Letters to Lucilius

SENECA

c. 4 BC – AD 65

Letters to Lucilius

Epistulae morales ad Lucilium

Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited

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Letters to Lucilius · Seneca (c. 4 BC – AD 65)

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INTRODUCTION

In the last years of his life, around AD 62–65, the Roman statesman and Stoic philosopher Seneca wrote a series of letters to his younger friend Lucilius, a Roman official in Sicily. They survive as 124 letters, and they are among the most readable works of ancient philosophy.

Each letter takes up a single theme — how to use time, how to face death, how to treat a slave, why a crowd is dangerous, what friendship is, how to read — and turns it into practical advice, often capped by a memorable line. Seneca had been Nero's tutor and adviser; he was soon to be ordered to take his own life. The letters are his attempt to show that philosophy is a way of living, not a subject.

The early letters each end with a "gift": a saying, often from Epicurus, the rival school Seneca freely borrows from.

Book I

On saving time (1), on reading (2), on crowds (7), on old age (12).

LETTER 1: ON SAVING TIME

Time is the only thing truly ours, so gather it up and guard it, since while we postpone, life speeds by.

1.1 Do this, my Lucilius: claim yourself for yourself. The time that until now was being taken from you, or stolen, or simply slipping away—gather it up and guard it. Convince yourself that it is just as I write: some of our time is snatched from us, some is quietly filched, some drains away. Yet the most shameful loss is the one that comes through carelessness. And if you care to look closely, the greatest part of life slips away from us while we do wrong, a large part while we do nothing, and the whole of it while we do something other than what we should.[1]

1.2 Can you show me anyone who puts some value on time, who reckons what a day is worth, who understands that he is dying every day? This is where we go wrong: we look ahead to death, but a great part of it is already behind us. Whatever years lie in the past, death holds. So, my Lucilius, do what you write that you are doing: grasp every hour. That way you will depend less on tomorrow, if you lay hold of today. While we postpone, life speeds by.

1.3 Everything, Lucilius, belongs to others; only time is ours. Nature has put us in possession of this one thing, fleeting and

1 Lucilius Junior, Seneca's younger friend, was then serving as the emperor's procurator in Sicily.

slippery as it is, and anyone who wants to can evict us from it. And such is the folly of mortals that they allow themselves to be charged for the smallest and cheapest things—things that can certainly be replaced—once they have obtained them; yet no one who has been given time thinks he owes anything, when this is the one thing that not even a grateful person can pay back.

1.4 You may ask what I do myself, I who lecture you like this. I will admit it frankly: I do what an extravagant but careful man does—I keep an account of my spending. I cannot say that I lose nothing, but I can tell you what I lose, and why, and how. I can give the reasons for my poverty. But what happens to me is what happens to most people who are reduced to want through no fault of their own: everyone forgives, nobody helps.

1.5 What, then? I do not consider a man poor if whatever little he has left is enough for him. Still, I would rather you held on to what is yours—and you will be starting at a good time. For as our ancestors thought, thrift comes too late at the bottom of the jar. What remains at the bottom is not only the least but the worst. Farewell.[2]

LETTER 2: ON READING

Stay with a few proven authors and digest them, rather than skimming many books, as a restless mind does.

2.1 From what you write me, and from what I hear, I am forming high hopes of you. You don't rush about, and you don't unsettle yourself by changing places. That kind of tossing to and fro belongs to a sick mind. The first sign of a well-ordered mind, I think, is to be able to stay put and keep one's own company.

2.2 But be careful that this reading of many authors and books of every kind doesn't have something aimless and unsteady about it. You should linger over a select few minds and feed on them, if you want to draw from them something that will settle faithfully in your mind. Whoever is everywhere is nowhere.

2 A proverb about wine, whose dregs are both scanty and poor; compare Hesiod, *Works and Days* 369.

People who spend their lives traveling end up with many hosts but no friends. The same is bound to happen to those who attach themselves closely to no one mind, but let everything pass through them in a rush.

2.3 Food does no good and adds nothing to the body if it passes straight out as soon as it is eaten. Nothing hinders health so much as constantly switching remedies. A wound will not scar over if one medicine after another is tried on it. A plant that is often moved never grows strong. Nothing is so useful that it can help just in passing. A multitude of books pulls you in different directions. So since you cannot read as many books as you might own, it is enough to own as many as you can read.

2.4 "But," you say, "I want to open this book now, and now that one." It is the mark of a jaded stomach to nibble at many dishes; when they are varied and mixed, they pollute rather than nourish. So always read authors of proven worth, and if you ever feel like turning aside to others, come back to the ones before. Each day, acquire some help against poverty, some against death, and no less against the other plagues; and when you have run through many things, pick out one to digest that day.

2.5 I do this myself: of the many things I have read, I seize on one. Today's is something I came across in Epicurus—for I often cross over even into the other side's camp, not as a deserter but as a scout.[3]

2.6 "Cheerful poverty," he says, "is an honorable thing." But it is not poverty at all if it is cheerful. It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, who is poor. What difference does it make how much he has lying in his strongbox or in his granaries, how many herds he grazes or how much he lends at interest, if he is eyeing what belongs to others, if he counts not what he has gained but what is still to be gained? You ask what the proper limit of wealth is? First, to have what is necessary; next, to have what is enough. Farewell.

3 Epicurus (341–270 BC), founder of the rival Epicurean school; Seneca offers a saying of his as a daily "gift" in many of the early letters.

LETTER 3: ON TRUE AND FALSE FRIENDSHIP

Judge a man carefully before befriending him, then trust him as fully as you trust yourself.

3.1 You have given your letters for me, you write, to a friend of yours to deliver. Then you warn me not to share with him everything that concerns you, since you yourself are not in the habit of doing so either. So in the same letter you have both called him a friend and denied it. Well, if you used that word, which has a precise meaning, as if it were common coin, and called him a friend the way we call all candidates for office "good men," or greet people we meet as "sir" when their names escape us—let it pass.

3.2 But if you consider anyone a friend whom you do not trust as much as yourself, you are badly mistaken and do not really understand the force of true friendship. Do discuss everything with a friend—but first discuss the friend himself. After friendship comes trust; before friendship, judgment. Those people get their duties backward who, contrary to the precepts of Theophrastus, judge after they have come to love, and do not love after they have judged. Think long about whether to admit someone into your friendship. Once you decide to, welcome him with your whole heart, and speak as boldly with him as with yourself.[4]

3.3 Live, indeed, in such a way that you entrust nothing to yourself that you could not entrust even to your enemy. But since certain matters come up that custom treats as secret, share all your worries and all your thoughts with your friend. Think him loyal and you will make him so. For some people have taught others to deceive by fearing to be deceived, and by their suspicion have given them the right to do wrong. Why should I hold back any words in front of my friend? Why should I not think myself alone when I am with him?

4 Theophrastus (c. 371–287 BC), Aristotle's successor as head of his school, wrote a work *On Friendship*.

3.4 Some people tell passersby what should be entrusted only to friends, and unload whatever is weighing on them into any ear at all. Others, by contrast, dread having even those dearest to them in on anything; if they could, they would not trust even themselves, and they bury every secret deep inside. Neither is right. Both are faults—trusting everyone and trusting no one—though I would call the one the more honorable fault, the other the safer;

3.5 just as you should blame both those who are always restless and those who are always at rest. For the bustle that delights in commotion is not industry but the scurrying of a harried mind. And the rest that counts every movement a nuisance is not rest but slackness and languor.

3.6 So you will commit to memory this line I read in Pomponius: "Some people have fled so far into hiding that they think whatever is in the light is in turmoil." These two must be blended: the one at rest must act, and the one acting must rest. Consult nature: she will tell you that she made both day and night. Farewell.[5]

LETTER 4: ON THE TERRORS OF DEATH

Death, the last of evils, is no great evil, and anyone who despises his own life is free of fear.

4.1 Keep on as you have begun, and hurry as much as you can, so that you may enjoy a mind that is corrected and settled for longer. You do enjoy it even while you are correcting it, even while you are settling it; but there is a different pleasure, the one that comes from contemplating a mind that is pure of every stain and shining.

4.2 You surely remember how much joy you felt when you laid aside the bordered toga of boyhood, put on the toga of manhood, and were escorted into the forum. Expect a greater joy when you have laid aside a boy's mind and philosophy has

5 Probably Publius Pomponius Secundus, a tragic poet and statesman of the generation before Seneca.

enrolled you among men. For what still remains in us is not childhood but, what is worse, childishness. And this is all the worse because we have the authority of old men and the faults of boys—and not only of boys, but of infants. Boys fear trivial things, infants imaginary things; we fear both.[6]

4.3 Just keep making progress; you will understand that some things are less to be feared precisely because they bring us so much fear. No evil is great that is the last one. Death is coming to you: it would be something to fear if it could stay with you; but it must either not reach you or pass on.

4.4 "It is hard," you say, "to bring the mind to the point of despising life." But don't you see for what trivial reasons life is despised? One man hanged himself at his mistress's door; another threw himself from a roof so as not to hear his master's temper any longer; another, to avoid being brought back after running away, drove a blade into his belly. Don't you think virtue will achieve what excessive fear achieves? No one can have a life free from care who thinks too much about prolonging it, who counts many consulships among the great goods.[7]

4.5 Rehearse this every day, so that you can leave life with a calm mind—life, which many people clutch and cling to the way those swept away by a torrent grab at brambles and sharp rocks. Most people toss about wretchedly between fear of death and the torments of life: they do not want to live, and they do not know how to die.

4.6 So make your whole life pleasant by setting aside all anxiety about it. No good thing benefits its possessor unless the mind is prepared to lose it; and nothing is easier to lose than what, once lost, cannot be missed. So against these things, which can befall even the most powerful, encourage and toughen yourself.

4.7 A boy and a eunuch passed sentence on Pompey's head; a cruel and arrogant Parthian on Crassus's. Gaius Caesar ordered

6 Freeborn Roman boys wore the purple-bordered *toga praetexta*; in their mid-teens they put on the plain adult toga in a ceremony that ended in the forum.

Lepidus to offer his neck to the tribune Dexter; he himself offered his own to Chaerea. Fortune has raised no one so high that she does not threaten him with as much as she has allowed him. Do not trust this calm: in a moment the sea is churned up. On the same day that boats were playing, they are swallowed.[8]

4.8 Remember that a robber or an enemy can put a sword to your throat. Even without any greater power, every slave holds the power of life and death over you. I put it this way: whoever despises his own life is master of yours. Go over the examples of those who died from plots in their own homes, by open force or by trickery: you will see that no fewer have fallen to the anger of slaves than to the anger of kings. So what does it matter to you how powerful the person you fear is, when what you fear him for is something anyone can do?

4.9 But suppose you fall into enemy hands: the victor will order you to be led away—yes, to the very place you are being led anyway. Why deceive yourself, and only now realize what you have been undergoing all along? I put it this way: from the moment you were born, you have been led there. These thoughts, and others like them, must be turned over in the mind if we want to await that last hour calmly—the hour whose fear makes all the others restless.

4.10 But to bring this letter to an end, here is what pleased me today. This too is picked from someone else's garden: "Poverty brought into line with the law of nature is great wealth." And do you know what limits that law of nature sets for us? Not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold. To drive off hunger and thirst, you do not need to sit on proud men's doorsteps or put up with their heavy frowns and even their insulting kindness; you

7 Romans named each year after its consuls, so to count many consulships is to live many years.

8 Pompey was killed in Egypt in 48 BC at the order of the boy-king Ptolemy XIII and his eunuch minister Pothinus; Crassus fell fighting the Parthians in 53 BC. Gaius Caesar is the emperor Caligula, who had Lepidus executed in AD 39 and was himself assassinated by the officer Chaerea in AD 41.

do not need to brave the seas or follow the army. What nature requires is easy to get and close at hand.[9]

4.11 It is for superfluous things that we sweat. Those are what wear our togas threadbare, force us to grow old in a tent, and drive us onto foreign shores. What is enough is at hand. Whoever is on good terms with poverty is rich. Farewell.[10]

LETTER 5: ON THE PHILOSOPHER'S MEAN

A philosopher should live better than the crowd without flaunting strange dress or squalor, and should stop both hoping and fearing.

5.1 That you are studying persistently and, dropping everything else, doing this one thing—making yourself better every day—I both approve and rejoice at, and I not only urge you to keep at it, I beg you. But I do warn you of this: don't be like those who want to be noticed rather than to make progress, and do things that make your dress or way of life conspicuous.

5.2 Avoid rough clothing, uncut hair, an unkempt beard, a declared hatred of silver, a bed laid on the ground, and whatever else self-promotion pursues by a perverse route. The very name of philosophy, even when handled modestly, draws enough resentment; what if we begin to set ourselves apart from people's customs? Inwardly, let everything be different; outwardly, let us fit in with the public.

5.3 Let our toga not be gleaming, but not filthy either. Let us not have silver inlaid with solid gold, but let us not think that doing without gold and silver is proof of frugality. Let us aim to live a better life than the crowd, not an opposite one; otherwise we drive away and repel the very people we want to reform. We also bring it about that they want to imitate nothing of ours, for fear they would have to imitate everything.

5.4 The first thing philosophy promises is fellow feeling, humanity, and fellowship. Being different will cut us off from

9 The saying is Epicurus', whose school was known as the Garden.
10 The threadbare toga is that of the client paying daily court to a patron; the tent is the soldier's.

that promise. Let us make sure that the things by which we hope to win admiration are not ridiculous and offensive. Our aim, after all, is to live in accordance with nature; and it is contrary to nature to torment one's body, to hate simple cleanliness, to seek out squalor, and to eat food that is not just cheap but foul and revolting.[11]

5.5 Just as craving dainty things is a sign of luxury, so shunning ordinary things that can be had cheaply is a sign of madness. Philosophy demands frugality, not punishment; and frugality can be neat. This is the balance I like: let life strike a mean between good morals and public ones; let everyone look up to our way of life, but recognize it.

5.6 "What, then? Are we to do the same things as everyone else? Will there be no difference between us and them?" A very great one. Let anyone who looks more closely know that we are unlike the crowd. Let whoever enters our house admire us rather than our furniture. Great is the man who uses earthenware as if it were silver; no less great is the man who uses silver as if it were earthenware. It is the sign of a weak mind to be unable to bear wealth.

5.7 But to share with you this day's little profit too: I found in our Hecaton that putting a limit on desires also helps to cure fear. "You will stop fearing," he says, "if you stop hoping." You will say, "How can things so different go together?" It is so, my Lucilius: though they seem at odds, they are joined. Just as the same chain links the prisoner and the soldier who guards him, so these two, so unlike each other, walk in step: fear follows hope.[12]

5.8 Nor am I surprised that they go together: both belong to a mind in suspense, a mind anxious with expectation of the future. But the chief cause of both is that we do not adapt ourselves to the present but send our thoughts far ahead. So foresight, the greatest good of the human condition, has been turned into an evil.

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11 "To live in accordance with nature" is the Stoic definition of the goal of life.
12 Hecaton of Rhodes, a Stoic philosopher of about 100 BC—hence "our."

5.9 Wild animals flee the dangers they see; once they have escaped, they are free from care. We are tormented both by what is to come and by what is past. Many of our goods do us harm: memory brings back the torment of fear, and foresight brings it on early. No one is wretched from present things alone. Farewell.

LETTER 6: ON SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Seneca feels himself transformed and wants to share his learning, since living example teaches faster than precepts.

6.1 I can tell, Lucilius, that I am not only being improved but transformed. I do not yet promise or hope that nothing is left in me that needs changing. Why shouldn't I have many things that ought to be pulled together, or thinned down, or built up? And this very fact is proof that a mind has changed for the better: it sees its own faults, which until now it did not know. With some sick people, congratulations are in order when they have realized that they are sick.

6.2 So I would like to share with you so sudden a change in me. Then I would begin to have surer confidence in our friendship—that true friendship which neither hope nor fear nor concern for self-interest can tear apart, the kind people die with, and die for.

6.3 I can show you many who have lacked not a friend but friendship. That cannot happen when an equal will to seek what is honorable draws minds into partnership. Why can't it? Because they know that they have everything in common—especially misfortunes. You cannot imagine how much difference I see each single day making to me.

6.4 "Send me too," you say, "these things you have found so effective." Indeed, I want to pour everything into you, and I am glad to learn something precisely so that I can teach it. Nothing will delight me, however outstanding and beneficial, if I am to know it only for myself. If wisdom were given to me on the condition that I keep it shut up and not speak of it, I would turn it

down. No good thing is pleasant to possess without a companion.

6.5 So I will send you the books themselves, and so that you don't spend much effort hunting here and there for what will be useful, I will put marks in them, so that you can go straight to the passages I approve and admire. Still, the living voice and life shared together will do you more good than any discourse. You should come and see for yourself: first, because people believe their eyes more than their ears; second, because the road through precepts is long, but through examples it is short and effective.

6.6 Cleanthes would not have become the image of Zeno if he had merely listened to him. He shared his life, saw into his private affairs, watched to see whether he lived by his own rule. Plato and Aristotle and the whole crowd of wise men who would go off in different directions took more from Socrates' character than from his words. It was not Epicurus' school but living under the same roof with him that made great men of Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaenus. And I am not summoning you only so that you can make progress, but so that you can help others; for we will each contribute a great deal to the other.[13]

6.7 Meanwhile, since I owe you your little daily payment, I will tell you what delighted me today in Hecaton. "You ask," he says, "what progress I have made? I have begun to be a friend to myself." He has made great progress: he will never be alone. Know that such a man is a friend to everyone. Farewell.

LETTER 7: ON CROWDS

Crowds and the arena corrupt character, so withdraw into yourself and keep company with those who make you better.

7.1 You ask what I think you should especially avoid? The crowd. You cannot yet trust yourself to it safely. I, at least, will confess

13 Zeno of Citium founded the Stoic school about 300 BC, and Cleanthes succeeded him as its head; Metrodorus, Hermarchus (later Epicurus' successor), and Polyaenus were Epicurus' closest disciples.

my weakness: I never bring home the character I went out with. Something I had set in order is disturbed; something I had driven away comes back. What happens to invalids whom long weakness has affected so much that they cannot be taken out anywhere without a setback happens to us, whose minds are recovering from a long illness.

7.2 Mixing with many people does us harm: there is no one who does not recommend some vice to us, or stamp it on us, or smear it on us without our knowing. Certainly, the bigger the crowd we mingle with, the greater the danger. But nothing is so ruinous to good character as sitting idle at some show. For then vices creep in more easily by way of pleasure.

7.3 What do you think I mean? I come home greedier, more ambitious, more self-indulgent—no, crueler and less humane, because I have been among human beings. I happened to drop in on the midday show, expecting some games and wit and relaxation, something to rest people's eyes from human blood. It is the opposite. Whatever fighting went on before was mercy. Now the trifling is dropped and it is sheer murder. The men have nothing to protect them; their whole bodies are exposed to the blows, and they never strike in vain.[14]

7.4 Most people prefer this to the regular pairs and the fighters brought on by popular demand. Why wouldn't they? No helmet, no shield wards off the sword. What need of armor? What need of skill? All that just delays death. In the morning, men are thrown to lions and bears; at midday, to the spectators. The spectators order the killers to be thrown to those who will kill them, and keep the victor back for another slaughter. For those who fight, the only way out is death. The business is carried on with sword and fire. And all this happens while the arena is supposedly on break.

7.5 "But he committed robbery; he killed a man." So what? Because he killed, he deserved to suffer this. But you, poor wretch, what have you done to deserve to watch it? "Kill him!

14 At midday, between the morning's beast fights and the afternoon's gladiatorial bouts, condemned criminals were made to kill one another.

Flog him! Burn him! Why does he run onto the sword so timidly? Why does he kill with so little nerve? Why does he die with so little relish? Drive him onto the wounds with the whip! Let them take each other's blows on bare, facing chests!" There is an intermission: "Cut a few throats in the meantime, so there's something going on." Come now, don't you even understand this—that bad examples recoil on those who set them? Thank the immortal gods that you are teaching cruelty to one who cannot learn it.

7.6 A young mind, not yet holding firmly to what is right, must be kept away from the crowd; it is easy to go over to the majority. A multitude unlike them could have shaken Socrates, Cato, and Laelius out of their character; so true is it that none of us, even at the very moment we are working hardest to shape our nature, can withstand the onslaught of vices arriving with so large a retinue.[15]

7.7 A single example of luxury or greed does a great deal of harm. A pampered companion gradually weakens and softens us; a rich neighbor stirs up desire; a malicious comrade rubs his rust off on someone, however pure and simple. What do you think happens to a character that is assailed by the public at large? You must either imitate it or hate it.

7.8 But both must be avoided: you should neither become like the bad because they are many, nor become an enemy of the many because they are unlike you. Withdraw into yourself as far as you can. Spend your time with those who will make you better. Welcome those whom you can make better. The process is mutual: people learn while they teach.

7.9 There is no reason to let the glory of displaying your talent draw you out in public, so that you want to give readings or hold debates before these people. I would want you to, if you had wares suited to this crowd; but there is no one here who can understand you. Perhaps someone—one or two—will come your way, and even he will have to be shaped and trained by you to

15 Cato the Younger (95–46 BC), Stoic statesman and model of integrity, who killed himself at Utica rather than live under Caesar; Gaius Laelius, friend of Scipio Aemilianus, was known as "the Wise."

understand you. "Then for whom did I learn all this?" You needn't fear that you have wasted your effort: you learned it for yourself.

7.10 But so that I have not learned today only for myself, I will share with you three fine sayings I came across, all on roughly the same idea. One of them will pay what this letter owes; take the other two as an advance. Democritus says: "One man is a whole people to me, and a people is one man."[16]

7.11 Well said too by that other man, whoever he was—the author is disputed—who, when asked why he took such pains over an art that would reach very few, said: "A few are enough for me; one is enough; none is enough." The third is excellent, from Epicurus, writing to one of his partners in study: "I say this not to the many, but to you; for each of us is a large enough audience for the other."

7.12 These sayings, my Lucilius, must be stored away in your mind, so that you despise the pleasure that comes from the approval of the many. Many people praise you. But have you any reason to be pleased with yourself, if you are someone the many can understand? Let your goods face inward. Farewell.

LETTER 8: ON THE PHILOSOPHER'S SECLUSION

Seneca's retirement is work for posterity: he writes to warn others away from the gifts of fortune.

8.1 "You tell me," you say, "to avoid the crowd, to withdraw, and to be content with a good conscience? What about those precepts of your school that command us to die in the midst of action?" As for what I seem to you to be urging meanwhile: I have hidden myself away and shut my doors precisely so that I can be of use to more people. No day of mine passes in mere leisure. I claim part of my nights for study. I do not make time

16 Democritus of Abdera (c. 460–370 BC), the atomist philosopher.

for sleep; I give in to it, and I keep my eyes at the work even when they are tired from staying awake and are closing.[17]

8.2 I have withdrawn not only from people but from business, and above all from my own business. I am working for posterity, writing down some things that may help them. I am committing to writing wholesome advice, like recipes for useful medicines, having found it effective on my own sores, which, even if they are not fully healed, have stopped spreading.

8.3 The right path, which I recognized late and worn out with wandering, I point out to others. I shout: "Avoid whatever pleases the crowd, whatever chance hands out. Stop short, suspicious and fearful, before every good that comes by luck: wild animals and fish alike are tricked by some tempting hope. You think these are gifts of fortune? They are traps. Whoever of you wants to live a safe life, let him steer as clear as he possibly can of these limed favors, in which we poor wretches are deceived in this way too: we think we hold them, but they hold us fast."[18]

8.4 "That course leads over the cliff. The end of this lofty life is a fall. And then you cannot even stop, once prosperity has begun to drive you off course—or at least go down upright, or all at once. Fortune does not just overturn you: she pitches you headlong and dashes you to pieces."

8.5 "So hold to this sound and healthy rule of life: indulge the body only as much as is enough for good health. It must be treated rather harshly, so that it does not disobey the mind. Let food quiet hunger, let drink quench thirst, let clothing keep off the cold, let a house be a defense against whatever threatens the body. Whether it was built of turf or of colored marble from some foreign land makes no difference: know that a person is sheltered as well by thatch as by gold. Despise everything that pointless labor adds as ornament and decoration. Reflect that nothing is admirable except the mind, to which, when it is great, nothing is great."

17 Leisure (*otium*): time withdrawn from public life for oneself and for study, not idleness.

18 Birdlime was a sticky paste smeared on branches to trap birds.

8.6 If I say these things to myself, if I say them to posterity, don't you think I am doing more good than when I went down to court to support someone answering bail, or pressed my sealring onto a will, or lent my voice and hand to a candidate in the senate? Believe me, those who seem to be doing nothing are doing greater things: they are dealing with the human and the divine at once.

8.7 But now I must stop, and pay something for this letter, as has been my practice. It will not come out of my own stock: I am still unrolling Epicurus, and today I read this saying of his: "You must be the slave of philosophy, if true freedom is to be yours." Whoever has submitted and handed himself over to her is not kept waiting from one day to the next; he is set free on the spot. For this very slavery to philosophy is freedom.[19]

8.8 You may ask why I quote so many good sayings from Epicurus rather than from our own school. But why should you think these sayings belong to Epicurus and not to everyone? How many things poets say that philosophers have said or ought to say! I won't touch on the tragedians or our Roman dramas in the toga, for these too have some seriousness and stand midway between comedy and tragedy. How many eloquent lines lie buried in the mimes! How many of Publilius' lines ought to be spoken not by actors in slippers but by actors in tragic boots![20]

8.9 I will quote one line of his that bears on philosophy, and on the very part of it we had in hand just now, in which he denies that gifts of chance should be counted as ours: "Whatever comes to you by wishing is not your own."

8.10 I remember you expressing the same idea considerably better and more tightly: "What fortune has made yours is not yours." Nor will I pass over a saying of yours that is better still: "A good that could be given can be taken away." I am not count-

19 "Set free on the spot" plays on Roman manumission, in which the master turned the slave around as a sign of release.

20 Publilius Syrus (1st century BC) wrote mimes, popular farces, and was famous for his one-line maxims. Slippers were the comic actor's footwear, high boots (*cothurni*) the tragic actor's.

ing this toward my payment: I have given you something of your own. Farewell.

LETTER 9: ON PHILOSOPHY AND FRIENDSHIP

The wise man is self-sufficient, yet he wants friends in order to practice friendship, not for his own advantage.

9.1 You want to know whether Epicurus is right to criticize, in one of his letters, those who say that the wise man is content with himself and therefore has no need of a friend. This is the charge Epicurus levels at Stilbo and at those who held that the highest good is a mind incapable of suffering.[21]

9.2 We run into ambiguity if we try to render ἀπάθεια [apatheia, freedom from passion] quickly in one word as *impatientia*. For it could be taken to mean the opposite of what we intend. We mean someone who rejects all sense of evil; it will be understood as someone who cannot bear any evil. Consider, then, whether it is better to speak of an invulnerable mind, or a mind placed beyond all suffering.[22]

9.3 This is the difference between us and them: our wise man overcomes every hardship but feels it; theirs does not even feel it. What we have in common with them is this: the wise man is content with himself. But even so, he wants to have a friend, a neighbor, a companion, though he is sufficient for himself.

9.4 See how self-content he is: at times he is content with part of himself. If disease or an enemy cuts off his hand, if some accident knocks out one of his eyes, or both, what is left of him will satisfy him, and he will be as happy with his body diminished and maimed as he was with it whole. But though he does not miss those parts if they are gone, he prefers that they not be gone.

9.5 So the wise man is self-content, not in the sense that he wants to be without a friend, but that he can be. And by "can" I

21 The wise man (*sapiens*) is the ideal Stoic sage. Stilbo (Stilpo) of Megara was a philosopher of the late 4th century BC.

mean this: he bears the loss calmly. Without a friend, indeed, he will never be; it is in his power how quickly he replaces one. Just as Phidias, if he lost a statue, would immediately make another, so this craftsman of friendships will put another in the place of the one he lost.[23]

9.6 You ask how he will make a friend quickly. I will tell you, if you and I can agree that I pay you at once what I owe, and that as far as this letter goes we are square. Hecaton says: "I will show you a love potion without drugs, without herbs, without any witch's spell: if you want to be loved, love." And not only the experience of an old and sure friendship brings great pleasure, but also the beginning and acquiring of a new one.

9.7 The difference between a farmer reaping and a farmer sowing is the difference between the man who has acquired a friend and the man who is acquiring one. The philosopher Attalus used to say that it is more pleasant to make a friend than to have one, just as it is more pleasant for an artist to paint than to have painted. That anxious absorption in one's work holds enormous delight in the absorption itself. The man who has taken his hand from a finished work does not take the same delight. Now he enjoys the fruit of his art; while he was painting, he enjoyed the art itself. Children are more fruitful in their youth, but sweeter in their infancy.[24]

9.8 Now let us return to the point. The wise man, even if he is content with himself, still wants to have a friend—if for no other reason, then to practice friendship, so that so great a virtue does not lie idle. Not for the reason Epicurus gave in this very letter, "so as to have someone to sit by him when he is sick, to help him when he is thrown into chains or is in need," but to have someone by whose sickbed he himself may sit, someone he himself may free when an enemy holds him captive. Whoever looks to himself and takes up friendship for that reason reckons badly.

22 Latin *impatientia* can mean both "not suffering" and "impatience," an inability to endure.

23 Phidias, the 5th-century BC Athenian sculptor of the Parthenon.

24 Attalus, a Stoic philosopher under whom Seneca studied as a young man.

As it began, so it will end: he has acquired a friend to bring help against chains; the moment the chain clanks, that friend will be gone.

9.9 These are the friendships the public calls temporary. The man taken up because he is useful will be welcome only as long as he is useful. That is why the prosperous are besieged by crowds of friends, while around the ruined there is solitude, and friends run away just when they are being put to the test. That is why there are so many wicked examples of some deserting out of fear and others betraying out of fear. Beginnings and endings are bound to match. Whoever began to be a friend because it paid will stop because it pays. Some price will be preferred to friendship, if anything in it is valued besides friendship itself.

9.10 For what purpose do I acquire a friend? To have someone I can die for, someone I can follow into exile, someone whose death I can block and spend myself to prevent. What you describe is a business deal, not friendship—one that approaches for advantage and keeps an eye on what it will get.

9.11 Without doubt, the passion of lovers has something like friendship about it; you could call it friendship gone mad. Does anyone, then, love for the sake of profit? Or of ambition or glory? Love itself, on its own, heedless of everything else, fires minds with desire for beauty, not without hope of affection in return. What, then? Does a shameful passion spring from a more honorable motive than friendship?

9.12 "The question now," you say, "is not whether friendship should be sought for its own sake." On the contrary, nothing needs proving more. For if it is to be sought for its own sake, then a man who is content with himself can approach it. "How, then, does he approach it?" As one approaches the most beautiful of things, not lured by gain nor frightened off by the swings of fortune. Whoever acquires friendship for the good times strips it of its majesty.

9.13 The wise man is content with himself. Many people, my Lucilius, misinterpret this: they banish the wise man from everything and confine him inside his own skin. But we must

distinguish what the phrase promises and how far it goes. The wise man is content with himself for living happily, not for living. For living, he needs many things; for living happily, only a mind that is sound and upright and scornful of fortune.

9.14 I want to show you a distinction made by Chrysippus as well. He says that the wise man lacks nothing, and yet needs many things. "The fool, by contrast, needs nothing—for he knows how to use nothing—but lacks everything. The wise man needs hands and eyes and many things necessary for daily use, but lacks nothing. For to lack implies necessity, and nothing is necessary to the wise man."[25]

9.15 So although he is content with himself, he needs friends. He wants to have as many as possible—but not in order to live happily, for he will live happily even without friends. The highest good seeks no tools from outside. It is cultivated at home and arises wholly from itself. It begins to be subject to fortune if it looks outside for any part of itself.

9.16 "But what sort of life will the wise man have if he is left without friends—thrown into prison, or stranded among some foreign people, or detained on a long voyage, or cast up on a deserted shore?" The life Jupiter has when the universe is dissolved and the gods are merged into one, and nature pauses for a while: he rests in himself, given over to his own thoughts. The wise man does something like this: he withdraws into himself; he keeps his own company.[26]

9.17 As long as he is allowed to order his affairs as he sees fit, he is content with himself—and he marries; he is content with himself—and he raises children; he is content with himself—and yet he would not live if he had to live without another human being. What brings him to friendship is not any advantage of his own but a natural impulse. For just as other things have an inborn sweetness for us, so does friendship. Just as there is a

25 Chrysippus (c. 279–206 BC), the third head of the Stoic school and its great systematizer.

26 In Stoic cosmology each world-cycle ends in a great conflagration in which everything is absorbed into Zeus (Jupiter) before the world is reborn.

hatred of solitude and a desire for company, just as nature draws human beings to one another, so here too there is an instinct that makes us seek friendships.

9.18 Nevertheless, though he is utterly devoted to his friends, though he ranks them equal to himself and often above himself, he will confine all his good within himself, and will say what Stilbo said—the Stilbo whom Epicurus' letter attacks. His city had been captured, his children lost, his wife lost, and he was walking out of the general blaze alone and yet happy, when Demetrius, who got the surname Poliorcetes, "the Besieger," from his destruction of cities, asked whether he had lost anything. "All my goods," he said, "are with me."[27]

9.19 There is a brave and vigorous man! He conquered his enemy's very victory. "I have lost nothing," he said; he made him wonder whether he had won at all. "All my goods are with me": that is precisely what it means to consider nothing good that can be taken away. We marvel at certain animals that pass through the middle of fire with their bodies unharmed; how much more marvelous is this man, who came out through sword and ruins and flames unhurt and unscathed! Do you see how much easier it is to conquer a whole people than one man? This saying he shares with the Stoic: the Stoic too carries his goods intact through burned cities. For he is content with himself; this is the boundary he sets to his happiness.

9.20 Don't think we alone toss around noble words: Epicurus himself, Stilbo's critic, uttered a saying like his—take it in good part, even though I have already paid off today's debt. "If someone," he says, "does not think what he has is ample, then even if he were master of the whole world, he is wretched." Or, if it seems better to you put this way—for our aim must be to serve not words but meanings: "Wretched is he who does not judge himself supremely happy, even if he rules the world."

9.21 And so that you may know that these sentiments are universal—nature, of course, dictating them—you will find in a

27 Demetrius I of Macedon took Stilbo's city of Megara in 307 BC.

comic poet: "He is not happy who does not think he is." For what does your situation matter, if it seems bad to you?

9.22 "What, then?" you say. "If that man who is disgracefully rich, and that man who is master of many but slave of more, call themselves happy, will they become happy by their own verdict?" What matters is not what one says but what one feels—and not what one feels on a single day, but constantly. But there is no reason to fear that so great a thing will come to someone unworthy: only the wise man is pleased with what is his own. All folly suffers from disgust with itself. Farewell.

LETTER 10: ON LIVING TO ONESELF

Avoid company, since the best company for a man making progress is himself, and live as if god could see you.

10.1 That's how it is, and I'm not changing my opinion: avoid the crowd, avoid the few, avoid even one. I have no one I would want you to share yourself with. And see what a verdict on you this is: I dare to trust you to yourself. Crates, they say—a pupil of that very Stilbo I mentioned in my last letter—saw a young man walking by himself and asked him what he was doing there alone. "I'm talking with myself," he said. To which Crates replied: "Be careful, I beg you, and pay close attention: you are talking with a bad man."[28]

10.2 We usually keep watch over someone who is grieving or afraid, so that he won't make bad use of being alone. No one who lacks wisdom should be left to himself. That is when such people hatch bad plans; that is when they build future dangers for others or for themselves; that is when they marshal their wicked desires. That is when the mind lays bare whatever it used to hide out of fear or shame; that is when it sharpens recklessness, stirs up lust, goads anger. In the end, the one advantage solitude has—confiding in no one, fearing no informer—is lost on the fool: he betrays himself. So see what I hope for you—or rather what I guarantee myself, since hope is just the name for an

28 Probably Crates of Thebes, the Cynic philosopher (c. 365–285 BC).

uncertain good: I can find no one I would rather you be with than yourself.

10.3 I recall how high-mindedly you tossed off certain words, and how full of strength they were. I congratulated myself at once and said: "Those didn't come from the tip of the lips; these words have a foundation. This man is not one of the crowd; his eyes are on what will save him."

10.4 Speak like that; live like that. See that nothing pushes you down. As for your old prayers, you may let the gods off them; take on new ones from scratch. Pray for a good mind, for good health of the spirit, and only then of the body. Why shouldn't you make those prayers often? Ask god boldly: you won't be asking him for anything that belongs to someone else.

10.5 But to send off this letter, as is my custom, with some small gift: here is a true saying I found in Athenodorus: "Know that you are free of all desires when you have reached the point where you ask god for nothing that you could not ask for openly." For as things are, how mad people are! They whisper the most shameful prayers to the gods; if anyone brings an ear close, they fall silent. What they don't want a human being to know, they tell to god. So consider whether this might be given as healthy advice: live with people as if god were watching; speak with god as if people were listening. Farewell.[29]

LETTER 11: ON THE BLUSH OF MODESTY

Wisdom cannot remove natural traits like blushing, but we should live as if some good man were always watching.

11.1 Your friend, a young man of good character, has been talking with me. How much spirit he has, how much talent, how much progress already—his very first conversation showed it. He gave me a taste, and he will live up to it. For he did not speak from preparation; he was caught off guard. As he collected himself he could hardly shake off his modesty—a good sign in a young man

29 Athenodorus of Tarsus, Stoic philosopher and teacher of the emperor Augustus (1st century BC).

—so deeply did the blush spread over him from within. That blush, I suspect, will stay with him even when he has grown steady and stripped off all his faults—even when he is wise. For no wisdom removes the body's natural failings. Whatever is fixed in us and inborn is softened by training, not conquered.

11.2 Some people, even the most self-possessed, break into a sweat in front of a crowd, just as the exhausted and overheated usually do. Some people's knees shake when they are about to speak; others' teeth chatter, their tongue stumbles, their lips clamp together. Neither training nor practice ever shakes these off; nature exerts her power, and through this weakness reminds even the strongest that she is there.

11.3 Among these, I know, is also the blush, which comes suddenly over even the most serious men. It shows more in the young, who have more heat and a tender complexion; but it touches veterans and old men too. Some people are never more to be feared than when they have blushed, as if they had poured out all their sense of shame.

11.4 Sulla was at his most violent when the blood had rushed to his face. Nothing was softer than Pompey's face: he never failed to blush in front of a group, especially at public meetings. I remember Fabianus blushing when he was brought into the Senate as a witness, and the modesty suited him wonderfully.[30]

11.5 This comes not from weakness of mind but from the novelty of the situation, which, even if it doesn't shake the inexperienced, does move them, since a natural tendency of the body makes them prone to it. For just as some people have calm blood, others have blood that is quick and mobile and rushes readily into the face.

11.6 This, as I said, no wisdom drives away; otherwise, if it could erase every flaw, wisdom would have the nature of things under its command. Whatever the circumstances of our birth and the makeup of our body have assigned us will stick, however much and however long the mind has composed itself.

30 Sulla, dictator of Rome (82–79 BC). Papirius Fabianus, orator turned philosopher, was one of Seneca's teachers.

None of these can be forbidden, any more than they can be summoned.

11.7 Actors on the stage, who imitate the passions, who portray fear and agitation, who represent sadness, imitate shame by these signs: they lower their faces, drop their voices, fix their eyes on the ground and keep them down. A blush they cannot produce; it can be neither prevented nor brought on. Against these things wisdom promises nothing, achieves nothing. They are a law unto themselves: they come unbidden and they go unbidden.

11.8 Now the letter calls for its closing words. Here they are—useful and healthy, and I want you to fix them in your mind: "We should cherish some good man and always keep him before our eyes, so that we live as if he were watching and do everything as if he saw it."

11.9 This, my Lucilius, is Epicurus' advice. He has given us a guardian and a tutor—and rightly so. A great part of wrongdoing disappears if a witness stands by those about to do wrong. Let the mind have someone it reveres, someone whose authority makes even its private moments purer. Happy the man who improves others not only by his presence but even when he is thought of! Happy the one who can so revere someone that even the memory of him makes him compose and order himself! Whoever can revere someone that way will soon deserve reverence himself.

11.10 So choose Cato. If he seems too severe to you, choose Laelius, a man of gentler spirit. Choose someone whose life and speech have pleased you, and whose very face, showing his character, has pleased you too; keep him always before you, as either guardian or model. We need someone, I say, against whom our character can measure itself. You won't straighten what is crooked without a ruler. Farewell.

LETTER 12: ON OLD AGE

Seneca's crumbling villa shows him his own age, which has its pleasures, and every day should be lived as if it completed a life.

12.1 Wherever I turn, I see proofs of my old age. I had gone to my place just outside the city and was complaining about the cost of a building that was falling apart. My estate manager told me it wasn't his negligence at fault—he was doing everything—but the house was old. This house grew up under my own hands! What is going to become of me, if stones my age are this crumbly?

12.2 Angry with him, I seized the next excuse to vent. "These plane trees are obviously being neglected," I said. "They have no leaves. How knotted and shriveled the branches are, how gloomy and scruffy the trunks! This wouldn't happen if someone dug around them and watered them." He swears by my guardian spirit that he is doing everything, that his care is slack in nothing, but that they are old. Between you and me, I had planted them; I had seen their first leaf.

12.3 Turning to the door, I said: "Who is that? That decrepit fellow, rightly placed by the doorway—he's facing out already. Where did you get him? What pleasure was there in taking in someone else's dead?" But he said: "Don't you recognize me? I'm Felicio, the one you used to bring little figurines to. I'm the son of Philositus the estate manager, your little favorite." "The man is completely raving," I said. "So this little boy has become my favorite too? Well, it's quite possible: his teeth are falling out right now."[31]

12.4 I owe this to my place outside the city: wherever I turned, my old age showed itself to me. Let us embrace it and love it; it is full of pleasure if you know how to use it. Fruit is most welcome when it is going; boyhood is loveliest at its end; for those devoted to wine it is the last drink that delights—the one that drowns them, that puts the finishing touch on drunkenness.

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31 The Roman dead were laid out in the entrance hall with their feet toward the door. The figurines (sigillaria) were small presents given at the Saturnalia.

12.5 Every pleasure saves its greatest delight for its end. The most delightful age is the one already on the downslope, but not yet at the drop. And even the age that stands on the last roof tile, I judge, has its own pleasures. Or else this itself takes the place of pleasures: to need none. How sweet it is to have worn out one's desires and left them behind!

12.6 "It's hard," you say, "to have death before your eyes." First, death should be before the eyes of the old man just as much as the young. We are not called up by the census rolls, oldest first. Next, no one is so old that it would be shameless to hope for one more day. And one day is a step of life. Our whole lifetime is made of parts, and has circles drawn one around another, larger around smaller. There is one that embraces and encircles them all: it reaches from birthday to last day. There is another that encloses the years of youth. There is one that binds all of childhood in its circuit. Then there is the year, a unit in itself, containing all the seasons; by multiplying years, life is built. The month is bound by a tighter circle. The day has the narrowest ring; but even it runs from beginning to end, from sunrise to sunset.

12.7 That is why Heraclitus, whose nickname came from the obscurity of his style, said: "One day is equal to every day." People have taken this in different ways. One said it was equal in hours—and he isn't wrong, for if a day is a span of twenty-four hours, all days must be equal to one another, since the night has what the day has lost. Another says that one day is equal to all days in likeness: the longest stretch of time holds nothing you would not also find in a single day—light and night—and through eternity the days only multiply these alternations; they are no different whether a day is shorter or longer.[32]

12.8 So every day should be arranged as if it were bringing up the rear, rounding off and completing our life. Pacuvius, who made Syria his own by long possession, used to hold his own funeral rites with wine and those funeral banquets, then be carried from dinner to his bedroom while, amid the applause of his

32 Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BC), a philosopher known as "the Obscure."

kept boys, this was sung to music: βεβίωται, βεβίωται ["He has lived, he has lived!"].[33]

12.9 Not a day passed without his carrying himself out to burial. What he did from a bad conscience, let us do from a good one, and as we go to sleep let us say, glad and cheerful: "I have lived; the course that fortune gave me I have run." If god adds tomorrow, let us accept it gladly. The happiest man, secure in possession of himself, is the one who waits for tomorrow without anxiety. Whoever has said "I have lived" gets up every day to a profit.[34]

12.10 But now I must close the letter. "So," you say, "it will come to me without any pocket money?" Don't worry: it brings something with it. Why did I say something? A lot. For what could be finer than this saying, which I hand to it to deliver to you: "It is bad to live under necessity; but there is no necessity to live under necessity." Why should there be? On every side many roads lie open to freedom, short and easy. Let us thank god that no one can be held in life. We may trample on necessities themselves.

12.11 "Epicurus said that," you say. "What are you doing with someone else's property?" Whatever is true is mine. I will keep pressing Epicurus on you, so that those who swear by someone's words, and weigh not what is said but who says it, may learn that the best things are common property. Farewell.

33 Pacuvius governed Syria as a deputy under Tiberius; "made it his own by possession" borrows the legal term for acquiring ownership through long use.
34 Virgil (70–19 BC), Rome's great epic poet, whom Seneca often quotes; this is Aeneid 4.653, the dying words of Dido, queen of Carthage.

Book II

On groundless fears (13), on philosophy and fortune (16).

LETTER 13: ON GROUNDLESS FEARS

We suffer more in imagination than in reality, so examine each fear and do not be miserable in advance.

13.1 I know you have plenty of spirit. Even before you equipped yourself with healthy precepts that overcome hardship, you were confident enough of yourself against fortune—and much more so after you came to grips with her and tested your strength. Strength can never give reliable confidence in itself until many difficulties have appeared on this side and that, and some have even come close. That is how the true spirit, the one that will never fall under another's control, is proved.

13.2 This is its assay. An athlete who has never been bruised cannot bring great spirit to a contest. The one who has seen his own blood, whose teeth have rattled under a fist, who has been tripped and borne his opponent's full weight, who was thrown down but did not throw away his courage, who every time he fell got up more defiant—he goes down to the fight with high hopes.

13.3 So, to follow that comparison: fortune has often been on top of you, yet you did not give up; you sprang back up and stood firmer. For virtue gains a great deal when it is provoked. Still, if you like, accept from me some reinforcements with which to fortify yourself.

13.4 There are more things, Lucilius, that frighten us than crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. I'm not speaking to you in the Stoic tongue, but in this more modest

one. For we Stoics say that all those things that wring groans and bellows from us are trivial and to be despised. Let's leave aside these grand words—true though they are, good gods! My advice to you is this: don't be miserable before the time, since what you dreaded as imminent may never come, and certainly has not come yet.

13.5 So some things torment us more than they should, some sooner than they should, some when they shouldn't at all. We either magnify our pain, or invent it, or anticipate it. The first point, since the matter is in dispute and we have a case pending, can be postponed for now. What I call light, you will insist is very heavy; I know that some laugh under the whip and others groan at a slap. Later we'll see whether these things are strong by their own power or through our weakness.

13.6 Just do this for me: whenever people crowd around you trying to convince you that you are miserable, think not about what you hear but about what you feel. Take counsel with your own endurance and question yourself, since you know your own affairs best: Why are these people pitying me? Why are they trembling, why do they even fear catching something from me, as if disaster could jump from one person to another? Is there anything bad here, or is this thing more disreputable than bad? Ask yourself: Am I tormenting myself and grieving for no reason, and making an evil out of what is not one?

13.7 "How," you ask, "can I tell whether the things that distress me are empty or real?" Here is a rule for it: we are tormented either by things present, or by things to come, or by both. About the present it's easy to judge: if your body is free and healthy, there is no pain from any injury. What is to come, we'll see; today there's no trouble.

13.8 "But it's going to happen." First, look into whether there is sure evidence of the coming evil. Mostly we suffer from suspicions, and we are fooled by rumor, which often settles wars, and settles individuals far more often. That's how it is, my Lucilius: we quickly give in to opinion. We don't test the things that drive us to fear, we don't shake them out; we tremble and turn our

backs, just like soldiers driven from their camp by the dust of a stampeding herd, or panicked by some tale spread without a source.

13.9 Somehow it's the empty things that disturb us more. Real things have their limits; whatever comes from uncertainty is handed over to guesswork and the free rein of a frightened mind. So no fears are so destructive, so beyond recall, as the frenzied kind. Other fears are without reason; these are out of their minds.

13.10 So let us look into the matter carefully. It is likely that something bad will happen; that doesn't make it true. How many things have come that weren't expected! How many that were expected have never appeared! Even if it is going to happen, what good is it to run out to meet your pain? You'll suffer soon enough when it comes; meanwhile, promise yourself better things.

13.11 What will you gain? Time. Many things will intervene, so that a danger near at hand, or even right upon you, either halts, or ends, or passes onto someone else's head. A fire has left a way of escape; a collapsing building has set some people down gently; sometimes the sword has been called back from the very neck; some have outlived their own executioner. Even bad fortune is fickle. Maybe it will happen, maybe it won't; meanwhile it isn't happening. Set better prospects before you.

13.12 Sometimes, with no visible signs to foretell anything bad, the mind invents false images for itself. It twists some ambiguous word toward the worse, or imagines someone's offense as greater than it is, and considers not how angry that person is but how much an angry person could do. But there is no point in living, no limit to our miseries, if we fear as much as is possible. Here let good sense help you; here, with strength of mind, reject even a fear that is well grounded. If you can't, drive out one fault with another: temper fear with hope. Nothing we fear is so certain that it isn't more certain still that feared things fade away and hopes deceive.

13.13 So weigh hope and fear, and whenever everything is uncertain, favor yourself: believe what you prefer. If fear has more votes, lean the other way anyway, and stop troubling yourself. And keep turning this over in your mind: most mortals, though nothing bad is happening to them and nothing is certain to happen, are in a fever and running about. For no one resists himself once he has begun to be driven, or reduces his fear to the truth. No one says: "The source is worthless; he's a worthless man who either made this up or believed it." We give ourselves up to be carried off by the breeze.

13.14 We are terrified of the doubtful as if it were certain. We don't keep things in proportion. A pebble of worry instantly turns into fear. I'm ashamed both to talk to you so gloomily and to revive you with such mild remedies. Let someone else say, "Maybe it won't come." You say, "So what if it does? We'll see who wins. Maybe it comes for my benefit, and that death will bring honor to my life." Hemlock made Socrates great. Wrest from Cato the sword that won him his freedom, and you'll have taken away a great part of his glory.[1]

13.15 I've been urging you on too long, when what you need is a reminder rather than encouragement. We are not leading you in a direction contrary to your nature; you were born for the things we are describing. All the more reason to increase and adorn the good that is yours.

13.16 But now I'll finish the letter, once I've pressed its seal on it —that is, once I've entrusted it with some splendid saying to carry to you. "Among its other evils, folly has this one too: it is always beginning to live." Think about what this saying means, Lucilius, best of men, and you'll understand how disgraceful is the fickleness of people who every day lay new foundations for their lives and start new hopes even at the very end.

13.17 Look around at people one by one: you'll come across old men who are, at this very moment, preparing themselves for political ambition, for travel, for business. And what is more disgraceful than an old man just beginning to live? I wouldn't add

1 Socrates was executed by a draft of hemlock in 399 BC.

the author of this saying if it weren't one of Epicurus' less familiar sayings, not among the well-known ones that I have allowed myself to praise and adopt. Farewell.

LETTER 14: ON THE REASONS FOR WITHDRAWING FROM THE WORLD

Care for the body without being its slave, and avoid provoking the powerful by retiring quietly into philosophy.

14.1 I admit that we have an inborn affection for our body; I admit that we are charged with its care. I don't deny we should indulge it; I deny we should be its slave. For whoever is a slave to his body—who fears too much for it, who measures everything by it—will be a slave to many.

14.2 We should conduct ourselves not as though we ought to live for the body, but as though we cannot live without it. Loving it too much disturbs us with fears, weighs us down with worries, exposes us to insults. The honorable is cheap to someone who holds his body too dear. Let it be cared for most diligently—but in such a way that, when reason, dignity, or good faith demands it, it can be thrown into the fire.

14.3 Nonetheless, as far as we can, let us avoid discomforts as well as dangers, and withdraw to safety, constantly thinking out ways to ward off what is to be feared. There are, unless I'm mistaken, three kinds of these: we fear poverty, we fear disease, and we fear what comes through the violence of someone more powerful.

14.4 Of all these, nothing shakes us more than what hangs over us from another's power. For it comes with great noise and commotion. The natural evils I mentioned, poverty and disease, creep up in silence and strike no terror into eyes or ears. The other evil comes in a huge parade. It has sword and fire around it, and chains, and a pack of wild beasts to set loose on human flesh.

14.5 Picture here the prison, and crosses, and the rack, and the hook, and the stake driven through a man until it comes out through his mouth, and limbs torn apart by chariots driven in

opposite directions, and that tunic smeared with and woven from fuel for fire, and whatever else cruelty has devised besides these.[2]

14.6 So it's no wonder that our fear of this is greatest, since its variety is great and its apparatus terrifying. For just as a torturer achieves more the more instruments of pain he lays out—people who would have held out under the suffering are beaten by the sight—so among the things that subdue and tame our minds, those that have something to display are more effective. Those other plagues are no less serious—I mean hunger and thirst, abscesses in the chest, and fever that scorches the very innards. But they are hidden; they have nothing to brandish, nothing to parade. The former, like great wars, win by their look and their array.

14.7 So let us take care to avoid giving offense. Sometimes it is the people we ought to fear; sometimes, if the state is organized so that most business is done through the Senate, the influential men in it; sometimes individuals who have been given power by the people and over the people. To have all these as friends is hard work; it is enough not to have them as enemies. So the wise man will never provoke the anger of the powerful; rather, he will steer clear of it, just as in sailing one steers clear of a storm.

14.8 When you were heading for Sicily, you crossed the strait. A reckless helmsman scorned the threats of the south wind—it's the wind that roughens the Sicilian sea and churns it into whirlpools—and made not for the left-hand shore but for the one near which Charybdis whirls the waters. But a more careful one asks people who know the area what the currents are, what signs the clouds give; he holds his course far from that region notorious for whirlpools. The wise man does the same: he avoids power that could harm him, taking care above all not to be seen avoid-

2 The "tunic" is the tunica molesta, a garment soaked in flammable material in which condemned people were burned alive.

ing it. For part of safety lies in not seeking it openly, since what a person flees, he condemns.[3]

14.9 So we must look around for ways to be safe from the mob. First, let's not desire the same things: there is strife among rivals. Next, let's not have anything that can be snatched away at great profit to someone lying in wait. Let there be as little plunder on your person as possible. No one comes after human blood for its own sake—or very few do. More people calculate than hate. The robber lets the naked man pass; even on a road under siege, the poor man has peace.

14.10 Then, following an old precept, there are three things we must take care to avoid: hatred, envy, contempt. How to do this, wisdom alone will show. For the balance is difficult, and we must beware lest fear of envy carry us into contempt—lest, while we refuse to trample others, we seem fit to be trampled. Being able to inspire fear has given many people reasons to fear. Let us draw back on every side: being despised does no less harm than being looked up to.

14.11 So we must take refuge in philosophy. These studies serve as a sacred headband, not only among good people but among the moderately bad. For eloquence in the courts, and anything else that stirs up the people, has its opponents; but philosophy, peaceful and minding its own business, cannot be despised, since all the arts give it honor, even among the worst of people. Wickedness will never grow so strong, there will never be such a conspiracy against the virtues, that the name of philosophy will not remain venerable and sacred. However, philosophy itself must be practiced quietly and modestly.[4]

14.12 "What then?" you say. "Does Marcus Cato seem to you to practice philosophy modestly—the man who tries to check a civil war with his vote? Who steps in between the arms of raging

3 Scylla and Charybdis, the monster and whirlpool of Homer's Odyssey, were placed in the Strait of Messina between Italy and Sicily.

4 The headband (infula) was a woolen band worn by priests and suppliants, marking them as sacred and inviolable.

leaders? Who, while some offend Pompey and others Caesar, provokes both at once?"

14.13 One could debate whether, at that time, a wise man should have taken part in public life. "What do you want, Marcus Cato? It's no longer a question of freedom; that was ruined long ago. The question is whether Caesar or Pompey will own the state. What have you to do with that contest? Neither side is yours. A master is being chosen. What does it matter to you which one wins? The better man can win; the man who has won cannot help being the worse." I have touched on Cato's final role. But not even the earlier years were such as to admit a wise man into that plundering of the state. What else did Cato do but shout and send out useless words, when at one moment he was hoisted up by the hands of the mob and, covered with spit, dragged out of the forum, and at another led from the Senate to prison?

14.14 But we'll see later whether the wise man should devote his efforts to the state. Meanwhile, I point you to those Stoics who, shut out of public life, withdrew to cultivate their lives and to establish laws for the human race, without offending anyone more powerful. The wise man will not disrupt the public's customs, nor will he draw the people's gaze with an unusual way of life.

14.15 "What then? Will whoever follows this plan be safe no matter what?" I can no more promise you that than I can promise good health to a temperate man—and yet temperance does produce good health. Some ship goes down in the harbor; but what do you think happens in the open sea? How much nearer at hand would danger be for someone busy with many schemes, when even leisure is not safe? The innocent sometimes perish—who denies it? But the guilty more often. A fighter's skill still stands, even if he has been struck through his armor.

14.16 In short, the wise man looks at the plan behind every action, not the outcome. Beginnings are in our power; fortune judges the result, and I don't grant her a verdict on me. "But it will bring some trouble, some adversity." A robber who kills you has not condemned you.

14.17 Now you're holding out your hand for the daily coin. I'll fill it with a gold one, and since gold has come up, here is how its use and enjoyment can give you more pleasure: "He enjoys wealth most who needs wealth least." "Tell me the author," you say. So you'll know how generous I am, my policy is to praise other people's words: it's from Epicurus, or Metrodorus, or someone from that workshop.

14.18 And what does it matter who said it? He said it for everyone. The man who needs riches fears for them. And no one enjoys a good that makes him anxious; he's eager to add something to it. While he thinks about increasing it, he forgets to use it. He takes in accounts, wears out the forum, pores over his loan book: from master he becomes manager. Farewell.

LETTER 15: ON BRAWN AND BRAINS

Exercise the mind more than the body, and do not let a foolish life be carried off wholly into the future.

15.1 The ancients had a custom, kept up to my own time, of adding to the first words of a letter: "If you are well, that's good; I am well." We rightly say: "If you are doing philosophy, that's good." For that alone is being well. Without it the mind is sick. The body, too, even if it has great strength, is healthy only in the way someone deranged or delirious is.

15.2 So take care above all of this health, and then of the other, second kind, which won't cost you much if you want to be well. For it's foolish, my Lucilius, and hardly fitting for an educated man, to busy himself with exercising his arms, broadening his neck, and strengthening his sides. Even when the fattening has gone well and your muscles have grown, you will never match the strength or the weight of a prize ox. Add now that the mind is crushed by the heavier load of the body and becomes less agile. So as far as you can, keep your body within bounds and make room for your mind.

15.3 Many drawbacks follow for those devoted to this pursuit. First, the exercises, whose effort drains the vital breath and

makes it unfit for concentration and more demanding study. Next, a surfeit of food dulls mental sharpness. Then there are slaves of the worst sort taken on as trainers—men who divide their time between oil and wine, whose day has gone as they wished if they've had a good sweat and, in place of what flowed out, have poured back plenty of drink that will sink deeper on an empty stomach. Drinking and sweating: the life of a heart patient.

15.4 There are exercises both easy and short that tire the body quickly and save time—which must be our chief concern: running, moving the arms with a weight, and jumping—either the kind that lifts the body high, or the kind that sends it far, or the kind of the Salian priests, so to speak, or, to put it more insultingly, of the fullers. Choose any of these to practice: plain and easy.[5]

15.5 Whatever you do, return quickly from the body to the mind. Exercise it night and day; it is nourished by moderate labor. Neither cold nor heat will hinder this exercise, not even old age. Take care of the good that grows better with age.

15.6 I'm not telling you to be always bent over a book or writing tablets. The mind must be given some break—yet so that it is not unstrung, only eased. Being carried in a litter both shakes up the body and doesn't hinder study: you can read, you can dictate, you can talk, you can listen—none of which even walking prevents.

15.7 Nor should you look down on exercising the voice—though I forbid you to raise it step by step through fixed scales and then lower it again. What if you then wanted to learn how to walk? Let in those people whom hunger has taught new trades: there will be someone to regulate your steps and watch your cheeks as you eat, and he will go as far as your patience and credulity let his impudence go. What then? Will your voice start straight off with shouting and full strain? It's so natural to rise little by little

5 The Salii were priests of Mars who performed a ritual leaping dance; fullers cleaned cloth by treading it in tubs.

that even people quarreling start with conversation and move on to shouting. No one begins by crying, "Citizens, help!"

15.8 So, however your mind's impulse urges you, deliver your tirade now more forcefully, now more gently, leaning whichever way your voice, too, prompts you. When you take it back and call it in, let it come down with restraint, not collapse; let it go out at a middle pitch, and not rage in an untrained, rustic way. For our aim is not that the voice get exercise, but that it give exercise.

15.9 I've taken a good deal of trouble off your hands. To these favors will be added one small fee and one Greek saying. Here is a remarkable precept: "The foolish life is thankless and anxious; it is carried entirely into the future." "Who says this?" you ask. The same man as before. What life do you think is meant here by the foolish one? Baba's and Isio's? Not so: it's ours that's meant—we whom blind desire hurls headlong toward things that will harm us and will certainly never satisfy us; we who, if anything could be enough, would have had enough by now; we who don't consider how pleasant it is to ask for nothing, how magnificent to be full and not depend on fortune.[6]

15.10 So, Lucilius, keep recalling how much you have achieved. When you look at how many are ahead of you, think how many are behind. If you want to be grateful to the gods and to your own life, think how many you have passed. What do the rest matter to you? You have passed yourself.

15.11 Set a limit that you would not even want to pass if you could. Let those treacherous goods go at last—sweeter to hope for than to get. If there were anything solid in them, they would sometime fill us; as it is, they stir up thirst in those who drink them. Away with showy trappings. And as for what the uncertain lot of the future holds, why should I beg fortune to give it rather than beg myself not to ask? And why should I ask? Shall I pile things up, forgetting how fragile human life is? What should I toil for? Look—this day is the last. Suppose it isn't: it's near the last. Farewell.

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6 Baba and Isio were apparently well-known clowns of Seneca's day.

LETTER 16: ON PHILOSOPHY, THE GUIDE OF LIFE

Philosophy is a matter of deeds, not words; whether fate, god, or chance rules, it teaches us how to live.

16.1 I know it's clear to you, Lucilius, that no one can live happily, or even tolerably, without the study of wisdom, and that a happy life is achieved by wisdom made perfect, but a tolerable one even by wisdom just begun. But what is clear must be strengthened and driven deeper by daily reflection. It takes more work to keep your resolutions than to make honorable ones. You must persevere and add strength by constant study, until what is now good will becomes a good mind.

16.2 So with me you no longer need many words or assurances: I understand that you've made great progress. I know where the things you write come from; they are not feigned or dressed up. Still, I'll tell you what I think: I already have hope for you, but not yet confidence. I want you to do the same: there's no reason to believe in yourself quickly and easily. Shake yourself out, search yourself from every angle, watch yourself. Above all, see whether you've made progress in philosophy or in life itself.

16.3 Philosophy is not a trade for the crowd, nor made for show. It lies not in words but in deeds. Nor is it used to pass the day with some amusement, to take the tedium out of leisure. It shapes and builds the mind, orders life, governs actions, shows what should be done and what left undone; it sits at the helm and steers our course as we toss through dangers. Without it no one can live without fear, no one free from care. Countless things happen every hour that call for advice, and that advice must be sought from philosophy.

16.4 Someone will say: "What use is philosophy to me, if there is fate? What use is it, if god is the ruler? What use is it, if chance commands? For what is fixed can't be changed, and nothing can be prepared against what is uncertain. Either god has forestalled my planning and decided what I should do, or fortune leaves nothing to my planning."

16.5 Whichever of these is true, Lucilius—or even if all of them are—we must practice philosophy. Whether the fates bind us with an inexorable law, or god as arbiter of the universe has arranged everything, or chance drives and tosses human affairs without order, philosophy must protect us. It will urge us to obey god willingly and fortune defiantly; it will teach you to follow god and to endure chance.

16.6 But we shouldn't turn now to the debate over what is in our power if providence is in command, or if a chain of fates drags us along in bonds, or if sudden and unexpected events rule. I return now to my point: to warn and urge you not to let the impulse of your mind slip away and cool. Hold on to it and steady it, so that what is now an impulse becomes a settled disposition of the mind.

16.7 Right from the start, if I know you well, you'll be looking around to see what little gift this letter has brought. Shake it out and you'll find it. There's no reason to admire my generosity: I'm still being liberal with other people's property. But why did I say other people's? Whatever has been well said by anyone is mine. This too was said by Epicurus: "If you live in accordance with nature, you will never be poor; if in accordance with opinion, you will never be rich."

16.8 Nature desires little, opinion without limit. Let whatever many rich men have possessed be heaped upon you. Let fortune carry you beyond the wealth of any private citizen, cover you with gold, clothe you in purple, bring you to such a pitch of luxury and riches that you hide the earth under marble—so that you may not only own your riches but walk on them. Add statues and paintings, and whatever any art has worked up for luxury: from these you will learn to want still more.

16.9 Natural desires have limits; those born of false opinion have nowhere to stop. For there is no end to what is false. When you travel a road, there is an end to it; wandering has no limit. So pull yourself back from empty things, and when you want to know whether what you seek springs from a natural desire or a blind one, consider whether it can come to a stop anywhere. If,

however far you've gone, there is always something farther left, know that it is not natural. Farewell.

LETTER 17: ON PHILOSOPHY AND RICHES

Do not wait to get rich before turning to philosophy: poverty travels light, and wealth only changes our miseries.

17.1 Throw all that aside, if you are wise—or rather, so that you may be wise—and strive toward a sound mind at full speed and with all your strength. If anything holds you back, untie it or cut it. "My household affairs are holding me up," you say. "I want to arrange them so that they can support me while I do nothing, so that neither poverty is a burden to me nor I to anyone else."

17.2 When you say this, you seem not to know the force and power of the good you are thinking about. You do see the sum of the matter—how much philosophy helps—but you do not yet make out the parts precisely enough. You do not yet know how much it assists us everywhere: how, to use Cicero's word, it both "lends aid" in the greatest matters and comes down to the smallest. Believe me, call it in as your adviser. It will counsel you not to sit down over your accounts.[7]

17.3 Surely this is what you are after, what you want to gain by this delay: not to have to fear poverty. But what if poverty is something to seek? Wealth has stood in the way of many who would have pursued philosophy; poverty travels light and without care. When the trumpet sounds, the poor man knows he is not the one being hunted. When the cry goes up for water against a fire, he asks how to get out, not what to carry out. If he has to go to sea, the harbor is not in an uproar, nor are the shores thrown into commotion by one man's retinue. No crowd of slaves surrounds him, for whose feeding one must pray for the harvests of lands overseas.

17.4 It is easy to feed a few bellies—well-trained ones, too, that want nothing but to be filled. Hunger costs little; fussiness costs

7 Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC), Roman orator, statesman and writer on philosophy.

a great deal. Poverty is content to satisfy pressing needs. Why, then, should you refuse to take as your companion the one whose ways the sensible rich man imitates?

17.5 If you want to have time for your mind, you must either be poor or be like the poor. Study cannot be healthful without some attention to frugality—and frugality is voluntary poverty. So away with those excuses: "I don't yet have enough; once I reach that sum, then I'll give myself wholly to philosophy." But nothing should be acquired before this thing that you put off and acquire after everything else. This is where you must begin. "I want to acquire the means to live," you say. Then acquire and learn at the same time. If something forbids you to live well, it does not forbid you to die well.

17.6 There is no reason for poverty to call us away from philosophy—not even destitution. Those hurrying toward it must endure even hunger. Some have endured hunger under siege, and what other reward did they have for their endurance than not falling into the victor's power? How much greater is what is promised here: lasting freedom, and fear of no one, human or divine. Truly, one must come to these things even starving.

17.7 Armies have endured the lack of everything; they have lived on the roots of plants and staved off hunger with foods too foul to name. All this they suffered for a kingdom—and, to make you marvel the more, someone else's. Will anyone hesitate to bear poverty in order to free his mind from madness? So there is no need to acquire first. You can reach philosophy even without money for the journey.

17.8 So it is. When you have everything, then you will want to have wisdom too? Will it be the last furnishing of your life—an extra, so to speak? No: if you have something, start philosophizing now (for how do you know you don't already have too much?); if you have nothing, seek this before anything else.

17.9 "But necessities were lacking." First, they cannot be lacking, since nature asks for very little, and the wise man adapts himself to nature. But if the most extreme need has come upon him, he will promptly leave life and stop being a burden to him-

self. If his means of prolonging life are scanty and narrow, he will make the best of them. Without worry or anxiety beyond necessities, he will give his belly and his back what they are owed; and, free from care and cheerful, he will laugh at the busyness of the rich and the rushing about of those chasing riches, and say:

17.10 "Why put yourself off for so long? Will you wait for the interest on a loan, or the profit on your merchandise, or the will of some rich old man, when you can become rich at once? Wisdom pays out wealth on the spot: to whomever it has made wealth superfluous, it has given it." These words concern others; you are closer to the rich. Change the age you live in, and you have too much. But in every age, what is enough is the same.

17.11 I could have ended the letter here, if I had not trained you badly. No one may greet the kings of Parthia without a gift; I am not allowed to say goodbye to you for free. What then? I will borrow from Epicurus: "For many, acquiring riches was not the end of their miseries, but a change in them."[8]

17.12 Nor does this surprise me. The fault is not in things but in the mind itself. What had made poverty heavy for us has made riches heavy too. Just as it makes no difference whether you lay a sick man on a wooden bed or a golden one—wherever you move him, he will take his illness with him—so it makes no difference whether a sick mind is placed in wealth or in poverty. Its trouble follows it. Farewell.

LETTER 18: ON FESTIVALS AND FASTING

During the Saturnalia, practice poverty for a few days so as to learn that it is nothing to fear.

18.1 It is December: the very time when the city is in a sweat. License has been granted to public indulgence. Everything resounds with huge preparations, as if there were any difference between the Saturnalia and working days. So little difference is

8 Parthia: the great empire on Rome's eastern frontier, in what is now Iran and Iraq.

there that I think the man was not wrong who said December used to be a month and is now a year.[9]

18.2 If I had you here, I would gladly consult with you about what you think we should do: whether to change nothing in our daily routine, or, so as not to seem at odds with public custom, to dine more festively and take off the toga. For what used to happen only in times of unrest and public grief, we now do for pleasure and holidays: we change our dress.[10]

18.3 If I know you well, acting as arbiter you would have wanted us to be neither like the cap-wearing crowd in everything nor unlike it in everything—unless perhaps these are exactly the days when the mind must be ordered to abstain from pleasures on its own, just when the whole crowd has sprawled headlong into them. For it gets the surest proof of its own firmness if it neither goes toward the charms that drag us into luxury nor is led off by them.[11]

18.4 It is far braver to stay dry and sober while the populace is drunk and vomiting. But it is more balanced not to set oneself apart or make oneself conspicuous, and yet not to blend in with everyone—to do the same things, but not in the same way. For one can keep a holiday without extravagance.

18.5 Still, I am so keen to test the firmness of your mind that I will pass on to you, too, a precept of great men: set aside some days on which, content with the scantiest and cheapest food and with rough, coarse clothing, you say to yourself: "Is this what I was afraid of?"

18.6 It is in the very midst of freedom from care that the mind should prepare itself for hardship, and steel itself against fortune's injuries while fortune is being kind. The soldier drills in the middle of peace; with no enemy anywhere, he throws up a rampart and wears himself out with needless labor, so that he can be equal to necessary labor. If you don't want someone to

9 The Saturnalia: Rome's midwinter festival (from December 17), a time of feasting, gift-giving and license.
10 At the Saturnalia Romans put aside the formal toga for a light dinner garment.
11 The felt cap (pilleus), the badge of a freed slave, was worn by all during the Saturnalia.

panic when the moment comes, train him before it. This is the course followed by those who imitated poverty every month and came close to actual want, so that they would never be terrified by what they had often rehearsed.

18.7 Don't think I mean Timon-style dinners and paupers' cells and whatever else luxury uses to amuse itself when bored with riches. Let the pallet be a real one, and the cloak, and the bread hard and coarse. Endure this for three or four days, sometimes more, so that it is not a game but a test. Then, believe me, Lucilius, you will rejoice at being full for two coppers, and you will understand that freedom from care does not depend on fortune. For what is enough for necessity, fortune gives even when angry.[12]

18.8 Still, there is no reason for you to think you are doing something great. You will be doing what many thousands of slaves and many thousands of poor people do. Admire yourself on this count: that you will be doing it under no compulsion, and that it will be as easy for you to endure it always as to try it now and then. Let us practice at the post. And so that fortune does not catch us unprepared, let poverty become familiar to us. We will be rich with less anxiety if we know how little of a burden it is to be poor.[13]

18.9 Epicurus, that famous teacher of pleasure, kept set days on which he satisfied his hunger stingily, to see whether anything was missing from full and complete pleasure—or how much was missing, and whether it was worth making up with great effort. He says so, at any rate, in the letters he wrote to Polyaenus in the year Charinus was archon. Indeed, he boasts that he fed himself for less than an as, while Metrodorus, who had not yet made as much progress, needed a whole one.[14]

18.10 Do you think such a diet fills a man? It gives pleasure too—and not that light, fleeting pleasure that must be constantly

12 Probably after Timon of Athens, the legendary misanthrope; wealthy Romans sometimes staged mock "poor men's" meals and rooms for amusement.
13 The wooden post at which gladiators and recruits practiced their strokes.
14 Charinus was the Athenian magistrate who gave his name to the year. The as was a small copper coin.

renewed, but pleasure that is stable and sure. Water and barley meal or a crust of barley bread are no delight in themselves; but it is the highest pleasure to be able to take pleasure even from these, and to have brought oneself down to what no unfairness of fortune can snatch away.

18.11 Prison rations are more generous; those set aside for execution are fed less meagerly by the man who is going to kill them. What greatness of mind it is to descend of one's own accord to a level that even those condemned to death need not fear! This is to get ahead of fortune's weapons.

18.12 So begin, my Lucilius, to follow their custom. Set aside some days on which to withdraw from your affairs and make yourself at home with the least; begin to have dealings with poverty. "Dare, my guest, to scorn wealth, and shape yourself, too, / worthy of the god."[15]

18.13 No one else is worthy of the god than the one who has scorned wealth. I don't forbid you to own it; I want you to be able to own it without fear. You will achieve that in only one way: if you convince yourself that you will live happily even without it, and if you always look on it as about to leave.

18.14 But now let us start folding up the letter. "First," you say, "pay what you owe." I will refer you to Epicurus; he will make the payment: "Anger beyond measure breeds madness." How true this is you are bound to know, since you have had both a slave and an enemy.

18.15 This passion flares up against every sort of person. It is born of love as much as of hatred, no less amid serious matters than amid games and jokes. And what matters is not how great the cause it springs from, but what kind of mind it reaches. So too with fire: what matters is not how big it is but where it falls. Solid things have withstood even the largest; on the other hand, things that are dry and quick to catch nurse even a spark into a blaze. So it is, my Lucilius: the outcome of great anger is mad-

15 Virgil, Aeneid 8.364–65: King Evander welcomes Aeneas into the humble house where Hercules had once been received.

ness, and so anger must be avoided not for the sake of moderation, but for the sake of sanity. Farewell.

LETTER 19: ON WORLDLINESS AND RETIREMENT

Lucilius should withdraw from his career while he can, and choose his dinner companions before his dinner.

19.1 I am delighted every time I receive your letters. They fill me with good hope; they no longer promise things about you, they guarantee them. Go on this way, I beg and implore you. For what better request could I make of a friend than one I am making for his own sake? If you can, slip away from those occupations of yours; if not, tear yourself away. We have scattered enough of our time; let us start, in old age, to pack our bags.

19.2 Is there anything to resent in that? We have lived on the open sea; let us die in port. Not that I would advise you to seek fame from your leisure, which you should neither flaunt nor hide. For I will never drive you so far in condemning the madness of the human race that I would want some hiding place and oblivion prepared for you. Aim for this: that your leisure does not stand out, but can be seen.

19.3 Those whose plans are still fresh and untouched can decide later whether they want to pass their lives in obscurity; for you it is not an option. The vigor of your talent, the elegance of your writings, your illustrious and noble friendships have brought you into public view. Fame has already taken hold of you. Even if you sink into the remotest corner and bury yourself deep, your past will point you out.

19.4 You cannot have darkness; wherever you flee, much of your former light will follow. Quiet you can claim without anyone's ill will, without regret or pangs of conscience. For what will you leave behind that you could think you left unwillingly? Your clients? Not one of them follows you yourself, only something of yours. Friendship used to be sought; now it is plunder. Abandoned old men will change their wills; the morning caller will move on to another doorstep. A great thing cannot come

cheap: weigh whether you would rather give up yourself or something of your own.[16]

19.5 If only it had been your lot to grow old within the station of your birth, and fortune had not carried you into deep water! Swift success has swept you far out of sight of a healthy life—a province, a procuratorship, and everything these promise. After that, greater offices will await you, and one after another.

19.6 What will be the end of it? Are you waiting until you stop having something to desire? That time will never come. Just as we say there is a chain of causes from which fate is woven, so it is with desires: one is born from the end of another. You have been plunged into a life that will never of itself put an end to your miseries and your servitude. Pull your neck, rubbed raw, out of the yoke. Better to have it cut once than to be crushed forever.

19.7 If you withdraw to private life, everything will be smaller, but it will fill you amply; as it is, heaps gathered from every side do not satisfy you. Which would you rather have: plenty out of scarcity, or hunger amid abundance? Success is both greedy itself and exposed to the greed of others. As long as nothing is enough for you, you yourself will not be enough for others.

19.8 "How," you ask, "shall I get out?" Any way you can. Think how many risks you have run rashly for money, how many laboriously for office. Something must be dared for leisure too—or else you must grow old amid the anxieties of procuratorships and then of official duties in Rome, in turmoil and in ever-new waves that no modesty and no quiet way of life has ever let anyone escape. For what does it matter whether you want to rest? Your fortune does not want it. What if you let it grow even now? Whatever is added to your successes will be added to your fears.

19.9 Here I want to quote you a saying of Maecenas, who spoke the truth on the very summit: "Height itself thunderstrikes the summits." If you ask in which book he said it: the one titled *Prometheus*. He meant that summits are struck by thunder. Is any

16 Roman patrons received clients and callers every morning; childless rich old men were courted for legacies.

power worth so much that your speech should become so drunken? He was a gifted man, who would have set a great example of Roman eloquence had success not unmanned him—no, castrated him. This end awaits you, unless you now shorten sail, unless you do what he wanted too late: hug the shore.[17]

19.10 I could settle my account with you with this saying of Maecenas. But if I know you, you will dispute it and refuse to accept what I owe you in rough, bad coin. As things stand, I must take out a loan from Epicurus. "You should look around," he says, "for the people you will eat and drink with before looking for what you will eat and drink. For feeding on meat without a friend is the life of a lion or a wolf."

19.11 This will not happen for you unless you withdraw; otherwise you will have as dinner guests the people your name-prompter has sorted out of the crowd of morning callers. But he is mistaken who looks for a friend in his entrance hall and tests him at his dinner table. A busy man, besieged by his own possessions, has no greater evil than this: he believes people are his friends to whom he is no friend himself, and he thinks his favors effective at winning friends, when some hate you more the more they owe you. A small debt makes a debtor; a large one, an enemy.[18]

19.12 "What then? Don't favors win friendships?" They do, if one was allowed to choose who would receive them, if they were placed with care, not scattered. So, while you are beginning to be master of your mind, use this advice of the wise in the meantime: consider it more important who receives something than what he receives. Farewell.

17 Gaius Maecenas (d. 8 BC), Augustus' close adviser and patron of Virgil and Horace, notorious for his mannered prose.

18 The name-prompter (nomenclator) was a slave who whispered callers' names to his master.

LETTER 20: ON PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH

Philosophy teaches us to act, not to talk; wisdom is always wanting the same thing and refusing the same thing.

20.1 If you are well and think yourself worthy of becoming at last your own man, I am glad. The credit will be mine if I pull you out of the place where you are drifting with no hope of escape. But this, my Lucilius, I ask and urge you: let philosophy sink into the depths of your heart, and test your progress not by speech or writing but by firmness of mind and the lessening of desires. Prove your words by your deeds.

20.2 Those who declaim and angle for the applause of the crowd have one aim; those who hold the ears of young men and idlers with varied or fluent argument have another. Philosophy teaches us to act, not to speak. It demands that each person live by his own law, that his life not be at odds with his words, and that his life be of one color throughout, with no discord among all his actions. This is the greatest duty of wisdom and its greatest proof: that deeds agree with words, that a man be equal to himself and the same everywhere. "Who will manage that?" Few; still, some. It is difficult. I do not say the wise man will always walk at the same pace—but on the same road.

20.3 So watch yourself: do your clothes and your house disagree? Are you generous to yourself and stingy to your household? Do you dine frugally and build extravagantly? Seize, once and for all, a single rule to live by, and bring your whole life into line with it. Some pull themselves in at home and spread and stretch themselves out in public. This inconsistency is a fault, and the sign of a wavering mind that has not yet found its steady course.

20.4 I will go further and tell you where this inconstancy comes from, this mismatch between actions and plans: no one sets himself a goal of what he wants, or, if he has, he does not stick to it but jumps to something else. Nor does he merely change; he

goes back and slides once more into what he had abandoned and condemned.

20.5 So, to leave aside the old definitions of wisdom and embrace the whole manner of human life, I can be content with this. What is wisdom? Always to want the same thing and always to refuse the same thing. You need not add that little proviso—that what you want must be right—since nothing can always please anyone unless it is right.

20.6 People, then, do not know what they want except at the moment they want it. No one has settled once and for all what to want or not to want. Judgment shifts daily and turns into its opposite, and for most people life passes as a game. So press on with what you have begun, and perhaps you will be carried either to the summit or to a point that you alone know is not yet the summit.

20.7 "What will become of this crowd of household dependents," you ask, "without household funds?" When that crowd stops being fed by you, it will feed itself; or what you cannot learn through your generosity, you will learn through poverty. Poverty will keep your true and reliable friends; anyone who was following not you but something else will leave. Is poverty not to be loved for this reason alone, that it will show you who loves you? Oh, when will that day come when no one lies to do you honor!

20.8 Let your thoughts aim here, then; care for this, pray for this, and release god from all your other prayers: that you be content with yourself and with the goods that spring from you. What happiness could be closer at hand? Bring yourself down to small things from which you cannot fall. And to help you do it more gladly, this letter's tribute, which I shall pay at once, will serve.

20.9 You may resent it, but even now Epicurus gladly pays on my behalf: "Believe me, your words will seem more impressive from a camp bed and in rags. For they will not merely be spoken but proven." I certainly hear what our friend Demetrius says dif-

ferently since I have seen him lying naked, on less than straw. He is not a teacher of the truth, but a witness to it.[19]

20.10 "What then? Is one not allowed to despise riches that lie in one's lap?" Why not? That man, too, has a great mind who, with riches pouring around him, after long and greatly wondering that they came to him, laughs at them, and hears rather than feels that they are his. It is a great thing not to be corrupted by living alongside riches; he is great who is poor amid riches.

20.11 "I don't know," you say, "how that man will bear poverty if he falls into it." Nor do I know, Epicurus, whether your poor man will despise riches if he falls into them. So in both cases it is the mind that must be weighed, and we must examine whether the one is fond of his poverty and whether the other is not fond of his riches. Otherwise a camp bed or rags are slight proof of good intentions, unless it is clear that someone endures them not from necessity but by choice.

20.12 Besides, it is the mark of a great nature not to rush toward these things as if they were better, but to prepare for them as if they were easy. And they are easy, Lucilius—indeed, when you come to them after long rehearsal, even pleasant. For they contain the thing without which nothing is pleasant: freedom from care.

20.13 I therefore judge it necessary to do what I wrote to you great men have often done: to set aside some days on which we train for real poverty with an imaginary one. This must be done all the more because we have been soaked through with luxuries and judge everything hard and difficult. Instead, the mind must be roused from sleep, pinched, and reminded that nature has allotted us very little. No one is born rich. Everyone who comes into the light has been ordered to be content with milk and a rag. From such beginnings, kingdoms are not big enough for us. Farewell.

19 Demetrius the Cynic, a philosopher at Rome famed for his poverty and bluntness, and Seneca's friend.

LETTER 21: ON THE RENOWN MY WRITINGS WILL BRING YOU

True fame comes from study, as Epicurus made Idomeneus famous, and wealth comes from subtracting desires.

21.1 Do you think your trouble is with those people you wrote about? Your greatest trouble is with yourself: you are a nuisance to yourself. You don't know what you want. You approve of the honorable more than you follow it. You see where happiness lies, but you don't dare to reach it. Since you don't see clearly enough yourself what is holding you back, I will tell you. You think the things you are about to leave are great; and when you have set before yourself that freedom from care into which you are about to cross, the glitter of this life you are leaving holds you back, as if you were about to fall into squalor and obscurity.

21.2 You are wrong, Lucilius: from this life one climbs up to that one. The difference between reflected shine and light—light has a sure source of its own, while the other gleams with borrowed brightness—is the difference between this life and that one. This one is lit by a glitter that comes from outside; anyone who stands in the way will at once cast a thick shadow over it. That one is bright with its own light. Your studies will make you famous and renowned.

21.3 I will cite the example of Epicurus. When he was writing to Idomeneus, trying to call him back from a showy life to faithful and stable glory—Idomeneus was then a minister of royal power and handling great affairs—he said: "If you are moved by glory, my letters will make you better known than all those things you court and for which you are courted."[20]

21.4 Did he lie, then? Who would know of Idomeneus if Epicurus had not engraved him in his letters? All those grandees and satraps, and the king himself from whom Idomeneus' title derived, have been buried in deep oblivion. Cicero's letters do

20 Idomeneus of Lampsacus, a disciple of Epicurus who served at a Hellenistic royal court.

not let the name of Atticus perish. It would have done him no good to have Agrippa as his son-in-law, Tiberius as the husband of his granddaughter, and Drusus Caesar as his great-grandson; among such great names he would go unmentioned, had Cicero not attached him to himself.[21]

21.5 The deep flood of time will roll over us. A few talents will lift their heads above it, and, though bound one day to pass into the same silence, will resist oblivion and hold their own for a long time. What Epicurus could promise his friend, I promise you, Lucilius. I will find favor with posterity; I can take names with me that will last. Our Virgil promised two men eternal remembrance, and delivers it: "Fortunate pair! If my songs have any power,

no day will ever erase you from the memory of time,
so long as the house of Aeneas dwells by the Capitol's unmoving rock
and the Roman father holds his empire."[22]

21.6 Whomever fortune has brought into public view, whoever have been limbs and parts of another's power—their influence flourished and their houses were thronged as long as they themselves stood; after them, their memory quickly faded. But the esteem of great minds grows, and not only are they themselves honored, but whatever has attached itself to their memory is preserved.

21.7 So that Idomeneus does not come into my letter for nothing, he shall pay his own way. It was to him that Epicurus wrote that famous saying, urging him to make Pythocles rich, but not by the common, risky road. "If you want to make Pythocles rich," he says, "do not add to his money; subtract from his desires."[23]

21 Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero's closest friend and the recipient of hundreds of his letters; his daughter married Augustus' general Agrippa, and his granddaughter the future emperor Tiberius.
22 Virgil, Aeneid 9.446–49, on the friends Nisus and Euryalus, killed together on a night raid.
23 Pythocles, a young follower of Epicurus.

21.8 That saying is too clear to need interpreting, and too eloquent to need help. I remind you of just one thing: don't think it was said only about riches. Wherever you transfer it, it will have the same force. If you want to make Pythocles honorable, do not add to his honors; subtract from his desires. If you want Pythocles to live in lasting pleasure, do not add to his pleasures; subtract from his desires. If you want to make Pythocles an old man with a full life, do not add to his years; subtract from his desires.

21.9 There is no reason to regard these sayings as Epicurus' own: they are public property. What is usually done in the Senate I think should be done in philosophy too: when someone has made a proposal part of which I like, I ask him to divide it, and I vote for the part I approve. I quote Epicurus' excellent sayings all the more gladly to prove to those who take refuge with him, led on by a bad hope, thinking they will have a cloak for their vices, that wherever they go they must live honorably.

21.10 When you approach his little gardens and read the inscription over them—"Stranger, here you will do well to stay; here the highest good is pleasure"—the keeper of that dwelling will be ready for you, hospitable and kindly. He will welcome you with barley porridge and serve you water generously too, and say: "Have you been well received?" "These gardens," he says, "do not whet hunger; they quench it. They do not make thirst greater with the very drinks; they soothe it with a natural remedy that costs nothing. It is in this pleasure that I have grown old."

21.11 I am speaking to you of those desires that accept no consolation, that must be given something to make them stop. As for the extraordinary ones, which can be postponed, chastised and suppressed, I will point out only this: that pleasure is natural, not necessary. You owe it nothing; if you spend anything on it, it is voluntary. The belly does not listen to precepts; it demands, it duns. Yet it is not a troublesome creditor: it is sent away with little, provided you give it what you owe, not what you can. Farewell.

Book III

On true joy (23), on despising death (24), on travel as a cure for discontent (28).

LETTER 22: ON THE FUTILITY OF HALF-WAY MEASURES

Get out of the business that entangles you, gently if you can, and do not die as unprepared as you were born.

22.1 You now understand that you must be led out of those showy and harmful occupations. But you ask how you can manage it. Some things can be shown only by someone who is present. A doctor cannot choose the time for food or a bath by letter; he must feel the pulse. There is an old proverb that the gladiator makes his plan in the arena: something in his opponent's face, something in a movement of his hand, something in the very tilt of his body warns him as he watches.

22.2 What is usually done, what ought to be done, can be prescribed and written down in general terms; such advice is given not only to the absent but even to posterity. That other question—when or how something should be done—no one will advise on from a distance. It must be decided in the presence of the facts themselves.

22.3 It takes someone not only present but watchful to spot an opportunity as it hurries past. So look out for it, and when you see it, seize it, and with all your drive and all your strength work to strip yourself of those duties. And listen to the motion I put forward: I propose that you must leave either that life or life itself. But I also think you should go by a gentle path, so that you untie rather than break what you have badly tangled—provided

that, if there is no other way to untie it, you break it. No one is so timid that he would rather hang forever than fall once.

22.4 Meanwhile—and this comes first—don't entangle yourself further. Be content with the business you have gone down into, or, as you would rather have it seem, fallen into. There is no reason to strive for more, or you will lose your excuse, and it will be plain that you did not fall. For the things people usually say are false: "I couldn't do otherwise." "What if I hadn't wanted to?" "It was necessary." No one is obliged to chase success at a run. It is something, even if you do not resist, to stand still and not press forward when fortune is carrying you along.

22.5 Will you be offended if I not only come to the council myself but also call in others—wiser ones than I am, to whom I usually refer anything I am deliberating? Read Epicurus' letter on this very matter, the one addressed to Idomeneus. He asks him to flee as fast as he can, hurrying before some greater force intervenes and takes away his freedom to withdraw.

22.6 Yet he adds that nothing should be attempted except when it can be attempted fittingly and at the right moment. But when that long-awaited moment comes, he says, you must leap. He forbids the man who is planning an escape to doze, and he hopes for a safe way out even from the most difficult straits, provided we neither hurry before the time nor hang back when it comes.

22.7 Now, I suppose, you want the Stoic view as well. There is no reason for anyone to slander them to you as reckless; they are more cautious than brave. Perhaps you expect them to tell you: "It is shameful to give way under a burden. Wrestle with the duty you have once taken on. No one who flees hard work is brave and energetic; he is so only if his spirit grows with the very difficulty of things."

22.8 Those things will be said to you if perseverance will be worth the effort, if nothing unworthy of a good man will have to be done or endured. Otherwise he will not wear himself out in squalid and degrading toil, nor stay busy for the sake of being busy. He will not even do what you think he will—stay entangled

in ambitious affairs and always bear their surges. When he sees that the matters he was wallowing in are heavy, uncertain and perilous, he will draw back his foot. He will not turn his back, but will retreat step by step to safety.

22.9 It is easy, my Lucilius, to escape occupations, if you despise the rewards of occupations. These are what delay and detain us: "What then? Shall I abandon such great hopes? Shall I leave just at harvest time? Will my side be bare, my litter unescorted, my hall empty?" So people withdraw from these things unwillingly; they love the wages of their miseries while cursing the miseries themselves.

22.10 They complain about ambition as they would about a mistress: that is, if you look at their true feelings, they don't hate her, they are quarreling with her. Examine those who lament what they longed for and talk of escaping things they cannot do without: you will see that they linger willingly in what they say they bear with difficulty and misery.

22.11 So it is, Lucilius: slavery holds few people fast; more hold fast to slavery. But if you mean to lay it down, and freedom has won you over in good faith, and you seek counsel for this alone —to be able to do it without constant anxiety—why should the whole cohort of Stoics not approve of you? All the Zenos and Chrysippuses will advise what is moderate, honorable, and right for you.

22.12 But if you are hedging so that you can look around and see how much you can take with you and how much money you can furnish your leisure with, you will never find a way out. No one swims to shore with his baggage. Rise to the surface into a better life, with the gods' favor—but not the kind of favor they show to those on whom, with kind and gracious faces, they have bestowed magnificent evils, excused only by this: that the things that burn and torture were given to those who prayed for them.

22.13 I was already pressing my seal on the letter; it must be opened again so that it can come to you with its customary little gift and bring some splendid saying along. And look, one occurs to me—I don't know whether it is more true or more eloquent.

"Whose?" you ask. Epicurus'; for I am still laying claim to other people's baggage:

22.14 "No one leaves life otherwise than as if he had only just entered it." Take anyone you like—young, old, middle-aged: you will find them equally afraid of death, equally ignorant of life. No one has anything finished, for we have put off our affairs into the future. Nothing in that saying delights me more than that it charges old men with infancy.

22.15 "No one," he says, "leaves life otherwise than as one just born." That is false: we die worse than we are born. That is our fault, not nature's. Nature ought to complain of us and say: "What is this? I brought you into the world without desires, without fears, without superstition, without treachery and those other plagues. Leave as you entered."

22.16 He has grasped wisdom who dies as free from care as he is born. As it is, we tremble when danger draws near; our courage fails, our color goes; tears fall that will do no good. What is more shameful than to be anxious on the very threshold of freedom from care?

22.17 The reason is this: we are empty of all goods, and we are in distress at losing life. For no part of it has settled with us; it has passed through and flowed away. No one cares how well he lives, only how long—though everyone can manage to live well, and no one to live long. Farewell.

LETTER 23: ON THE TRUE JOY WHICH COMES FROM PHILOSOPHY

Real joy is a serious thing that grows from within; those who keep starting life anew live badly.

23.1 Do you think I'm going to write to you about how kindly the winter has treated us—it was both mild and short—how spiteful the spring is, how unseasonable the cold, and the other trivia of people hunting for something to say? No: I will write something that can do both you and me some good. And what will that be, if not to urge you toward a sound mind? You ask what its founda-

tion is? Do not take joy in empty things. I called this the foundation; it is the summit.

23.2 He has reached the top who knows what to rejoice in, who has not placed his happiness in another's power. Anyone whom some hope keeps goading is anxious and unsure of himself—even if the thing is within reach, even if it is not hard to get, even if what he hoped for has never once let him down.

23.3 Above all, my Lucilius, do this: learn how to feel joy. Do you think I am now robbing you of many pleasures, since I clear away what chance brings and think hopes—the sweetest of delights—should be avoided? Quite the opposite: I never want you to lack gladness. I want it to be born for you at home; and it is, provided it is inside you. Other kinds of cheerfulness do not fill the heart; they smooth the brow, and they are shallow—unless perhaps you think that whoever laughs is joyful. The mind should be eager and confident, and raised above everything.

23.4 Believe me, true joy is a serious business. Or do you think anyone with a slack face and—as those dainty people put it—a jolly little look can despise death, open his house to poverty, keep his pleasures on a tight rein, rehearse the endurance of pain? Whoever turns these things over within himself is in great joy, but not a very soft one. That is the joy I want you to possess: it will never run short once you have found where to draw it from.

23.5 Mines of cheap metals yield at the surface; the richest are those whose vein lies hidden deep, and it will repay the digger ever more fully the longer he keeps at it. The things the crowd delights in give a thin, superficial pleasure, and any joy brought in from outside has no foundation. The joy I am speaking of, the one I am trying to lead you to, is solid, and opens out more the further in you go.

23.6 Please, dearest Lucilius, do the one thing that can make you happy: smash and trample those things that glitter on the outside, that are promised to you by someone else or from something else. Look to the true good, and rejoice in what is

your own. But what does "your own" mean? Yourself, and the best part of you. Your poor body, too—even though nothing can be done without it—count as a necessary thing rather than a great one. It supplies empty pleasures, short-lived and soon regretted, and unless they are tempered with great moderation they will turn into their opposite. I mean this: pleasure stands on a slope and tips toward pain unless it keeps within limits. But it is hard to keep within limits in something you have believed to be good. Greed for the true good is safe.

23.7 What is that, you ask, and where does it come from? I'll tell you: from a good conscience, from honorable intentions, from right actions, from contempt for what chance brings, from a calm and steady course of life that keeps to one road. For those who jump from one plan to another—or do not even jump, but are carried across by some accident—how can they have anything fixed or lasting, dangling and drifting as they are?

23.8 Few people arrange themselves and their affairs by deliberate plan; the rest are like things floating in a river: they do not go, they are carried. Some of these a gentler current has held back and borne along more softly; others a stronger one has swept away; some, as the flow slackened, it has set down near the bank; others a torrent's rush has flung out to sea. So we must settle what we want, and stick to it.

23.9 This is the place to pay off my debt. I can hand you a saying of your Epicurus and so discharge this letter: "It is tiresome always to be beginning life." Or, if the sense can be better expressed this way: "They live badly who are always beginning to live."

23.10 "Why?" you ask—for that saying does need explaining. Because their life is always unfinished. And a man who is only just beginning to live cannot stand ready for death. We must act so that we have lived enough. No one thinks that who is just now setting out on life.

23.11 There is no reason to suppose these people are few; they are almost everyone. Some, indeed, begin only when it is time to stop. If you find that surprising, I'll add something to surprise

you more: some have stopped living before they began. Farewell.

LETTER 24: ON DESPISING DEATH

Facing a lawsuit, imagine the worst and see that it is either short or small, as Cato and others showed by their deaths.

24.1 You write that you are anxious about the outcome of a lawsuit that an enemy's fury is threatening you with. You expect me to advise you to picture a better outcome for yourself and rest in comforting hope. After all, why go out and fetch troubles—they will have to be endured soon enough once they arrive—why anticipate them, and ruin the present through fear of the future? No doubt it is foolish to be miserable now because at some point you are going to be miserable. But I will lead you to freedom from care by another road.

24.2 If you want to shed all anxiety, assume that whatever you fear may happen will certainly happen. Whatever that evil is, measure it out in your own mind and put a price on your fear. You will surely see that what you fear is either not great or not long.

24.3 Nor do you need to spend long collecting examples to steady you: every age has produced them. Whatever part of history you turn your memory to, at home or abroad, you will meet characters of great achievement or great drive. If you are convicted, can anything harsher happen to you than to be sent into exile or led off to prison? Is there anything beyond that for anyone to fear than being burned, than dying? Set out each of these, and call up those who despised them—there is no need to hunt for them, only to choose among them.

24.4 Rutilius bore his conviction as if nothing troubled him except that the court judged badly. Metellus bore exile bravely, Rutilius even gladly: the one allowed himself to be recalled as a service to the state; the other refused his return to Sulla, who at that time was refused nothing. Socrates held discussions in prison; and though there were people promising him escape, he

would not leave. He stayed, to free humanity from its fear of the two most dreadful things, death and prison.[1]

24.5 Mucius put his hand into the fire. It is bitter to be burned; how much more bitter if you suffer it at your own hands! Here you see a man who was not educated, not armed with any teachings against death or pain, equipped only with a soldier's toughness, punishing himself for a failed attempt. He stood and watched his right hand dripping away on the enemy's brazier, and did not withdraw that melting hand, down to the bare bones, until the enemy took the fire away from him. He could have done something more successful in that camp; nothing braver. See how much keener virtue is to seize on dangers than cruelty is to inflict them: Porsenna forgave Mucius for wanting to kill him more easily than Mucius forgave himself for failing to kill.[2]

24.6 "Those stories," you say, "have been chanted to death in every school. Next, when we get to despising death, you'll be telling me about Cato." Why shouldn't I tell of him on that last night, reading a book of Plato's with a sword laid by his head? For his final hour he had provided these two instruments: one so that he would want to die, the other so that he could. So, having settled his affairs—as far as affairs so shattered and so near their end could be settled—he judged that he must see to it that no one should have the power to kill Cato or the luck to save him.[3]

24.7 And drawing the sword, which he had kept clean of all bloodshed until that day, he said: "Fortune, you have accomplished nothing by blocking all my efforts. I have fought until now not for my own freedom but for my country's, and I pressed on so stubbornly not to live free myself but to live among the free. Now, since the cause of humanity is past saving, let Cato be led off to safety."

