

# THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

## LXXII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quod quaeris a me, liquebat mihi, sic rem edidiceram, per se. Sed diu non retemptavi memoriam meam, itaque non facile me sequitur. Quod evenit libris situ cohaerentibus, hoc evenisse mihi sentio; explicandus est animus et quaecumque apud illum deposita sunt, subinde excuti debent, ut parata sint, quotiens usus exegerit. Ergo hoc in praesentia differamus; multum enim operae, multum diligentiae poscit. Cum primum longiorem eodem loco spera-
- 2 vero moram, tunc istud in manus sumam. Quaedam enim sunt, quae possis et in cisio scribere. Quaedam lectum et otium et secretum desiderant. Nihilominus his quoque occupatis diebus agatur aliquid et quidem totis. Numquam enim non succedent occupationes novae; serimus illas, itaque ex una exeunt plures. Deinde ipsi nobis dilationem damus: "cum hoc peregero, toto animo incumbam" et "si hanc rem molestam composuero, studio me dabo."
- 3 Non cum vacaveris, philosophandum est; omnia alia negligenda, ut huic adsideamus, cui nullum

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<sup>a</sup> The context furnishes no clue as to what the subject was.

<sup>b</sup> Seneca is fond of legal figures; cf. *Ep.* lxxv. 15. For the *dilatatio* see Pliny, *Ep.* i. 18. *I rogas ut dilationem petam.*

<sup>c</sup> Cf. *Ep.* liii. 9 (*philosophia*) *non est res subsiciva* ("a matter for spare time"), *ordinaria est; domina est, adessa iubet.*

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### LXXII. ON BUSINESS AS THE ENEMY OF PHILOSOPHY

The subject<sup>a</sup> concerning which you question me was once clear to my mind, and required no thought, so thoroughly had I mastered it. But I have not tested my memory of it for some time, and therefore it does not readily come back to me. I feel that I have suffered the fate of a book whose rolls have stuck together by disuse; my mind needs to be unrolled, and whatever has been stored away there ought to be examined from time to time, so that it may be ready for use when occasion demands. Let us therefore put this subject off for the present; for it demands much labour and much care. As soon as I can hope to stay for any length of time in the same place, I shall then take your question in hand. For there are certain subjects about which you can write even while travelling in a gig, and there are also subjects which need a study-chair, and quiet, and seclusion. Nevertheless I ought to accomplish something even on days like these,—days which are fully employed, and indeed from morning till night. For there is never a moment when fresh employments will not come along; we sow them, and for this reason several spring up from one. Then, too, we keep adjourning our own cases,<sup>b</sup> saying: “As soon as I am done with this, I shall settle down to hard work,” or: “If I ever set this troublesome matter in order, I shall devote myself to study.”

But the study of philosophy is not to be postponed until you have leisure;<sup>c</sup> everything else is to be neglected in order that we may attend to philosophy,

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tempus satis magnum est, etiam si a pueritia usque ad longissimos humani aevi terminos vita producitur. Non multum refert, utrum omittas philosophiam an intermittas; non enim ubi interrupta est, manet, sed eorum more, quae intenta dissiliunt, usque ad initia sua recurrit, quod a continuatione discessit. Resistendum est occupationibus, nec explicandae, sed submovendae sunt. Tempus quidem nullum parum est idoneum studio salutari; atqui multi inter illa non  
4 student, propter quae studendum est. "Incidet aliquid, quod impediat." Non quidem eum, cuius animus in omni negotio laetus atque alacer est; imperfectis adhuc interscinditur laetitia, sapientis vero contextitur gaudium, nulla causa rumpitur, nulla fortuna, semper et ubique tranquillus<sup>1</sup> est. Non enim ex alieno pendet nec favorem fortunae aut hominis expectat. Domestica illi felicitas est; exiret  
5 ex animo, si intraret; ibi nascitur. Aliquando extrinsecus, quo admoneatur mortalitatis, intervenit, sed id leve et quod summam cutem stringat. Aliquo, inquam, incommodo adflatur; maximum autem illud bonum est fixum. Ita dico: extrinsecus aliqua sunt incommoda, velut in corpore interdum robusto solidoque eruptiones quaedam pusularum et ulcuscula,  
6 nullum in aīto malum est. Hoc, inquam, interest

<sup>1</sup> *tranquillus* Haase; *tranquillum* MSS.

