26 During the second staged naval battle, one of the barbarians took the lance he had been given to use against his opponent and sank the whole of it into his own throat. "Why did I not escape long ago," he cried, "from every torment, every ridicule? Why? Why am I waiting for death when I have a weapon?" It made the show more worth watching, since from it people learn that dying is more honorable than killing.

27 Well, then. If desperate characters and criminals have such spirit, won't people also have it who have been prepared against misfortune by long practice and by reason, the ruler of all things? Reason teaches us that there are many ways of getting to our fate, but that the end is the same, and that since it is coming, it does not matter when it begins. **28** That same reasoning advises you to die in the way you prefer if you have that opportunity, but if not, to do so in whatever way you can, grasping any available means of doing violence to yourself. It is wrong to steal the means of living, but very fine to steal the means of dying.

Farewell.

Letter 71

From Seneca to Lucilius
Greetings

1 Over and over you consult me about specific matters, forgetting that you and I are separated by a wide and empty sea. Given that most advice depends on the situation, my response on some points is bound to reach you just when the opposite counsel would be more to your advantage. For advice is geared to events, and events are always moving—no, hurtling—along. So advice should be formulated on the day it is needed. And even that is too slow: let it be formulated "on the spot," as the saying goes.

How, then, is advice to be found? Let me explain. **2** Each time you want to know what to pursue or what to avoid, look to your highest good, the aim of your life as a whole. Everything we do ought to be in accordance with that aim. Only one who has the entirety of his life in view is in a position to arrange life's particulars. Even with paints all at the ready, no one can render a likeness until he has decided what he wants to paint. That's our mistake: everyone deliberates over the parts of life; no one over life as a whole. **3** If you want to shoot an arrow, you must know what you are trying to hit: only then can you direct the point and steady the shaft. Our counsels are all astray in that they have no mark to aim at. If one doesn't know what harbor to make for, there can be no favoring wind.

Chance has a great deal of power in our lives—necessarily so, since it is by chance that we are alive. **4** But sometimes people know things without knowing they know them. Just as we often look around for someone who is standing right next to us, so we generally fail to recognize life's goal and highest good even when it is before us. Lengthy explanations will not inform you what the highest good is: one must lay a finger on it, so to speak, and not let it be scattered about. How is it relevant for me to go into all the details, when one could simply say, "The highest good is that which is honorable."* Or, more surprisingly, "The sole good is that which is honorable; other supposed goods are counterfeit coin."

5 If you convince yourself of this, and fall deeply in love with virtue—for merely loving it is not enough!—then whatever virtue touches will be marvelously fortunate in your eyes, no matter how it appears to others. You will subdue even torture, if you bear it with no more concern than is felt by the torturer himself; even illness, if you do not curse fortune—that is, if you don't let the disease win. Indeed, everything others regard as bad will turn out to be a good if only you rise above it. Once you are clear on this point, that only what is honorable is good, then everything that is uncomfortable in itself will be counted as a good, as long as virtue renders it honorable. **6** Many people think that we Stoics promise more than the human condition is capable of, and with reason: they are looking to their bodies. Let them turn once again to the mind; then they will find in God the measure of humankind.*

Rouse yourself, most excellent Lucilius, and leave behind you that grammar school, those pedant philosophers who reduce this most amazing subject to words and syllables. By teaching the minutiae they debase the mind; they fritter it away. Be like those who made these discoveries, not like those who teach them with the aim of

making philosophy seem difficult rather than great. 7 Socrates, he who summoned all philosophy back toward ethics, used to say that the very height of wisdom is in distinguishing between good and bad. He said,

> If I have any authority with you, then follow those, so that you may be happy; and if someone thinks you are a fool, let him. Whoever wants to may insult you or do you wrong: you will be unaffected, as long as virtue is on your side. If you want to be happy, if you truly want to be a good man, then let yourself be despised.*

In order to achieve this, one must oneself learn to despise all things. One must level the field among all things that are good; for there is no good apart from what is honorable, and what is honorable is equal in every instance.*

8 "What do you mean? Does it not matter whether Cato is elected praetor or rejected?* Does it make no difference at all whether he is defeated at Pharsalus or defeats his enemy? Is this good that he has in remaining unconquerable when his side is defeated really equal to the good he would have had if he had won the battle, returned to his homeland, and established peace?" Why not? Virtue while defeating adversity is just the same as it is while holding the line in the midst of prosperity; yet virtue cannot be made larger or smaller: it has but the one size.