1 Publius Rutilius Rufus, unjustly convicted in 92 BC, lived out his exile at Smyrna; Quintus Caecilius Metellus Numidicus went into exile in 100 BC and was recalled.
2 Gaius Mucius Scaevola, the legendary young Roman who tried to assassinate the Etruscan king Porsenna during his siege of Rome (traditionally 508 BC).
3 Cato had been reading Plato's Phaedo, on the immortality of the soul.

24.8 Then he dealt his body a fatal wound. When the doctors had bound it up he had less blood and less strength, but the same spirit; angry now not only with Caesar but with himself, he drove his bare hands into the wound, and that noble spirit, contemptuous of all power, he did not release—he hurled it out.

24.9 I am not piling up examples now to exercise my wit, but to rally you against what seems most terrifying. And I will rally you more easily if I show that it was not only brave men who scorned this moment of breathing out the soul, but that some who were cowards in other respects matched the courage of the bravest in this one thing. Take Scipio, father-in-law of Gnaeus Pompey: driven back to Africa by a contrary wind, when he saw his ship being seized by the enemy, he ran himself through with a sword, and to those asking where the commander was, he said: "The commander is doing well."[4]

24.10 Those words made him the equal of his ancestors and did not let the glory fated for the Scipios in Africa be broken off. It was a great thing to conquer Carthage, but a greater one to conquer death. "The commander," he said, "is doing well." Should a commander—and Cato's commander at that—have died any other way?[5]

24.11 I am not calling you back to the history books, nor gathering from every century those who despised death—there are a great many. Look at these times of ours, whose sluggishness and luxury we complain of: they will supply people of every rank, every fortune, every age, who have cut their troubles short by death. Believe me, Lucilius, death is so far from being something to fear that, thanks to it, nothing is to be feared. So listen to your enemy's threats without a care.

24.12 And although your conscience gives you confidence, still, since many things outside the merits of a case carry weight, both hope for what is fairest and prepare yourself for what is

4 Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius Scipio, Pompey's father-in-law, who commanded the republican forces defeated by Caesar at Thapsus in 46 BC.

5 Scipio Africanus defeated Hannibal in 202 BC, and Scipio Aemilianus destroyed Carthage in 146 BC.

most unfair. Above all, remember this: strip things of their commotion and see what is in each one. You will find there is nothing terrible in them except fear itself.

24.13 What you see happen to children happens to us too, who are only slightly bigger children: if they see the people they love, whom they are used to, with whom they play, wearing masks, they are terrified. The mask must be taken off not only people but things, and their own face given back.

24.14 Why do you show me swords and fires and a crowd of executioners snarling around you? Take away that parade under which you hide and frighten fools! You are death, whom just recently my slave, my maidservant, despised. Why do you once again unroll before me whips and racks with such great display? Why the separate devices fitted to each separate joint to wrench it apart, and a thousand other instruments for butchering a man piece by piece? Put those things down; they stun us. Order the groans to fall silent, and the screams, and the harshness of cries forced out under torture! Of course—you are pain, which that man with gout despises, which that dyspeptic endures in the midst of his delicacies, which a girl bears in childbirth. You are light if I can bear you; you are short if I cannot.

24.15 Turn over in your mind these things you have often heard and often said. But prove by results whether you have truly heard them, truly said them. For the most shameful charge usually brought against us is this: that we handle the words of philosophy, not its deeds. What—have you only now learned that death hangs over you, only now exile, only now pain? You were born to these. Whatever can happen, let us think of it as going to happen.

24.16 What I am advising you to do, I know for certain you have done; now I am reminding you not to drown your mind in that anxiety. It will be dulled and have less vigor when it has to rise up. Lead it away from your private case to the common one. Tell yourself that you have a mortal and fragile little body, which will be threatened with pain not only by injury or by the might of someone more powerful. Pleasures themselves turn into tor-

ments: banquets bring indigestion; drinking bouts bring numbness and trembling of the nerves; lusts bring deformities of the feet, the hands, all the joints.

24.17 I may become poor: I will be among the majority. I may be exiled: I will think I was born where I am sent. I may be put in chains: so what? Am I unchained now? Nature has already bound me to this heavy weight of my body. I will die: you mean, I will stop being able to get sick, stop being able to be chained, stop being able to die.

24.18 I am not so foolish as to run through the Epicurean refrain here and say that the terrors of the underworld are empty—that Ixion is not spun on a wheel, nor a rock pushed uphill on Sisyphus' shoulders, nor anyone's entrails able to grow back every day and be torn out again. No one is so childish as to fear Cerberus and the darkness and the ghostly look of figures held together by bare bones. Death either consumes us or sets us free. If we are released, something better remains once the burden is lifted; if we are consumed, nothing remains—good and bad alike are taken away.[6]

24.19 Allow me here to quote a verse of yours—once I have first reminded you to consider that you wrote those lines not only for others but also for yourself. It is shameful to say one thing and think another; how much more shameful to write one thing and think another! I remember you once treated that theme: that we do not fall into death suddenly but advance toward it little by little. We die every day.[7]

24.20 For every day some part of life is taken away, and even while we are growing, life is shrinking. We have lost infancy, then childhood, then youth. All the time that has passed, up to yesterday, is gone; this very day we are living we share with death. Just as it is not the last drop that empties the water clock, but all that has flowed out before, so the final hour, in which we

6 Mythical sinners punished in the underworld: Ixion bound to a wheel, Sisyphus rolling his rock, and Tityos, whose liver was endlessly devoured; Cerberus was the hound guarding the underworld.

7 Lucilius wrote poetry as well as prose; this line is known only from Seneca's quotation.

cease to be, does not by itself make death; it only completes it. That is when we arrive at death, but we have been on our way a long time.

24.21 When you had described this in your usual style—always grand, but never more forceful than when you fit words to the truth—you said: "Death comes not once; the one that takes us is the last death." I would rather you read yourself than my letter. For it will be clear to you that this death we fear is the last, not the only one.

24.22 I see what you are looking for: you want to know what I have slipped into this letter—what bold saying of someone's, what useful precept. Something will be sent from this very subject we have had in hand. Epicurus rebukes those who long for death no less than those who fear it, and says: "It is absurd to run to death out of weariness with life, when it is your way of life that has made you have to run to death."

24.23 Likewise he says in another place: "What is so absurd as to seek death when you have made your life restless through fear of death?" You may add to these another saying of the same stamp: that human thoughtlessness—no, madness—is so great that some people are driven to death by the fear of death.

24.24 Whichever of these you ponder, you will strengthen your mind to endure either death or life. For we need warning and strengthening on both sides: not to love life too much, and not to hate it too much. Even when reason advises ending it, the impulse is not to be taken up rashly or with a headlong rush.

24.25 The brave and wise man should not flee from life but walk out of it. And above all, let us avoid that passion which has seized many: the lust for dying. For, my Lucilius, there is an unconsidered leaning of the mind toward death, as toward other things, which often takes hold of noble men of the keenest temperament, and often of the lazy and listless: the first despise life, the second find it a burden.

24.26 Some are overtaken by a surfeit of doing and seeing the same things—not hatred of life but distaste for it. We slide into this with philosophy itself pushing us, when we say: "How long

must it be the same things? Of course: I will wake, I will sleep; I will be hungry, I will be full; I will be cold, I will be hot. Nothing has an end; everything is linked in a circle; things flee and follow. Night presses on day, day on night; summer ends in autumn, winter presses on autumn, and is checked in turn by spring. Everything passes only to return. I do nothing new, I see nothing new." At some point even this becomes nauseating. There are many who judge living not painful, but pointless. Farewell.

LETTER 25: ON REFORMATION

Seneca describes two friends needing correction, and urges living as though a good man were always watching.

25.1 As for our two friends, we must take different roads: the faults of one need to be corrected, those of the other broken. I will use complete frankness. I don't love him if I don't offend him. "What?" you say. "Do you plan to keep a forty-year-old ward under your guardianship? Look at his age, already hardened and unmanageable. He can't be reshaped; it's soft things that get molded."

25.2 Whether I will make headway I don't know. I would rather lack success than loyalty. And don't give up hope that even long-standing invalids can be cured, if you stand firm against their excess and force them to do and endure many things against their will. Even about the other one I have little enough confidence, except that he still blushes at doing wrong. That sense of shame must be nurtured; as long as it lasts in his mind, there will be some room for good hope. With this veteran I think I must go more gently, so that he does not fall into despair of himself.

25.3 And there has never been a better time to approach him than now, while he is resting, while he looks like a reformed man. This pause of his has fooled others; it doesn't fool me. I expect his vices to return with heavy interest; I know they are

now idle, not gone. I will devote some days to this, and find out whether anything can be done or not.

25.4 You, as you are doing, show yourself brave for us, and cut down your baggage. None of the things we own is necessary. Let us return to the law of nature; then riches are ready to hand. What we need is either free or cheap: nature wants bread and water. No one is poor with respect to these, and anyone who has confined his desire within them can compete in happiness with Jupiter himself, as Epicurus says; I will wrap one of his sayings into this letter.

25.5 "Do everything," he says, "as if Epicurus were watching." There is no doubt it helps to have set a guard over yourself, and to have someone to look to, someone you think is present at your thoughts. It is far nobler, of course, to live as if under the eyes of some good man who is always present; but I am content even with this: that whatever you do, you do as though someone were watching. Solitude talks us into every kind of wrong.

25.6 When you have progressed so far that you have respect even for yourself, you may dismiss your tutor. Meanwhile, guard yourself by the authority of others—let it be Cato, or Scipio, or Laelius, or someone whose arrival would make even ruined men suppress their vices—while you make yourself the kind of person in whose presence you would not dare to do wrong. When you have done this, and some self-esteem has begun to take hold in you, I will begin to allow you what Epicurus also recommends: "Withdraw into yourself most of all when you are forced to be in a crowd."

25.7 You must make yourself unlike the many. Until it is safe for you to withdraw into yourself, look around at each person: there is no one who would not be better off with anyone at all than with himself. "Withdraw into yourself most of all when you are forced to be in a crowd"—if you are a good man, a calm one, a self-controlled one. Otherwise, you had better withdraw from yourself into the crowd; in there you are too close to a bad man. Farewell.

LETTER 26: ON OLD AGE AND DEATH

Seneca's mind is vigorous though his body is old, and death will be the real test of whether his words were sincere.

26.1 I was telling you just now that I was in sight of old age; now I'm afraid I have left old age behind me. Some other word now fits these years, or at any rate this body, since "old age" is the name for a time of life that is weary, not broken. Count me among the decrepit, those touching the very end.

26.2 Still, I congratulate myself in your presence: I do not feel the injury of age in my mind, though I feel it in my body. Only my vices, and the things that serve them, have grown old; my mind is vigorous and glad not to have much to do with the body. It has laid down a large part of its load. It exults and argues with me about old age: it says this is its prime.

26.3 Let us believe it; let it enjoy its good. It tells me to go into thought and discern how much of this tranquility and moderation of character I owe to wisdom and how much to age, and to sort out carefully what I cannot do and what I would not want to do [and to count whatever I am glad I cannot do as something I would not want]. For what complaint is there, what inconvenience, if whatever was bound to come to an end has run out?[8]

26.4 "The greatest inconvenience," you say, "is to be worn down and waste away and—to put it precisely—to melt. For we are not suddenly struck down and laid low; we are nibbled away. Each day takes something from our strength." But what end is better than to slip away to one's own finish as nature gently unties us? Not that a blow and a sudden exit from life is anything bad; but this is a gentle road—to be withdrawn by degrees. I, certainly, as if the test were approaching and the day had come that will pass sentence on all my years, watch myself and address myself like this:

26.5 "So far," I say, "what we have shown, in deeds or in words, is nothing. These are light and deceptive pledges of the mind,

wrapped in many allurements. What progress I have made, I will leave to death to tell. So I am not fearful as I prepare for that day on which, with tricks and makeup put aside, I will pass judgment on myself: whether I only speak brave words or truly feel them, and whether all the defiant words I have hurled at fortune were pretense and play-acting."

26.6 "Set aside people's opinion: it is always doubtful and split both ways. Set aside the studies you have pursued all your life: death is going to pronounce on you. I mean this: debates and literary conversations and sayings gathered from the precepts of the wise and learned talk do not show true strength of mind. For speech is bold even in the most timid. What you have done will be clear only when you are doing your dying. I accept the terms; I do not dread the judgment."

26.7 This is what I say to myself, but consider that I have said it to you too. You are younger: what does that matter? Years are not counted out. It is uncertain where death awaits you; so await it everywhere.

26.8 I was ready to stop, and my hand was heading for the close; but the rites must be completed, and this letter given its traveling money. Suppose I don't say where I am going to borrow from: you know whose strongbox I use. Wait for me a little, and the payment will come from my own house; meanwhile Epicurus will lend it, who says: "Rehearse death"—or, if the sense comes across better this way, "Rehearse passing over to the gods."

26.9 The meaning is plain: it is a splendid thing to learn death thoroughly. Perhaps you think it pointless to learn something that will be used only once. That is exactly why we ought to rehearse it: we must always be learning what we cannot test whether we know.

26.10 "Rehearse death": whoever says this is telling us to rehearse freedom. Whoever has learned to die has unlearned slavery; he is above all power, certainly beyond its reach. What

8 The Latin text is corrupt at this point; the bracketed words give the probable sense.

are prison, guards, and bars to him? He has an open door. There is one chain that keeps us bound: love of life. It should not be thrown off, but it should be reduced, so that if circumstances ever demand it, nothing holds us back or hinders us from being ready to do at once what must be done at some point anyway. Farewell.

LETTER 27: ON THE GOOD WHICH ABIDES

Only virtue gives lasting joy, and a sound mind can be neither borrowed nor bought, as rich Calvisius Sabinus learned.

27.1 "Are you advising me?" you say. "Have you already advised yourself, already corrected yourself? Is that why you have time to reform others?" I am not so shameless as to take up doctoring while I am sick myself; but as if I were lying in the same hospital, I am talking with you about the illness we share and passing on remedies. So listen to me as if I were talking to myself. I am admitting you into my private room, and with you there I am calling myself to account.

27.2 I shout to myself: "Count your years, and you will be ashamed to want the same things you wanted as a boy, to be pursuing the same things. At least do yourself this service as the day of your death approaches: let your vices die before you. Dismiss those turbulent pleasures that cost so dear: not only the ones to come do harm, but the ones past as well. Just as with crimes—even if they were not detected when committed, the anxiety does not go away with them—so with shameless pleasures, regret remains even after they are over. They are not solid, not reliable; even if they do no harm, they run away."

27.3 "Look around instead for some good that will last. But there is none except what the mind finds for itself from within itself. Virtue alone provides joy that is lasting and free from care. Even if something gets in the way, it comes between only like clouds, which drift below and never overpower the daylight."

27.4 When will it be my lot to reach this joy? Not that there has been any slacking so far—but let there be hurrying. Much work remains, on which you must spend your own wakeful nights, your own labor, if you want it done. This task cannot be handed off to someone else.

27.5 Another kind of learning does allow for help. Calvisius Sabinus, within our memory, was a rich man. He had a freedman's fortune and a freedman's mind; I never saw a man whose prosperity sat on him more unbecomingly. His memory was so bad that sometimes the name of Ulysses would slip his mind, sometimes Achilles', sometimes Priam's—names we know as well as those of our childhood attendants. No aged name-caller, who does not recall names but invents them, ever greeted the voting tribes as wrongly as he greeted the Trojans and the Greeks. Nevertheless, he wanted to be thought learned.

27.6 So he devised this shortcut: at great expense he bought slaves, one to know Homer by heart, another Hesiod; besides these he assigned one to each of the nine lyric poets. No wonder he paid a lot: he had not found them, he had them made to order. Once this household had been assembled, he began to pester his dinner guests. He kept these men at his feet and would ask them from time to time for lines to recite, yet often he broke down in the middle of a word.[9]

27.7 Satellius Quadratus, a sponger on rich fools—and, as follows from that, a smiler at them, and, as goes with both, a scoffer at them—advised him to keep scholars as crumb-gatherers. When Sabinus said that each of those slaves had cost him a hundred thousand sesterces, he said: "You could have bought as many bookcases for less." Yet Sabinus held the view that whatever anyone in his house knew, he knew himself.[10]

27.8 The same Satellius began urging him to take up wrestling—a sickly, pale, skinny man. When Sabinus replied, "And how can

9 The nine lyric poets were the canonical Greek lyricists, among them Sappho, Alcaeus, and Pindar.

10 Seneca puns on adrosor, adrisor, derisor ("nibbler, smiler, mocker"); the analectae were slaves who picked up scraps after dinner.

I? I can barely stay alive," he said: "Please, don't say that. Don't you see how many very strong slaves you have?" A sound mind can be neither borrowed nor bought. And I think that if it were for sale, it would find no buyer. But an unsound one is bought every day.

27.9 But take now what I owe you, and farewell. "Wealth is poverty brought into line with the law of nature." Epicurus says this often, in one form or another; but what is never learned enough can never be said too often. To some people remedies need only be pointed out; into others they must be pounded. Farewell.

LETTER 28: ON TRAVEL AS A CURE FOR DISCONTENT

Travel cannot cure a troubled mind, since you take yourself along wherever you go.

28.1 Do you think this has happened to you alone, and are you amazed, as if it were something new, that with such long travel and so many changes of scene you have not shaken off the gloom and heaviness of your mind? You need to change your mind, not your sky. Though you cross the vast sea, though, as our Virgil says, "lands and cities fall away," your vices will follow you wherever you arrive.

28.2 When someone complained of this same thing, Socrates said: "Why are you surprised that travel does you no good, when you carry yourself around with you? The same cause that drove you out is weighing on you." What good can new landscapes do? Or getting to know cities or places? All that tossing about comes to nothing. You ask why this flight does not help you? You are fleeing with yourself. The burden on your mind must be laid down; until then no place will please you.

28.3 Picture your present state as like that of the prophetess Virgil brings on stage, already roused and goaded and full of a spirit not her own: "The prophetess raves, if she can only shake / the mighty god from her breast." You go here and there to shake off the weight that sits on you, and it becomes more trouble-

some through the very tossing—just as on a ship, cargo that stays put presses less, while cargo that rolls around unevenly quickly sinks the side it lurches onto. Whatever you do, you do against yourself, and you harm yourself by the very motion: you are shaking a sick man.[11]

28.4 But once you have removed that evil, every change of place will be pleasant. You may be driven out to the ends of the earth, you may be settled in any corner of the barbarian world—that home, whatever it is, will be welcoming to you. What matters is who you are when you arrive, not where; and so we should not bind our minds to any one place. We must live with this conviction: "I was not born for one corner; this whole world is my homeland."

28.5 If that were clear to you, you would not be surprised that you get no help from the variety of regions you keep moving to out of boredom with the last. The first would have pleased you if you believed every place was yours. As it is, you are not traveling but wandering and being driven, swapping place for place, when what you are looking for—to live well—is to be found in every place.

28.6 Can anything be as turbulent as the forum? Even there one can live quietly, if one must. But if I were free to arrange my life, I would flee far even from the sight and neighborhood of the forum. For just as unhealthy places strain even the strongest constitution, so for a good mind, too, that is not yet perfect and is still convalescing, some places are not very wholesome.

28.7 I disagree with those who head into the middle of the waves and, approving of a stormy life, wrestle every day with great spirit against difficulties. The wise man will bear these things, not choose them, and will prefer to be at peace rather than at war. It does little good to have thrown off your own vices if you must brawl with other people's.

28.8 "The Thirty Tyrants," someone says, "surrounded Socrates and could not break his spirit." What does it matter how many

11 The Sibyl of Cumae, in Virgil's Aeneid 6.78–79.

masters there are? Slavery is one. Whoever despises it is free, however great the crowd of those lording it over him.[12]

28.9 It is time to stop—but only after I have paid the harbor toll. "The beginning of health is awareness of one's fault." Epicurus seems to me to have put this excellently. For someone who does not know he is doing wrong does not want to be set right; you must catch yourself in the act before you can reform.

28.10 Some people boast of their vices; do you suppose those who count their evils as virtues give any thought to a cure? So, as far as you can, convict yourself, investigate yourself. Play first the part of prosecutor, then of judge, and last of the one pleading for mercy. Now and then, give yourself offense. Farewell.

LETTER 29: ON THE CRITICAL CONDITION OF MARCELLINUS

Frank advice should be given selectively, and philosophy should aim at pleasing oneself, not the crowd.

29.1 You ask about our friend Marcellinus and want to know how he is doing. He rarely comes to see us, for no other reason than that he is afraid to hear the truth—a danger he is already well clear of. For truth should be spoken only to someone who will listen. That is why people often question whether Diogenes, and the other Cynics too, who used their frankness indiscriminately and lectured whoever they met, ought to have done so.[13]

29.2 For what if someone scolded the deaf, or people mute from birth or illness? "Why," you say, "should I be sparing with words? They cost nothing. I can't know whether I will help the person I admonish; I do know I will help someone if I admonish many. You have to scatter by the handful. Someone who tries many times cannot fail to succeed sometimes."

29.3 This, my Lucilius, is not something I think a great man should do. His authority gets diluted and does not carry enough

12 The oligarchy that ruled Athens in 404–403 BC, after its defeat in the Peloponnesian War.

13 Diogenes of Sinope (4th century BC), founder of the Cynics, famous for blunt public rebukes.

weight with those he could set right if it were less cheapened. An archer should not hit the mark only sometimes, but miss only sometimes. What reaches its goal by chance is not a skill. Wisdom is a skill: let it aim at a sure target, choose those who will make progress, withdraw from those it has given up on—yet not abandon them quickly, and, even when things look hopeless, try the last remedies.

29.4 I do not yet despair of our Marcellinus. He can still be saved, but only if a hand is held out to him quickly. There is a danger, admittedly, that he will pull in the one who reaches out; he has great force of character, but it is already tending toward the bad. Nevertheless I will face this danger and dare to show him his faults.

29.5 He will do what he usually does: he will call up those witticisms of his that could draw a laugh even from mourners, and make jokes first at his own expense, then at ours. He will get in ahead of everything I am going to say. He will rummage through our schools and throw in philosophers' faces their handouts, their mistresses, their gluttony. He will show me one in adultery, another in a tavern, another at court.

29.6 He will show me Aristo, the philosopher of Marcus Lepidus, who used to lecture while being carried in his litter—for that was the time he had chosen for bringing out his work. When someone asked what school he belonged to, Scaurus said: "Well, he's certainly not a Peripatetic." When Julius Graecinus, an excellent man, was asked his opinion of him, he said: "I can't tell you; I don't know what he can do on foot"—as if he were being asked about a chariot-fighter.[14]

29.7 These street-corner hucksters, who would have neglected philosophy more honorably than they peddle it, he will throw in my face. Still, I have decided to put up with the insults. Let him move me to laughter; perhaps I will move him to tears. Or if he keeps on laughing, I will be glad, as one is amid misfortune, that

14 The Peripatetics (Aristotle's school) were named from the Greek for "walking about." Mamercus Scaurus was an orator; Julius Graecinus a senator put to death by Caligula.

the kind of madness he has happens to be a cheerful one. But that cheerfulness does not last long. Watch: you will see the same people laughing wildly and, within a short time, raging wildly.

29.8 My plan is to take him on and show him how much more he was worth when many thought him worth less. Even if I don't cut out his vices, I will check them; they won't stop, but they will pause. And perhaps they will stop, too, if they make a habit of pausing. Even this is not to be scorned, since for the gravely ill a good remission counts as health.

29.9 While I get ready for him, you meanwhile—since you can, since you understand where you have come from and where you have got to, and can guess from that how far you will get—put your character in order, lift up your mind, stand firm against what you fear. Don't count the people who frighten you. Wouldn't a man seem a fool if he feared a crowd in a place where only one at a time can pass? Just so, many cannot get at your death, even if many threaten it. Nature has arranged it this way: one person will take away your breath, just as one gave it.

29.10 If you had any shame, you would have let me off the last installment. But I won't be stingy at the end of my debt either; I'll hand over what I owe you. "I never wanted to please the people. For what I know, the people do not approve; what the people approve, I do not know."

29.11 "Who said that?" you ask—as if you didn't know whose account I draw on: Epicurus. But all of them will shout the same thing at you from every house: Peripatetics, Academics, Stoics, Cynics. For who can please the people if virtue pleases him? Popular favor is sought by bad arts. You would have to make yourself like them; they will not approve of you unless they recognize you as one of their own. But it matters much more what you seem to yourself than what you seem to others. The love of shameful people can be won only by shameful means.

29.12 What then will philosophy—so praised, and preferred to every art and every possession—provide? This, of course: that you would rather please yourself than the people; that you

weigh judgments rather than count them; that you live without fear of gods or men; that you either overcome your troubles or end them. For the rest, if I see you celebrated by the applause of the crowd, if when you come in there is a din of shouting and clapping—the trappings of a pantomime dancer—if women and boys all over the city sing your praises, why shouldn't I pity you, when I know what road leads to that kind of favor? Farewell.

Book IV

On the letters of friends (40), on the god within us (41).

LETTER 30: ON CONQUERING THE CONQUEROR

The dying Aufidius Bassus shows how philosophy lets a man face approaching death cheerfully and calmly.

30.1 I saw Aufidius Bassus, that excellent man, battered and wrestling with his years. But now they weigh on him more than can be lifted; old age has settled on him with its great, its entire weight. You know his body was always frail and wasted. For a long time he held it together—or, to put it more exactly, kept it patched together. Now it has suddenly given way.[1]

30.2 On a ship that is taking in water, you can plug one crack or another; but once she starts to loosen and give way in many places, nothing can save a vessel that is gaping open. Just so, in an old man's body, frailty can be propped and shored up to a point. But when, as in a rotting building, every joint is pulling apart, and while one is being repaired another splits, you have to look around for a way out.

30.3 Still, our friend Bassus is keen in spirit. This is what philosophy provides: cheerfulness in sight of death, and courage and gladness in whatever state the body is in—never failing, though the body fails. A great helmsman sails on even with a torn sail, and if the storm has stripped his rigging, he still fits what is left of the ship to hold her course. That is what our Bassus does. He

1 Aufidius Bassus: Roman historian of the early Empire, author of histories of the German wars and of the civil wars.

looks on his own end with a mind and a face you would think too unconcerned even in a man looking on someone else's.

30.4 It is a great thing, Lucilius, and one that takes long to learn: when that inescapable hour arrives, to depart with a calm mind. Other kinds of death are mixed with hope. A disease runs its course; a fire is put out; a collapsing building sets down unhurt those it seemed about to crush; the sea throws back safe, with the same force with which it sucked them in, those it had swallowed; a soldier pulls back his sword from the very neck of the man about to die. But the man whom old age leads to death has nothing to hope for. Here alone there can be no reprieve. No kind of death is gentler—but none is longer either.

30.5 Our Bassus seemed to me to be attending his own funeral and laying himself out, living as if he had outlived himself, and bearing wisely the loss of himself. For he talks a great deal about death, and works hard to convince us that if there is anything unpleasant or frightening in this business, it is the fault of the dying man, not of death; that there is no more distress in death itself than after it.

30.6 For it is as mad to fear what you will not suffer as to fear what you will not feel. Or does anyone believe that the thing through which nothing is felt will itself be felt? "So," he says, "death is so far beyond all evil that it is beyond all fear of evils."

30.7 I know these things have often been said, and must often be said again. But they did not help me as much when I read them, or when I heard them from people who said there was nothing to fear while they were far from the things they told us not to fear. This man, though, carried the greatest authority with me, because he was speaking of a death close at hand.

30.8 I'll tell you what I think: I believe a man in the very act of dying is braver than one who is merely near death. For death, once it is brought close, gives even the untrained the courage not to shun what cannot be shunned. So a gladiator who has been utterly fearful through the whole fight offers his throat to his opponent and guides the wavering sword to the spot. But a death that is near, and certain to come, demands a slow and

steady firmness of mind. That is rarer, and only the wise man can supply it.

30.9 So I listened to him with the greatest pleasure, as though he were pronouncing a verdict on death and reporting what its nature is, like one who had inspected it at close range. I suppose you would give more credit, more weight, to someone who had come back to life and told you from experience that there is nothing bad in death. But what turmoil the approach of death brings, those will tell you best who have stood beside it, who have seen it coming and taken it in.

30.10 Among these you may count Bassus, who did not want us deceived. He says a man who fears death is as foolish as one who fears old age. For just as old age follows youth, so death follows old age. Whoever does not want to die did not want to live. Life was given to us on condition of death; death is where we are going. So it is madness to fear it: what is certain we wait for; only what is doubtful we dread!

30.11 Death binds us by a necessity that is equal and invincible. Who can complain of being in a condition that everyone is in? And the first part of fairness is equality. But there is no need now to plead nature's case; she wanted our law to be no different from her own. Whatever she has put together, she takes apart; and whatever she takes apart, she puts together again.

30.12 And if someone has had the luck to be let go gently by old age—not torn suddenly from life but drawn away little by little—surely he ought to thank all the gods that, having had his fill, he has been brought to a rest that a human being needs and a tired one welcomes. You see some people longing for death, and more intensely than people usually beg for life. I don't know which give us greater courage: those who demand death, or those who await it cheerfully and quietly. The first sometimes comes from frenzy and sudden indignation; the second is a tranquility that comes from settled judgment. Some go to death in anger; but no one welcomes death cheerfully as it comes, unless he has long prepared himself for it.

30.13 I admit, then, that I visited this man, dear to me for many reasons, rather often, to find out whether I would find him the same each time, and whether the vigor of his mind was waning with the strength of his body. But it was growing in him, the way a charioteer's joy usually shows more plainly on the seventh lap, as he nears the prize.[2]

30.14 Following the teachings of Epicurus, he said, first, that he hoped there would be no pain in that last gasp; but if there were, there was some comfort in its very brevity, since no great pain is long. Besides, even at the very tearing apart of mind and body, if it came with agony, he would be helped by the thought that after that pain he could feel no pain at all. He had no doubt, though, that an old man's soul was right at his lips and would not be wrenched from the body with great force. "A fire that has caught on fuel that feeds it has to be put out with water, sometimes by pulling the building down; one that runs short of fuel dies down of its own accord."

30.15 I listen to these things gladly, my Lucilius, not as though they were new, but as though I had been brought face to face with the thing itself. Well then? Haven't I watched many people cut their lives short? I have indeed; but those carry more weight with me who come to death without hating life, who let it in rather than drag it in.

30.16 He used to say that it is our own doing that we feel this torment, because we panic only when we believe death is near us. But from whom is it not near, when it stands ready in every place and at every moment? "But let us consider," he said, "when some cause of death seems to be approaching, how many others are closer that we do not fear. An enemy was threatening someone with death; indigestion got there first."

30.17 "If we are willing to sort out the causes of our fear, we will find that some are real and others only seem so. We do not fear death, but the thought of death. For from death itself we are

2 Roman chariot races were run over seven laps; the victor received a palm branch.

always the same distance away. So if death is to be feared, it is always to be feared. For what time is exempt from death?"

30.18 But I should worry that you'll hate such long letters worse than death. So I'll stop. You, though—so that you never fear death, always think about it. Farewell.

LETTER 31: ON SIREN SONGS

Stop your ears to the crowd's wishes: the only good is the knowledge that makes toil and fortune indifferent.

31.1 I recognize my Lucilius: he is beginning to show the man he promised to be. Follow that impulse of the mind that was carrying you toward all that is best, trampling underfoot what the crowd counts as goods. I don't wish you to become greater or better than you were striving to be. Your foundations have covered a great deal of ground; just complete what you set out to build, and carry out the plans you have been carrying in your mind.

31.2 In short, you will be wise if you close your ears—and it is not enough to stop them with wax; you need a tighter plug than the one Ulysses is said to have used for his crew. That voice, which was feared, was alluring, but it was not public; this one, which must be feared, sounds not from a single rock but from every part of the world. So sail past not one place suspected of treacherous pleasure, but every city. Make yourself deaf to those who love you most: they wish you ill with good intentions. And if you want to be happy, pray the gods that none of the things they wish for you comes true.[3]

31.3 Those things these people want to heap on you are not goods. There is one good, the cause and the foundation of a happy life: to trust yourself. But this cannot happen unless toil is despised and counted among the things that are neither good nor evil. For it is impossible for one and the same thing to be now bad, now good; now light and bearable, now terrifying.

3 In the Odyssey (Book 12), Ulysses (Odysseus) stopped his crew's ears with wax so they could sail past the Sirens, whose song lured sailors to their deaths.

31.4 Toil is not a good. What, then, is good? Contempt for toil. So I would blame those who toil for nothing. On the other hand, when people strive toward the honorable, the harder they press, and the less they let themselves be beaten and flag, the more I will approve of them and shout: "All the better! Get up, draw breath, and take that hill in a single breath if you can."

31.5 Toil nourishes noble minds. So there is no reason for you to choose, out of that old prayer your parents made for you, what you would like to happen to you, what to wish for. And in general, for a man who has already passed through the highest offices, it is shameful to be still wearying the gods. What need is there for prayers? Make yourself happy. And you will, if you understand that the things mixed with virtue are good, and those joined with vice are shameful. Just as nothing is bright without a mixture of light, and nothing dark unless it holds darkness or has drawn some gloom into itself; just as nothing is hot without the help of fire, and nothing cold without air: so it is partnership with virtue or vice that makes things honorable or shameful.

31.6 What, then, is good? Knowledge of things. What is evil? Ignorance of things. Your man of wisdom and skill will reject or choose each thing as the occasion demands. But he neither fears what he rejects nor admires what he chooses, provided his mind is great and unconquered. I forbid you to bow down or be crushed. It is not enough not to refuse toil: ask for it.

31.7 "What?" you say. "Toil that is trivial and pointless, called up by petty causes—isn't that bad?" No more than toil spent on fine things; for it is the endurance itself that belongs to the mind, the endurance that urges itself on to hard and rough tasks and says: "Why are you slacking? A man doesn't fear sweat."

31.8 Add to this that, for virtue to be perfect, there must be evenness and a course of life consistent with itself throughout. That cannot be unless one gains knowledge of things, and the art by which things human and divine are known. This is the highest good. If you seize it, you begin to be the gods' companion, not their suppliant.

31.9 "How," you ask, "does one get there?" Not over the Pennine or the Graian Alps, nor through the wastes of Candavia; you need not face the Syrtes, or Scylla, or Charybdis—though you have crossed all of these for the price of a paltry little procuratorship. The road is safe, it is pleasant, and nature has equipped you for it. She has given you gifts which, if you do not abandon them, will raise you to equal the god.[4]

31.10 But money will not make you equal to the god: the god owns nothing. A purple-bordered toga will not: the god is naked. Nor will fame, nor displaying yourself and spreading your name among the nations: no one knows the god, many think ill of him, and get away with it. Nor a crowd of slaves carrying your litter through the streets of town and abroad: that god, the greatest and most powerful, himself carries all things. Not even beauty and strength can make you happy: none of these withstands age.

31.11 We must look for something that does not get worse day by day, something that cannot be obstructed. What is it? The mind—but a mind that is upright, good, great. What else would you call such a mind but a god lodging as a guest in a human body? This mind can fall to a Roman knight just as well as to a freedman or a slave. For what is a Roman knight, or a freedman, or a slave? Names born of ambition or of injustice. From a humble corner one may leap up to heaven. Only rise, "and shape yourself, too, / worthy of the god." But you will not shape yourself so with gold or silver; from that material no likeness of the god can be formed. Remember that when the gods were kind to us, they were shaped from clay. Farewell.[5]

4 Hazards Lucilius had crossed in official service: the Pennine and Graian Alps (the Great and Little St Bernard passes), the Candavian mountains in Illyria, and the Syrtes, shoals off North Africa.

5 Virgil, Aeneid 8.364–65, quoted also in Letter 18. The gods' statues of early Rome were made of terracotta.

LETTER 32: ON PROGRESS

Live as if Seneca were watching, and complete your life before death so that no added years are needed.

32.1 I ask about you, and question everyone who comes from your part of the world: what are you doing, where are you spending your time, and with whom? You can't fool me; I am with you. Live as if I were going to hear what you do—no, as if I were going to see it. You ask what pleases me most of what I hear about you? That I hear nothing: most of the people I ask don't know what you are doing.

32.2 This is what keeps you healthy: not to keep company with people unlike you, who want different things. I am confident, indeed, that you cannot be twisted aside, and that you will hold to your purpose even if a crowd of tempters surrounds you. What, then? I don't fear that they will change you; I fear they will hold you up. And even someone who only delays you does great harm, especially when life is so short—and we make it shorter by our inconstancy, making first one fresh start at it and then another. We split it into little pieces and tear it to shreds.

32.3 So hurry, dearest Lucilius, and think how much speed you would add if an enemy were pressing at your back, if you suspected cavalry were coming on, hard on the heels of those in flight. It is happening: they are pressing you. Speed up and get away; bring yourself to safety, and consider again and again what a fine thing it is to complete your life before death, and then to await the rest of your time free from care, asking nothing for yourself, secure in possession of a happy life—which does not become happier by becoming longer.

32.4 Oh, when will you see the time when you know that time is no concern of yours—when you will be tranquil and calm, careless of tomorrow, as one who has had his fill of himself! Do you want to know what makes people greedy for the future? No one has yet come into possession of himself. And so your parents wished other things for you; but I, on the contrary, wish you

contempt for all the things they wished you plenty of. Their prayers rob many people to make you rich. Whatever they transfer to you has to be taken from someone.

32.5 I wish you mastery of yourself, so that your mind, tossed about by wandering thoughts, may at last stand firm and be steady; so that it may be content with itself and, having understood the true goods—which are possessed the moment they are understood—may have no need of added years. He alone has risen above necessity, he alone is discharged and free, who lives when his life is already complete. Farewell.

LETTER 33: ON THE FUTILITY OF LEARNING MAXIMS

Stoic wisdom runs through whole works rather than quotable lines, and a mature man should speak for himself.

33.1 You want these letters, like the earlier ones, to have some sayings of our leading men attached. They were not busy with little flowers of style; their whole fabric is manly. You may be sure there is unevenness where the things that stand out are the notable ones. A single tree is no wonder when the whole forest has risen to the same height.[6]

33.2 Poems are packed with sayings of this kind, and so are histories. So I don't want you to think they belong to Epicurus; they are public property, and ours above all. But in him they are noticed more, because they turn up only now and then, because they are unexpected, because it is surprising that something brave should be said by a man who professed softness. That, at any rate, is how most people judge. In my view Epicurus is brave too, even if he wears long sleeves. Courage and energy and a mind ready for war are found among Persians as much as among men with their tunics girded high.[7]

33.3 So there is no reason for you to demand extracts and repetitions; what others offer as excerpts, our writers offer through-

6 "Our leading men": the founders and masters of the Stoic school.

7 Long sleeves were a mark of softness at Rome; a tunic girded high was a sign of readiness for action.

out. And so we have no eye-catching window displays, and we don't deceive the customer, who, once inside, would find nothing beyond what is hung up out front. We let people take their samples from wherever they like.

33.4 Suppose we wanted to separate individual maxims from the mass: to whom would we credit them? To Zeno, or Cleanthes, or Chrysippus, or Panaetius, or Posidonius? We are not under a king; each of us claims his own freedom. Among those others, whatever Hermarchus said, whatever Metrodorus said, is credited to one man. Everything anyone said in that fellowship was said under the leadership and command of one. We cannot, I say, even if we try, pick anything out of so great a mass of equal things. "It's the poor man who counts his flock." Wherever you cast your eye, you will meet something that could stand out, if it were not being read among its equals.[8]

33.5 So give up the hope that you can sample the talents of the greatest men in summary. They must be examined whole, handled whole. The work proceeds as a whole, and a product of genius is woven together along its own lines, so that nothing can be pulled out of it without collapse. Nor do I object to your considering the individual limbs, provided you consider them in the person as a whole. A woman is not beautiful when her leg or her arm is praised, but when her whole appearance draws admiration away from her separate parts.

33.6 If you insist, though, I won't deal with you like a beggar; it will be done with a full hand. There is a huge crowd of them lying about everywhere; they need only be taken, not gathered up. For they don't drop out here and there; they flow. They are continuous and interwoven. Nor do I doubt that they help a great deal those who are still beginners and listening from outside; for individual sayings sink in more easily when they are marked off and enclosed, like a line of verse.

33.7 That is why we give children maxims to learn by heart, and what the Greeks call *chreiai* [anecdotal sayings], because a

8 Panaetius (c. 185–109 BC) and Posidonius (c. 135–51 BC) were the leading Stoics of the middle period. The quotation is Ovid, Metamorphoses 13.824.

child's mind can grasp them, when it cannot yet hold more. For a man who has made definite progress, it is shameful to chase after little flowers, to prop himself up with a handful of the best-known sayings and rely on memory; he should lean on himself by now. Let him say such things, not memorize them. For it is shameful for an old man, or one within sight of old age, to have wisdom out of a notebook. "Zeno said this." And you? "Cleanthes said this." And you? How long will you march under someone else's command? Take command, and say something worth handing down to memory. Bring out something of your own too.

33.8 So all these people—never authors, always interpreters, lurking in someone else's shadow—I consider to have nothing noble in them; they have never dared at last to do what they spent so long learning. They have exercised their memory on other people's words. But remembering is one thing, knowing another. To remember is to guard something entrusted to memory. To know, on the other hand, is to make everything your own, and not to hang on a model and keep looking back at the teacher.

33.9 "Zeno said this, Cleanthes said this." Let there be some difference between you and a book! How long will you go on learning? Start teaching now. "Why should I listen to what I can read?" "The living voice," someone says, "accomplishes a great deal." Yes—but not this voice, which merely lends itself to someone else's words and does the job of a clerk.

33.10 Add now that these people who never come of age follow their predecessors, first, in a matter where everyone has broken away from his predecessor; and second, in a matter that is still being investigated. But it will never be found if we are content with what has been found. Besides, whoever follows another finds nothing—in fact, he isn't even looking.

33.11 Well then? Shall I not walk in the footsteps of those before me? I will indeed use the old road; but if I find one shorter and more level, I will build that one. Those who worked on these questions before us are not our masters but our guides. Truth

lies open to all; no one has taken possession of it yet. Much of it has been left for those still to come. Farewell.

LETTER 34: ON A PROMISING PUPIL

Seneca rejoices at Lucilius' progress; wanting to be good is a large part of goodness.

34.1 I grow, I leap for joy, I shake off old age and warm up again whenever I see, from what you do and write, how far you have risen above yourself—for you left the crowd behind long ago. If a farmer delights in a tree he has brought to fruit, if a shepherd takes pleasure in the young of his flock, if no one looks at his foster child without feeling that its youth is his own—what do you think happens to those who have reared minds, and suddenly see full-grown what they shaped when it was tender?

34.2 I claim you as mine; you are my work. When I saw your character, I laid my hand on you, urged you on, applied the spur, and did not let you go slowly, but kept driving you on. And I do the same now—but now I am cheering on a runner who is cheering me on in turn.

34.3 "What else?" you say. "I am still only at the stage of wanting." That is most of it—though not in the way beginnings are said to be half of the whole task; this thing rests on the mind. So a great part of goodness is wanting to become good. Do you know whom I call good? The complete, finished man, whom no force and no necessity can make bad.

34.4 That is what I foresee you will be, if you persevere and apply yourself, and make it your aim that all your deeds and words agree and correspond with each other and are struck from a single die. A man whose actions are at odds with each other does not have a mind that is straight. Farewell.

LETTER 35: ON THE FRIENDSHIP OF KINDRED MINDS

Only a good man can be a true friend, so Lucilius should hurry his progress and be consistent with himself.

35.1 When I beg you so earnestly to study, I am looking after my own interest. I want to have you as a friend, and that cannot happen for me unless you go on cultivating yourself as you have begun. For now you love me; you are not my friend. "What? Are these two different?" More than that: they are unlike. A friend loves; one who loves is not necessarily a friend. So friendship always helps, while love sometimes even harms. If for no other reason, make progress so that you learn how to love.

35.2 Hurry, then, while your progress is for my benefit, or you will end up having learned it for someone else. I, for one, am already enjoying the fruit, when I imagine that we will be of one mind, and that whatever vigor has left my age will come back to me from yours—though yours is not so very far from mine.

35.3 Still, I want to be glad in reality too. Joy does come to us from those we love even when they are absent, but it is slight and fleeting; seeing them, having them present, talking with them, holds something of a living pleasure—especially if you see not only the person you want, but the kind of person you want. So bring me yourself, a huge gift; and to make you press on harder, remember that you are mortal and I am old.

35.4 Hurry to me—but to yourself first. Make progress, and above all take care to be consistent with yourself. Whenever you want to test whether anything has been achieved, see whether you want the same things today as yesterday. A change of will shows that the mind is adrift, turning up here and there as the wind carries it. What is fixed and founded does not wander. This belongs to the perfect wise man, and to some degree to one who is making progress and is well advanced. What, then, is the difference? The one is moved, yes, but does not shift; he sways in his own place. The other is not even moved. Farewell.

LETTER 36: ON THE VALUE OF RETIREMENT

Youth is the time for learning, and contempt of death is the discipline that arms us against everything.

36.1 Encourage your friend to despise, with a great spirit, those who scold him for having sought the shade and leisure, for having abandoned his rank, and for preferring quiet to everything when he could have risen higher. Let him show them every day how profitably he has managed his own affairs. Those who are envied will keep passing by: some will be crushed, others will fall. Prosperity is a restless thing; it harasses itself. It unsettles the brain in more ways than one, goading different people to different things—some to power, others to luxury. Some it puffs up; others it softens and dissolves entirely.

36.2 "But some people carry prosperity well." Yes—the way some carry their wine. So don't let these people persuade you that a man is happy who is besieged by many. They run to him as to a pool, which they drain and muddy. "They call him worthless and idle." You know that some people use words perversely, to mean the opposite.

36.3 They used to call him happy. So what? Was he? Nor do I mind that to some he seems too rough and gloomy in temperament. Ariston used to say he preferred a young man who was serious to one who was cheerful and charming to the crowd. For wine that seemed harsh and rough when new becomes good; wine that was pleasant in the cask does not stand up to age. Let them call him gloomy and an enemy of his own advancement; that very gloom will turn out well with age, if only he keeps cultivating virtue and drinking deep of liberal studies—not those you need only be sprinkled with, but those in which the mind must be steeped.[9]

36.4 This is the time for learning. "What? Is there any time when one should not learn?" Not at all. But while it is honorable

9 Ariston: probably Ariston of Chios, a pupil of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism (3rd century BC).

to study at every age, it is not honorable to be schooled at every age. An old man learning his ABCs is a shameful and ridiculous thing: the young man must acquire, the old man must use. So you will do yourself the greatest service if you make him as good as possible. These, they say, are the benefits to seek and to bestow—undoubtedly of the first rank—which it helps as much to give as to receive.

36.5 Besides, he no longer has any freedom in the matter: he has given his pledge. And it is less shameful to go bankrupt to a creditor than to high hopes. To pay off a debt of money, the merchant needs a prosperous voyage, the farmer needs fertile soil and a favorable sky; but what he owes can be paid by will alone.

36.6 Fortune has no jurisdiction over character. Let him order his character so that his mind may reach perfection in the greatest possible tranquility—a mind that feels nothing taken from it and nothing added, but stays in the same condition however things turn out. If ordinary goods are heaped upon it, it rises above its circumstances; if chance has knocked away some of these, or all of them, it is not diminished.

36.7 If he had been born in Parthia, he would be bending a bow as a baby; if in Germany, he would be brandishing a slender spear as a boy; if he had lived in our grandfathers' time, he would have learned to ride and to strike the enemy hand to hand. These are the things each people's training urges on its members, and commands.

36.8 What, then, should he practice? What serves well against every weapon and every kind of enemy: contempt of death. No one doubts that death has something terrifying about it, enough to shock our minds, which nature has formed to love themselves. For there would be no need to prepare and sharpen ourselves for something we would go toward by a kind of willing instinct, the way all creatures are drawn to preserve themselves.

36.9 No one learns how to lie calmly on a bed of roses, if need be; what he is hardened for is this: not to give up his loyalty under torture, and, if need be, to stand watch all night on the

rampart, sometimes even wounded, without so much as leaning on his spear, because sleep tends to creep up on those who rest against any support. Death has no disadvantage; for there has to be someone for whom it is a disadvantage.

36.10 But if such a desire for a longer life grips you, consider that none of the things that pass from our sight and are laid back in the nature of things—from which they came, and from which they will soon come forth again—is destroyed. They cease; they do not perish. And death, which we so dread and resist, interrupts life; it does not snatch it away. The day will come again that restores us to the light—a day many would refuse, if it did not bring us back having forgotten.

36.11 But later I will show more carefully that all things that seem to perish only change. One who is going to return ought to leave with a calm mind. Observe the cycle of things that come back around on themselves: you will see that nothing in this world is extinguished, but that things set and rise in turn. Summer has gone, but another year will bring it back; winter has fallen, and its months will bring it back again; night has buried the sun, but day will soon drive the night away. The wheeling of the stars repeats whatever it has passed; part of the sky is always rising, part sinking.

36.12 Finally, I will stop once I have added this one thing: neither infants nor children nor those whose minds have failed fear death, and it is utterly shameful if reason does not give us the freedom from care to which folly leads them. Farewell.

LETTER 37: ON ALLEGIANCE TO VIRTUE

The oath to be a good man binds like a gladiator's, and wisdom alone frees us from the passions.

37.1 You have promised to be a good man; you have taken the oath —the strongest bond there is to a sound mind. Anyone who tells you this service is soft and easy will be making fun of you. I don't want you deceived. The words of this most honorable

enlistment and of that most shameful one are the same: "to be burned, to be bound, to be killed by the sword."[10]

37.2 From those who hire out their hands to the arena, who eat and drink what they must pay back in blood, a guarantee is taken that they will endure these things even against their will; from you, that you will endure them willingly and gladly. They may lower their weapons and try for the pity of the crowd; you will neither lower yours nor beg for your life. You must die on your feet and unconquered. Besides, what is the good of gaining a few days or years? We are born with no reprieve.[11]

37.3 "How, then," you ask, "am I to get myself free?" You cannot escape necessities, but you can conquer them. "Force forges a way." And philosophy will give you this way. Go to her if you want to be safe, free from care, happy—and finally, if you want to be what matters most: free. This cannot come about any other way.[12]

37.4 Folly is a lowly thing—abject, squalid, servile, subject to many passions, and the cruelest ones. These harsh masters, who rule sometimes in turn and sometimes together, are sent away from you by wisdom, which alone is freedom. One road leads to it, and a straight one; you won't go astray. Walk with a sure step. If you want to subject everything to yourself, subject yourself to reason. You will rule many, if reason rules you. From her you will learn what to undertake and how; you won't blunder into things.

37.5 You won't find me anyone who knows how he came to want what he wants. He was not led there by deliberation; he was driven there by impulse. Fortune runs into us no less often than we run into her. It is shameful not to walk but to be carried along, and suddenly, in the middle of a whirlwind of events, to ask in a daze: "How did I get here?" Farewell.

10 The words echo the oath sworn by free men who hired themselves out as gladiators.

11 A missio was the reprieve granted to a defeated gladiator; a show "without reprieve" was a fight to the death.

12 "Force forges a way": Virgil, Aeneid 2.494, of the Greeks storming Priam's palace.

LETTER 38: ON QUIET CONVERSATION

Quiet talk teaches better than lectures, and precepts, like seeds, grow in a receptive mind.

38.1 You are right to ask that we keep up this exchange of letters more often. Conversation does the most good, because it creeps into the mind little by little. Lectures prepared in advance and poured out before an audience have more noise and less intimacy. Philosophy is good counsel, and no one gives counsel at the top of his voice. Sometimes we must use those harangues, so to speak, when someone who hesitates needs a push; but when the aim is not to make him want to learn, but to make him learn, we must come down to these quieter words. They enter more easily and they stick; for we do not need many words, but effective ones.

38.2 They should be scattered like seed. However tiny a seed is, once it has found a suitable spot, it unfolds its powers and spreads from the smallest beginnings into the greatest growth. Reason does the same: to look at, it does not extend far; in the working, it grows. What is said is little, but if the mind has received it well, it gains strength and springs up. The condition of precepts, I say, is the same as that of seeds: they achieve much, and yet they are small. Only, as I said, let a suitable mind take them in and draw them into itself. It will produce much in its turn, and give back more than it received. Farewell.

LETTER 39: ON NOBLE ASPIRATIONS

A noble mind is roused by the great, prefers the moderate to the excessive, and is ruined when superfluous things become necessary.

39.1 I will indeed put together the notes you ask for, carefully arranged and compressed into a small space. But consider whether a regular, systematic treatment will not do you more good than what is now commonly called a *breviarium* [abridgment], and was once called, when people spoke proper Latin, a *summarium* [summary]. The first is more necessary to the

learner, the second to one who already knows: the first teaches, the second reminds. But I will supply you with both. There is no reason for you to ask me for this authority or that; whoever produces a guarantor is himself unknown.

39.2 So I will write what you want, but in my own way. Meanwhile you have many authors whose writings are, I suspect, orderly enough. Take a list of the philosophers in hand: that alone will force you to wake up, when you see how many have worked on your behalf. You will long to be one of them yourself. For a noble mind has this finest quality: it is roused toward the honorable. No man of lofty talent takes pleasure in what is low and mean; the sight of great things calls him to itself and lifts him up.

39.3 As a flame shoots straight up and cannot lie flat or be pressed down, any more than it can rest, so our mind is always in motion, and the more vigorous it is, the more restless and active. But happy the man who has turned this drive toward better things! He will place himself beyond fortune's jurisdiction and dominion. He will temper prosperity, cut adversity down to size, and look down on what others admire.

39.4 It is the mark of a great mind to despise great things and to prefer the moderate to the excessive. For the moderate is useful and life-giving, while the excessive harms by its very overflow. So too rich a growth flattens the crop; so branches break under too heavy a load; so excessive fruitfulness never comes to ripeness. The same happens to minds: unrestrained prosperity bursts them, since they use it to injure not only others but themselves.

39.5 What enemy was ever as insulting to anyone as their own pleasures are to some people? Their lack of self-control and their mad lust you could forgive for this one reason: they suffer what they have done. And this frenzy torments them deservedly; for desire that leaps beyond nature's limit must run on into the boundless. What is natural has its own limit; empty desires, born of lust, have no end.

39.6 Need is the measure of what is necessary; by what will you bring the superfluous to measure? So people sink themselves in pleasures which, once they have become habits, they cannot do without. And they are most wretched for this very reason: they have come to the point where what was superfluous has become necessary to them. So they are slaves to their pleasures, not enjoyers of them; and—the worst of evils—they even love their own ills. Unhappiness is complete when shameful things not only give delight but win approval; and there is no longer room for a remedy when what were vices have become ways of life. Farewell.

LETTER 40: ON THE PROPER STYLE FOR A PHILOSOPHER'S DISCOURSE

A philosopher should speak slowly and with control, not in a torrent of words.

40.1 Thank you for writing to me so often. It is the one way you can show yourself to me. I never receive a letter from you without our being together at once. If portraits of absent friends give us pleasure—renewing our memory and easing our longing with a false and empty comfort—how much more pleasure do letters give, which bring us real traces, real marks of an absent friend? For the sweetest thing about seeing a friend face to face—recognizing him—is what a friend's hand, imprinted on a letter, gives us.

40.2 You write that you heard the philosopher Serapion when he put in at your shores: "He tends to wrench out his words in a great rush, not letting them pour out one at a time but pressing and crowding them together. More of them come than one voice can manage." I don't approve of this in a philosopher. His delivery, like his life, should be orderly; and nothing that tumbles headlong in a hurry is ordered. That is why, in Homer, the rapid speech that comes on without a break, like a snowstorm, is

given to the younger speaker, while from the old man flows speech that is gentle and sweeter than honey.[13]

40.3 So take it from me: that rapid, overflowing force of speech suits a street-corner showman better than a man who is handling and teaching a great and serious subject. I don't want him to drip any more than to race; let him neither strain our ears nor swamp them. True, the opposite—poverty and thinness of speech—leaves the listener less attentive, worn out by its halting slowness; still, what we wait for sinks in more easily than what flies past. Finally, we speak of teachers "handing down" precepts to their pupils; but you can't hand over what runs away.

40.4 Add to this that speech devoted to truth should be unstudied and simple. This popular style has nothing true about it. It wants to stir up the crowd and carry off unthinking ears by sheer force; it doesn't let itself be examined; it is swept away. And how can something govern when it cannot be governed? Besides, speech used to heal minds has to sink into us. Remedies do no good unless they stay.

40.5 Besides, it has a great deal of emptiness and hollowness; it has more sound than substance. What terrifies me must be soothed, what provokes me checked, what deceives me dispelled; extravagance must be curbed, greed rebuked. Which of these can be done in a rush? What doctor cures the sick in passing? And another thing: such a clatter of words, tumbling out without selection, doesn't even give any pleasure.

40.6 But just as it is enough to have seen once many things you wouldn't have believed could be done, so it is plenty to have heard once these people who put their words through their paces. What would anyone want to learn from them, or imitate? What is he to think of the mind of people whose speech is disordered and runs loose and cannot be reined in?

40.7 When people run down a slope, they don't stop where they meant to; the momentum of the body carries them off and further than they wanted. So too this speed of speech is not in its

13 In the Iliad, Odysseus' words fall "like winter snowflakes" (3.222), while the aged Nestor's speech flows "sweeter than honey" (1.249).

own control, and not becoming enough for philosophy, which ought to place its words, not fling them, and to move forward step by step.

40.8 "What, then? Shouldn't it sometimes rise higher?" Why not? But with the dignity of character preserved, which that violent, excessive force strips away. Let it have great strength, but controlled; let it be a steady stream, not a torrent. I would hardly allow even an orator such velocity of speech, unstoppable and running on without rule. For how could a juror keep up—sometimes one who is inexperienced and untrained at that? Even when showing off or emotion beyond his control has carried the speaker away, let him hurry and pile it on only as much as ears can bear.

40.9 So you will do right not to go and hear those who care how much they say, not how they say it; and if you must, you yourself should prefer to speak like Publius Vinicius, who stammers. When someone asked how Publius Vinicius spoke, Asellius said, "He drags it out." (Indeed Geminus Varius said, "I don't know how you can call that man eloquent: he can't string three words together.") Why shouldn't you prefer to speak like Vinicius?[14]

40.10 Someone may come along as tactless as the man who, while Vinicius was plucking out his words one at a time, as though dictating rather than speaking, said to him, "Speak! Have you anything to say?" As for the racing pace of Quintus Haterius, the most celebrated orator of his day, I want it kept far away from any sensible man: he never hesitated, never paused; he started once and he stopped once.[15]

40.11 Still, I think some styles suit some nations more or less. In a Greek you might put up with this license; we Romans, even when we write, are used to separating our words. Our own Cicero, too, from whom Roman eloquence sprang, was a steady

14 Publius Vinicius (consul AD 2), Asellius and Geminus Varius were orators and declaimers of the Augustan age.

15 Quintus Haterius (d. AD 26), senator and orator famous for his torrential delivery.

pacer. Roman speech looks about itself more, weighs itself, and offers itself to be weighed.[16]

40.12 Fabianus, a man outstanding in his life and his learning and also—a point that comes after those—in eloquence, used to discourse fluently rather than excitedly, so that you could call it ease, not speed. This I accept in a wise man; I don't demand it. Let his speech come out without hindrance; but I would rather it be brought forth than let flow.

40.13 I warn you away from this disease all the more because it can't come to you unless you have stopped feeling shame. You would have to harden your face and not listen to yourself. That unchecked rush will carry along many things you would want to find fault with.

40.14 It cannot, I say, come to you without loss of modesty. Besides, it requires daily practice, and you would have to shift your attention from things to words. And even if the words are there and can run on without any effort from you, they still need to be held in check. For just as a more restrained walk suits a wise man, so does speech that is compact, not reckless. Here, then, is the sum of it all: I bid you be slow of speech. Farewell.

LETTER 41: ON THE GOD WITHIN US

God dwells in every good man, and a person should be praised only for his own mind and reason.

41.1 You are doing an excellent thing, and good for you, if, as you write, you are persisting in the pursuit of a sound mind—which it is foolish to pray for when you can obtain it from yourself. There is no need to lift your hands to heaven or beg the temple keeper to let us get close to the statue's ear, as if we could be heard better that way. God is near you, he is with you, he is within you.

41.2 I mean it, Lucilius: a holy spirit dwells within us, the watcher and guardian of our evil and our good. As we treat it, so

it treats us. No one is a good man without god: can anyone rise above fortune unless he helps him? He gives noble and lofty counsel. In every good man "a god dwells—which god, is uncertain."[17]

41.3 If you come upon a grove thick with ancient trees that have grown beyond the usual height, shutting out the sight of the sky with the screen of branches overlapping one another, the loftiness of the forest, the seclusion of the place, and your wonder at a shade so dense and unbroken in the open air will convince you of a divine presence. If a cave, its rocks eaten deep away, holds a mountain suspended over it—not made by hand, but hollowed out to such a width by natural causes—it will strike your mind with a kind of intimation of the sacred. We revere the sources of great rivers; where a mighty river bursts suddenly from hiding, there are altars; springs of hot water are worshiped; and some pools have been made holy by their darkness or their immense depth.

41.4 If you see a man unafraid of dangers, untouched by desires, happy in adversity, calm in the midst of storms, who looks at men from a higher place and at the gods from their own level, won't reverence for him steal over you? Won't you say, "This thing is too great and too lofty to be thought of the same kind as this puny body it lives in? A divine power has come down into it."

41.5 A mind that is outstanding and controlled, that passes over everything as beneath it and laughs at whatever we fear and long for, is moved by a heavenly power. So great a thing cannot stand without the support of a divinity. So the greater part of it remains there, where it came down from. Just as the sun's rays do touch the earth but are really there where they are sent from, so a great and holy mind, sent down here so that we might know the divine more closely, keeps company with us but clings to its

16 Latin inscriptions and manuscripts often marked word breaks with dots, while Greek was written without breaks. A "steady pacer" (gradarius) is a horse that keeps an even walk.

17 Virgil, Aeneid 8.352, said of the wooded Capitoline hill.

origin. It hangs from there, looks and strives toward there; it takes part in our affairs as a being better than we are.

41.6 What, then, is this mind? One that shines with no good but its own. For what is more foolish than to praise in a man what belongs to others? What is more insane than to admire things that can be handed over to someone else in an instant? Golden bridles don't make a horse better. A lion with a gilded mane, who has been handled and, worn out, forced to put up with the ornament, is sent into the arena very differently from one untamed, his spirit unbroken. The second—fierce in his charge, as nature meant him to be, beautiful in his very shagginess, whose glory is that no one can look at him without fear—is preferred to the other, limp and covered in gold leaf.

41.7 No one should take pride in anything but what is his own. We praise a vine if it loads its shoots with fruit, if by the weight of what it bears it drags its very props to the ground. Would anyone prefer to this vine one hung with golden grapes and golden leaves? Fruitfulness is the proper virtue of a vine; in a man, too, what deserves praise is what is his own. He has a handsome staff of slaves and a beautiful house, he sows a great deal and lends a great deal at interest: none of these things is in him; they are around him.

41.8 Praise in him what can be neither taken away nor given, what belongs to a man as such. You ask what that is? The mind, and reason made perfect in the mind. For man is a rational animal. His good, then, is complete if he has fulfilled what he was born for.

41.9 And what does this reason demand of him? The easiest thing in the world: to live in accordance with his own nature. But the general madness makes it hard; we push one another into vices. And how can people be called back to health when no one holds them back and the crowd drives them on? Farewell.

Book V

On masters and slaves (47), on the shortness of life (49).

LETTER 42: ON VALUES

A truly good man is as rare as the phoenix, and we pay dearly in freedom for things we think are free.

42.1 Has that fellow already convinced you that he is a good man? Yet a good man can neither be made nor recognized so quickly. Do you know what kind of good man I mean here? One of the second rank. For the other kind is perhaps born, like the phoenix, once in five hundred years. And it's no wonder that great things are produced at long intervals: the ordinary ones, born for the crowd, fortune often brings forth; the exceptional she commends by their very rarity.

42.2 But this man is still a long way from what he claims to be. If he knew what a good man was, he would not yet believe himself one; he might even despair of ever becoming one. "But he thinks badly of bad men." So do bad men themselves; and there is no greater punishment for wickedness than that it is displeasing to itself and its own.

42.3 "But he hates those who wield great, sudden power with no power over themselves." He will do the same when he has the same power. Many men's vices lie hidden because they are weak; once their strength pleases them, they will dare no less than those that prosperity has already brought into the open.

42.4 They lack the tools to unfold their wickedness. In the same way even a deadly snake can be handled safely while it is stiff with cold: it doesn't lack venom then; the venom is simply numb. In many people cruelty, ambition and extravagance lack

only fortune's favor to dare as much as the worst. You will soon find that they want the same things, this way: give them the power to do as much as they want.

42.5 You remember how, when you insisted that a certain man was in your power, I said he was flighty and fickle, and that you were holding not his foot but a feather. Did I lie? You were holding a plume, which he let go of, and flew off. You know what tricks he played on you afterward, how many things he attempted that were bound to fall on his own head. He didn't see that in endangering others he was rushing into danger himself. He didn't consider how burdensome the things he was after were, even if they had not been superfluous.

42.6 So in the things we aim at and strive for with great effort, we ought to look for this: either there is nothing advantageous in them, or more that is disadvantageous. Some things are superfluous; some are not worth the price. But we don't see this clearly, and things seem free to us that cost us very dearly.

42.7 Our stupidity shows in this: we think we buy only what we pay money for, and we call free the things we spend ourselves on. Things we would refuse to buy if we had to give our house for them, or some pleasant or profitable estate, we are all too ready to obtain at the cost of anxiety, of danger, of the loss of self-respect and freedom and time. So true is it that nothing is cheaper to anyone than himself.

42.8 So in all our plans and affairs let us do what we usually do whenever we go up to a dealer in some merchandise: let us see what price is being asked for the thing we want. Often the thing for which no price is paid costs the most. I could show you many things whose getting and receiving has wrung our freedom from us. We would belong to ourselves if these things did not belong to us.

42.9 So turn these thoughts over with yourself, not only when it is a question of gain but also when it is one of loss. "This is going to be lost." Well, it came to you from outside; you will live without it as easily as you lived before. If you have had it a long time, you lose it after you have had your fill of it; if not long, you

lose it before you grow used to it. "You'll have less money." Yes, and less trouble.

42.10 "Less influence." Yes, and less envy. Look around at the things that drive us mad, that we lose with floods of tears: you will see that what troubles us in them is not the loss but the idea of loss. No one feels that they are gone; he thinks it. He who has himself has lost nothing. But how few have the good luck to have themselves! Farewell.

LETTER 43: ON THE RELATIVITY OF FAME

Lucilius is conspicuous in his province, so he should live as if his walls hid nothing.

43.1 You ask how this reached me—who told me what you were thinking, when you had told no one? The one who knows the most: rumor. "What?" you say. "Am I important enough to set rumor going?" There is no reason to measure yourself by looking back at this place here; look at the one where you are living.

43.2 Whatever stands out among its neighbors is great in the place where it stands out. For greatness has no fixed measure; comparison raises it or lowers it. A ship that is big on a river is tiny on the sea. A rudder that is big for one ship is small for another.

43.3 You, now, in your province, are a great man, however little you think of yourself. What you do, how you dine, how you sleep—people ask, and they find out. So you must live all the more carefully. Consider yourself truly happy when you can live in public, when your walls shelter you but don't hide you—walls we generally assume we have built around us not so that we may live more safely, but so that we may do wrong more secretly.

43.4 I'll tell you something by which you can judge our morals: you will hardly find anyone who could live with his door open. It is our conscience, not our pride, that has posted doorkeepers; we live in such a way that to be seen without warning is to be caught. But what good is it to hide away and avoid the eyes and ears of men?

43.5 A good conscience calls in the crowd; a bad one is anxious and troubled even in solitude. If what you do is honorable, let everyone know it; if it is shameful, what does it matter that no one knows, when you know? How wretched you are if you despise this witness! Farewell.

LETTER 44: ON PHILOSOPHY AND PEDIGREES

Philosophy ignores ancestry: everyone descends from both kings and slaves, and only the mind makes one noble.

44.1 Once again you are making yourself small to me, and saying that first nature, then fortune, treated you meanly—when you can lift yourself out of the crowd and rise to the greatest happiness men can have. If there is anything else good in philosophy, it is this: it doesn't look at your family tree. All men, if traced back to their first origin, come from the gods.

44.2 You are a Roman knight, and your own hard work brought you into that order. But, heavens, to many people the fourteen rows are closed; the senate house does not admit everyone; even the army is choosy about whom it takes on for toil and danger. A sound mind is open to all; for this we are all noble. Philosophy neither rejects anyone nor picks anyone out; it shines for all.[1]

44.3 Socrates was not a patrician. Cleanthes drew water and hired out his hands to water a garden. Philosophy did not find Plato noble; it made him so. Why should you despair of becoming equal to these men? They are all your ancestors, if you conduct yourself in a way worthy of them; and you will, if you convince yourself here and now that no one surpasses you in nobility.[2]

44.4 We all have just as many ancestors behind us; everyone's origin lies beyond memory. Plato says there is no king who is not descended from slaves, and no slave not descended from

1 The first fourteen rows of seats in the theater were reserved for the equestrian order (the "knights").

2 Cleanthes was said to have worked nights drawing water to pay for his studies.

kings. A long succession of changes has mixed all this up, and fortune has turned it upside down.[3]

44.5 Who is well born? The one whom nature has well fitted for virtue. That is the one thing to look at. Otherwise, if you go back to ancient times, everyone comes from a point before which there is nothing. From the first beginning of the world down to this day, an alternating line of the illustrious and the lowly has brought us here. A hall full of smoke-blackened portrait masks does not make a man noble. No one lived for our glory, and what came before us is not ours. It is the mind that makes a man noble, and from any condition it can rise above fortune.[4]

44.6 So imagine you are not a Roman knight but a freedman: you can still manage to be the only free man among the free-born. "How?" you ask. If you distinguish evil from good without taking the crowd as your authority. You must look not at where things come from but at where they are going. Whatever can make life happy is good in its own right; for it cannot be corrupted into evil.

44.7 Where, then, is the mistake, since everyone wants a happy life? It is that they take the instruments of it for the thing itself, and while they seek it, they run from it. For though the height of a happy life is solid freedom from care and an unshaken confidence in it, they collect reasons for anxiety, and on life's treacherous road they don't just carry their baggage, they drag it. So they keep getting further from achieving what they are after; the more effort they spend, the more they get in their own way and are carried backward. It is what happens to people hurrying through a maze: their very speed entangles them. Farewell.

3 Plato, Theaetetus 174e–175a.

4 Noble Roman families displayed wax masks of their ancestors in the atrium of the house.

LETTER 45: ON SOPHISTICAL ARGUMENTATION

Read a few good books, and spend time learning how to live instead of solving logical puzzles.

45.1 You complain that there is a shortage of books where you are. It doesn't matter how many books you have, but how good they are. Focused reading does you good; varied reading only entertains. Someone who wants to reach the destination he has set himself should follow one road and not wander along many. That is not traveling; it is straying.

45.2 "I would rather," you say, "you gave me advice than books." For my part, I am ready to send you whatever books I have and to empty out my whole granary. I would carry myself over there too, if I could; and if I did not hope that you would soon be released from your post, I would have ordered this old man's expedition for myself, and not even Charybdis and Scylla and that fabled strait could have frightened me off. I would have swum across, not just sailed across, if only I could embrace you and judge in person how much you have grown in spirit.

45.3 As for your wanting my own books sent to you, I don't think myself eloquent on that account any more than I would think myself handsome if you asked for my portrait. I know that comes from affection, not judgment. And if it does come from judgment, affection has deceived you.

45.4 But whatever they are like, read them as if I were still seeking the truth, not knowing it—and seeking it stubbornly. For I have not made myself anyone's property; I bear no one's name. I put great trust in the judgment of great men, but I claim something for my own judgment too. For they, too, left us not discoveries but things still to be sought; and perhaps they would have found what was necessary if they had not also gone looking for what was superfluous.

45.5 A great deal of their time was stolen by quibbling over words and by captious arguments that exercise a pointless ingenuity. We tie knots, binding ambiguous meanings onto

words, and then untie them. Do we have that much time to spare? Do we already know how to live, how to die? We must go with our whole mind to where we need to take care that it is not things—rather than words—that deceive us.

45.6 Why do you draw distinctions for me between similar-sounding words, which have never trapped anyone except in the middle of an argument? It is things that deceive us: distinguish those. We embrace evils in place of goods; we pray for the opposite of what we prayed for before. Our prayers fight with our prayers, our plans with our plans.

45.7 How like friendship flattery is! It doesn't merely imitate it; it outdoes and outstrips it. It is welcomed by open, well-disposed ears and sinks to the bottom of the heart, pleasing for the very reason that it harms. Teach me how to tell this likeness apart. An enemy comes to me in the guise of a friend, all charm. Vices creep up on us under the names of virtues: recklessness hides under the label of courage, restraint is called cowardice, the timid man passes for cautious. In these matters we go wrong at great peril. Stamp them with sure marks.

45.8 Anyway, a man who is asked whether he has horns is not so stupid as to feel his forehead, nor again so silly or dull as not to know he has none, however subtle the syllogism you have convinced him with. These tricks deceive without doing harm, like a conjurer's cups and pebbles, where the very deception is what delights me. Make me understand how it is done, and I have lost all interest. I say the same of these catches—for what better name could I give sophisms? They neither harm the man who doesn't know them nor help the man who does.[5]

45.9 If you really want to untangle ambiguities in words, teach us this: that the happy man is not the one the crowd calls happy, into whose lap great wealth has flowed, but the one whose every good is in his mind. He is upright and lofty, and tramples on what is changeable; he sees no one he would want to change places with; he values a man only in that part by which he is a

5 The "Horned" sophism: "What you have not lost, you have; you have not lost horns; therefore you have horns."

man; he takes nature as his teacher, shapes himself by her laws, and lives as she has prescribed. No force can shake his goods from him; he turns evils into good; he is sure in his judgment, unshaken, fearless. Some force may move him, but none throws him into turmoil. When fortune has hurled the deadliest weapon she has with all her might, it grazes him but does not wound him—and that rarely. For her other weapons, with which she conquers the human race, bounce off him like hail, which rattles on the roof and melts without any harm to the one living inside.

45.10 Why do you hold me up with the one you yourself call the pseudomenos ["the Liar"], on which so many books have been written? Look—my whole life is lying to me. Refute that; bring that back to the truth, if you are clever. It judges things necessary when a great many of them are superfluous. And even what is not superfluous has no weight in itself toward making anyone fortunate and happy. For a thing is not automatically a good because it is necessary; otherwise we debase the good, if we give that name to bread and barley meal and the other things without which life cannot go on.[6]

45.11 What is good is always necessary; what is necessary is not always good, since some necessary things are also the cheapest. No one is so ignorant of the dignity of the good as to lower it to the level of these everyday conveniences.

45.12 Well then? Won't you rather turn your efforts to showing everyone that superfluous things are pursued at a great cost of time, and that many people have gone through life while collecting the instruments of life? Review individuals, consider people as a whole: there is no one whose life is not looking toward tomorrow.

45.13 You ask what harm there is in that? Infinite harm. For they are not living; they are about to live. They put everything off. Even if we paid attention, life would still outrun us; as it is, while we hesitate, it runs past as though it belonged to someone

6 The Liar paradox, a famous puzzle of Greek logic: if a man says "I am lying," is he telling the truth?

else, and though it ends on the last day, it is lost on every day. But so as not to exceed the proper length of a letter, which ought not to fill the reader's left hand, I will put off to another day this dispute with the logicians—who are far too subtle, and care only about this, not about that as well. Farewell.[7]

LETTER 46: ON A NEW BOOK BY LUCILIUS

Seneca praises a book Lucilius has written and promises a fuller verdict later.

46.1 I have received the book of yours that you promised me. I opened it meaning to read it at my leisure, and wanted only a taste. Then the book itself coaxed me into going further. How eloquent it was you may judge from this: it seemed short to me, though it was not on the scale of your writings or mine, but at first glance might have been taken for something by Livy or Epicurus. It held me and drew me on with such sweetness that I read it through without a break. The sun was calling me out, hunger was reminding me, the clouds were threatening; still, I drank it all down.[8]

46.2 I was not merely pleased; I rejoiced. What talent it had, what spirit! I would say "what dash," if it had paused and then surged up again after an interval; as it is, it was not dash but a steady drive, a composition manly and pure. And yet now and then there came that sweetness, gentle in its proper place. You are grand and lofty; I want you to keep to this, to go on this way. The subject matter played its part too; so you should choose a fertile one, one that engages your talent and spurs it on.

46.3 I will write more about the book when I have gone over it again; for now my judgment is not settled, as if I had heard it rather than read it. Let me look into it, too. You have nothing to fear: you will hear the truth. How lucky you are, to have nothing

7 A book roll was unrolled with the right hand and the read portion rolled up in the left, so a long letter would fill the left hand.

8 Livy (59 BC–AD 17), whose history of Rome filled 142 books, and Epicurus, who wrote some 300 rolls, were both famously voluminous.

that would make anyone lie to you from so far away! Except that nowadays we lie even when the reason has been removed—out of habit. Farewell.

LETTER 47: ON MASTERS AND SLAVES

Slaves are fellow human beings and should be treated with kindness, since fortune rules masters and slaves alike.

47.1 I was glad to learn from people who come from you that you live on familiar terms with your slaves. This befits your good sense and your learning. "They're slaves." No—they're human beings. "They're slaves." No—they're companions under the same roof. "They're slaves." No—they're humble friends. "They're slaves." No—they're fellow slaves, if you reflect that fortune has as much power over you as over them.

47.2 So I laugh at those who think it degrading to dine with one's slave. And why, except that a most arrogant custom surrounds the master at dinner with a crowd of standing slaves? He eats more than he can hold, and with enormous greed loads his swollen belly, which has by now forgotten a belly's proper work, so that it takes more effort to throw everything up than it did to cram it in;

47.3 but the wretched slaves are not allowed to move their lips even to speak. Every murmur is suppressed with the rod; not even accidental sounds are exempt from beatings—a cough, a sneeze, a hiccup. Any word that breaks the silence is paid for with harsh punishment. All night long they stand there, hungry and mute.

47.4 So it happens that those who may not speak in front of their master speak about him. But those slaves who could talk not only in front of their masters but with them, whose mouths were not sewn shut, were ready to offer their necks for their master and to turn aside onto their own heads the danger that threatened him; they talked at dinner, but under torture they kept silent.

47.5 Then there is the proverb, born of the same arrogance, that you have as many enemies as you have slaves. We don't have them as enemies; we make them so. Meanwhile I pass over other cruel and inhuman things: that we misuse them not even as human beings, but as beasts of burden. When we have reclined to dine, one wipes up the spit; another, crouched under the couch, gathers up the leavings of the drunken guests.

47.6 Another carves costly birds: guiding his trained hand in precise strokes around the breast and rump, he slices off the portions. Unhappy man, to live for this one thing, carving fowl with elegance—except that the man who teaches this for pleasure's sake is more wretched than the one who learns it out of necessity.

47.7 Another, the wine server, dressed up like a woman, wrestles with his age: he cannot escape boyhood; he is dragged back to it. Though he already has a soldier's build, he is kept smooth, his hair rubbed away or plucked out by the roots, and he stays awake all night, dividing it between his master's drunkenness and his lust; in the bedroom he is a man, at the banquet a boy.

47.8 Another, who has been given the job of assessing the guests, stands there, poor fellow, watching for those whose flattery and lack of restraint, of appetite or of tongue, will get them invited back tomorrow. Add the caterers, with their fine knowledge of their master's palate, who know what flavor will rouse him, what sight will delight him, what novelty can revive him when he feels queasy, what he is now sick of from sheer surfeit, what he is hungry for that day. With these men he cannot bear to dine; he thinks it a diminishing of his dignity to come to the same table as his slave. The gods forbid!

47.9 And how many masters he has from among such people! I have seen the former master of Callistus standing at Callistus' door, and seen him shut out while others went in—the man who had hung a sale placard on him and put him up among the rejects. That slave, thrown into the first lot of ten, on which the auctioneer tries out his voice, repaid the favor: he in turn rejec-

ted his old master and judged him unworthy of his house. The master sold Callistus—but how much Callistus has made the master pay![9]

47.10 Won't you reflect that this man you call your slave sprang from the same seeds as you, enjoys the same sky, and breathes, lives and dies just as you do? You can as easily see him as free-born as he can see you as a slave. In the disaster of Varus, fortune brought low many men of the most distinguished birth, who were entering on a senatorial career through military service: one she made a shepherd, another a keeper of a hut. Despise now a man of that fortune into which, even while you despise him, you may pass.[10]

47.11 I don't want to launch into a huge subject and debate how slaves are treated—toward whom we are extremely arrogant, cruel and insulting. But here is the sum of my advice: live with your inferior as you would want your superior to live with you. Whenever it occurs to you how much power you have over your slave, let it occur to you that your master has just as much over you.

47.12 "But I," you say, "have no master." You are young yet; perhaps you will have one. Don't you know at what age Hecuba became a slave, or Croesus, or the mother of Darius, or Plato, or Diogenes?[11]

47.13 Treat your slave with kindness, and courtesy too; admit him to your conversation, your counsel and your company. At this point the whole crowd of the pampered will shout at me, "Nothing could be more degrading, nothing more shameful!" These same men I will catch kissing the hands of other people's slaves.

47.14 Don't you even see how our ancestors took all odium away from masters and all insult away from slaves? They called the

9 Callistus, a freedman who rose to great power as a secretary of the emperor Claudius.

10 In AD 9 three Roman legions under Quinctilius Varus were destroyed in the Teutoburg Forest in Germany; many survivors were enslaved.

master "father of the household" and the slaves—a usage that still survives in the mimes—"members of the household." They established a festival day—not the only day on which masters would eat with their slaves, but one on which they certainly would. They allowed slaves to hold offices in the house and to pronounce judgments, and they regarded the household as a miniature commonwealth.[12]

47.15 "What, then? Shall I bring all my slaves to my table?" No more than all free men. You are mistaken if you think I will turn some away as doing dirtier work—that mule driver, say, or that cowherd. I will judge them not by their jobs but by their character. Each man gives himself his character; chance assigns his job. Let some dine with you because they are worthy, others so that they may become so. For if there is anything slavish in them from mixing with low company, association with more honorable people will shake it out of them.

47.16 There is no reason, my Lucilius, to look for a friend only in the forum and the senate house; if you pay careful attention, you will find one at home too. Good material often lies idle for lack of a craftsman: try it and see. Just as a man is a fool who, when buying a horse, inspects not the horse but its saddlecloth and bridle, so he is the greatest fool of all who judges a man by his clothes, or by his condition in life, which is wrapped around us like clothing.

47.17 "He's a slave." But perhaps free in spirit. "He's a slave." Will that count against him? Show me who isn't. One man is a slave to lust, another to greed, another to ambition; all are slaves to fear. I will show you an ex-consul who is slave to a little old woman, a rich man slave to a young maidservant; I will show you young men of the noblest families who are the property of pantomime dancers! No slavery is more shameful than one freely chosen. So there is no reason for these fastidious people to deter you from

11 Hecuba, queen of Troy, was enslaved when the city fell; Croesus of Lydia was captured by Cyrus; Darius III's mother by Alexander; Plato was reportedly sold into slavery in Sicily, and Diogenes the Cynic captured by pirates and sold.
12 The festival is the Saturnalia, in December, when masters and slaves traditionally dined together.

showing yourself good-humored to your slaves, and not arrogantly superior. Let them respect you rather than fear you.

47.18 Someone will say now that I am summoning slaves to the cap of liberty and throwing masters down from their high place, because I said, "Let them respect their master rather than fear him." "Just so," he says. "Respect him the way clients do, the way morning callers do?" Whoever says this will forget that what is enough for a god is not too little for masters. One who is respected is also loved; and love cannot be mixed with fear.

47.19 So I think you are doing exactly right in not wanting to be feared by your slaves, and in using words to correct them; blows are for correcting brute animals. Not everything that offends us also harms us. But our pampered habits drive us to fury, so that whatever does not answer to our wishes calls up our anger.

47.20 We take on the temper of kings. For they, too, forgetting both their own strength and others' weakness, blaze up and rage as if they had been wronged, when the greatness of their fortune makes them entirely safe from any danger of that. Nor are they unaware of this; but by complaining they seize an opportunity to do harm. They have received an injury so that they may inflict one.

47.21 I don't want to keep you any longer; you don't need encouragement. Among its other merits, good character has this: it is content with itself, and it lasts. Wickedness is fickle; it changes often—not for the better, just into something else. Farewell.

LETTER 48: ON QUIBBLING AS UNWORTHY OF THE PHILOSOPHER

Friendship makes all things shared, and philosophy should help the suffering rather than play with syllogisms.

48.1 I'll answer later the letter you sent me from the road—a letter as long as the road itself. I need to withdraw and look around for what advice to give. After all, you who are asking for advice spent a long time wondering whether to ask; how much more must I do the same, since it takes longer to solve a question than

to pose one? Especially when one thing is to your advantage and another to mine. Am I talking like an Epicurean again?[13]

48.2 No—what is to your advantage is to mine too. Otherwise I am no friend, unless whatever concerns you is my concern as well. Friendship makes us partners in everything. Neither good fortune nor bad belongs to one of us alone; we live in common. No one can live happily who looks only to himself and turns everything to his own profit. You must live for another if you want to live for yourself.

48.3 This fellowship, kept carefully and devoutly, which joins us as human beings to other human beings and holds that there is a law common to the whole human race, also does a great deal to foster that inner fellowship I was speaking of, friendship. For the man who shares much with his fellow human being will share everything with his friend.

48.4 This, Lucilius, best of men, is what I would rather those subtle thinkers taught me: what I owe a friend, what I owe a human being—rather than in how many senses the word "friend" is used, and how many things "man" can mean. Look: wisdom and folly go off in opposite directions. Which shall I join? Which way do you tell me to go? For one, every human being is a friend; for the other, a friend is not even a human being. The one wins a friend for himself; the other gives himself to a friend. And you twist words for me and sort out syllables.

48.5 Of course: unless I build the craftiest of arguments and tie up a lie, born from the truth, in a false conclusion, I won't be able to tell what to pursue from what to avoid. I am ashamed. At our age we play games in a matter so serious.

48.6 "'Mouse' is a syllable. A mouse nibbles cheese. Therefore a syllable nibbles cheese." Suppose now that I can't untangle this. What danger threatens me from that ignorance? What inconvenience? No doubt I must worry that someday I'll catch syllables in a mousetrap, or that, if I'm careless, a book might eat my cheese. Unless perhaps this is the sharper inference:

13 Epicureans judged friendship by its usefulness; Seneca catches himself using their language of "advantage."

"'Mouse' is a syllable. A syllable does not nibble cheese. Therefore a mouse does not nibble cheese."[14]

48.7 What childish nonsense! Is this why we knit our brows? Is this why we let our beards grow? Is this what we teach, grim-faced and pale? Do you want to know what philosophy promises the human race? Counsel. One man is summoned by death, another is scorched by poverty, another is tormented by wealth —someone else's or his own. This one dreads bad fortune; that one longs to escape his own good fortune. This man is ill-treated by men, that one by the gods.

48.8 Why do you put together these toys for me? This is no place for jokes; you have been called in to help the wretched. You promised to bring aid to the shipwrecked, the captive, the sick, the needy, to those offering their heads beneath the raised axe. Where are you wandering off to? What are you doing? This man you are playing with is afraid. Come to his rescue, and free those caught in the noose. From every side all hands stretch out to you; lives that are ruined or on the brink of ruin beg for some help. In you are their hope and their resources. They ask you to drag them out of all this floundering, to show the bright light of truth to the scattered and the lost.[15]

48.9 Tell them what nature has made necessary and what superfluous; how easy the laws she has laid down; how pleasant and unencumbered life is for those who follow them, and how bitter and tangled for those who have trusted opinion more than nature. I would believe these toys of yours had some power to relieve such people's troubles, if you first showed me what part of them they will relieve. Which of them takes away desires? Which moderates them? If only they were merely useless! They do harm. Whenever you like, I will make it perfectly plain to you that a noble character is worn down and weakened when it is thrown into these quibbles.

48.10 I am ashamed to say what weapons they hand to men about to fight against fortune, how they equip them. Is this the

14 A parody of the logic-chopping syllogisms of Stoic dialecticians.

road to the supreme good? Through that philosophy of "or if not," and through pleas shameful and disreputable even to those who sit at the praetor's board? For what else are you doing, when you knowingly trap the man you are questioning, except making it look as if he has lost his case on a technicality? But just as the praetor restores the one, so philosophy restores the other to his former position.[16]

48.11 Why do you retreat from your huge promises? You spoke grandly: you would make the gleam of gold dazzle my eyes no more than the gleam of a sword; I would trample with great steadfastness both what all men long for and what all men fear. Why then do you descend to a grammar teacher's ABCs? What do you say? "This is the way to the stars"? For this is what philosophy promises me: to make me the equal of god. This is what I was invited to, this is why I came. Keep your word.[17]

48.12 So, my Lucilius, pull yourself back as far as you can from these exceptions and objections of the philosophers. Goodness suits what is open and simple. Even if we had plenty of life left, we should have to spend it sparingly so it would suffice for necessities. As it is, what madness it is to learn superfluous things when time is so scarce! Farewell.

LETTER 49: ON THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE

Seeing Campania reminds Seneca how quickly time passes, leaving no room for logic-chopping.

49.1 My Lucilius, a man is lazy and careless if some place has to remind him of a friend before he thinks of him. And yet familiar places sometimes do call up the longing stored away in our minds. They don't bring back a memory that had died out; they

15 The Latin text is corrupt at "free those caught in the noose"; the rendering gives the likely sense.

16 "Or if not" (sive nive) mimics the hair-splitting wording of legal formulas. The praetor's board (album) displayed his edict; in Roman procedure a litigant could lose on a flaw in the formula, and the praetor could grant "restoration to the former position."

17 "This is the way to the stars" quotes Virgil, Aeneid 9.641.

stir one that was dormant—just as, for mourners, even when their grief has been softened by time, the sight of a favorite slave of the one they lost, or a garment, or a house, renews it. Look: it is unbelievable how fresh my longing for you has become at the sight of Campania, and above all of Naples and your Pompeii. You are right before my eyes. I am taking leave of you this very moment. I see you swallowing your tears and not quite holding back your feelings, which break out even as you try to check them. I seem to have lost you just now.[18]

49.2 For what is not "just now," when you remember it? Just now I sat as a boy in the school of the philosopher Sotion; just now I began pleading cases; just now I stopped wanting to plead; just now I stopped being able to. Time's speed is boundless, and it is clearest to those who look back. For it slips past those intent on the present, so smooth is the passage of its headlong flight.[19]

49.3 Do you ask the reason? All the time that has passed is in the same place; it is seen all at once; it lies together. Everything falls into the same abyss. Besides, there cannot be long intervals in something that is short as a whole. The time we live is a point, and even less than a point. Yet nature has mocked even this tiny thing with the appearance of a longer span: out of one part she has made infancy, out of another childhood, out of another youth, out of another a kind of slope from youth to old age, out of another old age itself. How many steps she has set in so narrow a space!

49.4 Just now I saw you off. And yet this "just now" is a good part of our lifetime, and let us reflect that its brevity will one day run out. Time did not use to seem so swift to me; now its speed seems unbelievable, whether because I feel the finish line drawing near, or because I have begun to pay attention and count up my losses.

49.5 So I am all the more indignant that some people spend the greater part of this time—which cannot suffice even for necessit-

18 Lucilius came from Pompeii, near Naples in Campania.

ies, however carefully it is guarded—on superfluous things. Cicero says that if his lifetime were doubled, he still would not have time to read the lyric poets. Put the logicians in the same class; they are foolish in a gloomier way. The poets are openly frivolous; the logicians think they are actually doing something.

49.6 I don't deny that we should take a look at these things—but only a look, a greeting from the doorway, for this one purpose: so that we aren't fooled into thinking there is some great secret good in them. Why do you torture yourself and waste away over a question that it is cleverer to scorn than to solve? Collecting odds and ends is for someone moving house at leisure and at his convenience. When the enemy is pressing from behind and the soldier is ordered to march, necessity shakes out whatever idle peacetime had gathered.

49.7 I have no time to chase after words with doubtful meanings and to test my cunning on them. "Look what peoples gather, what walls have shut their gates / And sharpen steel." I must listen with a great spirit to this din of war that sounds all around me.[20]

49.8 Everyone would rightly think me mad if, while old men and women were piling up stones to fortify the walls, while the armed young men inside the gates waited for—or demanded—the signal to sally out, while the enemy's spears quivered in the gates and the very ground shook with mines and tunnels, I sat at leisure posing little questions like this: "What you have not lost, you have. You have not lost horns. Therefore you have horns," and other things fashioned on the model of this clever lunacy.

49.9 And yet you may just as well think me mad if I spend effort on such things; for I am under siege now as well. Back then, though, the danger threatening me under siege would come from outside, and a wall would separate me from the enemy; now the deadly things are inside with me. I have no time for this nonsense; I have an enormous task in hand. What am I to do?

19 Sotion was a philosopher of Pythagorean leanings who taught Seneca in his youth.
20 Virgil, Aeneid 8.385–86.

Death pursues me, life flees me. Teach me something against these.

49.10 Make it so that I don't flee death and life doesn't flee me. Encourage me against hardships; give me calm in the face of the inevitable. Loosen the narrow limits of my time. Teach me that the good of life lies not in its length but in its use, and that it can happen—indeed it happens very often—that a man who has lived long has lived little. Say to me as I go to sleep: "You may not wake up." Say to me when I have woken: "You may not sleep again." Say to me as I go out: "You may not come back." Say to me as I come back: "You may not go out again."

49.11 You are wrong if you think that only on a voyage is the gap that separates life from death very small. In every place the interval is just as thin. Death does not show itself so near everywhere, but everywhere it is just as near. Scatter this darkness, and you will more easily teach me the things I have been prepared for. Nature brought us forth teachable, and gave us reason—imperfect, but capable of being perfected.

49.12 Discuss justice with me, and duty, and frugality, and both kinds of chastity—the one that keeps away from another's body, and the one that takes care of one's own. If you won't lead me along byways, I will more easily reach the place I'm heading for. For as the tragic poet says, "The speech of truth is simple." So it should not be made tangled; nothing suits minds that attempt great things less than that sly cleverness. Farewell.[21]

LETTER 50: ON OUR BLINDNESS AND ITS CURE

Like Harpaste, who does not know she is blind, we do not see our own faults, but virtue can still be learned.

50.1 I received your letter many months after you sent it. So I thought it pointless to ask the man who brought it how you were doing; he would have a very good memory indeed if he remembered! And yet I hope you are now living in such a way that wherever you are, I know what you are doing. For what else

21 The tragic poet is Euripides (Phoenician Women 469).

are you doing but making yourself better every day, laying aside some of your errors, understanding that the faults you blame on circumstances are your own? For we ascribe certain faults to places and times. But they will follow us wherever we go.

50.2 Harpaste, my wife's household jester, has stayed on in my house, as you know, a burden I inherited. I myself have a strong dislike for such curiosities; if I ever want to be amused by a fool, I don't have to look far—I laugh at myself. This jester suddenly went blind. I'm telling you something incredible, but true: she doesn't know she is blind. Again and again she asks her attendant to move house. She says the house is dark.[22]

50.3 What we laugh at in her, be sure of it, happens to all of us. No one realizes he is greedy, no one that he is covetous. Yet the blind look for a guide; we wander without one and say: "I'm not ambitious, but no one can live any other way in Rome. I'm not extravagant, but the city itself demands great expense. It's not my fault that I'm hot-tempered, that I haven't yet settled on a fixed way of life; it's my youth that does it."

50.4 Why do we deceive ourselves? Our evil is not outside us; it is within us, it sits in our very innards. And we find it hard to reach health precisely because we don't know we are sick. Even if we begin to be treated, when will we shake off the great strength of so many diseases? As it is, we don't even look for a doctor, who would have less work to do if he were called in when the fault was fresh. Tender and unformed minds would follow someone pointing out the right way.

50.5 No one finds it hard to be brought back to nature except the one who has deserted her. We blush to learn good sense. But, by Hercules, if it is shameful to look for a teacher of this, then we must give up hope that so great a good can fall into our lap by chance. We must work. And to tell the truth, the work isn't even great—provided, as I said, we begin to shape and correct our mind before its crookedness hardens. But even when it has hardened, I don't despair.

22 Wealthy Roman households sometimes kept a person as a jester for entertainment.

50.6 There is nothing that persistent effort and intent, careful attention cannot conquer. You can straighten oak however bent. Heat unbends curved beams, and wood that grew otherwise is shaped into what our needs require. How much more easily does the mind take shape, pliable as it is, and more yielding than any liquid! For what else is the mind but breath in a certain state? And you see that breath is more tractable than any other material, just as it is finer.[23]

50.7 My Lucilius, there is no reason for you to stop hoping well of us because wickedness already holds us, because it has long been in possession of us. Good sense comes to no one before bad sense. We have all been taken over in advance. To learn virtues is to unlearn vices.

50.8 We ought to approach correcting ourselves with all the greater spirit because once the good is handed over to us, we possess it forever. Virtue is not unlearned. For opposites cling poorly in a place not their own, and so they can be driven out and thrown out; what comes into its own place sits fast. Virtue is in accordance with nature; vices are hostile and at war with it.

50.9 But though virtues, once received, cannot leave and are easy to guard, the first step toward them is hard, because it is the mark of a weak and sick mind to dread what it has not tried. So the mind must be forced to begin. After that the medicine isn't bitter; it delights at the same moment that it heals. With other remedies the pleasure comes after recovery; philosophy is at once healthful and sweet. Farewell.

LETTER 51: ON BAIAE AND MORALS

Avoid luxurious places like Baiae, since the setting affects the mind and pleasures embrace us only to strangle us.

51.1 Each as best he can, my Lucilius! You have Etna there, that lofty and most famous mountain of Sicily. Why Messala—or was it Valgius? I have read it in both—called it unique, I can't dis-

23 For the Stoics the mind was pneuma ("breath" or spirit), a fine, fiery-airy substance in a particular condition.

cover, since many places spew out fire: not only high ones, which happens more often (evidently because fire is carried upward), but low-lying ones as well. As for me, I make do as best I can with Baiae, which I left the day after I arrived—a place to be avoided for this reason, though it has certain natural gifts: luxury has chosen it as her playground.[24]

51.2 "What then? Should we declare hatred against any place?" Not at all. But just as some clothing suits a wise and upright man better than other clothing—he doesn't hate any color, but thinks some are hardly suitable for one who professes frugality—so there is also a region that a wise man, or one heading toward wisdom, will avoid as foreign to good character.

51.3 So when he thinks of a retreat, he will never choose Canopus, though Canopus forbids no one to be sober—nor Baiae either. They have begun to be vice's inns. There luxury allows herself the most; there, as if some license were owed to the place, she lets herself go further.[25]

51.4 We should choose a place healthy not only for the body but also for our character. Just as I would not want to live among torturers, so I would not want to live among taverns either. What need is there to see drunks wandering along the beaches, the revels of boating parties, the lakes ringing with bands and songs, and all the other things by which luxury, as though set free from the laws, not only does wrong but makes a public show of it?

51.5 Our aim should be to flee as far as possible from the incitements to vice. The mind must be hardened and dragged far from the charms of pleasure. A single winter quarters undid Hannibal; the comforts of Campania unmanned a man whom snows and Alps had not tamed. He conquered by arms; he was conquered by vices.[26]

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24 Messala and Valgius were Augustan-era writers. Baiae, on the Bay of Naples, was Rome's most fashionable and notorious resort.

25 Canopus, near Alexandria in Egypt, was proverbial for pleasure-seeking.

26 Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who crossed the Alps in 218 BC, wintered at Capua in Campania in 216–215 BC; later writers blamed its luxury for softening his army.

51.6 We too must fight as soldiers, and in a kind of warfare that never grants rest, never grants leisure. First of all, pleasures must be conquered—pleasures that, as you see, have carried off even savage natures. If anyone sets before himself how great a task he has undertaken, he will know that nothing must be done delicately, nothing softly. What have I to do with those hot pools? What with sweat baths, where dry steam is shut in to drain the body? Let all sweat come out through toil.

51.7 If we did what Hannibal did—broke off the course of events, dropped the war, and devoted ourselves to pampering our bodies—everyone would rightly condemn this untimely idleness, dangerous even to a victor, let alone to one still winning. We are allowed less than those who followed the Punic standards: more danger remains for us if we give way, more work even if we persevere.

51.8 Fortune is waging war on me. I am not going to do as I am told. I don't accept the yoke—no, what takes greater courage, I shake it off. The mind must not be softened. If I yield to pleasure, I must yield to pain, yield to toil, yield to poverty; ambition and anger will want the same power over me. I will be pulled apart among so many passions—no, torn to pieces.

51.9 Freedom is the goal; this is the prize we labor for. What is freedom, you ask? To be a slave to nothing—to no necessity, to no chance—and to bring fortune down to equal terms. The day I understand that I am the stronger, she will have no power. Shall I put up with her, when death is in my own hands?

51.10 A man intent on these thoughts should choose places that are serious and pure. Too much charm makes minds soft, and without doubt a region has some power to corrupt one's vigor. Pack animals whose hooves have been hardened on rough ground can handle any road; those fattened on soft, marshy pasture are soon worn lame. The braver soldier comes from rugged country; the city-bred and the home-born slave are sluggish. Hands that pass from the plow to arms refuse no toil; the sleek, perfumed fellow gives out at the first dust.

