evils? He makes use of them. It was not of ivory only that Phidias knew how to make statues; he also made statues of bronze. If you had given him marble, or a still meaner material, he would have made of it the best statue that the material would permit. So the wise man will develop virtue, if he may, in the midst of wealth, or, if not, in poverty; if possible, in his own country—if not, in exile; if possible, as a commander—if not, as a common soldier; if possible,

in sound health—if not, enfeebled. Whatever fortune he finds, he will accomplish therefrom something noteworthy.

Animal-tamers are unerring; they take the most savage animals, which may well terrify those who encounter them, and subdue them to the will of man; not content with having driven out their ferocity, they even tame them so that they dwell in the same abode. The trainer puts his hand into the lion's mouth;<sup>[16]</sup> the tiger is kissed by his keeper. The tiny Aethiopian orders the elephant to sink down on its knees, or to walk the rope.<sup>[17]</sup> Similarly, the wise man is a skilled hand at taming evils. Pain, want, disgrace, imprisonment, exile—these are universally to be feared; but when they encounter the wise man, they are tamed. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. Such as that in Ep. xxxiii. 9 (constructed, however, by Seneca himself) *dormienti nemo secretum sermonem committit*, etc. See ad loc. and n.
2. Cf. Ep. lxxxii. 24 *subula leonem excipis?*
3. E. V. Arnold (*Roman Stoicism*, p.333) calls attention to the passion of anger, for example, which the Peripatetics believed should be kept under control, but not stamped out.
4. Vergil, *Aeneid*, vii. 808 ff. The lines describe Camilla, the Volscian warrior-huntress.
5. Seneca uses *suffusio* of jaundice in Ep. xcv. 16. Celsus, vii. 7. 14, explains the cause of cataracts, *vel ex morbo vel ex ictu concrescit humor*, and outlines the treatment.
6. Another reply to the Peripatetic claim of § 3.
7. For this topic of emotions as possible sources of the vices cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* iv. 10 *ex perturbationibus autem primum morbi conficiuntur. . . . Hoc loco nimium operae consumitur a Stoicis.*
8. Representing the views of the Academic school.
9. Frag. 508 Usener.
10. The happy life constitutes virtue; and virtue, as Seneca says so often, is absolute, permitting neither increase nor diminution.
11. i.e., thereby allowing the aforesaid increase or diminution in virtue.
12. For the argument compare Ep. lxxxii. 7 ff.—the topic, *contra mortem te praeparare.*
13. Besides this definition (a standard Stoic one) of the third cardinal virtue, we also find “a knowledge of what to choose and what to avoid,” “knowing to endure things,” and finally “the will to undertake great enterprises.”

14. Cf. Diogenes Laertius, ii. 79 τοὺς τῶν ἐγκυκλίων παιδευμάτων μετασχόντας, φιλοσοφίας δὲ ἀπολειφθέντας, ὁμοίους ἔλεγεν εἶναι τοῖς τῆς Πηνελόπης μνηστῆρσιν.
15. The figure of the pilot is a frequent one in philosophy, from Plato down. See Seneca, Ep. viii. 4. The same argument, as applied to the musician, is found in Ep. lxxxvii. 12 ff.
16. Cf. *De Ben.* i. 5 *leonum ora a magistris inpune tractantur.*
17. Cf. Suet. *Galba* 6: at the Floralia *Galba novum spectaculi genus elephantos funambulos edidit*; also id. *Nero*, 11, and Pliny, *N. H.* viii. 2.

LETTER 86

*On Scipio's Villa*



I am resting at the country-house which once belonged to Scipio Africanus<sup>[1]</sup> himself; and I write to you after doing reverence to his spirit and to an altar which I am inclined to think is the tomb<sup>[2]</sup> of that great warrior. That his soul has indeed returned to the skies, whence it came, I am convinced, not because he commanded mighty armies—for Cambyses also had mighty armies, and Cambyses was a madman<sup>[3]</sup> who made successful use of his madness—but because he showed moderation and a sense of duty to a marvellous extent. I regard this trait in him as more admirable after his withdrawal from his native land than while he was defending her; for there was the alternative: Scipio should remain in Rome, or Rome should remain free.

“It is my wish,” said he, “not to infringe in the least upon our laws, or upon our customs; let all Roman citizens have equal rights. O my country, make the most of the good that I have done, but without me. I have been the cause of your freedom, and I shall also be its proof; I go into exile, if it is true that I have grown beyond what is to your advantage!”

What can I do but admire this magnanimity, which led him to withdraw into voluntary exile and to relieve the state of its burden? Matters had gone so far that either liberty must work harm to Scipio, or Scipio to liberty. Either of these things was wrong in

the sight of heaven. So he gave way to the laws and withdrew to Liternum, thinking to make the state a debtor for his own exile no less than for the exile of Hannibal.<sup>[4]</sup>

I have inspected the house, which is constructed of hewn stone; the wall which encloses a forest; the towers also, buttressed out on both sides for the purpose of defending the house; the well, concealed among buildings and shrubbery, large enough to keep a whole army supplied; and the small bath, buried in darkness according to the old style, for our ancestors did not think that one could have a hot bath except in darkness. It was therefore a great pleasure to me to contrast Scipio's ways with our own.

Think, in this tiny recess the "terror of Carthage,"<sup>[5]</sup> to whom Rome should offer thanks because she was not captured more than once, used to bathe a body wearied with work in the fields! For he was accustomed to keep himself busy and to cultivate the soil with his own hands, as the good old Romans were wont to do. Beneath this dingy roof he stood; and this floor, mean as it is, bore his weight.

But who in these days could bear to bathe in such a fashion? We think ourselves poor and mean if our walls are not resplendent with large and costly mirrors; if our marbles from Alexandria<sup>[6]</sup> are not set off by mosaics of Numidian stone,<sup>[7]</sup> if their borders are not faced over on all sides with difficult patterns, arranged in many colours like paintings; if our vaulted ceilings are not buried in glass; if our swimming-pools are not lined with Thasian marble,<sup>[8]</sup> once a rare and wonderful sight in any temple pools into which we let down our bodies after they have been drained weak by abundant perspiration; and finally, if the water has not poured from silver spigots.

I have so far been speaking of the ordinary bathing-establishments; what shall I say when I come to those of the freedmen? What a vast number of statues, of columns that support nothing,

but are built for decoration, merely in order to spend money! And what masses of water that fall crashing from level to level! We have become so luxurious that we will have nothing but precious stones to walk upon.

In this bath of Scipio's there are tiny chinks—you cannot call them windows—cut out of the stone wall in such a way as to admit light without weakening the fortifications; nowadays, however, people regard baths as fit only for moths if they have not been so arranged that they receive the sun all day long through the widest of windows, if men cannot bathe and get a coat of tan at the same time, and if they cannot look out from their bath-tubs over stretches of land and sea.<sup>[9]</sup> So it goes; the establishments which had drawn crowds and had won admiration when they were first opened are avoided and put back in the category of venerable antiques as soon as luxury has worked out some new device, to her own ultimate undoing.

In the early days, however, there were few baths, and they were not fitted out with any display. For why should men elaborately fit out that which, costs a penny only, and was invented for use, not merely for delight? The bathers of those day did not have water poured over them, nor did it always run fresh as if from a hot spring; and they did not believe that it mattered at all how perfectly pure was the water into which they were to leave their dirt.

Ye gods, what a pleasure it is to enter that dark bath, covered with a common sort of roof, knowing that therein your hero Cato, as aedile, or Fabius Maximus, or one of the Cornelia, has warmed the water with his own hands! For this also used to be the duty of the noblest aediles—to enter these places to which the populace resorted, and to demand that they be cleaned and warmed to a heat required by considerations of use and health, not the heat that men have recently made fashionable, as great as a conflagration—so much so, indeed, that a slave condemned for some



criminal offence now ought to be *bathed* alive! It seems to me that nowadays there is no difference between “the bath is on fire,” and “the bath is warm.”

How some persons nowadays condemn Scipio as a boor because he did not let daylight into his perspiring-room through wide windows, or because he did not roast in the strong sunlight and dawdle about until he could stew in the hot water! “Poor fool,” they say, “he did not know how to live! He did not bathe in filtered water; it was often turbid, and after heavy rains almost muddy!” But it did not matter much to Scipio if he had to bathe in that way; he went there to wash off sweat, not ointment.

And how do you suppose certain persons will answer me? They will say: “I don’t envy Scipio; that was truly an exile’s life—to put up with baths like those!” Friend, if you were wiser, you would know that Scipio did not bathe every day. It is stated by those<sup>[10]</sup> who have reported to us the old-time ways of Rome that the Romans washed only their arms and legs daily—because those were the members which gathered dirt in their daily toil—and bathed all over only once a week. Here someone will retort: “Yes; pretty dirty fellows they evidently were! How they must have smelled!” But they smelled of the camp, the farm, and heroism. Now that spick-and-span bathing establishments have been devised, men are really fouler than of yore.

What says Horatius Flaccus, when he wishes to describe a scoundrel, one who is notorious for his extreme luxury? He says. “Buccillus<sup>[11]</sup> smells of perfume.” Show me a Buccillus in these days; his smell would be the veritable goat-smell—he would take the place of the Gargonius with whom Horace in the same passage contrasted him. It is nowadays not enough to use ointment, unless you put on a fresh coat two or three times a day, to keep it from evaporating on the body. But why should a man boast of this perfume as if it were his own?

If what I am saying shall seem to you too pessimistic, charge it up against Scipio's country-house, where I have learned a lesson from Aegialus, a most careful householder and now the owner of this estate; he taught me that a tree can be transplanted, no matter how far gone in years. We old men must learn this precept; for there is none of us who is not planting an olive-yard for his successor. I have seen them bearing fruit in due season after three or four years of unproductiveness.<sup>[12]</sup>

And you too shall be shaded by the tree which

*Is slow to grow, but bringeth shade to cheer*

*Your grandsons in the far-off years,*<sup>[13]</sup>

as our poet Vergil says. Vergil sought, however, not what was nearest to the truth, but what was most appropriate, and aimed, not to teach the farmer, but to please the reader.

For example, omitting all other errors of his, I will quote the passage in which it was incumbent upon me today to detect a fault:

*In spring sow beans then, too, O clover plant,*

*Thou'rt welcomed by the crumbling furrows; and*

*The millet calls for yearly care.*<sup>[14]</sup>

You may judge by the following incident whether those plants should be set out at the same time, or whether both should be sowed in the spring. It is June at the present writing, and we are well on towards July; and I have seen on this very day farmers harvesting beans and sowing millet.

But to return to our olive-yard again. I saw it planted in two ways. If the trees were large, Aegialus took their trunks and cut off the branches to the length of one foot each; he then transplanted along with the ball, after cutting off the roots, leaving

only the thick part from which the roots hang. He smeared this with manure, and inserted it in the hole, not only heaping up the earth about it, but stamping and pressing it down.

There is nothing, he says, more effective than this packing process;<sup>[15]</sup> in other words, it keeps out the cold and the wind. Besides, the trunk is not shaken so much, and for this reason the packing makes it possible for the young roots to come out and get a hold in the soil. These are of necessity still soft; they have but a slight hold, and a very little shaking uproots them. This ball, moreover, Aegialus lops clean before he covers it up. For he maintains that new roots spring from all the parts which have been shorn. Moreover, the trunk itself should not stand more than three or four feet out of the ground. For there will thus be at once a thick growth from the bottom, nor will there be a large stump, all dry and withered, as is the case with old olive-yards.

The second way of setting them out was the following: he set out in similar fashion branches that were strong and of soft bark, as those of young saplings are wont to be. These grow a little more slowly, but, since they spring from what is practically a cutting, there is no roughness or ugliness in them.

This too I have seen recently—an aged vine transplanted from its own plantation. In this case, the fibres also should be gathered together, if possible, and then you should cover up the vine-stem more generously, so that roots may spring up even from the stock. I have seen such plantings made not only in February, but at the very end of March; the plants take hold of and embrace alien elms.

But all trees, he declares, which are, so to speak, “thick-stemmed,”<sup>[16]</sup> should be assisted with tank-water; if we have this help, we are our own rain-makers.

I do not intend to tell you any more of these precepts, lest, as Aegialus did with me, I may be training you up to be my competitor. Farewell.

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### Footnotes

1. See Ep. li. 11.
2. Cf. Livy xxxvii. 53 *orientem rure eo ipso loco sepeliri se iussisse ferunt monumentumque ibi aedificari*.
3. Herodotus iii. 25 ἔμμανής τε ἔὼν καὶ οὐ φρενήρης.
4. Livy's account (see above) dwells more on the unwillingness of Scipio and his friends to permit the great conqueror to suffer the indignities of a trial.
5. A phrase frequent in Roman literature; see Lucretius iii. 1034 *Scipiadas, belli fulmen, Carthaginis horror*.
6. Porphyry, basalt, etc.
7. i.e., the so-called *giallo antico*, with red and yellow tints predominating.
8. A white variety, from Thasos, an island off the Thracian coast.
9. Cf. Pliny, Ep. ii. 17. 12 *piscina, ex qua natantes mare aspiciunt*.
10. e.g., Varro, in the *Catus: balneum non cotidianum*.
11. Horace calls him Rufillus (*Sat. i. 2. 27*): *pastillos Rufillus olet, Gargonius hircum*.
12. This seems to be the general meaning of the passage.
13. *Georgics*, ii. 58.
14. *Georgics*, i. 215 f.
15. In Vitruvius vii. 1 G reads *pinsatione*, referring to the pounding of stones for flooring.
16. An agricultural term not elsewhere found.

*Some Arguments in Favour of the Simple Life*

“I was shipwrecked before I got aboard.”<sup>[1]</sup> I shall not add how that happened, lest you may reckon this also as another of the Stoic paradoxes;<sup>[2]</sup> and yet I shall, whenever you are willing to listen, nay, even though you be unwilling, prove to you that these words are by no means untrue, nor so surprising as one at first sight would think. Meantime, the journey showed me this: how much we possess that is superfluous; and how easily we can make up our minds to do away with things whose loss, whenever it is necessary to part with them, we do not feel.

My friend Maximus and I have been spending a most happy period of two days, taking with us very few slaves—one carriage-load—and no paraphernalia except what we wore on our persons. The mattress lies on the ground, and I upon the mattress. There are two rugs—one to spread beneath us and one to cover us.

Nothing could have been subtracted from our luncheon; it took not more than an hour to prepare, and we were nowhere without dried figs, never without writing tablets.<sup>[3]</sup> If I have bread, I use figs as a relish; if not, I regard figs as a substitute for bread. Hence they bring me a New Year feast every day,<sup>[4]</sup> and I make the New Year happy and prosperous by good thoughts and greatness of soul; for the soul is never greater than when it has laid aside all extraneous

things, and has secured peace for itself by fearing nothing, and riches by craving no riches.

The vehicle in which I have taken my seat is a farmer's cart. Only by walking do the mules show that they are alive. The driver is barefoot, and not because it is summer either. I can scarcely force myself to wish that others shall think this cart mine. My false embarrassment about the truth still holds out, you see; and whenever we meet a more sumptuous party I blush in spite of myself—proof that this conduct which I approve and applaud has not yet gained a firm and steadfast dwelling-place within me. He who blushes at riding in a rattle-trap will boast when he rides in style.

So my progress is still insufficient. I have not yet the courage openly to acknowledge my thriftiness. Even yet I am bothered by what other travellers think of me. But instead of this, I should really have uttered an opinion counter to that in which mankind believe, saying, "You are mad, you are misled, your admiration devotes itself to superfluous things! You estimate no man at his real worth. When property is concerned, you reckon up in this way with most scrupulous calculation those to whom you shall lend either money or benefits; for by now you enter benefits also as payments in your ledger.

You say. 'His estates are wide, but his debts are large.' 'He has a fine house, but he has built it on borrowed capital.' 'No man will display a more brilliant retinue on short notice, but he cannot meet his debts.'<sup>15</sup> 'If he pays off his creditors, he will have nothing left.'" So you will feel bound to do in all other cases as well—to find out by elimination the amount of every man's actual possessions.

I suppose you call a man rich just because his gold plate goes with him even on his travels, because he farms land in all the provinces, because he unrolls a large account-book, because he owns estates near the city so great that men would grudge his

holding them in the waste lands of Apulia. But after you have mentioned all these facts, he is poor. And why? He is in debt. "To what extent?" you ask. For all that he has. Or perchance you think it matters whether one has borrowed from another man or from Fortune.

What good is there in mules caparisoned in uniform livery?  
Or in decorated chariots and

*Steeds decked with purple and with tapestry,*

*With golden harness hanging from their necks,  
Champing their yellow bits, all clothed in gold?*<sup>[6]</sup>

Neither master nor mule is improved by such trappings.

Marcus Cato the Censor, whose existence helped the state as much as did Scipio's—for while Scipio fought against our enemies, Cato fought against our bad morals—used to ride a donkey, and a donkey, at that, which carried saddle-bags containing the master's necessaries. O how I should love to see him meet today on the road one of our coxcombs,<sup>[7]</sup> with his outriders and Numidians, and a great cloud of dust before him! Your dandy would no doubt seem refined and well-attended in comparison with Marcus Cato—your dandy, who, in the midst of all his luxurious paraphernalia, is chiefly concerned whether to turn his hand to the sword or to the hunting-knife.<sup>[8]</sup>

O what a glory to the times in which he lived, for a general who had celebrated a triumph, a censor, and what is most noteworthy of all, a Cato, to be content with a single nag, and with less than a whole nag at that! For part of the animal was pre-empted by the baggage that hung down on either flank. Would you not therefore prefer Cato's steed, that single steed, saddle-worn by Cato himself, to the coxcomb's whole retinue of plump ponies, Spanish cobs,<sup>[9]</sup> and trotters?<sup>[10]</sup>

I see that there will be no end in dealing with such a theme unless I make an end myself. So I shall now become silent, at least with reference to superfluous things like these; doubtless the man who first called them “hindrances”<sup>[11]</sup> had a prophetic inkling that they would be the very sort of thing they now are. At present I should like to deliver to you the syllogisms, as yet very few, belonging to our school and bearing upon the question of virtue, which, in our opinion, is sufficient for the happy life.

“That which is good makes men good. For example, that which is good in the art of music makes the musician. But chance events do not make a good man; therefore, chance events are not goods.” The Peripatetics reply to this by saying that the premiss is false; that men do not in every case become good by means of that which is good; that in music there is something good, like a flute, a harp, or an organ suited to accompany singing; but that none of these instruments makes the musician.

We shall then reply: “You do not understand in what sense we have used the phrase ‘that which is good in music.’ For we do not mean that which equips the musician, but that which makes the musician; you, however, are referring to the instruments of the art, and not to the art itself.<sup>[12]</sup> If, however, anything in the art of music is good, that will in every case make the musician.”

And I should like to put this idea still more clearly. We define the good in the art of music in two ways: first, that by which the performance of the musician is assisted, and second, that by which his art is assisted. Now the musical instruments have to do with his performance—such as flutes and organs and harps; but they do not have to do with the musician’s art itself. For he is an artist even without them; he may perhaps be lacking in the ability to practice his art. But the good in man is not in the same way twofold; for the good of man and the good of life are the same.



“That which can fall to the lot of any man, no matter how base or despised he may be, is not a good. But wealth falls to the lot of the pander and the trainer of gladiators; therefore wealth is not a good.” “Another wrong premiss,” they say, “for we notice that goods fall to the lot of the very lowest sort of men, not only in the scholar’s art, but also in the art of healing or in the art of navigating.”

These arts, however, make no profession of greatness of soul; they do not rise to any heights nor do they frown upon what fortune may bring.<sup>[13]</sup> It is virtue that uplifts man and places him superior to what mortals hold dear; virtue neither craves overmuch nor fears to excess that which is called good or that which is called bad. Chelidon, one of Cleopatra’s eunuchs, possessed great wealth; and recently Natalis—a man whose tongue was as shameless as it was dirty, a man whose mouth used to perform the vilest offices—was the heir of many, and also made many his heirs. What then? Was it his money that made him unclean, or did he himself besmirch his money? Money tumbles into the hands of certain men as a shilling tumbles down a sewer.

Virtue stands above all such things. It is appraised in coin of its own minting;<sup>[14]</sup> and it deems none of these random windfalls to be good. But medicine and navigation do not forbid themselves and their followers to marvel at such things. One who is not a good man can nevertheless be a physician, or a pilot or a scholar—yes just as well as he can be a cook! He to whose lot it falls to possess something which is not of a random sort, cannot be called a random sort of man: a person is of the same sort as that which he possesses.

A strong-box is worth just what it holds; or rather, it is a mere accessory of that which it holds. Who ever sets any price upon a full purse except the price established by the count of the money

deposited therein? This also applies to the owners of great estates: they are only accessories and incidentals to their possessions.

Why, then, is the wise man great? Because he has a great soul. Accordingly, it is true that that which falls to the lot even of the most despicable person is not a good.

Thus, I should never regard inactivity as a good; for even the tree-frog and the flea possess this quality.<sup>[15]</sup> Nor should I regard rest and freedom from trouble as a good; for what is more at leisure than a worm? Do you ask what it is that produces the wise man? That which produces a god.<sup>[16]</sup> You must grant that the wise man has in an element of godliness, heavenliness, grandeur. The good does not come to every one, nor does it allow any random person to possess it.

Behold:

*What fruits each country bears, or will not bear;*

*Here corn, and there the vine, grow richlier.*

*And elsewhere still the tender tree and grass*

*Unbidden clothe themselves in green. Seest thou*

*How Tmolus ships its saffron perfumes forth,*

*And ivory comes from Ind; soft Sheba sends*

*Its incense, and the unclad Chalybes*

*Their iron.<sup>[17]</sup>*

These products are apportioned to separate countries in order that human beings may be constrained to traffic among themselves, each seeking something from his neighbour in his turn. So the Supreme Good has also its own abode. It does not grow where ivory grows, or iron. Do you ask where the Supreme Good dwells? In the soul. And unless the soul be pure and holy, there is no room in it for God.