9 "But Gnaeus Pompey will lose his army; the nobles, fairest ornament of the Republic, and the first line of Pompey's faction—senators in arms!—will be smashed in a single battle. The collapse of so great a power will cast remnants across the whole world: part of it will fall in Egypt, another part in Africa, a third in Spain. Our poor Republic will not even be granted to have just the one downfall." 10 All of that may happen: Juba may gain no advantage for his knowledge of home terrain, or from the stubborn courage of his commoners defending their king; the loyalty of the Uticans may fail, broken down by adversity; Scipio may fall short of the luck his name had hitherto enjoyed in Africa.* Yet provision was made long ago that Cato should take no harm. 11 "But he was defeated." Yes, another setback for Cato. He will accept the obstacle to his victory just as nobly as he accepted the obstacles to his praetorship. The day he lost the election, he played a game; the night he was to die, he read a book.* It was all the same to him whether he lost the praetorship or lost his life; for he had convinced himself that whatever happened, he should endure it.

12 And really, why should he not endure the change in the Republic both courageously and calmly? What is exempt from the risk of change? Not the earth, not the sky, not the very fabric of the universe. Though woven by God's own agency, it will not keep to its present order forever: a day will come that will knock it off its course.* 13 All things proceed according to schedule: they must be born, grow, die. Everything you see passing above us, all that seems so solid beneath our feet, will crumble away; each thing has its own senescence. Nature sends them all away, after different spans yet to the same place. That which is, will not be.

Not that it perishes; rather it is dissolved. 14 For us, being dissolved is perishing, for we are looking at what is nearest to us. Our dull wits are pledged to the service of our bodies, and look no further than that. We would bear our own end and that of our loved ones with greater courage if we perceived that life and death, like everything else, come and go by turns. Compounds are dissolved, dissolute elements compounded, and in this way does the eternal craftsmanship of all-regulating God exert itself. 15 Thus like Marcus Cato our thoughts will speed through time and say,

> "All humankind, now and in the future, is doomed to die; all cities that have ruled the world and all that have been trophies of some other power will someday disappear from sight, wiped out by varied forms of ruin. Wars will destroy some; others will be swallowed up by desuetude, and peace that turns to idleness, and that which is most ruinous to great resources—luxury. All these fertile plains will someday be covered up by some sudden incursion of the sea, or engulfed by subsidence of the earth into an unexpected cavern. Why, then, should I complain? Why should I be sad to go just a moment sooner than the end decreed for nations and peoples? 16 A great spirit should obey God, not hesitating to comply with every instruction of the world's law. Either it is being sent away to a better life, to dwell in greater and more tranquil light amid the things of God, or at least it will be

free of discomfort, being mingled again with nature, returning to the universe."

So Cato's honorable life is not a greater good than his honorable death: virtue does not admit of augmentation. Socrates used to say that truth and virtue are the same thing. Just as truth does not increase, virtue does not increase either. It keeps its measures; it has its complement.*

17 You need not be surprised, then, that goods are equal to one another, not only those that one should make a point of pursuing but also those that one should take on if the situation warrants it. For if you accept that there is inequality, even such that you would consider the courageous endurance of torture to be one of the lesser goods, then you will also be regarding it as a bad thing.* You will be saying that Socrates was unfortunate in his prison, that Cato was unfortunate when he reopened his wounds even more bravely than he made them, that Regulus was more terribly afflicted than any of them, in that he kept a promise even to his enemies and paid the penalty for doing so. Yet no one, not even the most fainthearted, has dared to say that: they say that Regulus was not happy yet insist that he was not miserable either.* **18** The Old Academics admit that Regulus was happy even amid such torments, but not to the full and perfect extent of happiness.* This is completely unacceptable. If one is not happy, one cannot have attained the highest good. The highest good does not admit of any further degree of goodness, as long as there is virtue in it; as long as adversity does not diminish that virtue; as long as virtue remains intact even when the body is maimed. But it does remain intact, for I understand "virtue" to refer to that brave, exalted virtue which draws energy from whatever opposes it.

