

Happiness

Pierre Gassendi

1650

Copyright ©2010–2015 All rights reserved. Jonathan Bennett

[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type. —This version is based on the French translation of the work by Gassendi's friend François Bernier. When a passage by an ancient author is reported or quoted in French, Bernier usually gives it in Latin also; his French versions are pretty accurate, so the Latin will be passed over silently except where there is a reason to call attention to it. —For the other work by Gassendi presented on this website, see the final set of Objections to Descartes's *Meditations*.

First launched: March 2021

Contents

1: What happiness is	1
(i) Various opinions about the causes of happiness	2
(ii) Seven principles which, if examined and meditated on, contribute greatly to happiness and peace of mind	4
2: What kind of pleasure Epicurus thinks is the goal of the happy life	16
(i) How Epicurus and Aristippus differ	22
(ii) Epicurus on the wise man's condition and joy	23
(iii) The mind's pains and pleasures are greater than the body's	24
(iv) How Epicurus differs from the Stoics	25
(v) According to Epicurus, the virtues aim at pleasure as the goal of the happy life	26
3: What constitutes a happy life	29
(i) Whether all pleasure is a good in itself	30
(ii) Whether the Stoics' opinion about good and evil is tenable	31
(iii) Whether one might sometimes prefer pain to pleasure	32
(iv) The chief good intended by nature	33
(v) Practical good has to do with pleasure	36
(vi) Honest good has to do with pleasure	37
(vii) Whether the desire for honour is blameworthy	38
4: What good comes from moral virtue	39
(i) Self-love	44
(ii) The false virtue and false happiness of Regulus	46
5: Only the wise embrace moral virtue	49
(i) Tranquility of mind in particular	51
(ii) Life, and active happiness	53
(iii) Is contemplative happiness preferable to active happiness?	54
(iv) Freedom from pain in particular	56
6: How much good and virtue there is in being able to live on little	60
An account of India's Diogeneses	70

Glossary

enjoy(ment): Translates *jouissance*, using ‘enjoy’ in a sense that was common back then, in which to enjoy something is to have the use of it, be on the receiving end of it, possibly but not necessarily with pleasure.

has (something) to do with: Usually translates *se rapporte à*, which could mean something more specific such as ‘matches’ or ‘depends on’. The expression starts to become prominent on page 36.

indifferent: Neither good nor bad. As applied to alternatives: It doesn’t matter—it makes no real difference—which is chosen.

indolence: Translates the French *indolence*. Not a good translation, because it suggests laziness, culpable slackness. But it is hard to know what to do with Epicurus’s use of the term to describe one of life’s major goals.

mœurs: The *mœurs* of a people include their morality, their basic customs, their attitudes and expectations about how people will behave, their ideas about what is decent... and so on. This word—rhyming approximately with ‘worse’—is left untranslated because there’s no English word equivalent

to it. Good English dictionaries include it, for the sort of reason they have for including *schadenfreude*.

philosopher: In this work, ‘philosophers’ are sometimes scientists but sometimes philosophers in our sense of the word.

pleasure, pleasure: The former translates *volupté*, the latter *plaisir*. The two states are sometimes set side by side, implying that they differ somehow, but this work draws no clean comprehensive line between them; and on page 36 *plaisir* is one of a list of words said to be ‘synonyms’ of *volupté*.

pleasurable: Translates *doux* (except when this is applied to a person).

vexation: Translates *chagrin*: Not a particularly good translation, but it’s hard to know how to handle this term, which sometimes—especially on page 25—seems to carry great weight.

vulgar: As applied to people: low-class, ill-educated, not very intelligent. As applied to customs or institutions: suitable for such people.

1: What happiness is

Strictly speaking, happiness is the *enjoyment of* the chief good, and therefore the best state that can be desired; but because this state of enjoyment includes the chief good, happiness itself came to be called the chief good. It is also called ‘the chief of goods’, ‘the goal of the goals’ and ‘the goal *par excellence*’, because all things are desired for it—or for the love of it—in such a way that at the end of the chain it is desired for its own sake. Aristotle teaches us that ‘among desirable things, there has to be an end-stop of something that is ultimately desirable, because otherwise we run into an infinite regress’. But first two important things should be said.

- I shan’t be concerned here with the happiness invoked by **theological teachers** who tell us how happy a man is if, helped by divine influence, he devotes himself entirely to the worship of God, and—full of faith, hope and charity—spends his life gently and peacefully. I will speak only about the happiness that can be called ‘natural’ because it can be acquired by natural means, happiness of a kind that **philosophers** [see Glossary] have not despaired of being able to obtain.