“Good does not result from evil. But riches result from greed; therefore, riches are not a good.” “It is not true,” they say, “that good does not result from evil. For money comes from sacrilege and theft. Accordingly, although sacrilege and theft are evil, yet they are evil only because they work more evil than good. For they bring gain; but the gain is accompanied by fear, anxiety, and torture of mind and body.”

Whoever says this must perforce admit that sacrilege, though it be an evil because it works much evil, is yet partly good because it accomplishes a certain amount of good. What can be more monstrous than this? We have, to be sure, actually convinced the world that sacrilege, theft, and adultery are to be regarded as among the goods. How many men there are who do not blush at theft, how many who boast of having committed adultery! For petty sacrilege is punished, but sacrilege on a grand scale is honoured by a triumphal procession.

Besides, sacrilege, if it is wholly good in some respect, will also be honourable and will be called right conduct; for it is conduct which concerns ourselves. But no human being, on serious consideration, admits this idea.

Therefore, goods cannot spring from evil. For if, as you object, sacrilege is an evil for the single reason that it brings on much evil, if you but absolve sacrilege of its punishment and pledge it immunity, sacrilege will be wholly good. And yet the worst punishment for crime lies in the crime itself.

You are mistaken, I maintain, if you propose to reserve your punishments for the hangman or the prison; the crime is punished immediately after it is committed; nay, rather, at the moment when it is committed. Hence, good does not spring from evil, any more than figs grow from olive-trees. Things which grow correspond to their seed; and goods cannot depart from their class. As that which is honourable does not grow from that which is base,

so neither does good grow from evil. For the honourable and the good are identical.<sup>[18]</sup>

Certain of our school oppose this statement as follows: “Let us suppose that money taken from any source whatsoever is a good; even though it is taken by an act of sacrilege, the money does not on that account derive its origin from sacrilege. You may get my meaning through the following illustration: In the same jar there is a piece of gold and there is a serpent. If you take the gold from the jar, it is not just because the serpent is there too, I say, that the jar yields me the gold—because it contains the serpent as well—but it yields the gold in spite of containing the serpent also. Similarly, gain results from sacrilege, not just because sacrilege is a base and accursed act, but because it contains gain also. As the serpent in the jar is an evil, and not the gold which lies there, beside the serpent; so in an act of sacrilege it is the crime, not the profit, that is evil.”

But I differ from these men; for the conditions in each case are not at all the same. In the one instance I can take the gold without the serpent, in the other I cannot make the profit without committing the sacrilege. The gain in the latter case does not lie side by side with the crime; it is blended with the crime.

“That which, while we are desiring to attain it, involves us in many evils, is not a good. But while we are desiring to attain riches, we become involved in many evils; therefore, riches are not a good.”<sup>[19]</sup> “Your first premiss,” they say, “contains two meanings; one is: we become involved in many evils while we are desiring to attain riches. But we also become involved in many evils while we are desiring to attain virtue. One man, while travelling in order to prosecute his studies, suffers shipwreck, and another is taken captive.

The second meaning is as follows: that through which we become involved in evils is not a good. And it will not logically

follow from our proposition that we become involved in evils through riches or through pleasure; otherwise, if it is through riches that we become involved in many evils, riches are not only not a good, but they are positively an evil. You, however, maintain merely that they are not a good. Moreover," the objector says, "you grant that riches are of some use. You reckon them among the advantages; and yet on this basis they cannot even be an advantage, for it is through the pursuit of riches that we suffer much disadvantage."

Certain men answer this objection as follows: "You are mistaken if you ascribe disadvantages to riches. Riches injure no one; it is a man's own folly, or his neighbour's wickedness, that harms him in each case, just as a sword by itself does not slay; it is merely the weapon used by the slayer. Riches themselves do not harm you, just because it is on account of riches that you suffer harm."

I think that the reasoning of Posidonius is better: he holds that riches are a cause of evil, not because, of themselves, they do any evil, but because they goad men on so that they are ready to do evil. For the efficient cause, which necessarily produces harm at once, is one thing, and the antecedent cause is another. It is this antecedent cause which inheres in riches; they puff up the spirit and beget pride, they bring on unpopularity and unsettle the mind to such an extent that the mere reputation of having wealth, though it is bound to harm us, nevertheless affords delight.

All goods, however, ought properly to be free from blame; they are pure, they do not corrupt the spirit, and they do not tempt us. They do, indeed, uplift and broaden the spirit, but without puffing it up. Those things which are goods produce confidence, but riches produce shamelessness. The things which are goods give us greatness of soul, but riches give us arrogance. And arrogance is nothing else than a false show of greatness.

“According to that argument,” the objector says, “riches are not only not a good, but are a positive evil.” Now they would be an evil if they did harm of themselves, and if, as I remarked, it were the efficient cause which inheres in them; in fact, however, it is the antecedent cause which inheres in riches, and indeed it is that cause which, so far from merely arousing the spirit, actually drags it along by force. Yes, riches shower upon us a semblance of the good, which is like the reality and wins credence in the eyes of many men.

The antecedent cause inheres in virtue also; it is this which brings on envy—for many men become unpopular because of their wisdom, and many men because of their justice. But this cause, though it inheres in virtue, is not the result of virtue itself, nor is it a mere semblance of the reality; nay, on the contrary, far more like the reality is that vision which is flashed by virtue upon the spirits of men, summoning them to love it and marvel thereat.

Posidonius thinks that the syllogism should be framed as follows: “Things which bestow upon the soul no greatness or confidence or freedom from care are not goods. But riches and health and similar conditions do none of these things; therefore, riches and health are not goods.” This syllogism he then goes on to extend still farther in the following way: “Things which bestow upon the soul no greatness or confidence or freedom from care, but on the other hand create in it arrogance, vanity, and insolence, are evils. But things which are the gift of Fortune drive us into these evil ways. Therefore these things are not goods.”

“But,” says the objector, “by such reasoning, things which are the gift of Fortune will not even be advantages.” No, advantages and goods stand each in a different situation. An advantage is that which contains more of usefulness than of annoyance. But a good ought to be unmixed and with no element in it of harmfulness. A

thing is not good if it contains more benefit than injury, but only if it contains nothing but benefit.

Besides, advantages may be predicated of animals, of men who are less than perfect, and of fools. Hence the advantageous may have an element of disadvantage mingled with it, but the word “advantageous” is used of the compound because it is judged by its predominant element. The good, however, can be predicated of the wise man alone; it is bound to be without alloy,

Be of good cheer; there is only one knot<sup>[20]</sup> left for you to untangle, though it is a knot for a Hercules: “Good does not result from evil. But riches result from numerous cases of poverty; therefore, riches are not a good.” This syllogism is not recognized by our school, but the Peripatetics both concoct it and give its solution. Posidonius, however, remarks that this fallacy, which has been bandied about among all the schools of dialectic, is refuted by Antipater<sup>[21]</sup> as follows:

“The word ‘poverty’ is used to denote, not the possession<sup>[22]</sup> of something, but the non-possession or, as the ancients have put it, deprivation, (for the Greeks use the phrase ‘by deprivation,’ meaning ‘negatively’). ‘Poverty’ states, not what a man has, but what he has not. Consequently there can be no fullness resulting from a multitude of voids; many positive things, and not many deficiencies, make up riches. You have,” says he, “a wrong notion of the meaning of what poverty is. For poverty does not mean the possession of little, but the non-possession of much; it is used, therefore, not of what a man has, but of what he lacks.”

I could express my meaning more easily if there were a Latin word which could translate the Greek word which means “not-possessing.” Antipater assigns this quality to poverty, but for my part I cannot see what else poverty is than the possession of little. If ever we have plenty of leisure, we shall investigate the question: what is the essence of riches, and what the essence of poverty;

but when the time comes, we shall also consider whether it is not better to try to mitigate poverty, and to relieve wealth of its arrogance, than to quibble about the words as if the question of the things were already decided.

Let us suppose that we have been summoned to an assembly; an act dealing with the abolition of riches has been brought before the meeting. Shall we be supporting it, or opposing it, if we use these syllogisms? Will these syllogisms help us to bring it about that the Roman people shall demand poverty and praise it—poverty, the foundation and cause of their empire—and, on the other hand, shall shrink in fear from their present wealth, reflecting that they have found it among the victims of their conquests, that wealth is the source from which office-seeking and bribery and disorder<sup>[23]</sup> have burst into a city once characterized by the utmost scrupulousness and sobriety, and that because of wealth an exhibition all too lavish is made of the spoils of conquered nations; reflecting, finally, that whatever one people has snatched away from all the rest may still more easily be snatched by all away from one? Nay, it were better to support this law by our conduct and to subdue our desires by direct assault rather than to circumvent them by logic. If we can, let us speak more boldly; if not, let us speak more frankly.

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#### Footnotes

1. i.e., on my journey I travelled with almost as meagre an equipment as a shipwrecked man.
2. Cf. Ep. lxxxi. 11 and note.
3. As Pliny the Elder (a man of the same inquiring turn of mind) did on his journeys, Pliny, *Ep.* iii. 5. 15.
4. *Caricas* were sent as New Year gifts, implying by their sweetness the good wishes of the sender.
5. *Nomen* in this sense means primarily the name entered in the ledger; secondarily, the item or transaction with which the name is connected.
6. Vergil, *Aeneid*, vii. 277 ff., describing the gifts sent by King Latinus to Aeneas.
7. For *trossuli* cf. Ep. lxxvi. 2, and footnote.



8. i.e., whether to turn gladiator or *bestiarius*.
9. “Amblers” from Asturia in Spain.
10. Horses with rapid steps, compared with *gradarii*, “slow pacers,  
cf. Ep. xl. 11.
11. The literal meaning of *impedimenta*, “luggage.”
12. Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 86, where Socrates contrasts the material lyre with the  
“incorporeal, fair, divine” harmony which makes the music.
13. See Ep. lxxxviii., which is devoted to the development of this thought.
14. i.e., at its own worth.
15. Cf. the argument in lxxvi. 9 f.
16. i.e., perfect reason and obedience to Nature.
17. Vergil, *Georg.* i. 53 ff.
18. The good is absolute. The Stoics held that virtue and moral worth were  
identical, although those who followed the argument to its logical  
conclusion had to explain away many seeming inconsistencies. Cf. Ep.  
lxxxv. 17.
19. That riches are not a good, but merely an advantage, was one of the Stoic  
paradoxes. In another passage (*Dial.* vii. 24. 5) Seneca speaks of them in  
a kindlier manner: *divitias nego bonum esse; nam si essent, bonos facerent.*  
*Ceterum et habendas esse et utiles et magna commoda vitae adferentis*  
*fateor.* Cf. § 36 of this letter.
20. The “knot of Hercules” is associated with the *caduceus* (twining serpents)  
in Macrobius, *Sat.* i. 19. 16; and in Pliny, *N. H.* xxviii. 63, it has magic  
properties in the binding up of wounds.
21. Frag. 54 von Arnim.
22. *Per possessionem* translates the Greek καθ’ ἕξιν, as *per orbationem* (or  
*detractationem*) translates κατὰ στέρησιν.
23. Seneca here bursts into a diatribe on the corruption of Rome, a habit  
which we find in many other of his writings, especially in the *Naturales*  
*Quaestiones*.



**Japanese:** *Kokoro*.

**English:** Heart or spirit. As one example in context, it is found in the Zen expression *mushin no shin* (無心の心), meaning “the mind without mind” or the state of “no-mindedness,” which refers to a mind not fixed or occupied by thought or emotion and thus open to everything.

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Calligrapher: Noriko Lake

*On Liberal and Vocational Studies*

You have been wishing to know my views with regard to liberal studies.<sup>[1]</sup> My answer is this: I respect no study, and deem no study good, which results in money-making. Such studies are profit-bringing occupations, useful only in so far as they give the mind a preparation and do not engage it permanently. One should linger upon them only so long as the mind can occupy itself with nothing greater; they are our apprenticeship, not our real work.

Hence you see why “liberal studies” are so called; it is because they are studies worthy of a free-born gentleman. But there is only one really liberal study—that which gives a man his liberty. It is the study of wisdom, and that is lofty, brave, and great-souled. All other studies are puny and puerile. You surely do not believe that there is good in any of the subjects whose teachers are, as you see, men of the most ignoble and base stamp? We ought not to be learning such things; we should have done with learning them.

Certain persons have made up their minds that the point at issue with regard to the liberal studies is whether they make men good; but they do not even profess or aim at a knowledge of this particular subject.

The scholar<sup>[2]</sup> busies himself with investigations into language, and if it be his desire to go farther afield, he works on history, or, if he would extend his range to the farthest limits, on poetry. But

which of these paves the way to virtue? Pronouncing syllables, investigating words, memorizing plays, or making rules for the scansion of poetry, what is there in all this that rids one of fear, roots out desire, or bridles the passions?

The question is: do such men teach virtue, or not? If they do not teach it, then neither do they transmit it. If they do teach it, they are philosophers. Would you like to know how it happens that they have not taken the chair for the purpose of teaching virtue? See how unlike their subjects are; and yet their subjects would resemble each other if they taught the same thing.<sup>[3]</sup>

It may be, perhaps, that they make you believe that Homer was a philosopher,<sup>[4]</sup> although they disprove this by the very arguments through which they seek to prove it. For sometimes they make of him a Stoic, who approves nothing but virtue, avoids pleasures, and refuses to relinquish honour even at the price of immortality; sometimes they make him an Epicurean, praising the condition of a state in repose, which passes its days in feasting and song; sometimes a Peripatetic, classifying goodness in three ways;<sup>[5]</sup> sometimes an Academic, holding that all things are uncertain. It is clear, however, that no one of these doctrines is to be fathered upon Homer, just because they are all there; for they are irreconcilable with one another. We may admit to these men, indeed, that Homer was a philosopher; yet surely he became a wise man before he had any knowledge of poetry. So let us learn the particular things that made Homer wise.

It is no more to the point, of course, for me to investigate whether Homer or Hesiod was the older poet, than to know why Hecuba, although younger than Helen,<sup>[6]</sup> showed her years so lamentably. What, in your opinion, I say, would be the point in trying to determine the respective ages of Achilles and Patroclus?

Do you raise the question, "Through what regions did Ulysses stray?" instead of trying to prevent ourselves from going astray

at all times? We have no leisure to hear lectures on the question whether he was sea-tost between Italy and Sicily, or outside our known world (indeed, so long a wandering could not possibly have taken place within its narrow bounds); we ourselves encounter storms of the spirit, which toss us daily, and our depravity drives us into all the ills which troubled Ulysses. For us there is never lacking the beauty to tempt our eyes, or the enemy to assail us; on this side are savage monsters that delight in human blood, on that side the treacherous allurements of the ear, and yonder is shipwreck and all the varied category of misfortunes.<sup>[7]</sup> Show me rather, by the example of Ulysses, how I am to love my country, my wife, my father, and how, even after suffering shipwreck, I am to sail toward these ends, honourable as they are.

Why try to discover whether Penelope was a pattern of purity,<sup>[8]</sup> or whether she had the laugh on her contemporaries? Or whether she suspected that the man in her presence was Ulysses, before she knew it was he? Teach me rather what purity is, and how great a good we have in it, and whether it is situated in the body or in the soul.

Now I will transfer my attention to the musician. You, sir, are teaching me how the treble and the bass<sup>[9]</sup> are in accord with one another, and how, though the strings produce different notes, the result is a harmony; rather bring my soul into harmony with itself, and let not my purposes be out of tune. You are showing me what the doleful keys<sup>[10]</sup> are; show me rather how, in the midst of adversity, I may keep from uttering a doleful note.

The mathematician teaches me how to lay out the dimensions of my estates; but I should rather be taught how to lay out what is enough for a man to own. He teaches me to count, and adapts my fingers to avarice; but I should prefer him to teach me that there is no point in such calculations, and that one is none the happier for tiring out the book-keepers with his possessions—or

rather, how useless property is to any man who would find it the greatest misfortune if he should be required to reckon out, by his own wits, the amount of his holdings.

What good is there for me in knowing how to parcel out a piece of land, if I know not how to share it with my brother? What good is there in working out to a nicety the dimensions of an acre, and in detecting the error if a piece has so much as escaped my measuring-rod, if I am embittered when an ill-tempered neighbour merely scrapes off a bit of my land? The mathematician teaches me how I may lose none of my boundaries; I, however, seek to learn how to lose them all with a light heart.

“But,” comes the reply, “I am being driven from the farm which my father and grandfather owned!” Well? Who owned the land before your grandfather? Can you explain what people (I will not say what person) held it originally? You did not enter upon it as a master, but merely as a tenant. And whose tenant are you? If your claim is successful, you are tenant of the heir. The lawyers say that public property cannot be acquired privately by possession;<sup>[11]</sup> what you hold and call your own is public property—indeed, it belongs to mankind at large.

O what marvellous skill! You know how to measure the circle; you find the square of any shape which is set before you; you compute the distances between the stars; there is nothing which does not come within the scope of your calculations. But if you are a real master of your profession, measure me the mind of man! Tell me how great it is, or how puny! You know what a straight line is; but how does it benefit you if you do not know what is straight in this life of ours?

I come next to the person who boasts his knowledge of the heavenly bodies, who knows

*Whither the chilling star of Saturn hides,*

*And through what orbit Mercury doth stray.*<sup>[12]</sup>

Of what benefit will it be to know this? That I shall be disturbed because Saturn and Mars are in opposition, or when Mercury sets at eventide in plain view of Saturn, rather than learn that those stars, wherever they are, are propitious,<sup>[13]</sup> and that they are not subject to change?

They are driven along by an unending round of destiny, on a course from which they cannot swerve. They return at stated seasons; they either set in motion, or mark the intervals of the whole world's work. But if they are responsible for whatever happens, how will it help you to know the secrets of the immutable? Or if they merely give indications, what good is there in foreseeing what you cannot escape? Whether you know these things or not, they will take place.

*Behold the fleeting sun,*

*The stars that follow in his train, and thou  
Shalt never find the morrow play thee false,  
Or be misled by nights without a cloud.*<sup>[14]</sup>

It has, however, been sufficiently and fully ordained that I shall be safe from anything that may mislead me.

“What,” you say, “does the ‘morrow never play me false’? Whatever happens without my knowledge plays me false.” I, for my part, do not know what is to be, but I do know what may come to be. I shall have no misgivings in this matter; I await the future in its entirety; and if there is any abatement in its severity, I make the most of it. If the morrow treats me kindly, it is a sort of deception; but it does not deceive me even at that. For just as I know that all things can happen, so I know, too, that they will not happen in every case. I am ready for favourable events in every case, but I am prepared for evil.

In this discussion you must bear with me if I do not follow the regular course. For I do not consent to admit painting into the list of liberal arts, any more than sculpture, marble-working, and other helps toward luxury. I also debar from the liberal studies wrestling and all knowledge that is compounded of oil and mud;<sup>[15]</sup> otherwise, I should be compelled to admit perfumers also, and cooks, and all others who lend their wits to the service of our pleasures.

For what “liberal” element is there in these ravenous takers of emetics, whose bodies are fed to fatness while their minds are thin and dull?<sup>[16]</sup> Or do we really believe that the training which they give is “liberal” for the young men of Rome, who used to be taught by our ancestors to stand straight and hurl a spear, to wield a pike, to guide a horse, and to handle weapons? Our ancestors used to teach their children nothing that could be learned while lying down. But neither the new system nor the old teaches or nourishes virtue. For what good does it do us to guide a horse and control his speed with the curb, and then find that our own passions, utterly uncurbed, bolt with us? Or to beat many opponents in wrestling or boxing, and then to find that we ourselves are beaten by anger?

“What then,” you say, “do the liberal studies contribute nothing to our welfare?” Very much in other respects, but nothing at all as regards virtue. For even these arts of which I have spoken, though admittedly of a low grade—depending as they do upon handiwork—contribute greatly toward the equipment of life, but nevertheless have nothing to do with virtue. And if you inquire, “Why, then, do we educate our children in the liberal studies?”<sup>[17]</sup> it is not because they can bestow virtue, but because they prepare the soul for the reception of virtue. Just as that “primary course,”<sup>[18]</sup> as the ancients called it, in grammar, which gave boys their elementary training, does not teach them the liberal arts,



but prepares the ground for their early acquisition of these arts, so the liberal arts do not conduct the soul all the way to virtue, but merely set it going in that direction.

Posidonius<sup>[19]</sup> divides the arts into four classes: first we have those which are common and low, then those which serve for amusement, then those which refer to the education of boys, and, finally, the liberal arts. The common sort belong to workmen and are mere hand-work; they are concerned with equipping life; there is in them no pretence to beauty or honour.

The arts of amusement are those which aim to please the eye and the ear. To this class you may assign the stage-machinists, who invent scaffolding that goes aloft of its own accord, or floors that rise silently into the air, and many other surprising devices, as when objects that fit together then fall apart, or objects which are separate then join together automatically, or objects which stand erect then gradually collapse. The eye of the inexperienced is struck with amazement by these things; for such persons marvel at everything that takes place without warning, because they do not know the causes.

The arts which belong to the education of boys, and are somewhat similar to the liberal arts, are those which the Greeks call the “cycle of studies,”<sup>[20]</sup> but which we Romans call the “liberal.” However, those alone are really liberal—or rather, to give them a truer name, “free”—whose concern is virtue.

“But,” one will say, “just as there is a part of philosophy which has to do with nature, and a part which has to do with ethics, and a part which has to do with reasoning, so this group of liberal arts also claims for itself a place in philosophy. When one approaches questions that deal with nature, a decision is reached by means of a word from the mathematician. Therefore mathematics is a department of that branch which it aids.”<sup>[21]</sup>

But many things aid us and yet are not parts of ourselves. Nay, if they were, they would not aid us. Food is an aid to the body, but is not a part of it. We get some help from the service which mathematics renders; and mathematics is as indispensable to philosophy as the carpenter is to the mathematician. But carpentering is not a part of mathematics, nor is mathematics a part of philosophy.