19 Young men of noble disposition, when struck by the beauty of some honorable deed, frequently adopt an attitude of not caring about any of the contingencies. But wisdom will confer that same way of thinking without further ado. Wisdom will shower us° with the conviction that what is honorable is the sole good, and that the honorable cannot be either reduced or heightened, any more than you can bend the straight line that is the accepted standard for straightness. Any change you make in it is detrimental to straightness. **20** Thus we will say the same about virtue: it too is straight; it does not admit of curvature. Once a thing is vertical, what increase can be made in it?°* Virtue takes the measure of everything; nothing takes the measure of virtue. If virtue itself cannot be made any more straight and right, then no one of the things it does is more right than any other, for they necessarily conform to virtue's standard. Hence they are all equal.

21 "What's this?" you say. "Reclining at dinner is equal to being tortured?" Does this surprise you? Here is something that will amaze you even more: reclining at dinner is bad and lying on the rack is good if the one is done in a disgraceful manner and the other honorably. It is not the material that makes them good or bad but virtue: wherever that appears, everything is of the same measure and the same value.*

22 At this point, the person who judges everyone's spirit by his own waves his hands in my face because I say there is equality of goods between an honorable judge and an honorable defendant, and equality of goods between the returning general in his victory parade and the mentally unconquered captive that is trundled along in front of his chariot. Such people think that whatever they cannot do cannot be done; they form opinions about virtue based on their own weakness.

23 Why are you surprised that being burned, wounded, struck down, or shackled should be a source of satisfaction, sometimes even of gladness? When one is devoted to luxurious living, frugality is a punishment; when one is lazy, work is like a sentence; the fashionably effete person pities the industrious one; the idler finds study a torment. In just the same way, when we are all too weak for a task we think of it as harsh and intolerable. We forget there are many people who find it burdensome to go without wine or to be awakened at dawn. These things are not difficult by nature, but we ourselves are listless and feeble. **24** To take the measure of great challenges, one must have a great mind: otherwise one will think the fault lies with circumstances rather than with us. It is like certain objects which despite being quite straight still give the appearance of being bent or broken when lowered into the water.* It's not only what you see that matters; it's how you see. Our minds are too clouded to see things as they really are.

25 Give me a quick-witted youth who has not been corrupted;* he

will say that in his view, the more fortunate person is the one whose shoulders are unbowed as he bears every burden of adversity, the person who rises superior to fortune. Not to flinch in times of calm—there's nothing remarkable about that! What should excite wonder is when someone rises up while all are downcast; when someone stands while all are laid low.

26 What is it that is bad about torture or other events we regard as unfavorable? Just this, I think: abasing one's mind, bowing down, yielding. None of these can happen to the man of wisdom: he stands upright under any load. Nothing diminishes him; nothing he has to endure displeases him. Among all the things that can happen to a human being, there is not one that he complains of just because it has happened to him. He knows his own strength; he knows that he exists for the bearing of burdens.

27 I do not put the sage in a separate class from the rest of humankind, and neither do I eliminate pain and grief from him as if he were some sort of rock, not susceptible to any feeling. I keep in mind that he is made up of two parts. One is nonrational, and it is this that experiences the biting, the burning, the pain.* The other part is rational; it is this that holds unshakable opinions and that is fearless and unconquerable. In this latter resides the highest good of humankind. Before that good is filled out, the mind is uncertain and in turmoil; but when it has been perfected, the mind is stable and unmoved. **28** For this reason, the person who has made a start, the one who is committed to virtue but is still ascending the summit, who even if he is drawing near to perfect goodness has yet to apply the finishing touches, will sometimes slack off and allow his concentration to falter. For he has not yet gotten past the uncertainties; he is still on shaky ground. But the truly happy person, the person of accomplished virtue, loves himself most when he has met some challenge with exceptional courage. Trials that other people find frightening he not only endures but actually embraces, if they are the price of some honorable obligation. Rather than "What good fortune!" he would much prefer to hear "What good work!"

