



Epistles on Stoic Simplicity

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Epistle 86: Some Arguments in Favor of the Simple Life

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

My friend Maximus and I have been spending a most happy period of two days, taking with us very few slaves—one carriage-load—and no paraphernalia except what we wore on our persons. The mattress lies on the ground, and I upon the mattress. There are two rugs—one to spread beneath us and one to cover us. Nothing could have been subtracted from our luncheon; it took not more than an hour to prepare, and we were nowhere without dried figs, never without writing tablets. If I have bread, I used figs as a relish; if not, I regard figs as a substitute for bread. Hence they bring me a New Year feast every day, good thoughts and greatness of soul; for the soul is never greater than when it has laid aside all extraneous things, and has secured peace for itself by fearing nothing, and riches by craving no riches. The vehicle in which I have taken my seat is a farmer’s cart. Only by walking do the mules show that they are alive. The driver is barefoot, and not because it is summer either. I can scarcely force myself to wish that others shall think this cart mine. My false embarrassment about the truth still holds out, you see; and whenever we meet a more sumptuous party I blush in spite of myself-proof that this conduct which I approve and applaud has not yet gained a firm and steadfast dwelling-place within me. He who blushes at riding in a rattle-trap will boast when he rides in style.

So my progress is still insufficient. I have not yet the courage openly to acknowledge my thriftiness. Even yet I am bothered by what other travelers think of me. But instead of this, I should really have uttered an opinion counter to that in which mankind believe, saying, “You are mad, you are misled, your admiration devotes itself to superfluous things! You estimate no man at his real worth. When property is concerned, you reckon up in this way with most scrupulous calculation those to whom you shall lend either money or benefits; for by now you enter benefits also as payments in your ledger. You say: ‘His estates are wide, but his debts are large.’ ‘He has a fine house, but he has built it on borrowed capital.’ ‘No man will display a more brilliant retinue on short notice, but he cannot meet his debts.’ ‘If he pays off his creditors, he will have nothing left.’” So you will feel bound to do in all other cases as well,—to find out by elimination the amount of every man’s actual possessions.

I suppose you call a man rich just because his gold plate goes with him even on his travels, because he farms land in all the provinces, because he unrolls a large account-book, because he owns estates near the city so great that men would grudge his holding them in the waste lands of Apulia. But after you have mentioned all these facts, he is poor. And why? He is in debt. “To what extent?” you ask. For all that he has. Or perchance you think it matters whether one

has borrowed from another man or from Fortune. What good is there in mules caparisoned in uniform livery? Or in decorated chariots and “Steeds decked with purple and with tapestry, / With golden harness hanging from their necks, / Champing their yellow bits, all clothed in gold? / Neither master nor mule is improved by such trappings.”

Marcus Cato the Censor, whose existence helped the state as much as did Scipio's - for while Scipio fought against our enemies, Cato fought against bad morals, - used to ride a donkey, and a donkey, at that, which carried saddle-bags containing the master's necessities. O how I should love to see him meet to-day on the road one of our coxcombs, with his outriders and Numidians, and a great cloud of dust before him! Your dandy would no doubt seem refined and well-attended in comparison with Marcus Cato, - your dandy, who, in the midst of all his luxurious paraphernalia, is chiefly concerned whether to turn his hand to the sword or to the hunting-knife. O what a glory to the times in which he lived, for a general who had celebrated a triumph, a censor, and what is most noteworthy of all, a Cato, to be content with a single nag, and with less than a whole nag at that! For part of the animal was preempted by the baggage that hung down on either flank. Would you not therefore prefer Cato's steed, that single steed, saddle-worn by Cato himself, to the coxcomb's whole retinue of plump ponies, Spanish cobs, and trotters? I see that there will be no end in dealing with such a theme unless I make an end myself. So I shall now become silent, at least with reference to superfluous things like these; doubtless the man who first called them “hindrances” had a prophetic inkling that they would be the very sort of thing they now are. At present I should like to deliver to you the syllogisms, as yet very few, belonging to our school and bearing upon the question of virtue, which, in our opinion, is sufficient for the happy life.