51.11 A sterner discipline of place strengthens the character and makes it fit for great efforts. Scipio spent his exile more honorably at Liternum than he would have at Baiae; a downfall like his should not be settled so softly. Even those men to whom the fortune of the Roman people first handed over the state's power —Gaius Marius, Gnaeus Pompey, and Caesar—did build villas in the district of Baiae, but they set them on the highest ridges of the hills. It seemed more soldierly to survey far and wide, from a height, what lay below. Look at the position they chose, the sites where they raised their buildings, and what kind of buildings: you will know they are not villas but military camps.[27]

51.12 Do you think Cato would ever have lived in a pleasure pavilion, so he could count the adulteresses sailing past, and all the kinds of boats painted in various colors, and the roses floating across the whole lake, and listen to the brawling of singers at night? Wouldn't he have preferred to stay inside a rampart he had dug with his own hands for a single night? Why wouldn't any real man prefer to have his sleep broken by a trumpet rather than by a band?

51.13 But we have quarreled with Baiae long enough—never enough with vices. Pursue them, Lucilius, I beg you, without limit and without end, for they too have neither end nor limit. Throw out whatever is mangling your heart; if it could not be pulled out any other way, the heart itself would have to be torn out with it. Above all, drive out pleasures and hold them in utter hatred. Like the bandits the Egyptians call φιλητάς ["lovers"], they embrace us in order to strangle us. Farewell.[28]

27 Scipio Africanus, who defeated Hannibal in 202 BC, spent his last years in voluntary exile on his farm at Liternum on the Campanian coast. Marius, Pompey, and Julius Caesar were the great generals of the late Republic.

28 The Greek philētai ("lovers," "huggers") was an Egyptian nickname for robbers who embraced their victims to throttle them.

LETTER 52: ON CHOOSING OUR TEACHERS

We need a guide to escape folly, and should choose teachers whose lives match their words, not applause-seekers.

52.1 What is it, Lucilius, that drags us one way when we are heading another, and pushes us toward the place we long to get away from? What is it that wrestles with our mind and won't let us want anything once and for all? We waver between different plans. Nothing we want freely, nothing wholeheartedly, nothing always.

52.2 "It is folly," you say, "for which nothing is fixed, nothing pleases for long." But how or when will we tear ourselves away from it? No one is strong enough by himself to rise out of it. Someone must reach out a hand, someone must pull him out.

52.3 Epicurus says that some people have made their way to the truth without anyone's help, cutting a path for themselves. He praises these most of all, the ones whose impulse came from within, who brought themselves forward. Others, he says, need someone else's aid: they will not go unless someone goes ahead, but they will follow well. Metrodorus, he says, was one of these —an excellent mind too, but of the second rank. We are not of that first class; we are doing well if we are admitted to the second. Don't despise even the man who can be saved by another's kindness. This too is a great deal: to want to be saved.

52.4 Besides these you will find yet another kind of person, and not one to be scorned either: those who can be forced and driven to what is right, who need not just a guide but a helper—and, so to speak, a driver. This is the third type. If you want an example of this too, Epicurus says Hermarchus was such a man. So he congratulates the one more, but admires the other more; for though both arrived at the same goal, it deserves greater praise to have achieved the same result with more difficult material.

52.5 Imagine two buildings put up, unlike from the ground up, but equally tall and magnificent. One was given a clean site, and

the work rose there at once. For the other, the foundations wore out the builders, sunk as they were into soft, shifting soil, and a great deal of labor was spent before solid ground was reached. To anyone looking at both, everything the first builder did is out in the open; a large and more difficult part of the second one's work is hidden.

52.6 Some minds are easy and ready to go; others, as they say, must be made by hand, and are taken up with their own foundations. So I would call the first man luckier, who had no trouble with himself; but the second, I would say, has done better by himself, who has overcome the meanness of his own nature and has not so much led himself to wisdom as dragged himself there.

52.7 You may be sure that this hard and laborious kind of mind has been given to us. We are going through obstacles. So let us fight, and let us call on the help of others. "Whom," you ask, "shall I call on? This man or that?" Go back to earlier thinkers too; they have time to spare. Not only those who are alive can help us, but those who have been.

52.8 But of those who are alive, let us choose not the ones who rattle off words at great speed, roll out commonplaces, and put on shows for private audiences, but those who teach by their lives: who, when they have said what should be done, prove it by doing it; who teach what should be avoided and are never caught doing what they have said to shun. Choose as your helper the one you admire more when you see him than when you hear him.

52.9 I wouldn't forbid you, though, to hear those too who make a practice of admitting the public and lecturing—provided they come before the crowd with this purpose: to become better and to make others better, and don't do it for the sake of ambition. For what is more shameful than philosophy angling for applause? Does a sick man praise the surgeon who is cutting him?

52.10 Be silent, be reverent, and submit to the treatment. Even if you shout, I will hear it only as groaning when your vices are

touched. Do you want to testify that you are paying attention and are moved by the greatness of the subject? Very well, let that be allowed. And if you want to judge and cast your vote for the better course, why shouldn't I allow it? Among Pythagoras' followers, pupils had to keep silent for five years. Do you think, then, that they were allowed to speak and applaud right away?[29]

52.11 How mad is the man whom the shouts of the ignorant send away from the lecture hall in high spirits! Why are you glad to be praised by people you cannot praise yourself? Fabianus used to lecture to the public, but he was heard with restraint. At times a great shout of praise burst out, but it was called forth by the greatness of the subject, not by the sound of speech gliding along smoothly and softly.

52.12 There should be some difference between the shouting of the theater and that of the school; there is a decorum even in praising. Everything about everything, if you observe it, is a sign, and you can take evidence of character even from the smallest things. The lecher is revealed by his walk, by the movement of a hand, sometimes by a single answer, by a finger raised to his head, by the turn of his eyes. The rogue is shown by his laugh, the deranged by his face and bearing. For these things come out into the open through their marks. You will know what each person is like if you observe how he praises and how he is praised.[30]

52.13 From this side and that the audience stretch out their hands at the philosopher, and a crowd of admirers stands right over his head. He is not being praised now, if you understand me—he is being given a funeral cry. Let those shouts be left to the arts whose aim is to please the public. Let philosophy be worshiped.[31]

52.14 Young men will sometimes have to be allowed to follow the impulse of their feelings—but only when they act on

29 Pythagoras (6th century BC), Greek philosopher and mathematician; his followers were said to keep a five-year silence as novices.

30 Scratching the head with one finger was a stock Roman sign of effeminacy or vanity.

impulse, when they cannot command themselves to be silent. Praise of that kind brings some encouragement to the listeners themselves and spurs on young minds. Let them be moved by the substance, not by well-arranged words. Otherwise eloquence does them harm, if it makes them long not for the subject but for itself.

52.15 I'll put this off for now, since it calls for a long treatment of its own: how one should lecture to the public, how much a speaker may allow himself before the public, and how much he may allow the public before him. There will be no doubt that philosophy has suffered damage since she was prostituted. But she can still be displayed in her sanctuary, provided she has found not a peddler but a priest. Farewell.

31 A pun: conclamare means both to shout together and to call out the name of the dead in mourning.

Book VI

On noise (56), on Plato's kinds of being (58).

LETTER 53: ON THE FAULTS OF THE SPIRIT

Seasickness on a short voyage shows Seneca how we fail to notice the diseases of the mind.

53.1 What can't I be persuaded to do, when I was persuaded to go on a sea voyage? I set sail on a calm sea. The sky, no doubt about it, was heavy with dirty clouds, the kind that usually turn into either rain or wind. But I thought I could steal the few miles from your Parthenope to Puteoli, even under a doubtful, threatening sky. So to get clear faster, I headed straight across open water for Nesis, meaning to cut across all the bays.[1]

53.2 When we had gone so far that it made no difference to me whether I went on or turned back, first that calm which had seduced me disappeared. It was not yet a storm, but already the sea was heaving and the waves were coming more and more often. I began to ask the helmsman to put me ashore somewhere. He said the coast there was rugged and harborless, and that in a storm there was nothing he feared so much as land.

53.3 But I was too badly tormented for danger to occur to me. For that sluggish, endless seasickness was racking me, the kind that stirs up bile without bringing it up. So I pressed the helmsman and forced him, willing or not, to make for the shore. As soon as we got near it, I didn't wait for anything to be done according to Virgil's instructions—"They turn their prows to sea"

1 Parthenope is a poetic name for Naples; Puteoli (Pozzuoli) and the islet of Nesis (Nisida) lie a few miles along the coast to the west.

or "The anchor is cast from the prow." Mindful of my skill, as a longtime devotee of cold water, I threw myself into the sea, just as a cold-water bather should—in my woolen cloak.[2]

53.4 What do you think I went through while I crawled over the rocks, while I looked for a path, while I made one? I understood that sailors have good reason to fear land. What I endured when I couldn't endure myself is beyond belief. Know this: Ulysses was not born to so angry a sea that he was shipwrecked everywhere—he was seasick. I too, wherever I have to sail, will arrive in the twentieth year.[3]

53.5 As soon as I had pulled my stomach together—which, as you know, doesn't escape seasickness just by escaping the sea—and restored my body with a rubdown of oil, I began to think to myself how completely we forget our faults, even the bodily ones, which keep reminding us of themselves—let alone those that hide all the more, the greater they are.

53.6 A slight touch of fever can fool someone; but when it has grown and a real fever has flared up, it wrings a confession even from a tough, long-suffering man. The feet ache, the joints feel little prickling pains; we still pretend, and say we have twisted an ankle or overdone it at some exercise. While the illness is doubtful and just beginning, we look for a name for it; but once it starts to swell the ankles and has made both feet into right feet, we have to admit it is gout.[4]

53.7 The opposite happens with the diseases that afflict the mind: the worse off someone is, the less he feels it. No need to be surprised, dearest Lucilius. For a light sleeper sees images while he rests and sometimes, while asleep, thinks that he is asleep; but heavy slumber blots out even dreams and sinks the mind too deep for it to have any awareness of itself.

53.8 Why does no one confess his faults? Because he is still in them. Telling a dream belongs to someone awake, and confess-

2 Virgil, Aeneid 6.3 and 3.277. Seneca calls himself a psychrolutes (Greek, "cold-bather"), one who took a plunge in cold water each year.

3 Ulysses (Odysseus) took ten years to get home after the ten-year Trojan War, reaching Ithaca in the twentieth year.

4 "Both feet into right feet": so swollen that the two feet no longer differ in shape.

ing one's faults is a sign of health. So let us wake up, so that we can expose our errors. But only philosophy will rouse us; only philosophy will shake off that heavy sleep. Devote yourself wholly to her. You are worthy of her, she is worthy of you: go into each other's arms. Say no to everything else—firmly, openly. There's no reason to philosophize only on sufferance.

53.9 If you were sick, you would have stopped looking after your household affairs, your business in the courts would have slipped from your mind, and you would not think anyone important enough to go down and plead for him during a remission. With your whole mind you would be working to be free of the illness as soon as possible. What then? Won't you do the same now? Dismiss all obstacles and make time for good sense: no one reaches it while busy. Philosophy exercises her own sovereignty; she gives time, she doesn't receive it. She is not a spare-time pursuit; she is a regular one. She is mistress; she commands your presence.

53.10 When a certain city promised Alexander part of its territory and half of all its property, he said: "I came to Asia intending not to accept what you gave me, but to let you keep what I left you." Philosophy says the same to all things: "I don't intend to accept the time you have left over; you will have what I myself reject."[5]

53.11 Turn your whole mind here, sit by her side, cultivate her. A huge distance will open up between you and everyone else. You will far outstrip all mortals, and the gods will not far outstrip you. Do you ask what the difference between you and them will be? They will last longer. But, by Hercules, it is the mark of a great artist to have enclosed the whole in a small space. For the wise man his own lifetime lies as open as all eternity does for a god. There is one respect in which the wise man surpasses god: god is free of fear by the gift of nature, the wise man by his own.

53.12 Here is something great: to have the frailty of a human being and the freedom from care of a god. The power of philo-

5 Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), king of Macedon, conqueror of the Persian Empire.

sophy to blunt every assault of chance is unbelievable. No weapon lodges in her body; she is fortified, solid. Some she wears out and, as if they were light missiles, lets them slip off in the loose folds of her robe; others she shatters and hurls back at the one who threw them. Farewell.

LETTER 54: ON ASTHMA AND DEATH

A choking fit gives Seneca a rehearsal of death, which is simply the state of not being that preceded our birth.

54.1 Ill health had given me a long furlough; suddenly it attacked me. "What kind?" you ask. You're quite right to ask, since there is none I don't know. Yet there is one disease to which I am, so to speak, assigned. I don't know why I should call it by its Greek name; it can quite aptly be called "gasping." Its attack is very brief and like a squall; it usually ends within an hour. For who takes long to breathe his last?[6]

54.2 Every bodily ailment and danger has passed through me; none seems to me more troublesome. Why not? Any other thing is being ill; this is breathing out your life. So doctors call it "rehearsing death." For one day that breath will succeed in doing what it has so often tried.

54.3 Do you think I am cheerful writing this to you because I have escaped? I would be as ridiculous, taking pleasure in this ending as though it were good health, as a man who thinks he has won his case when he has merely had his court date postponed. But even while I was choking, I never stopped finding rest in cheerful and brave thoughts.

54.4 "What is this?" I say. "Does death test me so often? Let it. I tested it long ago." "When?" you ask. Before I was born. Death is not being; I already know what that is like. What was before me will be after me. If there is any torment in this state, it must also have existed before we came into the light; yet we felt no distress then.

6 The Greek name is asthma; Seneca uses the Latin suspirium ("gasping," "sighing").

54.5 I ask you: wouldn't you call someone utterly foolish if he thought a lamp was worse off when it had been put out than before it was lit? We too are put out and lit. In the time between we suffer something, but on either side there is deep freedom from care. This, my Lucilius, unless I am mistaken, is our mistake: we think death follows, when it has both gone before and will follow. Whatever was before us is death. For what does it matter whether you don't begin or you end, since the result of both is the same: not being?

54.6 With these and similar encouragements—silent ones, of course, since there was no room for words—I kept talking to myself. Then gradually that gasping, which had already begun to be a panting, came at longer intervals, slowed down, and stayed that way. Even now, though it has stopped, my breath doesn't flow naturally; I feel a kind of catch in it, a delay. Let it be as it will, so long as my sighs don't come from the heart.[7]

54.7 Take this assurance from me about myself: I will not tremble at the end. I am already prepared; I make no plans for a whole day ahead. Praise and imitate the man who does not mind dying though he enjoys living. For what virtue is there in leaving when you are thrown out? Yet there is virtue even here: I am being thrown out, but as if I were leaving. And so the wise man is never thrown out, because to be thrown out is to be expelled from a place you leave unwillingly. The wise man does nothing unwillingly; he escapes necessity because he wills what it is going to force on him. Farewell.

LETTER 55: ON VATIA'S VILLA

The villa of the idle Vatia prompts reflection on the difference between true leisure and hiding from life.

55.1 I have just this moment come back from being carried about in my litter, as tired as if I had walked as far as I sat. Being carried for a long time is also work—perhaps even harder work,

7 A play on suspirare ex animo, "to sigh from the heart," where animus also suggests the breath or spirit.

because it goes against nature, which gave us feet so that we could walk for ourselves, and eyes so that we could see for ourselves. Luxury has sentenced us to weakness: what we long refused to do, we are no longer able to do.[8]

55.2 Still, I needed to give my body a shaking, so that if bile had settled in my throat it might be shaken loose, or if my breathing itself had for some reason grown thick, the jolting might thin it out; I have felt that it did me good. So I kept on riding longer, drawn on by the shore itself, which curves between Cumae and the villa of Servilius Vatia and is closed in on one side by the sea and on the other by the lake, like a narrow causeway. It was packed firm after a recent storm. For, as you know, frequent rough waves level the sand, while a long calm loosens it once the moisture that binds the grains has drained away.[9]

55.3 Out of habit, though, I began to look around to see whether I could find something there that might do me good, and I turned my eyes to the villa that once belonged to Vatia. There that rich ex-praetor, known for nothing but his leisure, grew old, and for that one thing alone he was thought happy. For whenever friendship with Asinius Gallus, or the hatred and later the love of Sejanus, had ruined someone—it was as dangerous to have offended Sejanus as to have loved him—people would exclaim: "Vatia, you alone know how to live!"[10]

55.4 But what he knew was how to hide, not how to live. It makes a great difference whether your life is one of leisure or of idleness. Whenever I passed this villa while Vatia was alive, I never failed to say: "Here lies Vatia." But philosophy, my Lucilius, is something so sacred and venerable that even a counterfeit of it wins approval if it bears some resemblance. For the crowd thinks a man of leisure is withdrawn, free from care, con-

8 Being carried in a litter or carriage (gestatio) was a standard Roman form of gentle exercise, prescribed for health.

9 Cumae: an old Greek city on the coast north of the Bay of Naples. Servilius Vatia was a wealthy ex-praetor of Tiberius' reign.

10 Asinius Gallus, a senator, died starving in prison under Tiberius (AD 33). Sejanus, Tiberius' powerful praetorian prefect, was executed in AD 31, and his fall dragged down many of his friends.

tent with himself, living for himself—none of which can happen to anyone except the wise man.[11]

55.5 Can a man full of anxiety know how to live for himself? Indeed—and this comes first—does he know how to live at all? A man who has fled from affairs and from people, who has been sent into exile by the failure of his desires, who could not bear to see others more fortunate, who has gone into hiding out of fear like a timid, sluggish animal—that man is not living for himself but, most shamefully of all, for his belly, his sleep and his lust. Living for no one does not mean living for yourself. Yet constancy and persistence in one's purpose are so great a thing that even stubborn idleness carries some authority.

55.6 About the villa itself I can tell you nothing definite. I know only its front and the parts on display, which it shows even to passers-by. There are two grottoes, great feats of work, each as large as any spacious hall, made by hand; one never gets the sun, the other keeps it right up to sunset. A stream fed from both the sea and the Acherusian lake cuts through a grove of plane trees like a channel, and could support fish even if it were fished constantly. But it is spared while the sea is open; when a storm has given the fishermen a holiday, a hand reaches for what is ready to hand.[12]

55.7 But the most convenient thing about the villa is that it has Baiae just the other side of the wall: it is free of the resort's drawbacks and enjoys its pleasures. These merits I know for myself; I believe it is a house for every season. It faces the west wind and catches it so fully that it keeps it from Baiae. Vatia seems to have been no fool in choosing this spot to bring his leisure to, sluggish and elderly as it already was.

55.8 But place contributes little to tranquility; it is the mind that makes everything agreeable to itself. I have seen people gloomy in a cheerful, lovely villa; I have seen people in the middle of a wilderness who looked busy. So there is no reason to

11 "Here lies" (hic situs est) was the standard formula on Roman tombstones.
12 The Acherusian lake: a coastal lagoon near Cumae (today Lago Fusaro).

think you are unsettled because you are not in Campania. And why aren't you? Just send your thoughts here.

55.9 We can converse with absent friends—as often as we like and for as long as we like. We enjoy this pleasure, the greatest there is, all the more while we are apart. For presence spoils us: because we sometimes talk, walk and sit together, once we have parted we give no thought to those we have just seen.

55.10 And so we ought to bear absence calmly, because everyone is often absent even from those who are present. Count up, first, the nights spent apart, then the different business each of us has, then private studies and trips out of town: you will see that travel does not rob us of much.

55.11 A friend must be possessed in the mind, and the mind is never absent. It sees whomever it wishes every day. So study with me, dine with me, walk with me. We would be living in cramped quarters if anything were closed to our thoughts. I see you, my Lucilius; this very moment I hear you. I am so much with you that I wonder whether I should start writing you not letters but little notes. Farewell.[13]

LETTER 56: ON QUIET AND STUDY

The noise of a bathhouse cannot disturb a mind at peace, since true quiet comes from within.

56.1 Strike me dead if silence is as necessary as it seems for someone who has withdrawn to study. Look—a medley of noise resounds around me on every side. I live right above a bathhouse. Now picture to yourself every kind of sound that can make you hate your own ears. When the stronger men are exercising and swinging their hands weighted with lead, when they are straining or pretending to strain, I hear them groan every time they let out a held breath, and I hear their hissing and their harshest gasps. When I have come upon some lazy fellow content with a cheap rubdown, I hear the smack of a hand slapping

13 Little notes (codicilli): short messages on writing tablets, the kind sent to someone in the same town.

his shoulders, which changes its sound depending on whether it lands flat or cupped. But if a ball-player turns up and starts counting the balls, that's the end.[14]

56.2 Add to this a brawler, and a thief caught in the act, and the man who loves the sound of his own voice in the bath. Add those who leap into the pool with an enormous splash. Besides these, whose voices, if nothing else, are at least natural, think of the hair-plucker, forever letting out his thin, shrill cry to get himself noticed, and never silent except while he is plucking armpits and making someone else yell instead. Then there are the drink-seller's various cries, and the sausage man, and the pastry man, and all the hawkers from the cookshops, each selling his wares with his own distinctive singsong.

56.3 "You must be made of iron," you say, "or deaf, if your mind holds steady amid so many shouts, so varied, so discordant, when constant callers at his morning reception are driving our friend Chrysippus to his death." But, heaven help me, I care no more about that roar than about waves or falling water—though I hear that one people moved their city for this reason alone: they could not stand the thunder of the Nile's falls.[15]

56.4 A voice, it seems to me, distracts more than a clatter. A voice draws the mind to it; a clatter only fills and batters the ears. Among the things that din around me without distracting me I count carriages racing past, the carpenter who lodges in the building, the saw-seller next door, or the fellow by the Sweating Post who tries out his little trumpets and pipes and doesn't play so much as bellow.[16]

56.5 Even so, a sound that keeps breaking off bothers me more than a continuous one. But by now I have so hardened myself to all these things that I could even listen to a coxswain calling the stroke to his rowers in the harshest of voices. For I force my

14 The ball-player (pilicrepus) kept score, loudly, in the ball games played at the baths.

15 This Chrysippus is probably an acquaintance, not the Stoic philosopher; the text is uncertain.

16 The Sweating Post (Meta Sudans): a cone-shaped fountain, here apparently one at Baiae.

mind to attend to itself and not be drawn off to what is outside. Everything outside may resound, so long as there is no uproar within, so long as desire and fear are not brawling, so long as greed and self-indulgence are not at odds, one harassing the other. What good is the silence of a whole district if the passions are roaring?

56.6 "All things lay composed in the calm quiet of night." False. No quiet is calm except what reason has composed. Night brings trouble rather than removing it; it only changes our worries. Even the dreams of sleepers are as turbulent as their days. True tranquility is the state in which a sound mind unfolds itself.[17]

56.7 Look at the man who seeks sleep in the silence of a sprawling house: so that no sound may disturb his ears, his whole crowd of slaves has fallen silent, and anyone coming near walks on tiptoe. Yet of course he tosses this way and that, snatching a light sleep between spells of distress.

56.8 He complains of hearing things he has not heard. What do you think is the cause? His mind is making the noise. That is what must be calmed; that is where the mutiny must be put down. You have no reason to think the mind calm just because the body is lying still. Sometimes rest is restless. And so, whenever an idleness that cannot bear itself is doing us harm, we must rouse ourselves to action and keep busy with worthwhile studies.

56.9 Great generals, when they see their soldiers growing unruly, keep them in check with hard labor and occupy them with campaigns; men who are fully occupied never have time to run riot, and nothing is more certain than that the vices of leisure are dispelled by work. We often seem to have retired out of weariness with public life and regret for an unhappy, thankless post; yet in the hiding place into which fear and fatigue have thrown us, ambition sometimes breaks out afresh. For it has not stopped because it was cut out, but because it was worn out, or even resentful at things not going its way.

56.10 I say the same of love of luxury. It sometimes seems to have given up; then it tempts those who have professed frugality, and in the midst of their thrift it goes after pleasures that were not condemned but merely left behind—and all the more fiercely the more hidden it is. For every vice is milder out in the open; diseases, too, are on the way to recovery when they break out of hiding and show their full force. So you may be sure that greed, ambition and the other evils of the human mind are at their most destructive when they subside under a pretense of health.

56.11 We seem to be at leisure, and we are not. For if we are in good faith, if we have sounded the retreat, if we despise outward show, as I was saying a little while ago, then nothing will distract us; no chorus of people or of birds will interrupt our good thoughts, which by then are solid and settled.

56.12 A mind that starts up at every voice and every chance event is flighty and has not yet withdrawn into itself. It has some anxiety inside, and some fear it has taken in, which makes it jumpy, as our Virgil says: "And I, whom no weapons hurled at me could move a while ago,
nor Greeks massed in hostile ranks against me,
now every breeze alarms, every sound startles,
on edge, and fearing alike for my companion and my burden."[18]

56.13 The first man is the wise one: brandished weapons, the clash of arms in a close-packed column, the crash of a city being stormed do not frighten him. The second is untrained: he fears for his belongings and panics at every rattle; any single voice he takes for a roar throws him down; the slightest movement unnerves him. His baggage makes him a coward.

56.14 Pick anyone you like from among those fortunate people who drag and carry so much around with them, and you will see him "fearing alike for companion and burden." So know that

17 A line from Varro of Atax, a Roman poet of the 1st century BC.
18 Virgil, Aeneid 2.726–729: Aeneas fleeing burning Troy, carrying his father and leading his small son.

you are composed only when no shouting reaches you, when no voice shakes you out of yourself—not if it flatters, not if it threatens, not if it rattles around you with empty, meaningless noise.

56.15 "Well then? Isn't it sometimes more convenient to be free of the racket?" I admit it. That is why I am going to move out of this place. I wanted to test and train myself. Why should I be tortured any longer, when Ulysses found so easy a remedy for his companions even against the Sirens? Farewell.

LETTER 57: ON THE TRIALS OF TRAVEL

Passing through a dark tunnel, Seneca notes that even the wise man feels natural shocks, which are not fear.

57.1 When I had to go back from Baiae to Naples, I was easily persuaded that there was a storm, so as not to try a ship again; and the whole road was so deep in mud that I might be thought to have made the trip by sea after all. That day I had to endure the whole fate of an athlete: after the oiling came the sprinkling with dust, in the Naples tunnel.[19]

57.2 Nothing is longer than that prison, nothing dimmer than those torches, which let us see not through the darkness but the darkness itself. And even if the place had light, the dust would take it away. Dust is a heavy, troublesome thing even in the open air; what must it be like there, where it swirls around on itself and, shut in without any ventilation, falls back on the very people who stirred it up? We suffered two opposite discomforts at once: on the same road, on the same day, we struggled with both mud and dust.

57.3 Still, that darkness gave me something to think about. I felt a kind of jolt to my mind, and a change, though without fear, produced by the novelty of an unaccustomed thing combined with its ugliness. I am not speaking to you now about myself—I

19 Wrestlers were rubbed with oil (ceroma) and then sprinkled with dust (haphe, Greek) for grip. The Naples tunnel (Crypta Neapolitana) ran some 700 meters through the hill between Naples and Puteoli.

am far from being a tolerable human being, let alone a perfect one—but about the man over whom fortune has lost its power. His mind too will be struck; his color too will change.

57.4 For there are some things, my Lucilius, that no virtue can escape; nature reminds it of its own mortality. And so virtue will knit its brow at sad events, shudder at sudden ones, and grow dizzy if it stands on the brink of a vast height and looks down. This is not fear but a natural reaction that reason cannot overcome.

57.5 That is why some brave men, entirely ready to shed their own blood, cannot look at someone else's. Some faint and lose consciousness when a fresh wound is handled and examined, some when it is an old, festering one. Others find it easier to receive a sword than to look at one.

57.6 So, as I was saying, I felt not a disturbance, exactly, but a change. Then at the first sight of daylight returning, my good spirits came back of their own accord, without thought or command. Next I began to say to myself how foolish it is that we fear some things more and others less, when the end of them all is the same. What difference does it make whether a watchman's hut collapses on someone or a mountain does? You will find none. Yet there will be people who fear the second kind of collapse more, though both are equally fatal; so true is it that fear looks not at the effect but at what produces it.

57.7 Do you suppose I am now going to talk about the Stoics, who hold that the soul of a man crushed by a great weight cannot survive and is scattered at once, because it had no free way out? No, I am not; those who say this seem to me mistaken.

57.8 Flame cannot be smothered, for it escapes around whatever presses on it; air is not harmed by a blow or a stroke, is not even cut, but flows back around whatever it has given way to. In the same way the soul, which is made of the finest substance, cannot be caught or crushed inside the body, but thanks to its fineness bursts out through the very things that press on it. Just as lightning, even when it has struck and flashed over the widest area, has a way back through a tiny opening, so the soul,

which is finer still than fire, has an escape route through every part of the body.

57.9 So the question to ask about the soul is whether it can be immortal. Of this at least be certain: if it survives the body, it cannot be crushed out of existence in any way, since it does not perish; for there is no immortality with exceptions, and nothing can harm what is eternal. Farewell.

LETTER 58: ON BEING

Seneca sets out Plato's six senses of being, and draws from them a lesson on despising what is fleeting.

58.1 How poor—no, how destitute—our vocabulary is, I have never understood better than today. We happened to be talking about Plato, and a thousand things came up that needed names and had none, and some that had once had names but had lost them through our fastidiousness. But who can put up with fastidiousness in the midst of destitution?

58.2 The insect the Greeks call *oestrus*, which drives cattle before it and scatters them across whole woodlands, our people used to call *asilus*. You can take Virgil's word for it:

> "Around the groves of Silarus and Alburnus, green with holm oaks,
> swarms a flying pest whose Roman name is *asilus*;
> the Greeks have rendered it, calling it *oestrus*—/ fierce, with a harsh buzz, at which whole herds in terror
> scatter through the woods."[20]

58.3 You can see, I think, that this word has died out. Not to keep you long: some simple verbs used to be in use, as when people said *cernere ferro inter se* [to settle it between them with the sword]. The same Virgil will prove it to you: "that mighty men, born in far-apart parts of the world, / had met together to

20 Virgil, Georgics 3.146–150, on the gadfly. The Silarus is a river and Alburnus a mountain in southern Italy.

settle it with the sword." Now we say *decernere* for this. The use of that simple verb has been lost.[21]

58.4 The ancients said *si iusso*, that is, *iussero* [if I shall have ordered]. Don't take my word for it, but the same Virgil's: "Let the rest of the band bring up arms with me where I command."[22]

58.5 My point in all this careful attention is not to show how much time I wasted with the grammar teacher, but to let you see from it how many words in Ennius and Accius have been buried in mold, when even from this poet, who is pored over every day, some have been snatched away from us.[23]

58.6 "What is the point," you ask, "of all this preamble? What is it leading up to?" I won't hide it from you: I want, if possible, to say *essentia* [essence] with your ears' blessing; if not, I shall say it even if they are angry. I have Cicero as authority for this word—a rich enough source, I think. If you want someone more recent, Fabianus, eloquent and elegant, with a style polished enough even for our fastidious taste. For what else can we do, my Lucilius? How else are we to express οὐσία [being, essence], a thing we cannot do without, a nature that contains the foundation of all things? So I ask you to allow me to use this word. All the same, I shall take care to exercise the right you grant me very sparingly; perhaps I shall be content just to have permission.[24]

58.7 But what good will your indulgence do me, when, look, there is no way I can express in Latin the very thing for which I picked a quarrel with our language? You will condemn Roman narrowness even more once you learn there is a single syllable I cannot translate. What is it, you ask? τὸ ὄν [being, that which is]. You think I am slow-witted: the obvious answer is to translate it as *quod est* [that which is]. But I see a great difference: I am forced to put a verb in place of a noun.

58.8 But if it must be so, I shall put *quod est*. Our friend, a very learned man, was saying today that Plato uses this term in six

21 Virgil, Aeneid 12.708–709.
22 Virgil, Aeneid 11.467.

senses. I shall explain them all to you, once I have pointed out that there is such a thing as a genus, and also a species. What we are looking for now is that first genus on which the other species depend, from which all division begins, which embraces everything. It will be found if we start tracing particular things backward; that way we shall be led to the first.

58.9 Man is a species, as Aristotle says; horse is a species; dog is a species. So we must look for some common bond among them all, which embraces them and holds them beneath it. What is it? Animal. So animal has become the genus of all those I just mentioned: man, horse, dog.

58.10 But some things have a soul and are not animals. For it is agreed that plants and trees have a soul; that is why we say they live and die. So living things will hold a higher place, since both animals and plants fall under this category. But some things lack a soul, like stones. So there will be something prior to living things—body, of course. I shall divide it by saying that all bodies are either living or lifeless.[25]

58.11 There is something higher even than body. For we say that some things are corporeal and some incorporeal. What, then, will be the thing from which these are derived? The one to which we just gave a not very fitting name, "that which is." It will be divided into species this way: we shall say that "that which is" is either corporeal or incorporeal.

58.12 This, then, is the first and most ancient genus—the "general" genus, so to speak. The others are genera, but specific ones. Man, for example, is a genus. It contains species of nations: Greeks, Romans, Parthians; of colors: white, black, blond; it contains individuals: Cato, Cicero, Lucretius. So insofar as it contains many, it counts as a genus; insofar as it falls under something else, as a species. That genus, "that which is," is general

23 Ennius (239–169 BC) and Accius (170–c. 86 BC): early Roman poets whose language was already archaic in Seneca's day.
24 The word essentia does not appear in Cicero's surviving works.
25 Soul (anima): the principle of life, which ancient philosophy ascribed to plants as well as animals.

and has nothing above it; it is the beginning of things; everything falls under it.

58.13 The Stoics want to place above this yet another, still more primary genus; I shall speak of it shortly, once I have shown that the genus I have been describing is rightly put first, since it has room for all things.

58.14 "That which is" I divide into these species: corporeal and incorporeal. There is no third. How do I divide body? By saying that bodies are either living or lifeless. Again, how do I divide living things? By saying that some have mind and some only soul. Or like this: some have impulse, walk and move from place to place; others, fixed to the ground by roots, take nourishment and grow. Again, into what species do I cut animals? They are either mortal or immortal.

58.15 Some Stoics think the first genus is "something." I shall add why they think so. "In the nature of things," they say, "some things exist and some do not. But the nature of things also embraces those that do not exist—things that come into the mind, such as Centaurs, Giants, and whatever else, formed by false thinking, has come to have some image, though it has no substance."[26]

58.16 Now I return to what I promised you: how Plato divides everything that is into six modes. The first, "that which is," is grasped neither by sight nor by touch nor by any sense; it can be thought. What exists generally—man in general, for example—does not come before our eyes; but the specific does, like Cicero and Cato. Animal is not seen; it is thought. But its species are seen: horse and dog.

58.17 Second among the things that are, Plato places what stands out and surpasses everything. This, he says, is being par excellence. "Poet" is used in a general sense, since everyone who writes verse has this name; but among the Greeks it has come to mark out one man: when you hear "the poet," you

26 "Something" (Greek ti): for the Stoics the highest category, covering both what exists (bodies) and what merely subsists, such as figments of thought.

understand Homer. What, then, is this? God, of course, greater and more powerful than all.

58.18 The third class is of things that exist in the proper sense. These are countless, but they are placed beyond our sight. What are they, you ask? They are Plato's own special furniture: he calls them ideas, from which all things we see come into being and on the model of which everything is formed. These are immortal, unchangeable, inviolable.[27]

58.19 Hear what an idea is, that is, what Plato takes it to be: "An idea is the eternal pattern of the things that come into being by nature." I shall add an explanation to the definition, to make the matter clearer to you. Suppose I want to paint your portrait. I have you as the model for my painting, and from you my mind takes a certain form to impose on its work. So that face which teaches and guides me, and which I try to imitate, is the idea. Nature has countless such patterns—of people, fish, trees—on which whatever she must produce is modeled.

58.20 Fourth place will go to the *eidos*. You must pay attention to what this *eidos* is, and blame Plato, not me, for the difficulty of the subject. But there is no subtlety without difficulty. A moment ago I used the image of a painter. When he wanted to render Virgil in colors, he gazed at Virgil himself. The idea was Virgil's face, the pattern for the future work. What the artist draws from it and has imposed on his work is the *eidos*.[28]

58.21 What is the difference, you ask? The one is the pattern; the other is the form taken from the pattern and imposed on the work. The artist imitates the one and creates the other. A statue has a certain look: that is the *eidos*. The pattern itself, which the craftsman looked at as he shaped the statue, has a certain look: that is the idea. If you want yet another distinction: the *eidos* is in the work, the idea outside the work—and not only outside it, but before it.

27 Ideas: Plato's Forms, the eternal, perfect patterns of which sensible things are copies.

28 Eidos (Greek, "form"): here the form as it exists in the finished work, as opposed to the idea, the model outside it.

58.22 The fifth class is of things that exist in the ordinary sense; here things begin to concern us. Here is everything: people, cattle, things. The sixth class is of things that quasi-exist, such as the void, or time. Whatever we see or touch Plato does not count among the things he thinks exist in the proper sense. For they are in flux, constantly shrinking and growing. None of us is the same in old age as he was in youth; none of us is the same in the morning as he was the day before. Our bodies are swept along like rivers. Whatever you see runs on with time. Nothing we see stays. I myself, even as I say that these things change, have changed.

58.23 This is what Heraclitus says: "We step into the same river twice and do not." The river keeps the same name, but the water has flowed past. This is plainer in a river than in a person. But we too are swept past by a current no less swift. And so I marvel at our madness in loving so dearly that most fleeting of things, the body, and fearing that we may die someday, when every moment is the death of our former state. Won't you stop fearing that what happens every day will happen once!

58.24 I have been speaking of man, a fluid and perishable material exposed to every cause of harm; but the universe too, an eternal and invincible thing, changes and does not stay the same. For though it contains everything it contained before, it contains it differently; it changes its arrangement.

58.25 "What good," you ask, "will this subtlety do me?" If you ask me: none. But just as an engraver rests his eyes when they have been strained and tired for a long time, draws them away and, as the saying goes, "feeds" them, so we should sometimes relax the mind and refresh it with some amusements. But let the amusements themselves be work. From these too, if you watch closely, you will take something that can become wholesome.

58.26 This is what I usually do, Lucilius: from every idea, even one very far removed from philosophy, I try to dig something out and make it useful. What could be more remote from the reform of character than what we have just been discussing? How can Plato's ideas make me better? What can I draw from

them to curb my desires? This very thing: all those things that serve the senses, that inflame and provoke us, Plato says are not among the things that truly exist.

58.27 So these things are imaginary and wear some appearance only for a while; none of them is stable or solid. And yet we desire them as though they would always exist or we would always possess them. Weak and fluid ourselves, we stand among empty things. Let us turn our minds to what is eternal. Let us marvel at the forms of all things, flying on high, and at God moving among them and seeing to it that what he could not make immortal, because matter prevented it, he defends from death, and overcomes the defect of the body by reason.

58.28 For all things endure not because they are eternal but because they are protected by the care of the one who rules them; immortal things would need no guardian. The craftsman preserves them, overcoming the fragility of matter by his power. Let us despise all the things that are so far from precious that it is doubtful whether they exist at all.

58.29 Let us also consider this: if providence exempts the universe itself from dangers, though it is no less mortal than we are, then to some extent our own providence, too, can prolong the stay of this poor little body—if we can govern and restrain the pleasures by which most people perish.

58.30 Plato himself brought himself to old age by taking care. He had indeed been given a strong, sturdy body—his broad chest had even earned him his name—but sea voyages and dangers had greatly sapped his strength. Still, frugality, moderation in the things that stir up appetite, and careful looking after himself brought him to old age despite many obstacles.[29]

58.31 You know, I think, that thanks to his carefulness Plato had the luck to die on his birthday, having completed exactly eighty-one years, not a day short. That is why some Magi who happened to be in Athens offered sacrifice to him after his death, believing his lot to have been more than human, since he had completed the most perfect number, the one made by mul-

29 "Plato" was said to be a nickname from the Greek platys, "broad."

tiplying nine by nine. I have no doubt he would have been ready to give up a few days of that total, and the sacrifice too.[30]

58.32 Frugality can prolong old age, which I do not think should be longed for, but should not be refused either. It is pleasant to be with oneself as long as possible, once one has made oneself worth enjoying. So we shall give our verdict on this question: should one disdain the last stretch of old age and not wait for the end, but bring it about with one's own hand? The man who sluggishly waits for his fate is not far from a coward, just as the man who drains the jar and gulps down the dregs as well is overly devoted to wine.

58.33 But we shall ask this too: is the last part of life the dregs, or the clearest and purest part—provided the mind is unimpaired, the senses are sound and support the spirit, and the body is not worn out and dead before its time? For it makes a great deal of difference whether one is prolonging life or prolonging death.

58.34 But if the body is useless for its duties, why should one not release the struggling soul? And perhaps it should be done a little before it has to be, so that when it has to be done you are not unable to do it. And since the danger of living badly is greater than that of dying soon, he is a fool who will not buy his way out of a gamble for high stakes at the small price of a little time. Very long old age has brought few people to death unimpaired; many have lain inert in a life of no use to themselves. How much crueler, then, do you think it is to have lost some part of life than to have lost the right to end it?

58.35 Don't listen to me reluctantly, as if this opinion already applied to you; weigh what I say. I shall not abandon old age if it keeps me whole for myself—whole, that is, in my better part. But if it begins to shake my mind, to tear away its parts, if it leaves me not life but mere breath, I shall leap out of the rotting, collapsing building.

58.36 I shall not flee disease by dying, so long as it is curable and does not hinder the mind. I shall not lay hands on myself

30 The Magi: Persian priests, famed for astrology and number lore.

because of pain; to die like that is to be defeated. But if I know I shall have to suffer it forever, I shall depart—not because of the pain itself, but because it will stand in the way of everything we live for. He is weak and cowardly who dies because of pain; he is a fool who lives for the sake of pain.

58.37 But I am running on too long. Besides, there is material here that could fill a whole day. And how will a man be able to put an end to his life if he cannot put an end to a letter? So farewell—a word you will read more gladly than all this talk of death. Farewell.

LETTER 59: ON PLEASURE AND JOY

Real joy belongs only to the wise man, and comes from within, unlike the false joys of pleasure.

59.1 I got great pleasure from your letter. Allow me to use words in their everyday sense, and don't hold them to their Stoic meaning. We believe that pleasure is a vice. Granted; yet we commonly use the word to indicate a cheerful state of mind.

59.2 I know, I say, that if we align our words with our school's official register, pleasure is a thing of ill repute, and joy comes to no one but the wise man. For joy is the elation of a mind that trusts in its own true goods. Yet in common speech we say we took great joy in a friend's consulship, or his marriage, or his wife's giving birth—things so far from being joys that they are often the beginnings of sorrow to come. But it is the mark of joy that it does not cease and does not turn into its opposite.

59.3 So when our Virgil speaks of "the mind's evil joys," he speaks eloquently, but not quite precisely. For there is no such thing as an evil joy. He gave this name to pleasures, and so expressed what he meant: he was pointing to people glad at their own harm.[31]

59.4 Still, I had good reason for saying I took great pleasure from your letter. For even when an untrained man rejoices for an honorable reason, I still call his feeling pleasure: it is uncon-

31 Virgil, Aeneid 6.278–79.

trolled, ready at once to swing the other way, prompted by a belief in a false good, immoderate and excessive. But to return to my point, hear what delighted me in your letter: you have your words under control. Your language does not carry you away or drag you farther than you intended.

59.5 Many writers are lured by the charm of some attractive word into something they had not planned to write. That doesn't happen to you: everything is concise and fitted to the subject. You say as much as you want, and you mean more than you say. This is a sign of something greater: it shows that your mind, too, has nothing superfluous, nothing inflated.

59.6 I do find metaphors, though—not reckless ones, but ones that have been put to the test. I find images; and anyone who forbids us to use them, and thinks they are allowed to poets alone, seems to me never to have read any of the ancients, in whose day speech that angled for applause was not yet the fashion. Those men, who spoke plainly and only to make a point clear, are full of comparisons. I consider these necessary—not for the same reason poets need them, but as props for our weakness, to bring both speaker and listener face to face with the matter at hand.

59.7 Here I am, reading Sextius at this very moment—a keen man, who does philosophy in Greek words but by Roman morals. I was struck by an image he offers: an army marches in a hollow square, ready for battle, when the enemy is expected from every side. "The wise man," he says, "must do the same. He should deploy all his virtues on every side, so that wherever some threat arises, defenses are ready there and answer the commander's nod without confusion. We see this in armies drawn up by great generals: all the troops feel the leader's command at once, arranged so that a signal given by one man runs through infantry and cavalry together." This, he says, is far more necessary for us.[32]

59.8 For armies often fear an enemy for no reason, and the road they suspected most turns out to be the safest. But folly has no

peace. It fears what is above as much as what is below; both its flanks tremble; dangers follow behind it and meet it head on. It panics at everything, it is unprepared, and it is frightened even by its own reinforcements. The wise man, however, fortified and alert against every assault, will not give ground, whether poverty attacks, or grief, or disgrace, or pain. Undaunted, he will march both against them and through them.

59.9 We are held back by many things, weakened by many. We have lain long in these vices, and washing them out is hard. For we are not stained, but dyed through. Rather than pass from one image to another, let me ask something I often consider: why does folly hold us so stubbornly? First, because we don't push it away bravely or strive for health with all our might. Second, because we don't put enough faith in what wise men have discovered, or drink it in with open hearts, and we tackle so great a task lightly.

59.10 But how can anyone learn enough to fight his vices, when he learns only in the time his vices leave free? None of us goes deep. We have only plucked at the surface, and busy people have thought it more than enough to spend a little time on philosophy.

59.11 What especially hinders us is that we are quickly pleased with ourselves. If we find someone to call us good men, sensible, upright, we recognize ourselves in it. We are not content with modest praise: whatever flattery has shamelessly heaped on us we grab as our due. We agree with those who say we are the best and wisest of men, though we know they often tell many lies. We indulge ourselves so far that we want to be praised for the very quality whose opposite we are practicing at that moment. One man hears himself called most merciful in the midst of inflicting tortures, another most generous in the midst of plunder, another most temperate in the midst of drunkenness and lust. So it follows that we refuse to change precisely because we believe we are already the best.

32 Quintus Sextius, a Roman philosopher of Augustus' time who wrote in Greek and founded a short-lived school with Stoic and Pythagorean leanings.

59.12 When Alexander was roaming through India, laying waste in war to peoples not well known even to their neighbors, he was struck by an arrow during the siege of a city, as he rode round the walls looking for the weakest point in the fortifications. For a long time he stayed in the saddle and kept at what he had begun. Then the bleeding stopped, the pain of the drying wound grew, and his leg, hanging from the horse, gradually went numb. Forced to withdraw, he said: "Everyone swears I am the son of Jupiter, but this wound shouts that I am a man."[33]

59.13 Let us do the same. Flattery makes a fool of each of us in proportion to our standing. Let us say: "You tell me I am sensible, but I see how many useless things I crave, how many harmful things I wish for. I don't even understand what satiety teaches the animals—what limit there should be to food, what to drink. I still don't know how much I can hold."

59.14 Now I'll show you how to tell that you are not wise. The wise man is full of joy, cheerful and calm, unshaken; he lives on equal terms with the gods. Now consult yourself. If you are never sad, if no hope troubles your mind with expectation of the future, if day and night your mind keeps an even, steady course, lifted up and content with itself, then you have reached the summit of human good. But if you seek pleasures of every kind from every quarter, know that you fall as far short of wisdom as you do of joy. Joy is what you long to reach, but you go astray in hoping to get there amid riches and honors—that is, you are looking for joy amid worries. These things you pursue as if they would give you gladness and pleasure are causes of pain.

59.15 All of them, I say, are striving toward joy, but they don't know where to get a joy that is lasting and great. One looks for it in banquets and luxury, another in ambition and a crowd of clients around him, another in a mistress, another in a vain display of liberal studies and literature that heals nothing. All of them are deceived by delights that are false and brief—like drunkenness, which pays for one hour's cheerful madness with

33 Alexander was wounded in India (327–325 BC); he had been hailed as a son of Zeus (Jupiter).

a long stretch of misery; like applause and the favor of a cheering crowd, which costs great anxiety both to win and to pay for.

59.16 So consider this: the effect of wisdom is a joy that stays even. The wise man's mind is like the universe above the moon: there it is always clear. So here, too, is a reason for wanting to be wise: the wise man is never without joy. And this joy is born only from the awareness of one's virtues.[34]

59.17 No one can rejoice unless he is brave, just, and self-controlled. "What?" you say. "Don't fools and wicked men rejoice?" No more than lions that have caught their prey. When they have worn themselves out with wine and lust, when night has run out on them amid their vices, when pleasures crammed into a small body beyond its capacity have begun to fester, then the poor wretches cry out that line of Virgil: "For you know how we spent that last night / amid false joys."[35]

59.18 The self-indulgent spend every night amid false joys—and, indeed, as if it were their last. But the joy that comes to the gods and to those who rival the gods is not interrupted and does not cease. It would cease if it were drawn from somewhere else. Because it is no one else's gift, it is not subject to anyone else's will either. What fortune has not given, it cannot take away. Farewell.

LETTER 60: ON HARMFUL PRAYERS

The prayers of our families wish harm on us, and those who live only for their bellies are already dead.

60.1 I complain, I argue, I'm angry. Do you still wish for what your nurse, or your tutor, or your mother wished for you? Don't you understand yet how much evil they wished on you? Oh, how hostile to us are the prayers of those close to us! And all the more hostile the more luckily they have come true. I'm no longer surprised that every evil has followed us from earliest

34 In ancient cosmology the region above the moon was thought changeless and free of weather.

35 Aeneid 6.513–14: Deiphobus in the underworld recalls Troy's last night.

childhood: we grew up amid our parents' curses. May the gods hear our own voice too, praying for us—and asking them for nothing.

60.2 How long will we keep asking the gods for things, as if we still couldn't feed ourselves? How long will we fill the fields of great cities with our crops? How long will a whole people do our harvesting? How long will many ships—and from more than one sea—carry in the furnishings of a single table? A bull is filled by a pasture of a very few acres; one forest is enough for many elephants; man feeds on both land and sea.

60.3 What, then? Did nature give us so insatiable a belly, when she gave us such modest bodies, that we should outdo the greed of the hugest and most voracious animals? Not at all. For how little it is that we give to nature! She is sent away satisfied with little. It is not our belly's hunger that costs us so much, but our ambition.

60.4 So let us count those who, as Sallust says, are "slaves to their bellies" among animals, not men—and some not even among animals, but among the dead. He lives who is of use to many; he lives who makes use of himself. But those who lurk and grow sluggish are in their homes as if in a tomb. You may as well carve their names in marble on the very threshold: they have gone ahead of their own death. Farewell.[36]

LETTER 61: ON MEETING DEATH CHEERFULLY

Seneca is ready to die at any time, since willing acceptance removes necessity.

61.1 Let us stop wanting what we once wanted. I, at least, am doing just that: in old age I have stopped wanting what I wanted as a boy. To this one end go my days, to this my nights; this is my work, this my thought: to put an end to old evils. I am working to make each day equal to a whole life. And, heaven knows, I

36 Sallust (86–35 BC), Roman historian; the phrase is from the opening of his *Conspiracy of Catiline*.

don't snatch at it as if it were the last, but I look at it as one that may well be the last.

61.2 In this spirit I am writing you this letter, as if death were about to call me away in the very act of writing. I am ready to leave, and so I will enjoy life, because I don't worry too much about how long that will last. Before old age I took care to live well; in old age I take care to die well. And to die well is to die willingly. Make an effort never to do anything unwillingly.

61.3 Whatever will be a necessity if you resist is no necessity if you are willing. Here is what I mean: the man who accepts orders gladly escapes the bitterest part of slavery—doing what he does not want to do. It is not the man who does something on command who is wretched, but the one who does it unwillingly. So let us set our minds to want whatever circumstances demand, and above all to think of our own end without sadness.

61.4 We must prepare for death before we prepare for life. Life is well enough equipped, but we are greedy for more equipment. Something always seems to be missing, and always will. Whether we have lived enough depends not on years or days, but on the mind. I have lived, my dearest Lucilius, as long as was enough; I await death with my fill. Farewell.

LETTER 62: ON EMPLOYING TIME

No business keeps Seneca from study, since he lends himself to his affairs without giving himself up to them.

62.1 They are lying, those who want it to look as if a crowd of business keeps them from liberal studies. They pretend to be busy, they exaggerate it, and they keep themselves busy. I am free, Lucilius, I am free, and wherever I am, there I belong to myself. For I don't hand myself over to my affairs; I only lend myself. Nor do I chase after excuses to waste time. And wherever I have stopped, there I turn over my thoughts and ponder something wholesome in my mind.

62.2 When I have given myself to my friends, I still don't withdraw from myself. Nor do I linger with those whom some occa-

sion has thrown together with me, or some matter arising from civic duty. Instead I am with all the best people: to them, whatever place or whatever age they lived in, I send my mind.

62.3 I carry Demetrius, the best of men, around with me. Leaving the purple-clad behind, I talk with him, half-naked as he is, and I admire him. Why shouldn't I admire him? I have seen that he lacks nothing. Anyone can despise everything; no one can have everything. The shortest road to riches runs through contempt for riches. Our Demetrius, though, lives not as if he had despised all things, but as if he had left them to others to own. Farewell.

Book VII

On grief for lost friends (63), on the first cause (65).

LETTER 63: ON GRIEF FOR A FRIEND

Mourn a lost friend, but with restraint: grief that is paraded or prolonged is vanity, and memory should turn to pleasure.

63.1 I am sorry that your friend Flaccus has died, but I don't want you to grieve more than is right. That you should not grieve at all I will hardly dare demand—though I know that would be better. But who will attain such firmness of mind, except someone already raised far above fortune? Even he will feel the sting of this—but only the sting. We, though, may be forgiven for slipping into tears, provided they have not flowed too freely and we have checked them ourselves. When a friend is lost, our eyes should be neither dry nor streaming. We may weep, but we must not wail.

63.2 Do I seem to set you a harsh rule, when the greatest of Greek poets granted the right to weep for one day only, and said that even Niobe thought about food? Do you ask where laments come from, and excessive weeping? Through tears we seek proof of our longing; we don't follow our grief, we display it. No one is sad just for himself. What wretched folly! Even grief has its vanity.[1]

63.3 "What, then?" you say. "Shall I forget my friend?" It's a short memory you promise him if it is to last only as long as your grief. Soon any chance thing will turn that frown into a

1 Homer, *Iliad* 19.228–29 and 24.602–17; Niobe, whose children were killed by Apollo and Artemis, still took food.

smile. I am not putting it off to some distant time, when every longing is soothed and even the sharpest mourning subsides. As soon as you stop watching yourself, this picture of sadness will vanish. Right now you are guarding your grief yourself. But even as you guard it, it slips away, and the sharper it is, the sooner it ends.

63.4 Let us make sure that remembering those we have lost becomes a pleasure to us. No one willingly returns to a thought that is going to torment him. Still, it is bound to happen that the names of those we loved and lost come to us with a certain sting. But this sting, too, has its own pleasure.

63.5 For, as our Attalus used to say, "The memory of dead friends is pleasant in the way certain fruits are pleasantly tart, or the way, in a very old wine, the bitterness itself delights us. But when time has passed, all that pained us is extinguished, and pure pleasure comes to us."

63.6 If we believe him, "To think of friends who are alive and well is like enjoying honey and cake; recalling those who are gone gives pleasure, but not without a certain sharpness. Yet who would deny that sharp things like these, with something austere about them, also stimulate the appetite?"

63.7 I don't feel the same. For me the thought of dead friends is sweet and soothing. For I had them as one who would lose them; I have lost them as one who still has them. So, my Lucilius, act as befits your fair-mindedness: stop misinterpreting fortune's kindness. She has taken away, but she has also given.

63.8 So let us enjoy our friends eagerly, since it is uncertain how long this will be granted us. Let us think how often we have left them when setting out on some long journey, how often, while staying in the same place, we have not seen them. We will realize that we lost more time with them while they were alive.

63.9 And can you put up with people who treat their friends with utter neglect, then mourn them most wretchedly, and love no one until they have lost him? They grieve more lavishly then precisely because they fear there may be doubt whether they

loved at all. They are looking for belated proofs of their affection.

63.10 If we have other friends, we both wrong them and think poorly of them if they count for so little in consoling us for the one we have buried. If we have none, we have done ourselves a greater injury than we have received from fortune: fortune took away one friend, but we took away every one we failed to make.

63.11 Besides, a man who could love no more than one did not love even that one very much. If someone stripped of his only tunic would rather lament than look around for a way to escape the cold and find something to cover his shoulders, wouldn't you think him an utter fool? You have buried the one you loved; look for someone to love.

63.12 It is better to replace a friend than to weep for him. I know that what I am about to add is well worn by now, but I won't leave it out just because everyone has said it: even the man who has not ended his grief by choice finds an end to it in time. But for a sensible man the most shameful cure for sorrow is being tired of sorrowing. I would rather you left grief than have grief leave you. And stop as soon as possible doing what, even if you wanted to, you could not keep doing for long.

63.13 Our ancestors fixed a year as the period of mourning for women—not so they would mourn that long, but so they would mourn no longer. For men there is no lawful period, because no period is honorable. Yet of all those women who could barely be dragged from the pyre or torn from the corpse, which one can you show me whose tears lasted a whole month? Nothing becomes hateful more quickly than grief. When fresh, it finds someone to comfort it and draws people to it; but once it is old, it is laughed at, and rightly. For it is either feigned or foolish.

63.14 I who write this to you am the man who wept for Annaeus Serenus, my dearest friend, so immoderately that—much against my will—I am among the examples of those whom grief has conquered. Today, though, I condemn what I did, and I understand that the chief reason I mourned like that was that I had never considered he might die before me. The only thing that

occurred to me was that he was younger, much younger—as if the fates kept to the order of age.[2]

63.15 So let us constantly reflect on our own mortality and on that of all those we love. Back then I ought to have said: "My Serenus is younger—what does that matter? He ought to die after me, but he can die before me." Because I didn't, fortune struck me suddenly, unprepared. Now think of everything as mortal, and mortal under no fixed law. Whatever can ever happen can happen today.

63.16 So let us reflect, my dearest Lucilius, that we will soon arrive where he has arrived, the one we mourn. And perhaps, if what wise men say is true and there is some place to receive us, the one we think has perished has only been sent on ahead. Farewell.

LETTER 64: ON THE PHILOSOPHERS OF OLD

Reading Sextius fires the spirit; revere the teachers of the past, but add to the inheritance they left.

64.1 You were with us yesterday. You could complain, if it were only yesterday. That's why I added "with us": with me you always are. Some friends had dropped in, on whose account a bigger smoke went up—not the kind that usually bursts from the kitchens of the rich and alarms the fire watch, but a modest one, to signal that guests had arrived.

64.2 The conversation was varied, as at a dinner party, taking no subject through to the end but jumping from one to another. Then a book by Quintus Sextius the Elder was read—a great man, if you trust me, and a Stoic, though he denies it.

64.3 Good gods, what vigor there is in him, what spirit! You won't find this in every philosopher. The writings of some with famous names are bloodless. They lay down rules, they argue, they quibble; they don't put spirit into you, because they have none. When you read Sextius, you will say: "He is alive, he is vig-

2 Annaeus Serenus, Seneca's younger friend and kinsman, to whom he dedicated several philosophical dialogues; he died c. AD 62.

orous, he is free, he is more than human; he sends me away full of tremendous confidence."

64.4 I'll confess to you what frame of mind I am in when I read him: I want to challenge every misfortune, I want to cry out, "Why are you holding back, Fortune? Come fight! You see I'm ready." I put on the spirit of the man who looks for a place to test himself, a place to show his virtue: "Among the sluggish herds he prays / a foaming boar may come, or a tawny lion descend from the hills."[3]

64.5 I want something to overcome, something to exercise my endurance on. For Sextius has this excellent quality too: he will show you the greatness of the happy life without making you despair of it. You will see that it is on a height, but a height that anyone who is willing can reach.

64.6 Virtue itself will do the same for you: make you admire it and yet hope. For my part, the mere contemplation of wisdom often takes up much of my time. I gaze at it in amazement, just as I gaze at times at the universe itself, which I often look upon as if I were seeing it for the first time.

64.7 So I revere the discoveries of wisdom and their discoverers. I love to enter upon them as an inheritance from many people. It was for me they were acquired, for me they were worked out. But let us act like a good head of a household: let us increase what we have received. Let this inheritance pass from me to those who come after, larger than before. Much work still remains, and much will remain, and no one born a thousand ages from now will be denied the chance to add something more.

64.8 But even if everything has been discovered by the ancients, this will always be new: the application, the understanding, and the arrangement of what others have discovered. Suppose we have been left remedies for healing the eyes. I have no need to look for others, but these still have to be adapted to particular diseases and times. This one relieves soreness of the eyes; this one reduces swelling of the eyelids; this one wards off

3 Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.158–59, of the young Ascanius out hunting.

a sudden inflammation and discharge; this one sharpens vision. You have to grind them up, choose the right time, and apply the right amount of each. The remedies of the mind were discovered by the ancients; how and when to apply them is our work to find out.

64.9 Those before us achieved a great deal, but did not finish the job. Still, they deserve to be looked up to and worshiped as gods are. Why shouldn't I keep portraits of great men as spurs to the mind, and celebrate their birthdays? Why shouldn't I always address them with titles of honor? The reverence I owe my own teachers I owe equally to those teachers of the human race, from whom the beginnings of so great a good have flowed.

64.10 If I see a consul or a praetor, I will do everything customarily done to show respect for an office: I will jump off my horse, uncover my head, step aside from the path. What, then? Shall I welcome into my mind both Marcus Catos, and Laelius the Wise, and Socrates with Plato, and Zeno and Cleanthes, without the deepest respect? No—I revere them, and I always rise for names so great. Farewell.[4]

LETTER 65: ON THE FIRST CAUSE

The many causes of Aristotle and Plato reduce to one, creative reason or God, and studying nature frees the mind from the body.

65.1 I shared yesterday with ill health: it claimed the morning for itself and yielded the afternoon to me. So first I tested my mind with reading. Then, when it had coped with that, I dared to demand more of it—or rather, to allow it more. I wrote something, and with more concentration than usual, as I grappled with a difficult subject and refused to be beaten—until some friends came by who used force on me and restrained me like an unruly patient.

65.2 Conversation took the place of the pen, and from it I will bring you the part that is in dispute. We have appointed you

4 Cato the Elder (234–149 BC), the stern censor, and his great-grandson Cato the Younger.

arbiter. You have more on your hands than you think: the case has three sides. Our Stoics say, as you know, that there are two things in nature from which everything comes to be: cause and matter. Matter lies inert, a thing ready for anything, but idle if no one moves it. Cause—that is, reason—shapes matter, turns it whichever way it wishes, and produces various works from it. So there must be that from which something is made, and then that by which it is made. The latter is cause, the former matter.

65.3 All art is imitation of nature. So apply what I was saying about the universe to the things that humans have to make. A statue had both matter, which submitted to the artist, and an artist, who gave the matter a form. So in a statue the matter was bronze, the cause the craftsman. All things are in the same condition: they consist of what is made and what makes.

65.4 The Stoics hold that there is one cause: that which makes. Aristotle thinks "cause" is used in three ways. "The first cause," he says, "is the matter itself, without which nothing can be produced; the second is the craftsman; the third is the form, which is imposed on each work—as on a statue." For this is what Aristotle calls *eidos* [form]. "A fourth," he says, "is added to these: the purpose of the whole work."[5]

65.5 Let me explain what this means. Bronze is the first cause of the statue, for it would never have been made unless there had been something from which it could be cast or shaped. The second cause is the artist, for that bronze could not have been fashioned into the shape of a statue without skilled hands. The third cause is the form, for this statue would not be called the *Doryphoros* [Spear-Bearer] or the *Diadumenos* [Youth Binding His Hair] unless this appearance had been impressed on it. The fourth cause is the purpose in making it, for if this had not existed, it would not have been made.[6]

65.6 What is the purpose? What attracted the artist, what he pursued in making it. It may be money, if he made it to sell; or

5 Aristotle's four causes (material, efficient, formal, final), set out in his *Physics*, Book 2.

6 Two famous bronze statues by the Greek sculptor Polyclitus (5th century BC).

glory, if he worked for a name; or piety, if he prepared it as a gift for a temple. So this too is a cause: that for the sake of which a thing is made. Or don't you think that something whose removal would mean the work had never been made should be counted among the causes of the work?

65.7 To these Plato adds a fifth, the model, which he himself calls the *idea* [form]; for this is what the artist looks at in producing what he intended. It makes no difference whether he has his model outside, to fix his eyes on, or inside, conceived and placed there by himself. God has within himself these models of all things, and has embraced in his mind the numbers and measures of everything that is to be done. He is full of these shapes, which Plato calls ideas—immortal, unchangeable, unwearying. So human beings perish, but humanity itself, on which a human being is modeled, endures; and while humans suffer and die, it suffers nothing.

65.8 So there are five causes, as Plato says: that from which, that by which, that in which, that toward which, and that for the sake of which. Last comes what results from these. Take the statue, since we began with it: that from which is the bronze; that by which, the artist; that in which, the form fitted to it; that toward which, the model the maker imitates; that for the sake of which, the maker's purpose; and what results from these is the statue itself.

65.9 The universe too, as Plato says, has all these. The maker: that is God. That from which it is made: that is matter. The form: that is the shape and order of the universe that we see. The model, of course: that to which God looked in making this vast and most beautiful work.

65.10 The purpose, for the sake of which he made it. Do you ask what God's purpose is? Goodness. That, at any rate, is what Plato says: "What was God's reason for making the universe? He is good; the good begrudges no good thing to anyone. So he made it as good as he could." Now, judge, give your verdict and declare

who seems to you to speak most truly—not who does speak most truly. That is as far above us as truth itself.[7]

65.11 This crowd of causes put forward by Aristotle and Plato takes in either too many or too few. For if they judge that anything without which a thing cannot be produced is a cause of its making, they have named too few. Let them put time among the causes: nothing can happen without time. Let them put place: if there is nowhere for something to happen, it won't happen. Let them put motion: without it nothing comes to be or passes away. Without motion there is no art, no change.

65.12 But what we are looking for now is the first and general cause. This must be simple, for matter too is simple. Do we ask what the cause is? Creative reason, of course—that is, God. For all those things you have listed are not many separate causes; they depend on one, the one that makes.

65.13 Do you say the form is a cause? The artist imposes it on the work: it is part of the cause, not the cause. The model, too, is not a cause, but an instrument the cause needs. The artist needs a model the way he needs a chisel or a file; without these, art cannot proceed. Yet they are not parts of the art, or causes.

65.14 "The artist's purpose," someone says, "for the sake of which he sets about making something, is a cause." Even if it is a cause, it is not an efficient cause but an additional one. And such causes are countless; we are asking about the general cause. But this they said without their usual subtlety: that the whole universe, the finished work, is a cause. For there is a great difference between a work and the cause of a work.

65.15 So either give your verdict, or—easier in matters like this—declare that it isn't clear to you, and order us to argue again. "Why do you enjoy wasting time on these things," you say, "which rid you of no passion, drive away no desire?" For my part, I do deal with those more important matters, the ones that

7 Plato, *Timaeus* 29d–30a.

bring the mind peace, and I examine myself first, and then this universe.[8]

65.16 Not even now am I wasting time, as you think. For all these questions, provided they are not chopped too fine and drawn out into this useless hair-splitting, lift and lighten the mind, which is weighed down by a heavy load and longs to be set free and to return to the things it once belonged to. For this body is a weight and a punishment for the mind. Under its pressure the mind is burdened and in chains—unless philosophy has come and bidden it breathe freely at the spectacle of nature, and released it from earthly things to divine. This is its freedom, this its roaming abroad: for a while it slips away from the prison where it is held and is refreshed by the heavens.

65.17 Craftsmen who work at something delicate that tires the eyes with the strain, if the light they have is poor and uncertain, go out into the street, and in some district set aside for public recreation they refresh their eyes with free daylight. In the same way the mind, shut up in this gloomy, dark dwelling, seeks the open air whenever it can and rests in contemplating nature.

65.18 The wise man, and the seeker after wisdom, is indeed attached to his body, but with the best part of himself he is absent, directing his thoughts to lofty things. As if bound by a soldier's oath, he regards his life as a term of service. And he is so formed that he feels neither love nor hatred for life, and he endures mortal things, though he knows greater things remain.

65.19 Do you forbid me to study nature? Do you drag me away from the whole and confine me to a part? Shall I not ask what the beginnings of all things are? Who shaped them? Who separated everything when it was all merged in one mass and wrapped up in inert matter? Shall I not ask who the maker of this universe is? By what plan so vast a thing came under law and order? Who gathered what was scattered, separated what was confused, and gave each thing its own form when all lay in

8 "It isn't clear to me" (*non liquet*) was the formula by which a Roman judge declined to decide a case, which then had to be reheard.

one shapeless mass? Where does so much light pour from? Is it fire, or something brighter than fire?

65.20 Shall I not ask these things? Shall I not know where I came down from? Am I to see this world only once, or be born many times? Where am I to go from here? What home awaits the soul once it is freed from the laws of human slavery? Do you forbid me a share in heaven—that is, do you order me to live with my head bowed?

65.21 I am greater, and born for greater things, than to be the slave of my body, which I regard as nothing but a chain fastened around my freedom. So I put it in fortune's way as a buffer, and let no wound pass through it to me. This is the only thing in me that can suffer injury. In this vulnerable dwelling lives a free mind.

65.22 This flesh will never drive me to fear, never to a pretense unworthy of a good man. I will never lie to honor this poor body. When it seems right, I will dissolve my partnership with it. And even now, while we are bound together, we will not be equal partners: the mind will claim all authority for itself. Contempt for one's own body is sure freedom.

65.23 To return to my subject: that study of nature we were just speaking of will also contribute much to this freedom. All things, of course, are made up of matter and God. God governs them; they surround him and follow him as their ruler and guide. And what makes—that is, God—is more powerful and more precious than matter, which is acted on by God.

65.24 The place God holds in this universe, the mind holds in a human being. What matter is there, the body is in us. So let the worse serve the better. Let us be brave against the blows of chance. Let us not tremble at injuries, at wounds, at chains, at poverty. What is death? Either an end or a passage. I do not fear ending, for that is the same as never having begun; nor passing over, for nowhere will I be so cramped. Farewell.

LETTER 66: ON THE EQUALITY OF GOODS

Because virtue admits no increase, joy and the brave endurance of torture are equal goods.

66.1 I have seen Claranus, my old schoolmate, after many years. You don't expect me, I imagine, to add that he is old—but, by Hercules, he is green and vigorous in mind, and wrestling with his frail little body. Nature has treated him unfairly and housed such a mind badly. Or perhaps she wanted to show us exactly this: that the bravest and happiest of spirits can lie hidden under any skin. Still, he overcomes every obstacle, and from despising himself he has come to despise everything else.

66.2 The poet who said "Virtue is more pleasing when it comes in a beautiful body" was wrong, I think. Virtue needs no ornament. It is its own great glory, and it makes its body holy. I have certainly begun to look at our Claranus differently: he seems handsome to me, and as upright in body as he is in mind.[9]

66.3 A great man can come out of a hovel; a beautiful and great spirit can come out of an ugly, lowly little body. So I think nature produces some people like this in order to prove that virtue can be born anywhere. If she could bring forth naked spirits, she would have done so. As it is, she does something more: she brings forth some who are hampered by their bodies and yet break through the obstacles.

66.4 Claranus seems to me to have been produced as an example, so that we could learn that the mind is not disfigured by the ugliness of the body, but the body is beautified by the beauty of the mind. Although we spent only a very few days together, we had many conversations, which I will write down in turn and send on to you.

66.5 On the first day the question was this: how can goods be equal if they come in three kinds? Some, in the view of our school, are primary goods, such as joy, peace, the safety of one's country. Some are secondary, formed out of unhappy material,

9 Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.344, of the young athlete Euryalus.

such as endurance under torture and self-control in a serious illness. The first goods we will wish for outright; the second, only if we must. There is also a third kind, such as a modest walk, a calm and honest face, and bearing that befits a sensible man.

66.6 How can these be equal to one another, when some are to be wished for and others shunned? If we want to distinguish them, let us go back to the primary good and consider what it is. It is a mind that looks upon the truth; that knows what to avoid and what to seek; that sets a value on things not by opinion but by nature; that inserts itself into the whole universe and turns its contemplation on all the universe's workings; that is intent on both thought and action; that is equally great and forceful; unconquered alike by hardship and by flattery; submitting to neither kind of fortune; rising above everything that happens and befalls it; supremely beautiful, perfectly ordered in grace as well as in strength; sound and sober, unshaken, fearless; a mind that no force can break, that chance neither lifts up nor casts down. Such a mind is virtue.

66.7 That is its face, if it could come under a single view and show itself whole at once. But it has many aspects. They unfold according to the variety of life and of our actions, while virtue itself becomes neither less nor greater. For the highest good cannot shrink, and virtue is not allowed to go backward. Rather, it turns into one quality after another, shaped to suit the character of the task it is about to perform.

66.8 Whatever it touches, it brings into its own likeness and dyes with its own color. It adorns actions, friendships, sometimes whole households that it has entered and set in order. Whatever it handles, it makes lovable, conspicuous, admirable. So its power and greatness cannot rise any higher, since what is greatest admits no increase. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, no more than you will find anything truer than the true or more temperate than the temperate.

66.9 All virtue lies in measure, and measure has a fixed limit. Constancy has nowhere further to go, any more than confidence, truthfulness or loyalty. What can be added to the perfect?

Nothing—or what was added to was not perfect. So nothing can be added to virtue either: if anything could be added to it, it was lacking something. The honorable, too, admits no addition, for it is honorable precisely because of the qualities I have listed. What next? Do you not think that the seemly, the just and the lawful are of the same form, contained within fixed bounds? The capacity to grow is the mark of something imperfect.[10]

66.10 Every good falls under the same laws. Private and public benefit are joined together—as inseparable, by Hercules, as what is praiseworthy and what is desirable. Therefore the virtues are equal to one another, and so are the works of virtue, and so are all the people fortunate enough to possess them.

66.11 The virtues of plants and animals, being mortal, are also frail, perishable and unstable. They rise and fall, and so they are not valued at the same price. Human virtues are held to a single rule, for right reason is one and simple. Nothing is more divine than the divine, more heavenly than the heavenly.

66.12 Mortal things shrink, fall, wear away, grow, are drained and are refilled. So in their uncertain lot there is inequality; divine things have one nature. And reason is nothing other than a portion of the divine spirit plunged into a human body. If reason is divine, and there is no good without reason, then every good is divine. Moreover, there is no difference among divine things; so there is none among goods either. Therefore joy and the brave, unyielding endurance of torture are equal, for in both there is the same greatness of mind—relaxed and cheerful in the one, combative and strained in the other.

66.13 What? Do you not think the virtue of the man who bravely storms the enemy's walls is equal to that of the man who endures a siege with the greatest patience? Great was Scipio, who shut in and squeezed Numantia and forced its unconquered defenders to turn their hands to their own destruction. Great too was the spirit of the besieged, who knew that no one is shut in who has death open to him, and who breathed their last in the

10 The manuscripts read *sine modo* ("without measure"), which contradicts what follows; the translation follows the usual correction, *in modo* ("in measure").

embrace of freedom. In the same way the other virtues are equal to one another: tranquility, simplicity, generosity, constancy, equanimity, endurance. Beneath them all lies a single virtue, which makes the mind upright and unswerving.[11]

66.14 "What then? Is there no difference between joy and unbending endurance of pain?" None, as far as the virtues themselves are concerned; a very great one between the circumstances in which each virtue is displayed. In the one there is a natural relaxing and easing of the mind; in the other, pain, which is against nature. So these circumstances, which admit a very wide gap between them, are in between; the virtue in each is equal.

66.15 Material does not change virtue. Hard and difficult material does not make it worse; cheerful and happy material does not make it better. So it must be equal. In both cases what is done is done equally rightly, equally wisely, equally honorably. Therefore the goods are equal: the one man cannot conduct himself better in his joy, nor the other better in his torments. And two things than which nothing can be done better are equal.

66.16 For if things placed outside virtue can either lessen or increase it, then the honorable ceases to be the only good. Grant that, and everything honorable is lost. Why? I will tell you: because nothing is honorable that is done unwillingly, under compulsion. Everything honorable is voluntary. Mix in reluctance, complaint, evasion, fear, and it has lost the best thing it has—its satisfaction with itself. What is not free cannot be honorable, for whatever is afraid is a slave.

66.17 Everything honorable is free from care and tranquil. If it balks at something, laments it, judges it an evil, it has admitted disturbance and is tossed about in great conflict: on this side the vision of what is right calls it on, on that side the suspicion of evil pulls it back. So when a man is about to do something honorable, whatever stands in his way, even if he thinks it a hard-

11 Scipio Aemilianus besieged the Spanish town of Numantia in 134–133 BC; many of its starving defenders killed themselves rather than surrender.

ship, let him not think it an evil; let him will it and do it gladly. Everything honorable is unbidden and uncompelled, pure and mixed with no evil.

66.18 I know what someone may reply to me here: "Are you trying to persuade us that it makes no difference whether a man is enjoying himself or lying on the rack and wearing out his torturer?" I could reply that Epicurus too says the wise man, if he is being burned alive in the bull of Phalaris, will cry out, "How sweet this is, and how little it concerns me!" Why be surprised if I say the goods of one man reclining at a banquet and another standing firm and brave under torture are equal, when Epicurus says something harder to believe: that being roasted is sweet?[12]

66.19 But my reply is this: there is a very great difference between joy and pain. If I were asked to choose, I would seek the one and avoid the other. The one is in accordance with nature, the other against it. As long as they are valued in this way, a great distance separates them. But when it comes to virtue, the virtue is equal in both—the one that moves through happy things and the one that moves through sad ones.

66.20 Torment and pain and every other hardship carry no weight, for virtue overwhelms them. Just as the brilliance of the sun blots out small lights, so virtue by its greatness crushes and smothers pains, troubles and injuries. Wherever it shines, anything that appears without it is put out. Hardships that meet virtue count for no more than a rain shower in the sea.

66.21 To show you that this is so: the good man will rush without the least hesitation to every noble deed. Though the executioner stand there, though the torturer and the fire stand there, he will persist, looking not at what he will suffer but at what he will do. He will entrust himself to the honorable deed as he would to a good man, and judge it useful to him, safe, favorable. An honorable deed that is grim and harsh will hold the same place in his eyes as a good man who is poor, or exiled, or pale with sickness.

12 Phalaris, tyrant of Acragas in Sicily in the 6th century BC, was said to roast his victims alive inside a hollow bronze bull.

66.22 Come now, set on one side a good man overflowing with wealth, and on the other one who has nothing, but has everything in himself. Each will be equally a good man, even if their fortunes differ. As I said, we judge things as we judge people: virtue is equally praiseworthy whether it is placed in a body that is healthy and free or in one that is sick and in chains.

66.23 So you will not praise your own virtue more if fortune has granted it a sound body than if it has been maimed in some part. Otherwise you will be judging the master by how his slaves are dressed. For all those things over which chance holds sway are slaves: money, the body, public honors—weak, fleeting, mortal, of uncertain tenure. The works of virtue, by contrast, are free and unconquered. They are no more to be sought if fortune treats them kindly, and no less if they are weighed down by some unfairness of circumstance.

66.24 What friendship is among people, desire is among things. You would not, I think, love a good man more for being rich than poor, or strong and muscular rather than slight and frail. So neither will you desire or love a thing more because it is cheerful and peaceful rather than harried and laborious.

66.25 Or if you do, then of two equally good men you will love the sleek, perfumed one more than the dusty, unkempt one. Next you will go so far as to love the one who is whole and unhurt in every limb more than the one who is disabled or blind in one eye. Little by little your fastidiousness will reach the point where, of two equally just and wise men, you prefer the one with long, curly hair. Where virtue is equal in both, inequality in other things does not show. All those other things are not parts, but extras.

66.26 Does anyone judge his own family so unfairly that he loves a healthy son more than a sick one, or a tall, lofty one more than one who is short or of middling height? Wild animals make no distinction among their young, and lie down to feed them all alike; birds share out food equally. Ulysses hurries to the rocks of his Ithaca just as Agamemnon does to the noble

walls of Mycenae. For no one loves his country because it is great, but because it is his.

66.27 What is the point of all this? To make you see that virtue looks on all its works as if they were its children, with the same eyes, indulging them all equally—and indeed more lavishly those who are struggling, since even parents' love leans more toward the children it pities. Virtue, too, does not love more those of its works it sees afflicted and oppressed, but, in the manner of good parents, it embraces and cherishes them more.

66.28 Why is no good greater than another? Because nothing is more fitting than the fitting, nothing flatter than the flat. You cannot say that this thing is more equal to something than that; so nothing is more honorable than the honorable either.

66.29 But if the nature of all the virtues is equal, the three kinds of goods are on a level. I mean this: to rejoice with self-control and to grieve with self-control are on a level. The first kind of gladness does not outrank the second—that firmness of mind which swallows its groans under the torturer. The one kind of good is to be wished for, the other to be admired, but both are nonetheless equal, since any hardship is covered over by the power of a good so much greater.

66.30 Whoever judges them unequal turns his eyes away from the virtues themselves and looks around at externals. True goods all weigh the same and are all the same size. False goods have much emptiness in them. So they look splendid and grand to those who gaze on them, but once they are put on the scales, they disappoint.

66.31 So it is, my Lucilius: whatever true reason recommends is solid and eternal. It strengthens the mind and lifts it up, to stay forever on the heights. The things that are praised thoughtlessly and are goods in the opinion of the crowd puff up with empty things those who delight in them. The things, again, that threaten us as evils strike fear into minds and alarm them, just as the mere look of danger alarms animals.

66.32 Both kinds of thing, then, swell or sting the mind without cause; the one deserves no joy, the other no fear. Reason alone is

unchanging and holds fast to its judgment, for it does not serve the senses but commands them. Reason is equal to reason, as straight is to straight; so virtue is equal to virtue. Virtue is nothing other than right reason. All virtues are forms of reason. They are forms of reason if they are right. If they are right, they are also equal.

66.33 As reason is, so are actions; so all actions are equal. For since they resemble reason, they also resemble one another. I say actions are equal to one another insofar as they are honorable and right. Otherwise they will differ greatly as their material varies: now broader, now narrower, now illustrious, now obscure, now touching many people, now few. Yet in all of them what is best is equal: they are honorable.

66.34 In the same way, all good men are equal insofar as they are good. But they differ in age: one is older, another younger. They differ in body: one is handsome, another ugly. They differ in fortune: this one is rich, that one poor; this one influential, powerful, known to cities and peoples, that one unknown to most and obscure. But in that by which they are good, they are equal.

66.35 The senses do not judge of good and evil; they do not know what is useful and what is useless. They cannot pass a verdict unless they are brought face to face with the thing itself. They do not foresee the future or remember the past; they do not know what follows from what. Yet it is from this knowledge that the order and sequence of things is woven, and the unity of a life that is to travel on a straight path. Reason, then, is the judge of good and evil. It counts things foreign and external as worthless, and judges the things that are neither good nor evil to be tiny, trivial extras. For all its good lies in the mind.

66.36 Still, reason considers some goods primary, which it pursues by deliberate choice, such as victory, good children, the safety of one's country. Some are secondary, which appear only in adversity, such as bearing a serious illness or exile with equanimity. Some are intermediate, which are no more in accordance with nature than against it, such as walking sensibly

or sitting with composure. For sitting is no less in accordance with nature than standing or walking.

66.37 The two higher kinds of goods are different. The primary ones are in accordance with nature: delighting in the devotion of one's children and in the safety of one's country. The secondary ones are against nature: bravely resisting torture and enduring thirst when a disease is burning one's insides.

66.38 "What then? Is any good against nature?" Not at all. But the situation in which the good arises is sometimes against nature. To be wounded, to waste away over a fire placed beneath you, to be afflicted with ill health—that is against nature. But to keep an unwearied mind amid such things is in accordance with nature.

66.39 To put what I mean briefly: the material of a good is sometimes against nature; the good never is, since there is no good without reason, and reason follows nature. "What, then, is reason?" The imitation of nature. "What is the highest good for a human being?" To conduct oneself according to nature's will.

66.40 "There is no doubt," someone says, "that a peace never disturbed is happier than one restored at the cost of much blood. There is no doubt," he says, "that unshaken health is a happier thing than health brought back to safety, by some effort of strength and endurance, from grave and life-threatening illness. In the same way, there will be no doubt that joy is a greater good than a mind struggling to endure the torments of wounds or fire."

66.41 Not at all. Things that depend on chance admit a great deal of difference, for they are valued by their usefulness to those who take them. Goods have one aim: to agree with nature. In this they are all equal. When we follow someone's motion in the Senate, one cannot say, "This man agrees more than that one"; all go over to the same motion. I say the same of the virtues: they all agree with nature. I say the same of goods: they all agree with nature.

66.42 One man died young, another old, and another, besides these, as a baby, who got no more than a glimpse of life. All of

them were equally mortal, even if death let some lives go on longer, cut others off in full flower, and broke off others at their very beginning.

66.43 One man died in the middle of dinner. Another's sleep flowed on into death. Another was carried off in the act of love. Set against these those run through with a sword, or killed by a snake's bite, or crushed by a collapsing building, or twisted bit by bit through a long cramping of the sinews. Some deaths may be called better, some worse; but death itself is equal for all. The ways by which they leap down differ; the place into which they leap is one. No death is greater or smaller, for it has the same measure in all: to have ended life.

66.44 I tell you the same about goods. This good exists amid pure pleasures, that one amid sorrow and bitterness. The one governed fortune's indulgence; the other tamed her violence. Each is equally good, though the one traveled a smooth, soft road and the other a rough one. The end of all of them is the same: they are goods, they are praiseworthy, they go hand in hand with virtue and reason. Virtue makes equal whatever it acknowledges as its own.

66.45 There is no reason to be surprised at finding this among our doctrines. Epicurus has two goods, out of which that highest, blessed good is made up: that the body be free from pain and the mind free from disturbance. These goods do not grow once they are complete. How can what is full grow? The body is without pain; what can be added to this painlessness? The mind is at one with itself and calm; what can be added to this tranquility?

66.46 Just as a clear sky, once scoured to its purest brilliance, admits no further brightness, so the condition of a man who cares for his body and mind and weaves his good out of both is perfect, and he has reached the height of his prayers, if there is no turmoil in his mind and no pain in his body. If any pleasures come to him from outside, they do not increase the highest good; they season it, so to speak, and make it more agreeable.

For that complete good of human nature is content with peace of body and mind.

66.47 I will show you, further, in Epicurus a division of goods very like this one of ours. For there are some things with him that he would prefer to happen to him, such as rest for the body free from every hardship, and relaxation of a mind that delights in contemplating its own goods. There are others which, though he would not want them to happen, he nonetheless praises and approves—such as the one I spoke of a little earlier, the endurance of ill health and the most severe pains, which Epicurus underwent on that last and most blessed day of his. He says that he was bearing torments of the bladder and of an ulcerated stomach that could admit no further increase of pain, and yet that day was a blessed one for him. But no one can spend a blessed day unless he possesses the highest good.[13]

66.48 So even with Epicurus there are goods you would rather not experience, but which, since things have turned out so, must be embraced, praised and put on a level with the highest. One cannot say that the good which set the seal on a blessed life, and for which Epicurus gave thanks with his last words, is not equal to the greatest goods.

66.49 Allow me, Lucilius, best of men, to say something rather bolder: if any goods could be greater than others, I would have preferred these, which seem grim, to those soft and delicate ones; I would have called these greater. For it is a greater thing to break through difficulties than to keep joys within bounds.

66.50 It is the same reason, I know, that makes a man bear good fortune well and disaster bravely. The man who stood guard before the rampart, untroubled, while no enemy attacked the camp, can be as brave as the man who, with his hamstrings cut, sank onto his knees and did not let go of his weapons. But it is to those returning bloodied from battle that people say, "Well done—bravo!" So I would rather praise these goods that have been tested, that are brave, that have come to blows with fortune.

13 Epicurus described his final day, in agony from kidney stones and dysentery, in a letter to his friend Idomeneus.

66.51 Should I hesitate to praise that maimed and shriveled hand of Mucius more than the uninjured hand of any hero at all? He stood there, scorning his enemies and the flames, and watched his own hand melt away in the enemy's brazier, until Porsenna, who had been cheering on his punishment, came to envy his glory and ordered the fire to be taken away from him against his will.

66.52 Why should I not count this good among the primary ones, and think it as much greater than those safe goods that fortune never tested, as it is rarer to beat an enemy after losing one's hand than with a hand still armed? "What then?" you say. "Will you wish this good for yourself?" Why not? For only the man who is able to wish for it is able to do it.

66.53 Or should I rather wish to stretch out my joints for my kept boys to knead? Or to have some girl, or some man made up to look like one, pull at my little fingers? Why should I not think Mucius the more fortunate, for handling fire as if he had offered that hand to a masseur? He made good his whole mistake. Unarmed and maimed, he finished a war, and with that stump of a hand he defeated two kings. Farewell.[14]

LETTER 67: ON WISHING FOR HARDSHIP

Every good is worth wishing for, even brave endurance of torture, because what we wish for is the virtue, not the pain.

67.1 To begin with commonplace things: spring has begun to open up, but just as it was about to turn toward summer, at the time when it ought to be warm, it has cooled off, and it still cannot be trusted, for it often slides back into winter. Do you want to know how uncertain it still is? I don't yet trust myself to truly cold water; I still take the chill off it. "That," you say, "is standing neither heat nor cold." So it is, my Lucilius. At my age I am content with my own chill; it hardly thaws in midsummer.

14 Mucius had killed the wrong man, Porsenna's secretary; his fortitude so impressed the king that he made peace with Rome. The "two kings" are Porsenna and the exiled Tarquin, whom Porsenna was trying to restore.

67.2 So I spend most of my time bundled in clothes. I am grateful to old age for having fastened me to my couch. Why shouldn't I be grateful to it on that account? Whatever I ought not to want, I am no longer able to do. My chief conversation is with my books. Whenever your letters arrive, I seem to be with you, and I feel as though I were not writing back to you but answering you aloud. So let us look into your question together, as if we were talking face to face, and see what the answer is.

67.3 You ask whether every good is to be wished for. "If it is a good," you say, "to be tortured bravely, to be burned with a great spirit, to be ill patiently, it follows that these things are to be wished for. But I see nothing among them worth praying for. At any rate I have never yet heard of anyone paying a vow in thanks for being flogged, or twisted by gout, or stretched longer on the rack."

67.4 Draw distinctions, my Lucilius, and you will see that there is something in these things to be wished for. I would like torture to stay far from me. But if it has to be endured, I will wish to bear myself in it bravely, honorably, courageously. Of course I would prefer that war not break out. But if it does, I will wish to bear wounds, hunger and everything the necessities of war bring with nobility. I am not so mad as to want to be ill. But if I have to be ill, I will wish to do nothing without self-control, nothing soft. So it is not hardships that are to be wished for, but the virtue with which hardships are borne.

67.5 Some of our school think that brave endurance of all these things is not something to be wished for—though not something to be recoiled from either—because what we pray for should be a good that is pure, tranquil and beyond trouble. I disagree. Why? First, because it cannot be that something is good and yet not to be wished for. Next, if virtue is to be wished for, and there is no good without virtue, then every good is to be wished for. Finally, even brave endurance of torture is to be wished for.

67.6 I ask you further: surely courage is to be wished for? Yet it scorns dangers and challenges them. Its most beautiful and most admirable part is this: not to give way before fire, to go to

meet wounds, sometimes not even to dodge weapons but to take them full in the chest. If courage is to be wished for, then bearing torture patiently is to be wished for, for that is a part of courage. Only separate these things, as I said, and there will be nothing to lead you astray. It is not suffering torture that is to be wished for, but suffering it bravely. It is that "bravely" I wish for —and that is virtue.

67.7 "But who has ever wished this for himself?" Some prayers are open and declared, when they are made item by item; others are hidden, when many things are included in a single prayer. For instance, I wish myself an honorable life. But an honorable life consists of various actions. In it are Regulus' chest, Cato's wound torn open by his own hand, Rutilius' exile, the poisoned cup that carried Socrates from prison to heaven. So when I wished myself an honorable life, I also wished for these things, without which a life sometimes cannot be honorable.[15]

67.8 "O three and four times blessed,
Those whose lot it was to die before their fathers' eyes
Beneath the lofty walls of Troy!" What difference does it
make whether you wish this for someone or admit that it
was worth wishing for?[16]

67.9 Decius devoted himself for the Republic: spurring his horse, he charged into the midst of the enemy, seeking death. After him the second Decius, rivaling his father's courage, spoke the solemn words—by now a family formula—and rushed into the thickest of the battle line, anxious only that his sacrifice be accepted, and thinking a good death a thing to be wished for. Can you doubt, then, that it is best to die memorably, in some act of virtue?[17]

15 Marcus Atilius Regulus, a Roman general captured by Carthage in the First Punic War, was said to have been tortured to death in a spiked chest after keeping his word and returning to captivity.

16 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.94–96: Aeneas, caught in a storm at sea, envies those who fell at Troy.

17 Publius Decius Mus (340 BC) and his son of the same name (295 BC) each formally "devoted" himself to the gods of the underworld, offering his own life to win a battle for Rome.

67.10 When someone bears torture bravely, he is using all the virtues. Perhaps one is ready to hand and shows most plainly: endurance. But courage is there too, of which endurance, suffering and patience are branches. Prudence is there, without which no plan is undertaken, and which advises bearing as bravely as possible what you cannot escape. Constancy is there, which cannot be dislodged from its post and gives up its purpose under no force that wrenches at it. There is that inseparable company of the virtues: whatever is done honorably, one virtue does, but by the decision of the whole council. And what all the virtues approve, even if it seems to be done by one, is to be wished for.

67.11 What? Do you think only those things are to be wished for that come through pleasure and leisure, that are welcomed with garlanded doors? Some goods wear a grim face. Some prayers are celebrated not by a crowd offering congratulations but by people kneeling in reverence and worship.

67.12 So you don't think Regulus wished to reach Carthage? Put on the spirit of a great man and step away for a while from the opinions of the crowd. Form as grand an image as you ought of virtue, the most beautiful and magnificent of things—a virtue we must worship not with incense and garlands but with sweat and blood.

67.13 Look at Marcus Cato laying his pure hands on that sacred breast and tearing open wounds that had not been driven deep enough. Will you say to him, "I wish you what you wish" and "I am sorry for your trouble"—or "Good luck in what you are doing"?[18]

67.14 Here our friend Demetrius comes to mind, who calls a life free from care, untouched by any of fortune's assaults, "a dead sea." To have nothing to rouse you, nothing to spur you on, nothing whose threat and onslaught would test your firmness of mind, but to lie idle in unshaken leisure—that is not tranquility. It is a dead calm.

67.15 Attalus the Stoic used to say: "I would rather fortune kept me in her camp than in her luxuries. I am tortured, but bravely:

all is well. I am killed, but bravely: all is well." Listen to Epicurus: he will even say, "It is sweet." I would never give so soft a name to something so honorable and so stern.

67.16 I am burned, but unconquered. Why should I not think this worth wishing for—not that the fire burns me, but that it does not conquer me? Nothing is more excellent than virtue, nothing more beautiful. And whatever is done at its command is both good and to be wished for. Farewell.

LETTER 68: ON HIDDEN LEISURE

Withdraw into leisure without advertising it, and use it to treat your own faults.

68.1 I agree with your plan: hide yourself away in leisure. But hide your leisure too. You may know that in this you will be following the example of the Stoics, even if not their teaching. But you will be following their teaching as well; you will be able to justify it to yourself and to anyone you like.

68.2 We do not send the wise man into every state, nor at every time, nor without any limit. Besides, since we have given the wise man a state worthy of him—namely, the universe—he is not outside public life even if he withdraws. Indeed, perhaps, leaving one little corner behind, he passes into greater and wider realms, and, set up in the heavens, he understands how lowly a seat he had when he mounted the magistrate's chair or the tribunal. Take this to heart: the wise man is never more active than when things divine and human have come into his view.[19]

68.3 Now I return to what I had begun to urge on you: let your leisure be unknown. There is no need to label yourself with philosophy or retirement. Give your plan another name: call it poor health, weakness, laziness. To boast of one's leisure is idle ambition.

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18 Cato's first sword thrust at Utica was not fatal; when doctors bound the wound, he tore it open with his hands.

19 In Stoic thought the wise man is a "citizen of the world"; the curule chair and the tribunal were the seats of Roman magistrates.

68.4 Some animals, so as not to be found, confuse their tracks right around their lair. You must do the same. Otherwise there will always be people following you. Many pass by what is open and pry into what is hidden and tucked away; a seal tempts the thief. Whatever lies open seems cheap; the burglar passes over what is unlocked. This is the way of the public, the way of every ignorant person: they long to break into secrets. So the best thing is not to show off one's leisure.

68.5 But hiding too much and withdrawing from the sight of men is a kind of showing off. One man has buried himself in Tarentum, another has shut himself up in Naples, another has not crossed his own threshold in many years. Anyone who has built some story around his leisure draws a crowd.

68.6 When you have withdrawn, your aim should not be to have people talk about you, but to talk with yourself. And what will you say? What people most love to do about others: think ill of yourself, to yourself. You will grow used both to speaking the truth and to hearing it. Above all, work on what you feel is weakest in you.

68.7 Everyone knows the weak points of his own body. So one man relieves his stomach by vomiting, another props it up with frequent meals, another drains and purges his body with an occasional fast. Those whose feet are gripped by recurring pain abstain from wine or from the baths. Careless about everything else, they head off the thing that often troubles them. So too in our mind there are, as it were, ailing parts, to which treatment must be applied.

68.8 What do I do in my leisure? I tend my sore. If I showed you a swollen foot, a livid hand, or the withered sinews of a shriveled leg, you would let me lie in one place and nurse my disease. This is a greater evil, which I cannot show you: the gathering, the abscess, is in my very breast. No, no, don't praise me, don't say, "What a great man! He has scorned everything, condemned the madness of human life, and escaped it."

68.9 I have condemned nothing but myself. There is no reason to come to me in hope of making progress. You are wrong if you

expect any help from here: it is not a doctor who lives here, but a patient. I would rather you said as you leave, "I thought that man was happy and learned. I pricked up my ears—and I was let down. I saw nothing, heard nothing, that I wanted or would come back for." If that is what you feel and say, some progress has been made. I would rather you pardoned my leisure than envied it.

68.10 "Leisure, Seneca?" you say. "Are you recommending leisure to me? You are slipping into Epicurean talk." I recommend leisure to you in which you may do greater and finer things than those you have left behind. Knocking at the haughty doors of the powerful, keeping an alphabetical list of childless old men, wielding great influence in the Forum—that is power that draws envy and is short-lived, and, if you value it truly, shabby.[20]

68.11 One man will far outstrip me in influence at the bar, another in military service and the rank won by it, another in his throng of clients. It is worth being beaten by everyone, so long as fortune is beaten by me. In the crowd I cannot be her equal: she has more pull.

68.12 I only wish you had had the will to follow this plan long ago! I only wish we were not discussing the happy life within sight of death! But even now let us not delay. For many things we would have believed on reason's word to be superfluous and hostile, we now believe on the word of experience.

68.13 Let us do what people usually do who have set out too late and want to make up the time by speed: let us use the spur. This time of life is just right for these studies. It has already boiled off its froth. The vices, untamed in the first heat of youth, it has already worn out; it does not have much left to do to put them out altogether.

68.14 "And when," you say, "will this thing you are learning on your way out do you any good—and for what?" For this: that I may leave a better man. But you should not think any age is better suited to a sound mind than the one that has tamed itself

20 Legacy-hunters cultivated rich childless old men in hope of being named in their wills, a notorious practice at Rome.

through many trials and long, repeated regret for things, and that has reached what is wholesome with its passions calmed. This is the season for this good. Whoever comes to wisdom as an old man comes to it through his years. Farewell.

LETTER 69: ON RESTLESS TRAVEL

Constant moving keeps old desires alive, so stay put and practice being ready for death.

69.1 I don't want you changing places and hopping from one spot to another. First, because moving so often is the mark of an unsteady mind. The mind cannot grow firm in leisure unless it stops looking around and wandering. If you want to hold your mind in place, first stop your body from running away.

69.2 Second, remedies do the most good when they are kept up without a break. Your quiet, and your forgetting of your former life, must not be interrupted. Let your eyes unlearn; let your ears grow used to healthier words. Whenever you go out, things will meet you on your very way that rekindle your desires.

69.3 Someone trying to shake off a love affair must avoid every reminder of the beloved body—for nothing flares up again more easily than love. In the same way, anyone who wants to lay aside his longing for all the things he once burned to have should turn both eyes and ears away from what he has left behind. Passion is quick to rebel.

69.4 Wherever it turns, it will see some reward close at hand for its pursuit. No vice comes without its wages. Greed promises money; luxury, many and varied pleasures; ambition, the purple and applause, and from these, power and whatever power can do.

69.5 The vices tempt you with pay; here you must live for nothing. A whole lifetime can hardly bring vices swollen by such long license to submit and take the yoke—much less if we chop so short a time into pieces. Constant watchfulness and effort can barely bring any single thing to perfection.