Moreover, each has its own limits; for the wise man investigates and learns the causes of natural phenomena, while the mathematician follows up and computes their numbers and their measurements.<sup>[22]</sup> The wise man knows the laws by which the heavenly bodies persist, what powers belong to them, and what attributes; the astronomer merely notes their comings and goings, the rules which govern their settings and their risings, and the occasional periods during which they seem to stand still, although as a matter of fact no heavenly body can stand still.

The wise man will know what causes the reflection in a mirror; but, the mathematician can merely tell you how far the body should be from the reflection, and what shape of mirror will produce a given reflection.<sup>[23]</sup> The philosopher will demonstrate that the sun is a large body, while the astronomer will compute just how large, progressing in knowledge by his method of trial and experiment; but in order to progress, he must summon to his aid certain principles. No art, however, is sufficient unto itself, if the foundation upon which it rests depends upon mere favour.

Now philosophy asks no favours from any other source; it builds everything on its own soil; but the science of numbers is, so to speak, a structure built on another man's land—it builds on everything on alien soil;<sup>[24]</sup> It accepts first principles, and by their favour arrives at further conclusions. If it could march unassisted to the truth, if it were able to understand the nature of the universe, I should say that it would offer much assistance to our minds; for the mind grows by contact with things heavenly and

draws into itself something from on high. There is but one thing that brings the soul to perfection—the unalterable knowledge of good and evil. But there is no other art<sup>[25]</sup> which investigates good and evil.

I should like to pass in review the several virtues.

Bravery is a scorner of things which inspire fear; it looks down upon, challenges, and crushes the powers of terror and all that would drive our freedom under the yoke. But do “liberal studies”<sup>[26]</sup> strengthen this virtue? Loyalty is the holiest good in the human heart; it is forced into betrayal by no constraint, and it is bribed by no rewards. Loyalty cries: “Burn me, slay me, kill me! I shall not betray my trust; and the more urgently torture shall seek to find my secret, the deeper in my heart will I bury it!” Can the “liberal arts” produce such a spirit within us? Temperance controls our desires; some it hates and routs, others it regulates and restores to a healthy measure, nor does it ever approach our desires for their own sake. Temperance knows that the best measure of the appetites is not what you want to take, but what you ought to take.

Kindliness forbids you to be over-bearing towards your associates, and it forbids you to be grasping. In words and in deeds and in feelings it shows itself gentle and courteous to all men. It counts no evil as another’s solely. And the reason why it loves its own good is chiefly because it will some day be the good of another. Do “liberal studies” teach a man such character as this? No; no more than they teach simplicity, moderation and self-restraint, thrift and economy, and that kindness which spares a neighbour’s life as if it were one’s own and knows that it is not for man to make wasteful use of his fellow-man.

“But,” one says, “since you declare that virtue cannot be attained without the ‘liberal studies,’ how is it that you deny that they offer any assistance to virtue?”<sup>[27]</sup> Because you cannot attain virtue

without food, either; and yet food has nothing to do with virtue. Wood does not offer assistance to a ship, although a ship cannot be built except of wood. There is no reason, I say, why you should think that anything is made by the assistance of that without which it cannot be made.

We might even make the statement that it is possible to attain wisdom without the “liberal studies”; for although virtue is a thing that must be learned, yet it is not learned by means of these studies.

What reason have I, however, for supposing that one who is ignorant of letters will never be a wise man, since wisdom is not to be found in letters? Wisdom communicates facts<sup>[28]</sup> and not words; and it may be true that the memory is more to be depended upon when it has no support outside itself.

Wisdom is a large and spacious thing. It needs plenty of free room. One must learn about things divine and human, the past and the future, the ephemeral and the eternal; and one must learn about Time.<sup>[29]</sup> See how many questions arise concerning time alone: in the first place, whether it is anything in and by itself; in the second place, whether anything exists prior to time and without time; and again, did time begin along with the universe, or, because there was something even before the universe began, did time also exist then?

There are countless questions concerning the soul alone: whence it comes, what is its nature, when it begins to exist, and how long it exists; whether it passes from one place to another and changes its habitation, being transferred successively from one animal shape to another, or whether it is a slave but once, roaming the universe after it is set free; whether it is corporeal or not; what will become of it when it ceases to use us as its medium; how it will employ its freedom when it has escaped from this present prison; whether it will forget all its past, and at

that moment begin to know itself when, released from the body, it has withdrawn to the skies.

Thus, whatever phase of things human and divine you have apprehended, you will be wearied by the vast number of things to be answered and things to be learned. And in order that these manifold and mighty subjects may have free entertainment in your soul, you must remove therefrom all superfluous things. Virtue will not surrender herself to these narrow bounds of ours; a great subject needs wide space in which to move. Let all other things be driven out, and let the breast be emptied to receive virtue.

“But it is a pleasure to be acquainted with many arts.” Therefore let us keep only as much of them as is essential. Do you regard that man as blameworthy who puts superfluous things on the same footing with useful things, and in his house makes a lavish display of costly objects, but do not deem him blameworthy who has allowed himself to become engrossed with the useless furniture of learning? This desire to know more than is sufficient is a sort of intemperance.

Why? Because this unseemly pursuit of the liberal arts makes men troublesome, wordy, tactless, self-satisfied bores, who fail to learn the essentials just because they have learned the non-essentials. Didymus the scholar wrote four thousand books. I should feel pity for him if he had only read the same number of superfluous volumes. In these books he investigates Homer’s birthplace,<sup>[30]</sup> who was really the mother of Aeneas, whether Anacreon was more of a rake or more of a drunkard, whether Sappho was a bad lot,<sup>[31]</sup> and other problems the answers to which, if found, were forthwith to be forgotten. Come now, do not tell me that life is long!

Nay, when you come to consider our own countrymen also, I can show you many works which ought to be cut down with the axe.

It is at the cost of a vast outlay of time and of vast discomfort to the ears of others that we win such praise as this: “What a learned man you are!” Let us be content with this recommendation, less citified though it be: “What a good man you are!”

Do I mean this? Well, would you have me unroll the annals of the world’s history and try to find out who first wrote poetry? Or, in the absence of written records, shall I make an estimate of the number of years which lie between Orpheus and Homer? Or shall I make a study of the absurd writings of Aristarchus, wherein he branded the text<sup>[32]</sup> of other men’s verses, and wear my life away upon syllables? Shall I then wallow in the geometrician’s dust?<sup>[33]</sup> Have I so far forgotten that useful saw “Save your time”? Must I know these things? And what may I choose not to know?

Apion, the scholar, who drew crowds to his lectures all over Greece in the days of Gaius Caesar and was acclaimed a Homeric<sup>[34]</sup> by every state, used to maintain that Homer, when he had finished his two poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, added a preliminary poem to his work, wherein he embraced the whole Trojan war.<sup>[35]</sup> The argument which Apion adduced to prove this statement was that Homer had purposely inserted in the opening line two letters which contained a key to the number of his books.

A man who wishes to know many things must know such things as these, and must take no thought of all the time which one loses by ill-health, public duties, private duties, daily duties, and sleep. Apply the measure to the years of your life; they have no room for all these things.

I have been speaking so far of liberal studies; but think how much superfluous and unpractical matter the philosophers contain! Of their own accord they also have descended to establishing

nice divisions of syllables, to determining the true meaning of conjunctions and prepositions; they have been envious of the scholars, envious of the mathematicians. They have taken over into their own art all the superfluities of these other arts; the result is that they know more about careful speaking than about careful living.

Let me tell you what evils are due to over-nice exactness, and what an enemy it is of truth! Protagoras declares that one can take either side on any question and debate it with equal success—even on this very question, whether every subject can be debated from either point of view. Nausiphanes holds that in things which seem to exist, there is no difference between existence and non-existence.

Parmenides maintains that nothing exists of all this which seems to exist, except the universe alone.<sup>[36]</sup> Zeno of Elea removed all the difficulties by removing one; for he declares that nothing exists. The Pyrrhonian, Megarian, Eretrian, and Academic schools are all engaged in practically the same task; they have introduced a new knowledge, non-knowledge.

You may sweep all these theories in with the superfluous troops of “liberal” studies; the one class of men give me a knowledge that will be of no use to me, the other class do away with any hope of attaining knowledge. It is better, of course, to know useless things than to know nothing. One set of philosophers offers no light by which I may direct my gaze toward the truth; the other digs out my very eyes and leaves me blind. If I cleave to Protagoras, there is nothing in the scheme of nature that is not doubtful; if I hold with Nausiphanes, I am sure only of this—that everything is unsure; if with Parmenides, there is nothing except the One;<sup>[37]</sup> if with Zeno, there is not even the One.

What are we, then? What becomes of all these things that surround us, support us, sustain us? The whole universe is then a vain or deceptive shadow. I cannot readily say whether I am more vexed at those who would have it that we know nothing, or with those who would not leave us even this privilege. Farewell.

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### Footnotes

1. The regular round of education, ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, including grammar, music, geometry, arithmetic, astrology, and certain phases of rhetoric and dialectic, are in this letter contrasted with liberal studies—those which have for their object the pursuit of virtue. Seneca is thus interpreting *studia liberalia* in a higher sense than his contemporaries would expect. Compare J. R. Lowell's definition of a university, "a place where nothing useful is taught."
2. *Grammaticus* in classical Greek means "one who is familiar with the alphabet"; in the Alexandrian age a "student of literature"; in the Roman age the equivalent of *litteratus*. Seneca means here a "specialist in linguistic science."
3. i.e., philosophy (virtue).
4. This theory was approved by Democritus, Hippias of Elis, and the allegorical interpreters; Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Plato himself condemned Homer for his supposed unphilosophic fabrications.
5. The *tria genera bonorum* of Cicero's *De Fin* v. 84. Cf. *ib.* 18, where the three proper objects of man's search are given as the desire for pleasure, the avoidance of pain, and the attainment of such natural goods as health, strength, and soundness of mind. The Stoics held that the good was absolute.
6. Summers compares Lucian, *Gall.* 17. Seneca, however, does not take such gossip seriously.
7. This sentence alludes to Calypso, Circe, the Cyclops, and the Sirens.
8. Unfavourable comment by Lycophron, and by Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.* iii. 22 (*Mercurius*) *ex quo et Penelopa Pana natum ferunt.*
9. With *acutae* and *graves* supply *voces*.
10. Perhaps the equivalent of a "minor."
11. i.e., for a certain term of years; see R. W. Leage, *Roman Private Law*, pp. 133 ff. Compare also Lucretius iii. 971, and Horace, *Ep.* ii. 2. 159.
12. Vergil, *Georg.* i. 336 f.
13. Saturn and Mars were regarded as unlucky stars. Astrology, which dates back beyond 3000 B.C. in Babylonia, was developed by the Greeks of the Alexandrian age and got a foothold in Rome by the second century B.C., flourished greatly under Tiberius. Cf. Horace, *Od.* i. 11. 1 f.; Juv. iii. 42 f., and F. Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (trans.), esp. pp. 68 ff. and 84 ff.



14. Vergil, *Georg.* i. 424 ff.
15. An allusion to the sand and oil of the wrestling-ring.
16. Cf. Ep. xv. 3 *copia ciborum subtilitas impeditur*.
17. In a strict sense; not, as in § 2, as Seneca thinks that the term should really be defined—the “liberal” study, i.e. the pursuit of wisdom.
18. For the πρώτη ἀγωγή see Quintilian, ii. 1. 4.
19. From what work of Posidonius Seneca is here quoting we do not know; it may be from the Προπαισκευαί, or *Exhortations*, indicating the training preliminary to philosophy.
20. See § 1 note.
21. i.e., mathematics is a department of *philosophia naturalis*.
22. This line of argument inversely resembles the criticism by Seneca of Posidonius in Ep. xc.—that the inventions of early science cannot be properly termed a part of philosophy.
23. See *N. Q.* i. 4 ff.
24. According to Roman law, *superficies solo cedit*, “the building goes with the ground.”
25. Except philosophy.
26. i.e., in the more commonly accepted sense of the term.
27. This usage is a not infrequent one in Latin; cf. Petronius, *Sat.* 42 *neminem nihil boni facere oportet*; *id. ib.* 58; Verg. *Ecl.* v. 25, etc. See Draeger, *Hist. Syn.* ii. 75, and Roby, ii. 2246 ff.
28. Cf. Epp. xxxi. 6 and lxxxii. 29 *aestimare res, de quibus . . . cum rerum natura deliberandum est*.
29. The ancient Stoics defined Time as “extension of the world’s motion.” The seasons were said to be “alive” because they depended on material conditions. But the Stoics really acknowledged Time to be immaterial. The same problem of corporeality was discussed with regard to the “good.”
30. Compare the schoolmaster of Juvenal (vii. 234 ff.), who must know  
*Nutricem Anchisae, nomen patriamque novercae*  
*Anchemoli, dicat quot Acestes vixerit annis, etc.,*  
 and Friedländer’s note.
31. A tradition, probably begun by the Greek comic-writers, and explained by Professor Smyth (*Greek Melic Poets*, pp. 227 f.) as due to the more independent position of women among the Aeolians.  
*Transcriber’s note: Gummere has euphemistically translated Seneca here. The Latin is “in his an Sappho publica fuerit”, and the feminine noun “publica” means “public woman”, i.e. a courtesan or prostitute. So Gummere’s translation “whether Sappho was a bad lot” is more accurately rendered as “whether Sappho was a prostitute.”*
32. Marking supposedly spurious lines by the *obelus*, and using other signs to indicate variations, repetitions, and interpolations. He paid special attention to Homer, Pindar, Hesiod, and the tragedians.
33. The geometers drew their figures in the dust or sand.

34. Originally, rhapsodists who recited from Homer; in general, “interpreters and admirers—in short, the whole ‘spiritual kindred’—of Homer” (D. B. Monro)
35. An ancient explanation of the (now disproved) authorship by Homer of such poems as the *Cypria*, *Little Iliad*, *Sack of Troy*, etc.
36. In other words, the unchangeable, perfect Being of the universe is contrasted with the mutable Non-Being of opinion and unreality.
37. i.e., the universe.

*On the Parts of Philosophy*<sup>[1]</sup>

It is a useful fact that you wish to know, one which is essential to him who hastens after wisdom—namely, the parts of philosophy and the division of its huge bulk into separate members. For by studying the parts we can be brought more easily to understand the whole. I only wish that philosophy might come before our eyes in all her unity, just as the whole expanse of the firmament is spread out for us to gaze upon! It would be a sight closely resembling that of the firmament. For then surely philosophy would ravish all mortals with love for her;<sup>[2]</sup> we should abandon all those things which, in our ignorance of what is great, we believe to be great. Inasmuch, however, as this cannot fall to our lot, we must view philosophy just as men gaze upon the secrets of the firmament.

The wise man's mind, to be sure, embraces the whole framework of philosophy, surveying it with no less rapid glance than our mortal eyes survey the heavens; we, however, who must break through the gloom, we whose vision fails even for that which is near at hand, can be shown with greater ease each separate object even though we cannot yet comprehend the universe. I shall therefore comply with your demand, and shall divide philosophy into parts, but not into scraps. For it is useful that philosophy should be divided, but not chopped into bits. Just as it is

hard to take in what is indefinitely large, so it is hard to take in what is indefinitely small.

The people are divided into tribes, the army into centuries. Whatever has grown to greater size is more easily identified if it is broken up into parts; but the parts, as I have remarked, must not be countless in number and diminutive in size. For over-analysis is faulty in precisely the same way as no analysis at all; whatever you cut so fine that it becomes dust is as good as blended into a mass again.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the first place, therefore, if you approve, I shall draw the distinction between wisdom and philosophy. Wisdom is the perfect good of the human mind; philosophy is the love of wisdom, and the endeavour to attain it. The latter strives toward the goal which the former has already reached. And it is clear why philosophy was so called. For it acknowledges by its very name the object of its love.<sup>[4]</sup>

Certain persons have defined wisdom as the knowledge of things divine and things human.<sup>[5]</sup> Still others say: "Wisdom is knowing things divine and things human, and their causes also."<sup>[6]</sup> This added phrase seems to me to be superfluous, since the causes of things divine and things human are a part of the divine system. Philosophy also has been defined in various ways; some have called it "the study of virtue,"<sup>[7]</sup> others have referred to it as "a study of the way to amend the mind,"<sup>[8]</sup> and some have named it "the search for right reason."

One thing is practically settled, that there is some difference between philosophy and wisdom. Nor indeed is it possible that that which is sought and that which seeks are identical. As there is a great difference between avarice and wealth, the one being the subject of the craving and the other its object, so between philosophy and wisdom. For the one is a result and a reward of the other. Philosophy does the going, and wisdom is the goal.

Wisdom is that which the Greeks call σοφία. The Romans also were wont to use this word in the sense in which they now use “philosophy” also. This will be proved to your satisfaction by our old national plays, as well as by the epitaph that is carved on the tomb of Dossennus:<sup>[9]</sup>

*Pause, stranger, and read the wisdom of Dossennus.*

Certain of our school, however, although philosophy meant to them “the study of virtue,” and though virtue was the object sought and philosophy the seeker, have maintained nevertheless that the two cannot be sundered. For philosophy cannot exist without virtue, nor virtue without philosophy. Philosophy is the study of virtue, by means, however, of virtue itself; but neither can virtue exist without the study of itself, nor can the study of virtue exist without virtue itself. For it is not like trying to hit a target at long range, where the shooter and the object to be shot at are in different places. Nor, as roads which lead into a city, are the approaches to virtue situated outside virtue herself; the path by which one reaches virtue leads by way of virtue herself; philosophy and virtue cling closely together.

The greatest authors, and the greatest number of authors, have maintained that there are three divisions of philosophy—moral, natural, and rational.<sup>[10]</sup> The first keeps the soul in order; the second investigates the universe; the third works out the essential meanings of words, their combinations, and the proofs which keep falsehood from creeping in and displacing truth. But there have also been those who divided philosophy on the one hand into fewer divisions, on the other hand into more.

Certain of the Peripatetic school have added a fourth division, “civil philosophy,” because it calls for a special sphere of activity and is interested in a different subject matter. Some have added a department for which they use the Greek term “economics,”<sup>[11]</sup>

the science of managing one's own household. Still others have made a distinct heading for the various kinds of life.<sup>[12]</sup> There is no one of these subdivisions, however, which will not be found under the branch called "moral" philosophy.

The Epicureans<sup>[13]</sup> held that philosophy was twofold, natural and moral; they did away with the rational branch. Then, when they were compelled by the facts themselves to distinguish between equivocal ideas and to expose fallacies that lay hidden under the cloak of truth they themselves also introduced a heading to which they give the name "forensic and regulative,"<sup>[14]</sup> which is merely "rational" under another name, although they hold that this section is accessory to the department of "natural" philosophy.

The Cyrenaic<sup>[15]</sup> school abolished the natural as well as the rational department, and were content with the moral side alone; and yet these philosophers also include under another title that which they have rejected. For they divide moral philosophy into five parts: (1) What to avoid and what to seek, (2) The Passions, (3) Actions, (4) Causes, (5) Proofs. Now the causes of things really belong to the "natural" division, the proofs to the "rational."

Aristo<sup>[16]</sup> of Chios remarked that the natural and the rational were not only superfluous, but were also contradictory. He even limited the "moral," which was all that was left to him; for he abolished that heading which embraced advice, maintaining that it was the business of the pedagogue, and not of the philosopher—as if the wise man were anything else than the pedagogue of the human race!

Since, therefore, philosophy is threefold, let us first begin to set in order the moral side. It has been agreed that this should be divided into three parts. First, we have the speculative<sup>[17]</sup> part, which assigns to each thing its particular function and weighs the worth of each; it is highest in point of utility. For what is so indispensable as giving to everything its proper value? The second has

to do with impulse,<sup>[18]</sup> the third with actions.<sup>[19]</sup> For the first duty is to determine severally what things are worth; the second, to conceive with regard to them a regulated and ordered impulse; the third, to make your impulse and your actions harmonize, so that under all these conditions you may be consistent with yourself.

If any of the three be defective, there is confusion in the rest also. For what benefit is there in having all things appraised, each in its proper relations, if you go to excess in your impulses? What benefit is there in having checked your impulses and in having your desires in your own control, if when you come to action you are unaware of the proper times and seasons, and if you do not know when, where, and how each action should be carried out? It is one thing to understand the merits and the values of facts, another thing to know the precise moment for action, and still another to curb impulses and to proceed, instead of rushing, toward what is to be done. Hence life is in harmony with itself only when action has not deserted impulse, and when impulse toward an object arises in each case from the worth of the object, being languid or more eager as the case may be, according as the objects which arouse it are worth seeking.

The natural side of philosophy is twofold: bodily and non-bodily.<sup>[20]</sup> Each is divided into its own grades of importance, so to speak. The topic concerning bodies deals, first, with these two grades: the creative and the created;<sup>[21]</sup> and the created things are the elements. Now this very topic of the elements, as some writers hold, is integral;<sup>[22]</sup> as others hold, it is divided into matter, the cause which moves all things, and the elements.

It remains for me to divide rational philosophy into its parts. Now all speech is either continuous, or split up between questioner and answerer. It has been agreed upon that the former should be called rhetoric, and the latter dialectic. Rhetoric deals with words, and meanings, and arrangement. Dialectic is divided

into two parts: words and their meanings, that is, into things which are said, and the words in which they are said. Then comes a subdivision of each—and it is of vast extent. Therefore I shall stop at this point, and

*But treat the climax of the story;*<sup>[23]</sup>

for if I should take a fancy to give the subdivisions, my letter would become a debater's handbook!

I am not trying to discourage you, excellent Lucilius, from reading on this subject, provided only that you promptly relate to conduct all that you have read.