29 I come now to the point you have been expecting me to address. Lest it should seem that this virtue of ours strays outside the natural order, the wise person will tremble and feel pain and grow pale. For all these are feelings of the body. Where, then, is the malady? Where is the real harm? I'll tell you: it is when those responses pull the mind down, when they induce it to confess itself a slave, when they make it regret its own nature.* **30** The wise person vanquishes misfortune through courage, but many who profess wisdom are terrified at times by the most trivial of threats. At this point the fault is ours, for demanding the same from one who is making progress as from the sage. I am still persuading myself of the principles I extol; I am not fully convinced. And even if I were, I would not have the lessons so well prepared, so well practiced, as to have them spring to my defense in every tribulation. **31** Just as some dyes are readily absorbed by the wool, others only after repeated soaking and simmering, so there are some studies that show up well in our minds as soon as we have learned them; this one, though, must permeate us thoroughly. It must soak in, giving not just a tinge of color but a real deep dye, or it cannot deliver on any of its promises.

32 To tell it requires but a few quick words: that virtue is the sole good, and certainly that nothing is good without virtue; moreover, that virtue itself is located in our better part, namely, the rational part. What is this virtue? True and unshakable judgment, for from this come the impulses of the mind; by this, every impression that stimulates impulse is rendered perfectly clear.*

33 It will be consonant with this judgment to regard all things that are associated with virtue as goods and as equal to one another. The goods of the body are indeed good for bodies, but overall they are not goods. They will indeed have some value, but no true worth; and they will differ widely from one another, some being of lesser degree and others greater. **34** Even among those who pursue wisdom, we must admit there are differences. One person's progress is such that he dares to face up to fortune, but not steadily; he lowers his gaze again when dazzled by the glare. Another has advanced to where he can confront fortune directly, or perhaps he has even mounted to the summit, his confidence complete. **35** What is imperfect cannot but stumble. Now they advance; now they slip backward or fall. But they will indeed slip backward if they do not persevere in their struggle and their progress: if they relax their efforts, their faithful determination, they must necessarily lose ground. No one abandons the cause and then takes it up again at the same point.

36 Let us press on, then; let us persevere. The challenges that lie

ahead are greater than those we have overcome already. But most of progress consists in being willing to make progress.* This I recognize in myself: I am willing—with my entire mind, I am willing. And I see that you too are inspired; you are hurrying eagerly toward the most beautiful of ends. Let us both make haste! Only then is life worth living. Otherwise we are just marking time, and shamefully too, surrounded by ugliness. Let us strive to make every moment belong to us—but it never will belong to us until we belong to ourselves.

37 How long till I despise both bad fortune and good? How long till I subdue every passion, subject them to my judgment, and cry, "Victory is mine!" Do you ask who it is that I have conquered? Not the Persians, not the most distant Medes, not some warlike tribe out beyond the furthest Parthians but avarice, and ambition, and that which conquers the conquerors of nations: the fear of death.

Farewell.

Letter 72

From Seneca to Lucilius
Greetings

1 The point you are inquiring about used to be plain as day to me; that's how thoroughly I knew the material. But it has been a long time since I tested my memory, and hence I cannot now recall it easily. You know what happens to papyrus rolls when they become stuck together with disuse; well, I feel as if that has happened to me: my mind needs to be unrolled occasionally and its contents brought to light if they are to be available when the need arises. So let's defer your question for the time being: it demands much effort and attention. As soon as I expect to stay in one place for a longer period, I will take it in hand. 2 For there are some subjects one can write about even in a traveling carriage; others demand a comfortable seat, some leisure time, and freedom from distraction.