69.6 If you will listen to me, practice and rehearse this: to be ready both to receive death and, if circumstances advise it, to summon it. It makes no difference whether death comes to us or we go to it. Convince yourself that this saying of every ignorant man is false: "It is a fine thing to die one's own death." No one dies any death but his own. And you may reflect on this as well: no one dies except on his own day. You lose nothing of your own time; for what you leave behind belongs to someone else. Farewell.[21]

21 The pun turns on *sua morte*, "by one's own death," the ordinary Latin for dying a natural death.

Book VIII

On the right time to die (70), on the highest good (71).

LETTER 70: ON CHOOSING THE TIME TO DIE

The wise man lives as long as he ought, not as long as he can, for nature gave us one entrance to life and many exits.

70.1 After a long interval I have seen your Pompeii. I was brought face to face with my youth again. Whatever I had done there as a young man, I felt I could still do, and had done only a little while ago.

70.2 We have sailed past life, Lucilius. At sea, as our Virgil says, "lands and cities fall away"; just so, on this voyage of swiftest time, we first lose sight of boyhood, then youth, then whatever lies between young and old, on the border of both, then the best years of old age itself. Last of all, the common end of the human race begins to come into view.[1]

70.3 We think it a reef—how utterly mad we are! It is a harbor: one we must make for someday, and must never refuse. If anyone is carried into it in his earliest years, he has no more cause to complain than a man who has had a quick crossing. For one sailor, as you know, is toyed with and held back by sluggish winds and worn out by the tedium of a dead calm; another is carried through at top speed by a steady gale.

70.4 Think that the same happens to us. Life has brought some very swiftly to the place they had to reach even if they dawdled; others it has worn down and stewed. And such a life, as you know, is not always worth holding on to. For living is not a good;

1 Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.72, as Aeneas' fleet puts out to sea.

living well is. So the wise man lives as long as he ought, not as long as he can.

70.5 He will consider where he is to live, with whom, how, and what he is to do. He always thinks about the quality of his life, not its quantity. If many troubles come his way that disturb his tranquility, he sets himself free. And he does this not only in the last extremity: as soon as fortune begins to look suspect to him, he looks around carefully to see whether he should stop then and there. He thinks it makes no difference to him whether he brings about his end or receives it, whether it comes later or sooner. He does not fear it as a great loss; no one can lose much from a dripping trickle.

70.6 Dying sooner or later is not the point; dying well or badly is. And to die well is to escape the danger of living badly. That is why I think that Rhodian's words utterly spineless: thrown into a cage by a tyrant and fed like some wild animal, when someone urged him to stop eating, he said, "While a man lives, he may hope for anything."[2]

70.7 Even if that is true, life is not to be bought at any price. Some things may be great, may be certain, yet I will not come to them by a shameful confession of weakness. Am I to reflect that fortune can do anything to a man who is alive, rather than that fortune can do nothing to a man who knows how to die?

70.8 Sometimes, though, even if certain death is at hand and he knows his execution has been decided, the wise man will not lend a hand to his own punishment—though he would lend it for his own sake. It is folly to die from fear of dying. Someone is coming to kill you. Wait for him. Why get in first? Why take on the management of someone else's cruelty? Do you begrudge your executioner his work, or are you sparing him the trouble?

70.9 Socrates could have ended his life by fasting and died of starvation rather than poison. Yet he spent thirty days in prison awaiting death—not in the belief that anything might still happen, or that so long a time left room for many hopes, but to sub-

2 Telesphorus of Rhodes, mutilated and caged by Lysimachus, king of Thrace (c. 300 BC).

mit himself to the laws, and to let his friends enjoy the last of Socrates. What could have been more foolish than to despise death but fear poison?

70.10 Scribonia, a woman of dignity, was the aunt of Drusus Libo, a young man as stupid as he was well-born, whose hopes were higher than anyone could have hoped for in that age, or he himself in any age. He had been carried home ill from the Senate in a litter, with a far from crowded funeral procession—for all his relatives had undutifully abandoned him, as no longer a defendant but a corpse—and he began to deliberate whether to take his own life or wait for death. Scribonia said to him: "What pleasure is there in doing someone else's work?" She did not persuade him; he laid hands on himself, and not without reason. For a man who is going to die in two or three days at his enemy's pleasure is, if he goes on living, doing someone else's work.[3]

70.11 So you cannot lay down a general rule on whether, when an outside force announces death, one should anticipate it or wait for it. Many considerations can pull either way. If one death comes with torture and the other is simple and easy, why not seize the second? Just as I will choose a ship when I am about to sail, or a house when I am about to settle somewhere, so I will choose a death when I am about to leave life.

70.12 Besides, just as a longer life is not necessarily better, a longer death is certainly worse. In nothing should we humor the mind more than in death. Let it go out by the way its impulse has chosen: whether it reaches for the sword, or the noose, or some draught that takes over the veins, let it go on and break the chains of slavery. Everyone must make his life acceptable to others as well; his death, only to himself. The best death is the one you like.

70.13 It is foolish to think: "Someone will say I acted without enough courage, someone else too rashly, someone that there was a braver kind of death." Won't you realize that the decision in your hands is one that reputation has nothing to do with?

3 Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus, charged with plotting against the emperor Tiberius, killed himself during his trial in AD 16.

Look to this one thing: snatching yourself away from fortune as fast as you can. Otherwise there will always be people who think badly of what you did.

70.14 You will even find professed philosophers who say that no one should do violence to his own life, and who judge it a sin for a person to become his own killer: we must wait, they say, for the end that nature has decreed. Whoever says this fails to see that he is shutting the road to freedom. The eternal law has done nothing better than this: it has given us one entrance into life, but many exits.

70.15 Should I wait for the cruelty of disease, or of man, when I can go out through the midst of torments and shake off my troubles? This is the one reason we cannot complain about life: it holds no one back. Human affairs are well arranged in this, that no one is wretched except by his own fault. You like it? Live. You don't? You may go back where you came from.

70.16 To relieve a headache you have often had blood let. To reduce the body, a vein is opened. There is no need to split the chest open with a huge wound: a lancet opens the way to that great freedom, and a pinprick buys freedom from care. What is it, then, that makes us sluggish and inert? None of us reflects that some day he must move out of this dwelling. So old tenants are kept in place by fondness for the house and by habit, even when they are badly treated.

70.17 Do you want to be free where this body is concerned? Live in it as if you were about to move out. Keep in view that someday you will have to give up this companionship, and you will be braver when you have to leave. But how will their own end come to mind for those who crave everything without end?

70.18 There is nothing we need to rehearse so much. Other things we may practice for nothing. The mind was prepared against poverty—and the wealth stayed. We armed ourselves to despise pain—and the good fortune of a sound, healthy body never demanded a test of that virtue. We taught ourselves to bear the loss of those we lose bravely—and fortune kept alive

everyone we loved. But for this one thing, a day will come that demands its use.

70.19 You need not think that only great men have had the strength to break through the bars of human servitude. You need not judge that no one but Cato could do it—Cato, who tore out with his hand the soul he had failed to release with the sword. Men of the lowest station have escaped to safety with a mighty effort; and when they were not allowed to die at their convenience or to choose their instruments of death as they wished, they snatched up whatever lay at hand, and by their own force made weapons of things harmless by nature.

70.20 Not long ago, at a training school for beast-fighters, one of the Germans, who was being readied for the morning show, withdrew to relieve himself—the only privacy he was allowed without a guard. There he took the stick with a sponge attached that is kept for cleaning oneself, rammed the whole thing down his throat, blocked his windpipe, and choked the breath out of himself. That was an insult to death. Yes, indeed—not very clean, and not very decent. But what is more foolish than to be fastidious about how one dies?[4]

70.21 What a brave man! How worthy to be given his choice of fate! How bravely he would have used a sword, how boldly he would have flung himself into the depths of the sea or off a sheer cliff! Stripped of everything, he still found a way to supply himself both with death and with a weapon—so that you may know that nothing delays us from dying but the will. Let each judge the deed of this most spirited man as he sees fit, so long as this is agreed: the filthiest death is to be preferred to the cleanest slavery.

70.22 Since I have begun using lowly examples, I will keep on. Everyone will demand more of himself if he sees that this thing can be despised even by the most despised. We think the Catos and the Scipios, and the others we are used to hearing of with admiration, are beyond imitation. I will now show that this vir-

4 The morning shows in the arena featured fights with wild beasts.

tue has as many examples in the beast-fighters' school as among the leaders of the civil war.

70.23 Not long ago a man was being carried under guard to the morning show. As if nodding off with drowsiness, he let his head sink until he thrust it between the spokes, and he kept himself on his seat until the turning wheel broke his neck. By the very cart that was carrying him to his punishment, he escaped.

70.24 Nothing stops a man who wants to break out and leave. Nature keeps us in an open prison. Let the man whose circumstances allow it look around for a gentle way out. Let the one who has many means at hand of claiming his freedom make his choice and consider by which he may best be set free. Let the one for whom the opportunity is hard to find seize whatever is nearest as the best, however unheard of, however new. He who does not lack courage will not lack ingenuity for dying.

70.25 Do you see how even the lowest slaves, once pain has goaded them, rouse themselves and outwit the tightest guard? That man is great who has not only ordered death for himself but invented it. I promised you more examples from the same games.

70.26 At the second staged sea battle, one of the foreign fighters plunged the whole spear he had been given for use against his opponents into his own throat. "Why," he said, "why have I not long since escaped all this torment, all this mockery? Why should I wait for death with a weapon in my hand?" This was a finer spectacle by as much[5]

70.27 as it is more honorable for men to learn to die than to kill. What, then? What desperate and condemned men have, will those lack who have been equipped against such misfortunes by long reflection and by reason, the mistress of all things? Reason teaches us that the approaches to fate are many but the end is the same, and that it makes no difference where what is coming begins.

70.28 That same reason advises you to die as you please, if you may; if not, as you can, and to seize on whatever comes to hand

for doing violence to yourself. It is wicked to live by plunder; but to die by seizing whatever you can is the finest thing of all. Farewell.

LETTER 71: ON THE SUPREME GOOD

Test every choice against the highest good, the honorable, which is the same in victory and defeat.

71.1 You keep consulting me about particular matters, forgetting that a vast sea separates us. Since much of good advice depends on timing, it is bound to happen that my opinion on some questions reaches you when the opposite course is already better. For advice is fitted to circumstances, and our circumstances are carried along—no, whirled along. So advice ought to be born on the day; even that is too slow: it should be born, as they say, on the spot. But I will show you how it may be found.

71.2 Whenever you want to know what to avoid or what to seek, look to the highest good, the goal of your whole life. Everything we do must agree with that. No one will arrange the details unless he has already set before himself the sum of his life. No painter, however ready his colors, will produce a likeness unless he has already settled what he wants to paint. We go wrong because we all deliberate about the parts of life, and no one deliberates about the whole.

71.3 A man who wants to shoot an arrow must know what he is aiming at, and only then direct and control the shaft with his hand. Our plans go astray because they have nothing to aim at. When a man does not know which harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind. Chance must have great power in our lives, because we live by chance.

71.4 Some people, moreover, happen not to know that they know certain things. Just as we often look for people who are standing beside us, so, for the most part, we fail to see that the goal of the highest good lies right next to us. You will not need

5 Mock naval battles (*naumachiae*) were staged for the public, usually with captives or condemned men as combatants.

many words or a long detour to grasp what the highest good is: it should be pointed out with a finger, so to speak, not scattered over many things. What is the point of breaking it into little pieces, when you can say: the highest good is what is honorable? And, more surprising still: the only good is what is honorable; all other goods are false and counterfeit.

71.5 If you convince yourself of this and come to love virtue passionately—for merely loving her is too little—then whatever she has touched will be lucky and blessed for you, however it looks to others. Being tortured, provided you lie there calmer than your torturer; being ill, provided you do not curse fortune or give in to the disease—in short, everything that seems evil to others will be tamed and will turn into good, if you rise above it. Let this be clear: nothing is good except what is honorable; and all hardships will rightly be called goods, once virtue has made them honorable.

71.6 Many think we promise more than the human condition allows—and not without reason, for they are looking at the body. Let them turn back to the mind, and they will soon measure man by God. Lift yourself up, Lucilius, best of men, and leave that elementary school of the philosophers, who reduce the grandest of subjects to syllables and who drag the mind down and wear it out by teaching trivia. You will become like those who discovered these truths, not those who teach them and set about making philosophy seem difficult rather than great.

71.7 Socrates, who brought all of philosophy back to conduct, and said that the highest wisdom was to distinguish good from evil, said: "Follow them, if I have any authority with you, so that you may be happy; and let someone think you a fool. Let anyone who likes insult and injure you; you will still suffer nothing, provided virtue is with you. If you want to be happy," he said, "if you want in good faith to be a good man, let someone despise you." No one will achieve this unless he has made all goods equal, since there is no good without the honorable, and the honorable is equal in all things.

71.8 "What, then? Is there no difference between Cato's winning the praetorship and his defeat? No difference whether Cato is beaten in the battle line at Pharsalus or wins?" Was this good of his, by which he could not be beaten even when his side was beaten, equal to the good by which he would have returned victorious to his homeland and settled the peace? Why should it not be equal? For it is the same virtue by which bad fortune is overcome and good fortune set in order. And virtue cannot become greater or smaller; it has one stature.[6]

71.9 "But Gnaeus Pompey will lose his army; that finest ornament of the Republic, the nobility, and the front rank of Pompey's party, the Senate in arms, will be crushed in a single battle; and the ruin of so great an empire will burst apart across the whole world: some of it will fall in Egypt, some in Africa, some in Spain. The wretched Republic will not even be granted the mercy of falling once."

71.10 Let it all happen. Let Juba be helped neither by his knowledge of the country in his own kingdom nor by the stubborn courage of his people fighting for their king; let the loyalty of the people of Utica, broken by misfortune, fail as well; let the good luck of his name desert Scipio in Africa. Long ago provision was made that Cato should come to no harm.[7]

71.11 "Still, he was beaten." Count this, too, among Cato's electoral defeats: he will bear it with as great a spirit that something stood between him and victory as that something stood between him and the praetorship. On the day he lost the election, he played games; on the night he was to die, he read. Losing the praetorship and losing his life were all one to him; he had convinced himself that whatever happened must be borne.

71.12 Why should he not bear a change of government with a brave and even mind? For what is exempt from the danger of

6 Cato lost the election for praetor in 55 BC and won it the next year. At Pharsalus in 48 BC Julius Caesar crushed Pompey and the republican side Cato fought for.
7 Juba I, king of Numidia, and Metellus Scipio led the republicans in Africa, where the name Scipio was thought lucky; Caesar defeated them at Thapsus in 46 BC. The last sentence echoes the Senate's emergency decree "that the state come to no harm."

change? Not the earth, not the sky, not this whole fabric of all things, though it is guided by God's hand. It will not always keep this order; some day will throw it out of its present course.

71.13 All things move in their fixed times: they must be born, grow, and be extinguished. Whatever you see running its course above us, and these things among which we are set and on which we stand as if on the most solid ground, will be worn away and will cease. Nothing is without its old age. Nature sends all these things to the same place, though at unequal intervals. Whatever exists will cease to exist—yet it will not perish, but be dissolved.

71.14 To us, being dissolved means perishing, for we look only at what is nearest. The dull mind, which has enslaved itself to the body, does not look further ahead. Otherwise it would bear its own end, and the end of those it loves, more bravely, if it hoped that life and death, like everything else, take turns: that what is composed is dissolved, and what is dissolved is composed, and that the eternal art of God, who governs all things, is at work in this.

71.15 So Marcus Cato, when he has run through the ages in his mind, will say: "The whole human race, present and future, is condemned to death. All the cities that hold power anywhere in the world, and all that are the great glories of foreign empires—one day people will ask where they stood, and they will be swept away by various kinds of destruction. Some will be demolished by wars; others will be consumed by idleness, by peace turned to sloth, and by luxury, the ruin of great wealth. All these fertile plains will be hidden by a sudden flood of the sea, or carried off as the ground subsides and slides into a sudden chasm. Why, then, should I be indignant or grieve, if I go a tiny moment ahead of the common fate?"

71.16 A great mind should obey God and suffer without hesitation whatever the law of the universe commands. Either it is released into a better life, to dwell in greater light and peace among the divine, or at any rate, without any harm to itself, it will be mingled again with nature and return to the whole. So

for Marcus Cato an honorable life is not a greater good than an honorable death, since virtue admits no increase. Socrates used to say that truth and virtue were the same. Just as truth does not grow, neither does virtue: it has its full measure; it is complete.

71.17 So you need not be surprised that goods are equal—both those to be chosen deliberately and those that circumstances have brought. For if you admit this inequality, and count bravely enduring torture among the lesser goods, you will also count it among evils. You will call Socrates unhappy in prison, Cato unhappy as he reopened his wounds more boldly than he had made them, and Regulus the most wretched of all as he paid the penalty for keeping faith even with his enemies. Yet no one, not even the softest of men, has dared to say this. They deny that he was happy—but they deny too that he was wretched.

71.18 The philosophers of the Old Academy admit that a man is happy even amid such torments, but not perfectly or fully. That cannot be accepted at all. Unless he is happy, he is not in possession of the highest good. And the highest good has no rung above it—provided virtue is in it, provided adversity does not diminish virtue, provided virtue remains unharmed even when the body is crushed. And it does remain. For by virtue I mean something spirited and lofty, spurred on by whatever assails it.[8]

71.19 This spirit, which young men of noble nature often put on when the beauty of something honorable has struck them, so that they despise everything that chance can bring—this spirit wisdom will surely pour into us and pass on to us. It will convince us that the only good is the honorable; that it can be neither relaxed nor tightened, any more than you can bend the ruler by which we usually test what is straight. Whatever you alter in it is an injury to straightness.

71.20 We will say the same of virtue, then: it too is straight; it admits no bending. How can something already rigid be stretched any tighter? Virtue judges all things; nothing judges virtue. If it cannot itself become straighter, neither are the

8 The Old Academy: Plato's immediate successors, who held that bodily and external goods add to happiness.

things done by it straighter one than another. They must correspond to it; so they are equal.

71.21 "What?" you say. "Reclining at a banquet and being tortured are equal?" Does this seem strange to you? You may be more surprised at this: reclining at a banquet is an evil, and being on the rack a good, if the first is done shamefully and the second honorably. It is not the material that makes these things good or evil, but virtue. Wherever virtue has appeared, all things are of the same measure and value.

71.22 At this point the man who judges everyone's mind by his own is shaking his fists in my face, because I say that the goods of one who judges honorably and of one who faces danger honorably are equal; because I say that the good of the man who celebrates a triumph is equal to that of the man paraded before his chariot, unconquered in spirit. For such people think that whatever they cannot do cannot be done; they pass judgment on virtue from their own weakness.

71.23 Why are you surprised if being burned, wounded, killed, or chained does a man good—and is sometimes even welcome? To the self-indulgent, frugality is a punishment; to the lazy, work is a kind of torture; the pampered pity the hardworking; for the idle, studying is torment. In the same way we believe that these things, against which we are all weak, are hard and unbearable, forgetting how many find it torture to go without wine or to be woken at first light. These things are not hard by nature; we are flabby and spineless.

71.24 Great matters must be judged with a great mind; otherwise the fault that is ours will seem to be theirs. So certain objects that are perfectly straight look bent and broken to onlookers when they are dipped in water. It matters not only what you see but how; our mind is clouded when it comes to seeing the truth.

71.25 Give me a young man unspoiled and lively of mind: he will say that the more fortunate man, in his view, is the one who lifts the whole weight of adversity on an unbending neck, who stands above fortune. It is no wonder not to be shaken in calm

weather. Marvel at this instead: that someone is lifted up where everyone is pressed down, and stands where everyone lies fallen.

71.26 What is there evil in torture, or in the other things we call adversities? This, I think: that the mind gives way, bends, and collapses. None of these can happen to the wise man. He stands upright under any weight. Nothing makes him smaller; nothing he has to endure displeases him. Whatever can fall on a human being, he does not complain that it has fallen on him. He knows his strength. He knows he was made to bear burdens.

71.27 I am not removing the wise man from the ranks of humanity, nor shutting pain away from him as from some rock that admits no feeling. I remember that he is made up of two parts. One is irrational: this is bitten, burned, feels pain. The other is rational: this holds unshaken convictions, is fearless and unconquered. In this lies that highest good of man. Before it is complete, the mind is uncertain and tossed about; once it is perfected, it is immovably stable.

71.28 So the beginner, who is on his way to the heights and cultivates virtue, even if he is approaching the perfect good but has not yet put the finishing touch to it, will at times slip backward and relax some of his mental effort. For he has not yet passed beyond uncertainty; he is still on slippery ground. But the happy man, the man of perfected virtue, loves himself most when he has been most bravely tested; and the things others fear, if they are the price of some honorable duty, he not only bears but embraces. He would much rather hear "So much the better a man" than "So much the luckier."

71.29 Now I come to the point your expectation is calling me to. So that our virtue may not seem to wander outside the nature of things: the wise man will tremble, feel pain, and turn pale. For these are all feelings of the body. Where, then, is disaster; where is that true evil? There, surely—if these things drag the mind down, if they bring it to confess itself a slave, if they make it regret itself.

71.30 The wise man, it is true, overcomes fortune by virtue; but many who profess wisdom have sometimes been terrified by the slightest threats. Here the fault is ours, for demanding the same from one who is progressing as from the wise man. I am still urging on myself the things I praise; I have not yet convinced myself. And even if I had, I would not yet have them so ready or so well trained that they would rush out to meet every misfortune.

71.31 Just as wool takes some dyes at a single dipping, but will not soak up others unless it is steeped and boiled again and again, so other kinds of learning show their results as soon as minds take them in. But this one, unless it has sunk deep and settled for a long time, and has not merely tinted the mind but saturated it, delivers nothing of what it promised.

71.32 It can be passed on quickly and in very few words: virtue is the only good; there is certainly no good without virtue; and virtue itself is seated in the better part of us, the rational part. What will this virtue be? A true and unshakable judgment. From it the mind's impulses will come; by it every impression that stirs an impulse will be made clear.[9]

71.33 It will accord with this judgment to hold that everything virtue has touched is good, and that all such things are equal to one another. Goods of the body are indeed goods for the body, but they are not goods absolutely. They will have some value, but no true worth; they will differ widely among themselves, some lesser, some greater.

71.34 Among those who pursue wisdom, too, we must admit there are great differences. One has progressed so far that he dares to raise his eyes against fortune—but not steadily, for they drop, dazzled by its excessive glare. Another has progressed so far that he can meet it face to face—if, that is, he has already reached the summit and is full of confidence.

71.35 Things that are imperfect inevitably totter: now they move forward, now they slip back or give way. And they will slip

9 Stoic technical terms: an "impression" (Greek *phantasia*) produces an "impulse" (*hormē*) to act only when the mind assents to it.

back unless they keep going and keep striving; if they relax at all in their zeal and faithful effort, they must go backward. No one finds his progress where he left it. So let us press on and persevere.

71.36 More remains than we have got through; but a great part of progress is wanting to progress. This I know about myself: I want it, and I want it with my whole mind. You too, I see, are fired up and rushing with great momentum toward the finest things. Let us hurry; only then will life be a blessing. Otherwise it is a delay, and a shameful one at that, for people living among foul things. Let us see to it that all our time is our own. But it will not be, unless we first begin to be our own.

71.37 When will it be granted us to despise both kinds of fortune? When will it be granted us, with every passion crushed and brought under our control, to utter the cry "I have conquered"? Whom have I conquered, you ask? Not the Persians, nor the farthest Medes, nor any warlike people beyond the Dahae, but greed, ambition, and the fear of death, which has conquered the conquerors of nations. Farewell.[10]

LETTER 72: ON BUSYNESS AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is not for spare time, so shut out new occupations before they multiply.

72.1 The question you put to me was once clear to me by itself, so thoroughly had I learned the subject. But I have not tested my memory for a long time, so it does not follow me easily. I feel that what happens to scrolls whose pages have stuck together from disuse has happened to me: the mind must be unrolled, and whatever has been deposited in it must be shaken out now and then, so that it is ready whenever need demands. So let us put this off for now, for it calls for much work and much care. As soon as I expect to stay longer in one place, I will take it in hand.

72.2 For some things you can write even in a light carriage; others need a couch, leisure, and privacy. Nevertheless, even on

busy days like these something should be done—and on every one of them. For new occupations will never stop coming: we sow them, and so from one spring several more. Then we grant ourselves postponements: "When I have finished this, I will apply myself wholeheartedly," and "If I settle this annoying business, I will devote myself to study."

72.3 Philosophy is not something to do when you have free time. Everything else must be neglected so that we may attend to this, for which no amount of time is long enough, even if life stretches from boyhood to the farthest limits of the human span. It makes little difference whether you abandon philosophy or interrupt it; for it does not stay where it was broken off, but—like things that snap apart when stretched—it runs back all the way to its beginning, because it has broken its continuity. We must resist our occupations; they are not to be untangled but pushed away. No time is unsuitable for wholesome study; and yet many do not study amid the very things that are the reason for studying.

72.4 "Something will crop up to hinder me." Not, surely, the man whose mind is glad and eager in every business. It is in those still imperfect that happiness is cut to pieces; the wise man's joy is woven all of a piece. No cause breaks it, no fortune; he is always and everywhere at peace. For he does not depend on anything outside himself, nor wait for the favor of fortune or of men. His happiness is homegrown: it would leave his mind if it had come in from outside; it is born there.

72.5 Sometimes something from outside intervenes to remind him of his mortality—but it is slight, the kind of thing that grazes the surface of the skin. Some inconvenience, I say, may brush against him; but that supreme good of his is fixed. This is what I mean: there are some external inconveniences, as sometimes in a strong, sound body there are breakouts of pimples and little sores; but there is no evil deep inside.

72.6 This, I say, is the difference between the man of perfected wisdom and the one still progressing: the difference between a

healthy man and someone emerging from a severe and prolonged illness, for whom a milder bout passes for health. Unless the latter takes care, he soon grows worse again and falls back into the same state. The wise man cannot relapse, nor even fall ill any more. For the body, good health is temporary: even if the doctor has restored it, he cannot guarantee it, and often he is called out again to the same patient who sent for him. The mind is healed once and for all.

72.7 I will tell you how I recognize a healthy mind: if it is content with itself, if it trusts itself, if it knows that all the prayers of mortals, all the favors that are given and sought, carry no weight in a happy life. For whatever can have something added is imperfect; whatever can have something taken away is not lasting. The man whose joy is to last should rejoice in what is his own. Everything the crowd gapes after ebbs and flows. fortune gives nothing to own outright. But even these gifts of chance give pleasure when reason has tempered and blended them. It is reason that makes even external things agreeable—things that the greedy use without enjoyment.

72.8 Attalus used to use this image: "Have you ever seen a dog snapping with open jaws at scraps of bread or meat thrown by its master? Whatever it catches, it gulps down whole at once, and always gapes in hope of the next. It is the same with us: whatever fortune tosses us as we wait, we swallow immediately without any pleasure, alert and eager to snatch the next." This does not happen to the wise man; he is full. Even if something comes his way, he calmly receives it and puts it aside.

72.9 He enjoys the greatest joy, continuous and his own. Another man has good will and has made progress, but is still far from the summit: he is pushed down and lifted up by turns, now raised to the sky, now brought down to earth. For the

10 The Dahae were nomads east of the Caspian Sea, at the edge of the known world.

untrained and ignorant there is no end to the fall: they drop into that chaos of Epicurus, the void without limit.[11]

72.10 There is also a third kind: those who are playing at the edges of wisdom. They have not reached it, but they have it in sight and, so to speak, within striking distance. These people are not shaken; they do not even drift. They are not yet on dry land, but they are already in harbor.

72.11 So, since the gaps between the highest and the lowest are so great, and since even those in the middle are dogged by their own swell—dogged by the grave danger of sliding back into worse—we must not indulge our busy affairs. They must be shut out: once they get in, they will bring in others to take their place. Let us resist them at the start. Better that they never begin than that they have to stop. Farewell.

LETTER 73: ON PHILOSOPHERS AND RULERS

Philosophers are the most grateful subjects, since the peace a ruler secures gives them leisure for the highest things.

73.1 In my view, people are mistaken who think that those faithfully devoted to philosophy are stubborn and defiant, scorners of magistrates or kings or of those who run public affairs. On the contrary, no one is more grateful to them—and with good reason. For rulers do more for no one than for those who are free to enjoy peaceful leisure.

73.2 So those whose aim of living well owes much to public security must honor the author of this good as a parent—far more, in fact, than those restless people who stand in the thick of things. These owe much to their rulers, but they also charge much to their account, and no generosity can ever meet their desires so fully as to satisfy them, for those desires grow as they are filled. Whoever is thinking about getting has forgotten what he got; and greed has no worse evil than that it is ungrateful.

73.3 Add, too, that no one engaged in public life looks at how many he has surpassed, only at who has surpassed him. It gives

such people less pleasure to see many behind them than pain to see anyone ahead. All ambition has this fault: it never looks back. And it is not only ambition that is restless, but every desire, because it always starts over from where it finished.

73.4 But that sincere and upright man who has left the Senate house and the Forum and all public administration, to withdraw to greater things, loves those who make it safe for him to do so. He alone bears them witness without being paid for it, and he owes them a great debt without their knowing it. Just as he reveres and looks up to his teachers, whose kindness led him out of those trackless ways, so he honors those under whose protection he pursues his noble studies.

73.5 "But the king protects others with his strength too." Who denies it? Yet among those who have enjoyed the same calm sea, the one who carried more and costlier cargo on it judges that he owes more to Neptune; a merchant pays his vow more eagerly than a passenger; and among the merchants themselves, the one who carried perfumes and purple and goods worth their weight in gold is more lavishly grateful than the one who had loaded the cheapest wares, fit only for ballast. In the same way, the blessing of this peace, though it reaches everyone, reaches more deeply those who use it well.

73.6 For many of these men in togas find peace more laborious than war. Or do you think that those who spend peace on drunkenness or lust or other vices—vices that would be worth breaking up even by a war—owe as much for it? Unless perhaps you think the wise man so unfair as to judge that he owes nothing personally for goods shared by all. I owe a great deal to the sun and the moon, and they do not rise for me alone. I am personally indebted to the year and to the god who regulates the year, though none of their arrangements was made in my honor.

73.7 The foolish greed of mortals distinguishes possession from ownership, and believes nothing its own that is public. But the wise man judges nothing more his own than what he shares

11 Epicurus taught that the universe consists of atoms moving through an infinite void.

with the human race. For these things would not be common unless a part of them belonged to each individual; even the smallest share in something common makes one a partner.

73.8 Add, too, that great and true goods are not divided so that only a sliver falls to each person; they come whole to every single one. From a public handout, people carry off only as much as was promised per head. A public banquet, a distribution of meat, anything else that is taken by hand, gets split into portions. But these indivisible goods, peace and freedom, belong as wholly to all as to each.[12]

73.9 So he thinks about who it is that gives him the use and enjoyment of these things—who ensures that the needs of the state do not call him to arms, or to stand watch, or to guard the walls, or to pay the many taxes of war—and he thanks his helmsman. This above all is what philosophy teaches: to owe favors well and to repay them well; and sometimes the repayment is the acknowledgment itself.

73.10 He will acknowledge, then, that he owes much to the man whose government and foresight give him rich leisure, control of his own time, and a quiet undisturbed by public business. "O Meliboeus, a god has made this leisure for us: / For he will always be a god to me."[13]

73.11 If even that leisure owes much to its author—leisure whose greatest gift is this: "He has let my cattle roam, as you see, and let me / Play what I please upon my rustic reed"—how highly should we value this leisure, which is spent among the gods, and which makes us gods?[14]

73.12 That is what I say, Lucilius, and I am calling you to heaven by a shortcut. Sextius used to say that Jupiter has no more power than a good man. Jupiter has more things to give to human beings; but of two good men the richer is not the better, any more than, of two men equally skilled at steering, you

12 A congiarium was a handout of money or grain to the Roman people; a visceratio, a public distribution of sacrificial meat.
13 Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.6–7: the shepherd Tityrus speaks of the young Octavian (later Augustus), who let him keep his land.
14 Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.9–10.

would call the better one the man with the bigger and handsomer ship.

73.13 In what way does Jupiter surpass the good man? He is good for longer. The wise man thinks no less of himself because his virtues are confined to a shorter span. Just as, of two wise men, the one who died older is not happier than the one whose virtue ended within fewer years, so God does not surpass the wise man in happiness, even if he surpasses him in age.

73.14 Virtue is not greater for lasting longer. Jupiter has everything—but of course he has handed it over for others to have. The only use of it that belongs to him is this: he is the cause of everyone's using it. The wise man sees everything in the hands of others and despises it with as calm a mind as Jupiter; and he thinks the more of himself because Jupiter cannot use these things, while the wise man does not want to.

73.15 So let us believe Sextius when he points out the most beautiful road and cries: "This is the way 'to the stars'—the way of thrift, the way of self-control, the way of courage. The gods are not disdainful, not envious; they let you in, and as you climb, they hold out a hand."[15]

73.16 Are you surprised that a human being goes to the gods? God comes to human beings—no, nearer still, he comes into human beings. No mind is good without God. Divine seeds are scattered in human bodies. If a good farmer receives them, they come up like their source and grow to equal what they sprang from; if a bad one, then, just like barren and marshy soil, he kills them, and then produces weeds instead of grain. Farewell.

LETTER 74: ON THE ONLY GOOD

Whoever counts anything but the honorable as good falls into fortune's power, while virtue alone cannot be taken away.

74.1 Your letter delighted me and roused me from my torpor; it also called up my memory, which is now slow and sluggish. Of course, my Lucilius, you are right to count this conviction the

15 "To the stars" quotes Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.641.

greatest instrument of the happy life: that the only good is the honorable. For whoever judges other things to be good falls into fortune's power and becomes subject to another's will; whoever has bounded all good within the honorable is happy from within.

74.2 This man is grieving for lost children, that one is anxious over sick ones, another is saddened by children who are disgraceful and have suffered some scandal. You will see one tormented by love for another man's wife, another by love for his own. There will be no lack of people twisted by an electoral defeat; there will be others whom office itself torments.

74.3 But the largest crowd of the wretched in the whole mortal population is the one harried by the expectation of death, which looms from every side—for there is no quarter from which it cannot steal up. So, as when moving through enemy country, one must look around this way and that and turn one's head at every noise. Unless this fear is driven out of the breast, one lives with a pounding heart.

74.4 You will meet people driven into exile and stripped of their property. You will meet—the worst kind of want—people poor in the midst of riches. You will meet the shipwrecked, or those who have suffered something like shipwreck: people whom popular anger or envy, a weapon deadly to the best, has scattered while they were unsuspecting and carefree, like a storm that tends to burst out in the very confidence of fair weather, or a sudden thunderbolt whose strike makes even the neighborhood tremble. For just as there anyone standing near the fire is stunned like the one struck, so in misfortunes that come by some violence, disaster crushes one person and fear crushes the rest; and being able to suffer brings as much sorrow as having suffered.

74.5 Everyone's mind is unsettled by the sudden misfortunes of others. As birds are frightened even by the whir of an empty sling, so we are alarmed not only by the blow but by the sound. No one, then, can be happy who has put his trust in this belief.

For nothing is happy unless it is fearless; living amid suspicions is living badly.

74.6 Whoever has given himself over to chance has made himself a vast and inextricable store of turmoil. There is one road for anyone heading toward safety: to look down on externals and be content with the honorable. For whoever thinks anything better than virtue, or any good besides it, holds open the fold of his robe for whatever fortune scatters, and anxiously waits for her to throw.

74.7 Picture this in your mind: Fortune is putting on games and showering honors, riches, and influence on this crowd of mortals. Some of these gifts have been torn apart between the hands of those grabbing for them; some divided in faithless partnerships; some seized at great cost to those they landed on. Some fell to people who were not paying attention; some were lost because they were grabbed at too hard, and knocked away in the very eagerness of the snatching. And no one, not even the one whose snatch succeeded, enjoyed his prize for long. So all the most sensible people, as soon as they see the little presents being brought in, flee the theater, knowing that small things cost dearly. No one comes to blows with a man who is leaving; no one strikes a man on his way out; the brawl is around the prize.[16]

74.8 The same happens with what fortune throws down from above. We poor wretches seethe, we are pulled every which way, we wish we had many hands, we look now this way, now that. The things that provoke our desires seem to be thrown far too slowly; they reach only a few, while everyone is waiting for them.

74.9 We want to run and meet them as they fall. We rejoice if we have grabbed something—and some have been cheated by an empty hope of grabbing. We pay for a cheap prize with some great trouble, or we are left empty-handed and deceived. So let us withdraw from these games and make room for the snatch-

16 At public shows, tokens and gifts (missilia) were thrown into the crowd to be scrambled for.

ers. Let them gaze up at those goods dangling in the air, and dangle in suspense themselves even more.

74.10 Whoever resolves to be happy should hold that the only good is the honorable. For if he thinks there is any other, then, first, he passes a bad judgment on providence, because many misfortunes befall just men, and because whatever it has given us is brief and meager compared with the lifespan of the whole universe.

74.11 From this complaining it comes about that we are ungrateful interpreters of the divine: we complain that what falls to us is not permanent, is little, uncertain, and bound to leave. Hence we want neither to live nor to die: hatred of life grips us, and fear of death. Every plan wavers, and no good fortune can fill us. The reason is that we have not reached that immense and unsurpassable good where our wishes must come to rest, since there is no place beyond the highest.

74.12 Do you ask why virtue needs nothing? It rejoices in what it has and does not crave what is absent. Whatever is enough is great in its eyes. Depart from this judgment, and neither devotion nor good faith will survive. For whoever wants to show both must endure much of what is called evil, and give up much of what we indulge in as good.

74.13 Courage perishes, which must put itself to the test. Greatness of soul perishes, which cannot stand out unless it has despised as trifles everything the crowd longs for as the greatest things. Gratitude perishes, and the repaying of kindness, if we fear hardship, if we know of anything more precious than good faith, if we do not look to what is best.

74.14 But to pass over these points: either the things called goods are not goods, or man is happier than God, since God has no use for the things provided for us. Lust has nothing to do with him, nor sumptuous banquets, nor wealth, nor any of the things that bait human beings and lead them on by cheap pleasure. So either it is not incredible that God lacks goods, or the very fact that God lacks them proves they are not goods.

74.15 Add that many things that want to pass for goods fall more abundantly to animals than to man. Animals eat with greater appetite, they are not so exhausted by sex, and their strength is greater and steadier. It follows that they are much happier than man. For they live without wickedness, without deceit. They enjoy pleasures that they both take in more fully and have more easily, with no fear of shame or regret.

74.16 So consider whether we should call something a good in which God is outdone by man. Let us keep the highest good within the mind. It is debased if it passes from the best part of us to the worst and is transferred to the senses, which are sharper in brute animals. The sum of our happiness must not be placed in the flesh. The true goods are those that reason gives: solid and everlasting, unable to fall, or even to shrink or be diminished.

74.17 The rest are goods by opinion. They share the name with the true ones, but the essential quality of a good is not in them. So let them be called "advantages" and—to speak in our own language—"promoted things." Still, let us know that they are our possessions, not parts of us; let them be with us, but in such a way that we remember they are outside us. Even while they are with us, let them be counted among lowly, subordinate things, over which no one should puff himself up. For what is more foolish than for someone to be pleased with himself for something he did not do himself?[17]

74.18 Let all these things be attached to us, not stuck fast, so that if they are taken away they come off without tearing any part of us. Let us use them, not boast of them, and use them sparingly, as things deposited with us that will soon leave. Whoever has held them without reason has not held them long, for prosperity, unless it is tempered, crushes itself. If he has trusted in the most fleeting goods, he is soon deserted—and even if he is not deserted, he is afflicted. Few have been allowed to set down

17 Indifferents: in Stoic ethics, everything other than virtue and vice (health, wealth, pain, death), neither good nor evil in itself. *Producta* ("promoted things") renders the Greek *proēgmena*, the indifferents that are naturally preferable.

their good fortune gently; the rest fall along with the things among which they stood high, and the very things that had raised them up drag them down.

74.19 So prudence will be called in, to impose a limit or thrift on these things, since license hurls its own riches headlong and runs them down. Nothing immoderate has ever lasted unless reason, the great moderator, has reined it in. The fate of many cities will show you this: their empires fell through luxury in their very prime, and whatever had been won by virtue was ruined by excess. We must fortify ourselves against such disasters. But no wall is impregnable against fortune; let us arm ourselves within. If that part is safe, a man can be attacked, but he cannot be captured.

74.20 Do you want to know what this armor is? That he resent nothing that happens to him, and know that the very things that seem to harm him serve to preserve the universe and are among the things that complete the course and work of the world. Let whatever has pleased God please man. Let him admire himself and what is his for this very reason: that he cannot be conquered, that he holds evils themselves beneath him, that by reason—and nothing is stronger than reason—he subdues chance, pain, and injury.

74.21 Love reason! Love of it will arm you against the hardest things. Love for their cubs drives wild beasts onto the hunting spears, and their fierceness and headlong charge make them untamable. The desire for glory has sometimes driven young minds to despise sword and fire alike. The mere appearance and shadow of virtue pushes some people to a voluntary death. By as much as reason is braver and steadier than all of these, so much the more forcefully will it make its way through fear and danger themselves.

74.22 "You achieve nothing," someone says, "by denying that there is any good besides the honorable. This fortification will not make you safe and immune from fortune. For you say that dutiful children, a well-ordered country, and good parents are among the goods; you cannot watch these in danger without

anxiety. The siege of your country, the death of your children, the enslavement of your parents will shake you."

74.23 I will set out the answer usually given on our behalf against these critics; then I will add what I think should be answered besides. The case is different with things that, when taken away, put some disadvantage in their place. Good health, when ruined, turns into bad; the eyes' sight, when put out, afflicts us with blindness; when the hamstrings are cut, not only is speed lost, but weakness takes its place. There is no such risk with the things we mentioned just now. Why? If I have lost a good friend, I do not have to endure treachery in his place; nor, if I have buried good children, does undutifulness take their place.

74.24 Second, what dies there is not friends or children but bodies. And a good perishes in one way only: if it turns into evil—which nature does not allow, since every virtue and every work of virtue remains uncorrupted. Then again, even if friends have died, even if children have died who were upright and answered their father's prayers, there is something that can fill their place. You ask what it is? The thing that had made them good as well: virtue.

74.25 Virtue leaves no place empty. It fills the whole mind and takes away the longing for everything else; it alone is enough, for the power and source of all goods lie in it. What does it matter if running water is cut off and drains away, as long as the spring it flowed from is safe? You will not say that a life is more just with children alive than with children lost, nor more orderly, nor wiser, nor more honorable; so not better, either. Adding friends does not make one wiser, and losing them does not make one more foolish; so not happier or more wretched either. As long as virtue is safe, you will not feel whatever has gone.

74.26 "What then? Is a man not happier surrounded by a crowd of friends and children?" Why should he be? The highest good is neither broken down nor built up; it stays at its own measure, however fortune has behaved. Whether he has been granted a

long old age or his life ended short of old age, the measure of the highest good is the same, though the measure of years differs.

74.27 Whether you draw a larger or a smaller circle affects its area, not its shape. One may have lasted a long time, while you rubbed out the other at once and dissolved it into the dust it was drawn in; yet both had the same shape. What is right is not measured by size, or number, or time; it can no more be stretched than shrunk. Take an honorable life of a hundred years, cut it down as much as you like, and compress it into a single day: it is just as honorable.

74.28 Sometimes virtue spreads out widely: it governs kingdoms, cities, provinces; it makes laws, cultivates friendships, distributes duties among relatives and children. Sometimes it is hemmed in by the narrow limits of poverty, exile, bereavement. Yet it is no smaller if it is brought down from a loftier height to private life, from a royal station to a humble one, or if it contracts from a broad public jurisdiction into the narrow space of a house or a corner.

74.29 It is just as great even when it has withdrawn into itself, shut out on every side. For it is still the mark of a great and upright spirit, of perfect prudence, of unswerving justice. So it is equally happy. For happiness is lodged in one place only, in the mind itself—great, stable, tranquil—and it cannot be produced without knowledge of things divine and human.

74.30 Now comes the answer I said I would give myself. The wise man is not crushed by the loss of children or of friends. He bears their death with the same mind with which he awaits his own. He no more fears his own death than he grieves over theirs. For virtue consists in consistency: all its works agree and harmonize with it. That harmony is lost if the mind, which ought to be lofty, is brought low by grief or longing. All trepidation and anxiety is dishonorable, and so is sluggishness in any action. For the honorable is free from care and unencumbered; it is fearless; it stands ready for battle.

74.31 "What then? Will he feel nothing like distress? Will his color not change, his face not be disturbed, his limbs not grow

cold?"—and whatever else happens not at the mind's command but by some unthinking impulse of nature. I grant it. But he will keep the same conviction: that none of these things is an evil, or worth a sound mind's giving way. Whatever has to be done, he does boldly and promptly.

74.32 One might say that this is the special mark of folly: to do whatever it does sluggishly and grudgingly, to drive the body one way and the mind another, and to be torn between the most opposite impulses. For folly is despised for the very things it prides itself on and admires, and it does not willingly do even the things it boasts of. And if it fears some evil, then while it waits, it is weighed down by it just as if it had come; whatever it fears to suffer, it already suffers through fear.

74.33 In the body, signs run ahead of an illness that is settling in: a limp sluggishness, weariness without any exertion, yawning, a shiver running through the limbs. In the same way a weak mind is shaken by evils long before it is overwhelmed by them. It anticipates them and falls before its time. But what is madder than to be tormented by the future, and, instead of saving oneself for torment, to summon miseries and draw them near?

74.34 If you cannot dispel them, it is best to postpone them. Do you want to know that no one should be tortured by the future? Anyone who hears that he must undergo torture fifty years from now is not disturbed—unless he has leapt over the time in between and plunged himself into an anxiety that lies a lifetime ahead. In the same way it happens that minds that like being sick, and go hunting for reasons to grieve, are saddened by things long past and forgotten. What is past and what is to come are both absent; we feel neither. And there is no pain except from what you feel. Farewell.

Book IX

On the diseases of the soul (75), on learning wisdom in old age (76).

LETTER 75: ON PLAIN SPEECH AND PROGRESS

Say what you mean and live what you say; then Seneca sorts those making progress into three classes.

75.1 You complain that the letters I send you are not written with enough care. But who speaks with care, unless he wants to speak affectedly? I want my letters to be like my conversation would be if we were sitting or walking together: unlabored and easy. They have nothing forced or artificial about them.

75.2 If it were possible, I would rather show you what I feel than tell it. Even if I were arguing a case, I would not stamp my foot or throw my arm about or raise my voice; I would leave those things to orators, content to have conveyed my thoughts to you without either dressing them up or cheapening them.

75.3 This one thing I would like to prove to you fully: that I feel everything I say, and not only feel it but love it. People kiss a lover one way and their children another; yet even in this embrace, so pure and restrained, the affection shows plainly enough. Heavens, I do not want what is said about such great matters to be thin and dry; philosophy does not renounce talent. Still, one should not spend much effort on words.

75.4 Let this be the sum of our purpose: let us say what we feel, and feel what we say; let our speech agree with our life. That man has kept his promise who is the same whether you see him or hear him.

75.5 We will see what sort of man he is, how great a man: let him be one and the same. Let our words not delight but help. If, however, eloquence can come to someone without anxious effort, if it is ready to hand or costs little, let it be present and accompany the finest subjects. Let it be such as to display the subject rather than itself. Other arts belong wholly to cleverness; here the business of the soul is at stake.

75.6 A sick man does not look for an eloquent doctor. But if it happens that the same man who can cure him also speaks elegantly about what must be done, he will take it in good part. Still, he will have no reason to congratulate himself on having found a doctor who is also articulate. It is as if a skilled helmsman were also handsome.

75.7 Why tickle my ears? Why entertain me? There is other work to do: I need to be cauterized, cut, put on a diet. That is what you were called in for. You have to treat a disease that is old, serious, and widespread. You have as much on your hands as a doctor in a plague. Are you busy with words? Be glad right now if you are equal to the facts. When will you learn all there is to learn? When will you fix what you have learned so firmly in yourself that it cannot slip away? When will you put it to the test? For with these things, unlike others, it is not enough to have committed them to memory; they must be tried out in practice. The happy man is not the one who knows them, but the one who does them.

75.8 "What then? Are there no steps below him? Is there a sheer drop just below wisdom?" No, in my view. For the one who is making progress is still counted among the fools, yet he is separated from them by a great distance. Among those making progress, too, there are great differences. As some hold, they are divided into three classes:

75.9 first are those who do not yet have wisdom but have already taken their stand near it. Yet even what is near is still outside. You ask who these are? Those who have already laid aside all passions and vices, and have learned what they had to embrace; but their confidence is still untested. They do not yet

have their good in use, yet they can no longer fall back into what they have escaped. They have already reached the point from which there is no slipping back, but they are not yet clear about this themselves. As I remember writing in a certain letter, "they do not know that they know." They have already been granted the enjoyment of their good, but not yet confidence in it.

75.10 Some describe this class of those making progress, which I have been speaking of, as having already escaped the diseases of the mind but not yet the passions, and as still standing on slippery ground, since no one is beyond the danger of vice except one who has shaken it off entirely. And no one has shaken it off except one who has taken on wisdom in its place.[1]

75.11 I have often said before what the difference is between diseases of the mind and passions; now too I will remind you. Diseases are vices that are ingrained and hardened, like greed and ambition; they have entwined the mind far too tightly and have become its permanent evils. To define it briefly, disease is a persistent judgment in error, that things are greatly to be sought which are only slightly to be sought. Or, if you prefer, let us define it this way: to strain too hard after things that should be sought slightly or not at all, or to set a high value on things that deserve some value or none.

75.12 Passions are objectionable movements of the mind, sudden and agitated. When they are frequent and neglected, they produce disease, just as a single head cold, not yet habitual, produces a cough, while a constant, chronic one produces consumption. So those who have made the most progress are beyond the diseases; but, though very close to perfection, they still feel passions.

75.13 The second class consists of those who have laid aside both the greatest evils of the mind and the passions, but in such a way that they do not have a secure hold on their freedom from care. For they can slip back into the same state.

1 The Stoics distinguished passions (sudden, irrational movements of the mind) from diseases of the mind (false judgments hardened by habit), as Seneca explains next.

75.14 The third class is beyond many great vices, but not beyond all. It has escaped greed, but still feels anger; it is no longer troubled by lust, but is still troubled by ambition; it no longer craves, but it still fears. And even in its fear it is firm enough against some things but gives way to others. It despises death but dreads pain.

75.15 Let us give this point some thought. We will be doing well if we are admitted to this group. The second grade is reached through great natural gifts and great, sustained intensity of study; but even this third shade is not to be despised. Think how many evils you see around you; look how no crime lacks a precedent, how much ground wickedness gains every day, how much wrong is done in public and in private. You will realize we achieve enough if we are not among the worst.

75.16 "But I hope," you say, "that I can rise to a higher rank as well." I would wish this for us rather than promise it. We are preoccupied. We strive for virtue while pulled apart by vices. I am ashamed to say it: we cultivate the honorable when we have spare time. But what a great reward awaits us if we break off our busy affairs and our most tenacious evils! Neither desire nor fear will drive us.

75.17 Unshaken by terrors, uncorrupted by pleasures, we will fear neither death nor the gods. We will know that death is not an evil, and that the gods do no evil. What harms is as weak as what is harmed; the best things have no power to harm.

75.18 If we ever escape from these dregs to that sublime and lofty height, there await us tranquility of mind and, once our errors are driven out, complete freedom. You ask what that is? To fear neither men nor gods; to want nothing shameful and nothing excessive; to have supreme power over oneself. It is a priceless good to become one's own. Farewell.

LETTER 76: ON LEARNING IN OLD AGE

Seneca, now old, goes back to school, and argues again that reason perfected, the honorable, is the only good.

76.1 You threaten to be my enemy if I keep from you anything I do day to day. See how openly I live with you: I will confide even this. I am attending a philosopher's lectures. In fact, this is the fifth day I have been going to his school and hearing him lecture from the eighth hour on. "A fine age for it!" you say. Why not a fine age? What is more foolish than refusing to learn because you have not learned for a long time?[2]

76.2 "What then? Am I to do the same as the dandies and the young men?" I am doing well if this is the only thing unbecoming to my old age. This school admits people of every age. "Are we to grow old just to trail after the young?" Shall I go to the theater as an old man, have myself carried to the circus, let no pair of gladiators fight it out without me—and then blush to go to a philosopher?[3]

76.3 One should go on learning as long as one does not know—and, if we believe the proverb, as long as one lives. And nothing fits this better than the thing itself: as long as you live, keep learning how to live. Still, I also teach something there. You ask what I teach? That even an old man must learn.

76.4 But I am ashamed of the human race every time I enter the lecture hall. As you know, anyone heading for Metronax's house has to go right past the theater of the Neapolitans. That place is packed, and people judge with tremendous zeal who is a good pipe player; the Greek trumpeter and the herald also draw a crowd. But in the place where the question is what makes a good man, where one learns to be a good man, very few sit, and most people think these few have nothing worthwhile to do; they are called idle fools. Let that mockery fall on me. The insults of the

2 The eighth hour of the Roman day fell in the early afternoon.
3 Trossuli, originally a name for Roman cavalrymen, had become slang for fashionable young men.

ignorant must be heard with equanimity, and whoever is heading toward the honorable must despise contempt itself.[4]

76.5 Go on, Lucilius, and hurry, so that the same thing does not happen to you as to me—learning as an old man. Or rather, hurry all the more because you have only now taken up a subject you could scarcely master even by old age. "How much progress will I make?" you ask. As much as you attempt.

76.6 What are you waiting for? No one has become wise by chance. Money will come of its own accord; office will be offered; influence and rank may be thrust on you; but virtue will not fall into your lap. It is not come to know through light effort or small labor; but it is worth all the labor for one who will gain every good at a stroke. For there is only one good, the honorable; in all the things that reputation favors, you will find nothing true, nothing certain.

76.7 But I will tell you why the only good is the honorable, since you judge that I did not pursue the point far enough in my previous letter, and think the doctrine was more praised to you than proved; and I will condense what has been said.

76.8 Everything is valued for its own particular good. A vine is commended for its fruitfulness and the flavor of its wine, a stag for its speed. With pack animals, you ask how strong their backs are, since their one use is carrying loads. In a dog, keenness of scent comes first if it must track wild animals, speed if it must catch them, boldness if it must bite and attack. In each thing, what ought to be best is the quality it is born for, the one by which it is judged.

76.9 What is best in a human being? Reason. By it he outstrips the animals and follows the gods. So perfected reason is the good proper to him; everything else he shares with animals and plants. He is strong—so are lions. He is handsome—so are peacocks. He is swift—so are horses. I am not saying he is beaten in all these things; I am not asking what is greatest in him, but what is his own. He has a body—so do trees. He has impulse and

4 Metronax, a philosopher teaching in Naples, whose death Seneca mentions in Letter 93.

voluntary movement—so do beasts and worms. He has a voice—but how much clearer is a dog's, how much shriller an eagle's, how much deeper a bull's, how much sweeter and more nimble a nightingale's!

76.10 What is proper to a human being? Reason. When it is right and complete, it fills up a human being's happiness. So if everything that has perfected its own good is praiseworthy and has reached the goal of its nature, and a human being's own good is reason, then if he has perfected it, he is praiseworthy and has reached the goal of his nature. This perfected reason is called virtue, and it is the same as the honorable.

76.11 So the only good in a human being is the one thing that belongs to a human being alone. For we are not now asking what the good is, but what the good of a human being is. If nothing else belongs to a human being but reason, this will be his one good—but one to be weighed against all the rest. If someone is bad, I think he will be condemned; if good, I think he will be approved. So that is the first and only thing in a human being by which he is both approved and condemned.

76.12 You don't doubt that this is a good; you doubt whether it is the only good. If someone has everything else—health, wealth, many ancestral portraits, a crowded front hall—but is admittedly bad, you will condemn him. Likewise, if someone has none of the things I have listed, lacks money, a throng of clients, noble birth and a long line of grandfathers and great-grandfathers, but is admittedly good, you will approve of him. So this is the one good of a human being: whoever has it deserves praise even if he is stripped of everything else; whoever lacks it is condemned and rejected amid an abundance of everything else.[5]

76.13 What holds for things holds for people. A ship is called good not because it is painted in costly colors, or has a silver or gold ram, or its guardian image is carved in ivory, or it is laden with treasure and royal riches, but because it is steady and firm, its seams tight and keeping out the water, sturdy enough to bear

5 Wax masks of distinguished ancestors were displayed in the atrium of noble Roman houses; clients crowded there each morning to greet their patron.

the onslaught of the sea, obedient to the helm, swift, and unbothered by the wind.

76.14 You will call a sword good not because its belt is gilded or its scabbard studded with gems, but because its edge is fine for cutting and its point will break through any defense. With a carpenter's rule, we ask not how handsome it is but how straight. Each thing is praised for the quality it is acquired for—the one that is its own.

76.15 So in a human being, too, it makes no difference how much land he plows, how much money he lends at interest, how many people call on him in the morning, how costly the couch he reclines on, how translucent the cup he drinks from—only how good he is. And he is good if his reason is fully developed, upright, and adapted to what his nature wants.

76.16 This is called virtue; this is the honorable and the one and only good of a human being. For since reason alone perfects a human being, reason alone, when perfected, makes him happy; and the one thing that alone makes him happy is the one good. We also call good the things that proceed from virtue and are bound up with it—that is, all its works. But virtue itself is the one good, because there is no good without it.

76.17 If every good lies in the mind, then whatever strengthens, raises, and enlarges the mind is good; and virtue makes the mind stronger, loftier, and larger. Everything else that inflames our desires also weighs the mind down and weakens it, and when it seems to lift the mind up, it only puffs it up and fools it with a great deal of emptiness. So the only good is what will make the mind better.

76.18 All the actions of a whole life are governed by regard for the honorable and the shameful; by these the reasoning about what to do and not do is steered. Let me explain. A good man will do what he thinks it honorable to do, even if it will be laborious; he will do it even if it will be costly; he will do it even if it will be dangerous. Conversely, what is shameful he will not do, even if it brings money, or pleasure, or power. Nothing will

scare him away from the honorable; nothing will lure him to the shameful.

76.19 So if he will follow the honorable in every case and avoid the shameful in every case, and in every act of his life keep these two in view—no good but the honorable, no evil but the shameful—if virtue alone is incorruptible and alone holds its course, then virtue is the one good, and nothing can now happen to it that would make it cease to be good. It has escaped the danger of change. Folly creeps up toward wisdom; wisdom does not slide back into folly.

76.20 I said, if you happen to remember, that many people have trampled on what the crowd desires and dreads, driven by a thoughtless impulse. Men have been found who would put their hand into the flames; whose laughter the torturer could not interrupt; who shed no tear at their children's funeral; who met death without trembling. Love, anger, desire have courted danger. If a brief stubbornness of mind, roused by some goad, can do this, how much more can virtue, whose strength does not come from impulse or suddenness but is steady, and whose vigor never fails.[6]

76.21 It follows that things often despised by the thoughtless and always by the wise are neither good nor evil. So virtue itself is the one good, striding proudly between this fortune and that, with great contempt for both.

76.22 If you accept the belief that anything besides the honorable is good, every virtue will be in trouble. For none can be maintained if it looks to anything outside itself. And if that happens, it conflicts with reason, from which the virtues come, and with truth, which does not exist without reason. And any belief that conflicts with truth is false.

76.23 You must grant that a good man is supremely devoted to the gods. So whatever happens to him he will bear calmly, for he will know it has happened by the divine law by which the universe moves forward. If so, his one good will be the honorable; for that consists in obeying the gods, not flaring up at sudden

6 The man who put his hand into the flames is Mucius (Letters 24 and 66).

blows, not bewailing his lot, but patiently accepting fate and doing what he is ordered.

76.24 If anything other than the honorable is good, we will be pursued by greed for life, and greed for the things that equip life—which is unbearable, endless, and aimless. So the only good is the honorable, which has a limit.

76.25 We said that if things the gods have no use for, such as money and public honors, are goods, then human life will be happier than the life of the gods. Now add this: if souls, once released from the body, survive, a happier state awaits them than they have while living in the body. Yet if the things we use through the body are goods, the souls will be worse off once set free—and it is beyond belief that souls shut up and besieged are happier than souls set free and given to the universe.

76.26 I had also said that if the things that fall to human beings and brute animals alike are goods, then brute animals too will live a happy life—which is utterly impossible. Everything must be endured for the sake of the honorable; and that would not be so if there were any other good than the honorable. Though I pursued these points at greater length in my previous letter, here I have compressed them and run through them briefly.

76.27 But such a view will never seem true to you unless you lift up your mind and ask yourself: if circumstances demanded that you die for your country and buy the safety of all your fellow citizens with your own, would you stretch out your neck not only patiently but gladly? If you would, there is no other good. For you are giving up everything to have this. See how great the power of the honorable is: you will die for the commonwealth, even if you are to do so at once, the moment you know you must.

76.28 Sometimes a great joy is drawn from a noble deed even in a short, brief moment; and though no fruit of the finished act reaches the man who has died and passed out of human affairs, still the mere contemplation of the act to come delights him. The brave and just man, when he sets before himself the rewards of his death—his country's freedom, the safety of all, for

whom he is paying with his life—is in the height of pleasure and enjoys his own danger.

76.29 But even the man robbed of this joy, which comes from carrying out his greatest and last act, will leap into death without a moment's hesitation, content to do what is right and dutiful. Now set before him many arguments to dissuade him; tell him, "Your deed will soon be forgotten, and your fellow citizens will think little of it and feel little gratitude." He will answer you: "All that lies outside my act. I consider the act itself. I know that this is honorable. So wherever it leads and calls, I come."

76.30 This, then, is the one good, and not only the perfected mind perceives it, but also the noble mind of good disposition. Everything else is trivial and changeable. That is why one owns such things anxiously. Even if favoring fortune has heaped them all on one man, they sit heavy on their owners and always weigh them down, and sometimes crush them.

76.31 None of those you see dressed in purple is happy, any more than those to whom the play assigns a scepter and cloak on the stage: they strut before the audience broad-shouldered and on high boots, but the moment they exit, the boots come off and they return to their own height. None of these men whom wealth and honors set on a higher pedestal is great. Then why does he seem great? You are measuring him along with his base. A person of short stature is not tall, even if he stands on a mountain; a colossus will keep its size even if it stands in a well.[7]

76.32 This is the error we labor under; this is how we are deceived: we value no one by what he is, but add to him the trappings he is adorned with. Yet when you want to make a true estimate of a person and know what he is like, look at him naked. Let him lay aside his inheritance, lay aside his honors and fortune's other lies; let him strip off his very body. Look at his mind—what kind it is, how great it is, whether its greatness is borrowed or its own.

76.33 If he looks at flashing swords with unflinching eyes; if he knows it makes no difference to him whether his life leaves through his mouth or through his throat, call him happy. If, when he is threatened with bodily tortures, whether they come by chance or by the injustice of the powerful; if he hears of chains and exile and the empty terrors of human minds, untroubled, and says: "No face of hardship,

O maiden, rises new or unforeseen for me;

I have anticipated all and run through them in my mind.

You announce these things today; I have always announced them to myself, and prepared a human being for the human lot."[8]

76.34 The blow of a misfortune foreseen lands softly. But to fools and those who trust fortune, every face of events seems new and unexpected; and for the inexperienced, a large part of an evil is its novelty. As proof, once they have grown used to what they had thought harsh, they bear it more bravely.

76.35 That is why the wise man accustoms himself to future evils; what others make light by long endurance, he makes light by long reflection. We sometimes hear the inexperienced say, "I knew this was in store for me." The wise man knows that everything is in store for him. Whatever happens, he says, "I knew." Farewell.

LETTER 77: ON A GENTLE DEATH

The calm end of Tullius Marcellinus shows that a life, like a play, is judged by how well it is acted, not how long.

77.1 Suddenly today the Alexandrian ships came into view—the ones usually sent ahead to announce the arrival of the fleet that follows; they call them the mail boats. Campania is glad to see them. The whole crowd stands on the piers at Puteoli and can

7 Tragic actors wore the cothurnus, a high-soled boot, to add stature.

8 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.103–5: Aeneas replying to the Sibyl's warning of wars to come.

tell the Alexandrian ships, even in a great crowd of vessels, by the very rig of their sails. For they alone are allowed to spread the topsail, which all ships carry at sea.[9]

77.2 Nothing helps a ship's speed as much as the top of the sail; that is where it gets the most drive. So whenever the wind freshens and is stronger than is useful, the yard is lowered; a breeze has less force low down. Once ships have entered between Capri and the headland from which "Pallas keeps watch from her stormy peak," the rest are ordered to be content with the mainsail; the topsail is the distinguishing mark of the Alexandrians.[10]

77.3 In all this rushing about as everyone hurried to the shore, I took great pleasure in my own laziness: though I was about to receive letters from my people, I was in no hurry to know how my affairs stood there or what news they brought. For a long time now I have neither lost nor gained anything. I should have felt this even if I were not old; now all the more so. However little I had, I would still have more provisions left than road—especially since the road we have set out on is one we don't need to finish.

77.4 A journey will be incomplete if you stop halfway or short of your destination; a life is not incomplete if it is honorable. Wherever you stop, if you stop well, it is whole. And often one must stop bravely, and not for the greatest of reasons; for the reasons that hold us here are not the greatest either.

77.5 Tullius Marcellinus, whom you knew very well—a quiet young man who grew old early—was stricken with an illness, not incurable, but long, troublesome, and demanding much, and he began to deliberate about death. He called together a number of friends. Each of them either, being timid, urged on him what he would have urged on himself, or, being a flatterer and eager to

9 The grain fleet from Alexandria supplied Rome and docked at Puteoli on the Bay of Naples.

10 The headland is the Promontory of Minerva (Pallas), opposite Capri, with a temple to the goddess; the verse is from an unknown poet.

please, gave the advice he suspected would be more welcome to a man deliberating;[11]

77.6 but our Stoic friend, an exceptional man and—to praise him in the words he deserves—brave and vigorous, seems to me to have given him the best encouragement. He began like this: "Don't torment yourself, my Marcellinus, as if you were deliberating about something important. Living is not important; all your slaves live, and all animals. What is important is to die honorably, wisely, bravely. Think how long you have been doing the same things: food, sleep, sex—that is the circle we run around in. Wanting to die is not only for the wise, the brave, or the wretched; even the jaded can want it."

77.7 He needed not someone to persuade him but someone to help him; his slaves would not obey. First the Stoic took away their fear, pointing out that the household is in danger only when it is unclear whether the master's death was voluntary; otherwise it sets as bad an example to kill one's master as to stop him.[12]

77.8 Then he reminded Marcellinus himself that it would not be unkind—just as, when dinner is over, the leftovers are shared among the attendants standing by—so, when life is over, to hand something to those who had served him all his life. Marcellinus was easygoing and generous, even when it came out of his own pocket. So he distributed small sums to his weeping slaves and even comforted them himself.

77.9 He had no need of a blade or of blood. He fasted for three days and had a tent set up in his very bedroom. Then a tub was brought in, in which he lay a long time; hot water was poured in again and again, and he slowly faded away—not, as he said, without a certain pleasure, the kind a gentle loss of strength usually brings, which is not unknown to those of us who have sometimes fainted.

77.10 I have wandered off into a little story you won't find unwelcome. For you learn that your friend's end was neither dif-

11 Nothing is known of Tullius Marcellinus beyond Seneca's letters.

ficult nor wretched. Though he brought death on himself, he departed very gently and slipped out of life. But the story will not have been useless, either. For necessity often demands such examples. Often we ought to die and are unwilling; we are dying and are unwilling.

77.11 No one is so ignorant as not to know that one must die sometime; yet when death draws near, he turns tail, trembles, weeps. Wouldn't you think the greatest fool of all a man who wept because he had not been alive a thousand years ago? Just as foolish is the man who weeps because he won't be alive a thousand years from now. The two are equal: you will not be, and you were not. Neither time is yours.

77.12 You have been thrown into this point of time; even if you stretch it, how far will you stretch it? Why weep? Why pray? You are wasting your effort. "Cease hoping that the gods' decrees can be bent by prayer." They are settled and fixed, and driven by a great and eternal necessity. You will go where all things go. What is new to you in that? You were born under this law. This happened to your father, to your mother, to your ancestors, to everyone before you, and will happen to everyone after you. An unbroken chain, which no power can alter, binds and drags all things.[13]

77.13 What a throng of the dying will follow you! What a throng will go with you! You would be braver, I suppose, if many thousands were dying with you; and yet many thousands of humans and animals are breathing their last in various ways at this very moment, while you hesitate to die. Did you think you would never arrive where you were always heading? No journey is without its end.

77.14 You think I will now tell you examples of great men? I will tell you ones of boys. Tradition records that Spartan boy, still beardless, who when captured kept crying out in his Doric dialect, "I will not be a slave!"—and he made good his words. As

12 Under Roman law, if a master was killed in his house, his slaves could be interrogated and even executed.

13 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.376: the Sibyl's words to the unburied Palinurus.

soon as he was ordered to perform a slave's degrading service—he was told to bring a chamber pot—he dashed his head against a wall and broke it open.

77.15 Freedom is so near—and is anyone a slave? Wouldn't you rather your son died like that than grew old through cowardice? So why are you upset, if dying bravely is something even a boy can do? Suppose you don't want to follow: you will be led. Make your own what is in another's power. Won't you take on a boy's spirit and say, "I am no slave"? Poor wretch, you are a slave to people, a slave to things, a slave to life. For life, if the courage to die is missing, is slavery.

77.16 Do you have anything to wait for? The very pleasures that delay and hold you back you have used up. None is new to you; there is none that surfeit itself has not already made hateful. You know the taste of wine and of honeyed wine. It makes no difference whether a hundred or a thousand jars pass through your bladder: you are a strainer. You know perfectly well how an oyster tastes, how a mullet tastes; your luxury has left nothing untouched for the years ahead. Yet these are the things you are being torn away from against your will.

77.17 What else is there that you would grieve to lose? Friends? Can anyone be a friend to you? Your country? Do you value it so much that you would be late for dinner for it? The sun? You would put it out if you could. What have you ever done that was worthy of the light? Admit it: it is not longing for the senate house, or the forum, or the natural world itself that makes you slow to die. You hate to leave the food market, where you have left nothing on the shelves.

77.18 You fear death; yet how you scorn it in the middle of a mushroom dinner! You want to live; do you know how? You are afraid to die; and what then? Is this life of yours not death? When Gaius Caesar was passing along the Latin Way, one man from a column of prisoners, his old beard hanging down to his chest, begged him for death. "So," said Caesar, "you think you are alive now?" That is the answer to give those for whom death

would be a rescue: "You are afraid to die—do you think you are alive now?"[14]

77.19 "But I," someone says, "want to live, because I do many honorable things. I hate to leave the duties of life, which I carry out faithfully and diligently." What? Don't you know that dying is one of life's duties too? You are abandoning no duty. For no fixed number is set that you are obliged to complete.

77.20 Every life is short. For if you look at the nature of the universe, even the lives of Nestor and of Sattia are short—Sattia, who had it inscribed on her tomb that she had lived ninety-nine years. You see people boasting of a long old age. Who could have stood her if she had managed to reach her hundredth? As with a play, so with life: what matters is not how long it is, but how well it is performed. It makes no difference where you stop. Stop wherever you like; only give it a good ending. Farewell.[15]

LETTER 78: ON ILLNESS AND PAIN

Seneca's own illness teaches that friends, philosophy and contempt for death make pain bearable.

78.1 That you are troubled by frequent head colds and the low fevers that follow long, chronic colds distresses me all the more because I have experienced this kind of illness myself. In its early stages I made light of it: my youth could still bear injuries and stand up defiantly against disease. Then I gave in and was brought to the point where I was all catarrh myself, reduced to extreme thinness.

78.2 I often felt the urge to cut my life short; the old age of my most indulgent father held me back. For I considered not how bravely I could die, but how little bravely he could bear to lose me. So I ordered myself to live. For sometimes even to live is an act of courage.

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14 Gaius Caesar is the emperor Caligula. Mushrooms were a prized delicacy and sometimes deadly; the emperor Claudius was said to have been poisoned with them.

15 Nestor, the aged king in Homer's *Iliad*, outlived three generations; Sattia was proverbial at Rome for her long life.

78.3 I will tell you what comforted me then, once I have said this first: the very things I found rest in had the force of medicine. Honorable consolations turn into cures, and whatever lifts the mind helps the body too. Our studies were my salvation. I owe it to philosophy that I got up and recovered. I owe my life to her, and that is the least of what I owe her.

78.4 My friends did a great deal for my recovery; I was relieved by their encouragement, their vigils at my bedside, their conversation. Nothing, Lucilius, best of men, restores and helps a sick person like the affection of friends; nothing so steals away the expectation and fear of death. I did not think that I was dying if I left them alive after me. I thought, I tell you, that I would live on not with them but through them. I did not feel that I was pouring out my spirit, but handing it on. These things gave me the will to help myself and endure every torment. Otherwise it is most wretched, once you have thrown away the resolve to die, not to have the resolve to live.

78.5 So turn to these remedies. Your doctor will show you how far to walk and how much to exercise; he will tell you not to give in to idleness, toward which a sluggish illness tends; to read aloud and so exercise your breathing, whose passage and chamber are affected; to go sailing and shake up your insides with a gentle rocking; what foods to eat; when to call on wine to build your strength and when to stop it, so it doesn't irritate and aggravate your cough. I prescribe for you what is a remedy not only for this disease but for your whole life: despise death. Nothing is grim once we have escaped the fear of it.

78.6 In every illness, three things are hard: fear of death, bodily pain, and the interruption of pleasures. Enough has been said about death; I will say only this: this fear belongs not to disease but to nature. For many people illness has postponed death, and seeming to be dying has been their salvation. You will die not because you are sick, but because you are alive. That fate awaits you even when you are cured; when you recover, you will escape not death but ill health.

78.7 Now let us return to the drawback that belongs to illness itself: it brings great agonies. But intervals make these bearable. For pain at its most intense finds its own end. No one can feel severe pain and feel it long; nature, who loves us dearly, has so arranged us as to make pain either bearable or brief.

78.8 The worst pains are seated in the leanest parts of the body: sinews, joints, and anything else that is slender rage most fiercely when disease has taken hold in a narrow space. But these parts quickly grow numb, and through the pain itself lose the sense of pain—either because the vital breath, blocked from its natural course and changed for the worse, loses the force by which it thrives and alerts us, or because the corrupted fluid, when it has nowhere left to flow, spends itself and robs the overfilled parts of feeling.[16]

78.9 So gout of the feet and of the hands, and all pain in the spine and the sinews, takes a rest once it has dulled the parts it was racking. In all these, the first twinges are what torment us; the attack is quenched by time, and the end of the pain is numbness. Pain in the teeth, eyes, and ears is at its sharpest for this very reason, that it arises in narrow parts of the body—no less, heaven knows, than pain in the head itself. But if it grows more violent, it turns into delirium and stupor.

78.10 So this is the consolation for immense pain: you are bound to stop feeling it if you feel it too much. But what torments the inexperienced when the body is afflicted is this: they have not grown used to being content with the mind. They have had a great deal to do with the body. That is why a great and wise man draws his mind apart from the body and spends much time with the better, divine part, and with this complaining, fragile part only as much as he must.

78.11 "But it is hard," someone says, "to do without my usual pleasures, to go without food, to be thirsty, to be hungry." These things are hard at the first abstaining. Then desire slackens, as the very organs through which we desire grow tired and fail.

16 Spiritus ("breath," Greek pneuma) was held by ancient physicians and the Stoics to carry sensation through the body.

After that the stomach is fussy, and what one craved becomes repugnant. Desires themselves die. And it is not bitter to do without what you have stopped wanting.

78.12 Add that no pain fails to pause or at least ease. Add that you can guard against pain before it comes, and resist it with remedies when it threatens. For there is none that does not send warning signs ahead, especially the kind that returns habitually. Enduring illness is bearable if you despise its ultimate threat.

78.13 Don't make your troubles heavier yourself and burden yourself with complaints. Pain is slight if opinion adds nothing to it. On the contrary, if you begin to encourage yourself and say, "It's nothing, or at least it's small; let's hold out; it will stop soon," you will make it slight by thinking it so. Everything hangs on opinion; it is not only ambition that looks to it, but luxury and greed too. We suffer according to opinion. A man is as wretched as he thinks he is.

78.14 I think we should do away with complaints about past pains, and phrases like: "No one ever had it worse. What agonies, what miseries I went through! No one thought I would get up again. How often my family mourned me, how often the doctors gave up on me! People put on the rack are not stretched like that!" Even if these things are true, they are over. What good does it do to go over past pains and be wretched because you once were? Besides, doesn't everyone add a great deal to his troubles and lie to himself? And then, what was bitter to bear is pleasant to have borne; it is natural to rejoice at the end of one's troubles. So two things must be cut away: fear of the future and memory of past hardship. The latter no longer concerns me, the former not yet.[17]

78.15 Set in the midst of difficulties, let a man say, "Perhaps one day it will be a joy to remember even this." Let him fight back with all his heart: he will be beaten if he gives way, he will win if he strains against his pain. As it is, most people do the opposite: they pull down on themselves the collapse they should be bracing against. The thing that presses on you, hangs over you,

17 The eculeus ("little horse") was a wooden rack used for torture.

bears down on you—if you begin to pull away, it will follow you and fall on you all the harder; if you stand up to it and choose to push back, it will be driven off.[18]

78.16 How many blows do athletes take on the face, how many all over the body? Yet they bear every torment out of desire for glory, and they endure it not only because they fight but in order to fight: their very training is torment. Let us too conquer everything, when our prize is not a crown or a palm, nor a trumpeter calling for silence to announce our name, but virtue, strength of mind, and a peace won for all time, once fortune has been thoroughly beaten in any one contest.

78.17 "I feel severe pain." So? Do you feel it any less if you bear it weakly? Just as an enemy is more deadly to those who flee, so every chance misfortune presses harder on the one who gives way and turns his back. "But it is heavy." What? Are we brave in order to carry light loads? Would you rather your illness be long, or violent and short? If it is long, it has pauses, gives room for recovery, grants much time; as it rises, it must also subside. A short, headlong illness will do one of two things: it will be snuffed out, or it will snuff you out. And what difference is there between its ceasing to be and my ceasing to be? Either way, the pain ends.

78.18 It will also help to turn your mind to other thoughts and move away from the pain. Think of what you have done honorably, what bravely; go over the good parts you have played. Let your memory roam among the things you have most admired. Then let the bravest people come to mind, those who conquered pain: the man who went on reading his book while offering his varicose veins to be cut out; the man who did not stop laughing even while his torturers, angered by that very laughter, tried every instrument of their cruelty on him. Will pain not be conquered by reason, when it has been conquered by a laugh?

78.19 Name anything you like now—head colds, the force of a constant cough bringing up bits of your insides, a fever scorching your very chest, thirst, limbs twisted as the joints wrench

18 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.203: Aeneas encouraging his shipwrecked men.

apart. Worse still are the flame, the rack, the red-hot plate, and something pressed into the swelling wounds themselves to reopen them and drive them deeper. Yet amid all this, someone did not groan. "Not enough": he did not beg. "Not enough": he did not answer. "Not enough": he laughed—and laughed from the heart. After this, won't you laugh at pain?

78.20 "But," someone says, "illness lets me do nothing; it has taken me away from all my duties." Ill health has hold of your body, not your mind as well. So it will slow a runner's feet and hinder a cobbler's or a craftsman's hands; but if you are used to putting your mind to use, you will advise and teach, listen and learn, inquire and remember. What more? Do you think you are doing nothing if you are a self-controlled patient? You will show that illness can be overcome, or at least endured.

78.21 Believe me, virtue has a place even in a sickbed. It is not only arms and battle lines that give proof of a spirit that is eager and unconquered by terrors; a brave man shows himself even in his bedclothes. You have something to do: wrestle well with your illness. If it forces nothing out of you, wins nothing from you by pleading, you are setting a remarkable example. Oh, what great material for glory there would be, if people came to watch us when we are sick! Be your own spectator; be your own admirer.

78.22 Besides, there are two kinds of pleasures. Illness curbs the bodily ones but does not remove them. In fact, if you judge truly, it sharpens them: drinking is more delightful when you are thirsty, food more welcome when you are hungry. Whatever comes after abstaining is seized more greedily. But the pleasures of the mind, which are greater and surer, no doctor denies a sick man. Whoever pursues these and understands them well despises all the enticements of the senses.

78.23 "Oh, the poor sick man!" Why? Because he doesn't dilute his wine with snow? Because he doesn't renew the chill of the drink he has mixed in a roomy cup by crushing ice over it? Because Lucrine oysters are not opened for him right at the table? Because there is no bustle of cooks around his dining

room, carrying the very stoves along with the dishes? For luxury has now devised this: so that no food cools, so that nothing is less than piping hot for a palate already hardened, the kitchen follows the dinner.[19]

78.24 "Oh, the poor sick man!" He will eat as much as he can digest. No boar will lie in full view, banished from the table as cheap meat; no breasts of birds—for seeing the whole birds is tiresome—will be heaped on his serving tray. What harm has been done to you? You will dine like a sick man—or rather, at last, like a healthy one.

78.25 But we will easily put up with all these things—gruel, warm water, and whatever else seems unbearable to the pampered, to those wallowing in luxury and sicker in mind than in body—if only we stop dreading death. And we will stop, once we have learned the limits of good and evil; then at last life will not be tedious nor death frightening.

78.26 For a life that surveys so many things—varied, great, divine—cannot be overtaken by weariness of itself; it is idle leisure that tends to make life hateful to itself. For one who roams through the natural world, truth will never grow tiresome; it is the false that will cloy.

78.27 Then again, if death approaches and calls, even though it is untimely, even though it cuts him off in midlife, he has gathered the fruit of the longest life. He has come to know nature in large part. He knows that honorable things do not grow with time. It is inevitable that every life seems short to those who measure it by empty pleasures, which are therefore endless.

78.28 Refresh yourself with these thoughts, and meanwhile make time for my letters. A time will come that will join us and bring us together again; however short it may be, knowing how to use it will make it long. For, as Posidonius says, "A single day of learned men stretches further than the longest lifetime of the ignorant."

78.29 Meanwhile hold on to this, sink your teeth into it: do not give in to adversity, do not trust prosperity, keep all the license of fortune before your eyes, as if it will do whatever it can do. Whatever has been long expected arrives more gently. Farewell.

LETTER 79: ON ETNA AND THE SUMMIT OF WISDOM

Lucilius' Sicilian tour prompts the thought that the wise have no rivals at the top, and virtue wins its glory even if late.

79.1 I am waiting for your letters, to tell me what new things your tour of all Sicily has shown you, and above all to give me firmer information about Charybdis itself. For I know perfectly well that Scylla is a rock, and not even one that frightens sailors. Whether Charybdis lives up to the stories, I want you to write me in full. And if you happen to have observed it—and it deserves observing—let me know whether it is driven into whirlpools by one wind only, or whether every storm churns that sea alike; and whether it is true that whatever the eddy of that strait snatches away is dragged underwater for many miles and comes up again near the shore of Tauromenium.[20]

79.2 If you write me all this, then I will venture to charge you with climbing Etna too, in my honor. Some people conclude that it is being consumed and gradually sinking, because it used to be visible to sailors from farther away. This may happen not because the mountain's height is decreasing, but because the fire has died down and bursts out less violently and less abundantly—which is also why the smoke is more sluggish by day. Neither is incredible: that a mountain devoured every day grows smaller, or that it stays the same, because the fire does not eat away the mountain itself but gathers in some valley underground, boils up there, and feeds on other matter. In the mountain itself it has not its fuel but its passage.

79.3 In Lycia there is a very famous region—the inhabitants call it Hephaestion—where the ground is pierced with holes in many

19 Oysters from the Lucrine Lake near Baiae were the most prized in Rome.
20 Tauromenium is modern Taormina, on Sicily's east coast.

places, and a harmless fire plays around them without any damage to what grows there. So the region is fertile and grassy: the flames scorch nothing, but only glow with a soft and feeble force.[21]

79.4 But let us save these questions for when you have written me how far from the mouth of the crater lie the snows that not even summer melts—so safe are they from the fire next door. Still, you have no reason to charge this trouble to my account. You were going to indulge your own obsession even if no one asked you.

79.5 What would I have to pay you not to describe Etna in your poem, not to touch this set theme of every poet? Ovid was not kept from treating it by the fact that Virgil had already covered it fully; and neither of them deterred Cornelius Severus. Besides, this subject has yielded itself generously to everyone, and those who came first seem to me not to have used up what could be said, but to have opened it up.[22]

79.6 It makes a great difference whether you come to material that has been used up or to ground that has been worked and prepared. It grows day by day, and what has been discovered is no obstacle to those who will discover more. Besides, the last comer is in the best position: he finds the words ready, and arranged differently they take on a new face. Nor is he laying hands on them as if they belonged to someone else; they are public property.

79.7 Either I don't know you, or Etna is making your mouth water. You already long to write something grand, something equal to those before you. Your modesty does not let you hope for more; it is so great in you that I think you would hold back the strength of your talent if there were any danger of winning—such is your reverence for your predecessors.

79.8 Among its other blessings, wisdom has this one: no one can be surpassed by another except during the climb. Once you

21 Lycia, in southwest Asia Minor; the region is named for Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire. Its ever-burning gas vents still exist.

have reached the summit, all are equal; there is no room for growth; you stand still. Does the sun add to its size? Does the moon ever go beyond its usual course? The seas do not grow. The universe keeps the same state and measure.

79.9 Things that have filled out their proper magnitude cannot raise themselves higher. All who have been wise will be peers and equals. Each of them will have his own gifts: one will be more affable, another more nimble, another quicker in speech, another more eloquent. But the thing in question—what makes us happy—is equal in them all.

79.10 Whether your Etna can slip down and collapse into itself, whether the constant force of its fires is wearing down that lofty summit, visible across wide stretches of sea, I do not know. Virtue no flame and no collapse will bring lower. This is the one majesty that cannot be brought down. It can be neither extended further nor pulled back. Its greatness, like that of the heavenly bodies, is fixed. Let us try to raise ourselves up to it.

79.11 Much of the work is already done—no, if I want to confess the truth, not much. For it is not goodness to be better than the worst. Who would boast of his eyes because he has a faint suspicion of daylight? A man for whom the sun shines through a fog may be content for the moment to have escaped the darkness, but he does not yet enjoy the blessing of light.

79.12 Our mind will have reason to congratulate itself when, released from this darkness in which it wallows, it no longer glimpses the brightness with dim sight but takes in the full daylight, and is restored to its own heaven—when it has recovered the place it held by the lot of its birth. Its origins call it upward. And it will be there even before it is freed from this prison, once it has cast off its vices and, pure and light, has leapt up into divine thoughts.

79.13 It is a joy, dearest Lucilius, to be doing this, to be heading toward this with all our energy, even if few know it, even if no

22 Virgil described Etna in the *Aeneid* (3.570–87) and Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*; Cornelius Severus was an epic poet of Augustus' time. Lucilius was evidently writing a poem about Sicily.

one does. Glory is the shadow of virtue; it will accompany virtue even against its will. But just as a shadow sometimes goes ahead and sometimes follows or falls behind, so glory is sometimes in front of us and shows itself to view, and sometimes behind us—all the greater for coming late, once envy has withdrawn.

79.14 How long Democritus was thought to be mad! Fame barely took Socrates in. How long his country failed to recognize Cato! It rejected him, and did not understand him until it had lost him. The innocence and virtue of Rutilius would have lain hidden had he not been wronged; in being violated it shone out. Did he not thank his lot and embrace his exile? I am speaking of those whom fortune made famous while it tormented them. How many have had their progress come to light only after they were gone! How many has fame not welcomed but dug up![23]

79.15 You see how greatly Epicurus is admired, not only by the more educated but by the ignorant crowd as well. Yet he was unknown in Athens itself, near which he had lived in obscurity. And so, many years after he had outlived his friend Metrodorus, in a letter in which he had celebrated their friendship in grateful remembrance, he added at the end that amid such great blessings it had done neither him nor Metrodorus any harm that famous Greece had not only not known them but had barely heard of them.

79.16 Was he not, then, discovered after he had ceased to exist? Did his reputation not shine out? Metrodorus too admits this in one of his letters: that he and Epicurus had not become well enough known, but that after them anyone who chose to follow in the same footsteps would find a great name ready-made.

79.17 No virtue stays hidden, and to have been hidden is no loss to it. The day will come that brings it to light, though it was buried and suppressed by the spite of its own age. He who thinks only of the people of his own generation is born for few. Many thousands of years, many thousands of peoples will come after you: look to them. Even if envy has imposed silence on all who

23 Democritus was said to have been thought mad by his fellow citizens of Abdera.

live alongside you, others will come who judge without resentment and without favor. If virtue gets any reward from fame, that too does not perish. The talk of posterity, it is true, will mean nothing to us; yet even though we cannot feel it, it will honor us and throng around us.

79.18 Virtue has repaid everyone, living and dead, provided he followed it in good faith, provided he did not dress himself up and paint himself, but was the same whether he was seen by appointment or unprepared and without warning. Pretense achieves nothing. A face lightly applied from outside fools few people; truth is the same all the way through. Things that deceive have nothing solid in them. A lie is thin: it shows through, if you look carefully. Farewell.

LETTER 80: ON TRAINING THE MIND

A roar from the games leads Seneca to reflect that the mind trains more cheaply than the body, and freedom cannot be bought.

80.1 Today I have time for myself, not only through my own doing but thanks to a show that has drawn all the bores away to the ball-fight. No one will burst in, no one will interrupt my thinking, which, confident of this very fact, moves forward more boldly. The door has not kept creaking, the curtain will not be drawn back; I may go safely on my way—which is all the more necessary for one who walks by himself and follows his own path. So I do not follow my predecessors? I do, but I allow myself to discover something, to change something, and to abandon something. I am not their slave; I agree with them.[24]

80.2 Still, I spoke too soon when I promised myself silence and privacy without interruption. Listen: a huge roar is carried over from the stadium, and it does not drive me out of myself, but turns me to reflecting on this very thing. I think to myself how many people train their bodies, and how few their minds; what crowds flock to a spectacle that is not genuine but mere sport,

24 The ball-fight (Greek sphaeromachia) was a public contest, apparently a competitive ball game, though some take it to be a form of boxing.

and what emptiness surrounds the liberal arts; how feeble in mind are the men whose arms and shoulders we admire.

80.3 Above all I turn this over in my mind: if the body can be brought by training to such endurance that it takes the punches and kicks of more than one man at once, that a man can last a whole day in the blazing sun and burning dust, dripping with his own blood, how much more easily could the mind be strengthened, so as to take the blows of fortune unconquered, so as to rise again when thrown down and trampled on? The body needs many things to be strong; the mind grows from itself, feeds itself, trains itself. Athletes need a great deal of food, a great deal of drink, a great deal of oil, and, finally, long labor; virtue will come to you without equipment and without expense. Whatever can make you good, you already have with you.

80.4 What do you need in order to be good? To want to be. And what better can you want than to tear yourself away from this slavery that weighs on everyone—a slavery that even slaves of the lowest condition, born into this degradation, try by every means to shake off? They pay for their freedom with the savings they have scraped together by cheating their stomachs. Will you not long to reach freedom at any cost, you who think you were born to it?

80.5 Why look to your strongbox? Freedom cannot be bought. So the name of freedom entered in the records is an empty one: neither those who have bought it possess it, nor those who have sold it. You must give yourself this good; ask it of yourself. First free yourself from the fear of death—that is what puts the yoke on us; then from the fear of poverty.

80.6 If you want to know how little evil there is in poverty, compare the faces of the poor and the rich. The poor man laughs more often and more sincerely; no anxiety lies deep within him; even if some care befalls him, it passes like a light cloud. The cheerfulness of those called fortunate is feigned; their sadness is heavy and festering, all the heavier because at times they may

not be openly miserable, but amid sorrows that eat away their very hearts must play the part of the happy man.

80.7 I must use this illustration often, for nothing expresses more effectively this mime of human life, which assigns us parts that we play badly. The man who struts across the stage with his chest puffed out and, head thrown back, declaims: "Behold, I rule in Argos; Pelops left me his kingdom,

Where by the sea of Helle and the Ionian main
The Isthmus is hemmed in"—he is a slave; he gets five measures of grain and five denarii a month.[25]

80.8 The man who, proud and unbridled and swollen with confidence in his strength, says, "If you do not keep quiet, Menelaus, you will die by this right hand," gets a daily ration and sleeps on a patchwork rag. You can say the same of all those pampered people whom a litter carries above the heads of men and above the crowd: in every case their happiness is a mask. You will despise them once you have stripped them.

80.9 When you are going to buy a horse, you have its blanket taken off; you pull the clothes off slaves for sale, so that no physical defects stay hidden. Do you judge a man while he is all wrapped up? Slave dealers hide anything that might put a buyer off with some cosmetic trick, so buyers find the very finery suspect. If you saw a leg or an arm bandaged, you would order it bared and the body itself shown to you.

80.10 Do you see that king of Scythia or Sarmatia, adorned with the emblem on his head? If you want to assess him and know fully what he is, untie his diadem: much evil lies hidden beneath it. But why speak of others? If you want to weigh yourself, set aside your money, your house, your rank, and examine yourself within. As things are, you take other people's word for what you are. Farewell.

25 The verses come from an unknown Roman tragedy. Five measures (modii) of grain and five denarii were a slave's standard monthly ration and allowance.

Book X

On benefits (81), on the natural fear of death (82), on drunkenness (83).

LETTER 81: ON BENEFITS AND INGRATITUDE

Keep giving despite ingratitude, since gratitude is its own reward and ingratitude its own punishment.

81.1 You complain that you have run into an ungrateful man. If this is the first time, thank either your luck or your caution. But in this matter caution can do nothing except make you mean. For if you try to avoid this danger, you will not give benefits; and so, to keep them from being lost on someone else, they will be lost on you. Better that they bring no return than that they never be given. Even after a bad harvest we must sow again. Often all that was lost through the steady barrenness of unlucky soil is restored by the abundance of a single year.

81.2 To find one grateful man, it is worth trying the ungrateful as well. No one has so sure a hand in giving benefits that he is not often deceived; let them go astray, so that now and then they hit home. After a shipwreck, men try the sea again. The bankrupt does not drive the moneylender out of the forum. Life would soon grow numb in idle inactivity if we had to abandon everything that offends us. Rather, let this very experience make you more generous. For when the outcome of something is uncertain, you must try often so that it succeeds at some point.

81.3 But I have said plenty about this in the books entitled *On Benefits*. What seems to need more inquiry is a question that, I think, has not been sufficiently explained: whether someone

who helped us and later harmed us has squared the account and released us from our debt. Add this too, if you like: that he did much more harm afterward than he had done good before.[1]

81.4 If you want the strict verdict of a rigid judge, he will set the one against the other and say: "Although the injuries outweigh the benefits, still let whatever surplus of injury remains be forgiven for the sake of the benefits. He did more harm, but he did good first. So let the timing be taken into account too."

81.5 Other points are too obvious for you to need reminding that one must ask how willingly he helped and how unwillingly he harmed, since both benefits and injuries depend on intention. "I did not want to give the benefit; I was overcome by shame, or by the persistence of the man pressing me, or by hope."

81.6 Each thing is owed in the spirit in which it is given; what is weighed is not how much it is, but from what kind of will it came. Now let us set guesswork aside: the first was a benefit, and the second, which exceeded the measure of the earlier benefit, is an injury. A good man sets out the counters on both sides of the reckoning so as to cheat himself: he adds to the benefit and subtracts from the injury. The other, more lenient judge—the one I would rather be—will tell us to forget the injury and remember the kindness.

81.7 "Surely," you say, "it belongs to justice to give each his due: gratitude for a benefit, retaliation for an injury, or at least ill will." That will be true when one man has done the injury and another has given the benefit. But if it is the same man, the force of the injury is extinguished by the benefit. For a man who ought to be pardoned even if no services had come before is owed more than pardon when he does harm after benefits.

81.8 I do not set an equal value on the two. I rate a benefit higher than an injury. Not everyone who is grateful knows how to owe a benefit. Even a thoughtless, uneducated man, one of the crowd, can be grateful, especially while he is not far from

1 *On Benefits* (De Beneficiis), Seneca's treatise in seven books on giving and receiving kindnesses.

having received it; but he does not know how much he owes for it. Only the wise man knows what value to put on each thing. For the fool I was just speaking of, even if he means well, repays either less than he should, or at the wrong time, or in the wrong place. What ought to be returned, he pours out and throws away.

81.9 In some matters the precision of words is remarkable, and the usage of the old language marks certain things with very forceful expressions that teach us our duties. This, surely, is how we usually speak: "He returned thanks to him" (*gratiam rettulit*). To return (*referre*) is to bring, of your own accord, what you owe. We do not say "he paid back thanks" (*gratiam reddidit*), for people pay back when payment is demanded, and unwillingly, and anywhere at all, and through someone else. We do not say "he refunded the benefit" or "he discharged it": we have chosen no word that fits a debt.[2]

81.10 To return is to bring a thing back (*ferre*) to the person you received it from. The word means a voluntary bringing-back; whoever has returned something has dunned himself. The wise man will weigh everything within himself: how much he received, from whom, when, where, in what manner. That is why we say that no one knows how to return thanks except the wise man—just as no one but the wise man knows how to give a benefit: the man, of course, who takes more joy in giving than another does in receiving.

81.11 Someone counts this among those sayings of ours that seem to everyone contrary to expectation—the Greeks call them παράδοξα [paradoxa, paradoxes]—and says: "So no one but the wise man knows how to return thanks? Then no one else knows how to pay back what he owes to his creditor, or, when he buys something, how to pay the seller the price?" So that we do not bear all the odium, know that Epicurus says the same. Metrodorus, at any rate, says that only the wise man knows how to return thanks.

81.12 Then this same critic is astonished when we say, "Only the wise man knows how to love; only the wise man is a friend."

And yet returning thanks is part of both love and friendship—indeed it is more common and falls to more people than true friendship. Then again he is astonished that we say there is no good faith except in the wise man, as if he did not say the same himself. Or do you think a man has good faith who does not know how to return thanks?

81.13 So let them stop slandering us as though we were tossing out incredible claims, and let them understand that the wise man has the honorable things themselves, the crowd only their likenesses and images. No one knows how to return thanks except the wise man. Let the fool too return it as best he knows and as far as he can; let him lack knowledge rather than the will. Willing is not learned.

81.14 The wise man will compare everything with everything else; for the same thing becomes greater or less by time, place, and cause. Often riches poured into a house have not been able to do what a thousand denarii given at the right moment could do. It makes a great difference whether you made a gift or came to someone's rescue, whether your generosity saved a man or set him up in life. Often what is given is small, but what follows from it is great. And how great a difference do you think there is between a man who took from his own needs what he supplied, and a man who received a benefit in order to give one?

81.15 But let us not go round again over ground we have examined well enough. In this weighing of benefit against injury, the good man will indeed judge what is fairest, but he will favor the benefit; he will lean more to that side.

81.16 In matters of this kind the person concerned usually counts for most. "You did me a benefit in the case of my slave, an injury in the case of my father. You saved my son, but you took my father from me." He will go through the other points on which every comparison turns, and if the difference is tiny, he will overlook it. Even if it is large, provided it can be forgiven

2 The Latin idiom for repaying a kindness, *gratiam referre*, literally means "to bring back thanks"; Seneca plays on *ferre*, "to bring."

without violating family duty and good faith, he will let it go—that is, if the whole injury concerns himself alone.

81.17 The sum of it is this: he will be easygoing in the exchange. He will let more be charged to his account. He will be reluctant to pay off a benefit by setting an injury against it. He will lean to this side and tend this way: toward wanting to owe gratitude and wanting to return it. For anyone is mistaken who is happier to receive a benefit than to repay it. As much as the man who pays is more cheerful than the man who borrows, so much happier should the man be who frees himself from the enormous debt of a benefit received than the man who is at that moment being put under obligation.

81.18 For the ungrateful are mistaken in this too: to a creditor they pay something extra on top of the principal, but they think the use of benefits is free. Benefits too grow with delay, and the later one pays, the more must be paid. Whoever repays a benefit without interest is ungrateful. So this too will be taken into account when receipts and expenditures are compared.

81.19 We must do everything we can to be as grateful as possible. For this is a good that belongs to us, just as justice is not, as is commonly believed, something that concerns only others; a great part of it comes back to itself. Everyone who helps another has helped himself. I do not mean in the sense that the man who has been helped will want to help, and the man who has been defended will want to protect—that a good example comes full circle back to the one who sets it, just as bad examples recoil on their authors, and no pity is shown to those who suffer injuries they taught could be done by doing them. I mean that the reward of all the virtues lies in the virtues themselves. They are not practiced for a prize; the wage of a right action is to have done it.

81.20 I am grateful not so that someone else, spurred by my earlier example, will be more willing to do me a service, but so that I may do a most pleasant and most beautiful thing. I am grateful not because it pays, but because it delights me. To show you this is so: if I could be grateful only by seeming ungrateful,

if I could return a benefit only by what looked like an injury, I would press on toward the honorable course with perfect calm, straight through disgrace. No one seems to me to value virtue more highly, no one to be more devoted to it, than the man who has lost the reputation of a good man so as not to lose his conscience.

