

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

L. ANNAEI SENECAE AD LUCILIIUM EPISTULAE

LXVI.

SENECA LUCILIO SVO SALVTEM

1 Claranum, condiscipulum meum, vidi post multos annos. Non, puto, exspectas, ut adiciam senem, sed mehercules viridem animo ac vigentem et cum corpusculo suo conluctantem. Inique enim se natura gessit et talem animum male conlocavit; aut fortasse voluit hoc ipsum nobis ostendere, posse ingenium fortissimum ac beatissimum sub qualibet cute latere. Vincit tamen omnia inpedimenta et ad cetera con-

2 temnenda a contemptu sui venit. Errare mihi visus est, qui dixit

gratior et pulchro veniens e¹ corpore virtus.

Non enim ullo honestamento eget; ipsa magnum sui decus est et corpus suum consecrat. Aliter² certe Claranum nostrum coepi intueri; formosus mihi videtur et tam rectus corpore quam est animo.

3 Potest ex casa vir magnus exire, potest et ex deformi humilique corpusculo formosus animus ac magnus. Quosdam itaque mihi videtur in hoc tales natura

¹ The Vergil MSS. give *in*.

² *consecrat aliter* Haase; *consecraliter* MSS.

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LXVI. ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF VIRTUE

I HAVE just seen my former school-mate Claranus for the first time in many years. You need not wait for me to add that he is an old man ; but I assure you that I found him hale in spirit and sturdy, although he is wrestling with a frail and feeble body. For Nature acted unfairly when she gave him a poor domicile for so rare a soul ; or perhaps it was because she wished to prove to us that an absolutely strong and happy mind can lie hidden under any exterior. Be that as it may, Claranus overcomes all these hindrances, and by despising his own body has arrived at a stage where he can despise other things also. The poet who sang

Worth shows more pleasing in a form that's fair,^a

is, in my opinion, mistaken. For virtue needs nothing to set it off ; it is its own great glory, and it hallows the body in which it dwells. At any rate, I have begun to regard Claranus in a different light ; he seems to me handsome, and as well-set-up in body as in mind. A great man can spring from a hovel ; so can a beautiful and great soul from an ugly and insignificant body. For this reason Nature seems to

^a Vergil, *Aeneid*, v. 314.

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generare, ut adprobet virtutem omni loco nasci. Si posset per se nudos edere animos, fecisset; nunc, quod amplius est, facit; quosdam enim edit corporibus inpeditos, sed nihilominus perrumpentes
4 obstantia. Claranus mihi videtur in exemplar editus, ut scire possemus non deformitate corporis foedari animum, sed pulchritudine animi corpus ornari.

Quamvis autem paucissimos una fecerimus dies, tamen multi nobis sermones fuerunt, quos subinde
5 egeram et ad te permittam. Hoc primo die quaesitum est: quomodo possint paria¹ bona esse, si triplex eorum condicio est. Quaedam, ut nostris videtur, prima bona sunt, tamquam gaudium, pax, salus patriae; quaedam secunda, in materia infelici expressa, tamquam tormentorum patientia et in morbo gravi temperantia. Illa bona directo optabimus nobis, haec, si necesse erit. Sunt adhuc tertia, tamquam modestus incessus et compositus ac probus
6 voltus et conveniens prudenti viro gestus. Quomodo ista inter se paria¹ esse possunt, cum alia optanda sint, alia aversanda? Si volumus ista distinguere, ad primum bonum revertamur et consideremus id quale sit: animus intuens vera, peritus fugiendorum ac

¹ *paria* the later MSS. ; *tria* pVPb.

^a Seneca is not speaking here of the three generic virtues (physical, ethical, logical), nor of the three kinds of goods (based on bodily advantage) which were classified by the Peripatetic school; he is only speaking of three sorts of circumstances under which the good can manifest itself. And in §§ 36 ff. he shows that he regards only the first two classes as real goods. See Zeller, *Stoics*, p. 230, n. 3.