“That which is good makes men good. For example, that which is good in the art of music makes the musician. But chance events do not make a good man; therefore, chance events are not goods.” The Peripatetics reply to this by saying that the premise is false; that men do not in every case become good by means of that which is good; that in music there is something good, like a flute, a harp, or an organ suited to accompany singing; but that none of these instruments makes the musician. We shall then reply: “You do not understand in what sense we have used the phrase ‘that which is good in music.’ For we do not mean that which equips the musician, but that which makes the musician; you, however, are referring to the instruments of the art, and not to the art itself. If, however, anything in the art of music is good, that will in every case make the musician.” And I should like to put this idea still more clearly. We define the good in the art of music in two ways: first, that by which the performance of the musician is assisted, and second, that by which his art is assisted. Now the musical instruments have to do with his performance, - such as flutes and organs and harps; but they do not have to do with the musician's art itself. For he is an artist even without them; he may perhaps be lacking in the ability to practice his art. But the good in man is not in the same way twofold; for the good of man and the good of life are the same.

“That which can fall to the lot of any man, no matter how base or despised he may be, is not a good. But wealth falls to the lot of the pander and the trainer of gladiators; therefore wealth is not a good.” “Another wrong premise,” they say, “for we notice that goods fall to the lot of the very lowest sort of men, not only in the scholar's art, but also in the art of healing or in the art of navigating.” These arts, however, make no profession of greatness of soul; they do not rise to any heights nor do they frown upon what fortune may bring. It is virtue that uplifts man and places him superior to what mortals hold dear; virtue neither craves overmuch nor fears to excess that which is called good or that which is called bad. Chelidon, one of Cleopatra's eunuchs, possessed great wealth; and recently Natalis — a man whose tongue was a shameless as it was dirty, a man whose mouth used to perform the vilest offices — was the heir of many, and also made many his heirs. What then? Was it his money that made him unclean, or did he himself besmirch his money? Money tumbles into the hands of certain men as a shilling tumbles down a sewer. Virtue stands above all such things. It is appraised in coin of its own minting; and it deems none of these random wind-falls to be good. But medicine and navigation do not forbid themselves and their followers to marvel at such things. One who is not a good man can

nevertheless be a physician, or a pilot, or a scholar, -yes, just as well as he can be a cook! He to whose lot it falls to possess something which is not of a random sort, cannot be called a random sort of man; a person is of the same sort as that which he possesses. A strong-box is worth just what it holds; or rather, it is a mere accessory of that which it holds. Who ever sets any price upon a full purse except the price established by the count of the money deposited therein? This also applies to the owners of great estates: they are only accessories and incidentals to their possessions.

Why, then, is the wise man great? Because he has a great soul. Accordingly, it is true that that which falls to the lot even of the most despicable person is not a good. Thus, I should never regard inactivity as a good; for even the tree-frog and the flea possess this quality. Nor should I regard rest and freedom from trouble as a good; for what is more at leisure than a worm? Do you ask what it is that produces the wise man? That which produces a god. You must grant that the wise man has an element of godliness, heavenliness, grandeur. The good does not come to every one, nor does it allow any random person to possess it. Behold: "What fruits each country bears, or will not bear; / Here corn, and there the vine grow richlier. / And elsewhere still the tender tree and grass / Unbidden clothe themselves in green. Seest thou / How Tmolus ships its saffron perfumes forth, / And ivory comes from Ind; soft Sheba sends / Its incense, and the unclad Chalybes / Their iron." These products are apportioned to separate countries in order that human beings may be constrained to traffic among themselves, each seeking something from his neighbor in his turn. So the Supreme Good has also its own abode. It does not grow where ivory grows, or iron. Do you ask where the Supreme Good dwells? In the soul. And unless the soul be pure and holy, there is no room in it for God.