81.21 So, as I said, your gratitude does more for your own good than for the other's. What befell him was ordinary and everyday—getting back what he had given. What befell you was great, and sprang from the happiest state of the mind: having been grateful. For if wickedness makes people wretched and virtue makes them happy, and being grateful is a virtue, then you have returned something ordinary and gained something beyond price—the consciousness of gratitude, which comes only to a mind that is godlike and blessed. The opposite disposition, on the other hand, is beset by the greatest unhappiness. The ungrateful man will not become wretched later—I grant him no reprieve: he is wretched at once.

81.22 So let us avoid ingratitude, not for someone else's sake but for our own. Only the least and lightest part of wickedness spills over onto others; the worst of it and, so to speak, the densest stays at home and weighs on its owner. As our Attalus used to say: "Wickedness itself drinks the greater part of its own poison. The poison that snakes produce to destroy others, and carry without harm to themselves, is not like this one; this is most harmful to those who have it."

81.23 The ungrateful man tortures and wears himself away. He hates what he has received, because he will have to repay it, and he belittles it, while he stretches and magnifies his injuries. And what is more wretched than a man whose benefits slip from his memory while his injuries stick fast? Wisdom, on the contrary, adorns every benefit, commends it to itself, and delights in recalling it constantly.

81.24 The wicked have one pleasure, and a brief one: the moment of receiving benefits. From these the wise man draws a long and lasting joy. For what delights him is not receiving but

having received, which is immortal and constant. He disregards the things that have hurt him, and forgets them not through carelessness but by choice.

81.25 He does not turn everything for the worse or look for someone to blame for what happens; he would rather attribute people's mistakes to fortune. He does not twist words or looks; whatever happens, he lightens it by interpreting it kindly. He does not remember an offense rather than a service. As far as he can, he keeps his memory fixed on the earlier and better part, and does not change his attitude toward those who have deserved well of him unless the wrongs far outweigh the rest and the difference is plain even to someone shutting his eyes; and even then only so far as to be, after the greater injury, what he was before the benefit. For when the injury equals the benefit, some goodwill remains in the mind.

81.26 Just as a defendant is acquitted when the votes are equal, and humane feeling always tips whatever is doubtful toward the better side, so the wise man's mind, when services and wrongs are equal, will indeed stop owing, but does not stop wanting to owe; he does what people do who pay their debts after a general cancellation of debts.[3]

81.27 But no one can be grateful unless he has come to despise the things over which the crowd goes mad. If you want to return gratitude, you must be ready to go into exile, to shed your blood, to accept poverty, and often to let your very innocence be stained and exposed to undeserved rumors.

81.28 A grateful man pays no small price. Nothing do we value more dearly than a benefit while we are asking for it, nothing more cheaply once we have received it. You ask what makes us forget what we have received? The craving for what we are still to receive. We think not of what has been obtained, but of what is still to be asked for. We are drawn away from what is right by wealth, honors, power, and the other things that are dear in our opinion but cheap in their real worth.

3 Literally "after new account books" (*tabulae novae*), the Roman term for a general cancellation of debts.

81.29 We do not know how to value things; we ought to decide about them by consulting not reputation but the nature of things. These things have nothing magnificent to draw our minds to them, except that we have grown used to admiring them. For they are not praised because they are desirable; they are desired because they have been praised. And once the error of individuals has created a public error, the public error goes on to create the error of individuals.

81.30 But just as we have trusted the people about those things, let us trust the same people about this: that nothing is more honorable than a grateful spirit. All cities, and all nations, even from the most distant lands, will cry it out together. On this the good and the bad will agree.

81.31 Some will praise pleasures, others will prefer toil; some will call pain the greatest evil, others will not call it an evil at all. One will admit wealth into the supreme good; another will say it was invented as a curse on human life, and that no one is richer than the man to whom fortune can find nothing to give. Amid all this diversity of judgments, everyone will affirm to you with one voice, as they say, that gratitude must be returned to those who deserve well of us. On this so quarrelsome a crowd will agree. And yet meanwhile we repay benefits with injuries, and the first reason a man is ungrateful is that he could not be grateful enough.

81.32 Madness has gone so far that it is a most dangerous thing to confer great benefits on anyone; for since he thinks it shameful not to repay, he does not want the man he should repay to exist. Keep what you received; I do not ask it back, I do not demand it. Let it be safe to have done good. No hatred is more deadly than the one born of shame at a benefit betrayed. Farewell.

LETTER 82: ON THE FEAR OF DEATH

Clever syllogisms cannot cure the fear of death; only steady training of the mind can.

82.1 I have already stopped worrying about you. "Which of the gods," you ask, "did you take as your guarantor?" The one, of course, who deceives no one: a mind that loves what is right and good. The better part of you is safe. fortune can do you harm; what matters more, I am not afraid that you will do yourself harm. Go on the way you have begun, and settle yourself into this manner of life calmly, but not softly.

82.2 I would rather be badly off than soft. Take "badly off" here in the sense in which people usually use it: hard, rough, toilsome. We often hear the life of people who are envied praised like this: "He lives softly." What they mean is: "He is soft." For little by little the mind goes soft and slackens into the likeness of the leisure and idleness in which it lies. What then? Is it not better for a man even to grow stiff? Besides, these same pampered people fear the thing they have made their life resemble. There is a great difference between leisure and a tomb.

82.3 "What then?" you say. "Is it not better even to lie idle like that than to be whirled around in those whirlpools of duties?" Both are detestable, strain and torpor alike. I think the man who lies among perfumes is as dead as the one dragged off by the hook. Leisure without study is death—a living man's burial.[4]

82.4 Besides, what good does withdrawal do? As if the causes of our anxieties did not pursue us across the seas! What hiding place is there that the fear of death does not enter? What peaceful life is so fortified and so far removed on high that pain cannot terrify it? Wherever you hide yourself, human troubles will clamor around you. Many things outside surround us, to deceive us or to press on us; many things within seethe up in the midst of solitude.

4 The bodies of executed criminals were dragged away by a hook and thrown into the Tiber.

82.5 We must put philosophy around us—an impregnable wall that fortune, though it assails it with many siege engines, cannot cross. The mind stands on unassailable ground once it has abandoned external things, and it defends itself in its own citadel; every missile falls short beneath it. fortune does not have long arms, as we think; it seizes no one except those who cling to it.

82.6 So let us spring back from it as far as we can. Only knowledge of ourselves and of nature will achieve this. Let the mind know where it is going and where it came from, what is good for it and what is evil, what it should seek and what it should avoid, and what that reason is which distinguishes what is to be sought from what is to be shunned—the reason by which the madness of desires is tamed and the savagery of fears held in check.

82.7 Some people think they have checked these things by themselves, even without philosophy. But when some misfortune has tested them in their complacency, a belated confession is wrung from them. Big words fall away when the torturer demands their hand, when death has come closer. You could say to such a man: "It was easy to challenge troubles when they were far away. Here is pain, which you used to call bearable; here is death, against which you spoke so boldly and so often. The whips crack, the sword flashes: 'Now, Aeneas, you need courage, now a steadfast heart.'"[5]

82.8 What will make that heart steadfast is constant practice—if you train not your words but your mind, if you prepare yourself against death. Against death you will get no encouragement or lift from the man who tries to persuade you with quibbles that death is not an evil. For I would like, Lucilius, best of men, to laugh at Greek absurdities, which, much as I marvel at it, I have not yet shaken off.

82.9 Our Zeno uses this syllogism: "No evil is glorious; but death is glorious; therefore death is not an evil." Well done! I am freed from fear; after this I will not hesitate to stretch out my neck. Won't you speak more seriously, and not make a man about to die laugh? Honestly, I could not easily tell you which

5 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.261: the Sibyl to Aeneas as they enter the underworld.

was more foolish: the man who thought he could extinguish the fear of death with this argument, or the man who tried to refute it, as if it mattered.

82.10 For that man himself set up a counter-argument, born of the fact that we place death among the indifferents, which the Greeks call ἀδιάφορα [adiaphora, things that make no difference]. "Nothing indifferent," he says, "is glorious; but death is glorious; therefore death is not indifferent." You see where this argument slips in its trick: death is not glorious, but dying bravely is. And when you say, "Nothing indifferent is glorious," I grant it to you in this sense: nothing is glorious except in connection with indifferents. For example, I call indifferent—that is, neither good nor evil—illness, pain, poverty, exile, death.

82.11 None of these is glorious in itself, yet nothing is glorious without them. What is praised is not poverty, but the man whom poverty does not humble or bend. What is praised is not exile, but the man who went into exile as though he had sent himself. What is praised is not pain, but the man whom pain has forced into nothing. No one praises death, but rather the man whose death took away his breath before it could disturb his spirit.

82.12 All these things are in themselves neither honorable nor glorious; but whichever of them virtue has approached and handled, it makes honorable and glorious. They lie in the middle; what matters is whether wickedness or virtue has laid its hand on them. The very death that is glorious in Cato is instantly shameful and disgraceful in Brutus. For this is the Brutus who, when he was about to die and was looking for ways to delay death, withdrew to relieve his bowels, and when summoned to death and ordered to offer his neck, said: "I will offer it, as I hope to live!" What madness to run away when you cannot go back! "I will offer it," he said, "as I hope to live." He nearly added: "even under Antony." Here was a man who deserved to be sentenced to life![6]

82.13 But, as I had begun to say, you see that death itself is neither evil nor good. Cato used it most honorably, Brutus most

shamefully. Everything that lacked splendor acquires it when virtue is added. We call a bedroom bright; yet the same room is pitch-dark at night.

82.14 Day pours light into it, night snatches it away. So it is with the things we call indifferent and intermediate—riches, strength, beauty, honors, kingship, and on the other side death, exile, ill health, pain, and everything else we have dreaded more or less: it is wickedness or virtue that gives them the name of good or evil. A lump of metal is neither hot nor cold in itself; thrown into the furnace, it grows hot; dipped in water, it cools again. Death is honorable through what is honorable—that is, virtue and a mind that despises the worst.

82.15 Among these things we call intermediate, Lucilius, there is also a great difference. Death is not indifferent in the way that it is indifferent whether you have an even or an odd number of hairs. Death is among the things that are not evils but still have the look of evil. There is in us self-love, an inborn will to survive and preserve ourselves, and a recoil from dissolution, because it seems to snatch many goods from us and lead us away from this abundance of things we are used to. Another thing also estranges us from death: we already know what is here, but what we are about to pass over to we do not know, and we shudder at the unknown. There is, besides, a natural fear of the darkness into which death is believed to lead us.

6 Decimus Brutus, one of Caesar's assassins, was killed on Mark Antony's orders in 43 BC. His oath, *ita vivam* ("as I hope to live"), is taken literally by Seneca.

82.16 So even if death is indifferent, it is not the sort of thing that can easily be ignored. The mind must be hardened by long training to endure the sight and approach of it. Death ought to be despised more than it usually is. For we have believed many things about it. Many talented minds have competed to heighten its ill repute. They have described the prison below and a region weighed down by eternal night, where "the huge doorkeeper of Orcus,

Lying on half-gnawed bones in his bloody cave,
With endless barking terrifies the bloodless shades." Even when you have persuaded yourself that these are fables and that nothing is left for the dead to fear, another fear creeps in. For people are as afraid of being in the underworld as of being nowhere.[7]

82.17 With these things against us, poured over us by long-held belief, why should it not be glorious, and among the greatest achievements of the human mind, to endure death bravely? The mind will never rise to virtue if it believes death is an evil; it will rise if it thinks death indifferent. Nature does not allow anyone to approach with a great spirit something he judges to be evil; he will come sluggishly and hesitantly. But nothing done by someone unwilling and evasive is glorious; virtue does nothing because it must.

82.18 Add to this that nothing is done honorably unless the whole mind has devoted itself to it and been present for it, resisting it with no part of itself. But when someone approaches an evil, either from fear of worse things or in hope of goods worth the price of swallowing one evil to reach them, the judgments of the person acting are at odds. On one side is what bids him carry out his purpose; on the other, what holds him back and flees from something suspect and dangerous. So he is pulled in opposite directions; and if that happens, the glory is lost. For

7 Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.296–97 and 6.401, describing Cerberus, the watchdog of the underworld (Orcus).

virtue carries out its decisions with a mind in harmony. It does not fear what it does. "Do not yield to troubles, but go more boldly against them, / Wherever your fortune allows you."[8]

82.19 You will not go more boldly if you believe those things are evils. This belief must be rooted out of the heart; otherwise suspicion will hesitate and hold back your charge. You will be shoved toward what you ought to be attacking. Our own school, it is true, wants Zeno's argument to be considered valid, and the other, set against it, deceptive and false. I do not reduce these matters to the rules of dialectic and to those knots of a thoroughly worn-out art. I judge that that whole kind of argument should be thrown out, in which the person being questioned thinks he is being trapped and, led into an admission, answers one thing and thinks another. For the truth we should act more simply; against fear, more bravely.

82.20 I would rather untangle and weigh these very arguments they keep turning over, so as to persuade, not to impose. When a general is about to lead into battle an army that must face death for their wives and children, how does he exhort them? I give you the Fabii, taking upon a single household a war that belonged to the whole state. I show you the Spartans stationed in the very pass of Thermopylae. They hope for neither victory nor return. That place is to be their tomb.[9]

82.21 How do you exhort them to take the collapse of the whole nation on their own bodies, and to give up their lives rather than their ground? Will you say: "What is evil is not glorious; death is glorious; therefore death is not an evil"? What a rousing speech! Who, after this, would hesitate to throw himself on the enemy's blades and die where he stands? But Leonidas—how bravely he addressed them! "Comrades," he said, "eat your lunch as men who will dine in the underworld." The food did not swell in their

8 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.95–96: the Sibyl's advice to Aeneas.

9 The 306 men of the Fabian clan who waged Rome's war against Veii on their own and were wiped out at the Cremera (477 BC); Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans, who died holding the pass of Thermopylae against the Persians (480 BC).

mouths, or stick in their throats, or slip from their hands; eagerly they accepted the invitation both to lunch and to dinner.

82.22 What of that Roman commander who, sending soldiers to seize a position, when they had to make their way through a huge enemy army, addressed them thus: "Comrades, you must go to a place from which you need not return"? You see how simple and commanding virtue is. Which mortal can your deceptions make braver, which more resolute? They break the spirit, which should never be less cramped and forced into petty, thorny questions than when it is preparing for something great.[10]

82.23 It is not from three hundred but from all mortals that the fear of death must be removed. How do you teach them it is not an evil? How do you overcome the opinions of all the ages, with which infancy is steeped from the start? What help do you find for human weakness? What do you say to fire them to rush into the midst of danger? With what speech will you turn aside this universal agreement in fear, with what power of intellect the conviction of the human race straining against you? Do you construct trick words for me and string together petty syllogisms? Great monsters are struck down with great weapons.

82.24 That savage serpent in Africa, more terrifying to the Roman legions than the war itself, was attacked in vain with arrows and slings; not even Pythian Apollo could have wounded it, since its enormous bulk, as solid as its body was vast, threw back iron and whatever human hands had hurled. It was finally crushed with stones as big as millstones. And against death you throw such tiny darts? Do you meet a lion with an awl? These things you say are sharp—nothing is sharper than a beard of grain. Some things are made useless and ineffective by their very subtlety. Farewell.[11]

10 Traditionally the military tribune Quintus Caedicius (or Calpurnius Flamma) in Sicily in 258 BC, during the First Punic War.

11 The monstrous serpent of the Bagradas River, said to have been killed by the army of Regulus near Carthage in 256/255 BC. Pythian Apollo slew the giant serpent Python at Delphi.

LETTER 83: ON DRUNKENNESS

Zeno's syllogism against drunkenness fails; better to show plainly that drunkenness is voluntary madness.

83.1 You ask me to report each of my days to you—and whole days at that. You think well of me if you believe there is nothing in them I would hide. We should certainly live as though we lived in plain view, and think as though someone could look into the depths of our heart—and someone can. What good does it do to keep something secret from a human being? Nothing is closed to God. He is present in our minds and steps into the middle of our thoughts—steps in, I say, as though he ever left.

83.2 So I will do as you ask, and gladly write to tell you what I do and in what order. I will watch myself from now on, and—the most useful thing of all—review my day. What makes us so bad is this: no one looks back over his own life. We think about what we are going to do. And yet planning for the future comes from the past.

83.3 Today has been unbroken; no one has snatched any part of it from me. It has been divided entirely between my bed and my reading. The least possible was given to bodily exercise, and on that score I thank old age: exercise costs me little. The moment I have moved, I am tired. But that is the goal of exercise even for the strongest.

83.4 You want to know who my trainers are? One is enough for me: Pharius, a slave boy—a likable one, as you know, but he will be replaced. I am already looking for someone younger. He does say that the two of us are at the same crisis [Greek krisis, turning point], since we are both losing our teeth. But already I can barely keep up with him when he runs, and in a very few days I won't be able to; see what daily exercise achieves. A great gap soon opens between two people going in opposite directions. He is climbing while I am going down, and you know how much

faster the one goes than the other. I lied: at my age we don't go down, we fall.[12]

83.5 Still, you ask how today's contest turned out for us? We managed what rarely happens with runners—a hiera [a dead heat]. After this fatigue, more than exercise, I went down into cold water—which at my house means "not quite hot." I, the great psychrolutes [cold-water bather], who used to salute the Euripus on the first of January, who began the new year by jumping into the Virgo just as I began it by reading, writing and saying something—I moved my camp first to the Tiber, then to this tub, which, when I am at my bravest and everything is done honestly, is warmed by the sun. I have not far to go before a hot bath.[13]

83.6 Then dry bread and lunch without a table, after which there is no need to wash my hands. I sleep very little. You know my habit: I take the briefest sleep, a sort of short unyoking. It is enough for me to have stopped being awake. Sometimes I know I have slept; sometimes I suspect it.

83.7 Listen—the roar from the Circus is booming. My ears are struck by a sudden, universal shout. It doesn't shake my thoughts loose; it doesn't even interrupt them. I bear the din with the greatest patience. Many voices merged into one are to me like the surf, or the wind lashing a forest, and other sounds that carry no meaning.

83.8 So what have I set my mind on now? I'll tell you. A thought is left over from yesterday: what did those very wise men mean by making the proofs of the greatest matters so trivial and tangled—proofs that, even when true, look like lies?

83.9 Zeno, a very great man, the founder of this bravest and holiest of schools, wants to deter us from drunkenness. Listen, then, to how he concludes that the good man will not be drunk: "No one entrusts a secret to a drunk man; but people entrust

12 Children lose their milk teeth and old men their last ones, so boy and old man share a "turning point," the medical term for the crisis of an illness.

13 The Euripus was an ornamental channel in the Campus Martius at Rome; the Virgo (Aqua Virgo) an aqueduct famous for its cold water.

them to a good man; therefore the good man will not be drunk." Notice how it is made ridiculous when a similar syllogism is set against it. One out of many will do: "No one entrusts a secret to a sleeping man; but people entrust them to a good man; therefore the good man does not sleep."

83.10 Posidonius pleads our Zeno's case in the only way it can be pleaded—though not even so, I think, can it be won. He says "drunk" is used in two senses: one, when someone is heavy with wine and not in control of himself; the other, when he is in the habit of getting drunk and prone to this vice. Zeno, he says, meant the one who habitually gets drunk, not the one who is drunk. And no one will entrust to such a man secrets he might blurt out in his cups.

83.11 This is false. That first syllogism covers the man who is drunk, not the one who is going to be. You will grant there is a great difference between a drunk and a drunkard. A man who is drunk may be so for the first time and not have the vice, and a drunkard may often be free of drunkenness. So I take the word in its usual sense, especially since it is used by a man who professes precision and weighs his words. Besides, if Zeno meant this and wanted us to understand it, he was using the ambiguity of a word to make room for deceit—which one must never do when the truth is being sought.

83.12 But suppose that is what he meant. What follows is false: that a secret is not entrusted to a man who habitually gets drunk. Think how many soldiers, not always sober, have been given confidential orders by general, tribune and centurion. In the plot to kill Gaius Caesar—I mean the one who defeated Pompey and seized control of the state—Tillius Cimber was trusted as much as Gaius Cassius. Cassius drank water all his life; Tillius Cimber drank to excess and was a brawler besides. He joked about it himself: "Am I to bear with anyone—I, who can't bear my wine?"[14]

83.13 Let each of us now name for himself those he knows can be trusted badly with wine and well with a secret. I will relate

just one example that occurs to me, so that it isn't lost. For life must be furnished with illustrious examples. Let us not always take refuge in the ancient ones.

83.14 Lucius Piso, prefect of the city, was drunk from the moment he was first appointed. He spent the greater part of the night at dinner and slept until about the sixth hour: that was his morning. Yet he carried out his duty, on which the safety of the city depended, with the utmost diligence. The deified Augustus gave him secret instructions when he put him in command of Thrace, which he subdued; so did Tiberius, when he set out for Campania, leaving behind in the city many things that were both suspect and resented.[15]

83.15 Because Piso's drunkenness had worked out well for him, I suppose, Tiberius later made Cossus prefect of the city—a serious, self-controlled man, but steeped and sodden in wine, so much so that once, having come to the Senate straight from a dinner party, he was overcome by a sleep no one could rouse him from and had to be carried out. Yet Tiberius wrote him many things in his own hand that he judged should not be entrusted even to his own staff. Not one secret, private or public, ever slipped out of Cossus.[16]

83.16 So let us throw out these declamations: "A mind bound by drunkenness is not in its own control. As new wine bursts the very jars, and the force of its heat throws up to the top all that lies at the bottom, so when wine boils up, whatever lies hidden at the bottom is carried up and brought into the open. Men loaded with wine can't keep down their food when the wine overflows, and so they can't keep a secret either. Their own affairs and other people's—they pour it all out alike."

83.17 But though this often happens, it is just as common for us to consult on urgent matters with people we know are rather fond of drinking. So this claim, put forward as a defense of Zeno,

14 Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC; Cassius was one of the chief conspirators, and Tillius Cimber gave the signal for the attack.
15 Lucius Calpurnius Piso was prefect of the city of Rome from about AD 13 until his death in 32. The sixth hour was around noon.
16 Cossus Cornelius Lentulus, city prefect under Tiberius (emperor AD 14–37).

is false: that a secret is not given to a man who habitually gets drunk. How much better to attack drunkenness openly and set out its vices—vices that even a passable man would avoid, let alone the perfect and wise man, for whom it is enough to quench his thirst, and who, even if the cheerfulness of an evening prolonged for someone else's sake has sometimes urged him on, still stops short of drunkenness.

83.18 Whether the wise man's mind is disturbed by too much wine and does what drunks usually do, we will see later. Meanwhile, if you want to conclude that the good man ought not to get drunk, why use syllogisms? Say how shameful it is to pour into oneself more than one can hold and not to know the measure of one's own stomach; how many things drunks do that make them blush when sober; that drunkenness is nothing but voluntary madness. Stretch the drunk man's condition over several days: will you have any doubt it is insanity?

83.19 Even as it is, the madness is no less; only shorter. Cite the example of Alexander of Macedon, who ran Clitus, his dearest and most loyal friend, through at a banquet, and when he understood what he had done wanted to die—and certainly ought to have. Drunkenness both inflames and lays bare every vice; it removes the shame that stands in the way of evil undertakings. For more people keep from forbidden things out of shame at doing wrong than out of good will.[17]

83.20 Once too much wine has taken hold of the mind, whatever evil lay hidden comes to the surface. Drunkenness does not create vices; it drags them out. Then the lustful man doesn't even wait for the bedroom, but gives his desires all they ask without delay; then the shameless man flaunts his vice in public; then the insolent man restrains neither tongue nor hand. Pride swells in the arrogant, cruelty in the savage, spite in the envious. Every vice is let loose and comes forward.

83.21 Add that loss of self-awareness, the halting, slurred words, the unsteady eyes, the wandering step, the dizzy head,

17 Clitus had saved Alexander's life in battle; Alexander killed him in a drunken quarrel in 328 BC.

the ceiling itself moving as if a whirlwind were spinning the whole house round, the torments of the stomach when the wine ferments and swells the very bowels. Still, this is bearable after a fashion while the wine keeps its strength; but what about when it is spoiled by sleep, and what was drunkenness has become indigestion?

83.22 Think what disasters drunkenness has brought on whole peoples. It has handed the fiercest and most warlike nations over to their enemies; it has opened walls defended through many years of stubborn war; it has forced the most defiant peoples, who refused the yoke, under the rule of others; it has used wine to tame those unconquered in battle.

83.23 Alexander, whom I just mentioned, came through safely so many marches, so many battles, so many winters—through which he pressed on, overcoming the hardships of season and terrain—so many rivers flowing from unknown sources, so many seas; what buried him was intemperate drinking and that fatal cup of Hercules.[18]

83.24 What glory is there in holding a lot? When the prize is yours, and the others, sprawled asleep or vomiting, have refused your toasts; when you are the last survivor of the whole party; when you have beaten everyone by your magnificent virtue and no one has had such capacity for wine—you are beaten by a barrel.

83.25 Mark Antony, a great man of noble talent—what else ruined him and carried him over into foreign customs and un-Roman vices but drunkenness, and a love for Cleopatra no less than his love of wine? This made him an enemy of the state; this made him no match for his enemies; this made him cruel, when the heads of the leading men of the state were brought to him at dinner, when amid the most lavish feasts and royal luxury he identified the faces and hands of the proscribed, when, heavy with wine, he still thirsted for blood. It was intolerable that he was getting drunk while he did these things; how much more

18 Alexander died at Babylon in 323 BC; ancient writers said he fell ill after draining an enormous goblet, the "cup of Hercules," at a banquet.

intolerable that he did them in the very midst of his drunkenness![19]

83.26 Cruelty generally follows heavy drinking, for the soundness of the mind is corrupted and embittered. Just as long illnesses make people peevish and difficult, wild at the slightest offense, so continual drunkenness makes minds savage. Since they are often not themselves, the habit of madness sets in, and vices conceived in wine keep their strength even without it.

83.27 So say why the wise man ought not to get drunk. Show the ugliness and offensiveness of the thing by facts, not words. Prove—the easiest thing of all—that these so-called pleasures, once they have gone beyond measure, are punishments. For if you argue that the wise man gets drunk on a great deal of wine and yet keeps a straight course even when intoxicated, you might as well conclude that he will not die from drinking poison, nor fall asleep from taking a sleeping draught, nor, having taken hellebore, void from above and below whatever is lodged in his bowels. But if his feet are unsteady and his tongue is not steady either, what reason is there to think he is sober in part and drunk in part? Farewell.[20]

19 In the proscriptions of 43 BC, Antony and his allies outlawed their political enemies and put bounties on their heads; Cicero was among the victims.
20 Hellebore was a plant used in antiquity as a strong purge and emetic.

Books XI–XIII

On gathering ideas (84), Scipio's villa (86), on liberal studies (88).

LETTER 84: ON READING AND WRITING

Gather from many books as bees gather from flowers, then digest it all until it becomes your own.

84.1 These journeys, which shake the sluggishness out of me, are good, I think, both for my health and for my studies. You see why they help my health: since my love of literature makes me lazy and careless of my body, I get my exercise through other people's labor. Why they help my studies I will explain: I have not given up my reading at all. And reading, I believe, is necessary—first, so that I am not satisfied with myself alone; second, so that when I have learned what others have discovered, I may judge what has been found and think about what remains to be found. Reading nourishes the mind, and when it is tired from study it refreshes it—though not without study.[1]

84.2 We should neither only write nor only read. The one—I mean writing—will depress and drain our strength; the other will loosen and dilute it. We should go back and forth between them and temper one with the other, so that whatever has been gathered by reading, the pen may shape into a whole.

84.3 We should imitate the bees, as they say, which wander about and pluck the flowers suited to making honey, then arrange whatever they have brought and distribute it through

1 Seneca travels by litter, carried by slaves, so that "other people's labor" gives him exercise.

the combs, and, as our Virgil says, "pack the flowing honey / and swell the cells with sweet nectar."[2]

84.4 About the bees themselves it is not quite settled whether they draw from the flowers a juice that is honey straight away, or whether they turn what they have gathered into this flavor by a kind of mixing and by some property of their own breath. Some hold that their skill is not making honey but collecting it. They say that among the Indians honey is found on the leaves of reeds, produced either by the dew of that climate or by the sweet, rather thick sap of the reed itself. In our plants too, they say, the same property is present, but less obvious and noticeable, and an animal born for this task tracks it down and gathers it. Others think that what the bees have plucked from the tenderest parts of green and flowering plants is turned into this substance by preserving and storing—not without a kind of ferment, so to speak, by which different things fuse into one.

84.5 But so as not to be led away from the subject at hand: we too should imitate these bees. Whatever we have gathered from varied reading we should first sort out—things keep better separated—then, applying the care and resources of our own talent, blend those various samplings into a single flavor, so that even if it is clear where something came from, it is also clear that it is now something other than where it came from. This is what we see nature doing in our body without any effort of ours:

84.6 the food we have taken in, so long as it keeps its own character and floats undigested in the stomach, is a burden; but once it has been changed from what it was, then at last it passes into strength and blood. Let us do the same with what nourishes our minds: whatever we have taken in, let us not allow it to stay intact, so that it will not remain someone else's.

84.7 Let us digest it; otherwise it will go into our memory, not into our mind. Let us give it our honest assent and make it our own, so that out of many things a single thing results, as a single number results from separate ones when one calculation takes in smaller and differing sums. Let our mind do this: hide

2 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.432–33.

everything that has helped it, and show only what it has produced.

84.8 Even if you show a resemblance to someone whom admiration has fixed deep within you, I want you to resemble him as a son does, not as a portrait does: a portrait is a dead thing. "What then? Won't people see whose style you are imitating, whose way of arguing, whose epigrams?" I think that sometimes it cannot even be seen, if the likeness is true; for a true likeness stamps its own form on everything it has drawn from what served as its model, so that all of it comes together into a unity.

84.9 Don't you see how a chorus is made up of many voices? Yet a single sound comes out of them all. In it one voice is high, one low, one in between; women join the men; pipes are woven in. The individual voices are hidden; the voice of all of them is heard.

84.10 I mean the kind of chorus the old philosophers knew; at our public shows there are more singers than there used to be spectators in the theaters. When the ranks of singers fill every aisle, and the seating is ringed with trumpeters, and every kind of pipe and instrument sounds together from the stage, harmony is made out of discordant sounds. That is how I want our mind to be: let there be many arts in it, many precepts, examples from many ages, but all breathing together as one.

84.11 "How," you ask, "can this be achieved?" By constant effort —if we do nothing except at reason's urging. If you are willing to listen to reason, it will tell you: Leave at once those things everyone runs after. Leave riches: to own them is either a danger or a burden. Leave the pleasures of body and mind: they soften and weaken you. Leave ambition: it is a swollen, empty, windy thing; it has no limit; it is as anxious not to see anyone ahead of it as not to see anyone behind. It suffers from envy, and a double envy at that; and you see how wretched a man is if the one who is envied also envies.

84.12 Do you see those houses of the powerful, those thresholds noisy with the jostling of morning callers? They hold many insults for you as you enter, and more once you are inside. Pass

by those steps of the rich and those entrance halls raised on massive foundations: there you will stand not only on a precipice but on slippery ground. Instead, steer your course here, toward wisdom, and seek what it has to offer, the most tranquil and at the same time the most abundant of things.

84.13 Whatever seems to stand out in human affairs—however petty it may be, and prominent only in comparison with the very lowest—is still reached by difficult, steep paths. The road to the heights of rank is rough. But if you wish to climb this summit, to which fortune itself has submitted, you will indeed look down on everything regarded as most exalted—and yet you will reach the top over level ground. Farewell.

LETTER 85: ON MODERATE PASSIONS

Against the Peripatetic idea of moderated passions, Seneca argues that virtue alone makes a life fully happy.

85.1 I had been sparing you, and had passed over whatever knotty points remained, content to give you a sort of taste of what our school says to prove that virtue alone is enough to make the happy life complete. You tell me to include all the syllogisms, whether our own or those devised to discredit us. If I choose to do that, it will not be a letter but a book. I declare it again and again: I take no pleasure in this kind of argument. I am ashamed to go into a battle fought for gods and men armed with a cobbler's awl.

85.2 "The prudent man is also self-controlled. The self-controlled man is also steadfast. The steadfast man is untroubled. The untroubled man is free from sorrow. The man free from sorrow is happy. Therefore the prudent man is happy, and prudence is enough for the happy life."

85.3 Some Peripatetics answer this chain of reasoning by interpreting "untroubled," "steadfast" and "free from sorrow" like this: "untroubled" means someone troubled rarely and moderately, not someone never troubled. Likewise, they say, "free from sorrow" means someone not at the mercy of sorrow, nor

often or excessively given to this failing. For it denies human nature, they say, to claim that anyone's mind is immune to sorrow. The wise man is not conquered by grief, but he is touched by it. And other replies of this sort, in keeping with their school.

85.4 By this they do not remove the passions but moderate them. But how little we grant the wise man if he is braver than the weakest, more cheerful than the saddest, more restrained than the most unbridled, greater than the lowest! What if Ladas were to marvel at his own speed as he looked round at the lame and the feeble? "She could fly over the tips of the uncut grain
and never bruise the tender ears as she ran,
or make her way through the midst of the sea, borne up on the swelling wave,
and never wet her swift feet in the water." That is speed valued for itself, not praised by comparison with the slowest. What if you called a man with a slight fever healthy? A moderate illness is not good health.[3]

85.5 "In the same way," he says, "the wise man is called untroubled as certain fruits are called apyrina [seedless]—not because their seeds have no hardness at all, but because they have less." False. For in the good man I understand not a reduction of evils but freedom from them: there should be none at all, not small ones. For if there are any, they will grow, and meanwhile they will get in the way. Just as a large, complete cataract blinds the eyes, so a moderate one blurs them.

85.6 If you allow the wise man any passions, reason will be no match for them and will be swept away as if by a torrent—especially since you give him not one passion to wrestle with, but all of them. A crowd, even of moderate ones, can do more than the violence of a single great one.

85.7 He has a love of money, but a moderate one. He has ambition, but not frenzied. He has a temper, but it is easily calmed.

3 Ladas was a famous Spartan runner, an Olympic victor. The lines are Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.808–11, on the warrior maiden Camilla.

He has inconstancy, but it is less fickle and shifting. He has lust, but not insane lust. We would be better off dealing with someone who had one vice at full strength than with someone who had milder ones, but all of them.

85.8 Next, it makes no difference how great a passion is: however great, it does not know how to obey and will not take advice. Just as no animal obeys reason—not the wild, not the domestic and gentle, for their nature is deaf to persuasion—so the passions do not follow and do not listen, however small they are. Tigers and lions never shed their ferocity; sometimes they lower it, and when you least expect it, the softened savagery flares up again. Vices are never tamed in good faith.

85.9 Next, if reason prevails, the passions will not even begin; if they begin against reason's will, they will persist against its will. It is easier to stop them at the start than to control them once they surge. So this "moderation" is false and useless, to be put in the same class as saying that one should be moderately insane or moderately sick.

85.10 Only virtue has moderation; the evils of the mind do not admit it. You could more easily remove them than control them. Can anyone doubt that the vices of the human mind, once ingrained and hardened—what we call diseases—are immoderate, such as greed, cruelty, lack of self-control? Then the passions are immoderate too, for it is from them that one passes to those.

85.11 Next, if you grant any rights to sorrow, fear, desire and the other wrong impulses, they will not be in our power. Why? Because the things that provoke them are outside us. So they will grow according as the causes that stir them are greater or smaller. Fear will be greater if it sees more to terrify it, or sees it closer; desire will be sharper, the larger the prize whose hope has called it out.

85.12 If it is not in our power whether the passions exist, neither is it in our power how great they are. If you have let them begin, they will grow with their causes and will be as great as they become. Add, too, that these things, however small,

grow larger. Harmful things never keep within bounds. However slight their beginnings, diseases creep on, and sometimes the least flare-up overwhelms a sick body.

85.13 What madness it is to believe that when the beginnings of things lie outside our control, their endings lie within it! How am I strong enough to end something I was not strong enough to prevent, when it is easier to shut things out than to suppress them once admitted?

85.14 Some have drawn a distinction, saying: "The self-controlled and prudent man is calm in the disposition and state of his mind, but not in the event. For as far as the state of his mind is concerned, he is not troubled, does not grieve, does not fear; but many causes strike him from outside that bring him disturbance."

85.15 What they mean is this: he is not irascible, yet sometimes grows angry; he is not timid, yet sometimes fears—that is, he is free of the vice of fear, but not of the passion. But if this is admitted, fear, through frequent repetition, will turn into a vice, and anger, once let into the mind, will unravel that state of a mind free from anger.

85.16 Besides, if he does not despise the causes that come at him from outside, and fears anything, then when he must march bravely against weapons and fire for his country, its laws and its freedom, he will go out hesitantly and with a shrinking heart. But such a divided mind is not found in the wise man.

85.17 Besides, I think we must take care not to mix up two things that have to be proved separately. It is proved on its own that the only good is the honorable, and again, on its own, that virtue is enough for the happy life. If the only good is the honorable, everyone concedes that virtue is enough for living happily; but the converse will not be granted: if virtue alone makes one happy, it does not follow that the only good is the honorable.

85.18 Xenocrates and Speusippus think that one can become happy even by virtue alone, but that the honorable is not the only good. Epicurus too judges that whoever has virtue is happy, but that virtue itself is not enough for the happy life, because

what makes one happy is the pleasure that comes from virtue, not virtue itself. A silly distinction. For he also says that virtue never exists without pleasure. So if pleasure is always joined to it and inseparable from it, virtue alone is also enough. For it carries with it the pleasure without which it does not exist, even when it is alone.[4]

85.19 But it is absurd to say that a man will be happy even with virtue alone, yet will not be perfectly happy. I cannot see how that could be. For the happy life contains a good that is complete in itself and cannot be surpassed. If that is so, it is perfectly happy. If the life of the gods has nothing greater or better, and the happy life is divine, then it has nothing to which it can be raised any higher.

85.20 Besides, if the happy life lacks nothing, every happy life is perfect, and the same life is both happy and supremely happy. Do you doubt that the happy life is the highest good? So if it has the highest good, it is supremely happy. Just as the highest good admits no addition (for what will be above the highest?), neither does the happy life, which does not exist without the highest good. And if you bring in someone happier, you will also bring in someone far happier; you will create countless gradations of the highest good—whereas I understand the highest good as that which has no step above it.

85.21 If someone is less happy than another, it follows that he will desire the other's happier life more than his own. But the happy man prefers nothing to his own. Either alternative is incredible: that something is left over for the happy man that he would rather have than what he has, or that he does not prefer what is better than what he has. Surely the wiser he is, the more he will strain toward what is best and long to attain it by every means. But how can a man be happy who can still desire—no, who ought to?

85.22 I'll tell you where this error comes from: people don't know that the happy life is one. What places it in the best condi-

4 Speusippus and Xenocrates succeeded Plato, in turn, as heads of his Academy in the 4th century BC.

tion is its quality, not its size. So a long one and a short one are on a par, a broad one and a narrower one, one spread over many places and many parts and one gathered into one. Whoever values it by number, measure and parts robs it of what is outstanding in it. And what is outstanding in the happy life? That it is full.

85.23 The end of eating and drinking, I take it, is to be satisfied. This man eats more, that one less: what does it matter? Both are now full. This man drinks more, that one less: what does it matter? Neither is thirsty. This man lived more years, that one fewer: it makes no difference, if many years made the one as happy as few made the other. The man you call less happy is not happy; the name cannot be diminished.

85.24 "The brave man is without fear. The man without fear is without sorrow. The man without sorrow is happy." This syllogism is ours. They try to answer it like this: we are claiming as agreed something false and disputed—that the brave man is without fear. "What then?" he says. "Will the brave man not fear evils that threaten him? That would be the mark of someone out of his senses, not of a brave man. In fact," he says, "he fears very moderately, but he is not wholly beyond fear."

85.25 Those who say this are rolling back into the same position: for them, lesser vices take the place of virtues. For the man who does fear, but less often and less, is not free of wickedness; he is merely troubled by a milder form of it. "But I consider a man mad who does not dread evils that threaten him." What you say is true—if they are evils. But if he knows they are not evils, and judges baseness the only evil, he will have to face dangers calmly and scorn what others are bound to fear. Or, if it is the mark of a fool and someone out of his mind not to fear evils, then the wiser a man is, the more he will fear.

85.26 "So, in your view," he says, "the brave man will expose himself to dangers." Not at all: he will not fear them, but he will avoid them. Caution suits him; fear does not. "What then?" he says. "Will he not fear death, chains, fire, and fortune's other

weapons?" No. For he knows they are not evils, but only seem to be. He regards them all as the bugbears of human life.

85.27 Describe captivity, floggings, chains, poverty, and the mangling of limbs by disease or by violence, and whatever else you may bring up: he counts these among the terrors of the frenzied. Such things are for the timid to fear. Or do you consider something an evil that we must sometimes go to of our own accord?

85.28 You ask what evil is? Giving in to the things that are called evils, and surrendering to them one's freedom—for whose sake anything whatever must be endured. Freedom perishes unless we despise the things that put the yoke on us. They would not doubt what befits a brave man if they knew what bravery is. It is not thoughtless rashness, nor a love of danger, nor a craving for fearsome things; it is the knowledge of how to distinguish what is evil and what is not. Bravery is most careful in protecting itself, and also most patient in bearing things that have only the false appearance of evils.

85.29 "What then? If a sword is held to the brave man's neck, if one part of him after another is pierced, if he has seen his own entrails in his lap, if after an interval, so that he may feel the torture more, he is tortured again and fresh blood is drawn through his dried-up wounds—does he not fear? Will you say he does not even feel pain?" He certainly feels pain; no virtue strips a man of human feeling. But he does not fear: unconquered, he looks down on his pains from on high. You ask what spirit he has then? The spirit of people encouraging a sick friend.

85.30 "What is evil does harm. What does harm makes a man worse. Pain and poverty do not make a man worse; therefore they are not evils." "Your premise is false," he says. "It is not true that whatever does harm also makes one worse. A storm and a gale harm the helmsman, but they do not make him a worse helmsman."

85.31 Some Stoics answer this as follows: the helmsman is made worse by the storm and gale because he cannot accomplish what he set out to do or hold his course; he is not made worse in

his skill, but in his performance. To which the Peripatetic says: "Then poverty, pain and anything else of the kind will also make the wise man worse. For it will not rob him of his virtue, but it will hinder its workings."

85.32 That would be right, if the helmsman's situation were not different from the wise man's. For the wise man's aim in living his life is not, at all costs, to accomplish what he attempts, but to do everything rightly. The helmsman's aim is, at all costs, to bring his ship into port. The arts are servants: they must deliver what they promise. Wisdom is mistress and ruler. The arts serve life; wisdom commands it.

85.33 I think a different answer should be given: neither the helmsman's skill nor his exercise of that skill is made worse by any storm. The helmsman did not promise you good luck, but useful work and the knowledge of how to steer a ship. And this shows all the more clearly the more some chance force has worked against him. The man who could say, "Neptune, you will never sink this ship except on an even keel," has done all his art requires. The storm hinders not the helmsman's work, but its success.[5]

85.34 "What then?" he says. "Is the helmsman not harmed by what keeps him from reaching port, makes his efforts useless, and either drives him back or holds him fast and strips his ship?" It harms him not as helmsman but as a voyager; otherwise he is no helmsman. So far from hindering the helmsman's skill, it displays it: in calm weather, as they say, anyone is a helmsman. These things damage the vessel, not its pilot insofar as he is pilot.

85.35 The helmsman plays two roles: one he shares with everyone who has boarded the same ship—he too is a passenger; the other is his own—he is the helmsman. The storm harms him as a passenger, not as helmsman.

85.36 Besides, the helmsman's skill is a good for others: it concerns those he carries, as a doctor's concerns those he treats.

5 A proverbial boast of the ancient helmsman: whatever happens, the ship goes down steered correctly.

The wise man's good is shared: it belongs both to those he lives with and to himself. So the helmsman may perhaps be harmed, since his service, promised to others, is hindered by the storm;

85.37 but the wise man is not harmed by poverty, or by pain, or by life's other storms. For not all his work is prevented, only what concerns others. He himself is always in action, and achieves most when fortune has set itself against him. For then he is carrying out the business of wisdom itself, which we have said is a good both for others and for himself.

85.38 Moreover, he is not prevented from benefiting others even when hardships press on him. Poverty prevents him from teaching how the state should be governed; but he teaches how poverty should be handled. His work extends through his whole life. So no fortune, no circumstance shuts out the wise man's activity. For he is busy with the very thing that prevents him from doing other things. He is equipped for either kind of chance: of goods he is the master, of evils the conqueror.

85.39 He has trained himself, I say, to display virtue in prosperity as in adversity, and to look at virtue itself, not at the material it works on. So neither poverty nor pain nor anything else that turns the ignorant aside and drives them headlong holds him back. You think he is crushed by evils? He uses them.

85.40 Phidias did not know how to make statues only out of ivory; he made them out of bronze too. If you had offered him marble, or some still cheaper material, he would have made the best thing that could be made from it. So the wise man will display virtue in wealth if he may, if not, in poverty; in his own country if he can, if not, in exile; as a general if he can, if not, as a soldier; sound in body if he can, if not, disabled. Whatever fortune he receives, he will make something memorable out of it.

85.41 There are animal tamers who force the fiercest creatures, terrifying to meet, to put up with a human being; not content to have knocked out their wildness, they gentle them to the point of sharing their lodging. The trainer puts his hand into the lions' jaws; the keeper kisses his tiger; a tiny Ethiopian orders an elephant to kneel and to walk a tightrope. So the wise man is an

expert at taming evils. Pain, poverty, disgrace, prison, exile—dreadful everywhere—are tame once they reach him. Farewell.

LETTER 86: ON SCIPIO'S VILLA

Scipio's dark little bath shames modern luxury, and his estate gives a lesson in transplanting olives and vines.

86.1 I am writing this to you as I lie in the very villa of Scipio Africanus, having paid my respects to his spirit and to an altar that I suspect is the great man's tomb. As for his soul, I am persuaded that it has returned to the heaven from which it came—not because he led great armies (the deranged Cambyses had those too, and made his madness pay), but because of his remarkable restraint and devotion to his country. I judge this more admirable in him when he left his country than when he defended it. Either Scipio had to be absent from Rome, or Rome from liberty.[6]

86.2 "I have no wish," he said, "to detract in any way from the laws, or from our institutions. Let the rights of all citizens be equal. My country, enjoy the benefit I have done you—without me. I was the cause of your freedom; I will also be its proof. I am leaving, if I have grown greater than is good for you."

86.3 How can I not admire this greatness of mind, with which he withdrew into voluntary exile and relieved the state of its burden? Matters had come to the point where either liberty would wrong Scipio or Scipio would wrong liberty. Neither was right. So he gave way to the laws and retired to Liternum, meaning to lay his own exile to the state's account as surely as Hannibal's.

86.4 I saw the villa, built of squared stone; the wall enclosing a wood; towers, too, raised on either side as bulwarks for the house; a cistern hidden beneath the buildings and the greenery, big enough to supply even an army; and a cramped little bath, dark in the old style—our ancestors thought a hot bath had to be

6 Cambyses II, king of Persia (530–522 BC), notorious for his insanity.

a dim one. So I felt a great pleasure as I compared Scipio's habits with our own.

86.5 In this corner that terror of Carthage, to whom Rome owes the fact that it was captured only once, used to wash a body tired from farm work. For he kept himself fit by labor and tilled the soil with his own hands, as was the custom of the old Romans. Under this roof, so shabby, he stood; this floor, so cheap, bore his weight.[7]

86.6 But now who could bear to bathe like this? A man thinks himself poor and shabby unless his walls gleam with large and costly mirrors; unless Alexandrian marble is set off with panels of Numidian stone; unless a border of elaborate facing, patterned like a painting, runs all around them; unless the vaulted ceiling is hidden by glass; unless Thasian stone, once a rare sight even in a temple, lines the pools into which we lower bodies drained by heavy sweating; unless the water pours from silver taps.

86.7 And so far I am speaking of the plumbing of ordinary people. What about when I get to the baths of freedmen? How many statues, how many columns that hold nothing up but are placed there as ornament, for the sake of the expense! How much water tumbling down steps with a roar! We have reached such a pitch of refinement that we will not walk on anything but gems.

86.8 In this bath of Scipio's there are tiny chinks—not windows so much as slits—cut in the stone wall to let in light without weakening the fortification. But now people call baths "cockroach holes" if they are not designed to catch the sun all day long through enormous windows, if bathers cannot get a tan while they wash, if they cannot look out over fields and sea from the tub. So baths that drew crowds and admiration when they were opened are shunned and relegated to the category of antiques as soon as luxury has devised some new way to overwhelm itself.

7 Rome had been captured only once, by the Gauls, c. 390 BC; Scipio's victory kept Hannibal from repeating it.

86.9 In the old days, though, baths were few and had no decoration. Why decorate a thing that cost a quarter-penny and was invented for use, not delight? No water was poured in on top, nor did it always flow fresh as if from a hot spring; nor did people think it mattered how clear the water was in which they left their dirt.[8]

86.10 But, good gods, what a joy it is to enter those dim baths with their common plaster, knowing that Cato as aedile, or Fabius Maximus, or one of the Cornelii had tested the heat with his own hand! For even the noblest aediles performed this duty too: entering the places that received the public and insisting on cleanliness and a useful, healthy temperature—not this recently invented heat, like a blazing fire, so hot that a slave convicted of some crime ought to be bathed alive in it. It seems to me there is no longer any difference between "the bath is warm" and "the bath is on fire."[9]

86.11 How boorish some people now think Scipio, because he did not let daylight into his hot room through wide panes, because he did not stew in bright sunlight and wait to be cooked through in his bath! "Poor wretch! He didn't know how to live." He did not bathe in filtered water, but often in cloudy water, and when it rained hard, almost muddy. It made little difference to him whether he bathed like this; for he came to wash off sweat, not perfume.

86.12 What do you think some people will say now? "I don't envy Scipio; a man who bathed like that really did live in exile." In fact, if you want to know, he did not even bathe every day. For according to those who have recorded the ancient customs of the city, people washed their arms and legs daily—the parts, of course, that had gathered dirt from work—and bathed all over only on market days. Here someone will say, "Clearly they were very dirty men." What do you think they smelled of? Of soldier-

8 A quadrans, a quarter of an as, was the price of admission to a public bath.
9 Aediles were Roman magistrates responsible for public buildings, including baths. The Cornelii were Scipio's own clan; Quintus Fabius Maximus (d. 203 BC) was the general who wore Hannibal down by delay.

ing, of hard work, of manhood. Since clean baths were invented, people have become filthier.[10]

86.13 When Horace sets out to describe a man of ill repute, notorious for excessive refinement, what does he say? "Buccillus smells of scented lozenges." Show Buccillus to us now: it would be as if he smelled of goat—he would take the place of Gargonius, whom Horace set against Buccillus. It is not enough to put on perfume unless it is renewed two or three times a day, so that it does not fade on the body. And what of the fact that they boast of this scent as if it were their own?[11]

86.14 If all this seems too gloomy to you, blame the villa, where I learned from Aegialus, a most careful farmer (he is now the owner of this estate), that even an old tree can be transplanted. We old men need to learn this, since every one of us plants an olive grove for someone else. I saw it done: trees three and four years old, bearing fruit one would disdain, set in the ground.[12]

86.15 You too will be shaded by the tree that "grows slowly, to make shade for grandchildren long after," as our Virgil says—who looked not for what was most accurate, but for what was most graceful, and wanted not to teach farmers but to delight readers.[13]

86.16 To pass over everything else, I will add the one point I had to detect today: "In spring is the sowing of beans; then you too, alfalfa, / the crumbling furrows receive, and millet comes for its yearly tending." Whether these should be planted at the same time, and whether both are sown in spring, you may judge from this: it is June as I write to you, already verging on July, and on the same day I saw people harvesting beans and sowing millet.[14]

86.17 But to return to the olive grove, which I saw planted in two ways. Aegialus took the trunks of large trees, trimmed off

10 Market days (nundinae) came every eighth day.
11 Horace (65–8 BC), *Satires* 1.2.27, where the line ends "Gargonius smells of goat." The name there is usually given as Rufillus.
12 The last sentence of this section is corrupt in the manuscripts; the sense is uncertain.
13 Virgil, *Georgics* 2.58.
14 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.215–16.

their branches, cut them down to a single foot, and transplanted them with their root-stock, having lopped off the roots and left only the head from which they had hung. He dipped this in manure and lowered it into a pit, then did not just heap the earth on it but trod it down and pressed it tight.

86.18 He says there is nothing more effective than this "tamping," as he calls it: it keeps out, of course, the cold and the wind. Besides, the trunk is shaken less, and so it lets the new roots come out and grip the soil—roots which, still soft as wax and clinging precariously, even a slight shaking would tear loose. Before he buries the root-stock, he scrapes it; for new roots, he says, come out of all the wood that is laid bare. The trunk should stand no more than three or four feet above the ground; then it will be clothed in leaves right from the bottom, and a large part of it will not be dry and withered, as in old olive groves.

86.19 The second way of planting was this: he set strong branches, of not too hard a bark, such as young trees usually have, in the ground in the same fashion. These grow up a little more slowly, but since they have come on as if from a cutting, there is nothing rough or ugly about them.

86.20 This too I have seen: an old vine being transplanted from its orchard. Its fine rootlets, too, should be gathered up if possible; then the vine should be laid down more generously, so that it can put out roots from its stem as well. And I have seen vines planted not only in February but even at the end of March; they have taken hold and embraced elms not their own.

86.21 But all these trees that are, so to speak, "thick-stemmed," he says, should be helped along with water from a cistern. If that works, we have rain in our own power. I have no intention of teaching you more, in case, just as Aegialus has made me his rival, I make you mine. Farewell.

LETTER 87: ON TRAVELING LIGHT

A journey with almost nothing shows how much we carry that we do not need, and why riches are not a good.

87.1 I was shipwrecked before I boarded the ship. How it happened I won't add, in case you think this too belongs among the Stoic paradoxes—none of which is false or as surprising as it looks at first sight, as I will prove to you whenever you like, and even if you don't like. Meanwhile this journey has taught me how many superfluous things we have, and how easily we could give up by our own choice things whose loss we don't even feel when necessity has taken them away.[15]

87.2 With very few slaves—as many as one carriage could hold—and no belongings except what we carried on our persons, my friend Maximus and I are spending two days now that have been blissfully happy. The mattress lies on the ground, and I lie on the mattress. Of our two cloaks, one serves as a sheet, the other as a blanket.[16]

87.3 Nothing could be cut from lunch; it took no more than an hour to prepare, never without dried figs, never without my writing tablets. The figs serve as relish if I have bread, and as bread if I don't. Every day they make a New Year for me, which I make lucky and happy with good thoughts and greatness of mind—a mind never greater than when it has laid aside what belongs to others and has made peace for itself by fearing nothing, and wealth for itself by wanting nothing.[17]

87.4 The carriage I have been put in is a farm cart; the mules show they are alive only by walking; the muleteer goes barefoot, and not because it is summer. I can hardly bring myself to want people to think this cart is mine. A perverse embarrassment at doing the right thing still lingers, and whenever we meet some

15 Stoic paradoxes were Stoic doctrines that sound absurd to ordinary ears, such as "only the wise man is rich."
16 Probably Caesonius Maximus, a friend of Seneca exiled by Nero in AD 65.
17 Figs were a traditional New Year's gift at Rome, given with wishes for a sweet year.

more elegant party, I blush in spite of myself—which proves that the principles I approve and praise do not yet have a fixed and unshakable home in me. The man who blushes at a shabby carriage will boast of a costly one.

87.5 I have made little progress so far. I do not yet dare to display my frugality openly. I still care what travelers think. What I should have done was raise my voice against the opinions of the whole human race: "You are mad, you are wrong, you gape at superfluous things, you value no one for what is his own. When it comes to property, you are the most careful of accountants: you draw up the balance of each person to whom you are about to lend either money or favors (for you now enter these too as expenses) like this:"

87.6 "'He owns a lot of land, but he owes a lot. He has a handsome house, but bought with other people's money. No one will soon parade a finer household of slaves, but he doesn't meet his debts. If he paid his creditors, he would have nothing left.' You ought to do the same in everything else, too: find out how much each person really owns."

87.7 You think that man rich because his gold plate follows him even on the road, because he farms land in every province, because a big ledger of loans is unrolled for him, because he owns as much land near the city as he would be envied for owning in the wastes of Apulia. When you have said all that, he is poor. Why? Because he is in debt. "How much?" you ask. Everything. Unless perhaps you think it makes a difference whether one has borrowed from a man or from fortune.[18]

18 Kalendarium: the account book of loans, on which interest fell due on the Kalends (first day) of each month.

87.8 What do fattened mules all of one color have to do with it? What about those engraved carriages? "Winged-footed steeds, draped in purple and embroidered cloths;
golden collars hang down on their breasts;
decked in gold, they champ the tawny gold between their teeth." These things cannot make either the master or the mule any better.[19]

87.9 Marcus Cato the Censor—whose birth was as great a benefit to the state as Scipio's, for one waged war on our enemies, the other on our morals—used to ride a gelding, and with saddlebags on it at that, so as to carry his necessities with him. Oh, how I would love him to meet on the road now one of these dandies, with his runners and his Numidian outriders and a great cloud of dust before him! No doubt the dandy would look more elegant and better attended than Marcus Cato—the dandy who, amid all that luxurious equipment, is just now wondering whether to hire himself out for the sword or for the knife.[20]

87.10 Oh, what a glory to his age it was that a general who had celebrated a triumph, a former censor, and—what surpasses all these—a Cato, was content with a single nag, and not even the whole of it! For part of it was taken up by the baggage hanging down on either side. So would you not prefer that one horse, groomed by Cato himself, to all the fat ponies and Asturian cobs and ambling pacers?

87.11 I see there will be no end to this subject unless I make one myself. So I will fall silent here as far as these things are concerned—things that the man who first called them "impedimenta" no doubt foresaw would become what they are now. Now I want to give you a very few more of our school's syllogisms concerning virtue, which we maintain is sufficient for the happy life.[21]

87.12 "What is good makes men good. For in the art of music, too, what is good makes a musician. Chance things do not make

19 Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.277–79.
20 Men who had squandered their fortunes might sell themselves as gladiators (the sword) or as beast-fighters (the knife).

a man good. Therefore they are not goods." The Peripatetics answer this by saying that our first premise is false. "It is not the case," they say, "that men are necessarily made good by what is good. In music there is something good, such as a flute, or a string, or some instrument suited for playing; yet none of these makes a musician."[22]

87.13 Here we will reply: "You do not understand how we framed the phrase 'what is good in music.' For we do not mean what equips the musician, but what makes him one. You are going to the tools of the art, not to the art. But if there is anything good in the art of music itself, that will certainly make a musician."

87.14 I want to make this still plainer. The good in the art of music is spoken of in two ways: one by which the musician's performance is aided, the other by which his art is. The instruments—flutes, organs and strings—belong to the performance; they do not belong to the art itself. For a man is an artist even without them; he just may not be able to practice his art. This distinction is not equally twofold in the case of a human being; for the good of the man and the good of his life are one and the same.

87.15 "What can come to the most despised and the most shameful of men is not a good. But wealth comes even to the pimp and the trainer of gladiators. Therefore it is not a good." "Your premise is false," they say, "for in grammar and in the art of healing or of piloting we see goods come to the humblest people."

87.16 But those arts do not profess greatness of mind; they do not rise to the heights or look down on the gifts of chance. Virtue lifts a man up and sets him above what mortals hold dear; it neither craves too much nor fears too much the things called good or the things called evil. Chelidon, one of Cleopatra's eunuchs, owned a large fortune. Recently Natalis—a man as vile

21 Impedimenta, the Latin for "baggage," literally means "hindrances."
22 The Peripatetics counted bodily and external things, such as health and wealth, among goods.

of tongue as he was foul in his habits, whose mouth women used for the basest purposes—both inherited from many people and had many heirs. What then? Did the money make him foul, or did he defile the money? It falls to certain men the way a coin falls into a sewer.[23]

87.17 Virtue stands above all that. It is valued by its own coin. It judges none of those things good that fall to anyone at random. Medicine and navigation do not forbid themselves or their practitioners to admire such things. A man who is not a good man can still be a doctor, can be a pilot, can be a grammarian—just as well, by Hercules, as he can be a cook. The man who happens to possess something out of the ordinary you would not call an ordinary man; as each man's possessions are, so is he.

87.18 A money-box is worth what it holds—or rather, it becomes an appendage of what it holds. Who sets any value on a full purse except what the sum of money stored in it produces? The same thing happens to the owners of great fortunes: they are the fortune's appendages and accessories. Why, then, is the wise man great? Because he has a great mind. So it is true that what comes to the most despised of men is not a good.

87.19 So I will never call freedom from pain a good: the cicada has it, and so has the flea. I will not even call rest and freedom from trouble a good: what is more at leisure than a worm? Do you ask what makes a wise man? What makes a god. You must give him something divine, heavenly, magnificent. The good does not fall to everyone, nor does it tolerate just any owner.

87.20 Look: "what each region yields and what each refuses:
here crops, there grapes come up more happily;
elsewhere young trees and unbidden grass grow green.
Do you not see how Tmolus sends its saffron scents,
India its ivory, the soft Sabaeans their own incense?
But the naked Chalybes send iron."[24]

87.21 These things are allotted to different regions so that mortals would need to trade among themselves, each seeking some-

23 Nothing is known of Chelidon or Natalis beyond this passage.

thing from another in turn. That supreme good also has its own home. It does not grow where ivory grows, or where iron does. Do you ask where the supreme good resides? In the mind. And unless the mind is pure and holy, it has no room for God.

87.22 "Good does not come from evil. But riches come from greed. Therefore riches are not a good." "It is not true," they say, "that good does not arise from evil. For money arises from sacrilege and theft. So sacrilege and theft are indeed evils, but only because they produce more evil than good. For they bring gain, but with fear, anxiety, and torments of both mind and body."

87.23 Whoever says this must accept that sacrilege, just as it is an evil because it does much evil, is also in some part a good, because it does some good. What could be more monstrous than that? And yet we have thoroughly convinced ourselves that sacrilege, theft and adultery are to be counted among goods. How many people feel no shame at theft, how many boast of adultery! For petty sacrilege is punished; great sacrilege is carried in triumphal processions.

87.24 Add now that if sacrilege is in any part a good, it will also be honorable and will be called a right action; for it is our own act. No mortal's mind would accept that. Therefore goods cannot arise from evil. For if, as you say, sacrilege is evil for this one reason, that it brings much evil, then if you waive its penalties and guarantee impunity, it will be wholly good. And yet the greatest punishment of crimes lies in the crimes themselves.

87.25 You are wrong, I say, if you postpone that punishment until the executioner or the prison. Crimes are punished at once, when they are committed—no, while they are being committed. So good does not arise from evil, any more than a fig from an olive. What grows answers to its seed; goods cannot fall away from their kind. Just as the honorable does not arise from the shameful, neither does good arise from evil. For the honorable and the good are the same.

87.26 Some of our own school answer this as follows: "Let us suppose that money is a good, wherever it comes from. Even so,

money does not come from sacrilege just because it is taken by sacrilege. Understand it this way: in the same jar there is both gold and a viper. If you take the gold out of the jar, it is not, I say, because the viper is there that the jar gives me gold; it gives gold even though it also holds the viper. In the same way, gain comes from sacrilege not because sacrilege is shameful and criminal, but because it also contains gain. Just as in that jar the evil is the viper, not the gold that lies with the viper, so in sacrilege the evil is the crime, not the gain."

87.27 I disagree with them, for the two situations are completely unlike. There, I can take the gold without the viper; here, I cannot make the gain without the sacrilege. That gain is not placed beside the crime but mixed into it.

87.28 "That in pursuit of which we fall into many evils is not a good. But in pursuing riches we fall into many evils. Therefore riches are not a good." "Your premise," they say, "has two meanings. One is: in pursuing riches we fall into many evils. But we also fall into many evils while pursuing virtue. One man sailing in pursuit of learning has been shipwrecked; another has been taken captive."

87.29 "The other meaning is this: that through which we fall into evils is not a good. From this premise it will not follow that we fall into evils through riches or through pleasures; or, if we do fall into many evils through riches, then riches are not merely not a good—they are an evil. But you say only that they are not a good. Besides," they say, "you grant that riches have some use. You count them among advantages; yet by the same reasoning they will not even be an advantage, since many disadvantages come to us through them."

87.30 To this some reply: "You are wrong to blame riches for the disadvantages. Riches harm no one; each person is harmed either by his own folly or by someone else's wickedness, just as a sword kills no one: it is the weapon of the killer. Riches do not harm you just because you are harmed on account of riches."

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24 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.53–58. Tmolus is a mountain in Lydia; the Sabaeans lived in southern Arabia; the Chalybes, on the Black Sea, were famous ironworkers.

87.31 Posidonius, in my view, puts it better: he says riches are a cause of evils not because they themselves do anything, but because they spur on those who will. For there is one kind of cause, the efficient cause, which must necessarily do harm directly, and another, the antecedent cause. Riches have this antecedent cause: they puff up minds, breed arrogance, attract envy, and so derange the mind that the mere reputation for money delights us even though it will harm us.

87.32 But all goods ought to be free from blame; they are pure, they do not corrupt minds or unsettle them. They do lift and enlarge the mind, but without swelling it. Goods produce confidence; riches, audacity. Goods give greatness of mind; riches, arrogance. And arrogance is nothing but a false show of greatness.

87.33 "In that case," he says, "riches are not merely not a good; they are even an evil." They would be an evil if they did harm themselves—if, as I said, they had an efficient cause. As it is, they have an antecedent cause, and indeed one that not only spurs minds on but draws them in. For they cast over people a semblance of good that looks like the truth and that most people believe.

87.34 Virtue too has an antecedent cause: it brings on envy, for many are envied for their wisdom, many for their justice. But virtue does not have this cause from within itself, nor one that looks like the truth. On the contrary, virtue presents to people's minds a semblance far more like the truth, one that calls them to love and admiration.

87.35 Posidonius says the syllogism should be put this way: "Things that give the mind neither greatness nor confidence nor freedom from care are not goods. But riches, good health and the like do none of these things. Therefore they are not goods." He then presses this syllogism still harder in this form: "Things that give the mind neither greatness nor confidence nor freedom from care, but on the contrary create arrogance, conceit and presumption, are evils. But we are driven to these by the gifts of chance. Therefore they are not goods."

87.36 "By this reasoning," he says, "they will not even be advantages." The status of advantages is one thing, that of goods another. An advantage is what has more use than trouble. A good must be unmixed and harmless in every part. The good is not what does more benefit, but what does nothing but benefit.

87.37 Besides, advantage belongs to animals too, and to imperfect men, and to fools. So disadvantage can be mixed in with it, but it is called an advantage, judged by the greater part of itself. The good belongs to the wise man alone; it must be unimpaired.

87.38 Take heart: one knot remains for you, but a Herculean one. "Good does not come from evils. But riches come from many instances of poverty. Therefore riches are not a good." Our school does not recognize this syllogism; the Peripatetics both invent it and solve it. But Posidonius says that this sophism, bandied about in all the schools of the logicians, is refuted by Antipater as follows:[25]

87.39 "The word 'poverty' refers not to a possession but to a subtraction, or, as the ancients called it, a deprivation (the Greeks say κατὰ στέρησιν [by privation]). It does not speak of what a person has, but of what he does not have. So nothing can be filled from many empty things; riches are made by many possessions, not by many lacks. You understand poverty," he says, "otherwise than you should. For poverty is not having few things but not having many; so it gets its name not from what it has, but from what it lacks."

87.40 I could express what I mean more easily if there were a Latin word to render ἀνυπαρξία [non-possession]. Antipater assigns this to poverty; for my part, I do not see what else poverty is but the possession of little. We will look into that some time when we have plenty of leisure—what the substance of riches is, and what that of poverty. But then too we will consider whether it would not be better to soften poverty and take the haughtiness out of riches than to quarrel about words as if the facts had already been decided.

25 Antipater of Tarsus, head of the Stoic school in the 2nd century BC.

87.41 Let us imagine we have been summoned to an assembly; a law is proposed to abolish riches. Is it with these syllogisms that we will argue for it or against it? Is it with these that we will make the Roman people long for and praise poverty, the foundation and cause of their empire, and fear their own riches—make them reflect that they found these among the people they conquered; that from them bribery, handouts and riots have burst into a city once most scrupulous and most restrained; that the spoils of nations are displayed too extravagantly; that what one people has seized from all could more easily be seized by all from one? Better to argue for this, and to storm our passions, not to hem them in with quibbles. If we can, let us speak more boldly; if not, more plainly. Farewell.

LETTER 88: ON LIBERAL STUDIES

The liberal arts may prepare the mind, but only philosophy, which teaches virtue, makes it good and free.

88.1 You want to know what I think about liberal studies. I admire none of them, and count none among goods, that ends in money-making. They are wage-earning skills, useful only so far as they prepare the mind rather than detain it. We should linger over them only as long as the mind can do nothing greater; they are our apprenticeship, not our real work.[26]

88.2 You see why they are called liberal studies: because they are worthy of a free man. But in truth only one study is liberal—the one that makes a man free. That is the study of wisdom: lofty, brave, great-hearted. The rest are petty and childish. Or do you think there is any good in subjects whose teachers you see are the most disgraceful and depraved of men? We should not be learning these things; we should have learned them. Some have thought the question to ask about liberal studies is whether they make a man good. But they do not even promise this, nor do they aspire to such knowledge.

26 The "liberal studies" were the traditional education of a free Roman: grammar and literature, music, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and the like.

88.3 The grammarian busies himself with the care of language and, if he wants to range more widely, with history, and, to push his boundaries to the very limit, with poetry. Which of these paves the road to virtue? The pronunciation of syllables, precision with words, the memorizing of stories, the laws and scansion of verse? Which of these removes fear, takes away desire, reins in lust?

88.4 The question is whether these men teach virtue or not. If they do not teach it, they do not even pass it on. If they teach it, they are philosophers. Do you want to know how far they are from having set up shop to teach virtue? Look how unlike one another all their pursuits are; yet if they taught the same thing, they would be alike.

88.5 Unless perhaps they persuade you that Homer was a philosopher—though they refute this with the very passages from which they infer it. For sometimes they make him a Stoic, approving virtue alone, shunning pleasures, and refusing to depart from the honorable even at the price of immortality; sometimes an Epicurean, praising the condition of a peaceful state and a life spent among banquets and songs; sometimes a Peripatetic, introducing three kinds of goods; sometimes an Academic, saying that everything is uncertain. It is clear that none of these is in him, because all of them are; for they contradict one another. Let us grant them that Homer was a philosopher: surely he became wise before he knew any poems. So let us learn the things that made Homer wise.[27]

88.6 Indeed, for me to inquire which was older, Homer or Hesiod, is no more to the point than to know why Hecuba, though younger than Helen, aged so badly. What? Do you think, I ask, it is to the point to investigate the ages of Patroclus and Achilles?[28]

88.7 Do you ask where Ulysses wandered, rather than making sure that we do not wander forever? I have no time to hear

27 The Academics, the later followers of Plato, held that certain knowledge is impossible. The Peripatetics' three kinds of goods were those of the mind, of the body, and external ones.

whether he was tossed about between Italy and Sicily or outside the world known to us—for such a long wandering could not have taken place in so narrow a space. Storms of the mind toss us every day, and wickedness drives us into all the troubles of Ulysses. There is no lack of beauty to tempt our eyes, nor of enemies; on this side, savage monsters that delight in human blood; on that, treacherous enchantments for the ears; on another, shipwrecks and every variety of evil. Teach me this: how to love my country, my wife, my father; how to sail toward these honorable goals even when shipwrecked.

88.8 Why do you inquire whether Penelope was chaste, or whether she deceived her age? Whether she suspected that the man she saw was Ulysses before she knew it? Teach me what chastity is, how great a good lies in it, and whether it resides in the body or in the mind.

88.9 I pass on to the musician. You teach me how high and low notes harmonize with each other, how concord arises from strings that give out different sounds. Instead, bring it about that my mind is in harmony with itself and my purposes are not out of tune. You show me which modes are mournful; show me instead how not to utter a mournful cry in adversity.

88.10 The geometer teaches me to measure great estates, rather than teaching me how to measure how much is enough for a human being. He teaches me to count and lends his fingers to greed, rather than teaching me that such calculations are beside the point—that a man is no happier because his fortune wears out his accountants; indeed, how superfluous are the possessions of a man who would be most unhappy if he were forced to count up for himself how much he has.

88.11 What good is it to me to know how to divide a plot of land into parts, if I do not know how to share it with my brother? What good is it to reckon up precisely the feet in an acre and to catch even what escapes the measuring rod, if a violent neighbor who scrapes off a bit of my land makes me miserable? He

28 Hesiod (c. 700 BC), early Greek poet. The joke is that Hecuba, Troy's aged queen, was supposedly younger than Helen.

teaches me how to lose nothing from my boundaries; but I want to learn how to lose all of it cheerfully.

88.12 "I am being driven off the land of my father and grandfather," he says. What? Before your grandfather, who held that land? Can you explain whose it was—I do not say what man's, but what people's? You entered it not as its owner but as its tenant. Whose tenant are you? If things go well for you, your heir's. The jurists say that nothing public can be acquired by long use; what you hold, what you call yours, is public—indeed, it belongs to the human race.[29]

88.13 What a splendid art! You know how to measure circles, you reduce any shape you are given to a square, you state the distances between the stars; there is nothing that does not fall within your measurement. If you are an expert, measure a man's mind. Tell me how great it is, tell me how small. You know what a straight line is; what good is that to you if you do not know what is straight in life?

88.14 I come now to the man who prides himself on his knowledge of the heavens: "where Saturn's cold star withdraws itself, / into what orbits Cyllene's fire wanders in the sky." What good will it do to know this? So that I may be anxious when Saturn and Mars stand in opposition, or when Mercury sets in the evening in view of Saturn—rather than learning that wherever these bodies are, they are favorable, and cannot be changed?[30]

88.15 An unbroken order of fate and an inescapable course drives them. They return in fixed cycles and either cause or signal the outcome of all things. But if they cause whatever happens, what will knowledge of an unchangeable thing achieve? If they signal it, what does it matter to foresee what you cannot escape? Know these things or don't know them;

29 Under Roman law, uninterrupted possession for a set time (usucapio) conferred ownership, but not of public property.

30 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.336–37. "Cyllene's fire" is the planet Mercury, named for the god born on Mount Cyllene.

88.16 they will happen. "But if you watch the swift sun and the stars that follow
in their order, tomorrow's hour will never deceive you,
nor will you be caught by the snares of a cloudless night."
Ample provision has been made for me to be safe from snares.[31]

88.17 "Does tomorrow's hour never deceive me?" Yes—for what happens to someone who does not know it deceives him. I do not know what will be; I know what can be. So I will despair of nothing, and expect everything; if anything is spared me, I take it in good part. The hour deceives me if it spares me—but even so it does not deceive me. For just as I know that everything can happen, so I know too that it will not necessarily happen. I expect good fortune, but I am prepared for bad.

88.18 Here you must bear with me if I do not keep to the prescribed course. For I cannot be persuaded to admit painters into the ranks of the liberal arts, any more than sculptors or marble-workers or the other servants of luxury. Likewise I expel wrestlers, and the whole science made up of oil and mud, from these liberal studies; otherwise I would have to admit perfumers too, and cooks, and all the others who put their talents at the service of our pleasures.[32]

88.19 What, I ask you, is "liberal" about those fasting vomiters, whose bodies are fattened while their minds are starved and sluggish? Or do we believe that this is a liberal study for our young men—whom our ancestors trained to stand upright and throw the javelin, hurl the stake, ride a horse, handle arms? They taught their children nothing that had to be learned lying down. But neither these studies nor those teach or nourish virtue. For what good is it to rule a horse and check its pace with the bridle, and be carried off by utterly unbridled passions?

31 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.424–26.
32 Wrestlers oiled their bodies and fought on sanded or muddy ground.

What good is it to beat many opponents at wrestling or boxing, and be beaten by anger?[33]

88.20 "What then? Do liberal studies contribute nothing to us?" To other things, much; to virtue, nothing. After all, even those admittedly low arts that depend on the hand contribute a great deal to the equipment of life, yet they have nothing to do with virtue. "Why, then, do we educate our sons in liberal studies?" Not because they can give virtue, but because they prepare the mind to receive it. That first schooling—"letters," as the ancients called it—by which children are taught the alphabet, does not teach the liberal arts but prepares the ground for learning them soon after. In the same way the liberal arts do not lead the mind all the way to virtue; they clear the road for it.

88.21 Posidonius says there are four kinds of arts: the common and menial, the arts of entertainment, the arts of boyhood, and the liberal arts. The common arts belong to workmen; they depend on the hand and are busy with supplying life's needs, and in them there is no pretense of grace or honor.

88.22 The arts of entertainment are those aimed at the pleasure of the eyes and ears. Among these you may count the stage engineers, who devise scaffolds that rise by themselves, platforms that silently grow into the air, and other surprise transformations: things that were joined gaping apart, things that stood apart coming together of their own accord, things that stood high slowly sinking into themselves. These dazzle the eyes of the ignorant, who marvel at everything sudden because they do not know the causes.

88.23 The arts of boyhood, which have something in common with the liberal ones, are those the Greeks call ἐγκυκλίους [enkyklioi, the "circle" of general education] and we Romans call liberal. But the only truly liberal arts—or rather, to speak more accurately, the only free ones—are those whose concern is virtue.

88.24 "Just as," someone says, "one part of philosophy concerns nature, one ethics, and one reasoning, so this crowd of liberal

arts also claims a place for itself in philosophy. When we come to questions about nature, we rely on the testimony of geometry; so geometry is part of the discipline it assists."

88.25 Many things assist us without therefore being parts of us. In fact, if they were parts, they would not assist. Food assists the body, yet it is not part of it. Geometry does us some service; it is necessary to philosophy in the way the builder is necessary to geometry itself. But neither is the builder part of geometry, nor geometry part of philosophy.

88.26 Besides, each has its own boundaries. The wise man seeks and knows the causes of natural phenomena; the geometer tracks and calculates their numbers and measurements. The wise man knows the principle that holds the heavenly bodies together, what power they have and what nature; the mathematician collects their courses and returns, and the observations by which they set and rise and sometimes seem to stand still—though heavenly bodies are never allowed to stand still.

88.27 What causes a mirror to reproduce images, the wise man will know; the geometer can tell you how far the body must be from its image, and what shape of mirror gives back what sort of images. The philosopher will prove that the sun is large; how large it is, the mathematician will show, advancing by a kind of practice and exercise. But to advance at all, he must be granted certain first principles. And an art is not independent when its foundation is held on sufferance.

88.28 Philosophy asks nothing from anyone else; it raises the whole building from its own ground. Mathematics is, so to speak, a tenant: it builds on someone else's land. It takes its first principles from elsewhere, and by their favor reaches further. If it could go to the truth on its own, if it could grasp the nature of the whole universe, I would say it would contribute a great deal to our minds, which grow by dealing with heavenly things and draw something from on high. Only one thing makes the mind

33 Athletes in training alternated heavy eating, fasting and deliberate vomiting to manage their weight.

complete: an unchangeable knowledge of good and evil. And no other art inquires into good and evil.[34]

88.29 I'd like to go through the virtues one by one. Courage despises what is to be feared; it looks down on the terrors that would send our freedom under the yoke, challenges them, and breaks them. Do liberal studies strengthen this? Loyalty is the holiest good of the human heart: no necessity forces it into betrayal, no reward corrupts it. "Burn me," it says, "beat me, kill me: I will not betray. The harder pain probes for secrets, the deeper I will bury them." Can liberal studies create such spirits? Self-control governs the pleasures: some it hates and drives off, others it rations and brings back to a healthy measure, and it never approaches them for their own sake. It knows that the best measure of desires is not how much you want to take, but how much you ought to.

88.30 Humanity forbids us to be arrogant toward our fellows, forbids us to be greedy. In words, in deeds, in feelings it shows itself courteous and kind to all. It regards no one's misfortune as someone else's concern. And it loves its own good chiefly because it will be good for someone else. Do liberal studies teach these ways? No more than they teach sincerity, modesty and moderation; no more than frugality and thrift; no more than mercy, which spares another's blood as if it were its own, and knows that human beings must not be squandered by human beings.

88.31 "Since you Stoics say," someone objects, "that virtue cannot be reached without liberal studies, how can you deny that they contribute anything to virtue?" Because virtue cannot be reached without food either, yet food has nothing to do with virtue. Timber contributes nothing to a ship, though a ship can only be made of timber. There is no reason, I say, for you to think that something is brought about with the help of whatever it cannot be brought about without.

88.32 Indeed, one could even say this: that wisdom can be reached without liberal studies. For although virtue has to be

learned, it is not learned through these. Why should I suppose that someone who does not know literature will not become wise, when wisdom does not lie in literature? Wisdom teaches things, not words—and I am inclined to think a memory is more reliable when it has no support outside itself.

88.33 Wisdom is a great and spacious thing. It needs room to itself. One must learn about things divine and human, past and future, perishable and eternal, and about time. Look how many questions are asked about time alone: first, whether it is anything in its own right; next, whether anything exists before time, without time; whether time began with the world, or whether, since something existed even before the world, time existed too.

88.34 There are countless questions about the soul alone: where it comes from, what it is like, when it begins to exist, how long it exists; whether it passes from one place to another and changes lodgings, thrown into one animal form after another, or is enslaved only once and then, set free, roams through the universe; whether it is a body or not; what it will do when it stops acting through us; how it will use its freedom when it has escaped from this cage; whether it forgets its past and begins to know itself only once it has been drawn out of the body and has withdrawn on high.

88.35 Whatever part of things human and divine you take up, you will be worn out by the vast number of things to ask and to learn. If these things, so many and so great, are to find free lodging, the superfluous must be cleared out of the mind. Virtue will not squeeze itself into such cramped quarters; a great thing needs ample room. Drive everything else out; let the whole heart be free for it.

88.36 "But it is a delight to know many arts." Then let us keep only as much of them as is necessary. Do you think a man deserves blame who acquires things beyond his needs and puts a parade of costly objects on display in his house, and not the

34 Seneca uses a legal term (superficiarius) for someone who owns a building on land that belongs to another.

man who busies himself with superfluous literary furniture? Wanting to know more than is enough is a kind of intemperance.

88.37 What's more, this pursuit of the liberal arts makes people tiresome, wordy, tactless and self-satisfied—people who do not learn what is necessary precisely because they have learned what is superfluous. Didymus the grammarian wrote four thousand books. I would pity him if he had merely read so many superfluous ones. In some of these books he investigates Homer's homeland, in others the real mother of Aeneas, in others whether Anacreon was more of a lecher or a drunkard, in others whether Sappho was a prostitute, and other things you would have to unlearn if you knew them. Go on, then—tell me life isn't long![35]

88.38 And when you get to our own writers too, I will show you much that deserves the axe. This praise—"What a learned man!"—is bought at a great cost of time and a great nuisance to other people's ears. Let us be content with a more rustic title: "What a good man!"

88.39 Is that so? Am I to unroll the chronicles of every nation and inquire who first wrote poetry? Am I to calculate, without any calendars to go on, how much time lies between Orpheus and Homer? Am I to go over the silly marks with which Aristarchus stabbed other men's verses, and wear my life away on syllables? Am I to get stuck in the geometer's dust? Have I so forgotten that saving precept, "Spare your time"? Am I to know these things? And what, then, am I not to know?[36]

88.40 Apion the grammarian, who in the reign of Gaius Caesar toured all Greece like a traveling showman and was adopted under the name of Homer by every city, used to claim that Homer, after finishing both his subjects, the Odyssey and the

35 Didymus of Alexandria (1st century BC), a scholar famous for the sheer volume of his writings. Anacreon and Sappho were Greek lyric poets of the 6th and 7th centuries BC.

36 Orpheus was the legendary singer of Thrace. Aristarchus of Samothrace (2nd century BC), a scholar of Homer, marked lines he judged spurious; geometers drew their figures in sand or dust.

Iliad, added a beginning to his work in which he took in the whole Trojan War. As proof he offered the fact that Homer had deliberately placed in the first line two letters that stand for the number of his books.[37]

88.41 Such things are what a man must know who wants to know many things—and not stop to think how much time ill health takes from you, how much public business, how much private business, how much daily business, how much sleep. Measure your lifetime: it has no room for so much.

88.42 I have been speaking of the liberal studies; but how much that is superfluous the philosophers have, how much that has nothing to do with practical use! They too have stooped to distinguishing syllables and to the proper functions of conjunctions and prepositions; they have envied the grammarians, envied the geometers. Whatever was superfluous in those men's arts, they carried over into their own. The result is that they knew how to speak more carefully than how to live.

88.43 Listen to how much harm excessive subtlety does, and how hostile it is to truth. Protagoras says that on every question one can argue equally well on either side—including on this very question, whether every question can be argued on either side. Nausiphanes says that of the things that seem to exist, none exists any more than it does not exist.[38]

88.44 Parmenides says that of the things that seem to exist, none exists except the One, the universe. Zeno of Elea disposed of all the trouble by disposing of everything: he says nothing exists. The Pyrrhonists, the Megarians, the Eretrians and the Academics busy themselves with much the same things; they have introduced a new kind of knowledge: knowing nothing.[39]

37 Apion, a scholar from Alexandria; Gaius Caesar is the emperor Caligula (AD 37–41). The first two letters of the Iliad, μη, are the Greek numeral 48, the total books of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

38 Protagoras of Abdera (5th century BC), the leading Sophist. Nausiphanes (4th century BC), a follower of Democritus and a teacher of Epicurus.

39 Parmenides and his pupil Zeno of Elea (5th century BC) argued that change and plurality are illusions. The Pyrrhonists, Megarians, Eretrians and Academics were schools known for skepticism or hair-splitting logic.

88.45 Throw all these into that superfluous herd of liberal studies. The first group hands me knowledge that will do me no good; the second snatches away all hope of knowledge. It is better to know superfluous things than nothing. The first carry no torch before me to guide my sight toward the truth; the second gouge out my eyes. If I believe Protagoras, there is nothing in nature but doubt; if Nausiphanes, this one thing is certain, that nothing is certain; if Parmenides, nothing exists but the One; if Zeno, not even the One.

88.46 What, then, are we? What of all these things around us that nourish and sustain us? The whole of nature is a shadow, either empty or deceptive. I could not easily say which I am angrier with: those who wanted us to know nothing, or those who did not leave us even that—knowing nothing. Farewell.

Book XIV

On the parts of philosophy (89), on philosophy and the golden age (90), the burning of Lyons (91).

LETTER 89: ON THE PARTS OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy divides into moral, natural and rational parts, but all study must be turned toward living better.

89.1 What you want is useful, and necessary for anyone hurrying toward wisdom: to have philosophy divided and its vast body arranged into its limbs. For we are more easily led to knowledge of the whole through its parts. I only wish that, as the whole face of the universe comes into view, philosophy could present itself to us entire—a spectacle very like the universe. It would surely carry all mortals away in admiration of it, and they would abandon the things we now think great in our great ignorance of what is great. But since that cannot happen, we must look at it the way the secrets of the universe are studied.

89.2 The wise man's mind, it is true, takes in its whole mass and surveys it as swiftly as our eyes survey the sky. But for us, who have to break through the fog and whose sight gives out at close range, it is easier to be shown things one at a time, since we cannot yet take in the whole. So I will do as you ask, and divide philosophy into parts, not into scraps. It is useful to divide it, not to chop it up. For the smallest things are as hard to grasp as the largest.

89.3 The people is divided into tribes, the army into centuries. Anything that has grown large is easier to grasp if it is separated into parts—parts which, as I said, must not be countless and

tiny. Too much division has the same fault as none; anything cut up into dust is as good as jumbled.[1]

89.4 First, then, if you like, I will tell you the difference between wisdom and philosophy. Wisdom is the perfect good of the human mind. Philosophy is the love of wisdom and the striving for it. Philosophy is heading where wisdom has arrived. Where philosophy gets its name is obvious: the name itself confesses what it loves.[2]

89.5 Some have defined wisdom as the knowledge of things divine and human. Others put it this way: wisdom is knowing things divine and human and their causes. This addition seems superfluous to me, since the causes of things divine and human are part of the divine. Philosophy, too, has been defined in various ways. Some have called it the pursuit of virtue, others the pursuit of improving the mind; some have called it the quest for right reason.

89.6 One thing is more or less agreed: there is some difference between philosophy and wisdom. For what is striven for cannot be the same as what strives. Just as there is a great difference between greed and money, since the one desires and the other is desired, so there is between philosophy and wisdom. Wisdom is philosophy's result and reward. Philosophy is the traveler; wisdom is where it is going.

89.7 Wisdom is what the Greeks call σοφίαν [sophia, wisdom]. The Romans used to use this word too, just as they still use "philosophy." Our old comedies in Roman dress will prove this to you, and so will the inscription on the tomb of Dossennus: "Stranger, stop and read the sophia of Dossennus."[3]

89.8 Some of our school, although philosophy is the pursuit of virtue—virtue being what is sought and philosophy the seeker—nevertheless thought the two could not be separated. For there is no philosophy without virtue, nor virtue without philosophy.

1 The Roman citizen body was organized into voting tribes; a century was an army unit of about a hundred men.

2 The Greek philosophia means "love of wisdom."

3 The fabula togata was early Roman comedy set among Romans rather than Greeks. Dossennus was apparently an early comic writer.

Philosophy is the pursuit of virtue, but by means of virtue itself; virtue cannot exist without the pursuit of itself, nor the pursuit of virtue without virtue. It is not like trying to hit something from a distance, where the one aiming is in one place and the target in another. Nor do the roads to virtue lie outside it, as the roads leading to cities lie outside them. One reaches virtue by way of virtue. Philosophy and virtue are bound together.

89.9 The greatest authorities, and the greatest number of them, have said that philosophy has three parts: moral, natural and rational. The first puts the mind in order. The second investigates the nature of things. The third examines the proper meanings of words, their arrangement, and forms of argument, so that falsehoods do not creep in disguised as truths. But some have also been found who divide philosophy into fewer parts, and some into more.

89.10 Some of the Peripatetics added a fourth part, political philosophy, on the ground that it requires a special training of its own and deals with a different subject matter. Some added a part they call οἰκονομικήν [oikonomikē, household management], the science of running a household. Some also made a separate topic of the different ways of life. But every one of these will be found within the moral part.

89.11 The Epicureans held that philosophy has two parts, natural and moral; they got rid of the rational. Then, when the facts themselves forced them to sort out ambiguities and expose falsehoods lurking under the appearance of truth, they too brought in a rational part under another name—the topic they call "on judgment and the standard"—but they treat it as an appendage of the natural part.[4]

89.12 The Cyrenaics did away with the natural part along with the rational and were content with the moral; but they too bring back, in another way, what they remove. For they divide ethics into five parts: one on what to avoid and what to seek, a second on the passions, a third on actions, a fourth on causes, a fifth on

4 Epicurus called his theory of knowledge the Canon ("rule" or "standard").

proofs. But causes belong to the natural part, and proofs to the rational.[5]

89.13 Ariston of Chios said that the natural and rational parts were not merely superfluous but actually harmful. Even the moral part, the only one he had left, he cut down: he did away with the topic that contains advice, saying it belonged to the tutor, not the philosopher—as if the wise man were anything other than the tutor of the human race.

89.14 Since philosophy, then, is threefold, let us begin by laying out its moral part. It has been agreed to divide this, in turn, into three. The first is the examination that gives each thing its due and assesses what each is worth—supremely useful, for what is so necessary as putting a price on things? The second concerns impulse, the third actions. For the first task is to judge what each thing is worth; the second, to form an orderly and controlled impulse toward it; the third, to make your action match your impulse, so that in all these things you are in agreement with yourself.

89.15 If any of the three is missing, it throws the others into confusion as well. What good is it to have weighed everything against everything else, if your impulses run to excess? What good is it to have checked your impulses and to hold your desires in your power, if when it comes to acting you do not know the right moments, and do not know when, where and how each thing should be done? It is one thing to know the worth and price of things, another to know the right moments, another to rein in your impulses and go to action rather than rush at it. Life, then, is in harmony with itself when action does not let impulse down, and impulse is formed according to the worth of each thing, slacker or keener as that thing deserves to be pursued.

89.16 The natural part of philosophy is split in two: the corporeal and the incorporeal. Each is divided into its own grades, so to speak. The topic of bodies divides first into these: things that

5 The Cyrenaics, followers of Aristippus of Cyrene (4th century BC), held that pleasure is the good.

act, and things produced from them; and what is produced are the elements. The topic of the elements itself is, as some think, simple; as others think, it divides into matter, the cause that moves all things, and the elements.

89.17 It remains for me to divide the rational part of philosophy. All speech is either continuous or divided between one who answers and one who asks. It was agreed to call the latter διαλεκτικήν [dialektikē, dialectic], the former ῥητορικήν [rhētorikē, rhetoric]. Ῥητορική [rhetoric] attends to words, ideas and arrangement; διαλεκτική [dialectic] is divided into two parts, words and their meanings—that is, into the things said and the terms in which they are said. Then comes a vast subdivision of each. So I will stop here and "trace only the chief heights of the story"; otherwise, if I set out to make parts of the parts, this will turn into a book of problems.[6]

89.18 I do not discourage you from reading these things, Lucilius, best of men, provided that whatever you read you at once relate to conduct. Curb your habits; rouse what has gone limp in you, tighten what is slack, tame what is stubborn, harass your own desires and the public's as much as you can. And when people say, "How long—always the same thing?" reply:

89.19 "It is I who should be saying, 'How long will you keep committing the same sins?'" Do you want the remedies to stop before the vices do? I will speak all the more, and since you refuse to listen, I will persist. Medicine starts to do good at the point where a touch on the diseased body draws out pain. I will say things that will help you even against your will. Let a voice that does not flatter reach you at last; and since you will not hear the truth one by one, hear it in public.

89.20 How far will you extend the boundaries of your estates? Land that once held a whole people is too narrow for one owner. How far will you push your plowland, not content to limit your farms even to the size of provinces? Famous rivers run through private property, and great streams, the boundaries of great

6 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.342.

nations, are yours from source to mouth. Even this is too little unless you have ringed the seas with your estates, unless your bailiff reigns beyond the Adriatic, the Ionian and the Aegean, unless islands, once the homes of great leaders, are counted among your cheapest possessions. Own as widely as you like; let what was once called an empire be your farm; make yours whatever you can—there will still be more that belongs to someone else.

89.21 Now I am talking to you whose extravagance spreads as widely as the greed of those others. To you I say: how long will there be no lake overhung by the roofs of your villas? No river whose banks are not lined with your buildings? Wherever veins of hot water bubble up, new resorts of luxury will spring up there. Wherever the shore curves into a bay, you will at once lay foundations, and, not content with any ground you have not made by hand, you will push the sea back. Your houses may gleam in every place—here perched on mountains with a vast view of land and sea, there raised from the plain to the height of mountains—but for all your building, for all its size, each of you is still a single body, and a small one. What good are many bedrooms? You lie in one. Nothing is yours where you are not.

89.22 Next I turn to you whose deep and insatiable gluttony searches the seas on one side and the land on the other, hunting some creatures with hooks, some with snares, some with nets of every kind, at great effort; no animal has peace unless you are sick of it. How little of those feasts, procured through so many hands, do you taste with a mouth worn out by pleasures? How little of that game, caught at such risk, does its master, bloated and queasy, actually taste? How little of all that shellfish shipped from so far slides down that bottomless stomach? Poor wretches, don't you see that your hunger is bigger than your belly?

89.23 Say these things to others, so that while you say them you hear them yourself; write them, so that while you write them you read them, relating everything to conduct and to calming

the frenzy of the passions. Study not to know more, but to know better. Farewell.

LETTER 90: ON PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARTS

Against Posidonius, Seneca argues that philosophy did not invent the crafts; the golden age was innocent, not wise.

90.1 Who can doubt, my Lucilius, that life is the gift of the immortal gods, but living well the gift of philosophy? It would therefore be taken as certain that we owe philosophy more than the gods, as much more as a good life is a greater benefit than life—if the gods had not given us philosophy itself. They have given no one knowledge of it, but everyone the capacity for it.

90.2 For if they had made this too a common good, and we were born wise, wisdom would have lost the best thing about it: that it is not among the gifts of chance. As it is, what is precious and splendid in it is that it does not just come our way, that each person owes it to himself, that it is not asked of another. What would you find to look up to in philosophy if it were a handout?

90.3 Its one task is to discover the truth about things divine and human. Religion, reverence, justice and the whole company of the other virtues, linked and bound to one another, never leave its side. It has taught us to worship the divine and to love the human, and that power belongs to the gods, fellowship to human beings. That fellowship remained unbroken for some time, until greed tore society apart and became the cause of poverty even for those it had made richest. For people ceased to possess everything once they wanted things of their own.

90.4 But the first human beings and those born from them followed nature uncorrupted. They had one and the same man as both leader and law, entrusting themselves to the judgment of one better than themselves. For it is nature's way to place the worse under the better. Among brute herds it is the biggest or the fiercest that lead. The bull that goes before the cattle is no runt, but the one who has beaten the other males in size and muscle. The tallest elephant leads the herd. Among human

beings, the best counts as the highest. So a ruler was chosen for his mind, and those peoples were supremely happy among whom no one could be more powerful unless he was better. For a man can safely have as much power as he wants when he thinks he has power to do only what he ought.

90.5 In that age, then, which people call golden, Posidonius holds that rule was in the hands of the wise. They kept violence in check and protected the weaker from the stronger; they urged and dissuaded, and pointed out what was useful and what was not. Their foresight saw to it that their people lacked nothing, their courage warded off dangers, their generosity enriched and honored their subjects. Ruling was a duty, not a throne. No one tested how much power he had against those through whom he had come to have power; and no one had either the inclination or a reason to do wrong, since good rule met with good obedience, and the worst a king could threaten the disobedient with was that they should leave his kingdom.

90.6 But after vices crept in and kingdoms turned into tyrannies, there began to be a need for laws—and these too, at first, were introduced by the wise. Solon, who founded Athens on equal rights, was one of the seven famed for wisdom. Had Lycurgus lived in the same age, he would have joined that sacred number as the eighth. The laws of Zaleucus and Charondas are praised. These men learned the justice they would lay down for Sicily, then flourishing, and for the Greek cities of Italy not in the forum or in the halls of legal experts, but in that silent and holy retreat of Pythagoras.[7]

90.7 Up to this point I agree with Posidonius; but I would not grant that the arts life uses every day were invented by philosophy, nor would I claim for it the glory of craftsmanship. "Philosophy," he says, "taught people who were scattered, sheltering in caves or under an overhanging rock or in the trunk of a hollow tree, to build houses." But I think philosophy no more

7 Solon (6th century BC) was counted among the Seven Sages of Greece; Lycurgus was Sparta's legendary lawgiver; Zaleucus and Charondas gave laws to Greek cities in southern Italy and Sicily. Pythagoras' community was at Croton.

devised these contrivances of houses rising on houses and cities crowding on cities than it devised the fish ponds walled off so that gluttony need not face the risk of storms, and so that however fiercely the sea might rage, luxury could have its own harbors in which to fatten its separate schools of fish.

90.8 What are you saying? Philosophy taught people to have keys and bolts? What was that but giving greed the signal? Did philosophy hang these towering roofs over our heads, at such danger to those who live beneath them? As if it were not enough to take shelter under whatever came to hand, and without art or effort to find some natural refuge for oneself! Believe me, that was a happy age, before architects, before plasterers.

90.9 These things were born when luxury was already being born: cutting beams square, and splitting a timber with a saw guided by a sure hand along the marked line—"for the first men split the cleavable wood with wedges." Roofs were not yet being prepared for a dining hall to hold a banquet, nor were pines or firs carted in for that purpose in a long line of wagons, the streets trembling as they passed, so that coffered ceilings heavy with gold could hang from them. Forked poles set up at either end propped up a hut.[8]

90.10 With branches packed tight and leaves heaped up and laid on a slope, the rain, however heavy, ran off. Under such roofs they lived, but they lived free from care. Thatch once sheltered free men; slavery lives under marble and gold. On this point too I disagree with Posidonius: he judges that the craftsman's iron tools were invented by wise men.

90.11 By that reasoning he might as well say it was wise men through whom "it was found how to snare wild beasts and trick them with birdlime / and ring the great glades with hounds." For all these things were discovered by human shrewdness, not by wisdom.[9]

90.12 I also disagree that it was wise men who discovered iron and copper ores, when the earth, scorched by forest fires,

8 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.144.
9 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.139–40.

melted the veins lying near its surface and poured them out. Things like these are discovered by the kind of people who prize them.

90.13 Nor does the question seem as subtle to me as it does to Posidonius, whether the hammer or the tongs came into use first. Both were invented by someone with an active, sharp mind —not a great or lofty one—and so was everything else that has to be sought with body bent and mind fixed on the ground. The wise man lived simply. And why not? Even in our own age he wants to travel as light as possible.

90.14 How, I ask you, can you admire both Diogenes and Daedalus? Which of the two seems wise to you? The one who devised the saw, or the one who, seeing a boy drink water from his cupped hand, promptly took the cup out of his bag and broke it, scolding himself: "What a fool I've been, carrying superfluous baggage all this time!"—the man who curled up in a tub and slept in it?[10]

90.15 Today, then, which do you think the wiser: the man who invents a way to spray saffron perfume to an immense height from hidden pipes, who fills or drains channels with a sudden rush of water, and who fits together revolving dining-room ceilings so that one scene follows another and the ceiling changes as often as the courses—or the man who shows others and himself that nature has imposed nothing harsh or difficult on us; that we can live without the marble-cutter and the builder; that we can be clothed without the silk trade; that we can have everything we need for our use if we are content with what the earth has put on its surface? If the human race were willing to listen to him, it would know that a cook is as unnecessary to it as a soldier.