It is your conduct that you must hold in check; you must rouse what is languid in you, bind fast what has become relaxed, conquer what is obstinate, persecute your appetites, and the appetites of mankind, as much as you can; and to those who say: "How long will this unending talk go on?" answer with the words:

"I ought to be asking you 'How long will these unending sins of yours go on?'" Do you really desire my remedies to stop before your vices? But I shall speak of my remedies all the more, and just because you offer objections I shall keep on talking. Medicine begins to do good at the time when a touch makes the diseased body tingle with pain. I shall utter words that will help men even against their will. At times you should allow words other than compliments to reach your ears, and because as individuals you are unwilling to hear the truth, hear it collectively.

How far will you extend the boundaries of your estates? An estate which held a nation is too narrow for a single lord. How far will you push forward your ploughed fields—you who are not content to confine the measure of your farms even within the amplitude of provinces?<sup>[24]</sup> You have noble rivers flowing down through your private grounds; you have mighty streams—boundaries of mighty nations—under your dominion from source to



outlet. This also is too little for you unless you also surround whole seas with your estates, unless your steward holds sway on the other side of the Adriatic, the Ionian, and the Aegean seas, unless the islands, homes of famous chieftains, are reckoned by you as the most paltry of possessions! Spread them as widely as you will, if only you may have as a “farm” what was once called a kingdom; make whatever you can your own, provided only that it is more than your neighbour’s!

And now for a word with you, whose luxury spreads itself out as widely as the greed of those to whom I have just referred. To you I say: “Will this custom continue until there is no lake over which the pinnacles of your country-houses do not tower? Until there is no river whose banks are not bordered by your lordly structures? Wherever hot waters shall gush forth in rills, there you will be causing new resorts of luxury to rise. Wherever the shore shall bend into a bay, there will you straightway be laying foundations, and, not content with any land that has not been made by art, you will bring the sea within your boundaries.<sup>[25]</sup> On every side let your house-tops flash in the sun, now set on mountain peaks where they command an extensive outlook over sea and land, now lifted from the plain to the height of mountains; build your manifold structures, your huge piles—you are nevertheless but individuals, and puny ones at that! What profit to you are your many bed-chambers? You sleep in one. No place is yours where you yourselves are not.”

“Next I pass to you, you whose bottomless and insatiable maw explores on the one hand the seas, on the other the earth, with enormous toil hunting down your prey, now with hook, now with snare, now with nets of various kinds; no animal has peace except when you are cloyed with it. And how slight a portion of those banquets of yours, prepared for you by so many hands, do you taste with your pleasure-jaded palate! How slight a portion of all

that game, whose taking was fraught with danger, does the master's sick and squeamish stomach relish? How slight a portion of all those shell-fish, imported from so far, slips down that insatiable gullet? Poor wretches, do you not know that your appetites are bigger than your bellies?"

Talk in this way to other men—provided that while you talk you also listen; write in this way—provided that while you write you read, remembering that everything<sup>[26]</sup> you hear or read, is to be applied to conduct, and to the alleviation of passion's fury. Study, not in order to add anything to your knowledge, but to make your knowledge better. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. See §§ 9 ff., which give the normal division.
2. See Plato, especially *Symposium* 211 ff.
3. i.e., an infinitely small *divisio* is the same as its opposite—*confusio*.
4. "Love-of-Wisdom."
5. Θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων ἐπιστήμη, quoted by Plutarch, *De Plac Phil.* 874 E.
6. Cicero, *De Off.* ii. 2. 5.
7. The ἄσκησις ἀρετῆς of the earlier Stoics. Seneca (Frag. 17) also calls it *recta vivendi ratio*.
8. i.e., to make a *bona mens* out of a *mala mens*.
9. It is doubtful whether this was the name of a real person, or a mere "Joe Miller" type from the *Fabula Atellana*. The character in Horace, *Ep.* ii. 1. 173, is certainly the latter; and the testimony of Pliny (*N. H.* xiv. 15), who quotes a line from a play called *Acharistio*, is not reliable.
10. i.e., logic.
11. i.e., "the management of the home."
12. That is, of the various arts which deal with the departments of living, such as generalship, politics, business, etc.
13. Frag. 242 Usener.
14. Seneca by *de iudicio* is translating the Greek adjective δικανικός, "that which has to do with the courts of law," and by *de regula* the word κανονικός, "that which has to do with rules," here the rules of logic. The Epicureans used for logic κανονική, in contrast with Aristotle and his successors, who used λογική. The Latin *rationalis* is a translation of the latter.
15. Led by Aristippus of Cyrene. As the Cynics developed into the Stoics, so the Cyrenaics developed into the Epicureans.

16. Frag. 357 von Arnim.
17. Seneca translates θεωρητική.
18. Ὀρμητική; the ὄρμαί, *impetus*, in the Stoic philosophy, are the natural instincts, which require training and regulation before they can be trusted.
19. Πρακτική.
20. Σωματική and ἀσώματος.
21. Ποιητικά and παθητικά.
22. i.e., has no subdivisions.
23. Vergil, *Aeneid*, i. 342.
24. For the thought compare Petronius, *Sat.* 48 *nunc coniungere agellis Siciliam volo, ut, cum Africam libuerit ire, per meos fines navigem.*
25. i.e., by building embankments, etc. Cf. Horace, *Od.* ii. 18. 22 *parum locuples continente ripa.*
26. Cf. § 18.

*Seneca On the Happy Life*  
by Massimo Pigliucci

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“On the Happy Life” is one of Seneca’s mature essays, written to his brother Gallio in 58 CE, when he was 62 years of age. The main argument is that the pursuit of happiness (understood as *eudaimonia*) is the pursuit of reason. Or, in more standard Stoic fashion, that only the exercise of reason can lead to a flourishing life. It begins, appropriately enough: “All men, brother Gallio, wish to live happily, but are dull at perceiving exactly what it is that makes life happy.”

Seneca then argues (in book I) that in order to seek understanding about what makes for a good life we should resist the temptation to go with common opinion, because it is often not well thought out. We should not live “by imitation of others,” as “the mob is ready to fight against reason in defense of its own mistake.” While the latter comment opens up the author to the usual

accusation of elitism, I think we have all experienced plenty of what he's talking about in recent years (pick your favorite populist cause, anywhere in the world, advanced without much thought and adopted with even less).

Book II continues by enticing Gallio to embark on a reasoned quest on what makes for a happy life, and book III clarifies at the outset that Seneca doesn't feel constrained by whatever the "official" Stoic doctrine may be: "When, however, I say 'ours,' I do not bind myself to any one of the chiefs of the Stoic school, for I too have a right to form my own opinion." This is one of the things I most appreciate about Seneca: he's not afraid to break ranks, if there is a sufficiently good reason to do so, an attitude that also emerges clearly in the early letters to Lucilius, where he often approvingly quotes Epicurus.

In book IV, he unequivocally states: "The highest good is a mind which despises the accidents of fortune, and takes pleasure in virtue," on which he then elaborates in Book V: "a man may be called 'happy' who, thanks to reason, has ceased either to hope or to fear: but rocks also feel neither fear nor sadness, nor do cattle, yet no one would call those things happy which cannot comprehend what happiness is."

We have here an affirmation of the Stoic idea that happiness is about using reason to overcome fear and hope (in the sense of going after things that are outside of one's control), and yet also the realization that that's clearly not enough, since inanimate things (not so sure that cattle cannot feel fear, though very likely not hope) are in a similar situation by default, but it would make no sense to call them "happy."

The same book ends with a dig at the Epicureans, or at hedonists more generally: "what mortal that retains any traces of human origin would wish to be tickled day and night, and, neglecting his mind, to devote himself to bodily enjoyments?" Which reminds

me of a modern thought experiment in philosophy aiming at making the same point, Robert Nozick's so-called [experience machine](#). (Or maybe Woody Allen's famous [Orgasmatron](#) in the movie *Sleeper*.)

Book VI rather elegantly takes up one of the standard objections against the Stoic idea that the happy life is one of reason, not pleasure: “But, says our adversary, ‘the mind also will have pleasures of its own.’ Let it have them, then, and let it sit in judgment over luxury and pleasures... No insane person can be happy, and no one can be sane if he regards what is injurious as the highest good and strives to obtain it. The happy man, therefore, is he who can make a right judgment in all things.”

This is an interesting and subtle point: sure, under certain conceptions of “pleasure” even the Stoic Sage might be said to take pleasure in the rightness of her judgments. But Seneca uses that concession to turn the tables against the critics: see, right judgment is necessary even to appreciate pleasure, so reason is paramount.

In book VII he further elaborates on the distinction between pleasure and reason: “if they were entirely inseparable, we should not see some things to be pleasant, but not honorable, and others most honorable indeed, but hard and only to be attained by suffering.” Now, one could reasonably reject the distinction Seneca is trying to make, but then would be hard pressed to explain a large range of human behaviors where people do seem to genuinely prefer something despite its unpleasantness, for principled reasons, because they think it is good and honorable.

Book VIII gets to the heart of the matter with the claim that to live happily is the same thing as to live by following nature, which Seneca sets out to explain. He argues that internal harmony is crucial to *eudaimonia*, and that it cannot be obtained by seeking

pleasures, which are always in conflict with each other, but only by pursuing virtue:

“Such a mind, when it has ranged itself in order, made its various parts agree together, and, if I may so express myself, harmonized them, has attained to the highest good... You may, then, boldly declare that the highest good is singleness of mind: for where agreement and unity are, there must the virtues be: it is the vices that are at war one with another.”

Book IX takes up a related charge to the one above by an imaginary critic, essentially that of hypocrisy regarding the relationship between pleasure and virtue:

“‘But,’ says our adversary, ‘you yourself only practice virtue because you hope to obtain some pleasure from it.’ In the first place, even though virtue may afford us pleasure, still we do not seek after her on that account: for she does not bestow this, but bestows this to boot, nor is this the end for which she labors, but her labor wins this also, although it be directed to another end ... Pleasure is not the reward or the cause of virtue, but comes in addition to it; nor do we choose virtue because she gives us pleasure, but she gives us pleasure also if we choose her.”

I find this passage to be absolutely beautiful. Yes, virtue does give a kind of pleasure, but it is not sought because of that, it is just a bonus that is granted to the virtuous person.

And here is another stunning passage, where Seneca rebukes his imaginary interlocutor for essentially asking whether this is all there is to life and Stoic philosophy: “Does this not appear great enough, when I tell you that the highest good is an unyielding strength of mind, wisdom, magnanimity, sound judgment, freedom, harmony, beauty? Do you still ask me for something greater, of which these may be regarded as the attributes? Why do you talk of pleasures to me? I am seeking to find what is good for man, not for his belly.”

Book X ends with perhaps the sharpest contrast I've read between Epicureanism and Stoicism: "You devote yourself to pleasures, I check them; you indulge in pleasure, I use it; you think that it is the highest good, I do not even think it to be good: for the sake of pleasure I do nothing, you do everything." Well, I'm glad we're clear on that!

Skipping to book XII, we find a nicely balanced defense of Epicureanism from the apparently common abuse that many made of the term (which is still true today, indeed arguably even more so than in the time of Seneca): "Men are not encouraged by Epicurus to run riot, but the vicious hide their excesses in the lap of philosophy, and flock to the schools in which they hear the praises of pleasure. They do not consider how sober and temperate—for so, by Hercules, I believe it to be—that 'pleasure' of Epicurus is, but they rush at his mere name, seeking to obtain some protection and cloak for their vices... The reason why that praise which your school lavishes upon pleasure is so hurtful, is because the honorable part of its teaching passes unnoticed, but the degrading part is seen by all." This is a good example of Seneca's fairmindedness, as well as of his compelling style of argumentation, whereby he manages to both strike a point in favor of his opponents and one against them in a single sentence.

This defense of Epicurus — [something that, for sure, Epictetus would never have uttered](#) — continues in book XIII: "I myself believe, though my Stoic comrades would be unwilling to hear me say so, that the teaching of Epicurus was upright and holy, and even, if you examine it narrowly, stern."

But book XIV goes back to a critique of the pleasure principle: "those who have permitted pleasure to lead the van, have neither one nor the other: for they lose virtue altogether, and yet they do not possess pleasure, but are possessed by it."



In XV Seneca explains why one cannot simply combine virtue and pleasure and call it a day. The problem is that sooner or later pleasure will pull you toward unvirtuous territory: “You do not afford virtue a solid immovable base if you bid it stand on what is unsteady.”

Later, in book XVIII, he confronts directly the accusation that is still leveled to him 2000 years later: of not practicing what he preaches. His response: “I am not a wise man, and I will not be one in order to feed your spite: so do not require me to be on a level with the best of men, but merely to be better than the worst: I am satisfied, if every day I take away something from my vices and correct my faults. I have not arrived at perfect soundness of mind, indeed, I never shall arrive at it.”

Regardless of what one thinks of Seneca the historical figure, the above words resonate very powerfully with me: indeed, I am not the best of men, I’m just trying to be better than I was yesterday. And sometimes even that is difficult enough.

Book XX begins with a defense of philosophy, obviously very much needed even in those early times: “Philosophers do not carry into effect all that they teach.’ No; but they effect much good by their teaching.” The same, of course, could be said of practitioners of religions: at their best they do effect much good, even though on several occasions even their leaders fall far short of the ideal.

The same book actually provides a list of rules Seneca is trying to live by. It is worth considering it in full:

- I will look upon death or upon a comedy with the same expression of countenance.
- I will despise riches when I have them as much as when I have them not.

- I will view all lands as though they belong to me, and my own as though they belonged to all mankind.
- Whatever I may possess, I will neither hoard it greedily nor squander it recklessly.
- I will do nothing because of public opinion, but everything because of conscience.
- I will be agreeable with my friends, gentle and mild to my foes: I will grant pardon before I am asked for it, and will meet the wishes of honorable men half way.
- Whenever either Nature demands my breath again, or reason bids me dismiss it, I will quit this life, calling all to witness that I have loved a good conscience, and good pursuits.

In book XXI Seneca goes back to answering his critics, this time explaining the Stoic attitude (and particularly his own, since he was very wealthy) toward being rich: “[the wise person’s] answer is, that these things ought to be despised, not that he should not possess them, but that he should not possess them with fear and trembling: he does not drive them away from him, but when they leave him he follows after them unconcernedly.”

From XXII, on the same issue: “If my riches leave me, they will carry away with them nothing except themselves... my riches belong to me, you belong to your riches.”

At the beginning of XXIII he recaps: “Cease, then, forbidding philosophers to possess money: no one has condemned wisdom to poverty. The philosopher may own ample wealth, but will not own wealth that which has been torn from another, or which is stained with another’s blood: his must be obtained without wronging any man, and without its being won by base means.”

Phew! Now I can enjoy my CUNY salary and book royalties in peace! Seriously, though, this is a forceful reminder that Stoicism is not Cynicism, and it isn't about asceticism. And notice the positive message here, in the second part of the quote: philosophers do not have to be poor, but they do have to get their wealth honestly and virtuously, like everyone else, one would want to add.

In XXIV Seneca makes a plea for magnanimity and generosity, in a remarkably cosmopolitan fashion: "Nature bids me do good to mankind—what difference does it make whether they be slaves or freemen, free-born or emancipated, whether their freedom be legally acquired or bestowed by arrangement among friends? Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for a benefit."

Book XXV is devoted to explaining the apparently paradoxical Stoic concept of preferred indifferents: "place me where gold and silver plate is used for the commonest purposes; I shall not think more of myself because of things which even though they are in my house are yet no part of me. Take me away to the wooden bridge and put me down there among the beggars: I shall not despise myself because I am sitting among those who hold out their hands for alms."

But the Stoic does have preferences: "I prefer, as far as my feelings go, to show myself in public dressed in woolen and in robes of office, rather than with naked or half-covered shoulders... I prefer to have to regulate joys than to stifle sorrows... In spite of all this, I had rather be a conqueror than a captive. I despise the whole dominion of Fortune, but still, if I were given my choice, I would choose its better parts. I shall make whatever befalls me become a good thing, but I prefer that what befalls me should be comfortable and pleasant and unlikely to cause me annoyance."

Why is this apparently so difficult to understand for critics of Stoicism? Here is the answer: “I do not talk one way and live another: but you do not rightly understand what I say: the sound of my words alone reaches your ears, you do not try to find

*On the Part Played by Philosophy  
in the Progress of Man*



Who can doubt, my dear Lucilius, that life is the gift of the immortal gods, but that living well<sup>[1]</sup> is the gift of philosophy? Hence the idea that our debt to philosophy is greater than our debt to the gods, in proportion as a good life is more of a benefit than mere life, would be regarded as correct, were not philosophy itself a boon which the gods have bestowed upon us. They have given the knowledge thereof to none, but the faculty of acquiring it they have given to all.

For if they had made philosophy also a general good, and if we were gifted with understanding at our birth, wisdom would have lost her best attribute—that she is not one of the gifts of fortune. For as it is, the precious and noble characteristic of wisdom is that she does not advance to meet us, that each man is indebted to himself for her, and that we do not seek her at the hands of others.

What would there be in philosophy worthy of your respect, if she were a thing that came by bounty?

Her sole function is to discover the truth about things divine and things human. From her side religion never departs, nor duty, nor justice, nor any of the whole company of virtues which cling together in close-united fellowship. Philosophy has taught us to worship that which is divine, to love that which is human;<sup>[2]</sup> she

has told us that with the gods lies dominion, and among men, fellowship. This fellowship remained unspoiled for a long time, until avarice tore the community asunder and became the cause of poverty, even in the case of those whom she herself had most enriched. For men cease to possess all things the moment they desire all things for their own.

But the first men and those who sprang from them, still unspoiled, followed nature, having one man as both their leader and their law, entrusting themselves to the control of one better than themselves. For nature has the habit of subjecting the weaker to the stronger. Even among the dumb animals those which are either biggest or fiercest hold sway. It is no weakling bull that leads the herd; it is one that has beaten the other males by his might and his muscle. In the case of elephants, the tallest goes first; among men, the best is regarded as the highest. That is why it was to the mind that a ruler was assigned; and for that reason the greatest happiness rested with those peoples among whom a man could not be the more powerful unless he were the better. For that man can safely accomplish what he will who thinks he can do nothing except what he ought to do.

Accordingly, in that age which is maintained to be the golden age,<sup>[3]</sup> Posidonius<sup>[4]</sup> holds that the government was under the jurisdiction of the wise. They kept their hands under control, and protected the weaker from the stronger. They gave advice, both to do and not to do; they showed what was useful and what was useless. Their forethought provided that their subjects should lack nothing; their bravery warded off dangers; their kindness enriched and adorned their subjects. For them ruling was a service, not an exercise of royalty. No ruler tried his power against those to whom he owed the beginnings of his power; and no one had the inclination, or the excuse, to do wrong, since the ruler ruled well and the subject obeyed well, and the king could utter no

greater threat against disobedient subjects than that they should depart from the kingdom.

But when once vice stole in and kingdoms were transformed into tyrannies, a need arose for laws and these very laws were in turn framed by the wise. Solon, who established Athens upon a firm basis by just laws, was one of the seven men renowned for their wisdom.<sup>[5]</sup> Had Lycurgus lived in the same period, an eighth would have been added to that hallowed number seven. The laws of Zaleucus and Charondas are praised; it was not in the forum or in the offices of skilled counsellors, but in the silent and holy retreat of Pythagoras, that these two men learned the principles of justice which they were to establish in Sicily (which at that time was prosperous) and throughout Grecian Italy.

Up to this point I agree with Posidonius; but that philosophy discovered the arts of which life makes use in its daily round<sup>[6]</sup> I refuse to admit. Nor will I ascribe to it an artisan's glory. Posidonius says: "When men were scattered over the earth, protected by eaves or by the dug-out shelter of a cliff or by the trunk of a hollow tree, it was philosophy that taught them to build houses." But I, for my part, do not hold that philosophy devised these shrewdly-contrived dwellings of ours which rise story upon story, where city crowds against city, any more than that she invented the fish-preserves, which are enclosed for the purpose of saving men's gluttony from having to run the risk of storms, and in order that, no matter how wildly the sea is raging, luxury may have its safe harbours in which to fatten fancy breeds of fish.

What! Was it philosophy that taught the use of keys and bolts? Nay, what was that except giving a hint to avarice? Was it philosophy that erected all these towering tenements, so dangerous to the persons who dwell in them? Was it not enough for man to provide himself a roof of any chance covering, and to contrive for himself some natural retreat without the help of art and without trouble?

Believe me, that was a happy age, before the days of architects, before the days of builders!

All this sort of thing was born when luxury was being born—this matter of cutting timbers square and cleaving a beam with unerring hand as the saw made its way over the marked-out line.

*The primal man with wedges split his wood.*<sup>[7]</sup>

For they were not preparing a roof for a future banquet-ball; for no such use did they carry the pine trees or the firs along the trembling streets<sup>[8]</sup> with a long row of drays—merely to fasten thereon panelled ceilings heavy with gold.

Forked poles erected at either end propped up their houses. With close-packed branches and with leaves heaped up and laid sloping they contrived a drainage for even the heaviest rains. Beneath such dwellings, they lived, but they lived in peace. A thatched roof once covered free men; under marble and gold dwells slavery.

On another point also I differ from Posidonius, when he holds that mechanical tools were the invention of wise men. For on that basis one might maintain that those were wise who taught the arts

*Of setting traps for game, and liming twigs*

*For birds, and girdling mighty woods with dogs.*<sup>[9]</sup>

It was man's ingenuity, not his wisdom, that discovered all these devices.

And I also differ from him when he says that wise men discovered our mines of iron and copper, "when the earth, scorched by forest fires, melted the veins of ore which lay near the surface and caused the metal to gush forth."<sup>[10]</sup> Nay, the sort of men who discover such things are the sort of men who are busied with them.

Nor do I consider this question so subtle as Posidonius thinks, namely, whether the hammer or the tongs came first into use.



They were both invented by some man whose mind was nimble and keen, but not great or exalted; and the same holds true of any other discovery which can only be made by means of a bent body and of a mind whose gaze is upon the ground.

