

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

28 venit. Eadem illa ratio monet, ut, si licet, moriaris quemadmodum placet; si minus,¹ quemadmodum potes, et quicquid obvenerit ad vim adferendam tibi invadas. Iniuriosum est raptò vivere, at contra pulcherrimum mori raptò. VALE.

LXXI.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Subinde me de rebus singulis consulis oblitus vasto nos mari dividi. Cum magna pars consilii sit in tempore, necesse est evenire, ut de quibusdam rebus tunc ad te perferatur sententia mea, cum iam contraria potior est. Consilia enim rebus aptantur. Res nostrae feruntur, immo volvuntur. Ergo consilium nasci sub diem debet; et hoc quoque nimis tardum est; sub manu, quod aiunt, nascatur. Quemadmodum autem inveniatur, ostendam.

2 Quotiens, quid fugiendum sit aut quid petendum, voles scire, ad summum bonum, propositum totius vitae tuae, respice. Illi enim consentire debet, quicquid agimus; non disponet singula, nisi cui iam vitae suae summa proposita est. Nemo, quamvis paratos habeat colores, similitudinem reddet, nisi iam constat, quid velit pingere. Ideo peccamus, quia de partibus vitae omnes deliberamus, de tota

¹ Hense, following Schweighäuser, inserts *quemadmodum placet; si minus*.

^a *i.e.*, by robbing oneself of life; but the antithesis to Vergil's phrase (*Aen.* ix. 613) is artificial.

^b A similar argument is found in *Ep.* lxxv. §§ 5 ff., containing the same figure of thought.

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Reason, too, advises us to die, if we may, according to our taste; if this cannot be, she advises us to die according to our ability, and to seize upon whatever means shall offer itself for doing violence to ourselves. It is criminal to "live by robbery"^a; but, on the other hand, it is most noble to "die by robbery." Farewell.

LXXI. ON THE SUPREME GOOD

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

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

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3 nemo deliberat. Scire debet quid petat ille, qui sagittam vult mittere, et tunc derigere ac moderari manu telum. Errant consilia nostra, quia non habent, quo derigantur. Ignoranti, quem portum petat, nullus suus ventus est. Necesse est multum in vita
4 nostra casus possit, quia vivimus casu. Quibusdam autem evenit, ut quaedam scire se nesciant. Quemadmodum quaerimus saepe eos, cum quibus stamus, ita plerumque finem summi boni ignoramus adpositum.

Nec multis verbis nec circumitu longo, quod sit summum bonum, colliges¹; digito, ut ita dicam, demonstrandum est nec in multa spargendum. Quid enim ad rem pertinet in particulas illud diducere, cum possis dicere: summum bonum est, quod honestum est? Et quod magis admireris: unum bonum est, quod honestum est, cetera falsa et
5 adulterina bona sunt. Hoc si persuaseris tibi et virtutem adamaveris, amare enim parum est, quicquid illa contigerit, id tibi, qualecumque aliis videbitur, faustum felixque erit. Et torqueri, si modo iacueris ipso torquente securior, et aegrotare, si non male dixeris fortunae, si non cesseris morbo, omnia denique, quae ceteris videntur mala, et mansuescent et in bonum abibunt, si super illa eminueris.

Hoc liqueat, nihil esse bonum nisi honestum, et omnia incommoda suo iure bona vocabuntur, quae

¹ colliges Muretus; colligis MSS.

^a For a definition of *honestum* see Cicero, *De Fin.* ii. 45 ff., and Rackham's note, explaining it as "τὸ καλόν, the morally beautiful or good."

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The archer must know what he is seeking to hit; then he must aim and control the weapon by his skill. Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind. Chance must necessarily have great influence over our lives, because we live by chance. It is the case with certain men, however, that they do not know that they know certain things. Just as we often go searching for those who stand beside us, so we are apt to forget that the goal of the Supreme Good lies near us.

To infer the nature of this Supreme Good, one does not need many words or any round-about discussion; it should be pointed out with the forefinger, so to speak, and not be dissipated into many parts. For what good is there in breaking it up into tiny bits, when you can say: the Supreme Good is that which is honourable^a? Besides (and you may be still more surprised at this), that which is honourable is the only good; all other goods are alloyed and debased. If you once convince yourself of this, and if you come to love virtue devotedly (for mere loving is not enough), anything that has been touched by virtue will be fraught with blessing and prosperity for you, no matter how it shall be regarded by others. Torture, if only, as you lie suffering, you are more calm in mind than your very torturer; illness, if only you curse not Fortune and yield not to the disease—in short, all those things which others regard as ills will become manageable and will end in good, if you succeed in rising above them.