Still, I should have some project to work on even in these busy days, entirely full though they are. For there will always be some new occupation to replace the one before it. We plant them like seeds, each producing many more. Besides, we keep giving ourselves postponements. "Once I finish this, I will devote my whole mind to it," and "As soon as I get through this troublesome task, I will give myself over to study." 3 We ought not to wait for our spare time to practice philosophy; rather, we should neglect other occupations to pursue this one task for which no amount of time would be sufficient, even if our lives were prolonged to the greatest extent of the human lifespan. You might as well not bother with philosophy if you are going to practice it intermittently. For it does not stay in one place during an interruption. No, it is like some object that springs back after being compressed: once you let up, you revert to where you were before. You have to take a stand against occupations. Rather than reducing your encumbrances, you should get rid of them altogether. There is no time that is not well suited to these healing studies, yet there are many who fail to study when caught up in the problems that give one reason to study.

4 "Some chance event will hinder me." But nothing hinders the one whose mind is cheerful and eager in every occupation. When one is imperfect, one's cheerfulness is still subject to interruption; but wise joy is seamless.* It is not interrupted by any cause, any chance event. The wise person is always and everywhere tranquil; for he does not depend on what belongs to another, and does not wait upon the favor of fortune or of any other person. His happiness lives at home. If it came into the mind from elsewhere, it would also depart—but it is born there. 5 He does occasionally experience a disturbance from outside to remind him of his mortality, but one that is too slight to do more than scratch the surface.* Yes, he feels the winds of adversity, but the greatest good is firmly in place. That is to say, there are some discomforts that are external to him, just as a strong, sound body might have a scratch or a pimple without there being any deep-seated affliction.

6 I mean that the difference between the man of perfect wisdom and another who is making progress toward wisdom is like the difference between a healthy person and one who is recovering from a long and serious illness, with whom it counts as health if he merely has a less serious episode of his disease. If this latter person does not pay attention, his progress becomes more and more difficult, with frequent backsliding, whereas the wise person cannot suffer a relapse

and despises them as calmly as Jupiter does; in fact, he thinks more highly of himself in that while Jupiter cannot use those things, he, being wise, does not want to.

15 So let us believe Sextius when he shows us this most beautiful journey, when he cries, "This is the road by which one mounts to the stars: the road of frugality, the road of self-control, the road of courage." The gods are not scornful; they are not jealous of their own: they are welcoming; they lend a hand to those who would climb up. **16** Are you astounded that a human being can go to the gods? God comes to human beings. No, it is more intimate than that: God actually comes *into* human beings. For excellence of mind is never devoid of God. Seeds of divinity are scattered in human bodies: if a good gardener takes them in hand, the seedlings resemble their source and grow up equal to the parent plant. But poor cultivation, like sterile or boggy soil, kills the plants and produces only a crop of weeds.

Farewell.

Letter 74 The Good

From Seneca to Lucilius
Greetings

1 Your letter was a delight to me, dear Lucilius: it roused me, for I was growing faint; and it stirred my memory, which tends to be slow and feeble. You hold—and why shouldn't you!—that the best means toward happiness is this conviction of ours that honorable conduct is the only good. For he who regards other things as good is dominated by fortune and subject to another's whim; he who limits goodness to what is honorable is happy within himself.

2 One person is grieved when his children die, worried when they are sick; another is sad when they are of base character and tinged with notoriety. This fellow is wracked with love for another's wife; that one with love for his own. You will find one man tormented by a lost election; for another, elected office yields its own frustrations. **3** But of all the suffering crowds of humankind, the greatest is of those who are troubled by the thought of death. That thought meets

fear / death

them at every turn, for death may come from any direction. Like troops passing through enemy territory, they must be looking around all the time, turning their heads at every sound. Unless this fear is driven from the breast, we live with quaking hearts.