The wise man was easy-going in his way of living. And why not? Even in our own times he would prefer to be as little cumbered as possible.

How, I ask, can you consistently admire both Diogenes and Daedalus? Which of these two seems to you a wise man—the one who devised the saw, or the one who, on seeing a boy drink water from the hollow of his hand, forthwith took his cup from his wallet and broke it, upbraiding himself with these words:<sup>[11]</sup> “Fool that I am, to have been carrying superfluous baggage all this time!” and then curled himself up in his tub and lay down to sleep?

In these our own times, which man, pray, do you deem the wiser—the one who invents a process for spraying saffron perfumes to a tremendous height from hidden pipes, who fills or empties canals by a sudden rush of waters, who so cleverly constructs a dining-room with a ceiling of movable panels that it presents one pattern after another, the roof changing as often as the courses<sup>[12]</sup>—or the one who proves to others, as well as to himself, that nature has laid upon us no stern and difficult law when she tells us that we can live without the marble-cutter and the engineer, that we can clothe ourselves without traffic in silk fabrics, that we can have everything that is indispensable to our use, provided only that we are content with what the earth has placed on its surface? If mankind were willing to listen to this sage, they would know that the cook is as superfluous to them as the soldier.

Those were wise men, or at any rate like the wise, who found the care of the body a problem easy to solve. The things that are

indispensable require no elaborate pains for their acquisition; it is only the luxuries that call for labour. Follow nature, and you will need no skilled craftsmen.

Nature did not wish us to be harassed. For whatever she forced upon us, she equipped us. "But cold cannot be endured by the naked body." What then? Are there not the skins of wild beasts and other animals, which can protect us well enough, and more than enough, from the cold? Do not many tribes cover their bodies with the bark of trees? Are not the feathers of birds sewn together to serve for clothing? Even at the present day does not a large portion of the Scythian tribe garb itself in the skins of foxes and mice, soft to the touch and impervious to the winds?

"For all that, men must have some thicker protection than the skin, in order to keep off the heat of the sun in summer." What then? Has not antiquity produced many retreats which, hollowed out either by the damage wrought by time or by any other occurrence you will, have opened into caverns? What then? Did not the very first-comers take twigs<sup>[13]</sup> and weave them by hand into wicker mats, smear them with common mud, and then with stubble and other wild grasses construct a roof, and thus pass their winters secure, the rains carried off by means of the sloping gables? What then? Do not the peoples on the edge of the Syrtes dwell in dug-out houses and indeed all the tribes who, because of the too fierce blaze of the sun, possess no protection sufficient to keep off the heat except the parched soil itself?

Nature was not so hostile to man that, when she gave all the other animals an easy rôle in life, she made it impossible for him alone to live without all these artifices. None of these was imposed upon us by her; none of them had to be painfully sought out that our lives might be prolonged. All things were ready for us at our birth; it is we that have made everything difficult for ourselves, through our disdain for what is easy. Houses, shelter, creature

comforts, food, and all that has now become the source of vast trouble, were ready at hand, free to all, and obtainable for trifling pains. For the limit everywhere corresponded to the need; it is we that have made all those things valuable, we that have made them admired, we that have caused them to be sought for by extensive and manifold devices.

Nature suffices for what she demands. Luxury has turned her back upon nature; each day she expands herself, in all the ages she has been gathering strength, and by her wit promoting the vices. At first, luxury began to lust for what nature regarded as superfluous, then for that which was contrary to nature; and finally she made the soul a bondsman to the body, and bade it be an utter slave to the body's lusts. All these crafts by which the city is patrolled—or shall I say kept in uproar—are but engaged in the body's business; time was when all things were offered to the body as to a slave, but now they are made ready for it as for a master. Accordingly, hence have come the workshops of the weavers and the carpenters; hence the savoury smells of the professional cooks; hence the wantonness of those who teach wanton postures, and wanton and affected singing. For that moderation which nature prescribes, which limits our desires by resources restricted to our needs, has abandoned the field; it has now come to this—that to want only what is enough is a sign both of boorishness and of utter destitution.

It is hard to believe, my dear Lucilius, how easily the charm of eloquence wins even great men away from the truth. Take, for example, Posidonius—who, in my estimation, is of the number of those who have contributed most to philosophy—when he wishes to describe the art of weaving. He tells how, first, some threads are twisted and some drawn out from the soft, loose mass of wool; next, how the upright warp keeps the threads stretched by means of hanging weights; then, how the inserted thread of the woof,

which softens the hard texture of the web which holds it fast on either side, is forced by the batten to make a compact union with the warp. He maintains that even the weaver's art was discovered by wise men, forgetting that the more complicated art which he describes was invented in later days—the art wherein

*The web is bound to frame; asunder now*

*The reed doth part the warp. Between the threads*

*Is shot the woof by pointed shuttles borne;*

*The broad comb's well-notched teeth then drive it home.<sup>[14]</sup>*

Suppose he had had the opportunity of seeing the weaving of our own day, which produces the clothing that will conceal nothing, the clothing which affords—I will not say no protection to the body, but none even to modesty!

Posidonius then passes on to the farmer. With no less eloquence he describes the ground which is broken up and crossed again by the plough, so that the earth, thus loosened, may allow freer play to the roots; then the seed is sown, and the weeds plucked out by hand, lest any chance growth or wild plant spring up and spoil the crop. This trade also, he declares, is the creation of the wise—just as if cultivators of the soil were not even at the present day discovering countless new methods of increasing the soil's fertility!

Furthermore, not confining his attention to these arts, he even degrades the wise man by sending him to the mill. For he tells us how the sage, by imitating the processes of nature, began to make bread. “The grain,”<sup>[15]</sup> he says, “once taken into the mouth, is crushed by the flinty teeth, which meet in hostile encounter, and whatever grain slips out the tongue turns back to the selfsame teeth. Then it is blended into a mass, that it may the more easily pass down the slippery throat. When this has readied the stomach, it is digested by the stomach's equable heat; then, and not till then, it is assimilated with the body.

Following this pattern," he goes on, "someone placed two rough stones, the one above the other, in imitation of the teeth, one set of which is stationary and awaits the motion of the other set. Then by the rubbing of the one stone against the other, the grain is crushed and brought back again and again, until by frequent rubbing it is reduced to powder. Then this man sprinkled the meal with water, and by continued manipulation subdued the mass and moulded the loaf. This loaf was, at first, baked by hot ashes or by an earthen vessel glowing hot; later on ovens were gradually discovered and the other devices whose heat will render obedience to the sage's will." Posidonius came very near declaring that even the cobbler's trade was the discovery of the wise man.

Reason did indeed devise all these things, but it was not right reason. It was man, but not the wise man, that discovered them; just as they invented ships, in which we cross rivers and seas—ships fitted with sails for the purpose of catching the force of the winds, ships with rudders added at the stern in order to turn the vessel's course in one direction or another. The model followed was the fish, which steers itself by its tail, and by its slightest motion on this side or on that bends its swift course.

"But," says Posidonius, "the wise man did indeed discover all these things; they were, however, too petty for him to deal with himself and so he entrusted them to his meaner assistants." Not so; these early inventions were thought out by no other class of men than those who have them in charge today. We know that certain devices have come to light only within our own memory—such as the use of windows which admit the clear light through transparent tiles,<sup>[16]</sup> and such as the vaulted baths, with pipes let into their walls for the purpose of diffusing the heat which maintains an even temperature in their lowest as well as in their highest spaces. Why need I mention the marble with which our temples and our private houses are resplendent? Or the rounded

and polished masses of stone by means of which we erect colonnades and buildings roomy enough for nations? Or our signs<sup>[17]</sup> for whole words, which enable us to take down a speech, however rapidly uttered, matching speed of tongue by speed of hand? All this sort of thing has been devised by the lowest grade of slaves.

Wisdom's seat is higher; she trains not the hands, but is mistress of our minds.

Would you know what wisdom has brought forth to light, what she has accomplished? It is not the graceful poses of the body, or the varied notes produced by horn and flute, whereby the breath is received and, as it passes out or through, is transformed into voice. It is not wisdom that contrives arms, or walls, or instruments useful in war; nay, her voice is for peace, and she summons all mankind to concord.

It is not she, I maintain, who is the artisan of our indispensable implements of daily use. Why do you assign to her such petty things? You see in her the skilled artisan of life. The other arts, it is true, wisdom has under her control; for he whom life serves is also served by the things which equip life. But wisdom's course is toward the state of happiness; thither she guides us, thither she opens the way for us.

She shows us what things are evil and what things are seemingly evil; she strips our minds of vain illusion. She bestows upon us a greatness which is substantial, but she represses the greatness which is inflated, and showy but filled with emptiness; and she does not permit us to be ignorant of the difference between what is great and what is but swollen; nay, she delivers to us the knowledge of the whole of nature and of her own nature. She discloses to us what the gods are and of what sort they are; what are the nether gods, the household deities, and the protecting spirits; what are the souls which have been endowed with lasting

life and have been admitted to the second class of divinities,<sup>[18]</sup> where is their abode and what their activities, powers, and will.

Such are wisdom's rites of initiation, by means of which is unlocked, not a village shrine, but the vast temple of all the gods—the universe itself, whose true apparitions and true aspects she offers to the gaze of our minds. For the vision of our eyes is too dull for sights so great.

Then she goes back to the beginnings of things, to the eternal Reason<sup>[19]</sup> which was imparted to the whole, and to the force which inheres in all the seeds of things, giving them the power to fashion each thing according to its kind. Then wisdom begins to inquire about the soul, whence it comes, where it dwells, how long it abides, into how many divisions it falls. Finally, she has turned her attention from the corporeal to the incorporeal, and has closely examined truth and the marks whereby truth is known, inquiring next how that which is equivocal can be distinguished from the truth, whether in life or in language; for in both are elements of the false mingled with the true.

It is my opinion that the wise man has not withdrawn himself, as Posidonius thinks, from those arts which we were discussing, but that he never took them up at all.<sup>[20]</sup> For he would have judged that nothing was worth discovering that he would not afterwards judge to be worth using always. He would not take up things which would have to be laid aside.

“But Anacharsis,” says Posidonius, “invented the potter's wheel, whose whirling gives shape to vessels.”<sup>[21]</sup> Then because the potter's wheel is mentioned in Homer, people prefer to believe that Homer's verses are false rather than the story of Posidonius! But I maintain that Anacharsis was not the creator of this wheel; and even if he was, although he was a wise man when he invented it, yet he did not invent it *qua* “wise man”—just as there are a great many things which wise men do as men, not as wise men.

Suppose, for example, that a wise man is exceedingly fleet of foot; he will outstrip all the runners in the race by virtue of being fleet, not by virtue of his wisdom. I should like to show Posidonius some glass-blower who by his breath moulds the glass into manifold shapes which could scarcely be fashioned by the most skilful hand. Nay, these discoveries have been made since we men have ceased to discover wisdom.

But Posidonius again remarks. “Democritus is said to have discovered the arch,<sup>[22]</sup> whose effect was that the curving line of stones, which gradually lean toward each other, is bound together by the keystone.” I am inclined to pronounce this statement false. For there must have been, before Democritus, bridges and gateways in which the curvature did not begin until about the top.

It seems to have quite slipped your memory that this same Democritus discovered how ivory could be softened, how, by boiling, a pebble could be transformed into an emerald,<sup>[23]</sup>—the same process used even today for colouring stones which are found to be amenable to this treatment! It may have been a wise man who discovered all such things, but he did not discover them by virtue of being a wise man; for he does many things which we see done just as well, or even more skilfully and dexterously, by men who are utterly lacking in sagacity.

Do you ask what, then, the wise man has found out and what he has brought to light? First of all there is truth, and nature; and nature he has not followed as the other animals do, with eyes too dull to perceive the divine in it. In the second place, there is the law of life, and life he has made to conform to universal principles; and he has taught us, not merely to know the gods, but to follow them, and to welcome the gifts of chance precisely as if they were divine commands. He has forbidden us to give heed to false opinions, and has weighed the value of each thing by a true standard of appraisal. He has condemned those pleasures with which



remorse is intermingled, and has praised those goods which will always satisfy; and he has published the truth abroad that he is most happy who has no need of happiness, and that he is most powerful who has power over himself.

I am not speaking of that philosophy which has placed the citizen outside his country and the gods outside the universe, and which has bestowed virtue upon pleasure,<sup>[24]</sup> but rather of that philosophy which counts nothing good except what is honourable—one which cannot be cajoled by the gifts either of man or fortune, one whose value is that it cannot be bought for any value. That this philosophy existed in such a rude age, when the arts and crafts were still unknown and when useful things could only be learned by use—this I refuse to believe.

Next there came the fortune-favoured period when the bounties of nature lay open to all, for men's indiscriminate use, before avarice and luxury had broken the bonds which held mortals together, and they, abandoning their communal existence, had separated and turned to plunder. The men of the second age were not wise men, even though they did what wise men should do.<sup>[25]</sup>

Indeed, there is no other condition of the human race that anyone would regard more highly; and if God should commission a man to fashion earthly creatures and to bestow institutions upon peoples, this man would approve of no other system than that which obtained among the men of that age, when

*No ploughman tilled the soil, nor was it right*

*To portion off or bound one's property.*

*Men shared their gains, and earth more freely gave*

*Her riches to her sons who sought them not.*<sup>[26]</sup>

What race of men was ever more blest than that race? They enjoyed all nature in partnership. Nature sufficed for them, now the guardian, as before she was the parent, of all; and this her gift

consisted of the assured possession by each man of the common resources. Why should I not even call that race the richest among mortals, since you could not find a poor person among them?

But avarice broke in upon a condition so happily ordained, and, by its eagerness to lay something away and to turn it to its own private use, made all things the property of others, and reduced itself from boundless wealth to straitened need. It was avarice that introduced poverty and, by craving much, lost all.

And so, although she now tries to make good her loss, although she adds one estate to another, evicting a neighbour either by buying him out or by wronging him, although she extends her country-seats to the size of provinces and defines ownership as meaning extensive travel through one's own property—in spite of all these efforts of hers no enlargement of our boundaries will bring us back to the condition from which we have departed.

When there is no more that we can do, we shall possess much; but we once possessed the whole world!

The very soil was more productive when untilled, and yielded more than enough for peoples who refrained from despoiling one another. Whatever gift nature had produced, men found as much pleasure in revealing it to another as in having discovered it. It was possible for no man either to surpass another or to fall short of him; what there was, was divided among unquarrelling friends. Not yet had the stronger begun to lay hands upon the weaker; not yet had the miser, by hiding away what lay before him, begun to shut off his neighbour from even the necessities of life; each cared as much for his neighbour as for himself.

Armour lay unused, and the hand, unstained by human blood, had turned all its hatred against wild beasts. The men of that day, who had found in some dense grove protection against the sun, and security against the severity of winter or of rain in their mean hiding-places, spent their lives under the branches of the

trees and passed tranquil nights without a sigh. Care vexes us in our purple, and routs us from our beds with the sharpest of goads; but how soft was the sleep the hard earth bestowed upon the men of that day!

No fretted and panelled ceilings hung over them, but as they lay beneath the open sky the stars glided quietly above them, and the firmament, night's noble pageant, marched swiftly by, conducting its mighty task in silence. For them by day, as well as by night, the visions of this most glorious abode were free and open. It was their joy to watch the constellations as they sank from mid-heaven and others, again, as they rose from their hidden abodes.

What else but joy could it be to wander among the marvels which dotted the heavens far and wide? But you of the present day shudder at every sound your houses make, and as you sit among your frescoes the slightest creak makes you shrink in terror. *They* had no houses as big as cities. The air, the breezes blowing free through the open spaces, the flitting shade of crag or tree, springs crystal-clear and streams not spoiled by man's work, whether by water-pipe<sup>[27]</sup> or by any confinement of the channel, but running at will, and meadows beautiful without the use of art—amid such scenes were their rude homes, adorned with rustic hand. Such a dwelling was in accordance with nature; therein it was a joy to live, fearing neither the dwelling itself nor for its safety. In these days, however, our houses constitute a large portion of our dread.

But no matter how excellent and guileless was the life of the men of that age, they were not wise men; for that title is reserved for the highest achievement. Still, I would not deny that they were men of lofty spirit and—I may use the phrase—fresh from the gods. For there is no doubt that the world produced a better progeny before it was yet worn out. However, not all were endowed with mental faculties of highest perfection, though in all cases their native powers were more sturdy than ours and

more fitted for toil. For nature does not bestow virtue; it is an art to become good.

They, at least, searched not in the lowest dregs of the earth for gold, nor yet for silver or transparent stones; and they still were merciful even to the dumb animals—so far removed was that epoch from the custom of slaying man by man, not in anger or through fear, but just to make a show! They had as yet no embroidered garments nor did they weave cloth of gold; gold was not yet even mined.

What, then, is the conclusion of the matter? It was by reason of their ignorance of things that the men of those days were innocent; and it makes a great deal of difference whether one wills not to sin or has not the knowledge to sin.<sup>[28]</sup> Justice was unknown to them, unknown prudence, unknown also self-control and bravery; but their rude life possessed certain qualities akin to all these virtues. Virtue is not vouchsafed to a soul unless that soul has been trained and taught, and by unremitting practice brought to perfection. For the attainment of this boon, but not in the possession of it, were we born; and even in the best of men, before you refine them by instruction, there is but the stuff of virtue, not virtue itself. Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. Cf. Plato, *Crito* 48, “not life itself, but a good life, is chiefly to be desired.”
2. Compare the “knowledge of things divine and things human” of *lxxxix*. 5.
3. The “Golden Age” motif was a frequent one in Latin literature. Compare, e.g., Tibullus, i. 3. 35 ff., the passage beginning:

*Quam bene Saturno vivebant rege, priusquam  
Tellus in longas est patefacta vias!*

Cf. § 46, summing up the message of Seneca’s letter.

4. While modern philosophy would probably side with Seneca rather than Posidonius, it is interesting to know the opinion of Macaulay, who holds (*Essay on Bacon*) that there is much in common between Posidonius and the English inductive philosopher, and thinks but little of Seneca’s ideas on the subject. Cf. W. C. Summers, *Select letters of Seneca*, p. 312.

5. Cleobulus of Rhodes, Periander of Corinth, Pittacus of Mitylene, Bias of Priene, Thales of Miletus, Chilon of Sparta, and Solon of Athens. For some of these substitutions are made in certain lists.
6. Cf. Ep. lxxxviii. 20 *ad alia multum, ad virtutem nihil*.
7. Vergil, *Georg.* i. 144.
8. Cf. Juvenal, iii. 254 ff.:  
*Longa coruscat*  
*Serraco veniente abies, atque altera pinum*  
*Plaustra vehunt, nutant alte populoque minantur.*  
 Compare also the “towering tenements” of § 8.
9. Vergil, *Georg.* i. 139 f.
10. Cf. T. Rice Holmes, *Ancient Britain*, pp. 121 f., who concludes that the discovery of ore-smelting was accidental.
11. Cf. Diog. Laert. vi. 37 θεασάμενός ποτε παιδίον ταῖς χερσὶ ἐξέβριψε τῆς πήρας τὴν κοτύλην, εἰπών, Παιδίον με νενίκηκεν εὐτελεία.
12. Compare the halls of Nero which Seneca may easily have had in mind: (Suet. *Nero* 31) *cenationes laqueatae tabulis eburneis versatilibus . . . praecipua cenationum rotunda, quae perpetuo diebus ac noctibus vice mundi circumageretur*.
13. Cf. Ovid, *Met.* i. 121 f.:  
*Domus antra fuerunt*  
*Et densi frutices et vinctae cortice virgae.*  
 Among many accounts by Roman writers of early man, compare this passage of Ovid, and that in the fifth book of Lucretius.
14. Ovid, *Met.* vi. 55 ff.
15. Professor Summers calls attention to the similarity of this passage and Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.* ii. 134 ff. *dentibus manditur . . . a lingua adiuvari videtur . . . in alvo . . . calore . . . in reliquum corpus dividantur*.
16. Besides *lapis specularis* (window-glass) the Romans used alabaster, mica, and shells for this purpose.
17. Suetonius tells us that a certain Ennius, a grammarian of the Augustan age, was the first to develop shorthand on a scientific basis, and that Tiro, Cicero's freedman, had invented the process. He also mentions Seneca as the most scientific and encyclopaedic authority on the subject.
18. Possibly either the *manes* or the *indigitamenta* of the early Roman religion.
19. i.e., λόγος.
20. Seneca, himself one of the keenest scientific observers in history (witness *Nat. Quaest.*, Epp. lvii., lxxix., etc.), is pushing his argument very far in this letter. His message is clear enough; but the modern combination of natural science, psychology, and philosophy shows that Posidonius had some justification for his theories. Cf. also Lucretius, v. 1105-7 ff.

21. This Scythian prince and friend of Solon, who visited Athens in the sixth century B.C., is also said to have invented the bellows and the anchor. Cf., however, *Iliad* xviii. 600 f. ὥς ὄτε τις τροχὸν ἄρμενον ἐν παλάμησιν ἐξόμενος κεραμεὺς πειρήσεται, and Leaf's comment: "The potter's wheel was known in pre-Mycenean times, and was a very ancient invention to the oldest Epic poets." Seneca is right.
22. Seneca (see next sentence) is right again. The arch was known in Chaldaea and in Egypt before 3000 B.C. Greek bee-hive tombs, Etruscan gateways, and early Roman remains, testify to its immemorial use.
23. The ancients judged precious stones merely by their colour; their *smaragdus* included also malachite, jade, and several kinds of quartz. Exposure to heat alters the colour of some stones; and the alchemists believed that the "angelic stone" changed common flints into diamonds, rubies, emeralds, etc. See G. F. Kunz, *The Magic of Jewels and Charms*, p. 16. It was also an ancient superstition that emeralds were produced from jasper.
24. i.e., the Epicureans, who withdraw from civil life and regarded the gods as taking no part in the affairs of men.
25. i.e., live according to nature.
26. Verg. *Georg.* i. 125 ff.
27. Cf. Horace, *Ep.* i. 10. 20 f.:
- Purior in vicis aqua tendit rumpere plumbum*  
*Quam quae per pronum trepidat cum murmure rivum?*
28. Because virtue depends upon reason, and none but voluntary acts should meet with praise or blame.