Let this once be clear, that there is nothing good except that which is honourable, and all hardships will have a just title to the name of "goods," when

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6 modo virtus honestaverit. Multis videmur maiora promittere quam recipit humana condicio; non inmerito. Ad corpus enim respiciunt. Revertantur ad animum; iam hominem deo metientur. Erige te, Lucili virorum optime, et relinque istum ludum literarium philosophorum, qui rem magnificentissimam ad syllabas vocant, qui animum minuta docendo demittunt et conterunt; fies similis illis, qui invenerunt ista, non qui docent et id agunt, ut philosophia potius difficilis quam magna videatur.

7 Socrates qui totam philosophiam revocavit ad mores et hanc summam dixit esse sapientiam, bona malaque distinguere, "sequere," inquit, "illos, si quid apud te habeo auctoritatis, ut sis beatus, et te alicui stultum videri sine. Quisquis volet, tibi contumeliam faciat et iniuriam, tu tamen nihil patieris, si modo tecum erit virtus. Si vis," inquit, "beatus esse, si fide bona vir bonus, sine contemnat te aliquis." Hoc nemo praestabit, nisi qui omnia bona exaequaverit, quia nec bonum sine honesto est

8 et honestum in omnibus par est. "Quid¹ ergo? Nihil interest inter praeturam Catonis et repulsam? Nihil interest, utrum Pharsalica acie Cato vincatur an vincat? Hoc eius bonum, quo victis partibus

¹ Hense gives *quid ergo . . . componeret pacem?* to the supposed objector.

^a See, for example, the syllogistic display which is ridiculed in *Ep.* xlviii. 6.

^b *i.e.*, from being mere word-play.

^c Hense suggests that Seneca may be rendering the phrase of Simonides—*ἀνὴρ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθός*.

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once virtue has made them honourable. Many think that we Stoics are holding out expectations greater than our human lot admits of; and they have a right to think so. For they have regard to the body only. But let them turn back to the soul, and they will soon measure man by the standard of God. Rouse yourself, most excellent Lucilius, and leave off all this word-play of the philosophers, who reduce a most glorious subject to a matter of syllables, and lower and wear out the soul by teaching fragments; then you will become like the men who discovered these precepts, instead of those who by their teaching do their best to make philosophy seem difficult rather than great.^a

Socrates, who recalled^b the whole of philosophy to rules of conduct, and asserted that the highest wisdom consisted in distinguishing between good and evil, said: "Follow these rules, if my words carry weight with you, in order that you may be happy; and let some men think you even a fool. Allow any man who so desires to insult you and work you wrong; but if only virtue dwells with you, you will suffer nothing. If you wish to be happy, if you would be in good faith a good man,^c let one person or another despise you." No man can accomplish this unless he has come to regard all goods as equal, for the reason that no good exists without that which is honourable, and that which is honourable is in every case equal. You may say: "What then? Is there no difference between Cato's being elected praetor and his failure at the polls? Or whether Cato is conquered or conqueror in the battle-line of Pharsalia? And when Cato could not be defeated, though his party met defeat, was not this goodness of his equal to that which would have been his if

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- non potest vinci, par erat illi bono, quo victor rediret in patriam et conponeret pacem?" Quidni par sit? Eadem enim virtute et mala fortuna vincitur et ordinatur bona. Virtus autem non potest maior aut
- 9 minor fieri; unius staturae est. "Sed Cn. Pompeius amittet exercitum, sed illud pulcherrimum rei publicae praetextum, optimates, et prima acies Pompeianarum partium, senatus ferens arma, uno proelio profligabuntur et tam magni ruina imperii in totum dissiliet orbem; aliqua pars eius in Aegypto, aliqua in Africa, aliqua in Hispania cadet. Ne hoc quidem miserae rei publicae continget, semel ruere."
- 10 Omnia licet fiant; Iubam in regno suo non locorum notitia adiuvet, non popularium pro rege suo virtus obstinatissima, Uticensium quoque fides malis fracta deficiat et Scipionem in Africa nominis sui fortuna destituat. Olim provisum est, ne quid Cato detrimenti caperet.
- 11 "Victus est tamen." Et hoc numerata inter repulsas Catonis; tam magno animo feret aliquid sibi ad victoriam quam ad praeturam obstitisse. Quo die repulsus est, lusit, qua nocte periturus fuit, legit. Eodem loco habuit praetura et vita excidere; omnia, quae acciderent, ferenda esse persuaserat sibi.
- 12 Quidni ille mutationem rei publicae forti et aequo

^a Egypt—47 B.C.; Africa (Thapsus)—46 B.C.; Spain (Munda)—45 B.C.

^b A sort of serious parody of the *senatus consultum ultimum*. For a discussion of the history and meaning of the phrase see W. Warde Fowler's *Cicero*, pp. 151–158.

^c Plato's *Phaedo*. Cato slew himself at Utica, 46 B.C., after Scipio's defeat at Thapsus.

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