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<sup>a</sup> Cf. Ep. xlv. 9 *intrepidus, quem aliqua vis movet, nulla perturbat, quem fortuna . . . pungit, non vulnerat, et hoc raro.*

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for no amount of time is long enough for it, even though our lives be prolonged from boyhood to the uttermost bounds of time allotted to man. It makes little difference whether you leave philosophy out altogether or study it intermittently; for it does not stay as it was when you dropped it, but, because its continuity has been broken, it goes back to the position in which it was at the beginning, like things which fly apart when they are stretched taut. We must resist the affairs which occupy our time; they must not be untangled, but rather put out of the way. Indeed, there is no time that is unsuitable for helpful studies; and yet many a man fails to study amid the very circumstances which make study necessary. He says: "Something will happen to hinder me." No, not in the case of the man whose spirit, no matter what his business may be, is happy and alert. It is those who are still short of perfection whose happiness can be broken off; the joy of a wise man, on the other hand, is a woven fabric, rent by no chance happening and by no change of fortune; at all times and in all places he is at peace. For his joy depends on nothing external and looks for no boon from man or fortune. His happiness is something within himself; it would depart from his soul if it entered in from the outside; it is born there. Sometimes an external happening reminds him of his mortality, but it is a light blow, and merely grazes the surface of his skin.<sup>a</sup> Some trouble, I repeat, may touch him like a breath of wind, but that Supreme Good of his is unshaken. This is what I mean: there are external disadvantages, like pimples and boils that break out upon a body which is normally strong and sound; but there is no deep-seated malady. The difference, I say, between

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inter consummatae sapientiae virum et alium procedentis, quod inter sanum et ex morbo gravi ac diutino emergentem, cui sanitatis loco est levior accessio: hic nisi attendit, subinde gravatur et in eadem revolvitur, sapiens recidere non potest, ne incidere quidem amplius. Corpori enim ad tempus bona valetudo est, quam medicus, etiam si reddidit, non praestat, saepe ad eundem, qui<sup>1</sup> advocaverat, excitatur. Animus<sup>2</sup> semel in totum sanatur.

- 7 Dicam, quomodo intellegam<sup>3</sup> sanum: si se ipso contentus est, si confidit sibi, si scit omnia vota mortalium, omnia beneficia quae dantur petunturque, nullum in beata vita habere momentum. Nam cui aliquid accedere potest, id imperfectum est; cui aliquid abscedere potest, id inperpetuum est; cuius perpetua futura laetitia est, is suo gaudeat. Omnia autem, quibus vulgus inhiat, ultro citroque fluunt. Nihil dat fortuna mancipio. Sed haec quoque fortuita tunc delectant, cum illa ratio temperavit ac miscuit; haec est, quae etiam externa commendet, quorum  
8 avidis usus ingratus est. Solebat Attalus hac imagine uti: "vidisti aliquando canem missa a domino frusta panis aut carnis aperto ore captantem? Quicquid exceptit, protinus integrum devorat et semper ad

<sup>1</sup> qui Lipsius; quem MSS.

<sup>2</sup> animus added by Muretus.

<sup>3</sup> intellegam Koch; intellegas MSS.

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<sup>a</sup> Cf. Lucretius, iii. 971 *vita mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu*. Our lives are merely loaned to us; Nature retains the *dominium*. Cf. also Seneca's frequent figure of life as an inn, contrasted with a house over which one has ownership.

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

I shall tell you what I mean by health: if the mind is content with its own self; if it has confidence in itself; if it understands that all those things for which men pray, all the benefits which are bestowed and sought for, are of no importance in relation to a life of happiness; under such conditions it is sound. For anything that can be added to is imperfect; anything that can suffer loss is not lasting; but let the man whose happiness is to be lasting, rejoice in what is truly his own. Now all that which the crowd gapes after, ebbs and flows. Fortune gives us nothing which we can really own.<sup>a</sup> But even these gifts of Fortune please us when reason has tempered and blended them to our taste; for it is reason which makes acceptable to us even external goods that are disagreeable to use if we absorb them too greedily. Attalus used to employ the following simile: "Did you ever see a dog snapping with wide-open jaws at bits of bread or meat which his master tosses to him? Whatever he catches, he straightway swallows whole, and always

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spem venturi hiat. Idem evenit nobis; quicquid expectantibus fortuna proiecit, id sine ulla voluptate demittimus statim, ad rapinam alterius erecti et adtoniti." Hoc sapienti non evenit; plenus est. Etiam si quid obvenit, secure excipit ac reponit.

9 Laetitia fruitur maxima, continua, sua. Habet aliquis bonam voluntatem, habet profectum, sed cui multum desit a summo; hic deprimitur alternis et extollitur ac modo in caelum adlevatur, modo defertur ad terram. Imperitis<sup>1</sup> ac rudibus nullus praecipitationis finis est; in Epicureum illud chaos decidunt, inane,  
10 sine termino. Est adhuc genus tertium eorum, qui sapientiae adludunt, quam non quidem contigerunt, in conspectu tamen et, ut ita dicam, sub ictu habent; hi non concutiuntur, ne defluunt quidem. Nondum in sicco, iam in portu sunt.

11 Ergo cum tam magna sint inter summos imosque discrimina, cum medios quoque sequatur fluctus<sup>2</sup> suus, sequatur ingens periculum ad deteriora redeundi, non debemus occupationibus indulgere. Excludendae sunt; si semel intraverint, in locum suum alias substituent. Principiis illarum obstemus. Melius non incipient, quam desinent. VALE.

<sup>1</sup> *imperitis* later MSS.; *impeditis* VPb.

<sup>2</sup> *fluctus* later MSS.; *fructus* VPb.

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<sup>a</sup> The Void (*inane*), or infinite space, as contrasted with the atoms which form new worlds in continuous succession.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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