*On the Lesson to be Drawn  
From the Burning of Lyons*<sup>[1]</sup>



Our friend Liberalis<sup>[2]</sup> is now downcast; for he has just heard of the fire which has wiped out the colony of Lyons. Such a calamity might upset anyone at all, not to speak of a man who dearly loves his country. But this incident has served to make him inquire about the strength of his own character, which he has trained, I suppose, just to meet situations that he thought might cause him fear. I do not wonder, however, that he was free from apprehension touching an evil so unexpected and practically unheard of as this, since it is without precedent. For fire has damaged many a city, but has annihilated none. Even when fire has been hurled against the walls by the hand of a foe, the flame dies out in many places, and although continually renewed, rarely devours so wholly as to leave nothing for the sword. Even an earthquake has scarcely ever been so violent and destructive as to overthrow whole cities. Finally, no conflagration has ever before blazed forth so savagely in any town that nothing was left for a second.

So many beautiful buildings, any single one of which would make a single town famous, were wrecked in one night. In time of such deep peace an event has taken place worse than men can possibly fear even in time of war. Who can believe it? When

weapons are everywhere at rest and when peace prevails throughout the world, Lyons, the pride of Gaul,<sup>[3]</sup> is missing!

Fortune has usually allowed all men, when she has assailed them collectively, to have a foreboding of that which they were destined to suffer. Every great creation has had granted to it a period of reprieve before its fall; but in this case, only a single night elapsed between the city at its greatest and the city nonexistent. In short, it takes me longer to tell you it has perished than it took for the city to perish.

All this has affected our friend Liberalis, bending his will, which is usually so steadfast and erect in the face of his own trials. And not without reason has he been shaken; for it is the unexpected that puts the heaviest load upon us. Strangeness adds to the weight of calamities, and every mortal feels the greater pain as a result of that which also brings surprise.

Therefore, nothing ought to be unexpected by us. Our minds should be sent forward in advance to meet all problems, and we should consider, not what is wont to happen, but what can happen. For what is there in existence that Fortune, when she has so willed, does not drag down from the very height of its prosperity? And what is there that she does not the more violently assail the more brilliantly it shines? What is laborious or difficult for her?

She does not always attack in one way or even with her full strength; at one time she summons our own hands against us; at another time, content with her own powers, she makes use of no agent in devising perils for us. No time is exempt; in the midst of our very pleasures there spring up causes of suffering. War arises in the midst of peace, and that which we depended upon for protection is transformed into a cause of fear; friend becomes enemy, ally becomes foeman, The summer calm is stirred into sudden storms, wilder than the storms of winter.<sup>[4]</sup> With no foe in sight we are victims of such fates as foes inflict, and if other causes



of disaster fail, excessive good fortune finds them for itself. The most temperate are assailed by illness, the strongest by wasting disease, the most innocent by chastisement, the most secluded by the noisy mob.

Chance chooses some new weapon by which to bring her strength to bear against us, thinking we have forgotten her.

Whatever structure has been reared by a long sequence of years, at the cost of great toil and through the great kindness of the gods, is scattered and dispersed by a single day. Nay, he who has said “a day” has granted too long a postponement to swift-coming misfortune; an hour, an instant of time, suffices for the overthrow of empires! It would be some consolation for the feebleness of our selves and our works, if all things should perish as slowly as they come into being; but as it is, increases are of sluggish growth, but the way to ruin is rapid.

Nothing, whether public or private, is stable; the destinies of men, no less than those of cities, are in a whirl. Amid the greatest calm terror arises, and though no external agencies stir up commotion, yet evils burst forth from sources whence they were least expected. Thrones which have stood the shock of civil and foreign wars crash to the ground though no one sets them tottering. How few the states which have carried their good fortune through to the end!

We should therefore reflect upon all contingencies, and should fortify our minds against the evils which may possibly come.

Exile, the torture of disease, wars, shipwreck—we must think on these.<sup>[5]</sup> Chance may tear you from your country or your country from you, or may banish you to the desert; this very place, where throngs are stifling, may become a desert. Let us place before our eyes in its entirety the nature of man’s lot, and if we would not be overwhelmed, or even dazed, by those unwonted evils, as if they were novel, let us summon to our minds beforehand, not

as great an evil as oftentimes happens, but the very greatest evil that possibly can happen. We must reflect upon fortune fully and completely.

How often have cities in Asia, how often in Achaia, been laid low by a single shock of earthquake! How many towns in Syria, how many in Macedonia, have been swallowed up! How often has this kind of devastation laid Cyprus<sup>[6]</sup> in ruins! How often has Paphos collapsed! Not infrequently are tidings brought to us of the utter destruction of entire cities; yet how small a part of the world are we, to whom such tidings often come!

Let us rise, therefore, to confront the operations of Fortune, and whatever happens, let us have the assurance that it is not so great as rumour advertises it to be.

A rich city has been laid in ashes, the jewel of the provinces, counted as one of them and yet not included with them;<sup>[7]</sup> rich though it was, nevertheless it was set upon a single hill,<sup>[8]</sup> and that not very large in extent. But of all those cities, of whose magnificence and grandeur you hear today, the very traces will be blotted out by time. Do you not see how, in Achaia, the foundations of the most famous cities have already crumbled to nothing, so that no trace is left to show that they ever even existed?<sup>[9]</sup>

Not only does that which has been made with hands totter to the ground, not only is that which has been set in place by man's art and man's efforts overthrown by the passing days; nay, the peaks of mountains dissolve, whole tracts have settled, and places which once stood far from the sight of the sea are now covered by the waves. The mighty power of fires has eaten away the hills through whose sides they used to glow, and has levelled to the ground peaks which were once most lofty—the sailor's solace and his beacon. The works of nature herself are harassed; hence we ought to bear with untroubled minds the destruction of cities.

They stand but to fall! This doom awaits them, one and all; it may be that some internal force, and blasts of violence which are tremendous because their way is blocked, will throw off the weight which holds them down; or that a whirlpool of raging currents, mightier because they are hidden in the bosom of the earth, will break through that which resists its power; or that the vehemence of flames will burst asunder the framework of the earth's crust; or that time, from which nothing is safe, will reduce them little by little; or that a pestilential climate will drive their inhabitants away and the mould will corrode their deserted walls. It would be tedious to recount all the ways by which fate may come; but this one thing I know: all the works of mortal man have been doomed to mortality, and in the midst of things which have been destined to die, we live!

Hence it is thoughts like these, and of this kind, which I am offering as consolation to our friend Liberalis, who burns with a love for his country that is beyond belief. Perhaps its destruction has been brought about only that it may be raised up again to a better destiny. Oftentimes a reverse has but made room for more prosperous fortune. Many structures have fallen only to rise to a greater height. Timagenes,<sup>[10]</sup> who had a grudge against Rome and her prosperity, used to say that the only reason he was grieved when conflagrations occurred in Rome was his knowledge that better buildings would arise than those which had gone down in the flames.

And probably in this city of Lyons, too, all its citizens will earnestly strive that everything shall be rebuilt better in size and security than what they have lost. May it be built to endure and, under happier auspices, for a longer existence! This is indeed but the hundredth year since this colony was founded—not the limit even of a man's lifetime.<sup>[11]</sup> Led forth by Plancus, the natural advantages of its site have caused it to wax strong and reach the

numbers which it contains today; and yet how many calamities of the greatest severity has it endured within the space of an old man's life!

Therefore let the mind be disciplined to understand and to endure its own lot, and let it have the knowledge that there is nothing which fortune does not dare—that she has the same jurisdiction over empires as over emperors, the same power over cities as over the citizens who dwell therein. We must not cry out at any of these calamities. Into such a world have we entered, and under such laws do we live. If you like it, obey; if not, depart whithersoever you wish. Cry out in anger if any unfair measures are taken with reference to you individually; but if this inevitable law is binding upon the highest and the lowest alike, be reconciled to fate, by which all things are dissolved.

You should not estimate our worth by our funeral mounds or by these monuments of unequal size which line the road; their ashes level all men! We are unequal at birth, but are equal in death. What I say about cities I say also about their inhabitants. Ardea was captured as well as Rome.<sup>[12]</sup> The great founder of human law has not made distinctions between us on the basis of high lineage or of illustrious names, except while we live. When, however, we come to the end which awaits mortals, he says: “Depart, ambition! To all creatures that burden the earth let one and the same<sup>[13]</sup> law apply!” For enduring all things, we are equal; no one is more frail than another, no one more certain of his own life on the morrow.

Alexander, king of Macedon, began to study geometry;<sup>[14]</sup> unhappy man, because he would thereby learn how puny was that earth of which he had seized but a fraction! Unhappy man, I repeat, because he was bound to understand that he was bearing a false title. For who can be “great” in that which is puny? The lessons which were being taught him were intricate and could

be learned only by assiduous application; they were not the kind to be comprehended by a madman, who let his thoughts range beyond the ocean.<sup>[15]</sup> “Teach me something easy!” he cries; but his teacher answers: “These things are the same for all, as hard for one as for another.”

Imagine that nature is saying to us: “Those things of which you complain are the same for all. I cannot give anything easier to any man, but whoever wishes will make things easier for himself.” In what way? By equanimity. You must suffer pain, and thirst, and hunger, and old age too, if a longer stay among men shall be granted you; you must be sick, and you must suffer loss and death.

Nevertheless, you should not believe those whose noisy clamour surrounds you; none of these things is an evil, none is beyond your power to bear, or is burdensome. It is only by common opinion that there is anything formidable in them. Your fearing death is therefore like your fear of gossip. But what is more foolish than a man afraid of words? Our friend Demetrius<sup>[16]</sup> is wont to put it cleverly when he says: “For me the talk of ignorant men is like the rumblings which issue from the belly. For,” he adds, “what difference does it make to me whether such rumblings come from above or from below?”

What madness it is to be afraid of disrepute in the judgment of the disreputable! Just as you have had no cause for shrinking in terror from the talk of men, so you have no cause now to shrink from these things, which you would never fear had not their talk forced fear upon you. Does it do any harm to a good man to be besmirched by unjust gossip?

Then let not this sort of thing damage death, either, in our estimation; death also is in bad odour. But no one of those who malign death has made trial of it.

Meanwhile it is foolhardy to condemn that of which you are ignorant. This one thing, however, you do know—that death is

helpful to many, that it sets many free from tortures, want, ailments, sufferings, and weariness. We are in the power of nothing when once we have death in our own power! Farewell.

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### Footnotes

1. In spite of the *centesimus annus* of § 14 (q.v.), the most probable date of this letter, based on Tac. *Ann.* xvi. 13 and other general evidence, is July-September 64 A.D. 58 A.D. would be too early for many reasons—among them that “peace all over the world” would not be a true statement until January of 62. (See the monograph of Jonas, O. Binder, Peiper, and Schultess.)
2. Probably Aebutius Liberalis, to whom the treatise *De Beneficiis* was dedicated.
3. That Lyons, situated at the junction of the Arar and the Rhone, was of especial prominence in Gaul, may be also gathered from the fact that it boasted a government mint and the *Ara Augusti*—a shrine established for the annual worship of all the Gallic states. Moreover, the emperor Claudius delivered his famous address in that city (see Tac. *Ann.* xi. 23 f.).
4. Cf. Ep. iv. 7, esp. the words *noli huic tranquillitati confidere; momento mare evertitur*.
5. The passage bears a striking resemblance to the words of Theseus in an unknown play of Euripides (Nauck. Frag. 964) quoted by Cicero, *Tusc.* iii. 14. 29, and by Plutarch, *Consolation to Apollonius*, 112d.
6. Seneca (*N. Q.* vi. 26) speaks of Paphos (on the island of Cyprus) as having been more than once devastated. We know of two such accidents—one under Augustus and another under Vespasian. See the same passage for other earthquake shocks in various places.
7. Lyons held an exceptional position in relation to the three Gallic provinces; it was a free town, belonging to none and yet their capital, much like the city of Washington in relation to the United States.
8. A fact mentioned merely to suggest Rome with her seven hills.
9. For example, Mycenae and Tiryns.
10. Probably the writer, and intimate friend of Augustus, who began life in Rome as a captive from Egypt. Falling into disfavour with the Emperor, he took refuge with the malcontent Asinius Pollio at Tusculum, and subsequently died in the East. Cf. Seneca, *De Ira*, iii. 23.
11. It was in 43 B.C. that Plancus led out the colonists who were chiefly Roman citizens driven from Vienna. Seneca would have been more accurate had he said “one hundred and eighth (or seventh).” Buecheler and Schultess would (unnecessarily) emend to read *centesimus septimus*. But Seneca was using round numbers.
12. Ardea, the earliest capital of Latium, and Rome, the present capital of the empire. Seneca probably refers to Ardea’s capture and destruction by the Samnites in the fourth century; Rome was captured by the Celts in 390

B.C. The former greatness of Ardea was celebrated by Vergil, *Aeneid*, vii. 411 ff.:

*et nunc magnum manet Ardea nomen,  
Sed fortuna fuit.*

13. *Siremps* (or *sirempse*—Plaut. *Amph.* 73), an ancient legal term, is derived by Festus from *similis re ipsa*; but Corssen explains it as from *sic rem pse*.
14. i.e., surveying. See Ep. lxxxviii. 10.
15. i.e., Ὠκεανός, the stream which encircles the earth.
16. This plain-living, plain-speaking philosopher appears also in Epp. xx. 9 and lxii. 3. Seneca refers to him as *seminudum, quanto minus quam stramentis incubantem*.





LETTER 92

*On the Happy Life*<sup>[1]</sup>



You and I will agree, I think, that outward things are sought for the satisfaction of the body, that the body is cherished out of regard for the soul, and that in the soul there are certain parts which minister to us, enabling us to move and to sustain life, bestowed upon us just for the sake of the primary part of us.<sup>[2]</sup> In this primary part there is something irrational, and something rational. The former obeys the latter, while the latter is the only thing that is not referred back to another, but rather refers all things to itself. For the divine reason also is set in supreme command over all things, and is itself subject to none; and even this reason which we possess is the same, because it is derived from the divine reason.

Now if we are agreed on this point, it is natural that we shall be agreed on the following also—namely, that the happy life depends upon this and this alone: our attainment of perfect reason. For it is naught but this that keeps the soul from being bowed down, that stands its ground against Fortune; whatever the condition of their affairs may be, it keeps men untroubled. And that alone is a good which is never subject to impairment. That man, I declare, is happy whom nothing makes less strong than he is; he keeps to

the heights, leaning upon none but himself; for one who sustains himself by any prop may fall. If the case is otherwise, then things which do not pertain to us will begin to have great influence over us. But who desires Fortune to have the upper hand, or what sensible man prides himself upon that which is not his own?

What is the happy life? It is peace of mind, and lasting tranquility. This will be yours if you possess greatness of soul; it will be yours if you possess the steadfastness that resolutely clings to a good judgment just reached. How does a man reach this condition? By gaining a complete view of truth, by maintaining, in all that he does, order, measure, fitness, and a will that is inoffensive and kindly, that is intent upon reason and never departs therefrom, that commands at the same time love and admiration. In short, to give you the principle in brief compass, the wise man's soul ought to be such as would be proper for a god.

What more can one desire who possesses all honourable things? For if dishonourable things can contribute to the best estate, then there will be the possibility of a happy life under conditions which do not include an honourable life. And what is more base or foolish than to connect the good of a rational soul with things irrational?

Yet there are certain philosophers who hold that the Supreme Good admits of increase because it is hardly complete when the gifts of fortune are adverse.<sup>[3]</sup> Even Antipater,<sup>[4]</sup> one of the great leaders of this school, admits that he ascribes some influence to externals, though only a very slight influence. You see, however, what absurdity lies in not being content with the daylight unless it is increased by a tiny fire. What importance can a spark have in the midst of this clear sunlight?

If you are not contented with only that which is honourable, it must follow that you desire in addition either the kind of quiet which the Greeks call "undisturbedness," or else pleasure. But

the former may be attained in any case. For the mind is free from disturbance when it is fully free to contemplate the universe, and nothing distracts it from the contemplation of nature. The second, pleasure, is simply the good of cattle. We are but adding<sup>[5]</sup> the irrational to the rational, the dishonourable to the honourable. A pleasant physical sensation affects this life of ours why, therefore, do you hesitate to say that all is well with a man just because all is well with his appetite? And do you rate, I will not say among heroes, but among men, the person whose Supreme Good is a matter of flavours and colours and sounds? Nay, let him withdraw from the ranks of this, the noblest class of living beings, second only to the gods; let him herd with the dumb brutes—an animal whose delight is in fodder!

The irrational part of the soul is twofold:<sup>[6]</sup> the one part is spirited, ambitious, uncontrolled; its seat is in the passions; the other is lowly, sluggish, and devoted to pleasure. Philosophers have neglected the former, which, though unbridled, is yet better, and is certainly more courageous and more worthy of a man, and have regarded the latter, which is nerveless and ignoble, as indispensable to the happy life.

They have ordered reason to serve this latter; they have made the Supreme Good of the noblest living being an abject and mean affair, and a monstrous hybrid, too, composed of various members which harmonize but ill. For as our Vergil, describing Scylla, says<sup>[7]</sup>

*Above, a human face and maiden's breast,  
A beauteous breast—below, a monster huge  
Of bulk and shapeless, with a dolphin's tail  
Joined to a wolf-like belly.*

And yet to this Scylla are tacked on the forms of wild animals, dreadful and swift; but from what monstrous shapes have these wiseacres compounded wisdom!

Man's primary art is virtue itself; there is joined to this the useless and fleeting flesh, fitted only for the reception of food, as Posidonius remarks. This divine virtue ends in foulness, and to the higher parts, which are worshipful and heavenly, there is fastened a sluggish and flabby animal. As for the second desideratum—quiet—although it would indeed not of itself be of any benefit to the soul, yet it would relieve the soul of hindrances; pleasure, on the contrary, actually destroys the soul and softens all its vigour. What elements so inharmonious as these can be found united? To that which is most vigorous is joined that which is most sluggish, to that which is austere that which is far from serious, to that which is most holy that which is unrestrained even to the point of impurity.

“What, then,” comes the retort, “if good health, rest, and freedom from pain are not likely to hinder virtue, shall you not seek all these?” Of course I shall seek them, but not because they are goods—I shall seek them because they are according to nature and because they will be acquired through the exercise of good judgment on my part. What, then, will be good in them? This alone—that it is a good thing to choose them. For when I don suitable attire, or walk as I should, or dine as I ought to dine, it is not my dinner, or my walk, or my dress that are goods, but the deliberate choice which I show in regard to them, as I observe, in each thing I do, a mean that conforms with reason.

Let me also add that the choice of neat clothing is a fitting object of a man's efforts; for man is by nature a neat and well-groomed animal. Hence the choice of neat attire, and not neat attire in itself, is a good; since the good is not in the thing selected,

but in the quality of the selection. Our actions are honourable, but not the actual things which we do.

And you may assume that what I have said about dress applies also to the body. For nature has surrounded our soul with the body as with a sort of garment; the body is its cloak. But who has ever reckoned the value of clothes by the wardrobe which contained them? The scabbard does not make the sword good or bad. Therefore, with regard to the body I shall return the same answer to you—that, if I have the choice, I shall choose health and strength, but that the good involved will be my judgment regarding these things, and not the things themselves.

Another retort is: “Granted that the wise man is happy; nevertheless, he does not attain the Supreme Good which we have defined, unless the means also which nature provides for its attainment are at his call. So, while one who possesses virtue cannot be unhappy, yet one cannot be perfectly happy if one lacks such natural gifts as health, or soundness of limb.”

But in saying this, you grant the alternative which seems the more difficult to believe—that the man who is in the midst of unremitting and extreme pain is not wretched, nay, is even happy; and you deny that which is much less serious—that he is completely happy. And yet, if virtue can keep a man from being wretched, it will be an easier task for it to render him completely happy. For the difference between happiness and complete happiness is less than that between wretchedness and happiness. Can it be possible that a thing which is so powerful as to snatch a man from disaster, and place him among the happy, cannot also accomplish what remains, and render him supremely happy? Does its strength fail at the very top of the climb?

There are in life things which are advantageous and disadvantageous—both beyond our control. If a good man, in spite of being weighed down by all kinds of disadvantages, is not wretched,

how is he not supremely happy, no matter if he does lack certain advantages? For as he is not weighted down to wretchedness by his burden of disadvantages, so he is not withdrawn from supreme happiness through lack of any advantages; nay, he is just as supremely happy without the advantages as he is free from wretchedness though under the load of his disadvantages. Otherwise, if his good can be impaired, it can be snatched from him altogether.

A short space above,<sup>[8]</sup> I remarked that a tiny fire does not add to the sun's light. For by reason of the sun's brightness any light that shines apart from the sunlight is blotted out. "But," one may say, "there are certain objects that stand in the way even of the sunlight." The sun, however, is unimpaired even in the midst of obstacles, and, though an object may intervene and cut off our view thereof, the sun sticks to his work and goes on his course. Whenever he shines forth from amid the clouds, he is no smaller, nor less punctual either, than when he is free from clouds; since it makes a great deal of difference whether there is merely something in the way of his light or something which interferes with his shining.

Similarly, obstacles take nothing away from virtue; it is no smaller, but merely shines with less brilliancy. In our eyes, it may perhaps be less visible and less luminous than before; but as regards itself it is the same and, like the sun when he is eclipsed, is still, though in secret, putting forth its strength. Disasters, therefore, and losses, and wrongs, have only the same power over virtue that a cloud has over the sun.