- Secondly, when I speak of this ‘natural happiness’, I do not mean

- a state such that one cannot imagine a better, sweeter, or more desirable one; a state in which

- one fears nothing,
- possesses every good,
- has the power to do everything one wants to do,

in short, a state that is stable, safe, and secure. Rather, I mean

- a certain state in which one is as well as *possible*, a state in which there are necessary goods in abundance, very little that is evil, and in which one can therefore live as gently, calmly, and securely as the conditions of our country, society, lifestyle, health, age, and other circumstances allow.

As for this other *supreme* happiness, to promise or assign it oneself during the course of our life is to fail to recognise, or to have forgotten, that one is a man, that is, a feeble and stupid animal who by the condition of his nature is vulnerable to an infinity of evils and miseries.

And it is in this sense that we say that the wise man, though tormented by cruel pains, can nevertheless be happy, not with •that perfect and supreme happiness, but with the *human* happiness that in a wise man is always as great as his circumstances allow him to be; in that the wise man—not worsening his misfortunes with impatience and despair, but making them milder by his constancy—is happier, or to say it better, *less unhappy*, than if he succumbed in the manner of those who in such a plight do not maintain themselves with his kind of virtue and constancy, and who also (like him) don’t have the comfort that wisdom¹ provides, such as a guilt-free life and a conscience beyond reproach, which is always a marvellous consolation!

That is why one ought not to mock the wise man by saying that it makes no difference to him whether he is burning in Phalaris’s brazen bull or resting gently on a bed of roses. For there are things like fire and torments that he would wish not to suffer from, things he would *much* rather not have come his way. But when they arrive, he considers them as inevitable evils, and he endures them steadily; so that he can say ‘I burn, it is true, and I suffer, I sigh sometimes and

¹ [Though he doesn’t say so, Gassendi is talking about the supernatural wisdom that he says he won’t talk about. The rest of the sentence is meant sarcastically.]

let my tears flow, but I do not succumb. I am not vanquished and I do not let myself enter into a cowardly despair that would render my condition even more miserable.' [Gassendi builds into this speech a Latin sentence from Seneca: *Uror, sed invictus*; 'I burn but I am not conquered'.]

(i) Various opinions about the causes of happiness

What has to be said at the outset is that the causes of happiness are nothing but the goods of the mind, of the body, and of fortune. Some philosophers highly extol one or other of these, and some include them all.

Those who chiefly recommend the goods of the mind have different candidates:

- Anaxagoras: the contemplation things, combined with the kind of freedom that is born of delightful knowledge.
- Posidonius: contemplation, with mastery over one's irrational impulses.
- Herillus: generally and simply, knowledge.
- Apollodorus and Lycus: generally, pleasures of the mind.
- Leucinus: the pleasures that come from honest things.
- the Stoics, Zeno, Cleanthes, Aristus, and the others: virtue.

That last group pushed things to the point of saying that if one has virtue, it doesn't matter whether one is healthy or sick. All the others maintained a consensus that living happily was nothing but *living virtuously* or, as they expressed it, *living according to nature*.

As for those who prefer the goods of the body: because they mainly have sensual pleasure in mind, they were called

'the voluptuous'—*voluptuarii philosophi*. I'll have to discuss them later, when comparing them with Epicurus. Just now I need only remark in passing that •they had Aristippus for their leader, and with him the Cyrenaics, about whom I will also speak further on; and that •the Annicerians, who followed the Cyrenaics, did not recognise any definite goal of life, but pursued the particular pleasure of each action, whatever sort of action it is.

Finally, those who award the prize to the goods of fortune include very many common people of whom some look greedily at wealth, others at honours, still others at other things. But among philosophers, I shall cite only those who link these kinds of external goods to the goods of the mind and of the body; for these are the ones who inspired the beautiful depictions of happiness that poets drew from the various opinions of philosophers. [He quotes two verse fragments in Latin, •one saying that virtue should be sought, and that the gods should be asked for the blessing of being both happy and good; and •the other] requiring that one has health, a good nature, wealth acquired without fraud, and finally to live congenially among friends. And one by Martial, who requires several other things, such as

- goods of inheritance that came without trouble,
- never engaging in lawsuits,
- seldom entering public service,

and having

- a tranquil mind,
- a healthy body,
- simplicity accompanied by prudence,
- friends of equal condition,
- a wife who is not ugly but nevertheless has modesty,
- sleep that makes the nights short,
- no desire to be anything but what one is,
- neither fearing nor wishing for one's last day.

We may say about this **firstly** •that—following Horace, who was following Aristotle—many people often go wrong in the pursuit of happiness by making it consist in things that they don't have and admire in the others, such as the ignorant hankering for knowledge, the poor for wealth, the sick for health. Horace expresses this well in his satires regarding the merchant, the soldier, and the ploughman, each of whom admires and envies the fortune of the others:

“O happy traders!” cries the soldier, as he feels the weight of years, his frame now shattered with hard service. On the other hand, when southern gales toss the ship, the trader cries: “A soldier’s life is better!”.... One learned in law and statutes has praise for the farmer, when towards cockcrow a client comes knocking at his door. The man yonder, who has given surety and is dragged into town from the country, cries that only those who live in town are happy.’