4 You will find some who have suffered exile and confiscation of property; others who endure the worst form of poverty, for they are bankrupt in the midst of wealth. You will find shipwrecked sailors and men who have undergone another kind of shipwreck, since the people's wrath or their envy—that dart most deadly to the upper class—has struck them carefree and unawares and has flattened them like one of those sudden storms that blow up from a cloudless sky, or like a thunderbolt that causes all the land around to tremble. Just as when someone is struck by lightning the bystanders are stunned as well, so in these chance disasters one is stricken by calamity, others by fear, as much alarmed by the sight of what can happen as those are to whom it has actually happened. **5** Everyone is made anxious by the sudden misfortunes of others. Like birds that are put to flight by the whir of the sling whether or not it is loaded, we are startled not only by the blow but even by the sound of the blow.

No one can be happy, then, who entrusts himself to this belief. For there is no happiness without tranquility: a life amid anxieties is a life of misery. **6** Everyone who is much devoted to the advantages of fortune inevitably sets himself up for great emotional turmoil. There is but one road that leads to safety: you must rise above external things and be content with what is honorable. For he who thinks there is something better than virtue, or that anything besides virtue is good at all, exposes his breast to everything fortune can throw at him and waits anxiously for the blows to land.

7 Set before your mind the following image. Fortune is putting on a festival; elected office, wealth, and popularity are the largesse that it scatters amid this mortal crowd. Some of that largesse is torn to bits by many grasping hands; some shared out in faithless bargains; some carried off to the detriment of those who get it. Some of that falls to the inattentive; some is knocked away by those trying too eagerly to snatch it; but even when luck attends the catching, none of it brings anyone a joy that lasts even until tomorrow. The intelligent person therefore deserts the theater as soon as he sees the gifts brought in: he knows that small favors may come at a high price. No one grapples

with him as he is leaving; no one throws a punch as he is headed for the door; the scuffle is around the loot. **8** The same thing happens with the gifts that fortune showers upon us. Poor things, we are all in a fever and a fret; we wish that we had many hands; we look this way and that. We think they are too slow in coming, these gifts that madden us with desire, that come to so few, though all expect them. **9** We want to be where they are falling; we rejoice if we catch a few where others have been disappointed. Either we pay a great price in anxiety for our cheap trinkets, or we get none° and are disappointed. Let us withdraw, then, from the show, yielding our places to those who are still snatching for the prizes. Let them be the ones to gaze at those goods suspended in midair—and let them be in greater suspense themselves.

10 The person who is determined to be happy should make up his mind that the one good thing is honorable conduct. For if he imagines that there is any other good, first of all he thinks ill of providence, since many uncomfortable things happen to just men, and since whatever gifts we do receive are small and of brief duration compared with the age of the universe. **11** It is in consequence of this complaint that we are such thankless interpreters of the divine. We complain that our blessings are not ours forever, and that they are few, unreliable, and fleeting. Hence we are unwilling to live, unwilling to die; loathing life, we yet fear death. Every plan is adrift; no good fortune can satisfy us.

The reason, though, is that we have not attained that measureless and insurmountable good where all our wanting must come to an end, since beyond the summit there is nowhere more to go. **12** Do you ask why virtue lacks nothing? Virtue rejoices in present goods; has no longing for what is absent; finds nothing meager that will suffice. Abandon this attitude, and loyalty is lost; integrity is lost. For to preserve those values, one must endure many things that are regarded as bad and forgo many indulgences that are regarded as good. **13** Gone is courage, which requires risking oneself; gone is greatness of spirit, which cannot rise above its surroundings unless it holds in low esteem those objects which the common crowd prize most highly. Gratitude is lost, and readiness to return a favor, if we are afraid of hard work, if we treasure anything more than loyalty, if we do not turn our gaze toward what is best.

14 But besides all that, either those so-called goods really are not good or human beings are more fortunate than God. For God makes no use of those things that are dear to us: lust means nothing to him, nor the delicacies of the table, nor wealth, nor any other of those tawdry pleasures that humans find so enticing. Either we must believe that there are goods that God does not have, or God's not having them is proof that they are not goods. **15** Moreover, many of these would-be goods belong to animals more abundantly than to human beings. Animals partake of food more eagerly, are less exhausted by sexual intercourse, have greater and more consistent strength. It follows that they are much happier than humans. For they live without wickedness or deceit; they have a greater and easier capacity for pleasure, and they enjoy those pleasures with no fear of shame or regret.