We meet with one person who maintains that a wise man who has met with bodily misfortune is neither wretched nor happy. But he also is in error, for he is putting the results of chance upon a parity with the virtues, and is attributing only the same influence to things that are honourable as to things that are devoid

of honour. But what is more detestable and more unworthy than to put contemptible things in the same class with things worthy of reverence! For reverence is due to justice, duty, loyalty, bravery, and prudence; on the contrary, those attributes are worthless with which the most worthless men are often blessed in fuller measure—such as a sturdy leg, strong shoulders, good teeth, and healthy and solid muscles.

Again, if the wise man whose body is a trial to him shall be regarded as neither wretched nor happy, but shall be left in a sort of half-way position, his life also will be neither desirable nor undesirable. But what is so foolish as to say that the wise man's life is not desirable? And what is so far beyond the bounds of credence as the opinion that any life is neither desirable nor undesirable? Again, if bodily ills do not make a man wretched, they consequently allow him to be happy. For things which have no power to change his condition for the worse, have not the power, either, to disturb that condition when it is at its best.

“But,” someone will say, “we know what is cold and what is hot; a lukewarm temperature lies between. Similarly, A is happy, and B is wretched, and C is neither happy nor wretched.” I wish to examine this figure, which is brought into play against us. If I add to your lukewarm water a larger quantity of cold water, the result will be cold water. But if I pour in a larger quantity of hot water, the water will finally become hot. In the case, however, of your man who is neither wretched nor happy, no matter how much I add to his troubles, he will not be unhappy, according to your argument; hence your figure offers no analogy.

Again, suppose that I set before you a man who is neither miserable nor happy. I add blindness to his misfortunes; he is not rendered unhappy. I cripple him; he is not rendered unhappy. I add afflictions which are unceasing and severe; he is not rendered

unhappy. Therefore, one whose life is not changed to misery by all these ills is not dragged by them, either, from his life of happiness.

Then if, as you say, the wise man cannot fall from happiness to wretchedness, he cannot fall into non-happiness. For how, if one has begun to slip, can one stop at any particular place? That which prevents him from rolling to the bottom, keeps him at the summit. Why, you urge, may not a happy life possibly be destroyed? It cannot even be disjoined; and for that reason virtue is itself of itself sufficient for the happy life.<sup>[9]</sup>

“But,” it is said, “is not the wise man happier if he has lived longer and has been distracted by no pain, than one who has always been compelled to grapple with evil fortune?” Answer me now—is he any better or more honourable? If he is not, then he is not happier either. In order to live more happily, he must live more rightly; if he cannot do that, then he cannot live more happily either. Virtue cannot be strained tighter,<sup>[10]</sup> and therefore neither can the happy life, which depends on virtue. For virtue is so great a good that it is not affected by such insignificant assaults upon it as shortness of life, pain, and the various bodily vexations. For pleasure does not deserve that. virtue should even glance at it.

Now what is the chief thing in virtue? It is the quality of not needing a single day beyond the present, and of not reckoning up the days that are ours; in the slightest possible moment of time virtue completes an eternity of good. These goods seem to us incredible and transcending man’s nature; for we measure its grandeur by the standard of our own weakness, and we call our vices by the name of virtue. Furthermore, does it not seem just as incredible that any man in the midst of extreme suffering should say, “I am happy”? And yet this utterance was heard in the very factory of pleasure, when Epicurus said:<sup>[11]</sup> “Today and one other day have been the happiest of all!” although in the one case he



was tortured by strangury, and in the other by the incurable pain of an ulcerated stomach.

Why, then, should those goods which virtue bestows be incredible in the sight of us, who cultivate virtue, when they are found even in those who acknowledge pleasure as their mistress? These also, ignoble and base-minded as they are, declare that even in the midst of excessive pain and misfortune the wise man will be neither wretched nor happy. And yet this also is incredible—nay, still more incredible, than the other case. For I do not understand how, if virtue falls from her heights, she can help being hurled all the way to the bottom. She either must preserve one in happiness, or, if driven from this position, she will not prevent us from becoming unhappy. If virtue only stands her ground, she cannot be driven from the field; she must either conquer or be conquered.

But some say: “Only to the immortal gods is given virtue and the happy life; we can attain but the shadow, as it were, and semblance of such goods as theirs. We approach them, but we never reach them.” Reason, however, is a common attribute of both gods and men; in the gods it is already perfected, in us it is capable of being perfected.

But it is our vices that bring us to despair; for the second class of rational being, man, is of an inferior order—a guardian, as it were, who is too unstable to hold fast to what is best, his judgment still wavering and uncertain. He may require the faculties of sight and hearing, good health, a bodily exterior that is not loathsome, and, besides, greater length of days conjoined with an unimpaired constitution.

Though by means of reason he can lead a life which will not bring regrets, yet there resides in this imperfect creature, man, a certain power that makes for badness, because he possesses a mind which is easily moved to perversity. Suppose, however, the badness which is in full view, and has previously been stirred to

activity, to be removed; the man is still not a good man, but he is being moulded to goodness. One, however, in whom there is lacking any quality that makes for goodness, is bad.

But

*He in whose body virtue dwells, and spirit*

*E'er present*<sup>[12]</sup>

is equal to the gods; mindful of his origin, he strives to return thither. No man does wrong in attempting to regain the heights from which he once came down. And why should you not believe that something of divinity exists in one who is a part of God? All this universe which encompasses us is one, and it is God; we are associates of God; we are his members. Our soul has capabilities, and is carried thither,<sup>[13]</sup> if vices do not hold it down. Just as it is the nature of our bodies to stand erect and look upward to the sky, so the soul, which may reach out as far as it will, was framed by nature to this end, that it should desire equality with the gods. And if it makes use of its powers and stretches upward into its proper region it is by no alien path that it struggles toward the heights.

It would be a great task to journey heavenwards; the soul but returns thither. When once it has found the road, it boldly marches on, scornful of all things. It casts, no backward glance at wealth; gold and silver—things which are fully worthy of the gloom in which they once lay—it values not by the sheen which smites the eyes of the ignorant, but by the mire of ancient days, whence our greed first detached and dug them out.

The soul, I affirm, knows that riches are stored elsewhere than in men's heaped-up treasure-houses; that it is the soul, and not the strong-box, which should be filled.

It is the soul that men may set in dominion over all things, and may install as owner of the universe, so that it may limit

its riches only by the boundaries of East and West, and, like the gods, may possess all things; and that it may, with its own vast resources, look down from on high upon the wealthy, no one of whom rejoices as much in his own wealth as he resents the wealth of another.

When the soul has transported itself to this lofty height, it regards the body also, since it is a burden which must be borne, not as a thing to love, but as a thing to oversee; nor is it subservient to that over which it is set in mastery. For no man is free who is a slave to his body. Indeed, omitting all the other masters which are brought into being by excessive care for the body, the sway which the body itself exercises is captious and fastidious.

Forth from this body the soul issues, now with unruffled spirit, now with exultation, and, when once it has gone forth, asks not what shall be the end of the deserted day. No; just as we do not take thought for the clippings of the hair and the beard, even so that divine soul, when it is about to issue forth from the mortal man, regards the destination of its earthly vessel—whether it be consumed by fire, or shut in by a stone, or buried in the earth, or torn by wild beasts—as being of no more concern to itself than is the afterbirth to a child just born. And whether this body shall be cast out and plucked to pieces by birds, or devoured when

*thrown to the sea-dogs as prey,*<sup>[14]</sup>

how does that concern him who is nothing?

Nay even when it is among the living, the soul fears nothing that may happen to the body after death; for though such things may have been threats, they were not enough to terrify the soul previous to the moment of death. It says; “I am not frightened by the executioner’s hook,<sup>[15]</sup> nor by the revolting mutilation of the corpse which is exposed to the scorn of those who would witness the spectacle. I ask no man to perform the last rites for me;

I entrust my remains to none. Nature has made provision that none shall go unburied. Time will lay away one whom cruelty has cast forth.” Those were eloquent words which Maecenas uttered:

*I want no tomb; for Nature doth provide*

*For outcast bodies burial.*<sup>[16]</sup>

You would imagine that this was the saying of a man of strict principles. He was indeed a man of noble and robust native gifts, but in prosperity he impaired these gifts by laxness.<sup>[17]</sup> Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. The reader will find this topic treated at greater length in Seneca's *De Vita Beata*.
2. i.e., the soul. See Aristotle, *Eth.* 1. 13: “It is stated that the soul has two parts, one irrational and the other possessing reason.” Aristotle further subdivides the irrational part into (1) that which makes for growth and increase, and (2) desire (which will, however, obey reason). In this passage Seneca uses “soul” in its widest sense.
3. Certain of the Peripatetic and Academic school.
4. Probably due to the criticism of the Stoics by Carneades, who said that everything which is according to nature should be classed among the goods.
5. If we call pleasure a good.
6. Cf. § 1 of this letter. Plato gives three divisions—the λογιστικόν, the επιθυμητικόν, and the θυμοειδές which obeys either the first or the second. See his *Republic*, 440.
7. *Aeneid*, iii. 426 ff.
8. § 5.
9. Answering the objection raised in § 14.
10. Cf. Ep. lxxi. 16 *non intenditur virtus*. The Stoic idea of *tension* may be combined here with the raising of a note to a higher pitch.
11. Frag. 138 Usener. Cf. Sen. Ep. lxvi. 47.
12. Vergil, *Aeneid*, v. 363. Vergil MSS. read *pectore*.
13. i.e., to participation in the divine existence.
14. Vergil, *Aeneid*, ix. 485.
15. Cf. Juvenal, x. 65 *Seianus ducitur unco spectandus*. The bodies of criminals were dragged by the hook through the city to the *Scalae Gemoniae*, down which they were flung.
16. Frag. 6 Lunderstedt.

17. The figure is taken from the Roman dress—one who was “girt high” (*alte cinctus*), ready for vigorous walking, being contrasted with the loosely-girdled person (*discinctus*), indolent or effeminate. On the character of Maecenas see Epp. cxiv. 4 ff., xix. 9, cxx. 19.



## AFTERWORD



This is Tim Ferriss again, the producer of this series of *The Tao of Seneca*. On the next page is the first letter of the next volume, Volume 3—“On the Quality, as Contrasted With the Length, of Life.”

I hope you continue reading the letters in Volume 3, which contains some of my personal favorites. You can find that ebook volume for free at [tim.blog/seneca](http://tim.blog/seneca).

At the very least, don't miss the “PROFILES OF MODERN-DAY STOICS” on [pg 285](#) at the end of this volume. They're easy to digest, actionable, and intended to be a low-labor dessert after so much of our dear Seneca. They are no less impactful.

Enjoy,  
Tim





*On the Quality, as Contrasted  
With the Length, of Life*



While reading the letter in which you were lamenting the death of the philosopher Metronax<sup>[1]</sup> as if he might have, and indeed ought to have, lived longer, I missed the spirit of fairness which abounds in all your discussions concerning men and things, but is lacking when you approach one single subject—as is indeed the case with us all. In other words, I have noticed many who deal fairly with their fellow-men, but none who deals fairly with the gods. We rail every day at Fate, saying “Why has A. been carried off in the very middle of his career? Why is not B. carried off instead? Why should he prolong his old age, which is a burden to himself as well as to others?”

But tell me, pray, do you consider it fairer that you should obey Nature, or that Nature should obey you? And what difference does it make how soon you depart from a place which you must depart from sooner or later? We should strive, not to live long, but to live rightly;<sup>[2]</sup> for to achieve long life you have need of Fate only, but for right living you need the soul. A life is really long if it is a full life; but fullness is not attained until the soul has rendered to itself its proper Good,<sup>[3]</sup> that is, until it has assumed control over itself.

What benefit does this older man derive from the eighty years he has spent in idleness? A person like him has not lived; he

has merely tarried awhile in life. Nor has he died late in life; he has simply been a long time dying. He has lived eighty years, has he? That depends upon the date from which you reckon his death! Your other friend,<sup>[4]</sup> however, departed in the bloom of his manhood.

But he had fulfilled all the duties of a good citizen, a good friend, a good son; in no respect had he fallen short. His age may have been incomplete, but his life was complete. The other man has lived eighty years, has he? Nay, he has existed eighty years, unless perchance you mean by “he has lived” what we mean when we say that a tree “lives.”

Pray, let us see to it, my dear Lucilius, that our lives, like jewels of great price, be noteworthy not because of their width but because of their weight.<sup>[5]</sup> Let us measure them by their performance, not by their duration. Would you know wherein lies the difference between this hardy man who, despising Fortune, has served through every campaign of life and has attained to life’s Supreme Good, and that other person over whose head many years have passed? The former exists even after his death; the latter has died even before he was dead.<sup>[6]</sup>

We should therefore praise, and number in the company of the blest, that man who has invested well the portion of time, however little, that has been allotted to him; for such a one has seen the true light. He has not been one of the common herd. He has not only lived, but flourished. Sometimes he enjoyed fair skies; sometimes, as often happens, it was only through the clouds that there flashed to him the radiance of the mighty star.<sup>[7]</sup> Why do you ask: “How long did he live?” He still lives! At one bound he has passed over into posterity and has consigned himself to the guardianship of memory.

And yet I would not on that account decline for myself a few additional years; although, if my life’s space be shortened, I shall

not say that I have lacked aught that is essential to a happy life. For I have not planned to live up to the very last day that my greedy hopes had promised me; nay, I have looked upon every day as if it were my last. Why ask the date of my birth, or whether I am still enrolled on the register of the younger men?<sup>[8]</sup> What I have is my own.

Just as one of small stature can be a perfect man, so a life of small compass can be a perfect life. Age ranks among the external things.<sup>[9]</sup> How long I am to exist is not mine to decide, but how long I shall go on existing in my present way is in my own control. This is the only thing you have the right to require of me—that I shall cease to measure out an inglorious age as it were in darkness, and devote myself to living instead of being carried along past life.

And what, you ask, is the fullest span of life? It is living until you possess wisdom. He who has attained wisdom has reached, not the furthestmost, but the most important, goal. Such a one may indeed exult boldly and give thanks to the gods—aye, and to himself also—and he may count himself Nature's creditor for having lived. He will indeed have the right to do so, for he has paid her back a better life than he has received. He has set up the pattern of a good man, showing the quality and the greatness of a good man. Had another year been added, it would merely have been like the past.

And yet how long are we to keep living? We have had the joy of learning the truth about the universe. We know from what beginnings Nature arises; how she orders the course of the heavens; by what successive changes she summons back the year; how she has brought to an end all things that ever have been, and has established herself as the only end of her own being.<sup>[10]</sup> We know that the stars move by their own motion, and that nothing except the earth stands still, while all the other bodies run on with uninterrupted swiftness.<sup>[11]</sup> We know how the moon outstrips the sun;

why it is that the slower leaves the swifter behind; in what manner she receives her light, or loses it again; what brings on the night, and what brings back the day. To that place you must go where you are to have a closer view of all these things.

“And yet,” says the wise man, “I do not depart more valiantly because of this hope—because I judge the path lies clear before me to my own gods. I have indeed earned admission to their presence, and in fact have already been in their company; I have sent my soul to them as they had previously sent theirs to me. But suppose that I am utterly annihilated, and that after death nothing mortal remains; I have no less courage, even if, when I depart, my course leads—nowhere.”

“But,” you say, “he has not lived as many years as he might have lived.”

There are books which contain very few lines, admirable and useful in spite of their size; and there are also the *Annals of Tanusius*<sup>[12]</sup>—you know how bulky the book is, and what men say of it. This is the case with the long life of certain persons—a state which resembles the *Annals of Tanusius*!

Do you regard as more fortunate the fighter who is slain on the last day of the games than one who goes to his death in the middle of the festivities? Do you believe that anyone is so foolishly covetous of life that he would rather have his throat cut in the dressing-room than in the amphitheatre? It is by no longer an interval than this that we precede one another. Death visits each and all; the slayer soon follows the slain. It is an insignificant trifle, after all, that people discuss with so much concern. And anyhow, what does it matter for how long a time you avoid that which you cannot escape? Farewell.

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#### Footnotes

1. A philosopher of Naples, mentioned as giving lectures there: cf. Ep. lxxvi. 4.
2. i.e., “adequately,” equivalent to ὡς δεῖ.

3. For a complete definition of the Supreme Good cf. Ep. lxxi. 4 ff.
4. i.e., the Metronax mentioned above.
5. For the same phrase see Ep. lxvi. 30 and footnote.
6. Cf. Ep. lx. 4 *mortem suam antecesserunt*.
7. i.e., the Sun.
8. As in the original *comitia centuriata*, men between the ages of seventeen and forty-six.
9. As riches, health, etc.
10. i.e., Nature herself is eternal.
11. See, however, Seneca, *N. Q.* vii. 2. 3 *sciamus utrum mundus terra stante circumeat an mundo stante terra vertatur*. For doubts and discoveries cf. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, pp. 178 f.
12. See Index of Proper Names.

#1 New York Times  
best-selling author of  
*The 4-Hour Workweek*  
*The 4-Hour Body*



# TOOLS OF TITANS

THE TACTICS, ROUTINES, AND HABITS  
OF BILLIONAIRES, ICONS,  
AND WORLD-CLASS PERFORMERS

# TIM FERRISS

# PROFILES OF MODERN-DAY STOICS



The following pages profile modern-day stoics found in [\*Tools of Titans: The Tactics, Routines, and Habits of Billionaires, Icons, and World-Class Performers\*](#). These profiles also include some of their favorite tools and most amusing stories, anecdotes, and quirks. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Even Stoics deserve a laugh once in a while, *n'est-ce pas*?

Here's how they're spread across the volumes of *The Tao of Seneca*:

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**Volume 2** — Tony Robbins, Chris Sacca, Amelia Boone

**Volume 3** — Arnold Schwarzenegger, Naval Ravikant

Not all of the people above would describe themselves as “Stoic,” but they exhibit the qualities Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus would have recognized as such.

All are incredible.

Enjoy,  
Tim Ferriss

P.S. “TIM” or “TF” in the text refers to my words or commentary, as I interviewed the people profiled. Their full 2–3-hour interviews can all be found at [tim.blog/podcast](https://tim.blog/podcast).

# TONY ROBBINS

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Tony Robbins (TW/FB/IG: [@tonyrobbins](#), [tonyrobbins.com](#)) is the world's most famous performance coach. He's advised everyone from Bill Clinton and Serena Williams to Leonardo DiCaprio and Oprah (who calls him "superhuman"). Tony Robbins has consulted or advised international leaders including Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterrand, Princess Diana, Mother Teresa, and three U.S. presidents. Robbins has also developed and produced five award-winning television infomercials that have continuously aired—on average—every 30 minutes, 24 hours a day, somewhere in North America, since 1989.

## BACK STORY

I first read Tony Robbins's *Unlimited Power* in high school, when it was recommended by a straight-A student. Then, just out of college, I listened to a used cassette set of *Personal Power II* during my commute in my mom's hand-me-down minivan. It catalyzed my first real business, which led to many of the adventures (and misadventures) in *The 4-Hour Workweek*. People say, "Don't meet your heroes" because it nearly always ends in disappointment. With Tony, however, it's been the opposite: The more I get to know him, the more he impresses me.



## LITTLE-KNOWN FACT

The first Instagram pic I ever posted (@timferriss) was of Tony literally palming my entire face. His hands are like catcher's mitts.

## "I DIDN'T SURVIVE, I *PREPARED*."

Nelson Mandela's answer when Tony asked him, "Sir, how did you survive all those years in prison?"

## IS THERE A QUOTE THAT GUIDES YOUR LIFE?

"It's a belief: **Life is always happening *for* us, not *to* us.** It's our job to find out where the benefit is. If we do, life is magnificent."

## SHORT AND SWEET

"'Stressed' is the achiever word for 'fear.'"

"Losers react, leaders anticipate."

"Mastery doesn't come from an infographic. What you *know* doesn't mean shit. What do you *do* consistently?"

## THE BEST INVESTMENT HE'S EVER MADE?

\$35 for a 3-hour Jim Rohn seminar, attended at age 17. He agonized over the \$35 decision, as he was making \$40 a week as a janitor, but Jim gave Tony's life direction. Decades later, when Tony asked Warren Buffett what his all-time best investment was, the answer was a Dale Carnegie public speaking course, taken at age 20. Prior to that, Buffett would vomit before public speaking. After the course—and this is the critical piece—Buffett immediately went to the University of Omaha and asked to teach, as he didn't want to lapse back into his old behaviors. As Tony recounted, Buffett told him, "Investing in yourself is the most important investment you'll ever make in your life. . . . There's no financial investment that'll ever match it, because if you develop more skill,

more ability, more insight, more capacity, that's what's going to really provide economic freedom. . . . It's those skill sets that really make that happen." This echoes what Jim Rohn famously said, "If you let your learning lead to knowledge, you become a fool. If you let your learning lead to action, you become wealthy."

## QUALITY QUESTIONS CREATE A QUALITY LIFE

Tony sometimes phrases this as, "The quality of your life is the quality of your questions." Questions determine your focus. Most people—and I'm certainly guilty of this at times—spend their lives focusing on negativity (e.g., "How could he say that to me?!") and therefore the wrong priorities.

## A FOCUS ON "ME" = SUFFERING

"This brain inside our heads is a 2 million-year-old brain. . . . It's ancient, old survival software that is running you a good deal of time. Whenever you're suffering, that survival software is there. **The reason you're suffering is you're focused on yourself.** People tell me, 'I'm not suffering that way. I'm worrying about my kids. My kids are not what they need to be.' No, the reason [these people are] upset is they feel they failed their kids. It's still about them. . . . Suffering comes from three thought patterns: loss, less, never."

**TF:** The bolded portion above, combined with another friend's advice, changed my life. It took a while for me to connect the dots. I don't think I'm a complete narcissist (too bald and pale for that), but I still wondered how to put this into a concrete daily practice. Then, I learned the dead simple "loving-kindness meditation" exercise from my friend Chade-Meng Tan (page 157), which had a profound effect after just 3 to 4 days. Try it.