[Gassendi gives this in Horace’s Latin verse. The version above comes from Loeb’s Classical Library.]

Secondly that •admiring nothing, as Horace said, again following Aristotle, is just about the only thing that can make a man happy and maintain his happiness:

‘Admiring nothing, Numicius, is perhaps the one and only thing that can make a man happy and keep him so.’

This marks not only •the tranquility that comes to someone who—having recognised the vanity of human affairs—does not admire or love but rather despises that glare of power, honours, and riches that usually dazzles the eyes of men; but also •the other sort of tranquility that is acquired by anyone who—having come to the knowledge of natural causes—is no longer astonished, afraid, *terrified* •by natural events•, as common men are.

Happy the man who studying nature’s laws,
Through known effects can trace the secret cause;
His mind possessing in a quiet state,
Fearless of fortune, and resigned to fate.

[Dryden’s rendering of the four Latin lines of Virgil that Gassendi quotes.]

Thirdly that •the much-praised sweet repose or leisure that one finds in solitude, away from the tangle of worldly affairs, contributes much to happiness. Democritus, especially, said that anyone who aspires to the true goodness of life—which consists mainly in peace of mind—should not tangle himself in much business, whether private or public; and it is known that the ·Delphic· Oracle judged the great King Gyges to be much unhappier than the old man Aglaus Psophidius, who in a corner of Arcadia farmed a small place from which he drew life’s necessities in abundance and—having never left this small spot of ground—passed his life gently, without ambition and without having felt the slightest of the evils that torment most of mankind.

It is this sweet repose that Horace also recommended in his praise of the rustic lifestyle, having said that he who lives it is happy; not being charged with debts, he simply devotes himself—in the fashion of the earliest men—to plowing his native land, without knowing either war, or the sea, or the bar, or grand houses:

Happy the man whom bounteous Gods allow
With his own hand paternal grounds to plough!
Like the first golden mortals happy he
From business and the cares of money free!
No human storms break off at land his sleep.
No loud alarms of nature on the deep,
From all the cheats of law he lives secure,
Nor do the affronts of palaces endure.

[That is Abraham Cowley’s 17th century translation of the eight lines of Horace’s poetry that Gassendi quotes.]

And this is what Virgil also wanted to express to us when he exclaimed:

'Oh, all too happy labourers, if only you knew how fortunate you are! Happily you live far from the noise of weapons, content and satisfied with the fruits by which the earth rewards your worthy labours! If your houses do not overflow with a crowd of people who every morning come to say 'hello', at least nothing prevents you from living a guiltless life—a life that is preferable to all the riches of the world. For this, you slept calmly and without disturbance in the shade of your woods, and for this you enjoyed a steady, firm, and secure peace of mind.'

As for Epicurus: I will deal with him at more length later, discussing how he takes happiness to consist in ease of body and peace of mind, while maintaining and teaching that the causes of this happiness are not wines or delicious meals or anything like that, *but a sound, just, and enlightened rationality, accompanied by the virtues from which it is inseparable, a rationality that considers and examines the causes and motives that compel us to pursue or avoid something.* As part of his plan to discuss happiness, he urges us to think carefully about the things that create happiness. And because the most important of these is that the mind be released from certain erroneous beliefs that generate ceaseless anxieties and pointless terrors, he starts with certain key principles that he thinks are so important that, when well-examined, they ease the mind and give it a real and solid happiness.

(ii) Seven principles which, if examined and meditated on, contribute greatly to happiness and peace of mind

The **first principle** concerns *knowledge and fear of God*. It's for good reason that this philosopher [Epicurus] wants us to begin with the ideas we should have of this sovereign being; because anyone whose thoughts about him are as they ought to be will find himself so full of love for him and so concerned to please him that he will devote himself solely to honesty and virtue—relying for other things on God's infinite goodness, expecting everything from him as the source of all good, and thus passing his life gently, quietly, and pleasantly. I shan't spend time here demonstrating the existence of this being, having already done that elsewhere. I will simply remark that although Epicurus offers some notions of God that are very just and very reasonable, he also offers some that are not tolerable among the pious (though he has his own view about which of them should be judged as impious). For to believe that God exists, and is such as Lucretius makes him out to be in these beautiful verses—

For whatever is divine must live in peace,
In undisturbed and everlasting ease
Not care for us; from fears and dangers free
Sufficient to his own felicity,
Naught here below, naught in our power it needs,
Never smiles at good, never frowns at wicked
deeds.¹