"Good does not result from evil. But riches result from greed; therefore riches are not a good." "It is not true," they say, "that good does not result from evil. For money comes from sacrilege and theft. Accordingly, although sacrilege and theft are evil, yet they are evil only because they work more evil than good. For they bring gain; but the gain is accompanied by fear, anxiety, and torture of mind and body." Whoever says this must perforce admit that sacrilege, though it be an evil because it works much evil, is yet partly good because it accomplishes a certain amount of good. What can be more monstrous than this, We have, to be sure, actually convinced the world that sacrilege, theft, and adultery are to be regarded as among the goods. How many men there are who do not blush at theft, how many who boast of having committed adultery! For petty sacrilege is punished, but sacrilege on a grand scale is honored by a triumphal procession. Besides, sacrilege, if it is wholly good in some respect, will also be honorable and will be called right conduct; for it is conduct which concerns ourselves. But no human being, on a serious consideration, admits this idea.

Therefore, goods cannot spring from evil. For if, as you object sacrilege is an evil for the single reason that it brings on much evil, if you but absolve sacrilege of its punishment and pledge it immunity, sacrilege will be wholly good. And yet the worse punishment for crimes lies in the crime itself. You are mistaken, I maintain, if you propose to reserve your punishments for the hangman or the prison; the crime is punished immediately after it is committed; nay, rather, at the moment when it is committed. Hence, good does not spring from evil, any more than figs grow from olive-trees. Things which grow correspond to their seed; and goods cannot depart from their class. As that which is honorable does not grow from that which is base, so neither does good grow from evil. For the honorable and the good are identical.

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

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

“That which, while we are desiring to attain it, involves us in many evils, is not a good. But while we are desiring to attain riches, we become involved in many evils; therefore, riches are not a good.” “You first premise,” they say, “contains two meanings; one is: we become involved in many evils while we are desiring to attain riches. But we also become involved in many evils while we are desiring to attain virtue. One man, while traveling in order to prosecute his studies, suffers shipwreck, and another is taken captive. The second meaning is as follows: that through which we become involved in evils is not a good. And it will not logically follow from our proposition that we become involved in evils through riches or through pleasure; otherwise, if it is through riches that we become involved in many evils, riches are not only not a good, but they are positively an evil. You, however, maintain merely that they are not a good. Moreover,” the objector says, “you grant that riches are of some use. You reckon them among the advantages: and yet on this basis they cannot even be an advantage, for it is through the pursuit of riches that we suffer much disadvantage.” Certain men answer this objection as follows: “You are mistaken if you ascribe disadvantages to riches. Riches injure no one; it is a man’s own folly, or his neighbor’s wickedness, that harms him in each case, just as a sword by itself does not slay; it is merely the weapon used by the slayer. Riches themselves do not harm you, just because it is merely the weapon used by the slayer. Riches themselves do not harm you, just because it is on account of riches that you suffer harm.”

I think that the reasoning of Posidonius is better: he holds that riches are a cause of evil, not because, of themselves, they do any evil, but because they goad men on so that they are ready to do evil. For the efficient cause, which necessarily produces harm at once, is one thing, and the antecedent cause is another. It is this antecedent cause which inheres in riches; they puff up the spirit and beget pride, they bring on unpopularity and unsettle the mind to such an extent that the mere reputation of having wealth, though it is bound to harm us, nevertheless affords delight. All goods, however, ought properly to be free from blame; they are pure, they do not corrupt the spirit, and they do not tempt us. They do indeed, uplift and broaden the spirit, but without puffing it up. Those things which are goods produce confidence, but riches produce shamelessness. The things which are goods give us greatness of soul, but riches give us arrogance. And arrogance is nothing else than a false show of greatness.

“According to that argument,” the objector says, ‘riches are not only not a good, but are a positive evil.’ Now they would be an evil if they did harm of themselves, and if as I remarked, it were the efficient cause which inheres in them; in fact, however, it is the antecedent cause which inheres in riches, and indeed it is that cause which, so far from merely arousing the spirit, actually drags it along by force. Yes, riches shower upon us a semblance of the good, which is like the reality and wins credence in the eyes of many men. the antecedent cause inheres in virtue also, it is this which brings on envy-for many men become unpopular because of their wisdom, and many men because of their justice. But this cause, though it inheres in virtue, is not the result of virtue itself, nor is it a mere semblance of the reality: nay on the contrary, far more like the reality is that vision which is flashed by virtue upon the spirits of men, summoning them to love it and marvel thereat.