90.16 Those men were wise, or at least like the wise, for whom caring for the body was a simple matter. Necessities come with simple effort; it is for luxuries that we toil. You will not need craftsmen: follow nature. She did not want us to be distracted.

10 Daedalus, the legendary craftsman of Greek myth, was credited with inventing the saw and other tools. Diogenes famously lived in a large storage jar.

Whatever she compelled us to, she equipped us for. "Cold is unbearable to a naked body." What then? Can't the skins of wild beasts and other animals protect us from cold amply enough? Don't most peoples cover their bodies with tree bark? Aren't birds' feathers sewn together to be worn as clothing? Don't a large part of the Scythians even today dress in the pelts of foxes and mice, which are soft to the touch and impervious to the winds?[11]

90.17 "But we need thicker shade to keep off the heat of the summer sun." What then? Hasn't the passage of ages provided many places that, hollowed out by the ravages of time or some other chance, have receded into caves? What then? Didn't people weave wicker hurdles by hand, smear them with cheap mud, then cover the top with straw and other things from the woods, and, as the rain ran off the slopes, pass the winter free from care? What then? Don't the peoples of the Syrtes live in pits dug in the ground—they and others for whom, because of the sun's fierce heat, no covering is solid enough to keep out the heat except the parched earth itself?

90.18 Nature was not so hostile as to give all other animals an easy way of life and make man alone unable to live without so many arts. None of these was imposed on us by her; nothing has to be painfully sought for life to go on. We were born into a world made ready for us; we have made everything hard for ourselves out of disdain for what is easy. Shelter, clothing, warmth for our bodies, food—the things that have now become an enormous business—were within reach, free, and to be had with little effort. For the measure of everything matched our need; it is we who have made these things costly, marvelous, and obtainable only through great and numerous arts.

90.19 Nature is sufficient for what she demands. Luxury has deserted nature; every day it spurs itself on, it has been growing for so many centuries, and it lends its ingenuity to the vices. First it began to crave superfluous things, then things contrary to nature; in the end it made the mind over to the body and

11 The Scythians were nomadic peoples north of the Black Sea.

ordered it to serve the body's lusts. All those arts that make a city bustle or clamor are doing the body's business—the body to which everything was once supplied as to a slave, and is now provided as to a master. Hence the workshops of weavers and of craftsmen, hence the aromas of cooks, hence the softness of those who teach soft movements of the body and soft, languishing songs. For that natural measure, which limited desires to what was needed, has gone; now wanting just what is enough is a mark of boorishness and misery.

90.20 It is incredible, my Lucilius, how easily the charm of eloquence leads even great men away from the truth. Look at Posidonius—in my opinion one of those who have contributed most to philosophy. He sets out to describe, first, how some threads are twisted and others drawn out from the soft, loose mass of wool; then how the loom stretches the warp straight with hanging weights; how the inserted weft, which softens the hardness of the warp pressing on it from both sides, is forced by the batten to close up and join. And he said that even the art of weaving was invented by wise men, forgetting that the more refined kind was discovered later, in which "the web is tied to the beam; the reed parts the warp;

> the weft is shot through the middle by pointed shuttles,
> and the notched teeth of the broad comb beat it home."

What if he had had the chance to see the fabrics of our own day, which make clothing that hides nothing—clothing that offers, I won't say no protection to the body, but none to modesty?[12]

90.21 Then he moves on to farmers, and describes no less eloquently the ground broken by the plow and plowed a second time, so that the loosened soil may open more easily to roots; then the sowing of seed and the weeding by hand, so that noth-

12 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.55–57, from the weaving contest between Minerva and Arachne.

ing wild may spring up by chance and kill the crop. This too, he says, is the work of wise men—as if even now farmers were not discovering many new ways to increase fertility.

90.22 Then, not content with these arts, he sends the wise man down to the mill. He tells how the wise man, imitating nature, began to make bread. "Grain taken into the mouth," he says, "is crushed by the hard teeth meeting one another, and whatever falls away is brought back by the tongue to the same teeth; then it is mixed, so that it can pass more easily down the slippery throat. When it reaches the stomach, it is digested by the stomach's even heat, and only then is it absorbed by the body."

90.23 "Someone, following this model, placed one rough stone on another, in imitation of the teeth, one row of which stays still and waits for the movement of the other. Then the grain is crushed by the rubbing of the two and brought back again and again, until by repeated grinding it is reduced to fine particles. Then he sprinkled the flour with water, worked it into submission by constant kneading, and shaped a loaf, which at first was baked in hot ashes or a heated earthenware pot; later ovens were gradually discovered, and other kinds whose heat could be controlled at will." He came close to saying that shoemaking too was invented by the wise.

90.24 All these things were devised by reason, yes—but not by right reason. They are the inventions of man, not of the wise man—just as surely, by Hercules, as ships, by which we cross rivers and seas, with sails rigged to catch the force of the winds and rudders added at the stern to turn the vessel's course this way and that. The model was taken from fish, which steer by their tails and, with a slight movement of them to either side, turn their speed.

90.25 "The wise man," he says, "did invent all these things; but finding them too trivial to handle himself, he handed them over to humbler assistants." Not at all: they were devised by none other than the people who still look after them today. Some things we know appeared only within our own memory: the use of windows that let in clear light through transparent panes;

raised floors in baths and pipes set into the walls to spread heat that warms top and bottom evenly. Why should I mention the marble with which temples and houses gleam? Or the masses of stone shaped round and smooth, on which we rest colonnades and buildings big enough to hold whole populations? Or shorthand, by which a speech is taken down however fast it is delivered, and the hand keeps pace with the tongue? These are the inventions of the lowliest slaves;

90.26 wisdom sits higher up. It does not train hands; it is the teacher of minds. Do you want to know what it has unearthed, what it has achieved? Not graceful movements of the body, nor the varied melodies of trumpet and flute, in which breath, taken in and either released or passed through, is shaped into sound. It does not devise weapons or walls or anything useful in war; it favors peace and calls the human race to harmony.

90.27 It is not, I say, a maker of tools for everyday needs. Why do you assign it such petty things? What you are looking at is the craftsman of life. It does hold the other arts under its rule, for whoever is served by life is also served by what adorns life. But its goal is the happy state: it leads there, it opens the roads there.

90.28 It shows what things are evils and what only seem so; it strips minds of vanity; it gives a greatness that is solid, and deflates the greatness that is puffed up and showy out of emptiness; it does not let us ignore the difference between what is great and what is swollen; it imparts knowledge of the whole of nature and of itself. It makes clear what the gods are and what they are like; what the gods of the underworld are, what the household gods and guardian spirits; what the souls are that have been made to endure as divinities of the second rank—where they dwell, what they do, what they can do, what they want. These are its rites of initiation, which throw open not some local shrine but the vast temple of all the gods, the universe itself, whose true images and true faces it has brought out for our minds to see. For the eye is too dull for spectacles so great.

90.29 Then it goes back to the beginnings of things, to the eternal reason implanted in the whole, and to the power of all the seeds that gives each thing its own particular shape. Then it began to inquire into the soul: where it comes from, where it resides, how long it lasts, into how many parts it is divided. Then it turned from bodies to incorporeal things and examined truth and its proofs, and after that how the ambiguities of life and of speech might be resolved—for in both, falsehoods are mixed with truths.

90.30 The wise man did not, I say, withdraw himself from these arts, as Posidonius thinks; he never went near them at all. For he would have judged nothing worth inventing that he was not going to judge worth using forever. He would not take up what he would have to lay down.

90.31 "Anacharsis," he says, "invented the potter's wheel, whose turning shapes vessels." Then, because the potter's wheel is found in Homer, they would rather have the verses thought spurious than the story. For my part, I do not maintain that Anacharsis was the originator of this; and if he was, then a wise man did invent it, but not as a wise man—just as wise men do many things insofar as they are human, not insofar as they are wise. Suppose the wise man were extremely fast: he will outrun everyone in a race because he is fast, not because he is wise. I would like to show Posidonius some glassblower who with his breath shapes glass into a great many forms that even a careful hand could scarcely fashion. These things were discovered after we stopped discovering wisdom.[13]

90.32 "Democritus," he says, "is said to have invented the arch, in which the curve of stones leaning gradually inward is bound together by a keystone." I will say this is false; for there must have been bridges and gateways before Democritus, and their tops are generally curved.

90.33 Moreover, it has slipped your minds that this same Democritus discovered how ivory could be softened, and how a

13 Anacharsis was a Scythian prince of the 6th century BC, counted among the sages of Greek tradition; the potter's wheel appears in Homer, *Iliad* 18.600.

pebble, when boiled, could be turned into an emerald—the process by which, even today, stones found suitable for it are colored. The wise man may have discovered these things, but he did not discover them because he was wise; for he does many things that we see done by the most foolish, either equally well or with greater skill and practice.

90.34 You ask what the wise man has investigated, what he has brought to light? First, truth and nature—which he did not follow as the other animals do, with eyes too slow for things divine. Next, the law of life, which he brought into line with the universe; and he taught us not merely to know the gods but to follow them, and to accept whatever befalls us exactly as if it were a command. He forbade us to obey false opinions, and he weighed what each thing is worth by a true valuation. He condemned pleasures mixed with regret, he praised the goods that will always satisfy, and he made it plain that the happiest person is the one who has no need of happiness, and the most powerful the one who has himself in his power.

90.35 I am not speaking of the philosophy that has set the citizen outside his country and the gods outside the world, and has handed virtue over to pleasure, but of the philosophy that counts nothing good except what is honorable, that cannot be won over by the gifts either of men or of fortune, whose value lies in this: that no price can buy it. That this philosophy existed in that rough age, when crafts were still lacking and useful things were learned by use itself, I do not believe.[14]

90.36 Then came the fortunate times, when the gifts of nature lay open to all, for everyone to use in common—before greed and luxury split mortals apart and sent them running from partnership to plunder. Those men were not wise men, even if they did what wise men ought to do.

14 The first is Epicureanism, which advised withdrawal from public life and placed the gods in the spaces between worlds, untouched by ours.

90.37 No one could admire any other condition of the human race more; and if a god allowed someone to shape earthly things and give nations their customs, he would approve nothing other than what is recorded of those people, among whom "No farmers tamed the fields;
Even to mark the plain or share it out with boundaries
Was wrong; they sought the common store, and earth herself
Bore all things more freely, with no one asking."[15]

90.38 What race of humans was happier than that? They enjoyed nature in common; she was enough, as both parent and guardian of all; this was the secure possession of wealth held in common. Why should I not call that the richest race of mortals, among whom you could not find a single poor man? Greed burst in upon this excellent arrangement, and in its desire to set something aside and make it its own, it made everything belong to others, and shrank from the boundless to the cramped. Greed brought in poverty, and by craving much, it lost everything.

90.39 So although it now tries to recover what it lost, although it adds field to field, driving out a neighbor by money or by force, although it stretches its estates to the size of provinces and calls it ownership when one can make a long journey through one's own land—no extending of boundaries will bring us back to where we started. When we have done everything, we will have much; we used to have everything.

90.40 The earth itself was more fertile when unworked, and generous to the needs of peoples who did not plunder it. Whatever nature had produced, it was no less a pleasure to show one's find to another than to have found it. No one could have too much or too little; things were divided among people in harmony. The stronger had not yet laid hands on the weaker; the greedy man had not yet, by hiding away what lay there for his own use, shut another out even from necessities. Each cared for the other as much as for himself.

15 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.125–28, on the age before Jupiter.

90.41 Weapons lay idle, and hands unstained by human blood had turned all their hostility against wild beasts. Those whom some dense grove had shielded from the sun, who lived under the leaves, safe from the fury of winter or rain in some humble shelter, passed peaceful nights without a sigh. Anxiety tosses us in our purple and rouses us with the sharpest goads; but how soft was the sleep the hard earth gave them!

90.42 No carved, paneled ceilings hung over them; as they lay in the open, the stars glided above them, and the heavens—the glorious spectacle of the nights—wheeled headlong, carrying out so vast a work in silence. By day as by night the view of this most beautiful dwelling lay open to them. They loved to watch the constellations sinking from the middle of the sky, and others rising again from hiding.

90.43 Why would it not delight them to wander among wonders scattered so widely? But you tremble at every creak of your roofs, and if something cracks among your paintings, you run off in terror. They did not have houses the size of cities. Air and a free breeze blowing through open spaces, the light shade of a rock or a tree, crystal-clear springs and streams not spoiled by works or pipes or any forced channel but running of their own accord, meadows lovely without art—and among these a country dwelling, finished by a country hand. This was a home in accordance with nature, in which one was glad to live, fearing neither it nor for it. Now our houses are a large part of our fear.

90.44 But however excellent their life and free of deceit, they were not wise men, since that name now belongs to the highest achievement. Still, I would not deny that they were men of lofty spirit and, so to speak, fresh from the gods. For there is no doubt that the world, not yet worn out, brought forth better things. But while all of them had a sturdier nature, more ready for toil, their minds were not all brought to perfection. For nature does not give virtue: becoming good is an art.

90.45 They did not seek gold or silver or translucent gems in the lowest dregs of the earth, and they still spared even the speechless animals—so far were they from a man killing a man, not in

anger, not in fear, but merely to watch. They did not yet have embroidered clothing; gold was not yet woven—it was not even mined yet.

90.46 What follows, then? They were innocent through ignorance. But it makes a great difference whether someone does not want to do wrong or does not know how. They lacked justice, they lacked prudence, they lacked self-control and courage. Their rough life had certain things resembling all these virtues; but virtue does not come to a mind unless it has been trained and taught and brought to its peak by constant practice. We are born for this, but without it; and even in the best people, before you educate them, there is the material for virtue, not virtue. Farewell.

LETTER 91: ON THE BURNING OF LYON

The overnight destruction of Lugdunum shows that anything can happen, so the mind must rehearse every misfortune.

91.1 Our friend Liberalis is sad just now at the news of the fire that has burned down the colony of Lugdunum. This disaster could move anyone, let alone a man who loves his native city so dearly. It has made him look for the firmness of mind that he had trained, of course, against the things he thought might be feared. But I am not surprised if this evil, so unexpected and almost unheard of, was not feared, since there was no precedent for it. Fire has damaged many cities; it has wiped out none. For even where an enemy's hand has hurled fire onto the roofs, it dies down in many places, and although it is rekindled again and again, it rarely devours everything so completely as to leave nothing for the sword. Earthquakes, too, have hardly ever been so severe and destructive as to overturn whole towns. In short, no fire has ever blazed so fiercely against any place that nothing was left for a second fire.[16]

91.2 So many magnificent buildings, any one of which could have made a city famous, were leveled in a single night, and in

the midst of so deep a peace something happened greater than could be feared even in war. Who would believe it? With everything at rest, when security has spread throughout the whole world, Lugdunum, once shown off as the pride of Gaul, is searched for in vain. To everyone she has struck as a community, fortune has allowed time to fear what they were about to suffer. No great thing has fallen without some interval before its ruin; here, a single night stood between the greatest of cities and none at all. In short, I am taking longer to tell you it perished than it took to perish.

91.3 All this bends the feelings of our Liberalis, which stand firm and upright against his own troubles. Nor is he shaken without reason. The unexpected weighs more heavily; novelty adds weight to disasters, and every mortal grieves more at what has also astonished him.

91.4 That is why nothing should take us by surprise. The mind must be sent ahead to meet everything, and we must think not of whatever usually happens but of whatever can happen. For what is there that fortune, when she wishes, cannot pull down at the height of its prosperity? What does she not attack and shake all the more, the more splendidly it shines? What is steep or difficult for her?

91.5 She does not always charge by one road, nor even with all her force. Now she calls our own hands against us; now, content with her own strength, she finds dangers that need no agent. No time is exempt; in the midst of our very pleasures the causes of pain spring up. War rises in the middle of peace, and the supports of our security turn into sources of fear; a friend becomes an enemy, an ally a foe. Summer calm is driven into sudden storms worse than winter's. With no enemy we suffer what enemies inflict, and if other causes of disaster are lacking, excessive good fortune finds them for itself. Disease attacks the most temperate, consumption the strongest, punishment the most innocent, turmoil the most secluded. Chance picks some

16 Aebutius Liberalis, Seneca's friend and the dedicatee of his *On Benefits*, came from Lugdunum (modern Lyon), which burned in AD 64 or 65.

new way to bring its strength to bear on us, as though we had forgotten it.

91.6 Whatever a long succession of years has built with much labor and much kindness from the gods, a single day scatters and destroys. Whoever said "a day" gave hurrying evils a long delay: an hour, an instant of time, is enough to overthrow empires. It would be some consolation for our weakness and for our affairs if all things perished as slowly as they come into being; as it is, growth proceeds slowly, while ruin comes in a rush.

91.7 Nothing, private or public, is stable; the fates of men and of cities alike keep turning. Terror arises amid the calmest times, and with no disturbing cause from outside, evils burst out from where they were least expected. Kingdoms that stood firm through civil wars and foreign ones fall with no one pushing. How few cities have carried their prosperity to the end! So we must think about everything, and strengthen the mind against whatever can happen.

91.8 Rehearse in your mind exile, the torments of disease, wars, shipwrecks. Chance can snatch you from your country, or your country from you; it can drive you into the wilderness; this very place where crowds choke the streets can become a wilderness. Let us set the whole condition of the human lot before our eyes, and let us anticipate in our minds not what often happens but the worst that can happen, if we do not want to be crushed, or stunned by the unusual as if it were unheard of. Fortune must be imagined in full.

91.9 How often have the cities of Asia, how often those of Achaea, fallen in a single tremor? How many towns in Syria, how many in Macedonia, have been swallowed up? How often has this disaster laid Cyprus waste? How often has Paphos collapsed upon itself? We have often heard news of whole cities destroyed—and we, among whom such news so often arrives, what fraction of the whole are we? So let us rise up against the

blows of chance, and whatever happens, let us know that it is not as great as rumor makes it out to be.[17]

91.10 A city has burned—wealthy, the jewel of the provinces, set among them and yet standing apart, built on a single hill, and that not a very broad one. But of all those cities you now hear called magnificent and famous, time will erase even the traces. Do you not see how in Achaea the very foundations of the most famous cities have already worn away, and nothing survives to show that they even existed?

91.11 It is not only what hands have made that decays, nor only what human skill and effort have built that time overturns. Mountain ridges melt away, whole regions have sunk, places that stood far out of sight of the sea have been covered by the waves. The vast force of fire has eaten away the hills through which it used to glow, and brought down to low ground peaks once very high, the comfort and lookout of sailors. The works of nature herself are battered; and so we ought to bear the destruction of cities calmly.

91.12 They stand only to fall. This end awaits them all: whether some force within, and winds violently blocked in their passage, shake off the weight that holds them down; or the rush of torrents, more violent for being hidden, bursts through what stands in its way; or the violence of flames breaks apart the framework of the ground; or age, from which nothing is safe, takes them by storm little by little; or an unhealthy climate drains away their peoples and neglect corrupts the deserted places. It would take too long to list all the roads of fate. This one thing I know: all the works of mortals are condemned to mortality. We live among things that will perish.

91.13 These, then, and consolations like them, I offer our Liberalis, who burns with an incredible love for his native city—which was perhaps consumed so that it might rise again better. Disaster has often made room for greater fortune. Many things have fallen so as to rise higher. Timagenes, who resented Rome's

17 Asia and Achaea were Roman provinces (western Turkey and Greece); Paphos, a city on Cyprus, was repeatedly wrecked by earthquakes.

prosperity, used to say that fires in Rome grieved him for one reason only: he knew that better buildings would rise than had burned.[18]

91.14 In this city, too, it is likely that everyone will compete to restore it greater and more secure than what they lost. May it last long, and be founded under better auspices for a longer age! For this colony is in only the hundredth year since its founding —not even the utmost limit of a human life. Founded by Plancus, it grew to this great population thanks to its favorable location; and yet how many terrible disasters it has suffered within the span of one human old age![19]

91.15 So let the mind be trained to understand and endure its lot, and let it know that there is nothing fortune does not dare; that she has the same rights against empires as against emperors, the same power against cities as against people. None of this should make us indignant. We have entered a world in which life is lived by these laws. If you like them, obey. If you don't, leave by whatever way you wish. Be indignant if some injustice has been decreed against you in particular; but if this necessity binds the highest and the lowest alike, make your peace with fate, by which all things are dissolved.

91.16 There is no reason to measure us by our tombs and by these monuments of unequal size that line the road; ashes make everyone equal. We are born unequal; we die equal. I say the same of cities as of their inhabitants: Ardea was captured, and so was Rome. That founder of human law did not distinguish us by birth or the fame of our names, except while we exist. But when we come to the end of mortal things, he says: "Away, ambition! Let one and the same law hold for all that weighs upon the earth." We are equal in having to endure all things; no one is frailer than another, no one surer of his own tomorrow.[20]

91.17 Alexander, king of the Macedonians, had begun to learn geometry—unhappy man, for he was going to find out how tiny

18 Timagenes of Alexandria, a historian at Rome under Augustus, known for his biting tongue.

19 Lucius Munatius Plancus founded Lugdunum in 43 BC.

the earth was, of which he had seized only a minute part. I say it again: unhappy, because he ought to have understood that he bore a false title. For who can be great in something tiny? What was being taught was subtle and had to be learned with careful attention—not the kind of thing someone out of his mind could grasp, one who was sending his thoughts across the ocean. "Teach me something easy," he said. His teacher replied, "These things are the same for everyone, equally difficult."

91.18 Imagine that nature is saying this to you: "The things you complain about are the same for everyone. I cannot give anyone easier ones; but whoever wishes can make them easier for himself. How? By equanimity. You must feel pain, and thirst, and hunger, and grow old, if you are granted a longer stay among humans; you must fall ill, and lose things, and die."

91.19 Still, there is no reason for you to believe those who clamor around you: none of these things is evil, none unbearable or harsh. Our fear of them rests on mere agreement. You fear death the way you fear what people say. But what is more foolish than a person who is afraid of words? Our friend Demetrius has a witty saying: to him the talk of the ignorant ranks with the rumblings a belly lets out. "What does it matter to me," he says, "whether they make their noise above or below?"

91.20 What madness it is to fear being disgraced by the disgraceful! Just as you have dreaded talk without cause, so too you dread things you would never fear if talk had not ordered you to. Would a good man suffer any harm from being spattered with unjust rumors?

91.21 Then let not even death be harmed in our eyes by this: it, too, has a bad reputation. None of those who accuse it has tried it. Meanwhile, it is rash to condemn what you do not know. But this you do know: how useful it is to many, how many it frees from torture, poverty, complaints, punishments, weariness. We are in no one's power, since death is in ours. Farewell.

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20 Ardea was an ancient town of Latium; Rome itself was captured by the Gauls in 390 BC. Seneca phrases the "law" in archaic legal Latin.

LETTER 92: ON THE HAPPY LIFE

The happy life depends on perfected reason alone; bodily goods and pleasure add nothing to virtue.

92.1 I think you and I will agree that external things are acquired for the sake of the body; that the body is cared for out of regard for the mind; and that in the mind there are serving parts, by which we move and are nourished, given to us for the sake of the ruling part itself. In this ruling part there is something irrational, and also something rational. The former serves the latter; the latter is the one thing that is not referred to anything else but refers everything to itself. For that divine reason, too, is set over all things and is itself under none; and this reason of ours is the same, since it comes from that one.[21]

92.2 If we agree on this, it follows that we agree on this too: that the happy life depends on this alone, that reason be perfect in us. For this alone keeps the mind from bowing and stands firm against fortune; in any state of affairs it keeps us free from care. And that alone is good which is never broken. That man, I say, is happy whom nothing makes less; he holds the summit, leaning on no one but himself. For whoever is held up by some support can fall. If it is otherwise, things not our own will begin to have great power over us. But who wants to rest on fortune, or what sensible person admires himself for what belongs to others?

92.3 What is the happy life? Freedom from care and lasting tranquility. Greatness of mind will give it, and steadfastness that holds fast to what has been rightly judged. How does one reach these? If the whole truth has been seen through; if in action one has kept order, measure, propriety, and a will that is harmless and kind, intent on reason and never departing from it, at once lovable and admirable. In short, to write you a brief formula: the wise man's mind should be such as would befit a god.

92.4 What can someone lack who possesses everything honorable? For if things that are not honorable can contribute any-

thing to the best state, then the happy life will depend on things that lie outside the honorable. And what is more shameful or more foolish than to tie the good of a rational mind to irrational things?

92.5 Yet some hold that the highest good can be increased, because it is not quite complete when chance things oppose it. Even Antipater, one of the great authorities of our school, says he attributes something to externals, though only a very little. But you see what it is like not to be content with daylight unless some little flame has added its glow. What weight can a spark have in this brilliance of the sun?

92.6 If you are not content with the honorable alone, you must want either rest added to it—what the Greeks call ἀοχλησίαν [freedom from disturbance]—or pleasure. The first of these can be admitted after a fashion. For the mind, free of trouble, is at leisure to survey the universe, and nothing calls it away from the contemplation of nature. The other, pleasure, is the good of cattle. We are adding the irrational to the rational, the dishonorable to the honorable. A tickling of the body makes for this happy life;

92.7 then why do you hesitate to say that a man is well off if his palate is well off? And do you count this person—I don't say among men, but among human beings—whose highest good consists of flavors and colors and sounds? Let him be struck from the ranks of this most beautiful class of living beings, second only to the gods; let him be herded with the speechless beasts, an animal happy with its fodder.

92.8 The irrational part of the mind has two parts: one spirited, ambitious, uncontrolled, rooted in the passions; the other low, languid, devoted to pleasures. The first—unbridled, yet better, and certainly braver and more worthy of a man—they have left aside; the second, spineless and abject, they have thought necessary to the happy life.

92.9 They have ordered reason to serve it, and have made the highest good of the noblest of living creatures something low and base—a hybrid monster, besides, made of different, ill-matched limbs. For as our Virgil says of Scylla: "Above, a human face, a girl with lovely breast
Down to the groin; below, a sea-beast of monstrous body,
With dolphins' tails joined to a belly of wolves." Yet to this Scylla wild animals were joined, terrifying and swift; but out of what monstrosities have these people put wisdom together![22]

92.10 The foremost part of a human being is virtue itself; to it is joined useless, flabby flesh, fit only for taking in food, as Posidonius says. That divine virtue tapers off into something slippery, and to its upper parts, venerable and heavenly, is stitched a sluggish, flaccid animal. That other thing, rest, for all it was worth, gave the mind nothing of its own, but it did remove obstacles; pleasure actively dissolves it and softens all its strength. What joining of bodies so at odds with itself could be found? To the bravest thing is attached the most sluggish, to the most serious the frivolous, to the most holy the intemperate, even to the point of defilement.

92.11 "What then?" he says. "If good health and rest and freedom from pain are not going to hinder virtue at all, will you not seek them?" Of course I will—not because they are goods, but because they are in accordance with nature, and because I will take them up with good judgment. What, then, will be good in them? This one thing: that they are chosen well. For when I wear clothing that is fitting, when I walk as I ought, when I dine as I should, it is not the dinner or the walk or the clothing that is good, but my purpose in them, as I keep in each thing the measure that accords with reason.

92.12 Let me add this: the choice of clean clothing is something a human being should seek, for by nature man is a clean and

21 "The ruling part" (principale) renders the Stoic hegemonikon, the governing center of the mind.

22 Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.426–28. Scylla was the sea monster of the Strait of Messina.

elegant animal. So clean clothing is not a good in itself, but the choosing of clean clothing is; for the good lies not in the thing but in the quality of the choice. It is our actions that are honorable, not the things we do.

92.13 Take what I have said about clothing as said about the body too. For nature has wrapped this, too, around the mind like a kind of garment; it is its covering. But who ever valued clothes by the chest they are kept in? The scabbard does not make the sword good or bad. So about the body, too, I give you the same answer: I will take health and strength, if I am given the choice; but the good will be my judgment about them, not the things themselves.

92.14 "The wise man is indeed happy," he says, "but he does not attain that highest good unless his natural instruments also answer to it. So someone who has virtue cannot be wretched; but someone who lacks natural goods, such as health or soundness of limb, is not supremely happy."

92.15 You grant what seems harder to believe: that someone in great and unending pain is not wretched, is even happy. You deny what is less: that he is supremely happy. Yet if virtue can keep someone from being wretched, it will more easily make him supremely happy. For the distance from happy to supremely happy is smaller than from wretched to happy. Or can something powerful enough to snatch a person from disaster and set him among the happy not add what remains, to make him supremely happy? Does it give out at the top of the hill?

92.16 In life there are advantages and disadvantages, both outside us. If the good man is not wretched though pressed by every disadvantage, how is he not supremely happy if he lacks some advantages? For just as the weight of disadvantages does not push him down to wretchedness, so a lack of advantages does not draw him away from supreme happiness; he is as supremely happy without advantages as he is not wretched under disadvantages. Otherwise his good can be taken from him, if it can be diminished.

92.17 A little while ago I said that a small flame adds nothing to the light of the sun; for whatever would shine without the sun is hidden by its brightness. "But some things," he says, "stand in the way even of the sun." Yet the sun is intact even amid obstructions; and though something may lie between that keeps us from seeing it, it is at work, it moves on its course. Whenever it has shone out among clouds, it is no smaller than in a clear sky, nor even slower; for it makes a great difference whether something merely blocks the view or actually hinders.

92.18 In the same way, obstacles take nothing away from virtue; it is not less, it merely shines less. To us perhaps it does not appear and gleam as much, but to itself it is the same, and like the sun when obscured, it exerts its power out of sight. So calamities and losses and injuries have the same power against virtue as a cloud has against the sun.

92.19 There is someone who says that the wise man whose body is in poor health is neither wretched nor happy. He too is mistaken, for he puts chance things on a level with the virtues, and assigns as much to honorable things as to things that lack honor. But what is uglier, what more unworthy, than to compare the venerable with the contemptible? For justice, piety, loyalty, courage, and prudence are venerable; cheap, by contrast, are the things that often fall more abundantly to the cheapest people: a sturdy leg and arm, and teeth, and healthy, firm muscles.

92.20 Next, if the wise man whose body troubles him is counted neither wretched nor happy but left in between, then his life, too, will be neither worth seeking nor worth avoiding. But what is so absurd as to say that the wise man's life is not worth seeking? Or what so incredible as that some life is neither worth seeking nor worth avoiding? Further, if bodily losses do not make one wretched, they allow one to be happy. For things that have no power to move us into a worse state have no power even to interrupt the best.

92.21 "We know something cold," he says, "and something hot, and in between is lukewarm; so someone is happy, someone

wretched, someone neither happy nor wretched." I want to take apart this comparison set up against us. If I pour more cold into that lukewarm, it will become cold. If I pour in more hot, it will in the end become hot. But to this man who is neither wretched nor happy, however much I add to his miseries, he will not become wretched, as you yourselves say. So the comparison does not fit.

92.22 Next, I hand you a man who is neither wretched nor happy. I add blindness: he does not become wretched. I add infirmity: he does not become wretched. I add pains unending and severe: he does not become wretched. One whom so many evils do not move into a wretched life, they do not lead out of a happy one either.

92.23 If, as you say, the wise man cannot fall from happiness into wretchedness, he cannot fall into un-happiness either. For why would someone who has begun to slide stop anywhere? What does not let him roll down to the bottom keeps him at the top. Why could the happy life not be beyond cutting short? It cannot even be lessened; and so virtue by itself is enough for it.

92.24 "What then?" he says. "Is the wise man who has lived longer, whom no pain has distracted, not happier than one who has always wrestled with bad fortune?" Answer me: is he also better and more honorable? If not, he is not happier either. He must live more rightly in order to live more happily; if he cannot live more rightly, he cannot live more happily either. Virtue cannot be heightened; so neither can the happy life, which comes from virtue. For virtue is so great a good that it does not feel these tiny additions—shortness of life, pain, the various ailments of the body. As for pleasure, it is not worth virtue's even glancing at.

92.25 What is the chief thing in virtue? Not to need the future, and not to count one's days; in however small a span of time, it brings eternal goods to completion. These things seem incredible to us, and beyond human nature. For we measure its grandeur by our own weakness, and give the name of virtue to our vices. What more? Does it not seem just as incredible that

someone in the midst of the greatest tortures should say, "I am happy"? And yet this saying was heard in the very workshop of pleasure. "I am spending this, the happiest of days," said Epicurus, while he was tormented on one side by difficulty passing urine, on the other by the incurable pain of an ulcerated stomach.

92.26 Why, then, should these things be incredible among those who cultivate virtue, when they are found even among those ruled by pleasure? These people, too, degenerate and low-minded, say that in the greatest pains, in the greatest calamities, the wise man will be neither wretched nor happy. Yet this is incredible too—indeed, even more incredible. For I do not see how virtue, once cast down from its height, is not driven to the very bottom. Either it must make a man happy, or, if it has been driven from that, it will not keep him from becoming wretched. While it stands, it cannot be dismissed; it must either be defeated or win.

92.27 "Only to the immortal gods," he says, "have virtue and the happy life been granted; we have a kind of shadow and likeness of those goods. We approach them; we do not reach them." But reason is shared by gods and humans; in them it is perfected, in us it can be perfected.

92.28 But our vices bring us to despair. For that other person, of the second rank, is someone not steady enough to guard what is best, whose judgment still wavers and is uncertain. He may want the use of eyes and ears, good health, a body not ugly to look at, and besides, with his condition remaining as it is, a longer span of life.

92.29 With this, he can lead a life he need not regret; but in this imperfect man there is still some force of wickedness, because he has a mind easily moved to wrong. Open, active wickedness is absent; he is not yet good, but he is being shaped toward the good. Yet whoever falls at all short of the good is bad. But the man who has "virtue and courage present in his body" equals the gods; he strives toward them, mindful of his origin.[23]

23 Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.363.

92.30 No one is wrong to try to climb back to the place from which he came down. And why should you not believe there is something divine in one who is part of god? This whole in which we are contained is both one and god; we are its partners and its members. Our mind has great capacity; it is carried there, if vices do not weigh it down. Just as our bodies stand upright and look toward the sky, so the mind, which may reach out as far as it wishes, has been formed by nature for this: to want equality with the gods. And if it uses its own powers and stretches out into its own space, it is by no foreign road that it strives toward the heights.

92.31 It would be a great labor to go up to heaven; the mind is going back. Once it has found this road, it goes boldly, scorning everything. It does not look back at money; gold and silver, most deserving of the darkness in which they lay, it values not by the gleam with which they dazzle the eyes of the ignorant, but by the ancient mud from which our greed separated them and dug them out. It knows, I say, that riches are kept somewhere other than where they are piled up; that it is the mind that must be filled, not the strongbox.

92.32 Such a mind may be set in command of all things and put in possession of the whole of nature, so that it bounds its domain by the limits of east and west and possesses everything as the gods do, looking down from on high on the rich with their wealth—not one of whom is as glad of his own as he is sad at another's.

92.33 When it has lifted itself to this height, it treats the body, too, as a necessary burden—not as its lover but as its steward—and does not submit itself to that over which it has been placed. No one is free who is a slave to the body. For, to pass over the other masters that excessive anxiety on its behalf finds for us, the body's own rule is fussy and fastidious.

92.34 From this body the mind sometimes departs calmly, sometimes leaps out boldly, and does not then ask what will become of what it left behind. Just as we pay no attention to the clippings of beard and hair, so that divine mind, about to leave

the human being, judges it no more its concern where its container is taken—whether fire burns it, or stone encloses it, or earth covers it, or wild beasts tear it apart—than the afterbirth concerns a newborn child. Whether it is thrown out for birds to tear apart, or consumed, "given as prey to the dogs of the sea," what is that to one who no longer exists?[24]

92.35 But even while it is among human beings, it does not fear any threats after death from those for whom it is not enough to be feared until death. "I am not terrified," it says, "by the hook, nor by the mangling of a corpse thrown out for abuse, foul as that is to those who will see it. I ask no one for the last rites; I entrust my remains to no one. Nature has seen to it that no one would be unburied. Whom cruelty has thrown out, time will bury." Maecenas puts it eloquently: "I care nothing for a tomb. Nature buries the abandoned." You would think a man with his belt tightly girded had said it. For he had a great and manly talent, had he not loosened its belt in prosperity. Farewell.[25]

24 Adapted from Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.485.

25 The hook dragged away the bodies of executed criminals. Seneca plays on being "girded" (disciplined) versus "ungirded" (lax); Maecenas was notorious for soft living.

Book XV

On the quality of life (93), on precepts and doctrines (94–95).

LETTER 93: ON THE LENGTH OF LIFE

A life is long if it is full; measure it by what you do, not by how many years you last.

93.1 In the letter in which you lamented the death of the philosopher Metronax, as though he both could and should have lived longer, I missed your sense of fairness—which you have in abundance in every role and every business, but which fails you in one thing, the thing in which it fails everyone. I have found many people fair toward men, but none toward the gods. Every day we scold fate: "Why was he snatched away in mid-course? Why isn't that one snatched away? Why does he drag out an old age that is a burden to himself and to others?"

93.2 Tell me, please: which do you judge fairer—that you obey nature, or that nature obey you? And what difference does it make how soon you leave a place you must leave in any case? We should take care not to live long, but to live enough; for living long takes fate, living enough takes the mind. Life is long if it is full; and it is filled when the mind has given itself its own good and taken power over itself into its own hands.

93.3 What good to him are eighty years spent in idleness? That man has not lived; he has lingered in life. He did not die late; he died over a long time. "He lived eighty years." It matters from what day you count his death.

93.4 "But the other died in his prime." Yet he carried out the duties of a good citizen, a good friend, a good son; in no respect did he fall short. Though his age was incomplete, his life was

complete. "He lived eighty years." No—he existed for eighty years, unless perhaps you mean he lived the way trees are said to live. I beg you, Lucilius, let us see to it that our life, like precious things, covers not much space but carries much weight. Let us measure it by action, not by time. Do you want to know the difference between this vigorous man, who scorned fortune, served through every campaign of human life, and rose to its highest good, and that other, past whom many years have simply slipped by? The one exists even after death; the other perished before death.

93.5 So let us praise, and count among the fortunate, the man who has put to good use whatever little time was granted him. For he saw the true light. He was not one of the many. He both lived and flourished. Sometimes he enjoyed clear skies; sometimes, as happens, the gleam of a mighty star flashed out through the clouds. Why ask how long he lived? He lives: he has leapt across to posterity and committed himself to memory.

93.6 Not that I would refuse more years for myself; yet I will say that nothing was lacking to me for a happy life if its span is cut short. For I have not fitted myself to the day that greedy hope promised me as my last; I have looked on every day as though it were the last. Why do you ask me when I was born, or whether I am still registered among the juniors?[1]

93.7 I have what is mine. Just as a person can be complete in a smaller body, so a life can be complete in a smaller measure of time. Age is among the externals. How long I exist is not up to me; that I truly exist for as long as I do is up to me. Demand this of me: that I not pass through an inglorious lifetime as if through darkness; that I live my life, not ride past it.

93.8 Do you ask what is the fullest span of life? To live until you reach wisdom. Whoever has reached it has attained not the longest goal but the greatest. Let such a man glory boldly and thank the gods—and himself among them—and let him put it on nature's account that he has existed. And he will be right to do so: he has given back to her a better life than he received. He has

1 In the Roman census, men of military age (up to 46) were listed as "juniors."

set up a model of the good man, and shown what kind of man that is and how great. Anything more he added would have been just like what went before.

93.9 And yet how far does our life reach? We have enjoyed the knowledge of all things. We know from what first principles nature raises herself; how she orders the universe; through what changes she brings back the year; how she has enclosed everything that ever existed and made herself her own limit. We know that the stars move by their own momentum, that nothing but the earth stands still, while everything else runs on at unbroken speed. We know how the moon passes the sun; why the slower leaves the faster behind; how it gains or loses its light; what cause brings on the night and what brings back the day. We must go to the place where you may see these things more closely.

93.10 "Yet it is not this hope," says the wise man, "that makes me depart more bravely—my belief that the road lies open for me to my gods. I have indeed earned admission, and I have already been among them: I have sent my mind there, and they had sent theirs to me. But suppose I am removed entirely, and that after death nothing of a person remains: I have just as great a spirit, even if I depart to pass nowhere."

93.11 "He did not live as many years as he could have." A book, too, can have few lines and yet be praiseworthy and useful; you know how heavy the Annals of Tanusius are, and what they are called. That is what the long life of some people is—and what befalls the Annals of Tanusius.[2]

93.12 Do you think the man killed on the last day of the games is more fortunate than one killed on the middle day? Do you think anyone is so foolishly greedy for life that he would rather have his throat cut in the stripping room than in the arena? That is no greater than the interval by which we go ahead of one another. Death passes through everyone; the killer follows the killed. It is the smallest of things that we fret over most anxiously. And

2 The *Annals* of Tanusius Geminus, a historian of the late Republic, were probably the "*Annals* of Volusius" that Catullus mocked as fit only for toilet paper.

what does it matter how long you evade what you cannot evade? Farewell.[3]

LETTER 94: ON THE VALUE OF ADVICE

Against Ariston, Seneca defends precepts for particular situations as a real help to right living.

94.1 There is a part of philosophy that gives precepts suited to each particular role. Instead of shaping the human being as a whole, it advises a husband how to conduct himself toward his wife, a father how to bring up his children, a master how to govern his slaves. Some people have accepted this part alone and left the rest aside as wandering off beyond our practical needs—as if anyone could give advice about a part without first having grasped the sum of life as a whole.

94.2 But Ariston the Stoic, on the contrary, considers this part trivial, something that never sinks down into the heart, full of old wives' precepts. What does the most good, he says, are the doctrines of philosophy themselves and the definition of the supreme good. Whoever has understood and learned this well gives himself his own precepts about what to do in every situation.

94.3 Someone learning to throw the javelin aims at a fixed target and trains his hand to direct his throws; once he has acquired this skill through instruction and practice, he uses it wherever he likes, for he has learned to hit not this mark or that, but whatever he wants. In the same way, a person who has equipped himself for the whole of life needs no advice piece by piece. He has been taught for the whole: not how to live with his wife or his son, but how to live well. And that includes how to live with his wife and children.

94.4 Cleanthes judges this part useful too, but weak unless it flows from the whole—unless it knows the actual doctrines and main headings of philosophy. So this topic divides into two

3 The spoliarium, where fallen gladiators were stripped of their gear and those still alive were finished off.

questions: is it useful or useless, and can it by itself make a good man? That is, is it superfluous, or does it make all the other parts superfluous?

94.5 Those who want this part to be seen as superfluous argue as follows: "If something set in front of the eyes blocks the sight, it has to be removed. As long as it is in the way, anyone giving instructions—'Walk like this; reach your hand out there'—is wasting his effort. In the same way, when something blinds the mind and keeps it from making out the order of its duties, it is pointless to instruct: 'Live like this with your father, like this with your wife.' Precepts will accomplish nothing as long as error is spread over the mind; once that is dispelled, it will be clear what is owed to each duty. Otherwise you are teaching him what a healthy man should do; you are not making him healthy."

94.6 "You show a poor man how to act rich; how can he do that while his poverty remains? You show a hungry man what to do as if he were full; instead, pull out the hunger lodged in his marrow. I say the same to you about all the vices: they themselves must be removed. You should not prescribe what cannot be done while they remain. Unless you drive out the false opinions that afflict us, the greedy man will not listen to how money should be used, nor the coward to how he should scorn danger."

94.7 "You must bring him to know that money is neither good nor evil; show him rich men who are utterly wretched. You must bring him to know that none of the things we are all publicly terrified of—neither pain nor death—is as fearsome as rumor makes out. That in death, which it is the law of our being to suffer, there is often great comfort in the fact that it comes to no one twice. That in pain, the remedy will be the mind's resolve, which makes lighter for itself whatever it has endured defiantly. That the best thing about pain's nature is this: pain that lasts cannot be great, and pain that is great cannot last. That we must bravely accept whatever the necessity of the universe commands us."

94.8 "Once you have used these doctrines to bring him face to face with his own condition, and he has recognized that the

happy life is not the one in accordance with pleasure but the one in accordance with nature; once he has come to love virtue as the only good for a human being and to shun the shameful as the only evil, and knows that everything else—wealth, honors, good health, strength, power—belongs to a middle class of things, to be counted neither among goods nor among evils—then he will not need someone at his side for every detail, saying: 'Walk like this, dine like this. This suits a man, this a woman; this a husband, this a bachelor.'"

94.9 "Besides, those who hand out such advice most diligently cannot follow it themselves. A boy's attendant lays these rules down for the boy, a grandmother for her grandson, and the most hot-tempered schoolmaster argues that one should never lose one's temper. Walk into an elementary school and you will find that the things philosophers toss off with such enormous superciliousness are in the children's copybook."

94.10 "Next, will your precepts concern what is obvious or what is doubtful? The obvious needs no adviser; the man who prescribes the doubtful is not believed. So prescribing is superfluous. Learn it this way. If you are advising on something obscure and ambiguous, you will have to back it up with proofs. And if you are going to prove it, the proofs carry more weight, and they are sufficient by themselves."

94.11 "'Treat a friend like this, a fellow citizen like this, a partner like this.' Why? 'Because it is just.' The topic of justice gives me all of that. There I find that fairness is to be sought for its own sake; that we are neither forced into it by fear nor hired into it by reward; that no one is just who values anything in this virtue except the virtue itself. Once I have persuaded myself of this and thoroughly absorbed it, what good are these precepts, which teach a man already educated? To give precepts to someone who knows is superfluous; to someone who does not, insufficient. For he needs to hear not only what he is told to do, but also why."

94.12 "Are precepts necessary, I ask, for someone who holds true opinions about good and evil, or for someone who does not?

The one who does not will get no help from you: popular opinion, which contradicts your advice, has taken possession of his ears. The one who has an exact judgment about what to avoid and what to pursue knows what he should do even if you say nothing. So this whole part of philosophy can be done away with."

94.13 "There are two reasons why we go wrong. Either the mind harbors a wickedness contracted from warped opinions, or, even if it is not occupied by falsehoods, it is prone to them and quickly corrupted when some appearance draws it where it should not go. So we must either cure the sick mind thoroughly and free it from its vices, or get in first and take hold of a mind that is still unoccupied but leaning toward the worse. The doctrines of philosophy do both; therefore this kind of precept-giving accomplishes nothing."

94.14 "Besides, if we give precepts to each individual, the task is endless. We must give one set to the moneylender, another to the farmer, another to the merchant, another to the man who courts the friendship of kings, another to the man who will love his equals, another to the man who will love his inferiors."

94.15 "On marriage, you will prescribe how a man should live with a wife he married as a virgin, and how with one who had known another man before the marriage; how with a rich wife, and how with one who brought no dowry. Or don't you think there is some difference between a barren wife and a fertile one, between an older woman and a young girl, between a mother and a stepmother? We cannot cover every case, yet each demands its own rules. The laws of philosophy, by contrast, are brief and bind everything."

94.16 "Add now that the precepts of wisdom ought to be defined and certain; whatever cannot be defined lies outside wisdom. Wisdom knows the boundaries of things. So this preceptive part must be done away with, because what it promises to a few, it cannot deliver to all; but wisdom embraces all."

94.17 "Between madness in the public sense and the madness that is handed over to doctors there is no difference, except that

the second suffers from disease and the first from false opinions. The one derives the causes of its frenzy from ill health; the other is itself the ill health of the mind. If someone gave precepts to someone out of his mind—how he ought to speak, how to walk, how to behave in public, how in private—he would be crazier than the man he was advising. It is his black bile that must be treated, and the actual cause of his madness removed. The same must be done with this other madness, the madness of the mind. The madness itself must be dispelled; otherwise the advisers' words will vanish into thin air."[4]

94.18 That is what Ariston says, and we will answer him point by point. First, against his claim that if something blocks the eye and hinders sight, it ought to be removed. I grant that such a person needs not precepts for seeing but a remedy, to clear his sight and free it from the obstruction in its way. We see by nature, and whoever removes the obstacles gives nature back its use. But nature does not teach what is owed to each duty.

94.19 Next, a man whose cataract has been treated cannot, the moment he recovers his sight, restore it to others as well; but one who has been freed from wickedness frees others too. The eye needs no encouragement, not even advice, to recognize the distinct qualities of colors; it will tell white from black with no one prompting it. The mind, on the other hand, needs many precepts in order to see what should be done in life. And yet even with the eyes, the doctor does not just treat his patients; he also gives them advice.

94.20 "There is no reason," he says, "to expose weak eyes straight away to harsh light. Go first from darkness into shady places, then be bolder, and gradually get used to bearing bright light. Don't study after eating; don't make demands on eyes that are congested and swollen; avoid drafts and the force of cold air blowing in your face"—and other such things, which do no less good than the medicines. Medicine adds advice to its remedies.

94.21 "Error," he says, "is the cause of wrongdoing. Precepts do not remove it from us, nor do they defeat false opinions about

goods and evils." I grant that precepts on their own are not effective at overturning a warped conviction of the mind; but it does not follow that they accomplish nothing even when added to other things. First, they refresh the memory; second, things that seemed rather confused when taken as a whole are examined more carefully when divided into parts. Otherwise, by that reasoning, you could call consolations and exhortations superfluous too. But they are not superfluous; so neither are admonitions.

94.22 "It is foolish," he says, "to instruct a sick man in what he ought to do as if he were healthy, when it is his health that needs restoring; without it, precepts are useless." But what about the fact that the sick and the healthy have some things in common, about which they need to be advised—for instance, not to fall greedily on their food, and to avoid exhaustion? The poor man and the rich man have certain precepts in common.

94.23 "Cure greed," he says, "and you will have nothing to advise either the poor man or the rich, once the craving of each has settled." But what about the fact that not coveting money is one thing and knowing how to use money is another? The greedy do not know its limit; even those who are not greedy do not know its use. "Remove the errors," he says, "and precepts are superfluous." That is false. Suppose greed has been loosened, luxury tightened, rashness reined in, a spur put to sloth: even with the vices removed, we still have to learn what we ought to do and how.

94.24 "Admonitions," he says, "will achieve nothing when applied to serious vices." Not even medicine conquers incurable diseases; yet it is applied to some as a remedy, to others as a relief. Not even the power of philosophy as a whole, though it summon all its strength for the purpose, will pull out of the mind a plague that has become hardened and old. But it does not cure nothing just because it does not cure everything.

94.25 "What is the use," he says, "of pointing out the obvious?" A great deal; for sometimes we know things and pay them no

attention. Admonition does not teach; it turns our attention, it rouses us, it holds on to the memory and keeps things from slipping away. We walk past most of what is set before our eyes. To admonish is a kind of exhorting. Often the mind pretends not to see even what is obvious, so knowledge of the most familiar things must be pressed upon it. Here we should repeat that line of Calvus against Vatinius: "You know that there has been bribery, and everyone knows that you know it."[5]

94.26 You know that friendships should be kept with scrupulous care, but you don't do it. You know that a man is wicked who demands chastity from his wife while he himself seduces other men's wives; you know that just as she should have nothing to do with a lover, so you should have nothing to do with a mistress —and you don't act on it. So you must be brought back to remember these things again and again, for they should not be stored away but kept ready to hand. Whatever is wholesome should be stirred up often, turned over often, so that it is not only known to us but also at the ready. Add now that even obvious things tend to become more obvious.

94.27 "If what you prescribe is doubtful," he says, "you will have to add proofs; so it is the proofs, not the precepts, that will help." But what about the fact that, even without proofs, the adviser's authority by itself helps? In the same way, the rulings of legal experts carry weight even when no reasoning is given. Besides, precepts in themselves carry great weight, especially if they are woven into verse or compressed, in prose, into a maxim—like those sayings of Cato: "Buy not what you could use, but what you cannot do without; what you have no use for is dear at a penny." Of the same kind are the sayings delivered by oracles, or ones like them: "Be sparing of time," "Know yourself."[6]

94.28 Will you demand a reason when someone recites these lines to you? "The cure for wrongs is to forget them. / Fortune

4 Black bile: in ancient medicine, the bodily humor whose excess was thought to cause madness and melancholy.
5 Gaius Licinius Calvus (82–c. 47 BC), orator and poet, prosecuted the politician Publius Vatinius, among other charges for electoral bribery.
6 "Know yourself" was inscribed at Apollo's oracle at Delphi.

favors the bold; the lazy man stands in his own way." Such lines need no advocate; they touch the feelings directly, and they do good because nature is exerting its own force.[7]

94.29 Our minds carry within them the seeds of everything honorable, and admonition stirs them to life, just as a spark, helped along by a light breath, spreads its fire. Virtue rises up when it is touched and given a push. Moreover, some things are in the mind but not readily at hand, and they begin to be available once they are put into words. Others lie scattered in different places, and an untrained mind cannot gather them together. So they must be brought into one place and joined, so that they have more force and lift the mind higher.

94.30 Otherwise, if precepts are no help, all instruction should be abolished, and we should be content with nature alone. Those who say this do not see that one person has a quick and lively mind, another a slow and dull one, and that in any case some are more gifted than others. The power of a natural gift is fed and grows through precepts; it adds new convictions to the inborn ones and corrects those that have become warped.

94.31 "If someone does not have right doctrines," he says, "how will admonitions help him, bound as he is by his vices?" In just this way: they help free him from them. For his natural disposition has not been extinguished, only obscured and held down. Even so, it tries to rise again and struggles against what is warped; and when it finds support and gets help from precepts, it grows strong—provided a long-standing plague has not tainted it and killed it off, for then not even the discipline of philosophy, straining with all its might, will restore it. After all, what is the difference between the doctrines of philosophy and its precepts, except that doctrines are general precepts and precepts are specific ones? Both give instruction, but one deals with the whole, the other with the particulars.

94.32 "If someone has right and honorable doctrines," he says, "it is superfluous to advise him." Not at all. This man too has

7 The first line is from Publilius Syrus; the second recalls a proverb also found in Virgil, *Aeneid* 10.284.

been taught to do what he should, but he does not see clearly enough what that is. What keeps us from doing what deserves approval is not only our passions but our lack of skill in working out what each situation demands. Sometimes our mind is well ordered, but sluggish and untrained at finding the path of duty—and admonition shows it the way.

94.33 "Drive out," he says, "false opinions about goods and evils, put true ones in their place, and admonition will have nothing to do." No doubt the mind is set in order this way—but not only this way. For although argument has established which things are good and which evil, precepts still have their part to play. Both prudence and justice consist of duties, and duties are arranged by precepts.

94.34 Besides, our very judgment about evils and goods is strengthened by carrying out our duties, and it is precepts that lead us to do so. The two are in agreement: doctrines cannot go first without duties following. And duties follow in their proper order, which makes it clear that doctrines go first.

94.35 "Precepts," he says, "are infinite." False. On the greatest and most essential matters they are not infinite. They do have fine distinctions, which times, places and persons require; but even for these, general precepts are given.

94.36 "No one cures madness with precepts," he says, "so not wickedness either." The cases are different. If you remove madness, health returns; but if we have excluded false opinions, a clear view of what we should do does not immediately follow. And even if it does follow, admonition will still reinforce a right judgment about goods and evils. It is also false that precepts do no good with the mad. Just as they do no good on their own, so they help the cure. Both warnings and rebukes have restrained people with mental illness. I am speaking now of those whose minds are disturbed, not gone.

94.37 "Laws," he says, "do not make us do what we ought—and what are laws but precepts mixed with threats?" In the first place, laws fail to persuade precisely because they threaten, whereas precepts do not compel but entreat. Next, laws deter us

from crime; precepts urge us toward duty. Add to this that laws too help to form good character, especially if they not only command but teach.

94.38 On this point I disagree with Posidonius, who says: "I disapprove of Plato's adding preambles to his laws. A law should be brief, so that the uninstructed can grasp it more easily. Let it be like a voice sent down from heaven: let it command, not argue. Nothing seems to me flatter, nothing sillier, than a law with a prologue. Warn me, tell me what you want me to do; I am not learning, I am obeying." But laws do help: you will see that states which have had bad laws have had bad morals. "But they don't help everyone."[8]

94.39 Neither does philosophy—yet that does not make it useless or ineffective at shaping minds. And again: is philosophy not the law of life? But suppose laws do no good; it does not follow that admonitions do no good either. Otherwise, by the same token, deny that consolations help, and dissuasions, exhortations, rebukes and praises. All of these are kinds of admonition. It is through them that we arrive at the perfect state of mind.

94.40 Nothing does more to clothe minds in honorable ways, or to call the wavering and those inclined toward wrong back to what is right, than the company of good men. It sinks gradually into the heart: seeing them often and hearing them often has the force of precepts. Indeed, merely running into wise men helps, and there is something to be gained from a great man even when he says nothing.

94.41 I could not easily tell you how it helps, though I understand that it has helped. "There are certain tiny creatures," as Phaedo says, "whose bite is not felt, so slight and so stealthy is their power to harm. The swelling reveals the bite, and even in the swelling no wound can be seen. The same will happen to you in the company of wise men: you will not detect how or when they help you, but you will detect that they have helped."

94.42 "What is the point of all this?" you ask. Good precepts, if they are often with you, will help just as much as good

8 Plato's *Laws* prefaces its laws with persuasive preambles.

examples. Pythagoras says that people's minds are changed when they enter a temple, see the images of the gods close up, and wait for the voice of some oracle.

94.43 And who will deny that certain precepts strike home, and effectively, even with the least instructed? Take these very brief sayings, which carry great weight: "Nothing in excess.

A greedy mind is sated by no gain.

Expect from another what you have done to another." We feel a kind of blow as we hear them; no one is free to doubt them or ask "Why?"—so strongly does truth itself lead us, even without reasoning.[9]

94.44 If reverence reins in minds and checks vices, why can't admonition do the same? If rebuke instills a sense of shame, why shouldn't admonition, even if it uses bare precepts? But the admonition that backs up its precept with reason is more effective and goes deeper—the kind that adds why each thing should be done, and what reward awaits the one who does it and obeys the precepts. If command does good, so does admonition. But command does good; therefore so does admonition.

94.45 Virtue divides into two parts: the contemplation of truth, and action. Instruction imparts contemplation; admonition imparts action. Right action both exercises virtue and displays it. And if someone who persuades helps a person about to act, someone who admonishes will help too. So if right action is necessary to virtue, and admonition points out right actions, then admonition too is necessary.

94.46 Two things give the mind the most strength: belief in the truth, and confidence. Admonition produces both. For it is believed, and once it is believed, the mind conceives great courage and is filled with confidence. So admonition is not superfluous. Marcus Agrippa, a man of great spirit—the only one of those whom the civil wars made famous and powerful whose success

9 "Nothing in excess" was one of the maxims inscribed at Delphi; the other two lines are from Publilius Syrus.

was a blessing to the public—used to say that he owed a great deal to this maxim: "Through harmony small things grow; through discord the greatest fall apart." It was this, he said, that had made him the best of brothers and the best of friends.[10]

94.47 If maxims like this, taken intimately into the mind, shape it, why can't this part of philosophy, which is made up of such maxims, do the same? Virtue consists partly of learning and partly of practice: you must learn, and then confirm by action what you have learned. If so, it is not only the tenets of wisdom that help but also precepts, which restrain our passions and banish them as if by edict.

94.48 "Philosophy," he says, "divides into these: knowledge and a disposition of mind. Someone who has learned and grasped what to do and what to avoid is not yet wise unless his mind has been transformed into what he has learned. This third part, the giving of precepts, is made from both—from the doctrines and from the disposition. So it is superfluous for perfecting virtue, for which those two suffice."

94.49 By that reasoning, then, consolation is superfluous too, since it also comes from both; and so are exhortation and persuasion and argument itself. For these too proceed from a disposition of mind that is well ordered and strong. But though these things come from the best disposition of mind, the best disposition of mind also comes from them: it produces them and is itself produced by them.

94.50 Next, what you describe belongs to a man already perfect, who has reached the summit of human happiness. But one arrives there slowly. Meanwhile, even someone not yet perfect but making progress needs to be shown the way in practical matters. Wisdom may perhaps show itself that way even without admonition, once it has brought the mind to the point where it cannot move except toward what is right. But weaker natures certainly need someone to go ahead of them: "Avoid this; do this."

10 Marcus Agrippa (c. 63–12 BC), Augustus' general and closest friend. The maxim is from the historian Sallust (*Jugurthine War* 10.6).

94.51 Besides, if he waits for the time when he will know by himself what is best to do, he will go astray in the meantime, and his straying will keep him from reaching the point where he can be content with himself. So he must be guided until he begins to be able to guide himself. Children learn by following a model. Their fingers are held, and someone else's hand guides them over the outlines of the letters; then they are told to copy the models set before them and shape their handwriting to match. In the same way, our mind is helped while it is being taught by following a model.

94.52 These are the arguments that prove this part of philosophy is not superfluous. The next question is whether it alone is enough to make someone wise. We will give that question its own day. Meanwhile, arguments aside, isn't it obvious that we need some advocate to give us precepts that counter the precepts of the crowd?

94.53 No word reaches our ears without doing harm. Those who wish us well harm us, and so do those who curse us. The curses of the one plant false fears in us; the love of the other teaches us badly by wishing us well. It sends us off toward goods that are far away, uncertain and wandering, when we could bring happiness out from our own home.

94.54 We are not allowed, I say, to go by the straight road. Our parents drag us toward what is wrong; our slaves drag us. No one goes astray for himself alone: he spreads his madness to those around him and catches theirs in turn. That is why individuals have the vices of whole peoples: the people gave them. Each person, while making another worse, has been made worse himself; he learned what is worse, then taught it. And so that vast wickedness has been produced, heaped together from the worst that each person knows.

94.55 So let there be some guardian to tug at our ear now and then, to drive off the rumors and to shout back at the crowd's applause. You are wrong if you think our vices are born with us. They came on later; they were heaped upon us. So let frequent admonitions drive back the opinions that ring all around us.

94.56 Nature does not attach us to any vice; she brought us forth whole and free. She set nothing out in the open that might stir up our greed. She put gold and silver beneath our feet and gave us to trample and tread down everything for whose sake we are trampled and trodden down. She lifted our faces to the sky and wanted everything magnificent and wonderful that she had made to be seen by those who look up: the risings and settings of the heavenly bodies; the whirling course of the speeding universe, which by day reveals the things of earth and by night the things of heaven; the movements of the stars—slow if you compare them with the whole, but extremely swift if you consider the vast distances they circle at a speed that never slackens; the eclipses of sun and moon as each blocks the other; and further wonders besides, whether they come on in regular order or burst forth driven by sudden causes, such as trails of fire in the night, flashes as the sky opens without any thunderclap or sound, and columns and beams and various shapes of flame. All these she arranged to move above us;

94.57 but gold and silver, and the iron that because of them is never at peace, she hid away, as if they were not safe to entrust to us. It is we who have brought into the light the things we would fight over; we who have shoved aside the weight of the earth and dug out both the causes and the instruments of our dangers; we who have handed our own evils over to fortune, and do not blush that what had been lowest in the earth is held highest among us.

94.58 Do you want to know how false is the glitter that has deceived your eyes? Nothing is fouler or darker than these metals while they lie buried and wrapped in their own mud—and no wonder, since they are dragged out through the darkness of the longest tunnels. Nothing is uglier than they are while they are being worked and separated from their dross. Finally, look at the workmen themselves, through whose hands this barren, hellish kind of earth is refined: you will see how much soot they are smeared with.

94.59 And yet these things defile minds more than bodies, and there is more filth on their owner than on the craftsman. So we need to be admonished, to have some advocate of a sound mind, and amid all this roar and uproar of falsehoods to hear, at last, a single voice. What will that voice be? One, surely, that will whisper wholesome words to you, deafened as you are by the great clamor of ambition—words that say:

94.60 there is no reason to envy those the crowd calls great and happy; no reason to let applause shake loose the healthy disposition of your settled mind; no reason for that man dressed in purple beneath those fasces to make you disdain your own tranquility; no reason to judge the man for whom the road is cleared happier than yourself, whom the lictor pushes off the path. If you want to exercise a power that is useful to you and burdensome to no one, clear away your vices.[11]

94.61 Plenty of men can be found who will set fire to cities, lay low places that were impregnable for generations and safe for ages, raise siege mounds as high as citadels, and batter walls built to astonishing heights with rams and siege engines. Plenty drive columns of men before them, press hard on the enemy's rear, and reach the great sea drenched in the blood of nations. But these men too, in order to conquer the enemy, were conquered by desire. No one withstood them as they came; but neither had they withstood ambition and cruelty. At the very moment they seemed to be driving others, they were being driven.

94.62 It was a mad passion for laying waste other people's lands that drove the unhappy Alexander and sent him into the unknown. Or do you think a man sane who begins with the ruin of Greece, where he was educated? Who snatches from each city what it holds dearest, orders Sparta to be a slave and Athens to be silent? Not content with the destruction of so many cities, which Philip had either conquered or bought, he flings down others elsewhere and carries his arms around the whole world.

11 Fasces: the bundles of rods carried before Roman magistrates by attendants called lictors, who cleared the way through the crowd.

His cruelty never tires and never stops anywhere, like savage beasts that bite more than their hunger demands.

94.63 Now he has thrown many kingdoms together into one; now Greeks and Persians fear the same man; now even nations that were free of Darius accept the yoke. Yet he goes on beyond the ocean and the sun, indignant at turning his victory back from the footsteps of Hercules and Liber, and prepares to do violence to nature herself. It is not that he wants to go on; he cannot stand still—like weights flung over a cliff, whose movement ends only when they lie at the bottom.[12]

94.64 Nor was it virtue or reason that urged Gnaeus Pompey into wars abroad and at home, but a mad love of false greatness. Now he was off to Spain and the war against Sertorius, now off to round up the pirates and bring peace to the seas.[13]

94.65 These were the pretexts put forward for prolonging his power. What drew him to Africa, to the north, against Mithridates and Armenia and every corner of Asia? Surely an endless desire to grow, since to himself alone he never seemed big enough. What hurled Gaius Caesar toward his own doom and the state's alike? Glory and ambition, and no limit to rising above everyone else. He could not bear one man ahead of him, though the Republic bore two above itself.[14]

94.66 What about Gaius Marius, consul once—for he received one consulship and seized the rest—when he was cutting down the Teutones and the Cimbri, when he was pursuing Jugurtha through the deserts of Africa: do you think he sought out so many dangers at the prompting of virtue? Marius led armies; ambition led Marius.[15]

94.67 While these men were shaking everything, they themselves were being shaken, like whirlwinds that spin whatever

12 Liber is Bacchus (Dionysus); he and Hercules were said to have reached India, the limit of the known world.

13 Pompey (106–48 BC) fought the rebel general Quintus Sertorius in Spain (76–71 BC) and cleared the Mediterranean of pirates (67 BC).

14 Mithridates VI of Pontus, Rome's long-time enemy, was finally defeated by Pompey. The two men above the Republic were Caesar and Pompey.

they seize but are spun first themselves, and strike with all the greater force because they have no control over themselves. And so, having been the ruin of many, they themselves also feel the deadly force with which they harmed so many. There is no reason to believe that anyone becomes happy through someone else's unhappiness.

94.68 All those examples forced on our eyes and ears must be unraveled, and the heart that is full of bad talk must be emptied out. Virtue must be brought into the place they have occupied—virtue, to root out lies and things that please against the truth, to separate us from the crowd, which we trust too much, and to restore us to sound opinions. For this is wisdom: to turn back to nature and to be restored to the place from which public error drove us.

94.69 A large part of health is to have left behind those who egg us on to madness, and to have gone far away from that mutually harmful association. To see that this is true, look how differently each person lives for the public and for himself. Solitude is not in itself a teacher of innocence, nor does the countryside teach frugality; but once the witness and spectator have gone, the vices subside, since their reward is to be displayed and gazed at.

94.70 Who puts on purple that he will show to no one? Who serves a secret banquet on gold plate? Who, stretched out in the shade of some country tree, has ever unfolded the pomp of his luxury all by himself? No one is extravagant for his own eyes, or even for the eyes of a few intimate friends; he spreads out the equipment of his vices in proportion to the crowd watching.

94.71 That is how it is: what spurs on everything we are mad about is an admirer and a witness. You will stop us craving if you stop us showing. Ambition, luxury and lack of self-control want a stage: you will cure them if you hide them.

94.72 So if we are placed amid the roar of cities, let there be an adviser at our side. Against those who praise enormous fortunes, let him praise the man who is rich with little and meas-

15 Marius (157–86 BC), seven times consul, defeated Jugurtha, king of Numidia (106 BC), and the Germanic Cimbri and Teutones (102–101 BC).

ures wealth by its use. Against those who exalt influence and power, let him look up to a leisure devoted to letters, and a mind that has turned back from external things to its own.

94.73 Let him show that those whom popular judgment calls happy are trembling and dazed on their envied pinnacle, holding a very different opinion of themselves from the one others hold of them. For what seems lofty to others is sheer precipice to them. So they go faint and tremble whenever they look down from that steep height of their greatness. They think of all the things that can befall them, and how slippery everything is on the heights.

94.74 Then they fear what they strove for, and the good fortune that makes them oppressive to others weighs more heavily on themselves. Then they praise leisure, gentle and their own; they hate the glitter, and look for a way out while their affairs are still standing. Then at last you may see men turned philosophers by fear, and sound advice coming from sick fortune. For as if these two things were opposites—good fortune and a good mind—we are wiser in bad times; prosperity takes away our good sense. Farewell.

LETTER 95: ON DOCTRINES AND PRECEPTS

Precepts are not enough without the underlying doctrines of philosophy, which give every act its aim.

95.1 You ask me to settle now a question I had said should be put off until its proper day, and to write and tell you whether the part of philosophy that the Greeks call *paraenetic* and we call "preceptive" is enough to make a person perfectly wise. I know you will take it in good part if I refuse. All the more reason for me to promise, and not let the old saying go to waste: "Next time, don't ask for what you won't want to get."[16]

95.2 For sometimes we press hard for something we would refuse if anyone offered it. Whether this is fickleness or fawning,

16 Seneca's question is whether practical precepts (rules for conduct) suffice without philosophy's underlying doctrines (*decreta*, Greek *dogmata*).

it deserves to be punished by a prompt yes. We want to seem to want many things that we don't want. A reader brought along an enormous history, written in the tiniest hand and rolled up as tight as could be, and after reading a large part of it he said, "I'll stop, if you like." Up goes the shout, "Read on, read on!" from the very people who want him struck silent on the spot. We often want one thing and pray for another, and we don't tell the truth even to the gods; but the gods either don't hear us or take pity on us.

95.3 I, for my part, will show no pity and take my revenge: I will hurl an enormous letter at you. If you read it unwillingly, say, "I brought this on myself," and count yourself among those who are tormented by a wife they courted with great effort; among those whom wealth won by the hardest sweat makes miserable; among those racked by the offices they sought with every art and effort; and among all the rest who got the troubles they asked for.

95.4 But to skip the preamble and come to the matter itself: "The happy life," they say, "consists of right actions; precepts lead to right actions; therefore precepts are enough for the happy life." Precepts do not always lead to right actions, but only when the character is compliant; sometimes they are applied in vain, if the mind is besieged by warped opinions.

95.5 Then again, even if people act rightly, they do not know that they are acting rightly. For no one who has not been shaped from the start and composed entirely by reason can carry out every part of duty, so as to know when he ought to act, and how far, and with whom, and in what way, and why. He cannot strive for the honorable with his whole mind, or even steadily or willingly; he will look back, he will hesitate.

95.6 "If honorable action," he says, "comes from precepts, then precepts are more than enough for the happy life; but the first is true, so the second is too." We will reply that honorable actions do come about through precepts—but not through precepts alone.

95.7 "If the other arts," he says, "are content with precepts, wisdom will be content with them too, since it is the art of living. Yet the one who makes a helmsman is the one who instructs him: move the tiller like this, lower the sails like this, use a following wind like this, resist a head wind like this, turn a fitful, shifting wind to your advantage like this. Precepts shape other craftsmen as well; so they will be able to do the same for the craftsman of living."

95.8 All those arts are concerned with the tools of life, not with the whole of life. So many things from outside hold them back and hinder them—hope, desire, fear. But this art, which professes to be the art of living, can be kept from exercising itself by nothing; for it shatters obstacles and sweeps past whatever stands in its way. Do you want to know how different the position of the other arts is from this one? In them it is more excusable to go wrong on purpose than by accident; in this one the greatest fault is to do wrong deliberately.

95.9 What I mean is this. A grammarian will not blush at a solecism if he made it knowingly; he will blush if he made it unknowingly. If a doctor does not realize his patient is failing, he errs more, so far as his art goes, than if he realizes it and pretends not to. But in this art of living, the fault of those who err willingly is the more shameful. Add now that most arts—indeed the most liberal of them all—have their doctrines, not just their precepts: medicine, for example. So there is one school of Hippocrates, another of Asclepiades, another of Themison.[17]

95.10 Besides, no contemplative art is without its doctrines, which the Greeks call *dogmata* and we may call *decreta*, *scita* or *placita*; you will find them in geometry and in astronomy. Philosophy, however, is both contemplative and active: it observes and acts at once. You are mistaken if you think it promises you only earthly services; its aims are loftier. "I search out the whole universe," it says, "and I do not confine myself within the mortal

17 Hippocrates of Cos (5th century BC), the founder of Greek medicine; Asclepiades of Bithynia (1st century BC) and his pupil Themison of Laodicea founded rival medical schools at Rome.

household, content to urge you toward things or away from them. Great things call me, set high above you:

95.11 'For I shall begin to discourse to you on the highest order of
heaven and of the gods,
and I shall unfold the first beginnings of things:
from what nature creates all things, increases and
nourishes them,
and into what that same nature dissolves them again when
they perish,'" as Lucretius says. It follows, then, that since philosophy is contemplative, it has its doctrines.[18]

95.12 And what of this? No one will duly carry out even what ought to be done unless he has been given a method by which he can fulfill every part of duty in every matter; and he will not keep them if he has received precepts for the case at hand rather than for every case. Precepts given for parts are weak in themselves and, so to speak, rootless. It is doctrines that fortify us, that guard our freedom from care and our tranquility, that embrace at once the whole of life and the whole nature of things. The difference between philosophy's doctrines and its precepts is the difference between elements and limbs: the latter depend on the former, while the former are the causes both of these and of everything else.

95.13 "The ancient wisdom," he says, "taught nothing but what to do and what to avoid, and men were far better then. Since the learned have come forward, the good have gone missing. For that simple, open virtue has been turned into an obscure and clever science, and we are taught to debate, not to live."

95.14 No doubt, as you say, that old wisdom was crude, especially at its birth, no less than the other arts, whose refinement grew as they advanced. But then there was not even any need yet for careful remedies. Wickedness had not yet risen so high or spread so wide. Simple remedies could stand up to simple

18 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 1.54–57. Lucretius (c. 99–55 BC) set out Epicurus' physics in a Latin poem.

vices; now our defenses must be as much more elaborate as the forces attacking us are more violent.

95.15 Medicine was once the knowledge of a few herbs to stop the flow of blood and close wounds; then little by little it arrived at its present bewildering variety. Nor is it surprising that it had less to do then, when bodies were still firm and sound, and food was plain and not spoiled by art and pleasure. But once food came to be sought not to take away hunger but to provoke it, and a thousand sauces were invented to whet greed, what had been nourishment for the hungry became a burden for the full.

95.16 Hence pallor, and the trembling of sinews soaked in wine, and a thinness more pitiable from indigestion than from hunger. Hence the uncertain steps of the tottering, and a constant stagger, as if in the very act of drunkenness. Hence fluid seeping under the whole skin, and the belly swollen as it wrongly grows used to taking in more than it could hold. Hence the spreading of sallow bile, the discolored face, the wasting of bodies rotting from within, fingers twisted as the joints stiffen, the numbness of sinews lying dead to feeling, or the ceaseless throbbing of sinews that never stop quivering.

95.17 Why mention dizziness of the head? Why the torments of the eyes and ears, the wormlike gnawings of a feverish brain, and all the passages by which we relieve ourselves afflicted with internal ulcers? And beyond these, countless kinds of fever—some raging in a violent onset, some creeping on as a subtle plague, some arriving with shivering and much shaking of the limbs?

95.18 Why list the countless other diseases, the punishments of luxury? People were free of these ills when they had not yet let themselves go soft with pleasures, when they ruled themselves and waited on themselves. They hardened their bodies with work and real labor, tiring themselves out with running or hunting or turning the soil. Then food awaited them that could please no one who was not hungry. So there was no need for such a great store of medical equipment, for so many scalpels

and pillboxes. Health was simple, from a simple cause; many courses have made many diseases.

95.19 See how many things luxury—that ravager of land and sea—mixes together to pass down a single throat. Things so different must inevitably quarrel with one another, and, badly swallowed, they are badly digested, as each pulls in its own direction. No wonder, then, that disease born of discordant food is fickle and varied, and that things driven together from opposite parts of nature overflow. So we fall ill in as many ways as we live.

95.20 The greatest of physicians, the founder of this science, said that women do not lose their hair and do not suffer from gout in the feet. Yet now they both lose their hair and suffer in their feet. Women's nature has not changed; it has been overpowered. Having matched men's license, they have matched men's bodily ailments as well.[19]

95.21 They stay up no less, drink no less, and challenge men at both oil and neat wine; like men, they bring up through the mouth what they forced into unwilling bellies, and measure back all their wine in vomit; like men, they gnaw on snow to relieve a burning stomach. In lust they do not even yield to men—though born to be passive, may the gods and goddesses destroy them! So perverse is the kind of lewdness they have devised: they take the active role with men. So why be surprised that the greatest of physicians and the most expert in nature is caught out in a falsehood, when so many women are gouty and bald? Through their vices they have forfeited the privilege of their sex; because they have stripped off womanhood, they are condemned to men's diseases.

95.22 The old physicians did not know how to give frequent meals and prop up a failing pulse with wine; they did not know how to let blood or relieve a long illness with baths and sweating; they did not know how to bind the legs and arms to draw a hidden malady lodged in the middle of the body out to the

19 Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* 6.28–29.

extremities. There was no need to look around for many kinds of help when there were very few kinds of danger.

95.23 But now, how far the evils of ill health have advanced! This is the interest we pay on pleasures craved beyond all measure and right. You will not wonder that diseases are countless: count the cooks. All study has come to a halt; the teachers of the liberal arts preside over deserted corners with no crowd at all. In the schools of the rhetoricians and philosophers there is emptiness; but how busy the kitchens are, how many young men jostle around the stoves of the spendthrifts!

95.24 I pass over the herds of unhappy boys who, when the banquet is over, face other indignities in the bedroom. I pass over the troops of kept boys, sorted by nationality and complexion so that all have the same smoothness, the same length of first down, the same kind of hair, so that no one with straighter hair is mixed in with the curly-haired. I pass over the crowd of bakers, and the crowd of waiters who scurry off at a signal to bring in the dinner. Good gods, how many people one belly keeps busy! And what of this? Do you think those mushrooms, a poison taken by choice, do no hidden work, even if they have not killed on the spot?

95.25 What? Don't you think that summer snow puts a callus on the liver? What? Do you suppose those oysters, the sluggish flesh fattened on mud, bring no slimy heaviness with them? What? Don't you believe that the "sauce of our allies," that costly putrid juice of rotten fish, burns the insides with its salty corruption? What? Do you think those festering dishes, passed into the mouth almost straight from the fire, are quenched in our very entrails without harm? And so how foul and pestilent the belches are, how disgusted men are with themselves as they exhale yesterday's drinking! You may be sure that what they eat is rotting, not being digested.[20]

95.26 I remember hearing once of a famous dish, onto which a cookshop, hurrying toward its own ruin, had heaped everything

20 *Garum*, the prized fermented fish sauce, of which the most expensive kind was called "sauce of the allies" (*garum sociorum*), made in Spain.

that usually keeps the fashionable at table all day: Venus clams, thorny oysters, and ordinary oysters trimmed down to the edible part, separated by layers of sea urchins. Over the whole lay red mullets, filleted and arranged without any bones.

95.27 By now it is tiresome to eat things one at a time; the flavors are forced into one. What ought to happen in the stomach happens at the dinner table. Next I expect food to be served already chewed. And how little short of that is it, when the cook picks out the shells and bones and does the teeth's work? "It's a bother to indulge in luxury one dish at a time. Let everything be served at once, turned into a single flavor. Why should I stretch out my hand for just one thing? Let many come together; let the garnishes of many courses unite and cling together.

95.28 "Let those who said that people chase display and glory from such dishes learn right away that these things are not shown off, but offered to the conscience. Let things usually set out separately come all together, drenched in one sauce. Let there be no difference: let oysters, sea urchins, thorny oysters and mullets be served jumbled up and cooked together." Food that has been vomited could not be more of a mess.

95.29 As these dishes are tangled together, so the diseases born of them are not single, but inextricable, diverse, many-shaped, and medicine too has begun to arm itself against them with many kinds of treatment and many rules. I say the same to you about philosophy. It was once simpler, among people whose wrongs were smaller and could be cured with light care; against such a total overthrow of morals, every effort must be made. And would that even so this plague might at last be subdued!

95.30 We are mad not only in private but in public. We restrain murders and single killings; what of wars, and the glorious crime of slaughtering whole nations? Neither greed nor cruelty knows any limit. As long as such things are done by stealth and by individuals, they are less harmful and less monstrous; but by decrees of the Senate and votes of the people savage acts are carried out, and what is forbidden to the private citizen is commanded by the state.

95.31 Deeds that would be paid for with one's life if committed in secret, we praise because men in generals' cloaks committed them. Human beings, the gentlest of creatures, are not ashamed to delight in one another's blood, to wage wars and hand them down to their children to wage, when even brute and savage beasts keep peace among themselves.

95.32 Against a madness so powerful and so widespread, philosophy has had to work harder, and has taken on as much more strength as its opponents have gained. It was easy to scold those who were too fond of wine and sought out daintier food; it took no great force to bring the mind back to a frugality it had strayed only a little from:

95.33 "Now there is need of swift hands, now of the master's art." Pleasure is sought from every source. No vice stays within its bounds; luxury plunges headlong into greed. Forgetfulness of the honorable has taken over. Nothing is shameful if its price is pleasing. A human being, a sacred thing to human beings, is now killed for sport and fun; and one whom it was once a sin to train to give and take wounds is now led out naked and unarmed, and a man's death is spectacle enough.[21]

95.34 In such a perversion of morals, then, something more forceful than usual is needed to shake off long-rooted evils: we must work with doctrines, so that the false beliefs we have accepted may be torn out by the roots. If we add to these precepts, consolations and exhortations, they can be effective; by themselves they are powerless.

95.35 If we want to keep people bound to us and tear them away from the evils that now grip them, let them learn what is evil and what is good. Let them know that everything except virtue changes its name, now becoming evil, now good. In the army the first bond is religious awe, love of the standards, and horror at desertion; then everything else is easily demanded and ordered of men who have sworn the oath. So too with those you want to lead to the happy life: the first foundations must be laid,

21 Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.442. Seneca refers to the midday executions in the arena, when condemned men were made to kill one another without armor.

and virtue instilled. Let them be held by a kind of reverent devotion to it; let them love it; let them want to live with it, and refuse to live without it.

95.36 "What then? Haven't some people turned out good without subtle instruction, and made great progress, while simply obeying bare precepts?" I admit it; but they had a fortunate nature, which snatched up what was healthful in passing. The immortal gods learned no virtue, since they were born with all of it, and being good is part of their nature; just so, some human beings, blessed with an outstanding disposition, arrive at what is usually taught without long schooling, and embrace the honorable the moment they hear of it. Hence those minds so quick to seize on virtue, or fertile by themselves. But in the dull and slow, or those besieged by bad habit, the rust of the mind must be rubbed away for a long time.

95.37 Besides, whoever imparts the tenets of philosophy will bring those already inclined to the good more quickly to the summit, and will help the weaker ones and pull them out of their bad opinions. How necessary these tenets are, you may see in this way. There are things lodged in us that make us sluggish toward some things and reckless toward others. Neither can the recklessness be checked nor the sluggishness roused unless their causes are removed: false admiration and false fear. As long as these possess us, you may say, "You owe this to your father, this to your children, this to your friends, this to your guests"; greed will hold him back as he tries. He will know he must fight for his country; fear will talk him out of it. He will know he must sweat for his friends to the last drop of sweat; but his comforts will forbid it. He will know that a mistress is the gravest kind of wrong to a wife; but lust will drive him the opposite way.

95.38 So it will do no good to give precepts unless you first remove what will obstruct them—no more good than laying weapons in sight and moving them close, unless the hands that are to use them are freed. For the mind to be able to go toward the precepts we give, it must first be set loose.

95.39 Suppose someone does what he should. He will not do it constantly, he will not do it consistently; for he will not know why he does it. Some of his acts, whether by chance or by practice, will come out right; but he will have no rule in hand to test them by, no rule to trust that what he has done is right. The man who is good by chance will not promise to stay so forever.

95.40 Then again, precepts may perhaps ensure that he does what he should; they will not ensure that he does it as he should, and if they do not ensure this, they do not lead to virtue. He will do what he should once he is advised, I grant; but that is too little, since the merit lies not in the deed, but in how it is done.

95.41 What is more scandalous than a lavish dinner that eats up a knight's fortune? What so deserves the censor's mark of disgrace as a man who, in the gluttons' phrase, "treats himself and his inner genius"? And yet inaugural dinners have cost the most frugal of men a million sesterces. The same thing, if given to the belly, is shameful; if given to an office, it escapes reproach. For it is not luxury, but a customary expense.[22]

95.42 A red mullet of enormous size—and why shouldn't I add its weight and whet certain people's appetites? they said it weighed four and a half pounds—was sent to Tiberius Caesar. He ordered it to be taken to the market and sold, and said, "Friends, I'm quite mistaken unless either Apicius or Publius Octavius buys that mullet." His guess came true beyond his hopes: they bid against each other, Octavius won, and he gained enormous glory among his friends for having bought for five thousand sesterces a fish that Caesar had sold and not even Apicius had bought. To pay so much was shameful for Octavius, but not for the man who had bought it to send to Tiberius—though I would find fault with him too: he admired a thing he thought worthy of Caesar.[23]

22 A knight's (equestrian) census qualification was 400,000 sesterces. The "inaugural dinners" were feasts given by priests on taking office, notorious for extravagance.

23 Apicius was a notorious gourmet of Tiberius' reign. Publius Octavius is otherwise unknown.

95.43 Someone sits at the bedside of a sick friend: we approve. But he does it for the sake of an inheritance: he is a vulture waiting for a corpse. The same acts are either shameful or honorable; what matters is why and how they are done. And everything will be done honorably if we devote ourselves to the honorable and judge it, and what comes from it, to be the only good in human affairs. Everything else is good only for the day.

95.44 So a conviction must be planted that applies to the whole of life: this is what I call a doctrine. As this conviction is, so will be our actions and our thoughts. And as these are, so will our life be. To give advice on details is not enough for someone setting the whole in order.

95.45 Marcus Brutus, in the book he titled περὶ καθήκοντος [On Duty], gives many precepts to parents, children and brothers; but no one will carry them out as he should unless he has something to refer them to. We must set before ourselves the goal of the supreme good, toward which we strive, and to which our every deed and word looks back—as sailors must steer their course by some star.[24]

95.46 Life without a purpose wanders. And if a purpose must be set at all, doctrines begin to be necessary. You will grant this, I think: nothing is more shameful than a man who is doubtful, uncertain, and timidly drawing back his foot. This will happen to us in everything unless we remove what checks and holds back our minds and forbids them to venture and strive with all their might.

95.47 People commonly give precepts on how the gods should be worshiped. Let us forbid anyone to light lamps on the Sabbath, since the gods do not need light and not even humans enjoy soot. Let us forbid people to perform morning greetings and sit at the doors of temples: human ambition is won by such attentions, but God is worshiped by the one who knows him. Let us forbid people to bring towels and body scrapers to Jupiter and to hold up a mirror to Juno: God does not seek servants.

24 Marcus Junius Brutus (85–42 BC), one of Caesar's assassins, who wrote works of philosophy.

Why would he? He himself serves the human race; he is everywhere and at hand for all.[25]

95.48 A man may hear what limits he should keep in sacrifices, and how far he should recoil from burdensome superstitions; but he will never have made enough progress unless he has formed the right conception of God in his mind—as possessing all things, bestowing all things, and giving his benefits freely. What reason do the gods have for doing good?

95.49 Their nature. Anyone who thinks they are unwilling to do harm is mistaken; they are unable to. They can neither receive injury nor inflict it; for harming and being harmed go together. That supreme and most beautiful nature of all has not even made dangerous those it has exempted from danger.

95.50 The first act of worship is to believe in the gods; next, to grant them their majesty, and to grant them their goodness, without which there is no majesty. To know that they are the ones who preside over the universe, who govern all things by their power, who act as guardians of the human race, though at times unconcerned with individuals. They neither cause evil nor suffer it; still, they chastise and restrain some people, impose penalties, and sometimes punish under the appearance of good. Do you want to win the gods' favor? Be good. Whoever imitates them has worshiped them enough.

95.51 Here is the second question: how we should treat human beings. What are we to do? What precepts are we to give? That we should spare human blood? How little it is not to harm someone you ought to help! A great glory indeed, if a human being is gentle to a human being! Shall we instruct him to hold out his hand to the shipwrecked, show the way to someone lost, share his bread with the hungry? Why should I list everything that must be done or avoided, when I can briefly hand him this formula of human duty:

95.52 all that you see, which encloses the divine and the human, is one; we are limbs of a great body. Nature made us kin, since

she created us from the same things and for the same ends. She planted mutual love in us and made us sociable. She established fairness and justice; by her ordinance it is more wretched to harm than to be harmed. By her command let our hands be ready to help.

95.53 Let this verse be in our hearts and on our lips: "I am human; I count nothing human foreign to me." Let us hold things in common; we were born for this. Our fellowship is very like a stone arch, which would fall if the stones did not support one another, and is held up by this very thing.[26]

95.54 After gods and humans, let us consider how we should deal with things. We will have thrown out precepts to no purpose unless we first settle what opinion we should hold about each thing—about poverty and wealth, glory and disgrace, homeland and exile. Let us weigh each one, setting reputation aside, and ask what things are, not what they are called.

95.55 Let us pass on to the virtues. Someone will instruct us to value prudence highly, to embrace courage, and to hold justice, if possible, even closer than the rest. But he will achieve nothing if we do not know what virtue is: whether it is one or many, separate or interlinked; whether someone who has one has the others too; how they differ from one another.

95.56 A carpenter need not inquire into carpentry—what its origin is, what its use—any more than a pantomime dancer need inquire into the art of dancing. All these arts lack nothing if they understand themselves, for they do not concern the whole of life. Virtue is the knowledge both of other things and of itself; we must learn about it in order to learn it.

95.57 An action will not be right unless the will is right, for the action comes from the will. Again, the will will not be right unless the disposition of the mind is right, for the will comes from that. And the disposition of the mind will not be at its best

25 The Jewish custom of lighting lamps for the Sabbath; the other practices are Roman temple rituals that treated the gods' statues like great men receiving clients or ladies at their toilet.

26 Terence, *The Self-Tormentor* 77. Terence (d. 159 BC) was a Roman comic playwright.

unless it has grasped the laws of the whole of life and worked out what judgment must be made about each thing—unless it has brought things back to the truth. Tranquility comes only to those who have reached an unchanging and certain judgment; the rest keep falling and getting up again, and waver back and forth between what they have let go and what they seek.

95.58 What is the cause of their tossing about? That nothing is clear to those who steer by the most uncertain guide: reputation. If you want always to want the same things, you must want true things. There is no reaching the truth without doctrines; they hold life together. Good and evil, honorable and shameful, just and unjust, dutiful and undutiful, the virtues and their exercise, the possession of advantages, esteem and rank, health, strength, beauty, keenness of the senses—all these need someone to appraise them. Let us be allowed to know at what value each should be entered on the census.

95.59 For you are deceived, and think some things worth more than they are; so deceived, in fact, that the things most prized among us—wealth, influence, power—ought to be valued at a penny. You will not know this unless you examine the very standard by which these things are rated against one another. Just as leaves cannot stay green by themselves, but need a branch to cling to and draw sap from, so these precepts wither if they stand alone; they need to be grafted onto a school of thought.

95.60 Besides, those who do away with doctrines do not see that by the very act of doing away with them they confirm them. For what do they say? That precepts are enough to set out how to live, and that the doctrines of wisdom—that is, its *dogmata*—are superfluous. Yet this very statement of theirs is a doctrine—just as much, by Hercules, as if I were now to say that we should give up precepts as superfluous, use doctrines, and devote all our study to them alone. By the very act of denying that precepts matter, I would be giving a precept.

95.61 Some things in philosophy need only reminding; others need proof, and a great deal of it, because they are wrapped up

and can scarcely be laid open with the greatest care and subtlety. If proofs are necessary, so are doctrines, which gather truth by arguments. Some things are plain, some obscure: plain are those grasped by the senses and by memory; obscure are those beyond these. But reason is not satisfied with the obvious; its greater and more beautiful part lies in what is hidden. Hidden things demand proof; proof is impossible without doctrines; therefore doctrines are necessary.

95.62 What makes for common sense also makes for perfect sense: a firm conviction about things. If without it everything in the mind is adrift, then doctrines are necessary, since they give minds an unbending judgment.

95.63 Finally, when we advise someone to regard a friend as highly as himself, to reflect that an enemy can become a friend, to stir up love in the one case and temper hatred in the other, we add: "This is just and honorable." But the just and the honorable are contained in the system of our doctrines; so that system is necessary, since without it these things do not exist.

95.64 But let us join the two. For branches are useless without a root, and the roots themselves are helped by what they have produced. No one can fail to know how useful the hands are; they plainly help us. But the heart, by which the hands live, from which they take their impulse, by which they are moved, lies hidden. I can say the same about precepts: they are out in the open, while the doctrines of wisdom are concealed. Just as only initiates know the holier parts of the mysteries, so in philosophy those secrets are revealed only to those who have been admitted and received into the rites; but precepts and other such things are known even to the uninitiated.

95.65 Posidonius judges necessary not only precept-giving (nothing stops us from using this word) but also persuasion, consolation and exhortation. To these he adds the inquiry into causes, *aetiologia*—and why we should not dare to use that word, when the grammarians, guardians of the Latin language, use it by their own right, I do not see. He says that a description of each virtue will also be useful; Posidonius calls this *ethologia*,

and some call it *characterismos*: it gives the signs and marks of each virtue and vice, by which similar things may be told apart.[27]

95.66 This has the same force as giving precepts. For the one who gives precepts says, "You will do these things if you want to be self-controlled." The one who describes says, "The self-controlled person is the one who does these things and abstains from those." Do you ask what the difference is? One gives the precepts of virtue, the other its model. These descriptions—or, to use the tax collectors' word, these *iconismi* [identifying descriptions]—are useful, I admit. Let us hold up what deserves praise, and someone will be found to imitate it.[28]

95.67 Do you think it useful to be given the signs by which to recognize a thoroughbred horse, so that you won't be cheated when buying or waste your effort on a sluggard? How much more useful it is to know the marks of an outstanding mind—marks we are allowed to transfer from another to ourselves!

95.68 "From the first, the colt of noble stock in the fields
steps out higher and sets down his supple legs;
he is first to lead the way and try the threatening rivers,
and dares to trust himself to an unknown bridge,
nor does he shy at idle noises.
His neck is high,
his head clean-cut, belly short, back broad,
and his spirited chest swells with muscle. ...
... Then, if arms clash somewhere far off,
he cannot stand still; he pricks his ears, his limbs tremble,
and snorting, he rolls the pent-up fire beneath his
nostrils."[29]

95.69 While describing something else, our Virgil has described the brave man; I, at least, would give a great man no other

27 The Greek terms mean "the giving of causes," "the depiction of character" and "characterization."
28 *Iconismi*: descriptions of a person's physical features, used in official records to identify individuals.
29 Virgil, *Georgics* 3.75–81, 83–85.

image. If I had to portray Marcus Cato—undaunted amid the crash of civil wars, the first to attack armies already moved up to the Alps, throwing himself in the path of civil war—I would assign him no other look, no other bearing.

95.70 Surely no one could "step out higher" than the man who rose up against Caesar and Pompey at once, and, while some favored Caesar's power and others Pompey's, challenged them both and showed that the Republic too had a party of its own. For it is too little to say of Cato, "nor does he shy at idle noises." Of course not—when he does not shy at real noises close at hand, when against ten legions, Gallic auxiliaries and foreign arms mixed with Roman ones, he raises a free voice and urges the Republic not to give up the fight for liberty but to try everything, since it would be more honorable to fall into slavery than to walk into it.

95.71 How much vigor and spirit there is in him, how much confidence amid the public panic! He knows that he is the one man whose status is not at stake; for the question is not whether Cato is free, but whether he lives among the free. Hence his contempt for dangers and swords. As I admire the unconquered steadfastness of a man who did not totter amid the nation's ruin, I am tempted to say, "and his spirited chest swells with muscle."

95.72 It will be useful not only to say what good men are usually like and to sketch their form and features, but also to tell and set out what they were actually like: that last and bravest wound of Cato, through which liberty breathed out her life; the wisdom of Laelius and his harmony with his friend Scipio; the outstanding deeds of the other Cato at home and abroad; the wooden couches of Tubero, when they were spreading a public banquet, with goatskins for coverlets and earthenware vessels set out for the feasters before the very shrine of Jupiter. What else was this but to consecrate poverty on the Capitol? Even if I knew no

other deed of his by which to rank him with the Catos, do we think this one too little? It was a censure, not a supper.[30]

95.73 Oh, how little those who crave glory understand what it is, or how it should be sought! On that day the Roman people looked at many men's furnishings; they admired one man's. All their gold and silver has been broken up and melted down a thousand times, but Tubero's earthenware will last through all the ages. Farewell.

30 "The other Cato" is Cato the Elder. Quintus Aelius Tubero, a Stoic and Scipio's nephew, furnished Scipio Aemilianus' funeral banquet (129 BC) in this frugal style and lost an election for it.

Book XVI

On facing hardships (96), on consolation for the bereaved (99).

LETTER 96: ON FACING HARDSHIPS

Hardships are the taxes of life; to live is to be a soldier, so accept them willingly.

96.1 So you are still indignant or complaining about something, and do you not understand that there is nothing bad in these things except this one thing—that you are indignant and complaining? If you ask me, I think nothing is wretched for a man except to think anything in the nature of things wretched. I will not bear with myself on the day I cannot bear something. I am in poor health: that is part of fate. My slaves have fallen ill, my income has taken a hit, my house has cracked, losses, wounds, toils and fears have come rushing at me: this is what usually happens. That is not enough to say: it was bound to happen.

96.2 These things are decreed, not accidents. If you believe me at all, I am now laying bare my innermost feelings to you: in all that seems adverse and hard, I am so formed that I do not obey God—I agree with him. I follow him from the heart, not because I must. Nothing will ever befall me that I will meet with gloom or a sour face. I will pay no tax unwillingly. And all the things we groan at, all that terrifies us, are taxes of life; from these, my Lucilius, do not hope for exemption, and do not ask for it.

96.3 Your bladder has been troubling you, letters have come that were far from pleasant, you have had one loss after another—let me get closer to the point—you have feared for your life. What, didn't you know that you were praying for these things

when you prayed for old age? All of them come with a long life, just as dust and mud and rain come with a long road.

96.4 "But I wanted to live and yet be free of all troubles." Such a feeble remark is unworthy of a man. See how you take this prayer of mine for you; I make it with a great spirit, not just a kindly one: may neither gods nor goddesses let fortune keep you pampered.

96.5 Ask yourself: if some god gave you the choice, would you rather live in the food market or in a camp? Yet to live, Lucilius, is to be a soldier. So those who are tossed about, who go up and down through hard, steep places and undertake the most dangerous expeditions, are brave men and the leaders of the camp; those whom rotten ease keeps comfortable while others toil are pet turtledoves, safe only because they are held in contempt. Farewell.

LETTER 97: ON THE VICES OF EVERY AGE

The scandal of Clodius' trial shows that vice belongs to people, not to any one age, and conscience punishes the guilty.

97.1 You are wrong, my Lucilius, if you think that luxury, neglect of good morals, and the other things each man charges against his own times are the vice of our age. These belong to human beings, not to times. No age has been free of guilt. And if you begin to weigh the license of each age, I am ashamed to say it: never were wrongs done more openly than in Cato's presence.

97.2 Would anyone believe that money changed hands at the trial in which Publius Clodius was the defendant, for the adultery he had committed in secret with Caesar's wife? He had violated the rites of that sacrifice which is said to be offered on behalf of the people, a rite from which all men are so completely barred, beyond the enclosure, that even pictures of male animals are covered up. Yet money was given to the jurors, and, more shameful even than this bargain, the favors of married women

and of young noblemen were demanded on top of it as a sweetener.[1]

97.3 The acquittal was a worse wrong than the crime. The man accused of adultery handed out adulteries, and did not feel sure of his safety until he had made his jurors like himself. These things were done at the trial in which, if nothing else, Cato had given evidence. I will set down Cicero's own words, because the thing is beyond belief:[2]

97.4 "He summoned them to his house, he made promises, he stood surety, he paid. And then—good gods, what a scandal!—some of the jurors even received, as a bonus on top of their fee, nights with certain women and introductions to young noblemen."