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me to breed certain men of this stamp with the idea of proving that virtue springs into birth in any place whatever. Had it been possible for her to produce souls by themselves and naked, she would have done so; as it is, Nature does a still greater thing, for she produces certain men who, though hampered in their bodies, none the less break through the obstruction. I think Claranus has been produced as a pattern, that we might be enabled to understand that the soul is not disfigured by the ugliness of the body, but rather the opposite, that the body is beautified by the comeliness of the soul.

Now, though Claranus and I have spent very few days together, we have nevertheless had many conversations, which I will at once pour forth and pass on to you. The first day we investigated this problem: how can goods be equal if they are of three kinds?^a For certain of them, according to our philosophical tenets, are primary, such as joy, peace, and the welfare of one's country. Others are of the second order, moulded in an unhappy material, such as the endurance of suffering, and self-control during severe illness. We shall pray outright for the goods of the first class; for the second class we shall pray only if the need shall arise. There is still a third variety, as, for example, a modest gait, a calm and honest countenance, and a bearing that suits the man of wisdom. Now how can these things be equal when we compare them, if you grant that we ought to pray for the one and avoid the other? If we would make distinctions among them, we had better return to the First Good, and consider what its nature is: the soul that gazes upon truth, that is skilled in what should be sought and what should

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petendorum, non ex opinione, sed ex natura pretia rebus inponens, toti se inserens mundo et in omnes eius actus contemplationem suam mittens, cogitationibus actionibusque intentus, ex aequo magnus ac vehemens, asperis blandisque pariter invictus, neutri se fortunæ summittens, supra omnia quæ contingunt acciduntque eminens, pulcherrimus, ordinatissimus cum decore tum¹ viribus, sanus ac siccus, inperturbatus, intrepidus, quem nulla vis frangat, quem nec adtollant fortuita nec deprimant; talis animus virtus 7 est. Haec eius est facies, si sub unum veniat aspectum et semel tota se ostendat. Ceterum multae eius species sunt. Pro vitae varietate et pro actionibus explicantur; nec minor fit aut maior ipsa. Decrescere enim summum bonum non potest nec virtuti ire retro licet; sed in alias atque alias qualitates convertitur ad rerum, quas actura est, habitum 8 figurata. Quidquid attigit, in similitudinem sui adducit et tinguit; actiones, amicitias, interdum domos totas, quas intravit disposuitque, condecorat. Quidquid tractavit, id amabile, conspicuum, mirabile facit.

Itaque vis eius et magnitudo ultra non potest surgere, quando incrementum maximo non est. Nihil invenies rectius recto, non magis quam verius 9 vero, quam temperato temperatius. Omnis sine

¹ tum Haase; cum MSS.

^a *Siccus* (not in the sense of *Ep.* xviii. 4) here means "vigorous," "healthy," "dry"; *i. e.*, free from dropsy, catarrh, etc.

^b *Cf.*, from among many passages, *Ep.* lxxi. 20 f. and xcii. 16 ff.

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be avoided, establishing standards of value not according to opinion, but according to nature,—the soul that penetrates the whole world and directs its contemplating gaze upon all its phenomena, paying strict attention to thoughts and actions, equally great and forceful, superior alike to hardships and blandishments, yielding itself to neither extreme of fortune, rising above all blessings and tribulations, absolutely beautiful, perfectly equipped with grace as well as with strength, healthy and sinewy,^a unruffled, undismayed, one which no violence can shatter, one which acts of chance can neither exalt nor depress,—a soul like this is virtue itself. There you have its outward appearance, if it should ever come under a single view and show itself once in all its completeness. But there are many aspects of it. They unfold themselves according as life varies and as actions differ; but virtue itself does not become less or greater.^b For the Supreme Good cannot diminish, nor may virtue retrograde; rather is it transformed, now into one quality and now into another, shaping itself according to the part which it is to play. Whatever it has touched it brings into likeness with itself, and dyes with its own colour. It adorns our actions, our friendships, and sometimes entire households which it has entered and set in order. Whatever it has handled it forthwith makes lovable, notable, admirable.

Therefore the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is superlatively great. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate. Every virtue is

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