Posidonius thinks that the syllogism should be framed as follows: “Things which bestow upon the soul no greatness or confidence or freedom from care are not goods. But riches and health and similar conditions do none of these things; therefore, riches and health are not goods.” This syllogism he then goes on to extend still further in the following way: “Things which bestow upon the soul no greatness or confidence or freedom from care, but on the other hand create in it arrogance, vanity, and insolence, are evils. But things which are the gift of Fortune drive us into these evil ways. Therefore these things are not goods.” “But,” says the objector, “by such reasoning, things which are the gift of Fortune will not even be advantages.” No, advantages and goods stand each in a different situation. An advantage is that which

contains more of usefulness than of annoyance. But a good to be unmixed and with no element in it of harmfulness. A thing is not good if it contains more benefit. Besides, advantages may be predicated of animals, of men who are less than perfect, and of fools. Hence the advantageous may have an element of disadvantage mingled with it, but the word “advantageous” is used of the compound because it is judged by its predominant element. The good, however, can be predicated of the wise man alone; it is bound to be without alloy.

Be a good cheer; there is only one knot left for you to untangle, though it is a knot for a Hercules: “Good does not result from evil. But riches result from numerous cases of poverty; therefore, riches are not a good.” This syllogism is not recognized by our school, but the Peripatetics both concoct it and give its solution. Posidonius, however, remarks that this fallacy, which has been bandied about among all the schools of dialectic, is refuted by Antipater as follows: “The work ‘Poverty’ is used to denote, not the possession of something, but the non-possession or, as the ancients have put it deprivation, (for the Greeks use the phrase ‘by deprivation,’ meaning ‘negatively’). ‘Poverty’ states not what a man has, but what he has not. Consequently there can be no fullness resulting from a multitude of voids; many positive things, and many deficiencies, make up riches. You have,” says he, “a wrong notion of the meaning of what poverty is. For poverty does not mean the possession of little, but the non -possession of much; it is used, therefore, not of what a man has, but of what he lacks. “I could express my meaning more easily if there were a Latin word which could translate the Greek word which means “not-possessing.” Antipater assigns this quality too poverty, but for my part I cannot see what else poverty is than the possession of little. If ever we have plenty of leisure, we shall investigate the question; What is the essence of riches, and what the essence of poverty; but when the time comes, we shall also consider whether it is not better to try to mitigate poverty, and to relieve wealth of its arrogance, than to quibble about the words as if the question of the things were already decided.

Let us suppose that we have been summoned to an assembly; an act dealing with the abolition of riches has been brought before the meeting. Shall we be supporting it, or opposing it, if we use these syllogisms? Will these syllogisms help us to bring it about that the Roman people shall demand poverty and praise it-poverty, the foundation and cause of their empire,-and, on the other hand, shall shrink in fear from their present wealth, reflecting that they have found it among the victims of their conquests, that wealth is the source from which office-seeking and bribery and disorder have burst into a city once characterized by the utmost scrupulousness and sobriety, and that because of wealth an exhibition all too lavish is made of the spoils of conquered nations; reflecting, finally, that whatever one people has snatched away from all the rest may still more easily be snatched by all away from one? Nay, it were better to support this law by our conduct and to subdue our desires by direct assault rather than to circumvent them by logic. If we can, let us speak more boldly; if not, let us speak more frankly.

Epistle 87: On Sipro's Villa

I am resting at the country-house which once belonged to Scipio Africanus himself; and I write to you after doing reverence to his spirit and to an altar which I am incline to think is the tomb of that great warrior. That his soul has indeed returned to the skies, whence it came, I am convinced, not because he commanded mighty armies-from Cambyses also had mighty armies, and Cambyses was a mad-man who made successful use of his madness-but because he showed moderation and a sense of duty to a marvelous extent. I regard this trait in him as more admirable after his withdrawal from his native land than while he was defending her; for there was the alternative: Scipio should remain in Rome, or Rome should remain free. “It is my wish,” said he, “not to infringe in the least upon our laws, or upon our customs, let all Roman citizens have equal rights. O my country, make the most of the good that I have done, but without me. I have been the cause of your freedom, and I shall also be its proof; I go into exile, if it is true that I have grown beyond what is to your advantage!”