16 Consider, then, whether that in which humanity surpasses the divine should be called good. Let us enclose the highest good within the mind: it loses its meaning if it passes from our best part to our worst, and is transferred to the senses, which are keener in speechless animals. Our supreme felicity ought not to be assigned to the flesh. The goods that reason gives are real; they are solid and eternal; they cannot fail; they cannot decrease or be diminished. **17** Those others are the goods of opinion: they share their name with real goods, but the distinctive property of the good is not in them. For this reason let them be termed "comforts," or, to use our school's terminology, "preferred things."* Let us realize that they are our possessions, not parts of ourselves; let them be with us only insofar as we remember that they are external to us. And even if they are with us, let them be counted as servants of the most humble kind, about which no one has reason to boast. What is more foolish than taking pride in something one did not personally perform?

18 May all those things come to us, but may they not cling to us; so that if they should be taken away, their departure will not tear us apart. Let us use them, not glory in them; and let us use them sparingly, as loans that will someday be recalled. One who possesses them in an unreasoning manner does not keep them for long: in the absence of moderation, his very abundance is oppressive. If he trusts in these advantages that are so fleeting, they soon desert him; even if they do not,° they are still an affliction. Few people have been

able to lay aside an abundance of goods gracefully. All the rest are brought down along with the fortunes that surrounded them in their eminence; they are weighed down by that which had exalted them.

19 Therefore let intelligence come to our aid, imposing limits and careful management. For profligacy squanders its resources: the immoderate cannot last without moderating reason to keep it in check. You can see this in the fate of many cities that at the very height of their power have been laid low by self-indulgent regimes: everything courage has won, intemperance has destroyed. We must guard against such disasters. But there is no rampart fortune cannot storm. Our defenses must be arrayed within: if that part is safe, a person can be assailed but can never be captured. **20** Would you like to know what those defenses are? Taking no offense at anything that happens; knowing that what seems to harm you belongs to the preservation of the universe and fulfills the world's order and function; being pleased with whatever has been pleasing to God; taking pride in yourself and your own for one reason only: that you cannot be conquered, that you rise above your very ills, that by reason, the most powerful force there is, you overcome every misfortune, pain, and injury.

21 Fall in love with reason! That love will arm you against the toughest trials. Love for her cubs hurls the lioness onto the javelin; savagery and impulsiveness make her indomitable. Hunger for glory moves many a young man's heart to despise both fire and sword. The semblance and shadow of courage drive some to willful death. As reason is braver and steadier than any of these, so does it issue forth more valiantly through every fear and danger.

22 One might say, "It is futile to insist that there is no good but what is honorable. That armament will not make you safe from fortune and invulnerable. For among goods your school includes devoted children, good customs in one's homeland, and good parents. When those are endangered, you cannot look on without anxiety. You will be disturbed by an attack on your homeland, the death of your children, the enslavement of your parents."*

23 In reply I will first set down the points that are customarily made on behalf of our school,* then add a further response that I think ought to be made.

The situation is different with those things whose loss means that they are replaced by some discomfort. For instance, when good health is ruined, it turns into ill health; when keen eyesight is extinguished, we are afflicted with blindness; when the tendons of the knee are cut, we not only lose the ability to run quickly but become lame as well. But with the objects I mentioned just now, there is no such risk. How so? If I have lost a good friend, I need not suffer disloyalty in his place; if my good children have died, neglectful ones do not succeed them.

24 A further point is that in these cases, it is not the friends or the children that are lost but only their bodies. There is only one way the good perishes, namely, if it becomes bad; but nature does not permit that, since every virtue and every act of virtue remains unspoiled. Moreover, even if one's friends have indeed perished, and children of proven worth who were everything a parent could wish, we have something to fill the void. "What is that?" you ask. The same thing as made them good: virtue. **25** Virtue leaves no space empty; it occupies the entire mind, obviating all sense of loss. Virtue by itself is enough, for it has within it the strength and source of all good things. What does it matter if running water is intercepted or diverted, when the spring from which it flowed is undiminished? You will not say that a person's life is more just, more temperate, more intelligent, or more honorable when his children are alive than when they are lost; therefore it is not better either. Adding friends does not make one wiser; removing them does not make one more foolish; therefore friends do not make one happier or more miserable. As long as virtue is whole and sound, you will not feel any loss.