## STATE → STORY → STRATEGY

I learned this from my first Tony Robbins event, Unleash the Power Within (UPW), which Tony invited me to after our first podcast. Perhaps more than any other lesson from Tony, I've thought about this the most in the last year. If you were to look at my daily journal right now, you'd see that I've scribbled "STATE → STORY → STRATEGY" at the top of each page for the next several weeks. It's a reminder to check the boxes in that order.

Tony believes that, in a lowered emotional state, we only see the problems, not solutions. Let's say you wake up feeling tired and overwhelmed. You sit down to brainstorm strategies to solve your issues, but it comes to naught, and you feel even worse afterward. This is because you started in a negative state, then attempted strategy but didn't succeed (due to tunnel vision on the problems), and then likely told yourself self-defeating stories (e.g., "I always do this. Why am I so wound up I can't even think straight?"). To fix this, he encourages you to "prime" your state first. The biochemistry will help you proactively tell yourself an enabling story. Only then do you think on strategy, as you'll see the options instead of dead ends.

"Priming" my state is often as simple as doing 5 to 10 push-ups or getting 20 minutes of sun exposure (see Rick Rubin, page 502). Even though I do my most intense exercise at night, I've started doing 1–2 minutes of calisthenics—or kettlebell swings (see Justin Boreta, page 356)—in the morning to set my state for the day. Tony's own priming process is included below.

I now often ask myself, "Is this really a problem I need to *think* my way out of? Or is it possible I just need to fix my biochemistry?" I've wasted a lot of time journaling on "problems" when I just needed to eat breakfast sooner, do 10 push-ups, or get an extra hour of sleep. Sometimes, you think you have to figure out

your life's purpose, but you really just need some macadamia nuts and a cold fucking shower.

## **MORNING “PRIMING” INSTEAD OF MEDITATION**

Upon waking, Tony immediately goes into his priming routine, which is intended to produce a rapid change in his physiology: “To me, if you want a primetime life, you’ve got to prime daily.” There are many tools that I’ve seen Tony use over the years, several of which I’ve adopted for myself, including:

- Cold-water plunge (I use a quick cold shower, which could be just 30 to 60 seconds).
- Tony follows this with breathing exercises. He does 3 sets of 30 reps. His seated technique is similar to the rapid nasal “breath of fire” in yoga, but he adds in rapid overhead extension of the arms on the inhale, with the elbows dropping down the rib cage on the exhale.
- Alternative: “Breath walking.” This is vintage Tony, but I still use it quite often when traveling. Simply walk for a few minutes, using a breathing cycle of 4 short inhales through the nose, then 4 short exhales through the mouth.

Following something like the above, Tony does 9 to 10 minutes of what some might consider meditation. To him, however, the objective is very different: It’s about cueing and prompting enabling emotions for the rest of the day. His 9 to 10 minutes are broken into thirds. Here is an abbreviated synopsis:

The first 3 minutes: “Feeling totally grateful for three things. I make sure that one of them is very, very simple: the wind on my face, the reflection of the clouds that I just saw. But I don’t just think gratitude. I let gratitude fill my soul, because when you’re

grateful, we all know there's no anger. It's impossible to be angry and grateful simultaneously. When you're grateful, there is no fear. You can't be fearful and grateful simultaneously."

The second 3 minutes: "Total focus on feeling the presence of God, if you will, however you want to language that for yourself. But this inner presence coming in, and feeling it heal everything in my body, in my mind, my emotions, my relationships, my finances. I see it as solving anything that needs to be solved. I experience the strengthening of my gratitude, of my conviction, of my passion. . . ."

The last 3 minutes: "Focusing on three things that I'm going to make happen, my 'three to thrive.' . . . **See it as though it's already been done, feel the emotions, etc. . . .**

"And, as I've always said, there's no excuse not to do 10 minutes. If you don't have 10 minutes, you don't have a life."

This reminded me of something I've heard from many adept meditators (such as Russell Simmons) in various forms: "If you don't have 20 minutes to delve into yourself through meditation, then that means you really need 2 hours."

## **FOUR COMMONALITIES ACROSS THE BEST INVESTORS**

Tony has interviewed and developed friendships with some of the best investors in the world, including Paul Tudor Jones (who he's coached for more than 10 years), Ray Dalio, Carl Icahn, David Swensen, Kyle Bass, and many more. These are the hard-to-interview "unicorns" who consistently beat the market, despite the fact that it's called impossible. Tony wrote a book based on his learnings (*Money: Master the Game*), and here are few of the patterns he identified:

**1 Capping the downside:** “Every single one of those [people] is obsessed with *not* losing money. I mean, a level of obsession that’s mind-boggling.” On Richard Branson: “His first question to every business is, ‘What’s the downside? And how do I protect against it?’ Like when he did his piece with Virgin [air travel]—that’s a big risk to start an airline—he went to Boeing and negotiated a deal that [he] could send the planes back if it didn’t work, and he wasn’t liable.”

**TF:** Branson also tested with little or no risk. In *Losing My Virginity*, which had a huge impact on me around college graduation, he described his very first flight: “We were trying to catch a flight to Puerto Rico, but the local Puerto Rican scheduled flight was canceled. The airport terminal was full of stranded passengers. I made a few calls to charter companies, and agreed to charter a plane for \$2,000 to Puerto Rico. I divided the price by the number of seats, borrowed a blackboard, and wrote VIRGIN AIRWAYS: \$39 SINGLE FLIGHT TO PUERTO RICO. I walked around the airport terminal and soon filled every seat on the charter plane. As we landed in Puerto Rico, a passenger turned to me and said: ‘Virgin Airways isn’t too bad—smarten up the service a little and you could be in business.’ ”

Back to Tony, “cap the downside” also applies to thinking long-term about fees and middlemen: “If three of my friends [and I] all put aside the same amount of money, and we all get a 7% return, but my buddy’s getting fees of 3%, my other buddy’s 2%, and I’m 1%, and all three of us put \$1 million in or \$100,000 . . . the person with 3% of fees ends up with 65% less money [in the long-term]. . . .”

**2 Asymmetrical risks and rewards:** “Every single one of them is obsessed with asymmetrical risk and reward. . . . It simply means they’re looking to use the least amount of risk to get the

max amount of upside, and that's what they live for. . . . [They don't believe they] have to take huge risks for huge rewards. **Say, 'How do I get no risk and get huge rewards?' and because you ask a question continuously and you believe [there's an] answer, you get it.'**

**TF:** Here's a wild example. Kyle Bass at one point bought \$1 million worth of nickels (roughly 20 million coins). Why? Because their face value was 5 cents and their scrap metal value was 6.8 cents at the time. That's an immediate gain of \$360,000. Nicely done.

**3 Asset allocation:** “**They absolutely, beyond a shadow of a doubt, know they're going to be wrong** . . . so they set up an asset allocation system that will make them successful. They all agree asset allocation is the single most important investment decision.” In *Money: Master the Game*, Ray Dalio elaborated for Tony: “When people think they've got a balanced portfolio, stocks are three times more volatile than bonds.

So when you're 50/50, you're really 90/10. You really are massively at risk, and that's why when the markets go down, you get eaten alive. . . . Whatever asset class you invest in, I promise you, in your lifetime, it will drop no less than 50% and more likely 70% at some point. That is why you absolutely must diversify.”

**4 Contribution:** “And the last one that I found: almost all of them were real givers, not just givers on the surface . . . but really passionate about giving. . . . It was really real.”

**TF:** One great example is the Robin Hood Foundation, conceived of by Paul Tudor Jones, which fights poverty in New York City.

**\* Who comes to mind when I say the word “punchable”?**

For a few dozen podcast episodes, I asked the question: “When you think of the word ‘punchable,’ whose face is the first that comes to mind?” Nine times out of ten, it fell flat, and I’ve since stopped asking it. But in my interview with Tony, all of those flops were redeemed. He took a long pause and then said, “Punchable. Oh, my gosh. Well, I had an interesting meeting with President Obama . . .” and proceeded to describe a closed-session conversation with President Obama (you can hear the full story at 42:15 in episode #38). It was one of those “God, I really hope my audio equipment is working” moments. He closed it with “So, I don’t know if I’d say ‘punch,’ but ‘shake’ him.”

**\* Most-gifted or recommended books**

*Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl

*The Fourth Turning* by William Strauss (Also, *Generations* by William Strauss, which was gifted to Tony by Bill Clinton)

*Mindset* by Carol Dweck (for parenting)

*As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen (see Shay Carl, page 441)



# CHRIS SACCA

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Chris Sacca (TW/FB/IG/SC: [@sacca](#), [lowercasecapital.com](#)) is an early-stage investor in dozens of companies, including Twitter, Uber, Instagram, Kickstarter, and Twilio. He was the [cover story](#) of *Forbes's* Midas issue in 2015 thanks to what will likely be the most successful venture capital fund in history, Lowercase I of Lowercase Capital. (Get the name? It took me embarrassingly long.) Previously, Chris was Head of Special Initiatives at Google Inc., and he is currently a recurring guest Shark on ABC's *Shark Tank*.

*“It may be lucky, but it’s not an accident.”*

## RANDOM BITS

- I first met Chris in 2008 at a barbecue organized by Kevin Rose (page 340). For my entire life, I'd had a phobia of swimming and an acute fear of drowning. This came up over wine, and Chris said, “I have the answer to your prayers.” He introduced me to Total Immersion swimming by Terry Laughlin, and in less than 10 days of solo training, I went from a 2-length maximum (of a 25-yard pool) to swimming more than 40 lengths per workout in sets of 2 and 4. It blew my mind, and now I swim for fun.
- Chris is one of the people who generously mentored me in the startup investing game. The other majors include Naval

Ravikant (page 546), Kevin Rose (page 340), and Mike Maples, who got me started (see the Real-World MBA on page 250).

- Chris mentioned several books when he appeared on my podcast, including *I Seem to Be a Verb* by Buckminster Fuller. 48 hours later, used copies were selling for \$999 on Amazon.

## ARE YOU PLAYING OFFENSE OR DEFENSE?

Despite the fact that people refer to Chris as a “Silicon Valley investor,” he hasn’t lived in San Francisco since 2007. Instead, he bought a cabin in rural Truckee, Tahoe’s less-expensive neighbor, and moved to prime skiing and hiking country. It is no tech hot-bed. Back then, Chris hadn’t yet made real money in the investing game, but he had a rationale for buying the getaway:

“I wanted to go on offense. I wanted to have the time to focus, to learn the things I wanted to learn, to build what I wanted to build, and to really invest in relationships that I wanted to grow, rather than just doing a day of coffee after coffee after coffee.”

**TF:** He no longer felt compelled to take meetings he didn’t want. There were no more early-morning coffee dates and late-night social dinners he didn’t want to attend. Rather, Chris invited specific founders to spend weekends at “the jam pad” and “the jam tub” (the hot tub outside). He considers the cabin the best investment he’s ever made:

“Everyone loves coming to the mountains. Over the years, that’s helped me build lasting friendships. Some of those have been the catalysts for my investments in Uber, Twitter, and others. I’ve even had a body-hacking, grill-manning, best-selling author stay there a few times. [**TF:** I also embarrassed myself with Euro-style Speedos.] I borrow the cash for a 3-bedroom house and

get a lifetime's worth of pals and a hugely successful business in return? Best trade ever.”

Chris elaborates: “Generally, what all of this comes down to is whether you are on offense or defense. I think that as you survey the challenges in your lives, it’s just: **Which of those did you assign yourself, and which of those are you doing to please someone else? Your inbox is a to-do list to which anyone in the world can add an action item.** I needed to get out of my inbox and back to my own to-do list.”

## **GO TO AS MANY HIGHER-LEVEL MEETINGS AS POSSIBLE**

**TIM:** “If working in a startup environment, what should one do or focus on to learn and improve as much as possible?”

**CHRIS:** “Go to all the meetings you can, even if you’re not invited to them, and figure out how to be helpful. If people wonder why you’re there, just start taking notes. Read all the other notes you can find on the company, and gain a general knowledge that your very limited job function may not offer you. Just make yourself useful and helpful by doing so. That’s worked for me in a few different environments, and I encourage you to try it.”

**TF:** Chris was well known at Google for showing up to meetings with anyone, including the co-founders. Even if attendees looked at each other puzzled, Chris would sit down and let them know he’d be taking notes for them. It worked. He got a front-row seat to the highest levels of Google and soon became a fixture in those meetings.

## **COWBOY SHIRTS**

Chris is known for wearing somewhat ridiculous cowboy shirts. They’ve become his signature style. Here’s a bit more context, from a *Forbes* profile of Chris by Alex Konrad: “Steve Jobs had his black

turtleneck. Chris Sacca has his embroidered cowboy shirt. He bought his first one, impulsively, at the Reno airport en route to a speech, and the reaction prompted him to buy out half the store on his return.” He likes the brands Scully and Rockmount. A good place to look at a wide selection is [VintageWesternWear.com](http://VintageWesternWear.com).

A shirt might seem like a small thing, but Chris realized early on that being a successful investor isn’t simply knowing which companies to invest in. Part of the process is ensuring founders know who you are. If a single shirt can create seemingly unending media mentions and doesn’t hurt your reputation, it’s low-hanging fruit. On top of that: “It also saved me a lot of time thinking about what to wear and a lot of money that would’ve been wasted on suits.”

### **WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH — “TONIGHT, I WILL BE IN MY BED.”**

In 2009, Chris did a charity bicycle ride with the Trek Travel team from Santa Barbara, California, to Charleston, North Carolina:

“I had a phrase I kept repeating in my head over and over again, which was, ‘Tonight, I will be in my bed. Tonight, I will be in my bed. Tonight, I will be in my bed.’ . . . It was something I repeated to remind me that the pain of what I was going through was temporary and that, no matter what, at the end of that day, I would be in my bed that night.”

### **ON THE ADVANTAGE OF CULTIVATING BEGINNER’S MIND**

**“Experience often deeply embeds the assumptions that need to be questioned in the first place.** When you have a lot of experience with something, you don’t notice the things that are new about it. You don’t notice the idiosyncrasies that need to be

tweaked. You don't notice where the gaps are, what's missing, or what's not really working."

**TF:** Just like Malcolm Gladwell's dad (see page 573) and Alex Blumberg (page 303), Chris is incredibly smart about asking the "dumb" questions hiding in plain sight.

## **EMPATHY ISN'T JUST GOOD FOR LIFE, IT'S GOOD FOR BUSINESS**

"As a builder, as an entrepreneur, how can you create something for someone else if you don't have even enough glancing familiarity with them to imagine the world through their eyes?"

## **SWEET AND SOUR SUMMERS**

"There is something my parents did, and it was pretty unique. My brother and I refer to it as 'The Sweet and Sour Summer.' My parents would send us, for the first half of the summer, to an internship with a relative or a friend of the family who had an interesting job. So, at 12, I went and interned with my godbrother, who is a lobbyist in D.C. I would go along with him to pitch congressmen. I had one tie, and I was a pretty good writer. I'd write up one-page summaries of these bills we were pitching, and I'd literally sit there with these congressmen with these filthy mouths—you know, the old Alabaman senator and stuff like that—and watch the pitch happen. It was awesome. I learned so much and developed so much confidence, and really honed my storytelling skills.

"But then, from there, I would come home and work in a construction outfit, in a nasty, nasty job. I mean, hosing off the equipment that had been used to fix septic systems, gassing shit up, dragging shit around in the yard, filling up propane tanks. Just being the junior guy on the totem pole, and quite literally getting my ass kicked by whichever parolee was angry at me that day. I

think it was part of their master plan, which was: There's a world of cool opportunities out there for you, but let's build within you a sense of not just work ethic, but also, a little kick in the ass about why you don't wanna end up in one of those real jobs. . . ."

**TIM:** "You had the introduction to the godbrother, for the lobbying. Did your parents also help organize the sour part of each summer?"

**CHRIS:** "The guy who ran that construction company is my dad's best friend, and he was under strict orders to make sure we had the roughest day there."

### **"GOOD STORIES ALWAYS BEAT GOOD SPREADSHEETS"**

"Whether you are raising money, pitching your product to customers, selling the company, or recruiting employees, never forget that underneath all the math and the MBA bullshit talk, we are all still emotionally driven human beings. We want to attach ourselves to narratives. We don't act because of equations. We follow our beliefs. We get behind leaders who stir our feelings. In the early days of your venture, if you find someone diving too deep into the numbers, that means they are struggling to find a reason to deeply care about you."

### **"BE YOUR UNAPOLOGETICALLY WEIRD SELF"**

"I gave a commencement speech in Minnesota few years ago [at the Carlson School of Management]. The core of it was to **be your unapologetically weird self**. I think authenticity is one of the most lacking things out there these days."

An excerpt from that speech: "Weirdness is why we adore our friends. . . . Weirdness is what bonds us to our colleagues. Weirdness is what sets us apart, gets us hired. Be your unapologetically weird self. In fact, being weird may even find you the ultimate happiness."

**TF:** As an example—mullet wigs.

**CHRIS:** “If you could bring one thing to make for an amazing party night, it’s wigs, seriously. Go to Amazon right now and order 50 mullet wigs. Mullet wigs change everything.”

# AMELIA BOONE

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Amelia Boone (Twitter: [@ameliaboone](#), [ameliaboone.com](#)) has been called “the Michael Jordan of obstacle course racing” (OCR) and is widely considered the world’s most decorated obstacle racer. Since the inception of the sport, she’s amassed more than 30 victories and 50 podiums. In the 2012 World’s Toughest Mudder competition, which lasts 24 hours (she covered 90 miles and ~300 obstacles), she finished second OVERALL out of more than 1,000 competitors, 80% of whom were male. The one person who beat her finished just 8 minutes ahead of her. Her major victories include the Spartan Race World Championship and the Spartan Race Elite Point Series, and she is the only three-time winner of the World’s Toughest Mudder (2012, 2014, and 2015). She won the 2014 championship 8 weeks after knee surgery. Amelia is also a threetime finisher of the Death Race, a full-time attorney at Apple, and she dabbles in ultra running (qualified for the Western States 100) in all of her spare time.

*“I’m not the strongest. I’m not the fastest.  
But I’m really good at suffering.”*

**\* What would you put on a billboard?**

“No one owes you anything.”



### \* Amelia's best \$100 or less purchase?

Manuka honey bandages. Amelia has scars all over her shoulders and back from barbed-wire wounds.

### \* Most-gifted or recommended book

*House of Leaves* by Mark Danielewski: "This is a book that you have to hold, because there are parts of it where you need to turn it upside down to read it. There are certain pages where, you are reading it, and it turns in a circle. . . . This is a book that's an entire sensory experience."

## AMELIA'S TIPS AND TACTICS

- Hydrolyzed gelatin + beet root powder: I've consumed gelatin for connective tissue repair in the past. I've never stuck with it long term because gelatin takes on a seagull poo-like texture when mixed into cold water. Amelia saved my palate and joints by introducing me to the Great Lakes hydrolyzed version (green label), which blends easily and smoothly. Add a tablespoon of beet root powder like BeetElite to stave off any cow-hoof flavor, and it's a whole new game. Amelia uses BeetElite pre-race and pre-training for its endurance benefits, but I'm much harder-core: I use it to make tart, low-carb gummy bears when fat Tim has carb cravings.
- RumbleRoller: Think foam roller meets monster-truck tire. Foam rollers have historically done very little for me, but this torture device had an immediate positive impact on my recovery. (It also helps you sleep if used before bed.) Warning: Start slow. I tried to copy Amelia and did 20-plus minutes my first session. The next day, I felt like I'd been put in a sleeping bag and swung against a tree for a few hours.

- Rolling your foot on top of a golf ball on the floor to increase “hamstring” flexibility. This is infinitely more helpful than a lacrosse ball. Put a towel on the floor underneath the golf ball, lest you shoot your dog’s eye out.
- Concept2 SkiErg for training when your lower body is injured. After knee surgery, Amelia used this low-impact machine to maintain cardiovascular endurance and prepare for the 2014 World’s Toughest Mudder, which she won 8 weeks post-op. Kelly Starrett (page 122) is also a big fan of this device.
- Dry needling: I’d never heard of this before meeting Amelia. “[In acupuncture] the goal is not to feel the needle. In dry-needling, you are sticking the needle in the muscle belly and trying to get it to twitch, and the twitch is the release.” It’s used for super-tight, over-contracted muscles, and the needles are not left in. Unless you’re a masochist, don’t have this done on your calves.
- Sauna for endurance: Amelia has found using a sauna improves her endurance, a concept that has since been confirmed by several other athletes, including cyclist David Zabriskie, seven-time U.S. National Time Trial Championship winner. He considers sauna training a more practical replacement for high-altitude simulation tents. In the 2005 Tour de France, Dave won the Stage 1 time trial, making him the first American to win stages in all three Grand Tours. Zabriskie beat Lance Armstrong by seconds, clocking an average speed of 54.676 kilometers per hour (!). I now use a sauna at least four times per week. To figure out the best protocols, I asked another podcast guest, Rhonda Patrick. Her response is on page 7.

**\* Who do you think of when you hear the word “successful”?**

“Triple H is a great example [of someone who’s transitioned extremely well from athlete to business executive]. So, Paul Levesque.” (See page 128.)

**RANDOM FACTS**

- Amelia eats Pop-Tarts as part of her ritual pre-competition breakfast.
- Her record for unbroken double-unders (passing a jump rope under your feet twice with one jump) is 423, and is thus able to impress all CrossFitters. Unbeknownst to them, she was a state jump rope champion in third grade. Also unbeknownst to them, she ended at 423 because she had to pee so badly that she peed her pants.
- Amelia loves doing training runs in the rain and cold, as she knows her competition is probably opting out. This is an example of “rehearsing the worst-case scenario” to become more resilient (see page 474).
- She is a gifted a cappella singer and was part of the Green-leafs group at Washington University in St. Louis.