What can i do but admire this magnanimity, which led him to withdraw into voluntary exile

and to relieve the state of its burden? Matters had gone so far that either liberty must work harm to Scipio, or Scipio to liberty. Either of these things was wrong in the sight of heaven. So he gave way to the laws and withdrew to Liternum, thinking to make the state a debtor for his own exile no less than for the exile of Hannibal. I have inspected the house, which is constructed of hewn stone; the wall which encloses a forest; the towers also, buttressed out on both sides for the purpose of defending the house; the well, concealed among buildings and shrubbery, large enough to keep a whole army supplied; and the small bath, buried in darkness according to the old style, for our ancestors did not think that one could have a hot bath except in darkness. It was therefore a great pleasure to me to contrast Scipio's ways with our own. Think, in this tiny recess the "terror of Carthage," to whom Rome should offer thanks because she was not captured more than once, used to bathe a body wearied with work in the fields! For he was accustomed to keep himself busy and to cultivate the soil with his own hands, as the good old Romans were wont to do. Beneath this dingy roof he stood; and this floor, mean as it is, bore his weight.

But who in these days could bear to bathe in such a fashion? We think ourselves poor and mean if our walls are not resplendent with large and costly mirrors; if our marbles from Alexandria are not set off by mosaics of Numidian stone, if their borders are not faced over on all sides with difficult patterns, arranged in many colours like paintings; if our vaulted ceilings are not buried in glass; if our swimming-pools are not lined with Thasian marble, once a rare and wonderful sight in any temple-pools into which we let down our bodies after they have been drained weak by abundant perspiration; and finally, if the water has not poured from silver spigots. I have so far been speaking of the ordinary bathing-establishments; what shall I say when I come to those of the freemen? What a vast number of statues, of columns that support nothing, but are built for decoration, merely in order to spend money! And what masses of water that fall crashing from level to level! We have become so luxurious that we will have nothing but precious stones to walk upon.

In this bath of Scipio's there are tiny chinks-you cannot call them windows-cut out of the stone wall in such a way as to admit light without weakening the fortifications; nowadays, however, people regard baths as fit only for moths if they have not been arranged that they receive the sun all day long through the widest of windows, if men cannot bathe and get a coat of tan at the same time, and if they cannot look out from their bath-tubs over stretches of land and sea. So it goes; the establishments which had drawn crowds and had won admiration when they were first opened are avoided and put back in the category of venerable antiques as soon as luxury has worked out some new device, to her own ultimate undoing. In the early days, however, there were few baths, and they were not fitted out with any display. For why should men elaborately fit out that which costs a penny only, and was invented for use, not merely for delight? The bathers of those days did not have water poured over them, nor did it always run fresh as if from a hot spring; and they did not believe that it mattered at all how perfectly pure was the water into which they were to leave their dirt. Ye gods, what a pleasure it is to enter that dark bath, covered with a common sort of roof, knowing that therein your hero Cato, as aedile, or Fabius Maximus, or one of the Cornelii, has warmed the water with his own hands! For this also used to be the duty of the noblest aediles — to enter these places to which the populace resorted, and to demand that they be cleaned and warmed to a heat required by considerations of use and health, not the heat that men have recently made fashionable, as great as a conflagration — so much so, indeed, that a slave condemned for some criminal offence now ought to be bathed alive! It seems to me that nowadays there is no difference between "the bath is on fire." and "the bath is warm."

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

will say: "I don't envy Scipio; that was truly an exile's life-to put up with baths like those!" Friend, if you were wiser, you would know that Scipio did not bathe every day. It is stated by those who have reported to us the old-time ways of Rome that the Romans washed only their arms and legs daily-because those were the members which gathered dirt in their daily toil-and bathed all over only once a week. Here someone will retort: "Yes; pretty dirty fellows they evidently were! How they must have smelled!" But they smelled of the camp, the farm, and heroism. Now that spick-and-span bathing establishments have been devised, men are really fouler than of yore. What says Horatius Flaccus, when he wishes to describe a scoundrel, one who is notorious for his extreme luxury? He says: "Buccillus smells of perfume." Show me a Buccillus in these days; his smell would be the veritable goat-smell-he would take the place of the Gargonius with whom Horace in the same passage contrasted him. It is nowadays not enough to use ointment, unless you put on a fresh coat two or three times a day, to keep it from evaporating on the body. But why should a man boast of this perfume as if it were his own?