26 "What are you saying? How can a person not be happier when surrounded by a crowd of friends and children?" Why should he be? The highest good neither decreases nor increases: it continues to fill out its own limit, no matter how fortune behaves. Regardless of whether he lives to a ripe old age or dies before growing old, the measure of the ultimate good is the same, even if its lifespan is different. **27** Whether you draw a large circle or a small one concerns the size, not the shape. One may last a long time; the other you may erase immediately, reducing it to the dust in which it was drawn, but both were the same with regard to their shape. Straightness is not a matter of size or number or duration; it cannot be either extended or reduced. Take an honorable life of a hundred years' duration and contract it to any length you wish, even to a single day: it is still

equally honorable. **28** Sometimes virtue expands its scope; it rules kingdoms, cities, provinces, looks after friendships, performs various responsibilities among neighbors and children; at other times it is enclosed within a tight boundary of poverty, exile, or bereavement. Yet it is not made smaller when brought down to earth from a loftier pinnacle, from the estate of kings to that of the private citizen, from wide jurisdiction to the limitations of a single household or even a corner. **29** It is equally great even if it withdraws into itself, closed off on every side. For its spirit is no less great, no less upright, no less precise in intelligence, no less inflexible in justice. Therefore it is equally happy, for true happiness resides in just one place: the mind itself. The stability, the grandeur, the tranquility, of real happiness cannot be attained without knowledge of things divine and human.*

30 Now, here is the reply I said I would give on my own account. The wise person is not afflicted by the loss of children or of friends, because he endures their death in the same spirit as he awaits his own. He does not fear the one any more than he grieves over the other. For virtue is made up of consistency: all its actions harmonize and agree with one another. This harmony is lost if the mind, which by rights should be elevated, is brought down by desire or grief. All anxiety and worry is dishonorable, all reluctance to act; for honorable conduct is sure and unhampered, undismayed, ever standing at the ready.

31 "What do you mean? Doesn't the wise person experience something similar to emotion? Won't his color change, his expression show signs of alarm, his limbs grow cold, and everything else that does not come about at the mind's behest but by some unintentional impulse of nature?"* I grant that, but he will remain unchanged in his conviction that not one of the objects mentioned is bad or is such that a sound mind should quail at it. Everything that is to be done he will do promptly and boldly. **32** For it has been said that the distinctive property of foolishness is that all its actions are performed in a slothful and recalcitrant manner. The body goes in one direction, the mind in another; contrary impulses tear the person apart. The objects of its vanity and conceit are the very ones that render it despicable, and the actions in which it takes pride are not even willingly performed.

But when foolishness has something to fear, it is as tormented in its expectation as though the bad thing had already occurred: what it fears to endure, it endures already through fear. **33** Just as with bodily illness there are advance warnings that precede a seizure—a listless heaviness, unexplained fatigue, yawning, and a tingling that runs through the limbs—even so is the unhealthy mind shaken by misfortunes long before it is actually confronted with them: it anticipates them and is afflicted before its time. Yet what could be more senseless than suffering over what has not yet happened? Rather than awaiting future trials, you are summoning them to your side! Better you should delay them if you cannot dispel them altogether.

34 "Why," you ask, "should a person not be tormented by the future?" Suppose one were to hear that in fifty years' time he would be put to torture. The only way he would be alarmed would be if he were to bypass the intervening years and insert himself into the anxiety that is to come a lifespan later. The same thing happens with minds that deliberately make themselves ill by sorrowing over events long in the past. They are seeking out reasons for grief. Both the past and the future are absent; we have no sensation of either. And where you have no sensation, there is no source of pain.

Farewell.