97.5 There is no point complaining about the price; the extras were worth more. "Do you want that stern man's wife? I will give her to you. That rich man's? I will guarantee you a night with her. If you don't commit adultery, convict. That beauty you long for will come. I promise you a night with her, and I won't put it off; my promise will be kept before the adjournment is over." Handing out adulteries is worse than committing them: it is serving notice on the matrons of Rome.

97.6 These Clodian jurors had asked the Senate for a guard, which they needed only if they meant to convict, and they got it. So after the defendant was acquitted, Catulus remarked wittily to them: "Why did you ask us for a guard? So that no one would snatch your money?" Yet amid such jokes he went unpunished: an adulterer before the trial, a pimp during it, who escaped conviction more shamefully than he had earned it.[3]

97.7 Can you believe anything was more corrupt than the morals of that time, when lust could be checked neither by religious rites nor by courts, when, in the very inquiry held by special

1 In 62 BC Clodius, disguised as a woman, entered the women-only rites of the Bona Dea ("Good Goddess") held at the house of Julius Caesar, whose wife was Pompeia; he was tried for sacrilege in 61 BC and acquitted.
2 The passage comes from Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* 1.16.5.
3 Quintus Lutatius Catulus, a leading conservative senator, who died soon after the trial.

decree of the Senate, a greater crime was committed than the one under investigation? The question was whether anyone could be safe after adultery; it turned out that no one could be safe without it.

97.8 This happened in the company of Pompey and Caesar, of Cicero and Cato—yes, that Cato in whose presence, they say, the people did not allow themselves to call for the customary jests of the Floralia, with prostitutes stripped naked on stage—if you can believe that people were stricter as spectators then than as jurors. Such things will happen and have happened, and the license of cities sometimes subsides through discipline and fear, never of its own accord.[4]

97.9 So there is no reason to believe that we have given the most rein to lust and the least to the laws. Today's young men are far more restrained than those of that day, when the defendant denied adultery before the jurors and the jurors confessed it before the defendant; when debauchery was committed in order to decide a case; when Clodius, winning favor by the very vices that made him guilty, played the go-between while his case was being pleaded. Would anyone believe it? The man facing conviction for one adultery was acquitted by many.

97.10 Every age will produce Clodiuses; not every age will produce Catos. We slide easily toward the worse, because neither a leader nor a companion can ever be lacking, and the thing goes forward even without leader or companion. The road to vice is not merely downhill but a sheer drop. And this is what makes most people incorrigible: in every other craft, mistakes shame the craftsman and trouble the one who errs; the mistakes of life give pleasure.

97.11 A helmsman does not rejoice when his ship capsizes; a doctor does not rejoice when his patient is carried out for burial; an orator does not rejoice if his client is convicted through his advocate's fault. But everyone, by contrast, takes pleasure in his own crime. One man delights in an adultery to which the very

4 The Floralia, the spring festival of the goddess Flora, featured notoriously indecent stage shows.

difficulty spurred him. Another delights in fraud and theft, and his wrongdoing never displeases him until its luck does. This comes from bad habit.

97.12 Otherwise—so that you may know that even in minds led into the worst there remains a sense of the good, and that the shameful is not unknown but ignored—everyone conceals his wrongs, and however well they have turned out, enjoys their fruits while hiding the deeds themselves. But a good conscience wants to come forward and be seen; wickedness is afraid even of the dark.

97.13 So I think Epicurus put it neatly: "The guilty may manage to stay hidden, but they cannot be sure of staying hidden." Or, if you think the idea is better expressed this way: "Hiding does wrongdoers no good, because even if they have the luck to stay hidden, they do not have the confidence." That is how it is: crimes can be safe; they cannot be free from care.

97.14 I do not think this conflicts with our school, if it is explained in this way. Why? Because the first and greatest punishment for wrongdoers is to have done wrong. No crime goes unpunished, though fortune adorn it with her gifts, though she protect and defend it, since the punishment of crime lies in the crime. But these secondary punishments too press upon it and follow at its heels all the same: always to fear, to be terrified, to distrust one's own safety. Why should I free wickedness from this punishment? Why not leave it forever in suspense?

97.15 Let us disagree with Epicurus where he says that nothing is just by nature and that crimes should be avoided because fear cannot be avoided. Let us agree with him here: that evil deeds are flogged by conscience, and that its greatest torment is the perpetual anxiety that presses and lashes it, because it cannot trust those who guarantee its security. This very fact, Epicurus, proves that we recoil from crime by nature: no one is without fear, even when safe. Fortune frees many from punishment, no one from fear.

97.16 Why is this, unless we have an ingrained aversion to what nature has condemned? That is why those in hiding never feel

sure of staying hidden: conscience convicts them and reveals them to themselves. Trembling is the mark of the guilty. It would go badly for us, since many crimes escape the law, the avenger and the punishments set down in writing, if those natural and heavy penalties did not exact payment on the spot, and fear did not take the place of suffering. Farewell.

LETTER 98: ON THE FICKLENESS OF FORTUNE

Happiness that depends on luck is fragile; rely on the mind, which can bear any loss.

98.1 Never believe anyone happy whose happiness hangs on luck. He leans on fragile things who rejoices in what comes from outside: the joy that came in will go out. But the joy that springs from within is loyal and firm; it grows, and goes with us to the very end. The other things the crowd admires are goods for a day. "What then? Can't they be of use and give pleasure?" Who denies it? But only if they depend on us, not we on them.

98.2 All the things fortune looks upon become fruitful and pleasant only if the one who has them also has himself, and is not in the power of his possessions. For they are wrong, Lucilius, who think fortune gives us anything good or evil. It supplies the material of goods and evils, the beginnings of things that will turn out, in our hands, for evil or for good. For the mind is stronger than any fortune: it steers its own affairs in either direction and is the cause of its own happy or wretched life.

98.3 The bad man turns everything to bad, even what came looking like the best. The upright and sound man corrects fortune's wrongs; he softens what is hard and harsh by knowing how to bear it; and he receives prosperity with gratitude and moderation, adversity with steadiness and courage. A man may be prudent, may do everything with careful judgment, may attempt nothing beyond his strength; still he will not attain that good which is whole and beyond the reach of threats unless he is certain in the face of what is uncertain.

98.4 Whether you choose to observe others (for judgment is freer about other people's affairs) or yourself, setting partiality aside, you will perceive this and admit it: none of these desirable and precious things is of any use unless you have armed yourself against the fickleness of chance and of all that follows from chance; unless at each loss you say, often and without complaint, "The gods thought otherwise."[5]

98.5 No, by Hercules—to find a braver and juster saying to prop up your mind—say this whenever something turns out other than you expected: "The gods know better." Nothing will befall a man so prepared. And he will be so prepared if he has thought about what the changeability of human affairs can do before he feels it; if he holds children, wife and property as one who will not necessarily have them forever, and who will be none the more wretched if he ceases to have them.

98.6 Wretched is the mind anxious about the future, miserable before its miseries, fretting that the things it enjoys should last to the very end. It will never be at rest, and in waiting for what is to come it will lose the present things it could have enjoyed. Grief for a thing lost and fear of losing it are on a par.

98.7 I am not, for that reason, prescribing carelessness. By all means avoid what is to be feared. Whatever can be foreseen by planning, foresee. Whatever is going to harm you, watch for it and turn it aside long before it happens. For this very purpose, confidence and a mind steeled to endure everything will help you most. He who can bear fortune can guard against it. Certainly, in calm weather, he does not flounder. Nothing is more wretched or more foolish than fearing in advance. What madness is it to run out ahead of your own misfortune?

98.8 In short, to sum up briefly what I think and to describe for you these fussers who torment themselves: they are as unrestrained in their misfortunes as they are before them. He suffers more than necessary who suffers before it is necessary. For the same weakness that keeps him from anticipating pain keeps him from gauging it; the same lack of restraint makes him ima-

5 Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.428.

gine his happiness will last forever, imagine that whatever has come to him must not only endure but grow. And forgetting this acrobat's springboard on which human affairs are tossed, he promises himself alone that chance will stay constant.

98.9 So I think Metrodorus put it superbly in the letter in which he consoles his sister on the loss of a son of the finest character: "Every good of mortals is mortal." He is speaking of those goods that people rush after. For the true good does not die; it is certain and everlasting: wisdom and virtue. This is the one immortal thing that falls to mortals.

98.10 Yet people are so perverse, so forgetful of where they are going and where each day drives them, that they are amazed to lose anything, though they are going to lose everything in a single day. Whatever you are registered as owning is in your keeping; it is not yours. Nothing is firm for the infirm, nothing eternal and invincible for the fragile. Perishing is as inevitable as losing, and this very fact, if we understand it, is a consolation. Lose with equanimity: you must perish.

98.11 What help, then, have we found against these losses? This: to keep what we have lost in memory, and not let the benefit we drew from it vanish along with it. Having can be snatched away; having had, never. He is deeply ungrateful who, once he has lost something, thinks he owes nothing for having received it. Chance takes the thing from us but leaves us its use and enjoyment—which we lose through the unfairness of our longing.

98.12 Say to yourself: "Of the things that seem terrible, none is invincible. Many have already conquered each of them: Mucius fire, Regulus the cross, Socrates poison, Rutilius exile, Cato death driven home by the sword. Let us, too, conquer something."

98.13 Again, the things that draw the crowd as splendid and happy have been scorned by many, and often. Fabricius as general rejected riches, and as censor branded them. Tubero judged poverty worthy both of himself and of the Capitol when, by using earthenware at a public banquet, he showed that a man ought to be content with what the gods still used. The elder Sex-

tius refused office: born to a station that obliged him to enter public life, he declined the broad stripe when the deified Julius offered it. For he understood that what could be given could also be taken away. Let us, too, do something bold ourselves; let us be among the examples.[6]

98.14 Why have we lost heart? Why despair? Whatever could be done can be done. Let us only cleanse the mind and follow nature; whoever strays from her must desire, must fear, and must be a slave to chance. We may return to the road; we may be restored to our former state. Let us be restored, so that we can endure pain, however it has attacked the body, and say to fortune: "You are dealing with a man. Look for someone you can beat."

98.15 With talk like this, and more like it, the violence of that ulcer is eased. By Hercules, I pray it may be soothed, and either healed or checked, and grow old along with him. But I am not worried about him; it is our loss that is at stake, for an excellent old man is being taken from us. He himself has had his fill of life; he wishes nothing more added to it for his own sake, only for the sake of those to whom he is useful.

98.16 It is generous of him to go on living. Another man would have ended these torments already; he thinks it as shameful to flee from death as to flee to death. "What then? If circumstances advise it, will he not depart?" Why should he not depart, if no one can make use of him any longer, if he will be attending to nothing but pain?

98.17 This, my Lucilius, is learning philosophy in practice and training for the real thing: seeing what courage a man of good sense has against death and against pain, when the one draws near and the other presses hard. What must be done must be learned from one who is doing it. Until now it has been a matter of arguments: whether anyone could resist pain, whether death, when it comes near, could bring even great spirits to submit.

6 Gaius Fabricius (consul 282 and 278 BC) refused bribes from King Pyrrhus and as censor expelled a senator for owning silver plate. The broad purple stripe on the tunic marked senatorial rank.

98.18 What need is there of words? Let us look at the facts in front of us. Death does not make him braver against pain, nor pain braver against death. He trusts himself against both: he does not suffer patiently in the hope of death, nor die gladly out of weariness with pain. The one he bears, the other he awaits. Farewell.

LETTER 99: ON GRIEF FOR A CHILD

Seneca's blunt letter to the grieving Marullus: tears are natural, but mourning must not become a performance.

99.1 I have sent you the letter I wrote to Marullus when he had lost his little son and was said to be taking it weakly. In it I did not follow the usual custom, nor did I think he should be handled gently, since he deserved rebuke more than consolation. When a man is stricken and is bearing a great wound badly, one must give way to him for a little while: let him have his fill of grief, or at least pour out its first onslaught. But those who have taken up mourning as a role should be reproved at once, and learn that even tears can be foolish.[7]

99.2 "Do you expect consolation? Take reproof instead. You are taking your son's death weakly—what would you do if you had lost a friend? A son has died, a little child whose promise was still uncertain; a sliver of time has been lost."

99.3 "We go hunting for reasons to grieve, and we want to complain about fortune even unfairly, as if she would not give us fair reasons for complaint. But, by Hercules, I thought you already had spirit enough even against solid evils, let alone these shadows of evils at which people groan out of habit. Had you lost a friend—the greatest of all losses—you should have tried to rejoice that you had had him more than to grieve that you had lost him."

99.4 "But most people don't reckon how much they have received, how much joy they have had. Among its other evils, this grief of yours has this one: it is not only pointless but

7 Marullus is otherwise unknown, perhaps Junius Marullus, consul in AD 62.

ungrateful. So the fact that you had such a friend—was that all for nothing? After so many years, so close a sharing of life, so intimate a partnership in study, has nothing been achieved? Do you bury friendship along with your friend? And why grieve at having lost him, if having had him is of no benefit? Believe me, a great part of those we have loved stays with us, even though chance has taken them away. The time that is past is ours, and nothing is in a safer place than what has been."

99.5 "We are ungrateful for what we have received because we are hoping for what is to come—as if what is to come, if it turns out well for us at all, will not quickly pass into the past. He sets narrow limits to the enjoyment of things who delights only in the present. Both future and past give pleasure, the one by anticipation, the other by memory; but the one hangs in doubt and may not happen, while the other cannot not have been. What madness is it, then, to let slip what is most certain? Let us rest content with what we have already drunk in, provided we did not drink with a mind full of holes, letting through whatever it had taken in."

99.6 "There are countless examples of men who have buried grown sons without tears, who have gone back from the pyre to the Senate or to some public duty and at once turned to other business. And rightly. First, it is pointless to grieve if grieving does you no good. Next, it is unfair to complain of what has happened to one person but awaits everyone. Next, it is foolish to lament your longing when there is so little distance between the one lost and the one who longs for him. We should be all the more composed, then, because we are following those we have lost."

99.7 "Consider how swiftly time rushes on; think how brief the span we race across at full speed; look at this procession of the human race all heading for the same place, separated by the smallest of intervals even where they seem largest. The one you think has perished has been sent on ahead. And what is more senseless than to weep for the one who went ahead, when you must travel the same road yourself?"

99.8 "Does anyone weep over something he knew would happen? Or if he did not think of death in a human being, he deceived himself. Does anyone weep over something he himself said could not fail to happen? Whoever complains that someone has died is complaining that he was human. The same condition binds us all: whoever has had the lot of being born is left with dying."

99.9 "We are separated by intervals; at the end we are made equal. What lies between the first day and the last is varied and uncertain: measure it by its troubles, and it is long even for a boy; by its speed, and it is short even for an old man. Everything is slippery and treacherous and more changeable than any weather. All things are tossed about and turn into their opposites at fortune's command, and in such a whirl of human affairs nothing is certain for anyone but death. Yet everyone complains about the one thing in which no one is deceived. 'But he died a boy.' I do not yet say that it goes better for one who is quickly done with life; let us turn to the one who has grown old."

99.10 "How little he outlasts the infant! Set before your mind the vastness of time's abyss and take in the whole universe; then compare what we call a human lifetime with that immensity. You will see how tiny is the thing we pray for, the thing we try to stretch out. And how much of it is taken up by tears, how much by worries!"

99.11 "How much by death wished for before it comes, how much by illness, how much by fear! How much is held by years either untaught or useless! Half of it is slept away. Add toil, grief, danger, and you will understand that even in the longest life the part actually lived is very small."

99.12 "But who will grant you that he is not better off who is allowed to go home early, whose journey is finished before he grows tired? Life is neither a good nor an evil; it is the place of good and evil. So he has lost nothing but a throw of the dice more likely to end in loss. He might have turned out modest and wise; he might, under your care, have been shaped for the bet-

ter; but—and this is the more reasonable fear—he might have become like most people."

99.13 "Look at those young men from the noblest houses whom luxury has flung into the arena; look at those who ply their own and others' lusts in mutual shamelessness, not one of whose days goes by without drunkenness, without some notorious disgrace. It will be plain that there was more to fear than to hope for. So you ought not to go looking for reasons to grieve, or pile up slight troubles by resenting them."

99.14 "I am not urging you to strain every nerve and rise to the occasion; I do not think so poorly of you as to believe you must summon all your virtue against this. This is not pain but a sting; it is you who make it pain. Philosophy has certainly done you a great deal of good if you can bravely bear the loss of a boy who was still better known to his nurse than to his father!"

99.15 "What? Am I now recommending hardness? Do I want the face rigid at the very funeral, and not allow the heart even to contract? Not at all. It is inhumanity, not virtue, to watch the funerals of your own with the same eyes you watched them living, and not be moved at the first tearing apart of your family. But suppose I did forbid it: some things have a will of their own. Tears fall even from those who hold them back, and once shed they relieve the mind."

99.16 "What then? Let us allow them to fall, not order them to …; let as many flow as feeling draws out, not as many as imitation demands. Let us add nothing to grief, nor swell it to match someone else's example. Display of grief asks more than grief does: how few are sad for themselves alone! They groan louder when they are heard; quiet and silent while they are alone, they are roused to fresh weeping when they see someone. Then they beat their heads with their hands, which they could have done more freely with no one to stop them; then they pray for death; then they roll off their couches. Without a spectator, grief lapses."

99.17 "In this, as in other things, we are dogged by the same fault: we shape ourselves by the example of the many, and look

not at what is proper but at what is customary. We desert nature and hand ourselves over to the crowd, a poor guide in anything, and in this, as in everything else, the most inconsistent. If it sees someone brave in his grief, it calls him unfeeling and savage; if it sees someone collapsing and clinging to the body, it calls him soft and spineless."

99.18 "Everything, then, must be referred to reason. Nothing is more foolish than to court a reputation for sorrow and to give tears our approval. In the wise man, I judge, tears sometimes fall by his leave, and sometimes are carried out by their own force. Let me explain the difference. When the first news of a bitter death strikes us, when we hold the body that is about to pass from our embrace into the fire, natural necessity forces out tears; and the breath, driven by the blow of grief, shakes the whole body, and so too the eyes, squeezing out and expelling the moisture that lies around them."

99.19 "These tears are forced out and fall against our will. There are others to which we give an outlet, when we go back over the memory of those we have lost. And there is something sweet in sadness when their pleasant sayings come back to us, their cheerful company, their dutiful affection; then the eyes are loosened as if in joy. These tears we indulge; by the others we are overcome."

99.20 "So there is no reason, because a circle of people is standing or sitting around you, either to hold back your tears or to force them out. Neither holding them back nor letting them flow is ever as shameful as faking them. Let them come of their own accord. And they can come to those who are calm and composed. Often they have flowed without harm to a wise man's authority, with such restraint that they lacked neither humanity nor dignity. It is possible, I say, to obey nature and keep one's dignity."

99.21 "I have seen men worthy of respect at the funerals of their own, whose love stood out plainly on their faces with none of the theatrics of mourning; there was nothing that was not given to true feeling. There is a certain grace even in grieving; the

wise man must preserve it, and as in other matters, so in tears too there is such a thing as enough. It is the unwise whose sorrows, like their joys, overflow."

99.22 "Accept what cannot be avoided with equanimity. What incredible, what new thing has happened? How many are arranging funerals at this very moment, how many are buying grave clothes, how many will be mourning when your mourning is done! Whenever you think that he was a boy, think also that he was a human being, to whom nothing certain is promised, whom fortune does not necessarily escort to old age; it lets him go at whatever point it sees fit."

99.23 "For the rest, speak of him often and honor his memory as much as you can. It will come back to you more often if it comes without bitterness; for no one willingly keeps company with a sad person, much less with sadness itself. If you listened with pleasure to any of his sayings, to any of his jokes, small as he was, repeat them often; affirm boldly that he could have fulfilled the hopes you had conceived for him with a father's heart."

99.24 "To forget one's own, to bury their memory along with their bodies, to weep most lavishly and remember most sparingly—that is the mark of an inhuman mind. That is how birds and beasts love their young: their love is frantic and almost rabid, but when they lose them it is utterly extinguished. This does not become a man of sense; let him go on remembering, and stop mourning."

99.25 "I in no way approve what Metrodorus says: that there is a certain pleasure akin to sadness, and that it should be hunted out at such a time. I have copied out Metrodorus' own words below. Μητροδώρου ἐπιστολῶν πρὸς τὴν ἀδελφήν [From the letters of Metrodorus to his sister]. Ἔστιν γάρ τις ἡδονὴ λύπῃ συγγενής, ἣν χρὴ θηρεύειν κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν καιρόν [For there is a pleasure akin to sorrow, which one ought to hunt out at such a time]."

99.26 "I have no doubt what you will think of this. For what is more shameful than to hunt for pleasure in the midst of mourning—no, by means of mourning—and to look for some-

thing to enjoy even among tears? These are the people who accuse us of excessive rigor and slander our precepts as harsh, because we say that grief should either not be admitted into the mind at all or be quickly driven out. Which, pray, is more incredible or more inhuman: to feel no grief at losing a friend, or to go hunting for pleasure in grief itself?"

99.27 "What we teach is honorable: once feeling has poured out some tears and, so to speak, frothed itself off, the mind must not be surrendered to grief. What—you say that pleasure should be mixed into grief itself? That is how we comfort children with a little cake, how we hush babies' crying by giving them milk. Not even at the moment when your son is burning on the pyre, or your friend is breathing his last, will you let pleasure rest—you want to tickle grief itself? Which is more honorable: that grief be removed from the mind, or that pleasure be admitted even into grief? 'Admitted,' do I say? It is hunted—and from grief itself."

99.28 "'There is,' he says, 'a pleasure akin to sadness.' We may say that; you certainly may not. You recognize one good, pleasure, and one evil, pain; what kinship can there be between good and evil? But suppose there is: is now of all times the moment to dig it out? Are we to search grief itself to see whether it has anything pleasant or pleasurable about it?"[8]

99.29 "Some remedies that are healthful for certain parts of the body cannot be applied to others, being foul and indecent; and what would help elsewhere without offense to modesty becomes improper because of where the wound is. Are you not ashamed to heal grief with pleasure? This wound needs sterner treatment. Rather, point this out: no sense of evil reaches the one who has perished; for if it reaches him, he has not perished."

99.30 "Nothing, I say, harms one who is nothing; if he is harmed, he is alive. Do you think things go badly for him because he is nothing, or because he is still something? But he can suffer no torment from not existing—for what feeling does

8 Seneca now addresses the Epicureans, for whom pleasure was the only good and pain the only evil.

one who is nothing have?—nor from existing, for then he has escaped death's greatest drawback: not existing."

99.31 "Let us also say this to the one who weeps and longs for someone snatched away in early youth: in the brevity of our lifespan, compared with the whole, all of us, young and old alike, stand on equal terms. For what comes to us out of all time is less than anything one could call the smallest amount, since the smallest amount is at least some part. This span we live is next to nothing; and yet—oh, our madness!—we lay out grand plans for it."

99.32 "I have written this to you not as though you would be waiting for so late a remedy—for I am sure you have already told yourself everything you are about to read—but to rebuke that brief lapse in which you departed from yourself, and to urge you for the future to lift up your spirit against fortune and to watch for all her weapons, not as things that might come but as things certain to come." Farewell.

LETTER 100: ON THE STYLE OF FABIANUS

Fabianus wrote for the mind, not the ear, and a philosopher's style should be calm rather than showy.

100.1 You write that you read the books of Papirius Fabianus entitled On Civic Affairs with the greatest eagerness, and that they did not live up to your expectations; then, forgetting that it is a philosopher under discussion, you find fault with his style. Suppose what you say is so, and his words pour out rather than being set firmly in place. First, that has its own charm, and a gently gliding speech has a grace all its own. For I think it makes a great difference whether words have tumbled out or flowed. Add now that in this respect too, as I am about to say, there is a huge difference: Fabianus seems to me not to spill his words but to pour them, so abundant is his speech and so free of turbulence, though not without momentum.[9]

100.2 It plainly admits and displays one thing: it has not been worked over or long twisted into shape. But let us grant that it is as you say. He was composing character, not words, and he wrote these things for minds, not for ears.

100.3 Besides, had he been speaking in person, you would have had no time to examine the parts; the whole would have swept you away. And generally, what pleases by its momentum is worth less when taken in hand and examined. But it is also a great achievement to have captured the eye at first glance, even if careful study will find something to criticize.

100.4 If you ask me, the one who carries off our judgment is greater than the one who merely earns it; and I know that the latter is safer, I know he can promise himself more boldly about the future. An anxious style does not suit a philosopher. Where will a man ever be brave and steadfast, where will he put himself to the test, if he is afraid of words?

100.5 Fabianus was not careless in his style, but free from worry. So you will find nothing sordid in it: his words are chosen, not hunted for, not set against their nature and turned inside out in the fashion of our age; yet they are brilliant, though taken from everyday speech. You have honorable and splendid thoughts, not squeezed into epigrams but expressed more expansively. We may notice what has been too little pruned, too little built, what lacks this recent polish; but when you have looked it all over, you will see no hollow pettiness.

100.6 Granted, it lacks the variety of marbles, the channels of water running through the bedrooms, the "poor man's room," and whatever else luxury mixes in when it is not content with simple beauty; but, as the saying goes, the house is soundly built. Add now that there is no agreement about how words should be arranged. Some want style to be polished out of roughness; some so love the rugged that even what chance has

9 Fabianus' *On Civic Affairs* is lost.

arranged more smoothly they deliberately break up, cutting off their cadences so that they do not end as expected.[10]

100.7 Read Cicero: his arrangement is all of a piece, slow in the turn of its rhythm, and smooth without being disreputable. Asinius Pollio's, by contrast, is bumpy and jerky, and it breaks off just where you least expect it. In short, in Cicero everything comes to a close; in Pollio everything drops off, except for a very few passages bound to a fixed rhythm and a single pattern.[11]

100.8 Further, you say that everything seems low to you and not elevated enough. I judge him free of that fault. His writing is not low but calm, shaped to match a quiet and composed state of mind; not sunken but level. It lacks the orator's vigor and the goads you are looking for, and the sudden blows of epigram. But look at the whole body, how well groomed it is: it is honorable. His style does not have dignity, but it will confer it.

100.9 Name someone you could rank above Fabianus. Say Cicero, whose books on philosophy are nearly as many as Fabianus'; I will give way—but a thing is not at once paltry just because it is less than the greatest. Say Asinius Pollio; I will give way, and let us reply: in so great a field, it is a distinction to come after two. Name more. Titus Livy—for he too wrote dialogues, which you could class as philosophy no more than as history, and books that are avowedly philosophical; to him too I will yield place. But see how many a man surpasses who is beaten by three—and those the three most eloquent.[12]

100.10 But he does not supply everything. His style is not forceful, though it is lofty; not violent or torrential, though it is abundant; not transparent, but pure. "You would want," you say, "something said harshly against the vices, boldly against dangers, proudly against fortune, scornfully against ambition. I want luxury rebuked, lust exposed, unbridled passion broken. Let there be something with the bite of oratory, the grandeur of

10 The "poor man's room" was a bare chamber in which the rich playacted at poverty (see Letter 18).

11 Gaius Asinius Pollio (76 BC–AD 4), orator, historian and patron of letters, known for a harsh, archaic style.

12 Livy's philosophical writings are lost.

tragedy, the plainness of comedy." You want him to sit fussing over a trifle—words. He has devoted himself to the greatness of his subject, and draws eloquence after him like a shadow, without aiming at it.

100.11 No doubt not every detail will be carefully examined, compact and self-contained, and not every word will rouse and prick you, I admit. Many things will go by without striking home, and at times the speech will slide idly past; but there will be much light throughout, and a vast stretch without tedium. Above all, he will make it clear to you that he felt what he wrote. You will understand that his aim was for you to know what pleased him, not for him to please you. Everything tends toward progress, toward a sound mind; applause is not what he seeks.

100.12 I have no doubt his writings are of this kind, even though I recall them rather than retain them, and their color stays with me not closely, from recent acquaintance, but in outline, as usually happens with something known long ago. Certainly, when I used to hear him, they seemed to me like this: not solid, but full; the kind of writing that would lift up a young man of good character and call him to imitate it, without making him despair of surpassing it—which seems to me the most effective encouragement. For whoever has created the desire to imitate but taken away the hope of succeeding only discourages. Still, he was lavish with words, and though no single part stood out for praise, he was magnificent as a whole. Farewell.

Books XVII–XVIII

On the futility of planning ahead (101), on following the will of the universe (107), on how to read philosophy (108).

LETTER 101: ON PLANNING AHEAD

A friend's sudden death shows the folly of long plans; live each day as a complete life.

101.1 Every day, every hour shows how nothing we are, and with some fresh proof reminds us of the frailty we had forgotten; then, as we plan for eternity, it makes us look back at death. What do I mean by this opening, you ask? You knew Cornelius Senecio, a distinguished and obliging Roman knight. From humble beginnings he had worked his own way up, and the path to everything else was already running downhill for him. For rank grows more easily than it begins.

101.2 Money, too, lingers longest around poverty; while it is creeping out of it, it sticks. Senecio was already on the verge of riches, and two most effective things were carrying him toward them: the know-how to acquire and the know-how to keep—either one of which could have made him a rich man.

101.3 This man, extremely thrifty, as careful of his estate as of his body, had called on me in the morning as usual; had spent the whole day, right into the night, at the bedside of a friend who lay gravely ill and past hope; had dined cheerfully—and then he was seized by a sudden, headlong illness, quinsy, and with his throat closed tight he barely drew his breath until daybreak. So, within a very few hours of performing all the duties of a sound and healthy man, he was dead.

101.4 He who kept his money moving on sea and land, who had also gone into public contracts, leaving no kind of profit untried, was snatched away in the very course of success, in the very rush of money pouring in. "Now graft your pear trees, Meliboeus; set your vines in rows!" How foolish it is to lay out the years of your life when you are not master even of tomorrow! What madness it is to start on long-range hopes: "I'll buy, I'll build, I'll lend, I'll collect, I'll hold office—and then, weary and full of years, I'll retire into leisure."[1]

101.5 Believe me, everything is uncertain, even for the fortunate. No one should promise himself anything about the future. Even what we hold slips through our hands, and chance cuts into the very hour we are grasping. Time rolls on by a fixed law, yes, but in darkness; and what is it to me whether something is certain to nature, if it is uncertain to me?

101.6 We plan long voyages and, after roaming foreign shores, a late return home; military service and the slow wages of the camp's hardships; governorships and promotion from post to post—and all the while death is at our side. Since we never think of it except as someone else's, examples of mortality are thrust on us again and again, yet they stay with us no longer than our surprise.

101.7 But what is more foolish than to be surprised that something happened on one particular day which can happen on any day? A boundary does stand fixed for us, where the inexorable necessity of the fates has set it, but none of us knows how near it lies. So let us shape our minds as if we had come to the very end. Let us put nothing off. Let us balance our accounts with life every day.

101.8 The greatest flaw in life is that it is always unfinished, that some part of it is always being postponed. The man who puts the finishing touch on his life every day does not lack time. And from this lack springs fear, and a craving for the future that eats away the mind. Nothing is more wretched than uncertainty about how coming events will turn out; how much remains, or

1 Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.73, spoken bitterly by a farmer who has lost his land.

what sort it will be—over this an anxious mind is tossed about by a fear it cannot unravel.

101.9 How shall we escape this tossing? In one way only: if our life does not reach out ahead, if it is gathered into itself. For the man who hangs on the future is the one for whom the present is worthless. But once I have paid myself everything I owed, once my mind stands firm and knows that there is no difference between a day and a century, it looks down from a height on whatever days and events are still to come, and thinks of the chain of time with a great deal of laughter. For how will the variety and fickleness of chance disturb you, if you are sure in the face of what is unsure?

101.10 So hurry to live, my Lucilius, and count each day as a separate life. The man who has fitted himself to this, for whom his life was whole every day, is free from care. For those who live on hope, each coming moment slips away, and in creeps greed, and the fear of death, most wretched in itself and making everything else wretched. Hence that most shameful prayer of Maecenas, in which he does not refuse maiming, or disfigurement, or at last even the sharp cross, so long as among these evils his breath is prolonged:[2]

101.11 "Maim my hand, maim my foot and make me limp,
Pile on a hunched back, shake my teeth loose;
While life remains, all is well. Keep it for me, even if
I sit on the sharp cross."

101.12 What would be the most wretched thing if it befell him, he prays for, and asks for a stay of punishment as if it were life. I would think him most contemptible if he wanted to live right up to the cross. "No," he says, "maim me if you like, so long as breath remains in a body broken and useless. Deform me if you like, so long as some time is added to a monstrous and twisted life. Nail me up if you like, and set the sharp cross beneath me as I sit." Is it worth so much—to press on one's own wound and

2 Crucifixion was a Roman form of execution; the victim was sometimes set astride a sharp peg on the cross.

hang stretched out on the gibbet, just to postpone what is the best thing about suffering, the end of the punishment? Is it worth so much to have breath, only to breathe it out in agony?[3]

101.13 What could you wish for this man except gods who would grant his prayer? What does it mean, this shameful, spineless verse? This bargain struck by the maddest fear? This foul begging for life? You would think no one had ever read him Virgil: "Is it so very wretched, then, to die?" He prays for the worst of evils, and longs to have what is hardest to bear drawn out and prolonged—for what reward? A longer life, of course. But what kind of living is a slow death?[4]

101.14 Can anyone be found who would rather waste away under torture, perish limb by limb, and let his life out drop by drop, than breathe it out once? Can anyone be found who, fastened to that accursed tree, already maimed, already twisted, his shoulders and chest crushed into a hideous hump—a man with many reasons to die even before the cross—would want to draw a breath that would draw out so many torments? Deny now, if you can, that it is a great kindness of nature that we must die.

101.15 Many are ready to strike even worse bargains: to betray a friend in order to live longer, and with their own hands to hand over their children to be violated, just to be allowed to see the light that witnesses so many crimes. We must shake off the craving for life and learn that it makes no difference when you suffer what must be suffered at some point. What matters is how well you live, not how long; and often living well means not living long. Farewell.

3 The final question plays on animam habere (to have breath, life) and animam agere (to be at one's last gasp).

4 Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.646, spoken by Turnus as he goes to meet death.

LETTER 102: ON RENOWN AFTER DEATH

Seneca defends posthumous renown as a good, then turns to the soul's return to its heavenly home.

102.1 Someone who wakes a man enjoying a pleasant dream is a nuisance: he takes away a pleasure that, even if false, has the effect of a real one. That is the wrong your letter did me. For it called me back when I had given myself up to a fitting line of thought, one I would have followed further if I had been allowed.

102.2 I was enjoying an inquiry into the immortality of souls—no, by Hercules, I was enjoying believing in it. For I was readily lending myself to the opinions of great men, who promise this most welcome thing rather than prove it. I was giving myself over to so great a hope. I was already weary of myself; I was already scorning what remains of my broken years, since I was about to pass into that boundless time and into possession of all the ages—when suddenly your letter arrived and woke me, and I lost so lovely a dream. I will go after it again once I have dealt with you, and win it back.

102.3 You say that in my first letter I did not work out the whole question in which I was trying to prove the view our school holds: that renown which comes after death is a good. For, you say, I did not answer the objection raised against us: "No good," they say, "consists of separate things. But renown does consist of separate things."[5]

102.4 What you are asking about, my Lucilius, belongs to the same question but to another part of it, and so I had put off not only this but other points bearing on it. For, as you know, some matters of logic are mixed in with ethics. So I dealt with the part that is straightforward and concerns conduct: whether it is foolish and pointless to send our concerns past our last day; whether our goods perish along with us, so that nothing belongs

5 "Our school" is the Stoics. "Separate things" (ex distantibus) are wholes made of distinct, unjoined members, such as an army; the distinction is explained in 102.6.

to a man who no longer exists; and whether any benefit can be gained or sought, before it exists, from something we will not perceive when it does exist.

102.5 All these questions concern conduct, and so they were put in their proper place. But what the logicians say against this view had to be set apart, and so it was put aside. Now, since you demand everything, I will go through everything they say, and then answer each point.

102.6 Unless I say something first, the points to be refuted cannot be understood. What is it that I want to say first? That some bodies are continuous, like a human being; some are composite, like a ship, a house—in short, all things whose different parts are forced into one by joining; and some consist of separate things, whose members remain apart, like an army, a people, a senate. For the individuals that make up these bodies are held together by law or by duty, but by nature they are distinct and single. What else do I want to say first?

102.7 We hold that nothing is a good that consists of separate things. For a single good must be held together and governed by a single breath; a single good must have a single ruling part. This can be proved on its own terms whenever you want; for now it had to be laid down, because our own weapons are being hurled at us.[6]

102.8 "You say," someone objects, "that no good consists of separate things? But this renown is the favorable opinion of good men. For just as reputation is not one person's talk, and ill repute not one person's bad opinion, so renown is not merely having pleased one good man. For there to be renown, many distinguished and notable men must agree on it. But it arises from the judgments of many—that is, of separate people. Therefore it is not a good."

102.9 "Renown," he says, "is praise given to a good man by good men; praise is speech; speech is a sound that signifies something; and a sound, even if it comes from good men, is not a good. For not everything a good man does is a good. He both

6 In Stoic physics a single "breath" (Greek pneuma) holds a unified body together.

applauds and hisses, but no one calls his applause or his hissing a good—however much he admires and praises all he does—any more than his sneeze or his cough. Therefore renown is not a good."

102.10 "In sum, tell us whether it is the good of the one who praises or of the one praised. If you say it is the good of the one praised, you are doing something as ridiculous as if you claimed that someone else's good health is mine. But praising the worthy is an honorable action; so it is the good of the one praising, whose action it is, not of us who are praised. And that was the question."

102.11 I will now answer each point briefly. First, whether there is any good consisting of separate things is still an open question, and each side has its adherents. Next, does renown require many votes? It can be content with the judgment of a single good man: one good man judges us good.

102.12 "What then?" he says. "Will reputation be one man's opinion, and ill repute one man's spiteful talk?" Glory, too, I understand to be spread more widely, for it requires the agreement of many. But the case of these two is different from that of renown. Why? Because if one good man thinks well of me, I am in the same position as if all good men thought the same; for all of them, if they come to know me, will think the same. Their judgment is equal and identical, because it is equally steeped in truth. They cannot disagree; so it is as good as if they all thought the same, because they cannot think otherwise.

102.13 For glory or reputation, one man's opinion is not enough. In the first case, one verdict does as much as everyone's, because everyone's, if you polled them, would be one; in the second, the judgments of unlike people are various. You will find feelings hard to please, and everything doubtful, fickle, suspect. Do you think everyone can hold one opinion? A single man does not hold one opinion. The good man likes the truth, and truth has one force, one face; but what the many assent to is false. And falsehood never has consistency: it shifts and disagrees with itself.

102.14 "But praise," he says, "is nothing but a sound, and a sound is not a good." When they say renown is praise given to the good by the good, they refer not to the sound but to the judgment. For even if a good man says nothing, but judges someone worthy of praise, that person has been praised.

102.15 Besides, praise is one thing and a eulogy another; the eulogy also requires a voice. That is why no one speaks of "funeral praise" but of a "funeral eulogy," whose function consists in a speech. When we say someone is worthy of praise, what we are promising him is not people's kind words but their judgments. So praise belongs even to a silent man who thinks well of someone and praises a good man within himself.[7]

102.16 Next, as I said, praise refers to the mind, not to the words that give voice to the praise once conceived and send it out into public notice. The man who judges someone worthy of praise is praising him. When that tragic poet of ours says it is splendid "to be praised by a man who is praised," he means a man worthy of praise. And when an equally old poet says "praise nourishes the arts," he does not mean the eulogy, which corrupts the arts. For nothing has so spoiled eloquence and every other pursuit aimed at the ear as popular applause.[8]

102.17 Reputation certainly requires a voice; renown can come about even without one, content with a judgment. It is complete not only among the silent but even among those who protest. Let me say what the difference is between renown and glory: glory rests on the judgments of the many, renown on those of the good. "Whose good is renown," he asks, "that is, the praise given to a good man by good men?"

102.18 "Is it the good of the one praised or of the one praising?" Of both. It is mine, as the one praised, because nature created me to love everyone, and I rejoice at having done good, and I am glad to have found grateful interpreters of my virtues. That they

7 The contrast is between laus (praise, esteem) and laudatio (a formal speech of praise, as at a funeral).

8 The tragic line is from Naevius' *Hector's Departure* (3rd century BC), spoken by Hector to his father Priam.

are grateful is a good for the many, but it is also mine. For my mind is so disposed that I count the good of others as my own—especially of those whose good I myself have caused.

102.19 It is also the good of those who praise, for it is performed by virtue, and every action of virtue is a good. They could not have achieved it if I were not the kind of man I am. So being deservedly praised is a good for both—just as, by Hercules, a good judgment is a good both for the one who judged and for the one in whose favor it was given. Do you doubt that justice is a good both for the one who has it and for the one to whom it pays what is owed? Praising the deserving is justice; therefore it is a good for both.

102.20 We have answered these quibblers more than enough. But our aim should not be to argue cleverly and drag philosophy down from its majesty into these narrow straits. How much better to travel an open, straight road than to lay out a winding path for yourself which you must then retrace with great trouble! For these debates are nothing but a game played by men skilled at trapping one another.

102.21 Speak instead of how natural it is for the mind to stretch itself out into the infinite. The human spirit is a great and noble thing: it allows no limits to be set for it except those it shares with God. First, it does not accept a lowly homeland, Ephesus or Alexandria or any other place even more thickly peopled or more richly built up. Its homeland is whatever the highest and all-embracing heaven encloses in its circuit—this whole vault, within which lie the seas and the lands, within which the air both separates and joins the human and the divine, in which so many lights are set in order and keep watch over their appointed tasks.

102.22 Second, it does not allow a cramped span of life to be allotted to it. "All the years," it says, "are mine. No age is closed to great minds; no time is out of reach of thought. When that day comes which will part this mixture of the divine and the human, I will leave this body here, where I found it, and return myself to

the gods. Even now I am not without them, but I am held back by what is heavy and earthly."

102.23 Through these delays of mortal life we are rehearsing for that better and longer life. Just as for ten months our mother's womb holds us and prepares us, not for itself but for the place into which we are sent forth once we are fit to draw breath and survive in the open, so through this span that stretches from infancy to old age we are ripening for another birth. Another beginning awaits us, another state of things.

102.24 We cannot yet bear heaven except from a distance. So look forward without fear to that decisive hour: it is the last hour not for the mind, but for the body. Whatever things lie around you, look on them as the baggage in an inn: you must move on. Nature strips you as you leave, just as when you came in.

102.25 You may not carry out more than you brought in; indeed, even of what you brought into life a great part must be laid down. This wrapping around you, your last covering, the skin, will be stripped away; stripped away will be the flesh and the blood that suffuses it and runs throughout; stripped away the bones and sinews, the framework of what is fluid and slipping.

102.26 That day you dread as your last is the birthday of eternity. Lay down your burden. Why do you hesitate—as if you had not once before left the body you lay hidden in, and come out? You cling, you resist; back then, too, you were driven out by your mother's great effort. You groan, you weep; and this very weeping belongs to one being born—but then it was forgivable: you had come raw and ignorant of everything. Sent out from the warm, soft shelter of your mother's womb, you felt the freer air blow on you; then came the touch of a rough hand, and, still tender and knowing nothing, you were stunned among things unknown.

102.27 Now it is nothing new for you to be separated from something you were once part of. Calmly let go of limbs now useless, and put off this body you have lived in so long. It will be torn apart, buried, destroyed. Why are you sad? This is how it always

goes: the coverings of the newborn always perish. Why do you love these things as if they were your own? They are only your wrapping. The day will come that tears you out and leads you away from your lodging with a foul and smelly belly.

102.28 Even now withdraw yourself from it as much as you can, and from pleasure, except what is bound up with necessary and serious things. Estranged from it already, think of something higher and more sublime. One day the secrets of nature will be revealed to you; this fog will be scattered and bright light will strike you from every side. Picture to yourself how great that brilliance is, with so many stars mingling their light; no shadow will disturb the clear sky. Every side of heaven will shine equally; day and night are alternations of the lowest air. Then you will say you have lived in darkness, when with your whole being you see the whole light—the light you now glimpse dimly through the narrowest passages of the eyes. And yet you already admire it from afar; what will the divine light seem to you when you see it in its own place?[9]

102.29 This thought lets nothing base settle in the mind, nothing mean, nothing cruel. It tells us that the gods are witnesses of all things. It bids us win their approval, prepare ourselves to join them in the future, and set eternity before us. The man who has grasped this in his mind shrinks from no army, is not thrown into panic by the trumpet, is driven to fear by no threats.

102.30 Why should he not be fearless, when he hopes to die? Even the man who believes the soul lasts only as long as it is held by the bond of the body scatters it the moment it is freed, so that it can be useful even after death. For though he himself has been snatched from our sight, still "The hero's great courage keeps coming back to mind, / And the great glory of his race." Think how much good examples help us: you will find that the

9 The Latin of one clause is corrupt; the translation follows the usual correction.

memory of great men is no less useful than their presence. Farewell.[10]

LETTER 103: ON THE DANGER OF OTHER PEOPLE

The daily danger comes from other people; guard against them without making a show of philosophy.

103.1 Why are you looking around at things that may perhaps happen to you, but may also not happen? I mean fire, a building collapsing, other things that befall us but do not lie in wait for us. Rather, watch out for, and avoid, the things that watch us and try to catch us. Accidents like being shipwrecked or overturned in a carriage are rarer, even if serious; but from human being to human being the danger is daily. Get ready against this; keep your eyes fixed on it. No evil is more frequent, none more persistent, none more ingratiating.

103.2 A storm threatens before it rises; buildings creak before they fall; smoke announces a fire. But ruin from a human being is sudden, and the closer it comes, the more carefully it is hidden. You are wrong if you trust the faces of the people you meet: they have the look of human beings and the minds of wild beasts—except that with beasts the danger lies in the first attack; those they have passed by, they do not seek out. For nothing but need ever drives them to do harm: hunger or fear forces them to fight. A human being enjoys destroying a human being.

103.3 Yet so think about the danger that comes from human beings that you also think about the duty of a human being. Watch the one so as not to be harmed, the other so as not to do harm. Rejoice in everyone's good fortune, be moved by their misfortunes, and remember what you ought to provide and what you ought to guard against.

103.4 What will you gain by living this way? Not that people won't harm you, but that they won't deceive you. As far as you

10 Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.3–4, of Dido thinking of Aeneas. The text of the second sentence is uncertain; the sense is that even one who denies immortality can make his life useful after death through his example.

can, though, retreat into philosophy: she will shelter you in her embrace; in her sanctuary you will be either safe or safer. People collide only when they walk the same road.

103.5 But you must not make a show of philosophy itself; for many, handling it arrogantly and defiantly has been a source of danger. Let it strip away your faults, not reproach others for theirs. Let it not recoil from common customs, nor act so as to seem to condemn whatever it does not do. It is possible to be wise without pomp, without arousing ill will. Farewell.

LETTER 104: ON FEVER AND TRAVEL

Fleeing a fever to Nomentum, Seneca argues that travel cures nothing, since we carry our faults with us.

104.1 I have fled to my place at Nomentum—from what, do you think? The city? No, a fever, and one creeping up on me at that. It had already laid hands on me. The doctor said it was starting, with my pulse agitated, irregular, and disturbing its natural rhythm. So I ordered my carriage made ready at once. My Paulina tried to hold me back, but I insisted on leaving. I had on my lips the words of my lord Gallio, who, when he began to run a fever in Achaea, boarded a ship at once, insisting that the illness belonged not to his body but to the place.[11]

104.2 I said this to my Paulina, who urges me to take care of my health. For since I know that her life hangs on mine, I am beginning, out of consideration for her, to be considerate of myself. And though old age has made me braver about many things, I lose this benefit of my years: for it occurs to me that in this old man there is also a young man who must be spared. So since I cannot prevail on her to love me more bravely, she prevails on me to love myself more carefully.

104.3 For we must indulge honorable feelings; and sometimes, even if reasons press us to die, we must call our breath back,

11 Nomentum, a town about 14 miles northeast of Rome, where Seneca had a vineyard estate. Paulina was Seneca's wife; Gallio, his elder brother, was governor of the province of Achaea (Greece) c. AD 51–52.

even with anguish, for the sake of our loved ones, and hold it in at our very lips; for a good man must live not as long as it pleases him but as long as he ought. The man who does not value his wife or his friend enough to linger longer in life, who insists on dying, is self-indulgent. The mind should give itself this order too, when the good of its loved ones requires it: not only if it wants to die, but even if it has begun to, let it pause and oblige its own.

104.4 It is the mark of a great spirit to return to life for another's sake, as great men have often done. But I also consider it a sign of the highest humanity to guard your old age more attentively—whose greatest reward is the freedom to care less for your own safety and to use life more boldly—if you know that it is sweet, useful, and desirable to one of your loved ones.

104.5 Besides, this brings with it no small joy and reward. For what is more delightful than to be so dear to your wife that you become dearer to yourself because of it? So my Paulina can hold me accountable not only for her fear but also for my own.

104.6 So you ask how my plan to leave turned out? As soon as I had left the city's heavy air and that smell of smoking kitchens, which, once fired up, pour out along with their dust whatever deadly fumes they hold, I felt at once that my health had changed. And how much strength do you think was added once I reached my vineyards? Turned out to pasture, I fell upon my food. So I am myself again now; that languor of a body out of sorts and thinking gloomy thoughts has not lasted. I am beginning to study with my whole mind.[12]

104.7 The place does not contribute much to this, unless the mind is master of itself; such a mind will have privacy in the midst of business, if it wishes. But the man who picks out regions and hunts for leisure will find something to distract him everywhere. For they say that when someone complained to Socrates that his travels had done him no good, he replied: "It serves you right; you were traveling with yourself."

12 The text of "I am myself again" (repeti vi) is uncertain; the usual reading is "repetivi ergo iam me."

104.8 Oh, how well off some people would be if they could wander away from themselves! As it is, they burden themselves, worry themselves, corrupt themselves, frighten themselves. What good is it to cross the sea and change cities? If you want to escape the things that oppress you, you need not be somewhere else, but someone else. Suppose you have come to Athens, suppose to Rhodes; choose any city you like—what does it matter what its character is? You will bring your own.

104.9 You will judge wealth a good: poverty will torment you, and—most wretched of all—a false poverty. For however much you own, because someone else has more, you will think yourself as short as you are outdone. You will judge public office a good: you will be upset that so-and-so was made consul, that so-and-so was even made consul again; you will be envious whenever you read someone's name in the calendar of consuls more often. So great will be the madness of ambition that you will think no one comes after you, if anyone has gone before you.[13]

104.10 You will judge death the greatest evil, though there is nothing evil in it except what comes before it: being feared. You will be terrified not only by dangers but by suspicions; you will always be tossed about by empty fears. "What good will it be to have escaped so many Argive / Cities, and held your course of flight through the midst of foes?" Peace itself will supply fears. Once the mind is thrown into panic, it will not trust even what is safe; and once it has formed the habit of blind terror, it is unfit even to protect its own safety. For it does not avoid danger, it runs from it. And we are more exposed to dangers when we turn our backs.[14]

104.11 You will judge it the gravest evil to lose one of those you love, when in fact this will be as silly as weeping because the leaves fall from the lovely trees that adorn your house. Whatever gives you delight, look on it just as you look on green

13 Roman years were named after the two consuls, whose names were recorded in the official lists (fasti).

14 Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.282–83, on the Trojans' escape past the Greek cities.

leaves: while they are green, enjoy them. Chance will shake off one on one day, another on another. But just as the loss of leaves is easy to bear, because they grow back, so is the loss of those you love and think of as the delights of your life, because they are replaced, even if they do not grow back.

104.12 "But they won't be the same." Neither will you be the same. Every day, every hour changes you; but in others the plundering shows more easily, while in you it is hidden, because it does not happen in the open. Others are carried off, while we are stolen away from ourselves. You will think of none of this, nor apply remedies to your wounds; you will sow the seeds of your own anxieties by hoping for some things and despairing of others. If you are wise, mix the one with the other: do not hope without despair, or despair without hope.

104.13 What good could travel in itself ever do anyone? It has not moderated pleasures, reined in desires, curbed anger, or broken the untamed attacks of love; in short, it has drawn no evil out of the mind. It has not given judgment or dispelled error; like a child marveling at the unfamiliar, it has held a man's attention for a short while with some novelty.

104.14 Besides, it provokes the instability of a mind that is already very sick, and the tossing itself makes it more restless and more fickle. So the places people sought most eagerly they leave more eagerly still, and like birds they fly on and depart more quickly than they came.

104.15 Travel will give you knowledge of peoples; it will show you new shapes of mountains, unfamiliar stretches of plain, and valleys watered by never-failing streams; it will let you observe the nature of some river—how the Nile swells with its summer flood, or how the Tigris is snatched from sight and, after running its course underground, is restored to its full size, or how the Maeander, the practice ground and plaything of all the poets, winds in frequent loops and, often brought close to its

own bed, turns away before it flows into itself. But it will make you neither better nor saner.[15]

104.16 We must spend our time in study and among the authors of wisdom, so as to learn what has been discovered and search for what has not yet been found. This is how the mind is set free from the most wretched slavery and claimed for liberty. As long as you do not know what to avoid and what to seek, what is necessary and what superfluous, what is just and what unjust, this will not be traveling but wandering.

104.17 This running about will bring you no help, for you travel with your passions, and your troubles follow you. If only they did follow you! Then they would be farther away; as it is, you are carrying them, not leading them. So they weigh on you everywhere and chafe you with the same discomforts. It is medicine the sick man needs to look for, not a region.

104.18 Someone has broken his leg or dislocated a joint: he does not board a carriage or a ship; he calls a doctor to set the broken part or put the dislocated one back in place. Well then? Do you believe that a mind broken and twisted in so many places can be healed by a change of place? That evil is too great to be cured by a ride.

104.19 Travel does not make a doctor or an orator; no skill is learned from a place. Well then? Is wisdom, the greatest of all skills, picked up on a journey? Believe me, there is no journey that will set you beyond desires, beyond anger, beyond fear; or if there were, the human race would march there in a body. These evils will press on you and wear you down as you roam over lands and seas, as long as you carry the causes of your evils with you.

104.20 Are you surprised that running away does you no good? What you are running from is with you. So correct yourself: throw off your burdens, and keep within a healthy limit the desires that must be cut back. Scrape all wickedness out of your mind. If you want your travels to be pleasant, cure your travel-

15 The Maeander, a river in Asia Minor (modern Büyük Menderes) famous for its winding course, gave us the word “meander.”

ing companion. Greed will cling to you as long as you live with a greedy and stingy man; arrogance will cling to you as long as you keep company with a proud one. You will never put off cruelty while you share a house with a torturer. Gatherings of adulterers will inflame your lusts.

104.21 If you want to be stripped of your vices, you must withdraw far from examples of vice. The greedy man, the seducer, the cruel man, the swindler, who would do you great harm if they were near you, are inside you. Move over to better company: live with the Catos, with Laelius, with Tubero. And if you like to live with Greeks as well, spend your time with Socrates, with Zeno: the one will teach you to die if it is necessary, the other to die before it is necessary.[16]

104.22 Live with Chrysippus, with Posidonius: they will pass on to you knowledge of things human and divine; they will bid you be active—not merely to talk cleverly and toss out words to delight your hearers, but to harden your mind and raise it up against threats. For there is only one harbor for this tossing, stormy life: to scorn what is to come, to stand confidently, ready to take fortune's weapons full in the chest, not skulking or turning your back.

104.23 Nature brought us forth great-souled. And just as she gave some animals a fierce spirit, some a cunning one, some a timid one, so she gave us a proud and lofty spirit, one that seeks where it may live most honorably, not most safely, very like the universe, which it follows and rivals as far as mortal steps allow. It puts itself forward; it believes it is praised and watched.

104.24 It is master of all things; it is above all things. So let it bow to nothing; let nothing seem heavy to it, nothing that could bend a man. "Shapes terrible to see, and death, and toil"—not at all, if one could look at them with a steady gaze and break through the shadows. Many things taken as terrors in the night, the day turns to laughter. "Shapes terrible to see, and death, and

16 Zeno, founder of Stoicism, was said to have ended his own life in old age.

toil": our Virgil put it splendidly when he said they are terrible not in fact but to see—that is, they seem so, but are not.[17]

104.25 What is there in them, I ask, as frightening as rumor has spread? Why, I beg you, Lucilius, should a man fear toil, or a human being fear death? I so often meet those people who think that whatever they cannot do cannot be done, and who say that we Stoics talk of things greater than human nature can bear.

104.26 But how much better I think of them! They too can do these things; they just don't want to. In fact, whom have these things ever failed when he tried them? To whom have they not seemed easier once he was doing them? It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.

104.27 If, however, you want an example, take Socrates, an old man who endured everything, tossed through every hardship, yet unconquered both by poverty, which his family burdens made heavier, and by toils, including those of military service he bore. At home he was well trained by these, whether we think of his wife, savage in her ways and sharp of tongue, or his unteachable children, more like their mother than their father. If you reckon it truly, he lived either in war, or under tyranny, or under a liberty more savage than wars and tyrants.[18]

104.28 The fighting went on for twenty-seven years; after the arms were laid down, the city was handed over for punishment to the Thirty Tyrants, most of whom were his enemies. Last came his condemnation on the gravest charges: he was accused both of violating religion and of corrupting the young, whom he was said to have turned against the gods, against their fathers, against the state. After this, prison and poison. All this so little moved Socrates' mind that it did not even change his expression. Oh, what wonderful and unique praise! Right to the end no

17 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.277, from the figures at the entrance to the underworld.
18 Socrates' wife Xanthippe was proverbial for her temper. Socrates served as a foot soldier in the Peloponnesian War.

one saw Socrates more cheerful or more gloomy. He was even in the midst of such unevenness of fortune.[19]

104.29 Do you want another example? Take the younger Marcus Cato, whom fortune treated with even more hostility and persistence. Though she opposed him everywhere, and finally even in death, he still showed that a brave man can live against fortune's will and die against her will. His whole life was spent either in civil war or in a peacetime already breeding civil war. And you could say that he, no less than Socrates, pledged himself to liberty in the midst of slavery—unless perhaps you think Gnaeus Pompey and Caesar and Crassus were allies of liberty.[20]

104.30 No one saw Cato change, though the state changed so often. He showed himself the same in every situation: as praetor, in defeat at the polls, as prosecutor, in his province, in the assembly, in the army, in death. And finally, in that crisis of the Republic, when on one side stood Caesar, backed by ten most warlike legions and all the forces of foreign nations, and on the other Gnaeus Pompey, a match by himself for all of it; when some leaned toward Caesar and others toward Pompey—Cato alone made a party for the Republic too.

104.31 If you care to picture that time in your mind, you will see on one side the common people and the whole mob eager for revolution; on the other the nobles and the order of knights, all that was revered and select in the state; and two left in the middle, the Republic and Cato. You will marvel, I tell you, when you behold "Atreus' son, and Priam, and Achilles, fierce to both." For he condemns both, he disarms both.[21]

104.32 This is his verdict on the two of them: he says that if Caesar wins he will die, and if Pompey wins he will go into exile. What did he have to fear, a man who had decreed for himself,

19 The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta (431–404 BC) was followed by the rule of the Thirty (404–403 BC).

20 Pompey, Julius Caesar and Crassus formed the informal alliance (the "first triumvirate") that dominated Roman politics from 60 BC.

21 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.458, describing the Trojan War pictured on a temple wall; Atreus' son is Agamemnon.

whether beaten or victorious, what his bitterest enemies could have decreed for him? So he died by his own decree.

104.33 You see that people can endure toil: he led an army on foot through the midst of the African deserts. You see that thirst can be borne: dragging the remnants of a beaten army over parched hills, without any baggage train, he bore the lack of water in full armor, and whenever there was a chance of water, he drank last. You see that office and disgrace can be scorned: on the very day he was defeated at the polls, he played ball in the voting place. You see that one need not fear the power of those above: he challenged both Pompey and Caesar at once, when no one dared offend one except to win favor with the other. You see that death can be scorned as much as exile: he sentenced himself to exile and to death, and meanwhile to war.[22]

104.34 So we can have just as much courage against these things—if only we are willing to pull our necks out from under the yoke. First of all, pleasures must be rejected: they weaken and soften us, and they demand a great deal—and a great deal must be demanded of fortune. Next, wealth must be scorned: it is the bounty that signs us into slavery. Let gold and silver and whatever else weighs down prosperous houses be left behind; freedom cannot be had for nothing. If you value it highly, you must value everything else lightly. Farewell.[23]

LETTER 105: ON LIVING SAFELY

Avoid provoking hope, envy, hatred, fear and contempt, and keep a clear conscience.

105.1 I will tell you what you should watch out for in order to live more safely. But I suggest you listen to these precepts as if I were advising you how to stay healthy on your estate at Ardea. Con-

22 In 47 BC Cato led the remnants of Pompey's army on a thirty-day march across the Libyan desert.

23 Auctoramenta: the fee paid to a free man who hired himself out as a gladiator, binding himself to his master.

sider what it is that drives one human being to destroy another: you will find hope, envy, hatred, fear, and contempt.[24]

105.2 Of all these, contempt is so much the slightest that many have actually hidden inside it as a refuge. When someone despises you, he does trample on you, no doubt, but he passes on; no one harms a despised man persistently, no one with any care. Even in battle, the man lying on the ground is passed over; the fight is with the one still standing.

105.3 You will escape the hopes of the wicked if you have nothing that could stir up someone else's wicked greed, if you own nothing conspicuous. For even small things are coveted if they catch the eye, if they are rare. You will escape envy if you do not thrust yourself in front of people's eyes, if you do not boast of your good things, if you know how to enjoy them privately.

105.4 Hatred either comes from some offense—you will avoid this by provoking no one—or it is unprovoked, and from that common sense will protect you. This has been dangerous for many: some people have been hated without having had an enemy. As for not being feared, a modest fortune and a gentle disposition will secure that for you. Let people know that you are someone they can offend without danger; let reconciling with you be both easy and sure. Being feared is as much trouble at home as abroad, from slaves as from free men. Everyone has strength enough to do harm. Add to this that whoever is feared, fears; no one has ever been terrifying and at ease.

105.5 That leaves contempt. Whoever has taken it on keeps its measure in his own hands—if he is despised because he chose to be, not because he deserved to be. Its drawbacks are cleared away by honorable accomplishments and by the friendship of people who have influence with someone influential. It will pay to attach yourself to them, but not to get entangled with them, so that the remedy does not cost more than the danger.

105.6 Nothing, though, will help as much as keeping quiet—talking very little with others and a great deal with yourself. There

24 The district around Ardea, south of Rome, was notoriously unhealthy (malarial); Lucilius evidently had property there.

is a certain sweetness in conversation that creeps in and coaxes secrets out, just as drunkenness or love does. No one will keep quiet about what he has heard. No one will repeat only as much as he has heard. Whoever does not keep the story quiet will not keep quiet its source. Everyone has someone he trusts as far as he himself was trusted. Even if he guards his chatter and is content with a single pair of ears, he will create a crowd, and what was a secret a moment ago becomes rumor.

105.7 A large part of freedom from care comes from doing nothing wrong. People without self-control lead a confused and turbulent life; they fear as much as they harm, and they are never at rest. They tremble once they have done the deed, and they are stuck; their conscience does not let them attend to anything else, and keeps forcing them to answer to it. Whoever waits for punishment is already paying it—and whoever has earned it, waits for it.

105.8 A bad conscience can be made safe by one thing or another, but free from care by nothing; for the guilty man thinks that even if he is not caught, he could be. He stirs in his sleep, and whenever anyone speaks of someone else's crime, he thinks of his own; it never seems wiped out enough, never hidden enough. The guilty have sometimes had the luck to stay hidden, never the confidence. Farewell.

LETTER 106: ON WHETHER THE GOOD IS A BODY

Seneca argues the Stoic case that goods, virtues and passions are bodies, then mocks such hair-splitting.

106.1 I am slow in answering your letters, but not because I am tied up with business. Don't listen to that excuse: I have time, and so does everyone who wants it. Business chases no one. People embrace it themselves, and think being busy is proof of happiness. So why didn't I answer at once? What you asked about was going to be woven into the fabric of my work.

106.2 You know that I want to cover the whole of moral philosophy and to set out all the questions that belong to it. So I hesit-

ated whether to put you off until that subject came up in its proper place, or to hear your case out of turn. It seemed kinder not to keep waiting someone who had come so far.

106.3 So I will pull this one out of that series of connected topics, and if there are any others of this sort, I will send them to you without your asking. What sort are they, you ask? Things it is more pleasant than useful to know—like this question of yours: is the good a body?

106.4 The good acts, for it benefits; and whatever acts is a body. The good stirs the mind, and in a sense shapes it and holds it together—and these are properties of a body. The goods of the body are bodies; therefore so are the goods of the mind.[25]

106.5 For the mind too is a body. A human being's good must be a body, since he himself is bodily. I am lying if the things that nourish him, and those that preserve or restore his health, are not bodies; therefore his good too is a body. I don't think you will doubt whether the passions—anger, love, sadness—are bodies (to cram in something else you did not ask about), unless you doubt whether they change our expression, knit the brow, relax the face, summon a blush, or drive away the blood. Well then? Do you believe that such obvious bodily marks are stamped on us by anything but a body?

106.6 If the passions are bodies, so are the diseases of the mind, such as greed and cruelty—vices that have hardened and reached an incurable state. Therefore so is wickedness, with all its kinds: malice, envy, arrogance;

106.7 and therefore so are goods, first because they are the opposites of these, and second because they will give you the same signs. Don't you see how much vigor courage gives the eyes? How much focus prudence gives? How much modesty and calm reverence gives? How much serenity joy? How much sternness severity? How much ease gentleness? So the things that change the color and bearing of bodies, that exercise their rule

25 The Stoics held that only bodies exist in the full sense, since only bodies can act or be acted upon; so virtues, passions and even the mind itself count as bodies.

over them, are bodies. And all the virtues I have mentioned are goods, and so is whatever comes from them.

106.8 Can there be any doubt that whatever can touch something is a body? "For nothing can touch or be touched except body," as Lucretius says. And none of the things I have mentioned would change the body unless they touched it; therefore they are bodies.[26]

106.9 Again, whatever has force enough to drive, compel, hold back and restrain is a body. Well then? Does fear not hold us back? Does boldness not drive us on? Does courage not launch us and give us momentum? Does self-control not rein us in and call us back? Does joy not lift us up? Does sadness not drag us down?

106.10 In short, whatever we do, we do at the command of either vice or virtue. What commands the body is a body; what applies force to the body is a body. The good of the body is bodily; a human being's good is also the good of his body; therefore it is bodily.

106.11 Now that I have humored you as you wished, I will say to myself what I can see you are about to say: we are playing board games. Our subtlety is wasted on superfluous things; these things make people learned, not good.[27]

106.12 Being wise is a plainer matter than that—or rather, it is simply better to use learning to gain a sound mind. But just as we spill everything else into excess, so we do with philosophy itself. We suffer from overindulgence in learning, as in everything; we learn not for life but for the classroom. Farewell.

LETTER 107: ON RUNAWAY SLAVES

Your slaves' desertion is nothing unexpected; follow God willingly, for fate drags the unwilling.

107.1 Where is that good sense of yours? Where is your sharpness in examining things? Where is your greatness of spirit? Does

26 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 1.304.

such a trifle torment you now? Your slaves took your busyness as a chance to run away. If your friends had deceived you—by all means let them keep the name our mistake has given them, and be called friends, so that it is all the more shameful for them not to be—then something would be missing from your whole life. As it is, you are missing people who were wasting your efforts and who thought you a nuisance to others.

107.2 None of this is unusual, none of it unexpected. To be upset by such things is as ridiculous as complaining that you get splashed in the street or dirtied in the mud. Life has the same conditions as a bathhouse, a crowd, or a journey: some things will be thrown at you, some will just hit you. Living is not a delicate business. You have set out on a long road: you are bound to slip, to bump into things, to fall, to grow tired, and to cry out, "O death!"—that is, to lie. In one place you will leave a companion behind, in another you will bury one, in another you will be afraid. Through stumbles like these you must cover this rough road.

107.3 Does he want to die? Let the mind be prepared against everything; let it know that it has come to where the thunderbolt crashes. Let it know that it has come to where "Grief and avenging Cares have made their beds, / and pale Diseases dwell, and sad Old Age." In such company life must be lived. You cannot escape these things; you can despise them. And you will despise them if you think about them often and anticipate what is to come.[28]

107.4 Everyone has met more bravely what he had long prepared himself for, and has stood up even to hardships if he thought them through in advance. The unprepared, on the other hand, panic at the slightest things. We must see to it that nothing takes us by surprise. And since everything is harder to bear when it is new, constant reflection will ensure that you are a raw recruit to no misfortune.

27 Latrunculi ("little bandits"), a Roman board game of strategy, something like checkers.

28 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.274–75, describing the entrance to the underworld.

107.5 "My slaves have left me." Other men's slaves have robbed them, accused them, killed them, betrayed them, trampled on them, gone after them with poison or with false charges; whatever you name has happened to many. Then again, the weapons aimed at us are many and varied. Some have already lodged in us, some are quivering and on their way this very moment, some meant for others graze us.

107.6 Let us not be surprised at any of the things we were born to—things no one should complain about, because they are the same for everyone. Yes, I say, the same: for even what someone has escaped, he could have suffered. A law is fair not when everyone has experienced it, but when it was laid down for everyone. Let us impose fairness on our mind and pay the taxes of mortality without complaint.

107.7 Winter brings cold: we must shiver. Summer brings back heat: we must swelter. Bad weather tests our health: we must fall ill. Somewhere a wild beast will meet us, and a human being more destructive than any beast. Water will take one thing from us, fire another. We cannot change this condition of things; what we can do is take on a great spirit, worthy of a good man, so as to bear bravely whatever chance brings and to agree with nature.

107.8 And nature governs this realm you see by means of change: clear skies follow cloud; seas grow rough after they have been calm; the winds blow by turns; day follows night; one part of the sky rises while another sinks. The eternity of the universe is made of opposites.

107.9 To this law our mind must adjust itself; let it follow this law, obey it. Whatever happens, let it think that it had to happen, and let it not want to scold nature. It is best to endure what you cannot correct, and to accompany God, by whose authority all things come about, without grumbling. He is a bad soldier who follows his general with a groan.

107.10 So let us receive our orders briskly and eagerly, and not abandon the course of this most beautiful work, into which everything we are to suffer is woven. And let us address Jupiter, by whose helm this vast mass is steered, as our Cleanthes

addresses him in most eloquent verses—verses I am allowed to turn into our own language, following the example of that most eloquent man, Cicero. If you like them, take them kindly; if you don't, you will know that in this I was following Cicero's example:[29]

107.11 "Lead me, O father, lord of the lofty heavens,
wherever you please; I will not delay to obey.
Here I am, eager. Suppose I refuse: I will follow, groaning,
and suffer as a bad man what I might have done as a good one.
The fates lead the willing, and drag the unwilling."

107.12 So let us live, so let us speak; let fate find us ready and eager. This is a great spirit—the one that has handed itself over to fate. Small and degenerate, on the other hand, is the one that struggles against it, thinks ill of the order of the world, and would rather correct the gods than itself. Farewell.

LETTER 108: ON HOW TO LEARN PHILOSOPHY

Seneca recalls his youthful zeal under Attalus and Sotion and warns against studying words instead of life.

108.1 What you ask about is one of those things worth knowing only for the sake of knowing. Nonetheless, because it does matter to you, you are in a hurry and don't want to wait for the books I am putting in order at this very moment, which cover the entire moral part of philosophy. I will deal with it at once. But first I will write about how you should manage this eagerness to learn that I see you burning with, so that it does not get in its own way.

108.2 You must neither pick at things here and there nor greedily rush at the whole; you will reach the whole by way of the parts. The load should be fitted to your strength, and you should not take on more than you can manage. Drink in not as much as

29 Cleanthes' Greek lines survive in Epictetus (*Handbook* 53); the last line of Seneca's version appears to be his own addition. Cicero had translated many Greek verses into Latin.

you want but as much as you can hold. Only keep a good mind, and you will hold as much as you want. The more the mind takes in, the more it expands.

108.3 I remember Attalus giving us this advice, when we used to besiege his classroom, arriving first and leaving last, and even when he was out walking we would draw him into some discussion; he was not only available to his students but went out to meet them. "Teacher and student," he said, "should have the same aim: the one should want to help, the other to make progress."

108.4 Whoever goes to a philosopher should take something good home with him every day: he should come back either healthier or easier to cure. And he will; such is the power of philosophy that it helps not only those who study it but even those who spend time around it. Whoever goes out into the sun will get a tan, even if that is not why he went; those who have sat in a perfume shop and lingered a little too long carry the scent of the place away with them. And those who have been with a philosopher are bound to have picked up something that would benefit even the careless. Note what I say: the careless, not the resistant.

108.5 "What then? Don't we know some people who have sat with a philosopher for many years and have not taken on even a tinge of color?" Of course I know them—very persistent and regular ones, too, whom I call not the philosophers' pupils but their lodgers.

108.6 Some come to hear, not to learn, just as we are drawn into the theater for pleasure, to delight our ears with speech or song or plays. You will see that a large part of the audience treats the philosopher's classroom as a lounge for their leisure. Their aim is not to lay aside some of their vices there, or to take away some rule of life by which to measure their conduct, but to enjoy the entertainment of their ears. Some, though, even come with notebooks—to take down not the substance but the words, which they then repeat with as little benefit to others as they got from hearing them.

108.7 Some are stirred by grand utterances and take on the feelings of the speakers, eager in face and mind, roused just as the castrated men are at the sound of the Phrygian pipe, raving on command. What carries them away and spurs them on is the beauty of the ideas, not the sound of empty words. If something has been said boldly against death, or defiantly against fortune, they are eager to act at once on what they hear. They are moved and become what they are told to be—if only that shape of mind lasted, if only the crowd, which talks people out of the honorable, did not at once seize on that fine impulse. Few have managed to carry home the frame of mind they had formed.[30]

108.8 It is easy to rouse a listener to desire what is right, for nature has given everyone the foundations and seeds of the virtues. We are all born for all these things; when someone comes along to stir them, that good spirit awakens as if set free. Don't you see how the theaters ring with applause whenever something is said that we publicly recognize and all agree to be true?

108.9 "Poverty lacks much, greed lacks everything. / The greedy man is good to no one, and worst to himself." At these lines the stingiest man alive applauds and is delighted to hear his own vices abused. How much more do you think this happens when a philosopher says such things, when verses are woven into wholesome precepts, to drive those same ideas more effectively into the minds of the untrained?[31]

108.10 "For," as Cleanthes used to say, "just as our breath gives a clearer sound when a trumpet has drawn it through the narrow confines of a long tube and poured it out at last through a wider opening, so the tight constraints of verse make our thoughts clearer. The same things are heard more carelessly and strike home less as long as they are said in prose; once meter is added and fixed feet have bound a fine thought tightly, that same idea is hurled as if by a stronger arm."

108.11 Much is said about despising money, and long speeches teach people to think that riches lie in the mind, not in one's

30 The castrated priests of Cybele, the Great Mother of Phrygia, worked themselves into a frenzy to the music of pipes.

estate, and that the rich man is the one who has adapted himself to his poverty and made himself wealthy on little. But minds are struck harder when verses like these are recited: "That mortal needs least who wants least. / He has what he wants who can want what is enough."

108.12 When we hear these and similar lines, we are brought to acknowledge the truth. Even those for whom nothing is enough admire, cheer, and declare war on money. When you see them feeling this way, press on, push this point, load this on them, and leave aside ambiguities and syllogisms and quibbles and the other toys of futile cleverness. Speak against greed, speak against luxury; when you see that you have made headway and moved your listeners' minds, press harder. You would not believe how much good a speech like that does when it aims at a cure and is turned wholly to the good of the listeners. For young minds are very easily won over to love of the honorable and the right; and while they are still teachable and only lightly corrupted, truth lays hold of them—if it has found a fitting advocate.

108.13 Certainly, when I listened to Attalus declaiming against vices, errors, and the evils of life, I often felt pity for the human race, and believed him to be lofty and raised above the height of human beings. He used to call himself a king, but to me he seemed more than a king, since he had the right to pass judgment on kings.

108.14 And when he began to recommend poverty and to show how everything beyond our needs is a useless weight and heavy for the one who carries it, I often wanted to leave the classroom a poor man. When he began to expose our pleasures, and to praise a chaste body, a sober table, a mind pure not only of forbidden pleasures but even of superfluous ones, I wanted to put limits on my gullet and my belly.

108.15 Some of that has stayed with me, Lucilius. For I had come at everything with great zeal. Then, when I was brought back to the life of the city, I kept a few of my good beginnings. Since then I have given up oysters and mushrooms for life; for they

31 Both lines are from Publilius Syrus.

are not food but relishes that force people who are already full to keep eating—which is very welcome to gluttons who stuff themselves beyond their capacity—food that goes down easily and comes up easily.

108.16 Since then I have gone without perfume for life, since the best smell for the body is none. Since then my stomach has done without wine. Since then I have avoided the baths for life: we believed that boiling the body and draining it with sweat was both useless and self-indulgent. Other habits I gave up have come back, but in such a way that where I broke off my abstinence, I keep to a limit, and one quite close to abstinence—perhaps a harder one, since some things are more easily cut off by the mind than moderated.

108.17 Since I have begun to explain to you how much more eagerly I came to philosophy as a young man than I pursue it as an old one, I will not be ashamed to admit the enthusiasm that Pythagoras inspired in me. Sotion used to explain why Pythagoras had abstained from animal flesh, and why Sextius did later. Each had a different reason, but each a splendid one.

108.18 Sextius believed that human beings have enough to live on without bloodshed, and that cruelty becomes a habit once tearing flesh is turned into a pleasure. He added that the raw material of luxury should be cut back; he reasoned that a varied diet, foreign to our bodies, is bad for the health.

108.19 But Pythagoras said that all things are related to all others, and that there is an exchange of souls passing into one form after another. If you believe him, no soul perishes; it does not even cease, except for a brief time while it is being poured into another body. We shall see through what cycles of time, and when, after wandering through many dwellings, it returns into a human being. Meanwhile he made people afraid of crime and parricide, since they might unknowingly come upon a parent's soul and wound it with blade or tooth—if some kindred spirit happened to be lodging in that body.

108.20 When Sotion had set this out and filled it in with his own arguments, he would say: "Don't you believe that souls are

assigned to one body after another, and that what we call death is a change of address? Don't you believe that in these cattle, or wild beasts, or creatures under water, there lingers a soul that was once a man's? Don't you believe that nothing in this universe perishes, but only changes its location? That not only do the heavenly bodies turn in fixed orbits, but living creatures too go through their turns, and souls travel in a cycle? Great men have believed these things."

108.21 "So suspend your judgment, then, but keep all your options open. If these things are true, abstaining from animal flesh is innocence; if false, it is thrift. What does your believing cost you? I am only taking the food of lions and vultures away from you."

108.22 Spurred on by this, I began to abstain from animal flesh, and after a year the habit was not only easy for me but pleasant. I believed my mind was more lively—though I would not swear to you today whether it was. You ask how I came to stop? My youth fell in the early years of Tiberius Caesar's reign. Foreign rites were then being banished, and abstaining from certain kinds of meat was counted as evidence of superstition. So at the request of my father—who did not fear slander but hated philosophy—I went back to my old habit. And he had no trouble persuading me to start dining better.[32]

108.23 Attalus used to praise a mattress that resisted the body; I use one like that even in old age, one on which no imprint can show. I have told you this to prove to you how strong are a beginner's first impulses toward all that is best, if someone encourages them, if someone sets them alight. But the fault lies partly with the teachers, who teach us how to argue, not how to live, and partly with the students, who bring to their teachers the aim of training not their mind but their wits. So what was philosophy has become philology.[33]

32 In AD 19 Tiberius expelled Egyptian and Jewish rites from Rome.

108.24 It matters a great deal with what purpose you approach any subject. The man who scrutinizes Virgil because he means to become a grammarian does not read that splendid line, "Time flies beyond recall," in this spirit: we must stay alert; unless we hurry, we will be left behind; the swift day drives us and is driven; we are swept along unawares; we arrange everything for the future and are sluggish on the brink of the abyss. No—he reads it to note that whenever Virgil speaks of the swiftness of time, he uses this verb, "flies": "Each best day of life for wretched mortals
is first to flee; then come diseases and sad old age
and toil, and the harshness of unrelenting death sweeps them off."[34]

108.25 The one who looks toward philosophy takes these same words where they ought to lead. "Virgil never says," he observes, "that days go, but that they flee, which is the most urgent kind of running, and that the best are the first to be snatched away. So why do we hesitate to urge ourselves on, so that we can match the speed of this swiftest of things? The better things fly past; the worse take their place."

108.26 Just as the first wine to flow from a jar is the purest, while the heaviest and cloudiest settles at the bottom, so in our life the best part comes first. Do we let others drain that off, so that we can keep the dregs for ourselves? Let this cling to your mind, and let it please you as if it came from an oracle: "Each best day of life for wretched mortals / is first to flee."

108.27 Why best? Because what remains is uncertain. Why best? Because when we are young we can learn; we can turn a mind that is pliable and still manageable toward better things; because this is the time fit for toil, fit for exercising the mind in study and the body in work. What remains is slower and more

33 Philology (philologia) here means the scholarly study of words, texts and antiquarian lore, as opposed to the love of wisdom.

34 The grammaticus was the teacher of language and literature. The lines are from Virgil, *Georgics* 3.284 and 3.66–68.

languid, and nearer the end. So let us do this with our whole mind, drop the things that lead us astray, and work at one thing alone—so that we do not grasp the speed of this swiftest time, which we cannot hold back, only when it has left us behind. Let every first day please us as the best, and let us make it our own.

108.28 What flees must be seized. The man who reads that poem with a grammarian's eyes does not reflect that each first day is best because diseases come on, because old age presses on us and hangs over the heads of those still thinking about their youth. Instead he says that Virgil always puts disease and old age together—and quite rightly, too. For old age is an incurable disease.

108.29 Besides, he says, Virgil gave old age this epithet: he calls it sad—"then come diseases and sad old age." Elsewhere he says: "and pale Diseases dwell, and sad Old Age." There is no reason to be surprised that from the same material each person gathers what suits his own interests. In the same meadow the ox looks for grass, the dog for a hare, the stork for a lizard.

108.30 When Cicero's book On the Republic is taken up by a philologist, a grammarian, and a devotee of philosophy, each turns his attention in a different direction. The philosopher marvels that so much could have been said against justice. When the philologist comes to the same text, he makes this note: that there were two Roman kings of whom one had no father and the other no mother. For there is doubt about the mother of Servius, while Ancus, Numa's grandson, is said to have had no father.[35]

108.31 He notes, too, that the official we call dictator, and read of under that name in the histories, was called by the ancients the "master of the people." That survives today in the augurs' books, and there is evidence for it in the fact that the man he appoints is called the master of the horse. He notes, likewise, that Romulus perished during an eclipse of the sun, and that there was a right of appeal to the people even from the kings—and that this

35 Book 3 of Cicero's *On the Republic* contains a speech arguing against justice. Servius Tullius and Ancus Marcius were the sixth and fourth kings of Rome.

is so recorded in the pontiffs' books, as others think, and Fenestella too.[36]

108.32 When a grammarian unrolls the same books, he first records in his commentary the word forms Cicero uses: reapse, meaning re ipsa ["in reality"], and likewise sepse, meaning se ipse ["himself"]. Then he moves on to things the usage of the age has changed, as when Cicero says: "since we have been called back by his interruption from the very calx." What we now call the creta in the Circus, the ancients called calx.[37]

108.33 Next he collects lines of Ennius, above all those written about Africanus: "to whom no citizen nor enemy / could render the price of his help." From this he says he understands that among the ancients ops meant not only aid but effort. For Ennius is saying that no one, citizen or enemy, could have paid Scipio a price worthy of his efforts.[38]

108.34 Then he counts himself lucky to have found where Virgil got the idea for saying "over whom the mighty gate of heaven thunders." He says that Ennius stole it from Homer, and Virgil from Ennius. For in this very work of Cicero's, On the Republic, there is this epigram by Ennius: "If it is right for anyone to climb to the regions of the gods, for me alone the great gate of heaven stands open."[39]

108.35 But so that I too, while doing something else, do not slide into being a philologist or a grammarian, let me give this reminder: listening to philosophers and reading them should be directed toward the goal of a happy life—not so that we hunt for archaic or invented words and extravagant metaphors and figures of speech, but for precepts that will help us, and for grand

36 Fenestella was a Roman antiquarian historian of the Augustan age.
37 Both words mean the chalk (or lime) line marking the finish in the racecourse; Cicero means "from the very finish line."
38 Scipio Africanus defeated Hannibal in 202 BC. The grammarian's point turns on the phrase operae pretium, "the worth of one's effort."
39 The Virgil phrase is *Georgics* 3.260–61; Ennius' epigram speaks in the voice of Scipio Africanus.

and spirited sayings that can soon be turned into action. Let us learn them so well that what were words become deeds.

108.36 I judge that no one does worse by all mankind than those who have learned philosophy as if it were some trade for sale, who live otherwise than they teach others to live. For they carry themselves around as examples of a useless discipline, slaves to every vice they attack.

108.37 Such a teacher can do me no more good than a seasick helmsman in a storm. The tiller must be held while the waves wrench at it; one must wrestle with the sea itself; the sails must be snatched from the wind. What help can I get from a ship's pilot who is dazed and vomiting? And how much greater a storm, do you think, tosses life about than any ship? What is needed is not talk but steering.

108.38 Everything they say, everything they toss out before a listening crowd, belongs to others. Plato said it, Zeno said it, Chrysippus and Posidonius said it, and a vast column of our own Stoics, so many and so great. I will show how they can prove these words are their own: let them do what they have said.

108.39 Now that I have said what I wanted to convey to you, I will satisfy your request and put the whole of what you asked for into another letter, so that you do not come tired to a thorny subject that must be heard with ears pricked up and attentive. Farewell.

LETTER 109: ON WISE MEN HELPING EACH OTHER

One wise man benefits another by exercising his virtue and sharing in counsel.

109.1 You want to know whether a wise man can benefit a wise man. We say that the wise man is full of every good and has attained the highest; so the question is how anyone can benefit a person who possesses the highest good. Good men benefit one another: they exercise each other's virtues and keep wisdom at

its proper level. Each of them wants someone to compare notes with, someone to inquire with.

109.2 Skilled wrestlers are kept in shape by practice; a musician is roused by another who has learned as much. The wise man, too, needs his virtues kept in motion: just as he stirs himself, so he is stirred by another wise man.

109.3 What will a wise man do for a wise man? He will give him impetus and point out opportunities for honorable action. Besides this, he will share some thoughts of his own: he will teach what he has discovered. For even for the wise man there will always be something left to discover, something for his mind to range over.

109.4 A bad man harms a bad man and makes him worse—by stirring up his anger, agreeing with his gloom, praising his pleasures. And bad men are in the worst trouble when they have mixed their vices together most thoroughly and their wickedness has been pooled into one. It follows, conversely, that a good man will benefit a good man. "How?" you ask.

109.5 He will bring him joy and strengthen his confidence; seeing the tranquility in each other, both will grow in gladness. Besides, he will pass on knowledge of certain things, for the wise man does not know everything. And even if he did, someone could work out shorter routes through a subject and point them out, so that the whole task is covered more easily.

109.6 A wise man will benefit a wise man—not, of course, by his own strength alone, but by the strength of the one he helps. That one could indeed play his part even if left to himself; still, even a runner is helped by someone cheering him on. "The wise man is not benefited by a wise man, but by himself. Be sure of this: take away his own power, and the other will accomplish nothing."

109.7 By that reasoning you might as well say there is no sweetness in honey. For the person who is to taste it must have tongue and palate so suited to that kind of taste that the flavor takes hold of him; otherwise he will be put off. Indeed there are some people to whom, because of illness, honey tastes bitter. Both

must be healthy: the one so that he can give benefit, the other so that he is fit material to receive it.

109.8 "If," he says, "it is pointless to heat what has been brought to the highest heat, it is pointless to benefit what has been brought to the highest good. Does a farmer who is fully equipped ask to be equipped by someone else? Does a soldier armed well enough to go safely into battle want more arms? No more does the wise man; for he is equipped enough, armed enough, for life."

109.9 To this I reply: even what is at the highest heat needs heat added to stay at the highest. "But heat," he says, "sustains itself." First, there is a great difference between the things you are comparing: heat is one thing, while benefit takes many forms. Second, heat does not need added heat to be hot; but the wise man cannot remain in his state of mind unless he has let in some friends like himself with whom to share his virtues.

109.10 Add now that all the virtues are friends with one another. So a man gives benefit when he loves the virtues of someone his equal and offers his own to be loved in return. Like delights in like—above all when it is honorable and knows how to approve and be approved.

109.11 Moreover, no one but a wise man can move a wise man's mind skillfully, just as no one but a human being can move a human being by reason. So just as reason is needed to move reason, perfect reason is needed to move perfect reason.

109.12 People are also said to benefit us when they give us the intermediate things: money, influence, safety, and other things valued or needed for the uses of life. In these a fool, too, will be said to benefit a wise man. But to benefit, properly speaking, is to move a mind in accordance with nature by one's own virtue, as well as by the virtue of the one who is moved. And this cannot happen without good to the benefactor as well; for in exercising another's virtue he is bound to exercise his own.[40]

109.13 But even if you set aside those things that are either the highest goods or produce them, wise men can still benefit one

another. For a wise man finding a wise man is something desirable in itself, since by nature every good is dear to the good, and each person is drawn to the good just as he is to himself.

109.14 For the sake of the argument I must pass from this question to another. It is asked whether the wise man will deliberate, and whether he will call someone in for advice. He must do so when it comes to civic and household affairs—mortal affairs, so to speak. In these he needs another's advice, just as he needs a doctor, a helmsman, an advocate, or someone to prepare his lawsuit. So a wise man will sometimes benefit a wise man: he will advise him. But in those great and divine matters too, as we said, he will be useful by discussing the honorable in common and by blending minds and thoughts.

109.15 Moreover, it is in accordance with nature to embrace our friends and to rejoice at their advancement as if it were our very own. For unless we do this, not even virtue will stay with us, since it grows strong by exercising its faculties. Virtue urges us to arrange the present well, to plan for the future, to deliberate and apply the mind; and a man will apply his mind and work things out more easily if he has taken someone as a partner. So he will seek either a perfect man or one who is making progress and is close to perfection. And the perfect man will benefit him if he assists his planning with their shared good sense.

109.16 People say that we see more clearly in someone else's affairs. This happens to those who are blinded by self-love, and whose fear in times of danger robs them of a clear view of their interest; a man will begin to be wise once he is more secure and out of fear's reach. Even so, there are some things that even wise men see more carefully in another than in themselves. Besides, the wise man will give the wise man that sweetest and most honorable thing, "to want the same things and to refuse the

40 "Intermediate things" (media) are the indifferents: things neither good nor bad in themselves.

same things": yoked as a matched pair, they will pull a splendid load.[41]

109.17 I have paid what you asked for, although it belonged in the sequence of topics that I am covering in my books on moral philosophy. Remember what I often tell you: in such questions we are doing nothing but sharpening our wits. I keep coming back to this: what good does this do me? Make me braver now, more just, more self-controlled. I do not yet have time for exercise; I still need a doctor.[42]

109.18 Why do you demand useless knowledge of me? You promised great things: put me to the test, watch me. You said I would be fearless even if swords flashed all around me, even if the point touched my throat; you said I would be free from care even if fires blazed all around me, even if a sudden whirlwind swept my ship across the whole sea. Give me this: see to it that I despise pleasure, that I despise glory. Later you will teach me to untangle knots, sort out ambiguities, see through obscurities; for now, teach me what is necessary. Farewell.

41 The phrase comes from Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 20.4, where it defines firm friendship.

42 Seneca's *Books of Moral Philosophy*, a systematic work he was writing at this time, is lost.

Book XIX

On true and false riches (110), on style as a mirror of character (114).

LETTER 110: ON TRUE AND FALSE RICHES

Attalus teaches that riches are a passing parade; true wealth is desiring nothing.

110.1 I greet you from my place at Nomentum, and I bid you have a good mind—that is, all the gods on your side; for whoever has made peace with himself has them gracious and favorable. Set aside for the moment the belief some people hold that each of us is given a god as a guardian—not one of the regular gods, but one of lower rank, from among those Ovid calls "gods of the common folk." But set it aside while remembering that our ancestors, who believed it, were Stoics; for they gave each man his Genius and each woman her Juno.[1]

110.2 Later we shall see whether the gods have so much time on their hands that they manage private people's business. Meanwhile, know this: whether we have been assigned a guardian or neglected and handed over to fortune, you can call down no heavier curse on anyone than to pray that he be at odds with himself. But there is no reason to wish hostile gods on anyone you think deserves punishment; he has them hostile already, I tell you, even if he seems to be promoted by their favor.

110.3 Apply your care and look at what our circumstances are, not what they are called, and you will find that more evils brush

1 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.595. Romans believed each man had a guardian spirit, his Genius, and each woman a Juno.

against us than actually strike us. How often has what was called a disaster been the cause and beginning of happiness? How often has something welcomed with great congratulation built itself a step toward the precipice, and raised someone already prominent still higher—as though he were still standing where people can fall safely?

110.4 But even that fall has nothing bad in it, if you look to the end, beyond which nature has never thrown anyone down. The end of all things is near—near, I tell you, both the point from which the fortunate man is thrown out and the point from which the unfortunate man is released. We stretch both of them out and make them long by our hope and our fear. But if you are wise, measure everything by the human condition; shrink both what you rejoice in and what you fear. It is worth taking no long joy in anything, so that you have nothing to fear for long.

110.5 But why am I only narrowing this evil down? There is no reason to think anything should be feared. These things that alarm us and keep us stunned are empty. None of us has sifted out the truth; we have passed fear from one to another. No one has dared to go up to what disturbed him and learn the nature of his fear—and whether there is any good in it. So a false and hollow thing is still believed, because it is never exposed.

110.6 Let us think it worth the effort to look hard; it will soon be clear how short-lived, how uncertain, how harmless are the things we fear. The confusion of our minds is just what Lucretius saw: "For just as children tremble and fear everything / in blinding darkness, so we are afraid in the light." What then? Are we not more foolish than any child, we who are afraid in the light?[2]

110.7 But you are wrong, Lucretius: we are not afraid in the light; we have made everything darkness for ourselves. We see nothing, neither what harms us nor what helps us; all our lives we go blundering into things, and yet we do not stop for that or step more carefully. You see what a mad thing it is to rush forward in the dark. Yet, heavens, that is just what we do, so that we

2 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 2.55–56.

have to be called back from farther away; and though we do not know where we are heading, we keep going, and at speed, toward the place we are aiming for.

110.8 But it can grow light, if we are willing. There is only one way it can: if a person has acquired this knowledge of things human and divine; if he has not been merely sprinkled with it but dyed in it; if he goes over the same things again, though he knows them, and often applies them to himself; if he has inquired what things are good, what bad, and to which things these names have been falsely given; if he has inquired about the honorable and the shameful, and about providence.

110.9 Nor does the keenness of the human mind stop within these limits; it longs to look beyond the universe as well—where it is heading, where it arose, toward what end all this rushing speed of things is hurrying. We have dragged the mind away from this divine contemplation down to base and lowly things, to make it a slave to greed, so that it forsakes the universe, its boundaries, and the masters who set all things in motion, and instead burrows into the earth, looking for what evil it can dig out of it, not content with what was freely offered.

110.10 Whatever was going to be good for us, God, our parent, has placed close at hand; he did not wait for us to search but gave it of his own accord. What would harm us he buried deepest. We can complain of no one but ourselves: the things that would destroy us we have brought to light, against nature's will and though she hid them. We have handed our minds over to pleasure, and to indulge it is the beginning of all evils; we have surrendered them to ambition and reputation and everything else just as vain and empty.

110.11 So what am I urging you to do now? Nothing new—for we are not looking for cures for new evils—but first of all this: to examine for yourself what is necessary and what is superfluous. Necessary things will meet you everywhere; superfluous things must always be hunted for, and with your whole heart.

110.12 But there is no reason to praise yourself too much if you have despised gilded couches and jeweled furniture. What vir-

tue is there in despising superfluous things? Admire yourself when you have despised necessary things. You are doing nothing great if you can live without royal splendor, if you do not crave boars weighing a thousand pounds, or flamingos' tongues, and the other monstrosities of a luxury that is now bored with whole animals and picks out particular parts from each. I will admire you when you despise even coarse bread; when you have convinced yourself that grass grows, in time of need, not for cattle only but for human beings; when you know that the tops of trees can fill the belly—the belly into which we cram costly things as though it kept what it received. It should be filled without fussiness. For what does it matter what it takes in, when it is going to lose whatever it takes?

110.13 You delight in arrays of what is caught on land and sea—some the more welcome if they reach the table fresh, others if they have been fed long and forced to fatten until they are dripping and can scarcely hold in their own fat. You delight in their aroma, coaxed out by art. But, heavens, once these things, so anxiously sought out and so variously seasoned, have gone down into the belly, one and the same foulness will take them all over. Do you want to despise the pleasure of food? Look at where it ends up.

110.14 I remember Attalus saying this, to the great admiration of all: "For a long time," he said, "riches took me in. I was dazzled whenever some part of them glittered here or there. I supposed that what was hidden was like what was on display. But at a certain procession I saw the whole wealth of the city: chased work in gold and silver, and in materials that surpassed gold and silver in value; exquisite colors, and garments brought from beyond not only our borders but the borders of our enemies; on one side troops of slave boys, striking in dress and looks, on the other troops of women; and everything else that the fortune of a supreme empire, reviewing its possessions, had put on show.

110.15 "'What is this,' I said to myself, 'but stirring up human desires that are already roused on their own? What is the point of this parade of money? Have we gathered here to learn greed?'

But, heavens, I carried away less desire than I had brought. I despised riches, not because they are superfluous, but because they are paltry. Did you see how, within a few hours, that procession passed by, slow and orderly though it was?

110.16 "Has a thing that could not fill a whole day taken up our whole life? Something else struck me as well: the riches seemed as superfluous to those who owned them as to those who watched.

110.17 "So this is what I tell myself whenever something like this dazzles my eyes, whenever I come upon a splendid house, a well-groomed band of slaves, a litter borne on handsome porters' shoulders: 'Why do you marvel? Why do you gape? It is a parade. These things are put on show, not owned; and while they please, they pass away.'

110.18 "Turn instead to true riches. Learn to be content with little, and cry out, great-spirited and bold, that famous saying: 'We have water, we have barley porridge; let us compete with Jupiter himself in happiness.' Let us do it, I beg you, even if these are lacking. It is shameful to rest the happy life on gold and silver; it is just as shameful to rest it on water and porridge.[3]

110.19 "'What then shall I do if I do not have them?' Do you ask what the remedy for want is? Hunger ends hunger. Otherwise, what difference does it make whether the things that force you to be a slave are great or small? What does it matter how little it is that fortune can refuse you?

110.20 "Even this water and porridge fall under someone else's control. The free man is not the one over whom fortune has little power, but the one over whom it has none. That is how it is: you must desire nothing if you want to challenge Jupiter, who desires nothing." That is what Attalus told us. If you think it over often, you will work to be happy, not to seem so—and to seem so to yourself, not to others. Farewell.

3 The saying echoes Epicurus, who boasted that on bread and water he could rival Jupiter in happiness (see Letter 25.4).

LETTER 111: ON QUIBBLES

Logical tricks make no one better; the real philosopher is great in deeds, not in cleverness.

111.1 You have asked me what sophismata are called in Latin. Many have tried to give them a name, but none has stuck—evidently because, since we did not accept the thing itself or have any use for it, the name was resisted too. Still, the most fitting seems to me the one Cicero used: he calls them cavillationes [quibbles].[4]

111.2 Whoever gives himself up to them spins crafty little puzzles, but makes no progress toward living: he becomes neither braver nor more self-controlled nor more high-minded. But the one who has practiced philosophy as a cure for himself grows great in spirit, full of confidence, unconquerable—and greater the closer you come.

111.3 What happens with great mountains, whose height seems less to those who look from far away—when you come close, it becomes clear how steep their summits are—is true, my Lucilius, of the real philosopher, a philosopher in deeds and not in tricks. He stands on a height, admirable, lofty, of true greatness. He does not rise on his toes or walk on the tips of his feet, like those who use deceit to help their stature and want to look taller than they are; he is content with his own greatness.

111.4 Why should he not be content to have grown to a height beyond fortune's reach? So he is above human things, and equal to himself in every state of affairs, whether his life moves along on a favorable course or is tossed about and passes through adversity and hardship. This steadiness those quibbles I was speaking of just now cannot supply. The mind plays with them and makes no progress, and they drag philosophy down from its summit to the plain.

111.5 I would not stop you from doing these things now and then—but only when you want to be doing nothing. The worst

thing about them, though, is this: they create a certain sweet taste for themselves, and they hold and detain the mind, lured on by an appearance of subtlety, when so great a mass of things calls to us, when a whole life is barely enough to learn this one thing: to despise life. "What? Not to govern it?" you say. That is the second task; for no one has governed it well except the one who had despised it. Farewell.

LETTER 112: ON AN UNREFORMABLE FRIEND

A man hardened and softened by long indulgence cannot yet take the graft of reason.