If what I am saying shall seem to you too pessimistic, charge it up against Scipio's country-house, where I have learned a lesson from Aegialus, a most careful householder and now the owner of this estate; he taught me that a tree can be transplanted, no matter how far gone in years. We old men must learn this precept; for there is none of us who is not planting an olive-yard for his successor. I have seen them bearing fruit in due season after three or four years of unproductiveness. And you too shall be shaded by the tree which "is slow to grow, but brighly shade to cheer your grandsons in the far-off years," as our poet Vergil says. Vergil sought, however, not what was nearest to the truth, but what was most appropriate, and aimed, not to teach the farmer, but to please the reader. For example, omitting all other errors of his, I will quote the passage in which it was incumbent upon me to-day to detect a fault: "In spring sow beans; then too, O clover plant, thou'rt welcomed by the crumbling furrows; and the millet calls for yearly care." You may judge by the following incident whether those plants should be set out at the same time, or whether both should be sowed in the spring. It is June at the present writing, and we are well on towards July; and I have seen on this very day farmers harvesting beans and sowing millet....

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

Epistle 110: On Simplicity

Let us now pass on to property, the greatest cause of human troubles. For if you compare all the other things by which we are troubled, deaths, sicknesses, fears, desires, endurance of pains and labors, with those evils which our money causes, this last part will far outweigh the others. Therefore we must consider how much less the pain is not to possess money than to lose it; then we shall understand that the less opportunity for loss poverty has, the less trouble she has. For you are mistaken if you think that the rich bear their losses more courageously: a wound causes an equal amount of pain to the greatest and the smallest bodies. Bion neatly says that "it is no less unpleasant for those who have a luxuriant growth of hair to have their hair torn out than for those who are bald." You may know that the same thing holds true concerning the rich and the poor; their trouble is equal; for their money clings to both and cannot be torn away without being felt. But it is more endurable, as I have said, and easier not to acquire than to lose; therefore you will find that those whom fortune has never favored are more joyful than those whom she has deserted.

Diogenes, a man of extraordinary mind, comprehended this and arranged so that nothing could be taken from him. Call this poverty, want, indigence, give it any ignominious name you please: I shall believe that he is not happy, if you find me another who can lose nothing. Either I am deceived, or it is a mark of royalty among the covetous, defrauders, robbers, and thieves to be the only one who cannot be injured. If anyone doubts concerning the happiness of Diogenes, he is able also to doubt concerning the condition of the immortal gods, whether they do live sufficiently happy, because they possess no farms or gardens, no costly estates for their slaves,

and no money at interest in the bank.

Are you not ashamed who look upon riches with admiration: Look at the universe: you will see that the gods are without anything, giving all things, but possessing nothing. Do you consider that one a pauper or like the immortal gods who has divested himself of all fortuitous things? Do you call Demetrius, Pompey's freedman, more happy because he was not ashamed to be richer than Pompey? The number of his slaves was reported to him daily as that of an army is to its general, whilst long ago two under-slaves and a wider cell ought to have been wealth for him. But Diogenes's only slave ran away, and, when he was pointed out to him, he did not consider it worth while to take him back. "It is a disgrace," he said, "if Manes can live without Diogenes, and Diogenes cannot live without Manes." He seems to me to have said, "Fortune, attend to your own affair: you have nothing to do with Diogenes. Did a slave run away from me? No, he went away a free man. Slaves require clothing and food; so many stomachs of exceedingly hungry animals must be supplied; their clothing must be bought, their most thievish hands must be guarded, and the services of weak and cursing slaves must be employed. How much happier is he who is indebted to no one for anything except what he can very easily deny himself!" But since we do not possess so much strength, we ought at least to circumscribe our property in order that we may be less exposed to the injuries of fortune. Bodies which can be enclosed within their armor are more fitted for war than those which extend out beyond it and whose very magnitude exposes them to wounds on all sides. The proper amount of wealth is that which neither descends to poverty nor is far distant from poverty.

But this measure will be pleasing to us, if we have previously found pleasure in economy, without which no riches are sufficient, and none are open to us that are at all satisfactory, --especially since there is a remedy at hand and poverty itself can change itself into wealth if economy is called to its assistance. Let us accustom ourselves to set aside all ostentation, and to estimate the value of things by their uses, not by their embellishments. Let food overcome hunger, drinking thirst, and our desires take their course only so far as it is necessary. Let us learn to depend upon our own limbs, to arrange our food and clothing not according to the latest style, but as the customs of our ancestors recommend. Let us learn to increase moderation, to restrain luxury, to control our appetites, to appease our anger, to look upon poverty with indifference, to cultivate frugality, even if we are ashamed to be like common people, to apply to our natural desires remedies involving little or no expense, to hold as it were in chains unruly hopes and a mind striving to peer into the future, and to keep it in view that we seek our riches from ourselves rather than from fortune. So great a diversity and unfairness of misfortunes can never be averted to such an extent that, if we let out a great amount of sail, many storms would not break over us: our affairs must be confined to a narrow place in order that fortune's darts may fall in vain. Therefore banishments and calamities have sometimes become remedies, and more grievous ills have been healed by lighter ones; when the mind does not listen to precepts and cannot be healed by milder means, why should it not be expedient, if poverty, disgrace, and the destruction of property are employed as means? One evil is opposed to another.

Let us, therefore, accustom ourselves to be able to dine without a great company, to be served by fewer slaves, to provide clothes for the purpose for which they are intended, and to live on a more modest scale. Not only in running a race and in contests of the circus, but also in the course of life we must take the inner track. The outlay upon literary studies, which is also the most noble in the world, has justification only so long as it is kept within bounds. What is the good of having innumerable books and libraries, whose owner can scarcely read through their titles in his whole lifetime? A great number of books overwhelms the learner instead of instructing him; and it is much better to devote yourself to few authors than to skim through many. Forty thousand books were burned at Alexandria--that most beautiful monument of royal wealth. Let another praise it, as did Livius, who says that "this was a magnificent result of the taste and the care of kings." It was not taste or care, but learned luxury; nay, not even learned, since they collected it not for the love of study, but for the purpose of display, just as many men, who are ignorant even of the lower branches of learning, possess books not as means to help them in their studies, but as ornaments of their dining-rooms. Therefore let a man

provide as many books as are necessary, but none for the mere sake of display....

This discourse of mine is applicable to the imperfect, the mediocre, and those whose minds are disturbed, not to the wise man. Such an one does not need to walk about timidly or cautiously: for he possesses such self-confidence that he does not hesitate to go to meet fortune nor will he ever yield his position to her: nor has he any reason to fear her, because he considers not only slaves, property, and positions of honor, but also his body, his eyes, his hands,—everything which can make life dearer, even his very self, as among uncertain things, and lives as if he had borrowed them for his own use and was prepared to return them without sadness whenever claimed. Nor does he appear worthless in his own eyes because he knows that he is not his own, but he will do everything as diligently and carefully as a conscientious and pious man is accustomed to guard that which is entrusted to his care. Yet whenever he is ordered to return them, he will not complain to fortune, but will say: “I thank you for this which I have had in my possession. I have indeed cared for your property,—even to my great disadvantage,—but, since you command it, I give it back to you and restore it thankfully and willingly: if you still wish me to have anything of yours, I will keep it for you: if you decide otherwise, I return to you and make restitution of my wrought and stamped silver, my house and my servants.” If nature should demand of us that which she has previously entrusted to us, we will also say to her: “Take back a better mind than you gave: I seek no way of escape nor flee: I have voluntarily improved for you what you gave me without my knowledge; take it away.” What hardship is there in returning to the place whence one has come? that man lives badly who does not know how to die well. In the first place, therefore, we must take away from this thing its value, and life must be numbered among the things of little value.