112.1 Heavens, I would love your friend to be shaped and trained, as you wish. But he is very hard to take hold of—or rather, what is more troublesome, very soft, and broken down by long bad habit. I want to give you an illustration from my own craft.

112.2 Not every vine will take a graft. If it is old and decayed, or weak and spindly, it will either not accept the cutting, or not nourish it, or not bond it to itself and pass into its quality and nature. So we usually cut it off above ground, so that, if it does not respond, a second attempt can be made and it can be grafted again below ground.

112.3 This man you write about and commend to me has no strength; he has indulged his vices. He has withered and hardened at the same time. He cannot take in reason; he cannot nourish it. "But he wants it himself." Do not believe it. I am not saying he is lying to you; he thinks he wants it. Luxury has turned his stomach; he will soon make up with it again.

112.4 "But he says he is disgusted with his own life." I would not deny it. Who is not? People love and hate their vices at the same time. So we will pass judgment on him when he has convinced us that luxury has become hateful to him; for now they are merely on bad terms. Farewell.

4 Sophismata (Greek): "sophisms," trick arguments that lead by apparently valid steps to false conclusions.

LETTER 113: ON WHETHER THE VIRTUES ARE LIVING CREATURES

Seneca ridicules the Stoic claim that the virtues are animals and asks instead how to reach them.

113.1 You want me to write to you what I think about this question much discussed in our school: whether justice, courage, prudence, and the other virtues are living creatures. With such hair-splitting, dearest Lucilius, we have made it look as if we exercise our wits on pointless things and wear away our leisure in debates that will do no good. I will do as you wish and set out what our school holds. But I declare that I hold a different view: I think there are some things that suit a man in Greek slippers and cloak. So I will tell you what it was that moved the ancients —or rather, what the ancients set in motion.[5]

113.2 It is agreed that the mind is a living creature, since it is what makes us living creatures, and since living creatures (animalia) take their name from it (animus). But virtue is nothing other than the mind in a certain state; therefore it is a living creature. Next, virtue does something, and nothing can be done without impulse. If it has impulse, which belongs only to a living creature, it is a living creature. "If virtue is a living creature," he says, "then virtue itself has virtue."

113.3 Why should it not have itself? Just as the wise man does everything through virtue, so virtue does everything through itself. "In that case," he says, "all the arts are living creatures too, and everything we think and grasp with the mind. It follows that many thousands of living creatures dwell in the narrow confines of our chest, and that each of us is many living creatures, or has many." Do you ask what answer can be made to this? Each one of those things will be a living creature; they will not be many living creatures. Why? I will tell you, if you lend me your subtlety and attention.

5 The Latin animal (like the Greek zōon) means any living, breathing being. Greek slippers and cloak were the dress of Greek philosophers.

113.4 Separate living creatures must have separate substances; all these have a single mind. So each can be a living creature, but they cannot be many. I am both a living creature and a human being, yet you will not say that we are two. Why? Because to be two they would have to be separate. I mean this: one must be divided off from the other for there to be two. Whatever is manifold within one thing falls under one nature, and so it is one.

113.5 My mind is a living creature and I am a living creature, yet we are not two. Why? Because my mind is part of me. A thing will be counted by itself only when it stands by itself; when it is a limb of something else, it cannot be regarded as a separate thing. Why? I will tell you: because what is a separate thing must be its own, peculiar to itself, whole and complete within itself.

113.6 I have declared that I hold a different view. For if this is accepted, not only the virtues will be living creatures but also their opposites, the vices, and the passions, such as anger, fear, grief, and suspicion. The thing will go further still: all opinions, all thoughts will be living creatures. That cannot be accepted in any way. Not everything a human being produces is a human being.

113.7 "What is justice?" he says. The mind in a certain state. "So if the mind is a living creature, justice is too." Not at all. For justice is a state of the mind and a kind of power. The same mind is transformed into various shapes, and it does not become a different living creature every time it does something different. Nor is what the mind produces a living creature.

113.8 If justice is a living creature, and courage, and the other virtues, do they cease to be living creatures and then start again, or do they exist always? The virtues cannot cease. So many living creatures—no, countless ones—are moving about in this mind.

113.9 "They are not many," he says, "because they are bound to a single one and are parts and limbs of one." So we are picturing the mind as looking like the many-headed hydra, each of whose heads fights by itself and does harm by itself. Yet none of those

heads is a living creature; each is the head of a living creature, while the hydra itself is one living creature. No one ever said that the lion or the serpent in the Chimera was a living creature; they were its parts, and parts are not living creatures. What is there from which you can conclude that justice is a living creature?

113.10 "It does something," he says, "and it is of benefit. What does something and is of benefit has impulse; and what has impulse is a living creature." True, if it has its own impulse. But it does not have its own; it has the mind's.

113.11 Every living creature remains what it began as until it dies: a human being is a human being until he dies, a horse a horse, a dog a dog. It cannot pass into something else. Justice—that is, the mind in a certain state—is a living creature. Let us believe it. Next, courage is a living creature—that is, the mind in a certain state. Which mind? The one that was justice a moment ago? It is held fast in the first living creature; it is not allowed to pass into another. It must stay in the one in which it first began to exist.

113.12 Besides, one mind cannot belong to two living creatures, much less to more. If justice, courage, self-control, and the other virtues are living creatures, how will they have one mind? Each must have its own, or they are not living creatures.

113.13 One body cannot belong to several living creatures. Even they admit this. What is the body of justice? "The mind." And what is the body of courage? "The same mind." Yet one body cannot belong to two living creatures.

113.14 "But the same mind," he says, "takes on the state of justice and of courage and of self-control." That could be so if, at the time when there was justice, there were no courage, and at the time when there was courage, there were no self-control. But in fact all the virtues exist together. So how will each one be a living creature, when there is one mind, which cannot make more than one living creature?

113.15 Finally, no living creature is part of another living creature. But justice is part of the mind; therefore it is not a liv-

ing creature. I seem to be wasting effort on something that is admitted; this calls for indignation more than argument. No living creature is identical to another. Look around at the bodies of all of them: every one has its own color, its own shape, its own size.

113.16 Among the other reasons why the genius of the divine craftsman is wonderful, I count this too: in such an abundance of things he never repeats himself. Even things that seem alike prove different when you compare them. He has made so many kinds of leaves, each stamped with its own character; so many animals, and none matches another in size—there is always some difference. He required of himself that things that are distinct should also be unlike and unequal. But all the virtues, as you say, are equal. Therefore they are not living creatures.[6]

113.17 Every living creature acts by itself; but virtue does nothing by itself, only together with a human being. All living creatures are either rational, like human beings and gods, or irrational, like wild beasts and cattle. The virtues are certainly rational; yet they are neither human beings nor gods; therefore they are not living creatures.

113.18 Every rational creature does nothing unless first it has been stirred by the impression of something; then it has an impulse; then assent confirms this impulse. I will tell you what assent is. "I ought to walk": only then do I walk, when I have said this to myself and approved this opinion of mine. "I ought to sit": only then do I sit. This assent is not found in virtue.

113.19 Suppose it is prudence: how will it assent to "I ought to walk"? Its nature does not allow it. For prudence looks out for the one it belongs to, not for itself; it can neither walk nor sit. So it has no assent, and what has no assent is not a rational creature. But if virtue is a living creature, it is rational.

113.20 It is not rational, however; therefore it is not a living creature either. If virtue is a living creature, and virtue is a good, is not every good a living creature? It is—our school admits it. To save one's father is a good; to state one's opinion wisely in the

6 The Stoics held that all virtues are equal, as are all faults.

senate is a good; to judge justly is a good. Therefore saving one's father is a living creature, and stating one's opinion wisely is a living creature. The thing has been pushed so far that you cannot help laughing: to keep wisely silent is a good, to dine frugally is a good; so keeping silent and dining are living creatures.

113.21 Heavens, I will not stop tickling myself and playing the fool, making sport of these subtleties. If justice and courage are living creatures, they certainly live on land. Every land creature feels cold, hunger, thirst; so justice is cold, courage is hungry, and mercy is thirsty.

113.22 And then? Shall I not ask them what shape these living creatures have—a human's, a horse's, a wild beast's? If they give them a round shape, like the one they have given to God, I will ask whether greed and luxury and madness are equally round; for they too are living creatures. If they round these off as well, I will go on to ask whether a prudent walk is a living creature. They will have to admit it, and then say that a walk is a living creature—and a round one at that.[7]

113.23 And do not think that I am the first of our school to speak not by the rulebook but from my own judgment: Cleanthes and his pupil Chrysippus disagree about what walking is. Cleanthes says it is breath sent out from the ruling part down to the feet; Chrysippus says it is the ruling part itself. Why, then, should not each of us follow the example of Chrysippus himself, claim his own freedom, and laugh at all these living creatures, more than the universe itself could hold?

113.24 "The virtues," he says, "are not many living creatures, and yet they are living creatures. For just as a man can be both a poet and an orator and still be one man, so these virtues are living creatures, but they are not many. The mind is the same—mind, and just, and prudent, and brave—standing in a certain state in relation to each virtue."

113.25 The dispute removed, we agree. For I too admit, for the time being, that the mind is a living creature—I will consider

7 The Stoics held that God is the universe, which is spherical.

later what verdict to give on this—but I deny that its actions are living creatures. Otherwise all words and all verses will be living creatures too. For if prudent speech is a good, and every good is a living creature, speech is a living creature. A prudent verse is a good, and every good is a living creature; so a verse is a living creature. Thus "Arms and the man I sing" is a living creature—and they cannot call it round, since it has six feet.[8]

113.26 "The whole thing," you say, "heavens, this very business now under discussion, is so much cobweb-spinning." I burst out laughing when I picture a solecism as a living creature, and a barbarism, and a syllogism, and, like a painter, assign them suitable faces. Is this what we debate with knitted brows and wrinkled foreheads? I cannot use Caelius' phrase here, "O gloomy trifles!"—they are laughable. So why do we not rather take up something useful and wholesome to us, and ask how we can reach the virtues, and what road will lead us to them?[9]

113.27 Teach me not whether courage is a living creature, but that no living creature is happy without courage—unless it has grown strong against chance events and mastered every misfortune in advance, by thinking about it before it came. What is courage? The impregnable fortress of human weakness; whoever has built it around himself holds out, free from care, through this siege of life, for he uses his own strength and his own weapons.

113.28 At this point I want to give you a saying of our Posidonius: "There is no reason ever to think yourself safe with fortune's weapons; fight with your own. Fortune does not arm anyone against herself. So people equipped against their enemies are unarmed against her."

113.29 Alexander ravaged and routed the Persians, the Hyrcanians, the Indians, and every nation that the East spreads out as far as the Ocean. But he himself, now after killing a friend, now

8 The opening words of Virgil's *Aeneid*; its meter, the hexameter, has six metrical "feet."

9 Marcus Caelius Rufus (c. 82–48 BC), orator and friend of Cicero, known for his wit.

after losing one, lay in darkness, grieving now over his crime, now over his loss—the conqueror of so many kings and peoples, overcome by anger and grief. For he had worked to have everything in his power except his passions.[10]

113.30 Oh, how great are the errors that grip people who long to extend their right to rule across the seas, and think themselves most fortunate if they hold many provinces with their soldiers and add new ones to old—not knowing what that vast kingdom is that is equal to the gods'.

113.31 To rule oneself is the greatest rule. Let me be taught what a sacred thing justice is, looking to another's good and seeking nothing from itself except to be put to use. Let it have nothing to do with ambition and reputation; let it be pleasing to itself. Before all else, let each of us convince himself of this: "I must be just for nothing." That is not enough; let him convince himself of this further: "Let me be glad to spend myself freely on this most beautiful virtue." Let all his thought be turned as far as possible from private advantage. There is no reason to look at what the reward for a just deed is; the greater reward lies in being just. Fix this in your mind as well, which I said a little while ago: it makes no difference how many people know of your fairness.

113.32 Whoever wants his virtue advertised is working not for virtue but for glory. You are unwilling to be just without glory? Heavens, you will often have to be just with disgrace. And then, if you are wise, let a bad reputation well earned delight you. Farewell.

LETTER 114: ON STYLE AND CHARACTER

People speak as they live: Maecenas' loose style mirrored his loose life, and a corrupt style signals a corrupt age.

114.1 You ask why, in certain periods, a degenerate style of speaking has sprung up, and how talent came to lean toward particular faults—so that at one time a bloated delivery was in fashion,

10 The friend he killed was Clitus; the friend he lost was Hephaestion, who died in 324 BC. The Hyrcanians lived by the Caspian Sea.

at another a broken style, drawn out like a song. Why at one time bold thoughts, straining belief, were popular, at another abrupt and cryptic epigrams, in which more was to be guessed than heard? Why was there an age that exploited the privilege of metaphor without any shame? The answer is what you commonly hear, a saying that has become a proverb among the Greeks: people speak as they live.[11]

114.2 Just as each person's conduct resembles his speech, so the style of an age sometimes copies its public morals, when a city's discipline has grown slack and given itself over to pleasures. A wanton style is proof of public luxury—provided it is not found in one or two speakers, but is approved and accepted.

114.3 The mind and the talent cannot be of different colors. If the mind is sound, orderly, serious and self-controlled, the talent too is dry and sober; when the mind is corrupted, the talent is tainted with it. Don't you see that when the mind has gone slack, the limbs drag and the feet move sluggishly? That when it has gone soft, the softness shows in the very walk? That when it is keen and fierce, the step quickens? That when it rages, or is angry, which is close to raging, the body's movement is thrown into disorder and does not walk but is swept along? How much more, do you think, must this happen to the talent, which is wholly blended with the mind—shaped by it, obedient to it, taking its law from it.

114.4 How Maecenas lived is too well known to need telling now: how he walked, how pampered he was, how he longed to be looked at, how unwilling he was to hide his vices. Well then? Wasn't his style just as loose as he himself was ungirt? Weren't his words as conspicuous as his dress, his retinue, his house, his wife? He would have been a man of great talent if he had pursued it by a straighter road, if he had not avoided being understood, if he had not let himself run loose in his style as well. So you will find his eloquence to be that of a drunken man—tangled, wandering, full of license.

114.5 What is uglier than "a river and a bank with long-haired woods"? See how "they plow the channel with skiffs and, turning up the shallows, leave the gardens behind." What of someone who "curls his lady's locks and bills and coos with his lips, and begins with a sigh, as the forest tyrants with weary neck run wild"? "An incurable faction, they rummage at feasts and try houses with the wine jar, and by hope exact death." "A guardian spirit, scarcely witness to its own feast day." "Or threads of a slender taper and crackling meal, the hearth that mother or wife clothes."[12]

114.6 When you read this, won't it strike you at once that this is the man who always walked through the city with his tunic ungirt? For even when he was acting as deputy for the absent Caesar, the watchword was taken from a man in loose clothes. This is the man who appeared on the tribunal, on the Rostra, at every public gathering, with his cloak wrapped around his head and only his ears sticking out on either side, just like the runaway rich man in a farce. This is the man who, at the very moment when civil wars were roaring and the city was anxious and under arms, went about in public escorted by two eunuchs —more men, even so, than he was. This is the man who married his wife a thousand times, though he had only one. These words, so perversely put together, so carelessly thrown down, so contrary to everyone's usage, show that his character too was just as strange, crooked and peculiar.[13]

114.7 He is given the highest praise for his mildness: he spared the sword, kept from bloodshed, and showed his power in nothing except his license. Yet he spoiled this very praise with those affected indulgences of his utterly monstrous style.

114.8 For it is plain that he was soft, not gentle. Those involved word orders, those words set askew, those strange thoughts—

11 The Greek proverb ran roughly: "As a man's life is, so is his speech."
12 Fragments of Maecenas' prose, chosen by Seneca for their contorted obscurity; the manuscript text is also badly corrupt, so the sense of several phrases is uncertain.

often great ones, but unnerved by the time they come out—will make this clear to anyone. His head was turned by too much good fortune. This fault sometimes belongs to a man, sometimes to an age.

114.9 When prosperity has spread luxury far and wide, people first begin to take more care of their bodies' dress. Next they labor over their furniture. Next they lavish attention on their very houses—making them sprawl to the size of country estates, making the walls glitter with marble brought across the seas, making the roofs bright with gold, and the gleam of the floors match the paneled ceilings. Next the refinement passes to dinners, and there novelty and a reversal of the usual order are hunted for to win approval: what used to close the meal is served first, and what used to be offered to guests as they arrived is given to them as they leave.

114.10 Once the mind has grown used to scorning what is customary, and the usual seems shabby to it, it seeks novelty in speech too. Now it calls back antique, obsolete words and brings them out; now it coins unknown words and bends old ones; now —something that has lately become common—bold and frequent metaphor passes for elegance.

114.11 Some cut their thoughts short and hope to win favor if the sense is left hanging and makes the listener suspect what it means. Some hold them back and draw them out. Some don't merely go right up to the edge of a fault—which anyone attempting something grand has to do—but love the fault for its own sake. So wherever you see a corrupt style popular, there will be no doubt that morals too have strayed from what is right. Just as luxury in banquets and in dress are signs of a sick city, so license in style, if it is widespread, shows that the minds the words come from have also fallen.

114.12 You need not be surprised that corrupt writing is welcomed not only by the shabbier ring of bystanders but also by

13 Maecenas governed Rome for Octavian (later Augustus) during his absences in the civil wars; his stormy marriage to Terentia was broken off and renewed again and again.

this more refined crowd; they differ from each other in their togas, not in their judgment. What you may find more surprising is that not only faulty things are praised, but the faults themselves. For this has always happened: no talent has ever pleased without some indulgence. Give me any man you like, of great name; I will tell you what his own age forgave him, what it knowingly overlooked in him. I will give you many whose faults did them no harm, and some whom their faults actually helped. I will give you, I say, men of the greatest fame, held up for admiration, whom you would destroy if you corrected them; their faults are so bound up with their virtues that they would drag the virtues along with them.

114.13 Add to this that style has no fixed rule. The usage of the community, which never stays in one place for long, keeps turning it over. Many go to another era for their words and talk the Twelve Tables. For them Gracchus and Crassus and Curio are too polished and modern; they go all the way back to Appius and Coruncanius. Others, by contrast, wanting nothing that is not worn and familiar, fall into vulgarity.[14]

114.14 Each of these is corrupt, in opposite ways—just as corrupt, I swear, as refusing to use any words but splendid, sonorous, poetic ones and avoiding those that are necessary and in everyday use. I would say the one errs as much as the other: one grooms himself more than is right, the other neglects himself more than is right; one shaves even his legs, the other not even his armpits.

114.15 Let us pass to the arrangement of words. How many kinds of fault shall I show you in it? Some like it broken and rough; if anything has flowed a little too smoothly, they deliberately disrupt it. They don't want a joint without a jolt; they consider the arrangement manly and strong that strikes the ear with its unevenness. With others, it is not arrangement but singing, so coaxing is it and so softly does it glide.

14 The Twelve Tables were Rome's earliest law code (c. 450 BC). Gaius Gracchus, Lucius Crassus and Curio were orators of the late Republic; Appius Claudius Caecus and Tiberius Coruncanius belonged to the early third century BC.

114.16 What shall I say of the kind in which words are held back and, long awaited, barely return at the close of the sentence? Or of the kind that is slow at the end, as Cicero's is, sloping and softly lingering, always the same, keeping to its habit and its rhythm? Nor is the fault only in the arrangement; it lies in the kind of thoughts, too—if they are petty and childish, or brazen, daring more than modesty allows; if they are flowery and too sweet; if they end in nothing and, having no effect, do nothing more than make a sound.[15]

114.17 Some one man, who at the time holds the lead in eloquence, introduces these faults; the rest imitate him and pass them on to one another. So when Sallust was in vogue, lopped-off sentences, words that fell before you expected them, and obscure brevity counted as elegance. Lucius Arruntius, a man of rare frugality, who wrote a history of the Punic War, was a Sallustian and strained after that style. There is a phrase in Sallust: "he made an army with silver," that is, he raised one with money. Arruntius fell in love with this; he put it on every page. In one place he says: "they made flight for our men." In another: "Hiero, king of Syracuse, made war." And in another: "these tidings made the people of Panormus surrender to the Romans."[16]

114.18 I wanted to give you a taste; the whole book is stitched together from such things. What was rare in Sallust is frequent in him, almost continuous—and not without reason: Sallust fell into these expressions, while Arruntius went looking for them. You see what follows when someone takes a fault for a model.

114.19 Sallust said: "with the waters wintering." Arruntius, in the first book of his Punic War, says: "suddenly the storm wintered." And in another place, wanting to say that it had been a cold year, he says: "the whole year wintered." And in another: "from there he sent sixty cargo ships, lightly laden apart from the soldiers and the sailors' necessities, with the north wind

15 Cicero favored a few characteristic rhythmic cadences (clausulae) at the ends of his sentences.

16 Lucius Arruntius (consul AD 6) wrote a history of the First Punic War (264–241 BC). Hiero II ruled Syracuse; Panormus is modern Palermo.

wintering." He never stops stuffing this word in everywhere. In one place Sallust says: "amid civil war he sought reputations for justice and goodness." Arruntius could not restrain himself from writing, right at the start of his first book, that there were enormous "reputations" concerning Regulus.[17]

114.20 These faults, then, and others like them, which imitation has stamped on someone, are not signs of luxury or of a corrupt mind. For faults from which you judge a person's feelings must be his own and born from within him. An angry man's style is angry; an agitated man's is too excited; a pampered man's is soft and slack.

114.21 That is what you see in those fellows who either pluck out their beards or pluck them in patches, who crop and shave their upper lips close while letting the rest grow long, who put on cloaks of loud colors and see-through togas, who refuse to do anything that people's eyes could pass over. They provoke those eyes and turn them on themselves; they are willing even to be criticized, as long as they are looked at. Such is the style of Maecenas and of all the others who go wrong not by accident but knowingly and willingly.

114.22 This springs from a great sickness of the mind. With wine, the tongue does not stumble until the mind has given way under the load and has toppled or betrayed itself; in the same way this drunkenness of style—for what else is it?—troubles no one unless the mind is tottering. So it is the mind that must be cured. From it come our thoughts, from it our words; from it come our bearing, our expression, our walk. When the mind is sound and strong, speech too is vigorous, brave, manly; if the mind has fallen, everything else follows in the collapse.

114.23 "While their king is safe, all have one mind; / when he is lost, they break faith." Our king is the mind. While it is safe, the rest stay at their duty, obey and comply; when it wavers a little, they waver with it. But when it has yielded to pleasure, its skills

17 "Wintering" and the plural "reputations" render Sallust's unusual verb *hiemare* and plural *famae*, which Arruntius overused.

and actions also wither, and all its effort comes from something slack and flabby.[18]

114.24 Since I have used this comparison, I will keep it up. Our mind is sometimes a king, sometimes a tyrant. It is a king when it looks to the honorable, cares for the well-being of the body entrusted to it, and orders it to do nothing shameful, nothing base. But when it is uncontrolled, greedy and self-indulgent, it passes to that hated and dreadful name and becomes a tyrant. Then uncontrolled passions take hold of it and press on it; at first, indeed, they rejoice—like a populace glutted to no purpose with a largesse that will harm it, pawing at what it cannot swallow.

114.25 But when the disease has more and more eaten away his strength, and indulgence has sunk into his marrow and sinews, he delights in the sight of the pleasures that his excessive greed has made him unfit for. In place of his own pleasures he takes the spectacle of other people's, becoming the supplier and witness of lusts whose use he has taken from himself by overindulgence. Nor is it as pleasant for him to be flush with delights as it is bitter that he cannot pass all that splendor through his gullet and belly, that he cannot wallow with the whole throng of kept boys and women; and he grieves that a great part of his happiness lies idle, shut out by the narrow limits of his body.

114.26 Isn't it madness, my Lucilius—not only that none of us thinks himself mortal, none thinks himself weak, but that none of us thinks he is just one person? Look at our kitchens and the cooks running to and fro among so many fires: do you think it is a single belly for which food is prepared with such commotion? Look at our wine stores and our cellars full of the vintages of many generations: do you think it is a single belly for which the wines of so many consuls and so many regions are laid up? Look at how many places the soil is turned, how many thousands of farmers plow and dig: do you think it is a single belly for which crops are sown in Sicily and in Africa?[19]

18 Virgil, *Georgics* 4.212–213, of bees and their king.
19 Roman wines were dated by the consuls of the year of vintage.

114.27 We will be sane and our desires moderate if each of us counts himself, measures his body too, and knows how little it can hold and for how short a time. But nothing will help you toward moderation in all things so much as thinking often about how short life is, and how uncertain. Whatever you do, keep your eye on death. Farewell.

LETTER 115: ON THE BEAUTY OF THE GOOD MIND

Care for what you think, not how you phrase it; the good mind is beautiful, and wealth is a gilded lie.

115.1 I don't want you to worry too much about words and their arrangement, my Lucilius; I have greater things for you to care about. Look for what to write, not how; and even that, not in order to write but to feel, so that you may apply what you have felt more closely to yourself and, as it were, set your seal on it. Whenever you see a style that is anxious and polished, know that the mind too is no less taken up with trifles.

115.2 A great man speaks more easily and with less concern; whatever he says has more confidence in it than care. You know those dainty young men, sleek of beard and hair, straight out of a bandbox: don't expect anything brave from them, anything solid. Speech is the dress of the mind. If it is trimmed and painted and artificial, it shows that the mind too is not genuine and has something broken in it. Prettiness is no ornament for a man.

115.3 If we could look into a good man's mind, what a beautiful face we would see, how holy, how radiant with calm magnificence—justice shining on one side, courage on the other, temperance and wisdom on this side and that! Besides these, frugality and self-control, endurance and generosity and courtesy, and —who would believe it?—kindness, a good so rare in a human being, would pour their own splendor over it. Then foresight with good taste, and, towering above them all, greatness of soul —good gods, how much beauty they would add to it, how much

weight and dignity! How much authority joined with charm! No one would call it lovable without calling it venerable as well.

115.4 If anyone saw that face, higher and more radiant than anything commonly seen among human beings, wouldn't he stop short, stunned as if he had met a god, and silently pray that "it be no sin to have seen it"? Then, drawn forward by the very kindness of its look, wouldn't he worship and entreat it? And after long contemplating it, towering far above and lifted beyond the measure of what we usually see among us, its eyes gentle yet blazing with living fire—wouldn't he then, in awe and wonder, utter those words of our Virgil:

115.5 "By what name shall I call you, maiden? For your face is not a mortal's, nor does your voice sound human.

...

Be gracious, whoever you are, and lighten our burden." She will be there and will lighten it, if we are willing to worship her. And she is worshipped not by slaughtering the fattened bodies of bulls, nor by hanging up offerings of gold and silver, nor by pouring coins into temple treasuries, but by a devout and upright will.[20]

115.6 No one, I say, would fail to burn with love for her if we were granted the sight of her. As it is, many things block our view and either dazzle our sight with too much brightness or hold it back in darkness. But if, just as the eyes' vision can be sharpened and cleared by certain medicines, we are willing to free the sight of our mind from its obstructions, we will be able to perceive virtue even when buried in a body, even with poverty standing in the way, even with low birth and disgrace lying across it. We will see, I say, that beauty, however squalid its covering.

115.7 Equally, we will see through to wickedness and the torpor of a wretched mind, however much the glitter of radiant wealth

20 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.327–330: Aeneas addresses his mother Venus, disguised as a huntress.

gets in the way and the false light of honors on one side and great power on the other beats upon the viewer's eyes.

115.8 Then we will be able to understand how contemptible the things are that we admire. We are just like children, who prize every plaything: they value necklaces bought for a penny above their parents, and their brothers too. What difference is there, then, between us and them, as Ariston says, except that we are crazy about paintings and statues and are fools at greater cost? They are delighted by smooth, speckled pebbles found on the beach; we by the veined markings on huge columns, brought from the sands of Egypt or the deserts of Africa to hold up some colonnade or a dining room big enough for a whole people.

115.9 We admire walls faced with thin marble, though we know what is hidden underneath. We deceive our own eyes; and when we have flooded our ceilings with gold, what are we doing but delighting in a lie? For we know that under that gold lies ugly wood. And it is not only walls and ceilings that are covered with a thin veneer: all those people you see strutting along with their heads high have a gold-leaf happiness. Look closely, and you will learn how much evil lies under that thin skin of rank.

115.10 This very thing that occupies so many magistrates and judges, and makes both magistrates and judges—money—from the moment it began to be honored, the true honor of things fell. We have become traders and merchandise by turns, and we ask not what a thing is like but what it costs. We are dutiful for pay, undutiful for pay; we follow the honorable as long as there is some hope of gain in it, ready to switch to the opposite if crimes promise more.

115.11 Our parents taught us to admire gold and silver; the greed poured into us when we were young has sunk deep and grown up with us. Then a whole people, at odds about everything else, agrees on this: this is what they look up to, what they wish for their families, what they dedicate to the gods, when they want to seem grateful, as though it were the greatest of human possessions. In the end morals have sunk so low that poverty is a curse and a disgrace—despised by the rich, hated by the poor.

115.12 On top of this come the songs of the poets, putting a torch to our passions, in which wealth is praised as though it were the one glory and ornament of life. Nothing better, it seems to them, can the immortal gods give or possess.

115.13 "The palace of the Sun stood high on lofty columns,
bright with glittering gold." Look at his chariot too: "Golden
was the axle, golden the pole, golden the rims
that bound the wheels, and silver the row of spokes."
Finally, the age they want to call the best, they call
golden.[21]

115.14 Nor among the Greek tragedians is there any lack of characters who would trade innocence, safety and good name for gain: "Let me be called the worst of men, so long as I'm called rich.
'Is he rich?' we all ask—no one asks, 'Is he good?'
Not why or where it came from—people only ask what you have.
Everywhere, each man has been worth just as much as he had.
What is it shameful for us to have, you ask? Nothing.
I'd rather live rich, or else die poor.
He dies well who dies while making a profit.
Money, the great good of the human race—/ neither a mother's joy nor that of coaxing children
can equal it, nor a father honored for his kindnesses.
If anything so sweet sparkles in the face of Venus,
no wonder she stirs the loves of gods and men."[22]

115.15 When these last lines were spoken in a tragedy of Euripides, the whole audience rose as one to drive out both the actor and the play, until Euripides himself leapt into their midst and asked them to wait and see what end this admirer of gold would

21 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.1–2 and 2.107–108.
22 Seneca renders lines from various Greek tragedies into Latin verse.

come to. In that play Bellerophon paid the penalty that everyone pays in his own drama.[23]

115.16 For no greed goes unpunished, though greed is punishment enough in itself. How many tears, how much toil it demands! How wretched it is in what it longs for, how wretched in what it has won! Add the daily worries that torment each person in proportion to what he owns. Money is possessed with greater torment than it is sought. How they groan over their losses—which are heavy when they happen, and seem heavier! Finally, even if fortune takes nothing from them, whatever they fail to gain is a loss.

115.17 "But people call that man happy and rich, and they pray to get as much as he owns." I admit it. So what? Do you think anyone is in a worse condition than those who have both misery and envy? If only those about to pray for riches would consult the rich! If only those about to seek office would consult the ambitious and those who have reached the highest rank! They would certainly change their prayers—since meanwhile those people are taking up new ones, having condemned the old. For there is no one whose success satisfies him, even if it came at a run. They complain about their plans and their progress, and always prefer what they left behind.

115.18 So philosophy will give you this, and I think nothing is greater: you will never regret being yourself. To this happiness, so solid that no storm can shake it, neither neatly joined words nor smoothly flowing speech will lead you. Let words go as they will, as long as the mind keeps its own arrangement—as long as it is great, unconcerned about opinions, pleased with itself for the very things that displease others; a mind that measures its progress by its life and judges that it knows only as much as it is free from desire and from fear. Farewell.

23 The last lines are in fact from Euripides' *Danaë*; Seneca attributes them to his *Bellerophon*.

LETTER 116: ON THE PASSIONS

The Peripatetics moderate the passions, the Stoics expel them; it is easier to keep a passion out than to drive it out.

116.1 Whether it is better to have moderate passions or none at all is an old question. Our school expels them; the Peripatetics moderate them. I don't see how a moderate amount of disease can be healthy or useful. Don't be afraid: I am taking away nothing that you don't want refused you. I will show myself easygoing and indulgent toward the things you aim at and consider either necessary for life or useful or pleasant; I will take away the vice. For when I have forbidden you to crave, I will allow you to want—so that you may do those same things without fear, with more reliable judgment, and feel the pleasures themselves more keenly. Why shouldn't they reach you more fully if you command them than if you are their slave?

116.2 "But it is natural," you say, "for me to be tormented by longing for a friend; grant the right to tears that fall so rightly. It is natural to be touched by what people think and saddened by their disapproval; why wouldn't you allow me this honorable fear of a bad reputation?" There is no vice without its advocate; every vice starts out modest and easily persuaded, but from there it spreads more widely. You won't manage to make it stop if you have allowed it to start.

116.3 Every passion is weak at first. Then it rouses itself and gathers strength as it goes; it is easier to keep out than to throw out. Who denies that all passions flow from some source that is, so to speak, natural? Nature has entrusted us with the care of ourselves, but when you indulge that care too far, it is a vice. Nature has mixed pleasure into necessary things—not so that we would seek it, but so that its addition would make the things we cannot live without agreeable to us. Let pleasure come in on its own account, and it is luxury. So let us resist the passions as they come in, because, as I said, it is easier not to let them in than to get them out. "Allow me to grieve up to a point," you say,

"and to fear up to a point." But that "up to a point" stretches a long way and does not stop where you want it to.

116.4 The wise man can safely guard himself without anxiety; he will halt his tears and his pleasures wherever he wishes. For us, since turning back is not easy, the best thing is not to go forward at all.

116.5 I think Panaetius answered neatly when a young man asked him whether the wise man would fall in love. "As for the wise man," he said, "we shall see. You and I, who are still far from being wise, must not let ourselves fall into a state that is agitated, out of control, enslaved to another, worthless in its own eyes. If the beloved does not reject us, we are aroused by her kindness; if she scorns us, we are inflamed by her pride. The ease of love harms us as much as its difficulty: ease captures us, difficulty makes us fight. So, aware of our weakness, let us keep still. Let us not entrust a weak mind to wine, or to beauty, or to flattery, or to anything that draws us on with its charm."

116.6 What Panaetius answered to the question about love, I say about all the passions. As far as we can, let us step back from slippery ground; even on dry ground we don't stand very firmly.

116.7 At this point you will confront me with that common complaint against the Stoics: "You promise too much, you demand too much. We are poor little human beings; we can't deny ourselves everything. We will grieve, but not much; we will crave, but moderately; we will get angry, but be appeased." Do you know why we can't do those things?

116.8 Because we don't believe we can. No—by Hercules, there is something else behind it: we defend our vices because we love them, and we would rather excuse them than shake them off. Nature has given human beings enough strength, if we use it, if we gather our powers and rouse them all on our own behalf, and certainly not against ourselves. Unwillingness is the reason; inability is the pretext. Farewell.

LETTER 117: ON WISDOM AND BEING WISE

Seneca rejects the Stoic distinction between wisdom and being wise, and calls for help in living instead.

117.1 You will cause me a lot of trouble and, without knowing it, plunge me into a great dispute and nuisance by putting such petty little questions to me, in which I can neither disagree with my own school without losing their goodwill nor agree with them without violating my conscience. You ask whether it is true, as the Stoics hold, that wisdom is a good but being wise is not a good. First I will set out the Stoic view; then I will venture to give my own opinion.

117.2 Our school holds that what is good is a body, because what is good acts, and whatever acts is a body. What is good is beneficial. But it has to act in some way in order to be beneficial; if it acts, it is a body. They say wisdom is a good; it follows that they must also call it bodily.

117.3 But being wise, they think, is not in the same category. It is incorporeal and an attribute of something else, namely wisdom; so it neither acts nor is beneficial. "Well then," says one, "don't we say that being wise is good?" We do say so, but referring it to that on which it depends—to wisdom itself.

117.4 Hear what others answer to these people, before I begin to break away and take my seat on another side. "In that case," they say, "living happily is not a good either. Like it or not, they must answer that the happy life is a good, but living happily is not a good."

117.5 This objection too is still raised against our school: "You want to be wise. So being wise is a thing to be sought. If it is a thing to be sought, it is a good." Our people are forced to twist words and insert one syllable into *expetendum* ("to be sought"), which our language does not allow to be inserted. I will add it, if you will permit me. "What is good," they say, "is *expetendum*, to be sought; what is *expetibile*, desirable, is what comes to us when

we have attained the good. It is not sought as a good, but accompanies the good that has been sought."

117.6 I don't share this view, and I think our people come down to this because they are already bound by the first link in the chain and are not free to change their formula. We usually attach great weight to what all people assume, and for us it is a proof of truth that something seems so to everyone. For instance, we infer that there are gods from, among other things, the fact that everyone has an inborn belief about the gods, and no nation anywhere is so far cast out beyond laws and customs as not to believe in some gods. When we discuss the eternity of souls, the agreement of mankind, whether fearing the underworld or worshipping its powers, carries no small weight with us. I make use of this general conviction: you will find no one who does not think that both wisdom and being wise are good.

117.7 I won't do what losers usually do and appeal to the people; let us begin to fight with our own weapons. When something happens to a thing, is it outside the thing it happens to, or in it? If it is in the thing it happens to, it is as much a body as that thing. For nothing can happen to anything without contact; and what makes contact is a body. If it is outside, then after it happened it withdrew. What has withdrawn has motion. What has motion is a body. You expect me to say that a race is not one thing and running another, nor heat one thing and being hot another, nor light one thing and shining another. I grant that these are different things, but not of a different category.

117.8 If health is indifferent, being healthy is indifferent too; if beauty is indifferent, so is being beautiful. If justice is a good, so is being just. If baseness is an evil, being base is an evil—just as surely, by heaven, as, if eye inflammation is an evil, having inflamed eyes is an evil too. To show you this: neither can exist without the other. Whoever is being wise is a wise man; whoever is a wise man is being wise. So little can it be doubted that whatever the one is, the other is too, that to some they seem one and the same.

117.9 But here is what I would gladly ask: since all things are either evil or good or indifferent, in which class is being wise? They deny it is a good; it certainly is not an evil; so it follows that it is in between. But we call "in between" and "indifferent" what can fall to a bad man as well as a good one—such as money, beauty, noble birth. But being wise can fall only to the good man; therefore it is not indifferent. Nor is it an evil, since it cannot fall to a bad man; therefore it is a good. What only the good man has is a good. Only the good man has the quality of being wise; therefore it is a good.

117.10 "It is an attribute of wisdom," says he. Then this thing you call being wise—does it produce wisdom, or is it acted upon by it? Either way it is a body. For both what is acted upon and what acts is a body; if it is a body, it is a good. The one thing that kept it from being a good was that it was incorporeal.

117.11 The Peripatetics hold that there is no difference between wisdom and being wise, since each is contained in the other. Do you suppose anyone is being wise except someone who has wisdom? Do you suppose anyone who is being wise does not have wisdom?

117.12 The old dialecticians distinguish these; the distinction came down from them to the Stoics. I will tell you what it is. A field is one thing, having a field another. Naturally: having a field concerns the one who has it, not the field. In the same way wisdom is one thing, being wise another. I think you will grant that these are two: what is had, and the one who has it. Wisdom is had; the one who is wise has it. Wisdom is the mind perfected, or brought to the highest and best state; for it is the art of living. What is being wise? I cannot call it "the mind perfected," but what falls to one who has a perfected mind. So the one is a good mind, the other, so to speak, having a good mind.

117.13 "There are," he says, "natures of bodies—this is a man, this is a horse. These are followed by movements of the mind that make statements about bodies. These have something peculiar to them and separate from bodies. For instance, I see Cato walking. The senses showed this, and the mind believed it. What

I see is a body, and I have directed my eyes and my mind to it. Then I say: 'Cato is walking.' What I am now saying," he says, "is not a body but a kind of statement about a body—what some call a proposition, others an enunciation, others a 'saying.' So when we say 'wisdom,' we understand something bodily; when we say 'he is wise,' we are speaking about a body. And it makes a great difference whether you name the thing or speak about it."[24]

117.14 Let us suppose for now that these are two things—I am not yet declaring my own view. What prevents being wise from being something different yet a good all the same? I was saying a moment ago that a field is one thing and having a field another. Of course; for the one who has and the thing that is had are of different natures: the one is earth, the other a man. But in the case we are discussing, both are of the same nature—the one who has wisdom and wisdom itself.

117.15 Besides, in that case the thing had is one thing and the one who has it another; here what is had and the one who has it are in the same place. A field is possessed by law, wisdom by nature. The field can be sold off and handed to someone else; wisdom never leaves its owner. So there is no reason to compare things that are unlike each other. I had begun to say that these can be two things and yet both good—just as wisdom and the wise man are two, and you grant that both are good. And just as nothing prevents both wisdom and the one who has wisdom from being good, so nothing prevents both wisdom and having wisdom—that is, being wise—from being good.

117.16 I want to be a wise man for this purpose: to be wise. Well then? Isn't that a good without which the other is not a good? You certainly say that wisdom, if it were given without the use of it, should not be accepted. What is the use of wisdom? Being wise. That is the most precious thing in it; take that away, and it becomes superfluous. If torture is an evil, being tortured is an evil—so much so that tortures would not be evils if you took away what follows from them. Wisdom is the state of a perfected

24 These Latin terms render the Stoic *lekton* ("what is said"), the meaning of a statement, which the Stoics counted as incorporeal.

mind; being wise is the use of a perfected mind. How can the use of something not be a good when the thing is not a good without its use?

117.17 I ask you whether wisdom is to be sought: you admit it is. I ask whether the use of wisdom is to be sought: you admit it—for you say you would not accept wisdom if you were prevented from using it. What is to be sought is a good. Being wise is the use of wisdom, as speaking eloquently is the use of eloquence, and seeing the use of the eyes. So being wise is the use of wisdom, and the use of wisdom is to be sought; therefore being wise is to be sought. If it is to be sought, it is a good.

117.18 For some time now I have been condemning myself for imitating these people even while I accuse them, and spending words on something obvious. For who can doubt that if heat is an evil, being hot is an evil too? If cold is an evil, being cold is an evil? If life is a good, living is a good? All these questions are about the edges of wisdom, not inside it. But it is inside wisdom that we should linger.

117.19 Even if we feel like wandering, wisdom has ample and spacious retreats. Let us inquire into the nature of the gods; into what feeds the heavenly bodies; into the stars' many-varied courses; whether our affairs move with their movements; whether the impulse of all bodies and minds comes from there; whether even the things called chance are bound by a fixed law, and nothing in this universe rolls on suddenly or without order. Such questions have already moved away from the shaping of character, but they lift the mind and raise it to the greatness of the very things it deals with. The questions I was talking about a little earlier diminish and depress it; they do not sharpen it, as you people think, but thin it out.

117.20 I ask you, are we to wear out the care that is so necessary and owed to greater and better things on something that is perhaps false and certainly useless? What good will it do me to know whether wisdom is one thing and being wise another? What good will it do me to know that the one is a good and the

other is not? I will be reckless and take a gamble on this prayer: may wisdom fall to you and being wise to me—we will be even.

117.21 Instead, set about showing me the road by which I may reach those things. Tell me what I should avoid, what I should seek, by what studies I may strengthen my faltering mind; how I may drive far off the things that strike me from the side and sweep me away; how I can be a match for so many evils; how I can rid myself of the calamities that have burst in on me, and of those I have burst in on myself. Teach me how to bear hardship without groaning myself, and prosperity without making others groan; how not to wait for the last, inevitable end, but to flee of my own accord when it seems right.

117.22 Nothing seems to me more shameful than praying for death. If you want to live, why pray to die? And if you don't, why ask the gods for what they gave you at birth? For that you will die some day has been settled even against your will; that you may die when you choose is in your own hands. The one is necessary for you; the other is permitted.

117.23 These days I read a most shameful opening by a man who was, by heaven, eloquent: "So may I die as soon as possible!" You are out of your mind: you are praying for something that is already yours. "So may I die as soon as possible!" Perhaps you have grown old while saying these words. Otherwise, what is the delay? No one is holding you; escape by whatever way you like. Choose any part of nature you please and bid it provide you with an exit. Surely these are the elements by which this universe is governed: water, earth, air. All of them are as much causes of living as roads to death.

117.24 "So may I die as soon as possible": this "as soon as possible"—what do you want it to mean? What day do you set for it? It can come sooner than you pray for. These are the words of a weak mind, trying to win pity by this cursing; the man who prays for death does not want to die. Ask the gods for life and health; if you have decided to die, the reward of death is this: to stop praying.

117.25 These are the things, my Lucilius, that we should deal with; with these let us shape the mind. This is wisdom, this is being wise—not tossing about the emptiest subtleties in futile little debates. Fortune has put so many questions to you that you have not yet solved; are you already quibbling? How foolish it is, when you have been given the signal for battle, to practice feints in the air. Put away those play weapons; you need real ones, the kind that decide the fight. Tell me how no sorrow and no fear may disturb the mind, how I may throw off this load of hidden desires. Let something be done.[25]

117.26 "Wisdom is a good, being wise is not a good": so it turns out that we are said not to be wise, and this whole pursuit is laughed at as busy with trifles. What if you knew that it is also debated whether future wisdom is a good? What doubt is there, I ask you, that barns do not yet feel the coming harvest, and childhood does not sense its coming youth with any strength or vigor? Meanwhile, future health does a sick man no good, any more than rest that will come many months later refreshes a man running or wrestling.

117.27 Who does not know that what is future is not a good for the very reason that it is future? For what is good is certainly beneficial. Only present things can be beneficial; if it is not beneficial, it is not a good; if it is beneficial, it already exists. I am going to be wise; this will be a good when I am, but in the meantime it is not. A thing must first exist, and only then be of some kind.

117.28 How, I ask you, can something that is still nothing already be a good? And how could you want better proof that something does not exist than if I say: it is in the future? For it is plain that what is still coming has not yet come. Spring will follow: I know it is winter now. Summer will follow: I know it is not summer. My strongest proof that a thing is not yet present is that it is in the future.

117.29 I will be wise, I hope; but meanwhile I am not wise. If I had that good, I would already be free of this evil. That I will be

wise some day—from this you may understand that I am not yet wise. I cannot be in that good and in this evil at the same time; the two do not combine, and good and evil do not live together in the same person.

117.30 Let us hurry past these most ingenious trifles and hasten to the things that will bring us some help. No one anxiously fetching a midwife for his daughter in labor stops to read through the notice of the games and their program. No one running to his burning house studies a game board to learn how a trapped piece can get free.

117.31 But, by heaven, news reaches you from every side: your house on fire, your children in danger, your country under siege, your property plundered. Add to these shipwrecks and earthquakes and whatever else can be feared. Hemmed in by all this, do you have time for things that do nothing but amuse the mind? Are you inquiring into the difference between wisdom and being wise? Are you tying and untying knots while such a mass hangs over your head?

117.32 Nature has not given us time so generous and lavish that we can afford to waste any of it. And see how much is lost even by the most careful: one person's own health takes away some, another's the health of his family; necessary business takes up some, public business some more; sleep shares our life with us. Of this time—so narrow, so swift, and carrying us off with it—what good is it to send the greater part into emptiness?

117.33 Add now that the mind gets used to amusing itself rather than healing itself, and to making philosophy a pastime when it is a remedy. What the difference is between wisdom and being wise, I don't know; I do know it makes no difference to me whether I know it or not. Tell me: when I have learned the difference between wisdom and being wise, will I be wise? Why, then, do you keep me among the words of wisdom rather than its works? Make me braver, make me freer from care, make me for-

25 *Decretoria* were the sharp weapons used in earnest gladiatorial combat, as opposed to blunt practice arms.

tune's equal—make me her superior. And I can be her superior if I direct everything I learn to that end. Farewell.

Book XX

On how we learn the good (120), on reason and the true good (124).

LETTER 118: ON THE GOOD AND THE HONORABLE

Seek no office from fortune; the good is what is in accordance with nature and perfected into the honorable.

118.1 You ask me for more frequent letters. Let's compare accounts: you won't be able to pay. Our agreement, of course, was that you would go first—you would write, and I would write back. But I won't be difficult; I know you are good for the credit. So I will pay in advance, and I won't do what Cicero, that most eloquent man, tells Atticus to do—that even "if he has nothing to say, he should write whatever comes into his mouth."[1]

118.2 I can never run short of things to write about, even if I pass over all the stuff that fills Cicero's letters: which candidate is struggling; who is fighting with borrowed strength and who with his own; who is running for the consulship on the strength of Caesar, who on Pompey's, who on his money chest; how hard a lender Caecilius is, from whom even his relatives cannot pry a penny at less than one percent a month. Better to handle one's own troubles than other people's—to examine oneself and see how many things one is a candidate for, and to vote for none of them.[2]

118.3 This, my Lucilius, is the splendid thing, this is what is carefree and free: to seek nothing, and to walk right past the

1 Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.12.4.

whole of fortune's elections. When the tribes have been called to vote, and the candidates hang anxiously about in their sacred precincts—one announcing cash handouts, another working through a go-between, another wearing out with kisses the hands of men whom, once elected, he will refuse even to let touch his own—and everyone waits, spellbound, for the herald's voice, how pleasant do you think it is to stand at leisure and watch that market, neither buying nor selling anything?

118.4 How much greater the joy of the man who looks on without a care, not at the elections for praetor or consul, but at those great elections in which some seek annual offices, others lasting power, others successful wars and triumphs, others wealth, others marriages and children, others the safety of themselves and their families! What greatness of mind it takes to be the only one who seeks nothing, begs of no one, and says: "I have nothing to do with you, Fortune. I am not putting myself at your disposal. I know that with you Catos are voted down and Vatiniuses voted in. I ask for nothing." This is reducing Fortune to a private citizen.

118.5 So we can write about these things instead, and draw on this material that is always fresh, as we look around at so many thousands of restless people, who, to get something that will harm them, struggle through evils toward evil, and seek what they will soon want to escape or even find distasteful.

118.6 For who, having got it, was ever satisfied with what seemed too much while he was praying for it? Prosperity is not greedy, as people think, but small; that is why it fills no one. You think those things lofty because you lie far below them; but to the man who has reached them they are lowly. Call me a liar if he isn't still trying to climb higher: what you think is the summit is only a step.

118.7 Ignorance of the truth does harm to everyone. Deceived by rumor, they rush toward things as if they were goods; then, having won them and suffered much, they see that they are

2 Quintus Caecilius, Cicero's uncle and Atticus' adoptive father, a notoriously grasping moneylender.

evils, or empty, or less than they had hoped. Most people admire things that deceive at a distance, and to the crowd the big passes for the good.

118.8 So that this does not happen to us as well, let us ask what the good is. It has been explained in various ways; different people have put it differently. Some define it like this: "The good is what attracts minds, what calls them to itself." The immediate objection to this is: what if it attracts, but to ruin? You know how many evils are enticing. The true and the true-seeming differ from each other; so what is good is joined to the true, for nothing is good unless it is true. But what attracts and allures is merely true-seeming: it steals in, it tempts, it draws you on.

118.9 Some have defined it like this: "The good is what arouses a desire for itself," or "what arouses an impulse of the mind toward itself." The same objection applies to this one, for many things arouse the mind's impulse that are sought to the seeker's harm. Better are those who defined it like this: "The good is what arouses an impulse of the mind toward itself in accordance with nature, and it is to be sought only once it has begun to be truly worth seeking." At that point it is also honorable; for that is what is perfectly worth seeking.[3]

118.10 The topic itself prompts me to say what difference there is between the good and the honorable. They have something mixed together and inseparable: nothing can be good unless it contains something honorable, and the honorable is certainly good. What, then, is the difference between the two? The honorable is the perfect good, which makes the happy life complete, and by contact with which other things too become good.

118.11 Here is what I mean. There are some things that are neither good nor bad—military service, a post as a governor's deputy, administering justice. When these are carried out honorably, they begin to be good, and pass from the doubtful to the good. The good comes about by partnership with the honorable; the honorable is good in itself. The good flows from the honor-

3 The Stoic good is the honorable (honestum), what is morally right; things merely "in accordance with nature," such as health, are not goods in the full sense.

able; the honorable comes from itself. What is good could have been bad; what is honorable could not have been anything but good.

118.12 Some have offered this definition: "The good is what is in accordance with nature." Pay attention to what I say: what is good is in accordance with nature, but what is in accordance with nature is not automatically also good. Many things agree with nature, but are so trivial that the name of good does not fit them. They are slight, to be despised. There is no good so tiny that it can be despised; for as long as a thing is tiny, it is not good, and once it has begun to be good, it is not tiny. How is the good recognized? If it is perfectly in accordance with nature.

118.13 "You admit," you say, "that what is good is in accordance with nature; that is its distinguishing property. You admit that other things are in accordance with nature too, but are not goods. How, then, is the one good when the others are not? How does it arrive at a different property, when both have that chief feature in common—being in accordance with nature?"

118.14 By its very magnitude, of course. And it is nothing new that some things change as they grow. Someone was an infant; he has become an adult, and his distinctive property is different: the infant lacks reason, the adult has it. Some things, as they grow, do not simply become bigger, but become something else.

118.15 "What becomes bigger," he says, "does not become something else. Whether you fill a jug or a vat with wine makes no difference: in both the distinctive property of wine is there. A small quantity of honey and a large one do not differ in taste." The examples you offer are of a different kind, for in these the quality is the same; however much they are increased, it remains.

118.16 Some things, when enlarged, persist in their own kind and their own property. Others, after many increases, are finally transformed by the last addition, which stamps on them a new condition, different from the one they had. One stone makes an arch: the one that wedges the sloping sides together and binds them by its insertion. Why does the final addition, even a slight

one, accomplish so much? Because it does not enlarge; it completes.

118.17 Some things, as they advance, shed their former form and pass into a new one. When the mind has long extended something and grown tired of following its size, it begins to be called infinite—which has become something very different from what it was when it seemed large, but finite. In the same way we have thought of something as hard to cut; at last, as the difficulty increases, it is found to be uncuttable. So too from what could scarcely and with difficulty be moved we have advanced to the immovable. By the same reasoning, something was in accordance with nature; its magnitude carried it over into a different property and made it good. Farewell.

LETTER 119: ON NATURE AS OUR PROVIDER

The quickest road to riches is to want only what nature requires.

119.1 Whenever I have found something, I don't wait for you to say "Halves!" I say it to myself. You ask what I have found? Hold open the fold of your toga: it is pure profit. I will teach you how you can become rich very fast. How badly you want to hear! And rightly so: I will lead you by a shortcut to the greatest riches. You will need a lender, though: to do business you must take on debt. But I don't want you to borrow through a middleman; I don't want brokers bandying your name about.[4]

119.2 I will give you a lender ready at hand—Cato's famous one: you will borrow from yourself. However little it is, it will be enough, if we seek from ourselves whatever is lacking. For, my Lucilius, it makes no difference whether you do not desire a thing or you have it. The heart of the matter is the same either way: you will not be tormented. Nor am I telling you to deny nature anything—she is stubborn, she cannot be beaten, she

4 "In commune!" ("Share it!") was the cry by which a companion claimed half of a lucky find.

demands what is hers—but to know that whatever goes beyond nature is a matter of favor, not necessity.[5]

119.3 I am hungry; I must eat. Whether this bread is coarse or made of fine wheat makes no difference to nature; she wants the belly not to be pleased but to be filled. I am thirsty: whether this water is what I have scooped from the nearest pond, or what I have packed in heaps of snow to chill it with borrowed cold, makes no difference to nature. She commands this one thing: that thirst be quenched. Whether the cup is gold, or crystal, or precious murrine, or a clay cup from Tibur, or a cupped hand, does not matter.

119.4 Look to the purpose of everything, and you will let go of what is superfluous. Hunger calls me: let my hand reach out to whatever is nearest; hunger itself has made whatever I take hold of attractive to me.

119.5 A hungry man scorns nothing. So you ask what it is that has delighted me? This strikes me as splendidly said: "The wise man is the keenest seeker of natural riches." "You are presenting me," you say, "with an empty platter. What is this? I had already got my money baskets ready. I was looking around for which sea to launch my business ventures on, which public contract to take up, what goods to import. This is a cheat—teaching poverty after you promised riches." So you judge a man poor who lacks nothing? "That is thanks to himself and his own endurance," you say, "not to fortune." Then you do not judge him rich just because his riches cannot come to an end? Would you rather have much or enough?

119.6 The man who has much wants more—proof that he does not yet have enough. The man who has enough has attained what no rich man ever has: an end. Or do you think these are not riches because no one was ever proscribed for them? Because no son ever poisoned his father for them, no wife her husband? Because they are safe in war? Because in peace they

5 Cato the Elder was credited with the saying "Borrow from yourself," that is, find the money by cutting your own spending.

leave you at leisure? Because they are neither dangerous to own nor troublesome to manage?[6]

119.7 "But a man has too little if all he manages is not to be cold, not to be hungry, not to be thirsty." Jupiter has no more. Enough is never too little, and what is not enough is never much. After Darius and the Indians, Alexander is poor. Am I lying? He is looking for something to make his own; he explores unknown seas, sends new fleets out onto the Ocean, and bursts, so to speak, the very barriers of the world. What is enough for nature is not enough for a man.[7]

119.8 Someone was found who craved something more after having everything—so great is the blindness of our minds, and so completely does each of us, once he has advanced, forget where he began. That man, lately master of an obscure corner, and even that not undisputed, has touched the end of the earth and is sad that he must go back through a world that is his own.

119.9 Money has made no one rich; on the contrary, it has struck into everyone a greater craving for itself. You ask the reason for this? The more a man has, the more he begins to be able to have. In short, drag into the open any man you like from among those whose names are listed alongside Crassus and Licinus. Let him bring his census return, and reckon up together all he has and all he hopes for: if you believe me, he is poor; if you believe yourself, he may be.[8]

119.10 But this man, who has fitted himself to what nature demands, is beyond not only the feeling of poverty but the fear of it. And so that you may know how hard it is to narrow one's possessions to nature's measure: even this very man we are describing, the one you call poor, has something superfluous.

119.11 But wealth dazzles the crowd and turns its eyes toward itself if a great deal of cash is carried out of some house, if even

6 Proscription: the posting of names of men declared outlaws, whose property was confiscated and who could be killed with impunity, as in the civil wars of the first century BC.

7 Alexander defeated the Persian king Darius III and then invaded India (327–325 BC).

the roof is thickly coated with gold, if the household slaves are picked for their looks or striking in their dress. The happiness of all these people faces outward, toward the public; the man we have withdrawn from both the crowd and fortune is happy within.

119.12 For as regards those in whom busy poverty has falsely usurped the name of riches, they have riches in the way we are said to "have" a fever, when really it has us. Conversely, we usually say, "A fever has hold of him." In the same way we should say, "Riches have hold of him." So there is no advice I would rather give you than this, which no one is given enough: measure everything by natural desires, which can be satisfied either free or cheaply. Only don't mix vices in with your desires.

119.13 You ask on what kind of table, on what silver, by what well-matched, smooth-skinned servants your food is brought? Nature requires nothing but food. "When thirst burns your throat, do you ask for
golden cups? When you are hungry, do you turn your nose up at everything but
peacock and turbot?"[9]

119.14 Hunger has no ambitions; it is content to stop, and does not much care what stops it. Those are the torments of unhappy luxury: it looks for ways to be hungry even after it is full, ways not to fill the belly but to stuff it, ways to bring back a thirst that the first drink has quenched. So Horace splendidly says that it makes no difference to thirst in what cup, or by how elegant a hand, water is served. For if you think it matters to you how long-haired the boy is or how clear the cup he hands you, you are not thirsty.

119.15 Among her other gifts, nature has given us this outstanding one: she has shaken fussiness out of necessity. Superfluous things allow picking and choosing: "this isn't quite fitting, that isn't highly thought of, this offends my eyes." The founder of the

8 Licinus, a Gallic freedman of Augustus, grew enormously rich as a financial official in Gaul; he and Crassus were bywords for wealth.
9 Horace, *Satires* 1.2.114–116.

world, who laid down for us the laws of living, saw to it that we should be safe, not pampered. Everything needed for safety is ready and at hand; everything for pleasure is got together with misery and anxiety.

119.16 So let us use this gift of nature, counting it among the great ones, and let us reflect that she has earned our thanks on no score more than this: that whatever is wanted out of necessity is taken without fussiness. Farewell.

LETTER 120: ON HOW WE LEARN THE GOOD

We come to know virtue by analogy, from admiring noble deeds and a life consistent with itself.

120.1 Your letter wandered through several little questions, but it came to rest on one and asks to have it settled: how did we come to know the good and the honorable? For other schools these two are different things; for us they are merely distinguished.

120.2 Let me explain. Some think the good is whatever is useful, so they give the name to riches, a horse, wine, a shoe—so cheap does the good become among them, and so far does it sink into the sordid. They think the honorable is what shows the reasoned performance of a right duty—dutiful care for an aged father, help for a friend's poverty, a brave expedition, a wise and measured opinion. We, too, make these two things, but out of one.

120.3 Nothing is good except what is honorable; what is honorable is certainly good. I think it superfluous to add what the difference between them is, since I have said it often. I will say only this: nothing seems good to us that anyone can also use badly. And you see how many people use riches, noble birth and strength badly. Now, then, I return to what you want me to discuss: how did we first come to know the good and the honorable?

120.4 Nature could not have taught us this: she gave us the seeds of knowledge, not knowledge. Some say we came upon the notion by chance, that the image of virtue happened to present

itself to someone—which is incredible. We think it was put together by observation and by comparing things often done; our school holds that the honorable and the good are grasped by analogy. Since the Latin grammarians have granted this word citizenship, I do not think it should be condemned; I think it should be restored to its rights as a citizen. So I will use it not merely as admitted but as familiar.[10]

120.5 Let me explain this analogy. We knew health of body; from it we inferred that there is also a health of mind. We knew strength of body; from it we inferred that there is also a robustness of mind. Certain kind deeds, certain humane deeds, certain brave deeds had amazed us; we began to admire them as if they were perfect. Underneath them lay many faults, which the look and glitter of some conspicuous deed concealed; these we overlooked. Nature bids us magnify what deserves praise; everyone has carried glory beyond the truth. From these, then, we drew the image of an immense good.

120.6 Fabricius rejected King Pyrrhus' gold, and judged that being able to despise a king's wealth was greater than a kingdom. When Pyrrhus' doctor promised to poison the king, the same Fabricius warned Pyrrhus to beware of the plot. It took the same spirit not to be conquered by gold and not to conquer by poison. We admired this great man, whom neither the king's promises nor promises against the king could sway; who held fast to a good example—which is the hardest thing; who was innocent in war, believing that some things are wrong even against enemies; who in the extreme poverty he had made his glory shrank from riches just as he shrank from poison. "Live, Pyrrhus," he said, "thanks to me, and rejoice at what used to grieve you: that Fabricius cannot be corrupted."

120.7 Horatius Cocles alone blocked the narrow bridge, and ordered his retreat behind him to be cut off, provided the enemy's path was taken away; and he held out against the attackers until the beams, torn down, crashed in a great col-

10 Analogia is a Greek word ("proportion," "inference by comparison") that Roman grammarians had adopted for the regularity of word forms.

lapse. When he looked back and saw that his country was out of danger at the cost of his own, he said, "Let anyone who wants follow me as I go this way," and threw himself headlong; and in that rushing river channel, no less anxious to come out armed than to come out alive, he returned, keeping the glory of his victorious arms, as safely as if he had come back by the bridge.[11]

120.8 These deeds and others like them showed us an image of virtue. I will add something that may seem surprising: evils have sometimes presented the appearance of the honorable, and the best has shone out by contrast with its opposite. For, as you know, vices border on virtues, and even the corrupt and shameful bear a likeness to the right. So the spendthrift passes himself off as generous, though it makes all the difference whether a man knows how to give or does not know how to save. There are many, I tell you, Lucilius, who do not give but throw away; I do not call a man generous who is angry at his money. Carelessness imitates easygoingness, and recklessness imitates courage.

120.9 This resemblance forced us to pay attention and to distinguish things that are close in appearance but very far apart in reality; and while we observed those whom some outstanding achievement had made famous, we began to note who had done something with a noble spirit and great zeal, but only once. We saw one man brave in war but timid in the Forum, bearing poverty with spirit but disgrace abjectly; we praised the deed and despised the man.

120.10 We saw another kind to his friends, restrained toward his enemies, conducting public and private business with scrupulous integrity; we saw that he did not lack patience in what had to be endured, nor good sense in what had to be done; we saw him giving with a full hand where giving was called for, and, where toil was called for, persistent and determined, relieving his body's weariness by his spirit. Besides this he was always the same, consistent with himself in every action, good no longer by design but brought by habit to the point where he was not only

11 Horatius Cocles, legendary Roman who held the Sublician bridge over the Tiber against the Etruscan army of Lars Porsenna while it was demolished behind him.

able to act rightly but unable to act otherwise than rightly. We understood that in him virtue was perfect.

120.11 We divided it into parts. Desires had to be reined in, fears suppressed, what must be done foreseen, what is owed distributed; so we arrived at temperance, courage, prudence and justice, and assigned each its own function. From what, then, did we come to understand virtue? It was shown to us by its order, its seemliness, its steadfastness, the harmony of all its actions with one another, and its greatness rising above everything. From this we came to understand that happy life, flowing on with a favorable current, wholly under its own control.

120.12 How, then, did this very thing become clear to us? I will tell you. That perfect man, who had attained virtue, never cursed fortune, never received what happened with gloom; believing himself a citizen and a soldier of the universe, he undertook his labors as if they were orders. Whatever befell him he did not spurn as an evil that chance had carried his way, but accepted as a duty assigned to him. "Whatever this is," he said, "it is mine; it is harsh, it is hard—let us put our effort into this very thing."

120.13 Necessarily, then, a man who never groaned at misfortune and never complained of his fate appeared great. He made many understand him, and shone out like a light in the darkness, turning everyone's minds toward himself, since he was calm and gentle and equally fair in human and divine affairs.

120.14 He had a perfect mind, brought to its own highest point, above which there is nothing except the mind of God, a part of which has flowed down even into this mortal breast. That mind is never more divine than when it reflects on its mortality, and knows that a human being was born in order to finish his life, and that this body is not a home but a lodging—and a brief lodging at that—which must be left when you see you have become a burden to your host.

120.15 The greatest proof, I tell you, my Lucilius, that the mind comes from a loftier dwelling is that it judges the things it moves

among to be lowly and cramped, and is not afraid to depart. For the one who remembers where he came from knows where he is going. Do we not see how many ills harass us, how badly this body suits us?

120.16 Now we complain of the head, now of the stomach, now of the chest and throat. At one time our sinews trouble us, at another our feet; now it is diarrhea, now catarrh; sometimes there is too much blood, sometimes too little. We are assailed on this side and that, and driven out: this is what usually happens to those who live in someone else's house.

120.17 Yet though we have been allotted a body so rotten, we nonetheless set eternal goals before ourselves, and in hope we lay claim to as much time as a human life can possibly be stretched to, content with no amount of money, no amount of power. What could be more shameless than this, what more foolish? Nothing is enough for those who are going to die—no, who are dying. For every day we stand nearer the end, and every hour pushes us toward the point from which we must fall. See how blind our mind is!

120.18 What I speak of as future is happening at this very moment, and a large part of it has already happened: the time we have lived. We are wrong to fear our last day, since each day contributes just as much to death. It is not the step on which we collapse that causes the exhaustion; that step only reveals it. The last day arrives at death; every day approaches it. Death picks at us; it does not snatch us all at once. So a great mind, conscious of its better nature, takes care to conduct itself honorably and diligently at the post where it has been stationed, but considers none of the things around it its own; it uses them as things on loan, a traveler in a hurry.

120.19 When we saw someone of this steadfastness, how could the image of an uncommon nature not come over us? Especially if, as I said, its evenness showed this greatness to be genuine. What is true keeps a steady course; false things do not last. Some people are Vatiniuses and Catos by turns: at one moment Curius is not stern enough for them, Fabricius not poor enough, Tubero

not frugal enough and content with cheap things; at the next they challenge Licinus in wealth, Apicius in dinners, Maecenas in luxury.[12]

120.20 The greatest sign of an unsound mind is wavering, a constant tossing back and forth between pretended virtues and love of vices. "He often kept two hundred slaves, often ten; now it was kings and tetrarchs, all grand talk; now it was 'Give me a three-legged table and a shell of plain salt, and a toga, however coarse, that can keep out the cold.' Give a million sesterces to this frugal man, content with little—in five days there was nothing left."[13]

120.21 People like this are just like the man Horace Flaccus describes: never the same, not even like himself, so far does he stray in opposite directions. Did I say many? It is nearly everyone. There is no one who does not change his plans and his prayers every day. Now he wants a wife, now a mistress; now he wants to be a king, now he makes sure no slave is more obsequious than he; now he puffs himself up until he is envied, now he shrinks and contracts below the lowliness of the truly downtrodden; now he scatters money about, now he grabs it.

120.22 This is what most clearly exposes a foolish mind: it shows itself as one person and then another, and—nothing, I think, is more shameful—it is inconsistent with itself. Consider it a great thing to play one single man. But no one except the wise man plays one; the rest of us are many-shaped. At one moment we will seem to you frugal and serious, at the next wasteful and frivolous. We keep changing our mask, and put on the opposite of the one we have taken off. So demand this of yourself: whatever kind of person you have undertaken to show yourself, keep to it right to the end. See to it that you can be praised—or if not, at least recognized. Of someone you saw yesterday, it can rightly be said, "Who is this?"—so great is the change. Farewell.

12 Manius Curius Dentatus (consul 290 BC), a hero of old Roman austerity said to have lived on turnips in a humble farmhouse.

13 Horace, *Satires* 1.3.11–17, describing the inconsistent singer Tigellius.

LETTER 121: ON ANIMAL INSTINCT

Every animal from birth is aware of its own constitution and attached to its own preservation.

121.1 You will argue with me, I see, when I lay out for you today's little question, on which we were stuck quite long enough. For you will exclaim again, "What does this have to do with conduct?" But go ahead and exclaim, as long as I first set up other opponents for you to argue with—Posidonius and Archidemus; they will take on the case. Then I will say: not everything that concerns conduct makes conduct good.[14]

121.2 One thing serves to feed a human being, another to exercise him, another to clothe him, another to teach him, another to delight him. Yet all of them concern the human being, even if not all of them make him better. Different things bear on conduct in different ways: some correct and regulate it, some investigate its nature and origin.

121.3 When I ask why nature brought forth man, why she set him above the other animals, do you think I have left conduct far behind? That is false. For how will you know what conduct to adopt unless you have found out what is best for a human being, unless you have looked into his nature? Only when you have learned what you owe to your nature will you understand what you should do and what you should avoid.

121.4 "I want to learn," you say, "how to desire less and fear less. Shake superstition out of me. Teach me that what is called happiness is fickle and empty—that one syllable is very easily added to it." I will satisfy your wish: I will both encourage the virtues and flog the vices. Though someone may judge me excessive and immoderate on this score, I will not stop pursuing wickedness, checking the wildest passions, restraining pleasures that will end in pain, and shouting down people's prayers. Why not? When the greatest of evils have been what we prayed for, and

14 Archidemus of Tarsus, a Stoic philosopher of the 2nd century BC.

whatever we now offer consolation for was born of congratulation.[15]

121.5 Meanwhile, allow me to examine things that seem a little more remote. We were asking whether all animals have an awareness of their own constitution. That they do is especially clear from the way they move their limbs deftly and easily, just as if they had been trained to it. Every creature is nimble with its own parts. A craftsman handles his tools with ease; a helmsman skillfully turns the steering oar; a painter, who has set out before him many different colors for rendering a likeness, picks them out very quickly, and moves back and forth between the paint and the work with easy eye and hand. In the same way an animal is agile in every use of itself.[16]

121.6 We usually marvel at skilled dancers, because their hands are ready to express every kind of thing and feeling, and their gestures keep pace with the speed of the words. What art supplies to them, nature supplies to animals. No animal has trouble moving its limbs; none hesitates in the use of itself. They do this straight from birth. They come forth with this knowledge; they are born already trained.

121.7 "Animals move their parts deftly," he says, "because if they moved them otherwise they would feel pain. So, as you people say, they are compelled; it is fear, not will, that moves them in the right way." That is false. Things driven by necessity are slow; nimbleness belongs to what moves of its own accord. And so far is fear of pain from driving them to this that they strive toward their natural movement even when pain holds them back.

121.8 So an infant who is trying to stand and getting used to supporting himself falls as soon as he begins to test his strength, and gets up again in tears, over and over, until through pain he has trained himself to what nature demands. Certain animals with hard backs, when turned over, twist and thrust out their

15 Adding the syllable in- turns felicitas (happiness) into infelicitas (unhappiness).
16 "Constitution" translates the Stoic technical term for an animal's make-up, defined below (121.10).

feet and move them sideways until they are put back in position. A tortoise on its back feels no torture, yet it is restless from longing for its natural position, and does not stop struggling until it stands on its feet.

121.9 So all animals have an awareness of their own constitution, and hence their ready handling of their limbs; and we have no greater evidence that they come into life with this knowledge than the fact that no animal is untrained in the use of itself.

121.10 "A constitution," he says, "as you people define it, is the ruling part of the mind disposed in a certain way toward the body. How does an infant understand something so intricate and subtle, which even you can scarcely explain? All animals would have to be born logicians to understand a definition that is obscure to most people who wear the toga." Your objection would be valid if I were saying that animals understand the definition of a constitution, not the constitution itself.

121.11 Nature is easier to understand than to explain. So the infant does not know what a constitution is, but knows its own constitution. It does not know what an animal is, but it feels that it is an animal.

121.12 Moreover, it understands its constitution itself only crudely, in outline, and dimly. We too know that we have a mind; what the mind is, where it is, what it is like or where it comes from, we do not know. As our awareness of our own mind is, though we do not know its nature and seat, so is every animal's awareness of its own constitution. For they must perceive that through which they perceive other things too; they must have an awareness of that which they obey and by which they are governed.

121.13 Every one of us understands that there is something that sets his impulses in motion; what it is he does not know. He knows he has a drive; what it is, or where it comes from, he does not know. So infants and animals too have an awareness of their ruling part, but one that is not very clear or distinct.

121.14 "You say," he objects, "that every animal is first attached to its own constitution; but that a human being's constitution is

rational, and so a human being is attached to himself not as an animal but as a rational being. For a human being is dear to himself in that part by which he is human. How, then, can an infant be attached to a rational constitution when it is not yet rational?" Every age has its own constitution: one for the infant, another for the boy, another for the old man. All are attached to the constitution they are in.[17]

121.15 An infant has no teeth: it is attached to this constitution of its own. Its teeth have come in: it is attached to that constitution. For even the green shoot that will become a crop of grain has one constitution when it is tender and barely showing above the furrow, another when it has grown strong and stands on a stalk that is soft but able to bear its own weight, and another when it turns yellow and looks toward the threshing floor and its ear has hardened. Whatever constitution it comes into, it protects that one and adapts itself to it.

121.16 The ages of infant, boy, youth and old man are different; yet I am the same person who was an infant, a boy and a youth. So, although each has one constitution after another, the attachment to one's own constitution is the same. For nature commends to me not the boy or the young man or the old man, but myself. Therefore the infant is attached to the constitution it has at that time as an infant, not the one it will have as a young man. For even if something greater remains for it to pass into, that does not mean the state in which it is born is not also in accordance with nature.

121.17 An animal is first attached to itself, for there must be something to which other things are referred. I seek pleasure—for whom? For myself. So I am taking care of myself. I flee pain—on whose behalf? My own. So I am taking care of myself. If I do everything out of care for myself, care for myself comes before everything. This is present in all animals, not grafted on, but inborn.

121.18 Nature brings forth her offspring; she does not cast them away. And because the surest protection is the one closest at

hand, each creature has been entrusted to itself. So, as I said in earlier letters, even young animals, just emerged from the mother's womb or the egg, know at once by themselves what is dangerous, and avoid what is deadly. Those exposed to birds of prey are afraid even of the shadow of birds flying overhead. No animal comes into life without the fear of death.

121.19 "How," he says, "can a newborn animal have an understanding of what is healthful or deadly?" The first question is whether it understands, not how it understands. That they have this understanding is clear from the fact that they would do nothing more if they did understand. Why is it that a hen does not flee a peacock or a goose, but does flee a hawk, which is so much smaller and which it does not even know? Why do chicks fear a cat, but not a dog? It is clear that they have a knowledge of what will harm them that is not gathered from experience; for they are on their guard before they can have experience.

121.20 Next, so that you do not think this happens by chance: they fear nothing other than what they should, and they never forget this watchfulness and care; their flight from what is harmful is consistent. Besides, they do not grow more timid as they live longer. From this it is clear that they do not arrive at this by experience, but by a natural love of their own safety. What experience teaches is slow and uneven; whatever nature hands down is the same for all and immediate.

121.21 But if you insist, shall I tell you how every animal tries to understand what is harmful? It feels that it is made of flesh; so it feels what can cut, burn or crush flesh, and which animals are armed to do harm; of these it forms an image as hostile and inimical. These things are bound up together: at the same moment each creature is attached to its own safety, seeks what will help it, and dreads what will hurt it. Impulses toward what is useful are natural, and so are aversions from its opposite. Whatever nature has prescribed happens without any reflection to dictate it, without deliberation.

17 "Attached" renders conciliari, the Stoic oikeiōsis: the natural affinity by which a creature is from birth drawn to and cares for itself.

121.22 Do you not see how much skill bees have in shaping their homes, how much harmony in dividing up the work to be done on every side? Do you not see how the spider's web is something no mortal can imitate, how much labor it takes to arrange the threads—some laid straight as a framework, others running in circles, from close-set to wide-spaced—so that smaller creatures, for whose destruction the web is spread, are tangled and held as if in nets?

121.23 That skill is born, not learned. So no animal is more expert than another: you will see that spiders' webs are alike, and in honeycombs every cell has the same angles. Whatever art hands down is uncertain and uneven; what nature deals out comes equally. Nature has handed down nothing more than self-protection and the skill for it, and that is why animals begin to learn and to live at the same time.

121.24 Nor is it surprising that they are born with that without which they would be born in vain. This is the first tool nature gave them for survival: attachment to and love of themselves. They could not be safe unless they wanted to be. This by itself would not have been of use, but without it nothing would have been. In no animal will you detect disregard for itself, nor even carelessness. Even mute and brute creatures, however sluggish in other respects, are clever at staying alive. You will see that things useless to others do not fail themselves. Farewell.

LETTER 122: ON LIVING BY NIGHT

Those who turn night into day live against nature, seeking notoriety through perverse luxury.

122.1 The day has already felt its loss. It has shrunk back somewhat, though still leaving a generous stretch if one rises, so to speak, with the day itself. Better and more dutiful is the man who waits for it and greets the first light; disgraceful is the one who lies half-asleep with the sun high, whose waking begins at noon—and for many even that is before dawn.[18]

18 Written as autumn advanced and the days grew shorter.

122.2 There are people who have turned the duties of day and night upside down, and who do not pry open eyes heavy with yesterday's hangover until night has begun to approach. The condition of those whom nature, as Virgil says, has placed beneath our dwellings, on the opposite side of the earth—"And when the rising Dawn first breathes on us with panting steeds, / For them the reddening Evening lights her late-burning lamps"—is the condition of these people: not their region but their life is the opposite of everyone else's. There are antipodes in this very city, who, as Marcus Cato says, have never seen the sun rise or set.[19]

122.3 Do you think these people know how to live, when they do not know when to live? And do they fear death, when they have buried themselves alive? They are as ill-omened as birds of the night. They may pass their hours of darkness amid wine and perfume, they may spend the whole time of their perverse waking at banquets—and banquets cooked down into many courses at that—but they are not feasting; they are holding their own funeral rites. The dead, at least, receive their offerings by day. But, by heaven, no day is long to a person who is busy. Let us extend our life: action is both its duty and its proof. Let the night be cut back, and some part of it be transferred to the day.[20]

122.4 Birds being fattened for banquets are kept in the dark so that, unable to move, they grow fat easily; so, as they lie there without any exercise, a swelling overtakes their sluggish bodies, and in the proud shade an idle bulk of fat builds up. In the same way the bodies of those who have given themselves over to darkness are hideous to look at. Their color is more alarming than that of people pale from illness: they are languid and washed-out and white, and in the living their flesh is the flesh of a corpse. Yet I would call this the least of their ills. How much more darkness there is in their minds! Such a mind is dazed

19 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.250–51. The Cato quoted is Cato the Elder.
20 Roman offerings to the dead were made in daylight, whereas funerals of the young were held at night by torchlight.

within itself, it is fogged; it envies the blind. Who ever had eyes for the sake of darkness?

122.5 You ask how the mind comes by this perversity of shunning the day and transferring the whole of life to the night? All vices fight against nature; all abandon the proper order. This is the aim of luxury: to delight in what is perverse, and not merely to depart from what is right, but to go as far from it as possible, and finally even to take a stand against it.

122.6 Don't you think those people live against nature who drink on an empty stomach, who take wine into empty veins and move on to their food drunk? Yet this is a common vice among young men who cultivate their strength: they drink on the very threshold of the baths, practically, among the naked bathers—no, they guzzle—and keep scraping off the sweat they have worked up with frequent hot drinks. To drink after lunch or dinner is common; that is what country fathers of families do, men who know nothing of true pleasure. The neat wine that delights is the wine that does not float on top of food, that penetrates freely to the sinews; the drunkenness that gives pleasure is the one that comes into an empty body.

122.7 Don't you think those people live against nature who exchange clothing with women? Don't those people live against nature who contrive that boyhood should shine at a time not its own? What could be more cruel or more pitiable? Will he never be a man, so that he can long submit to a man? And when his sex ought to have rescued him from abuse, will not even his age rescue him?[21]

122.8 Don't those people live against nature who long for a rose in winter, and who force a lily, a spring flower, in midwinter by warming it with hot water and by suitably changing its location? Don't those people live against nature who plant orchards on the tops of towers? Whose woods sway on the roofs and gables of their houses, their roots springing up where it would have been outrageous for their treetops to reach? Don't those people live

21 Seneca refers to slave boys kept smooth and youthful in appearance for their masters' sexual use.

against nature who lay the foundations of hot baths in the sea, and think they are not swimming in true luxury unless their heated pools are lashed by waves and storm?

122.9 When they have made it their rule to want everything contrary to nature's custom, they end by breaking away from it entirely. "It is light: time for sleep. It is quiet: now let us exercise, now let us go for a ride, now let us have lunch. Now the dawn is drawing near: time for dinner. We should not do what the common people do. It is a sordid thing to live by the worn and common road. Let the public day be left behind: let us have a morning that is private and our own."

122.10 To me, such people are as good as dead. For how far are they from a funeral—and an untimely one at that—when they live by torchlight and candlelight? We remember many who led this life at the same time, among them Acilius Buta, a former praetor. After he had used up an enormous inheritance and confessed his poverty to Tiberius, the emperor said: "You have woken up too late."[22]

122.11 Julius Montanus was reciting a poem—a passable poet, known both for his friendship with Tiberius and for the chill that followed it. He loved to work sunrises and sunsets into his verses. So when someone was complaining that he had recited for the whole day and saying that no one should go to his recitations, Natta Pinarius said: "I could not be more generous: I am ready to listen to him from sunrise to sunset."

22 A praetor was a senior Roman magistrate, ranking just below the consuls.

122.12 When he had recited these lines: "Phoebus begins to send
forth his blazing flames,
The ruddy day to spread itself; now the sad swallow
Begins to bring food to her chattering nestlings
And shares it out, serving each from her soft beak," Varus, a Roman knight and companion of Marcus Vinicius, a hanger-on at good dinners which he earned by his wicked tongue, cried out: "Buta is beginning to go to sleep!" Then later, when he had recited:[23]

122.13 "Now the shepherds have stabled their herds,
Now sluggish night begins to grant silence
To the drowsy lands," the same Varus said: "What's that? Is it night already? I'll go and pay my morning call on Buta." Nothing was better known than this life of his, turned around to its opposite—a life which, as I said, many led at the same time.[24]

122.14 Some people live this way not because they think the night itself holds anything more delightful, but because nothing ordinary pleases them; because light weighs on a bad conscience; and because to someone who desires or despises everything according to whether it was bought at a high or low price, light that costs nothing is contemptible. Besides, people of luxury want their life to be talked about while they live; if no one speaks of them, they think they are wasting their effort. So they are unhappy whenever they do something that escapes notice. Many people eat up their fortunes, many keep mistresses. To make a name among such people, you must do something not just extravagant but conspicuous; in so busy a city, ordinary depravity makes no stories.

122.15 We had heard Pedo Albinovanus—and he was a most elegant storyteller—telling how he had lived above the house of Sextus Papinius. Papinius was one of this crowd of light-shunners.

23 Phoebus is Apollo as the sun god. Marcus Vinicius, consul in AD 30, married a granddaughter of Tiberius.
24 The morning call (salutatio) was paid to a patron at dawn.

"Around the third hour of the night," he said, "I hear the sound of whips. I ask what he is doing; I'm told he is going over his accounts. Around the sixth hour of the night I hear loud shouting; I ask what it is; I'm told he is exercising his voice. Around the eighth hour of the night I ask what that sound of wheels means; I'm told he is going for a drive."[25]

122.16 "Around dawn there is a rushing about: slaves are summoned, the butlers and cooks are in an uproar. I ask what it is; I'm told he has called for honeyed wine and porridge and has come out of the bath. His dinner," he said, "never went beyond his day, for he lived very frugally: he used up nothing but the night. So when some people called him stingy and mean, you," he said, "had better call him a 'lamp-liver' too."[26]

122.17 You should not be surprised if you find so many peculiarities of vice. Vices are varied, they have countless faces, their kinds cannot be comprehended. The pursuit of what is right is simple; the pursuit of what is wrong is manifold, and admits any number of new twists. The same goes for character: those who follow nature are easygoing, free, and differ little from one another; the twisted differ greatly both from everyone else and among themselves.

122.18 But the chief cause of this disease seems to me to be a disgust with ordinary life. Just as they distinguish themselves from others by their dress, by the elegance of their dinners, by the splendor of their carriages, so they also want to set themselves apart by how they arrange their hours. They do not want to sin in ordinary ways, these people for whom the reward of sinning is notoriety. That is what they all seek, these people who live, so to speak, backward.

122.19 So, Lucilius, we must keep to the road that nature has laid down, and not turn aside from it. For those who follow it, everything is easy and unobstructed; for those who strain

25 Pedo Albinovanus, a poet and friend of Ovid. The Romans counted the hours of the night from sunset, so the third hour is roughly 9 p.m.
26 Lychnobius, a Greek-style coinage: one who lives by lamplight.

against it, life is nothing but rowing against the current. Farewell.

LETTER 123: ON PLEASURE AND VIRTUE

Arriving tired at a bare villa, Seneca urges training in simplicity and deafness to the voices that praise vice.

123.1 Worn out by a journey more uncomfortable than long, I have reached my Alban villa late at night. I find nothing ready except myself. So I am resting my weariness on a couch and taking this delay of the cook and the baker in good part. For I am talking to myself about this very thing: how nothing is hard if you take it lightly, and nothing is worth getting angry about unless you pile it up yourself by getting angry.[27]

123.2 My baker has no bread; but the steward has some, the doorkeeper has some, the tenant farmer has some. "Bad bread," you say. Wait: it will turn good. Hunger will make even that bread soft and fine for you. So one should not eat until hunger commands it. I will wait, then, and not eat until I either have good bread or stop being fussy about it.

123.3 It is necessary to grow used to little: many difficulties of place and of time will get in the way, even of the rich and of those equipped for pleasure. No one can have whatever he wants; what he can do is not want what he does not have, and cheerfully use what is offered. A well-trained stomach, one that can put up with ill-treatment, is a large part of freedom.

123.4 You cannot imagine how much pleasure I take in the fact that my weariness is getting used to itself. I look for no masseurs, no bath, no remedy but time. For what toil has brought on, rest removes. This supper, whatever it turns out to be, will be more delightful than an inaugural banquet.

123.5 For I have made a kind of test of my mind without warning—which is a more candid and truer test. When the mind has prepared itself and ordered itself to be patient, it is not so clear how much real firmness it has. The surest proofs are the

27 Seneca's country house in the Alban hills, southeast of Rome.

ones it gives on the spur of the moment: if it has looked on troubles not only calmly but serenely; if it has not flared up or quarreled; if it has made up for what it should have been given by not wanting it, and has reflected that something was lacking to its habits, but nothing to itself.

123.6 We do not realize how superfluous many things are until they begin to be lacking. We used them not because we needed them, but because we had them. And how many things we acquire because others have acquired them, because most people own them! Among the causes of our troubles is this: we live by the example of others, and we are not guided by reason but led astray by custom. What we would not want to imitate if a few did it, we follow once more people begin doing it—as though it were more honorable because it is more common. And error takes the place of right among us once it has become public.

123.7 Now everyone travels with a troop of Numidian horsemen riding ahead of them, with a column of runners going before them. It is disgraceful to have no one to throw people coming the other way off the road, or to announce by a great cloud of dust that a gentleman is on his way. Now everyone has mules to carry their crystal and fluorspar vessels and plate engraved by the hands of great artists. It is disgraceful to seem to have only luggage that can be shaken about without danger. Everyone's troop of page boys rides with faces smeared with ointment, so that neither sun nor cold may hurt their tender skin. It is disgraceful to have not a single boy in your retinue whose healthy face calls for cosmetics.[28]

123.8 The talk of all these people must be avoided: they are the ones who pass on vices and carry them from one person to another. The worst kind of people was once thought to be those who carry gossip; there are some who carry vices. Their talk does great harm; for even if it does not take effect at once, it leaves seeds in the mind and follows us even after we have left them—an evil that will spring up again later.

28 Numidia, in North Africa, was famous for its cavalry. Murrine ware, prized and costly, was probably made of fluorspar.

123.9 Just as people who have heard a concert carry the melody and the sweetness of the songs around in their ears, and it interrupts their thoughts and does not let them concentrate on serious matters, so the talk of flatterers and of those who praise what is wrong lingers longer than it is heard. It is not easy to shake a sweet sound out of the mind: it follows us, lasts, and comes back after an interval. So we must shut our ears to bad voices, and from the very first; once they have made a start and been let in, they grow bolder.

123.10 From there one comes to words like these: "Virtue and philosophy and justice are a rattle of empty words. The only happiness is to do well by life. To eat, to drink, to enjoy your inheritance—that is living, that is remembering that you are mortal. The days flow by, and life runs down, never to be restored. Do we hesitate to be wise? What good is it to force frugality on your youth—an age that will not always be able to take in pleasures—while it can, while it demands them? Get ahead of death that way, and let whatever it will take away perish now of your own accord. You have no mistress, no boy to make a mistress jealous; you go out sober every day; you dine as if you had to get your daybook approved by your father. That is not living; that is taking part in someone else's life."

123.11 "What madness it is to look after your heir's interests and deny yourself everything, so that a large inheritance turns your friend into your enemy! For the more he receives, the more he will rejoice at your death. As for those gloomy, supercilious censors of other people's lives, enemies of their own, schoolmasters to the public—don't give a penny for them, and don't hesitate to prefer a good life to a good reputation."

123.12 These voices must be fled no differently from the ones Ulysses refused to sail past unless he was bound. They have the same power: they draw us away from our country, our parents, our friends, our virtues, and dash us—full of hopes that are wretched if not shameful—into a shameful life. How much better it is to follow the straight path and to bring yourself to the point where only what is honorable is pleasant to you.

123.13 We will be able to achieve this if we know that there are two kinds of things that either attract us or repel us. We are attracted by things like wealth, pleasures, beauty, ambition, and everything else that is alluring and smiles at us; we are repelled by toil, death, pain, disgrace, and a more restricted way of living. So we must train ourselves not to fear the latter and not to desire the former. Let us fight in the opposite direction: let us draw back from what attracts us, and rouse ourselves against what attacks us.

123.14 Don't you see how different the posture is of people going downhill and people going uphill? Those going down a slope lean their bodies back; those going up a steep one lean forward. For if you are going down, to throw your weight forward, or if you are going up, to pull it back, is, Lucilius, to go along with vice. The road into pleasures goes downhill; toward what is rough and hard we must climb. In the one case let us drive our bodies forward; in the other let us rein them in.

123.15 Do you think I am saying now that the only people harmful to our ears are those who praise pleasure, who strike fear into us of pain—things frightening in themselves? I think those people harm us too who urge us toward vice under cover of the Stoic school. For this is what they boast: that only the wise man and the learned man is a true lover. "He alone has wisdom in this art; the wise man is also the most skilled in drinking and dining together. Let us inquire up to what age young men may be loved."[29]

123.16 Let such things be left to Greek custom; let us rather turn our ears to these words: "No one is good by chance. Virtue must be learned. Pleasure is a low and petty thing, to be held of no value, shared with brute animals—the smallest and most despised creatures flock to it. Glory is something empty and fleeting, more changeable than the wind. Poverty is an evil to no one except the one who fights against it. Death is not an evil. What more do you want? It is the only law equal for the whole human

29 Early Stoics, including Zeno and Chrysippus, wrote that the wise man would love the young, meaning a love aimed at friendship and virtue.

race. Superstition is the error of a deranged mind: it fears those it should love; it wrongs those it worships. For what difference does it make whether you deny the gods or defame them?"

123.17 These things must be learned—no, learned by heart. Philosophy ought not to supply excuses for vice. A sick man has no hope of recovery if his doctor urges him to overindulge. Farewell.

LETTER 124: ON THE GOOD AS GRASPED BY REASON

The good is perceived by reason, not the senses, and so belongs only to a perfected rational mind.

124.1 "I can relate to you many precepts of the ancients, / Unless you shrink back and find it tiresome to learn of slight concerns." But you do not shrink back, and no subtlety drives you away. It is not in keeping with your refinement to pursue only great questions. I approve of the fact that you relate everything to some kind of progress and are annoyed only when the utmost subtlety accomplishes nothing. I will take pains that this does not happen now either. The question is whether the good is grasped by the senses or by the intellect. Connected with this is the point that it does not exist in brute animals and infants.[30]

124.2 All who rank pleasure highest judge the good to be something perceived by the senses; we, on the contrary, judge it to be something grasped by the intellect, since we assign it to the mind. If the senses were judges of the good, we would reject no pleasure, for there is no pleasure that does not attract us, none that does not delight us; and conversely we would undergo no pain willingly, for there is no pain that does not offend the senses.[31]

124.3 Besides, those who are too fond of pleasure and those whose greatest fear is pain would not deserve blame. Yet we disapprove of people who are slaves to gluttony and lust, and we despise those who will never dare anything manly for fear of

30 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.176–77, slightly adapted.
31 The pleasure-school here is chiefly the Epicureans.

pain. But what wrong do they commit, if they obey the senses—that is, the judges of good and evil? For it is to the senses that you have handed the decision about what to seek and what to avoid.

124.4 But clearly it is reason that has been put in charge of this matter. Just as reason decides about the happy life, about virtue, about the honorable, so it decides about good and evil. For with those people, the meanest part is given the verdict on the better: the senses are to pronounce on the good—a dull and blunt thing, and slower in human beings than in other animals.

124.5 What if someone wanted to discern tiny objects not by the eyes but by touch? There is no sharper or more attentive faculty for this than the eyes—yet even they could not tell good from bad. You see in what deep ignorance of the truth a man is caught, and how far he has cast down what is lofty and divine to the ground, when for him touch judges the highest good and evil.

124.6 "Just as every science and art," he says, "must have something evident and grasped by the senses from which it arises and grows, so the happy life draws its foundation and beginning from things that are evident and fall under the senses. Surely you say yourselves that the happy life takes its beginning from what is evident."

124.7 We say that things in accordance with nature are happy. And what is in accordance with nature is plain and immediately apparent, just as what is whole is. What is in accordance with nature—what falls to someone as soon as he is born—I call not a good, but the beginning of the good. You grant the highest good, pleasure, to infancy, so that the newborn starts from the point a fully formed human being arrives at.

124.8 You are putting the treetop in place of the root. If anyone said that the child hidden in its mother's womb, its sex still uncertain, tender, unfinished and unformed, already possessed some good, he would plainly seem mistaken. Yet how little difference there is between one who is just now receiving life and one who is still a hidden burden in his mother's body! Both are

equally mature as far as understanding good and evil goes; and an infant is no more capable of the good than a tree or some brute animal. And why is there no good in a tree or a brute animal? Because there is no reason. For this reason there is none in an infant either, for it too lacks reason; it will arrive at the good when it has arrived at reason. There is the irrational animal, there is the not-yet-rational, there is the rational but imperfect; in none of these is there the good. Reason brings it along with itself.

124.9 What then is the difference between the ones I have mentioned? In the irrational there will never be the good. In the not-yet-rational there cannot be the good at that stage. In the rational but imperfect there can already be the good, but there is not.

124.10 This is what I say, Lucilius: the good is not found in just any body or at just any age, and it is as far from infancy as last is from first, as the finished is from the beginning. So it is not in the tender body that is only just taking shape. Why should it not be there? No more than in the seed.

124.11 Put it this way: we recognize a certain good of a tree or a plant; this good is not in the first shoot that just now breaks through the soil as it comes up. There is a certain good of wheat; it is not yet in the milky blade, nor when the soft ear pushes out of its husk, but when summer and due ripeness have matured the grain. Just as every nature brings forth its good only when it is complete, so the good of a human being is not in a human being until reason has been perfected in him.

124.12 And what is this good? I will tell you: a free mind, upright, subjecting other things to itself and itself to nothing. Infancy is so far from admitting this good that boyhood cannot hope for it and youth hopes for it presumptuously. Old age does well if it has reached it by long and concentrated study. If this is the good, it is also something grasped by the intellect.

124.13 "You said," he objects, "that there is a certain good of a tree, a certain good of a plant; so there can also be a certain good of an infant." The true good is not in trees or in brute animals;

what is good in them is called good only by courtesy. "What is it, then?" you ask. It is what is in accordance with the nature of each. The good, at any rate, can in no way belong to a brute animal; it belongs to a happier and better nature. Where there is no room for reason, there is no good.

124.14 There are these four natures: of tree, animal, human being, and god. The latter two, being rational, have the same nature; they differ in that one is immortal, the other mortal. Of these, then, the good of the one—namely god—is perfected by nature; that of the other—the human being—by effort. The rest are perfect only in their own nature, not truly perfect, since they lack reason. For only that is perfect which is perfect in accordance with universal nature, and universal nature is rational. The other things can be perfect of their kind.

124.15 Where the happy life cannot exist, neither can that which produces the happy life; and the happy life is produced by goods. In a brute animal there is no happy life, nor what produces the happy life: in a brute animal there is no good.

124.16 A brute animal grasps present things with its senses. It remembers past things when it meets something that jogs its senses—as a horse remembers a road when it is brought to the start of it. In the stable, at any rate, it has no memory of the road, however often it has trodden it. The third time, the future, does not concern brute animals at all.

124.17 How, then, can the nature of creatures that have no use of time in its entirety be regarded as perfect? For time consists of three parts: past, present, and future. To animals is given only the part that is briefest in its passing: the present. Their memory of the past is rare, and it is never recalled except when present things run into it.

124.18 So the good of a perfect nature cannot exist in an imperfect nature; or if such a nature has it, plants have it too. Nor do I deny that brute animals have strong and urgent impulses toward the things that seem in accordance with nature—but those impulses are disorderly and confused. And the good is never disorderly or confused.

124.19 "What then?" you ask. "Do brute animals move in a confused and disorderly way?" I would say they move in a confused and disorderly way if their nature were capable of order; as it is, they move in accordance with their own nature. For that is confused which could at some point also be unconfused; that is troubled which could be free from care. No one has a vice except one who could have virtue; for brute animals, such movement comes from their own nature.

124.20 But not to keep you long: there will be some good in a brute animal, there will be some virtue, there will be something perfect—but neither good nor virtue nor perfection in the absolute sense. These fall only to rational beings, who are given to know why, how far, and in what way. So the good exists in nothing except where there is reason.

124.21 You ask what the point of this discussion is, and what good it will do your mind? I say: it exercises and sharpens the mind, and, since it is bound to do something, keeps it busy with honorable activity. It also helps by holding back those who are hurrying toward wrongdoing. But I say this too: I can help you in no way more than by showing you your own good, by separating you from the brute animals, by placing you alongside God.

124.22 Why, I ask, do you nurture and exercise your bodily strength? Nature has granted greater strength to cattle and wild beasts. Why do you cultivate your looks? When you have done everything, brute animals will beat you in beauty. Why do you comb your hair with such enormous care? Whether you let it flow loose in the Parthian way, or tie it up in the German fashion, or let it fly wild as the Scythians do, any horse will toss a thicker mane, and a lion's bristles more handsomely on its neck. When you have trained yourself for speed, you will be no match for a little hare.[32]

124.23 Will you not leave behind the things in which you are bound to be beaten, struggling as you are for what belongs to others, and return to your own good? What is it? A mind, of

32 The Parthians, Germans, and Scythians were peoples on the edges of the Roman world, known for their distinctive hairstyles.

course, that is corrected and pure, rivaling God, raising itself above human things, placing nothing of its own outside itself. You are a rational animal. What, then, is the good in you? Perfected reason. Will you call it out to its goal, to grow as much as it possibly can?

124.24 Judge yourself happy when all your joy springs from this; when, having seen the things that people snatch, pray for, and guard, you find nothing—I do not say that you would prefer, but that you would want. I will give you a short rule by which to measure yourself, by which to feel that you are now perfect: you will have what is truly yours when you understand that the fortunate are the most unfortunate of all. Farewell.