Now God, who is the Father of us all, has placed ready to our hands those things which he intended for our own good; he did not wait for any search on our part, and he gave them to us voluntarily. But that which would be injurious, he buried deep in the earth. We can complain of nothing but ourselves; for we have brought to light the materials for our destruction, against the will of Nature, who hid them from us. We have bound over our souls to pleasure, whose service is the source of all evil; we have surrendered ourselves to self-seeking and reputation, and to other aims which are equally idle and useless.

What, then, do I now encourage you to do? Nothing new—we are not trying to find cures for new evils—but this first of all: namely, to see clearly for yourself what is necessary and what is superfluous. What is necessary will meet you everywhere; what is superfluous has always to be hunted out—and with great endeavour. But there is no reason why you should flatter yourself over-much if you despise gilded couches and jewelled furniture. For what virtue lies in despising useless things: The time to admire your own conduct is when you have come to despise the necessities. You are doing no great thing if you can live without royal pomp, if you feel no craving for boars which weigh a thousand pounds, or for flamingo tongues, or for the other absurdities of a luxury that already wearies of game cooked whole, and chooses different bits from separate animals; I shall admire you only when you have learned to scorn even the common sort of bread, when you have made yourself believe that grass grows for the needs of men as well as of cattle, when you have found out that food from the treetop can fill the belly—into which we cram things of value as if it could keep what it has received. We should satisfy our stomachs without being overnice. How does it matter what the stomach receives, since it must lose whatever it has received? You enjoy the carefully arranged dainties which are caught on land and sea; some are more pleasing if they are brought fresh to the table, others, if after long feeding and forced fattening they almost melt and can hardly retain their own grease. You like the subtly devised flavour of these dishes. But I assure you that such carefully chosen and variously seasoned dishes, once they have entered the belly, will be overtaken alike by one and the same corruption. Would you despise the pleasures of eating? Then consider its result! I remember some words of Attalus, which elicited general applause:

“Riches long deceived me. I used to be dazed when I caught some gleam of them here and there. I used to think that their hidden influence matched their visible show. But once, at a certain elaborate entertainment, I saw embossed work in silver and gold equalling the wealth of

la whole city, and colours and tapestry devised to match objects which surpassed the value of gold or of silver—brought not only from beyond our own borders, but from beyond the borders of our enemies; on one side were slave-boys notable for their training and beauty, on the other were throngs of slave-women, and all the other resources that a prosperous and mighty empire could offer after reviewing its possessions. What else is this, I said to myself, than a stirring-up of man's cravings, which are in themselves provocative of lust? What is the meaning of all this display of money? Did we gather merely to learn what greed was? For my own part I left the place with less craving than I had when I entered. I came to despise riches, not because of their uselessness, but because of their pettiness. Have you noticed how, inside a few hours, that programme, however, slow-moving and carefully arranged, was over and done? Has a business filled up this whole life of ours, which could not fill up a whole day?

“I had another thought also: the riches seemed to me to be as useless to the possessors as they were to the onlookers. Accordingly, I say to myself, whenever a show of that sort dazzles my eyes, whenever I see a splendid palace with a well-groomed corps of attendants and beautiful bearers carrying a litter: Why wonder? Why gape in astonishment? It is all show; such things are displayed, not possessed; while they please they pass away. Turn thyself rather to the true riches. Learn to be content with little, and cry out with courage and with greatness of soul: ‘We have water, we have porridge; let us compete in happiness with Jupiter himself.’ And why not, I pray thee, make this challenge even without porridge and water? For it is base to make the happy life depend upon silver and gold, and just as base to make it depend upon water and porridge. ‘But,’ some will say, ‘what could I do without such things?’ Do you ask what is the cure for want? It is to make hunger satisfy hunger; for, all else being equal, what difference is there is the smallness or the largeness of the things that force you to be a slave? What matter how little it is that Fortune can refuse to you? Your very porridge and water can fall under another's jurisdiction; and besides, freedom comes, not to him over whom Fortune has slight power, but to him over whom she has no power at all. This is what I mean: you must crave nothing, if you would vie with Jupiter; for Jupiter craves nothing.”

This is what Attalus told us. If you are willing to think often of these things, you will strive not to seem happy, but to be happy, and, in addition, to seem happy to yourself rather than to others. Farewell.

Seneca. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. Trans. Richard M. Gummere. London: William Heinemann, 1918.

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