—believing in a sovereign being who exists for all eternity, has an immortal nature, is blessed, fortunate in himself, has no need for us, and no need to fear *anything*, and who is not subject to pain, anger, or other passions; these are undeniable truths, and acceptance of them couldn't be more

¹ [This is Thomas Creech's 1685 translation of six lines of Latin poetry that Gassendi quotes.]

praiseworthy, especially for a pagan philosopher. But—to return the point I was starting to make before quoting the verse—to abolish *providence*, as these same verses seem to do, or to believe that it is incompatible with supreme happiness, so that God does not particularly care for man, and good people have nothing to expect from his kindness or wicked ones from his anger—this is something that reason and genuine piety will never permit.

The **second principle**—which will run to page 9—concerns *death*. For death, in Aristotle's observation of it, is considered to be the most horrible of all evils, an inevitability from which nobody is exempt. Epicurus contends that we should accustom ourselves to thinking about it, so as to learn from this to rid ourselves as much as possible of those terrors that could disturb our life's tranquility and thus its happiness.

For that reason, he tries to persuade us that death, far from being the most horrible of all evils, is not an evil at all. Here is his argument:

- Death doesn't affect us, and consequently it is not to be judged an evil from our point of view. For anything that affects us is accompanied by some feeling, whereas death is the deprivation of feeling.

He tells us also, as Anaxagoras does, that

Just as it was not upsetting to have no feelings before we first had any, so too it will not be upsetting to be without them after they are all over. Just as when we are asleep we are not upset about not being awake, so too when we are dead we shan't be upset about not being alive.

He concludes, as Archesilas does, that

Death, which is said to be an evil, has this special feature: when it has never troubled anybody by being *present* to him, it is only weakness of soul and the slanders against it that are spread around that make

it formidable when it is *absent*—so formidable that some are struck dead by the very fear of dying.

Well, we might admit here that death is the deprivation of external feeling, or of 'feeling' [*sentiment*] properly so-called; and Epicurus is right to say that once death has come there is nothing to fear about harms involving sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch; because all these senses exist only in the body, which no longer exists or is dissolved. But approval should not be given to something he said elsewhere, namely that death is also the deprivation and extinction of the soul, or of understanding, which is an internal sense, what he calls simply a sense [*sens*]. That is why—not lingering on this impiety, which was sufficiently refuted elsewhere in a discussion of the immortality of the soul—we should stick to stifling these excessive horrors of death, these terrors which, as Lucretius said, 'disturb all the leisure and peace of our life and infect the most harmless pleasures with their gloomy darkness'. So let us remember in the first place—to stifle that foolish desire [*passion*] to live forever—the feeble condition of our nature. Not wanting from it anything beyond its capacity, let us enjoy—gently, peacefully, and without complaint—the present life allotted to us, however short or long it may be. We certainly wouldn't be *wronged* if we were deprived of it [meaning: if we were deprived of any part of it by God]. Let us thankfully acknowledge the liberality of him who gave it to us, and add this to the number of the benefits that we daily draw from his bounty.

Nature has allowed us, for a certain amount of time, the enjoyment of the show it puts on. Let us not be distressed that we have to leave when our time is up. We were admitted ·to the show· only on the condition that we would yield our place to others, just as others have yielded theirs to us. Our bodies are naturally subject to decay, and getting born makes it necessary that one will die. If it is sweet to be born, then it

shouldn't be upsetting to be 'deborn', to appropriate Seneca's word. If rebelling against this necessity could serve some purpose, perhaps those efforts would deserve approval; but all our efforts in this achieve nothing; tormenting ourselves, we only make things worse.

The number of our days is determined in such a way that our lifetime goes by irreversibly; and we run the course in such a way that, whether we want to or not, we finally reach the finishing-post.

As many days as we live, that much of the life prescribed for us by nature has gone; so that—death being the loss of life—we die in proportion as we live, doing this by a death that does not come all at once, but in parts that we will accumulate bit by bit; though we reserve the name 'death' for the last of them. So true it is that the end depends on the beginning!

Let us then moderate the desire for nature [i.e. the desire to go on viewing nature's show] according to the rule that nature itself has prescribed; and if the Fates (to adopt the terms of the ancient poets) cannot be swayed, so that despite us they carry us off, let us at least soften the severity by going willingly.

The one and only prescription for being able to pass life calmly and without anxiety is to adapt ourselves to nature, to want only what it wants, to count among its gifts the last moment of life, and to get ourselves ready so that when death comes we can say: 'I have lived, and I completed the course that nature had given me to run.' [This is adapted from Virgil who wrote: 'She calls, and I have completed the course that fortune laid out for me.' Note the switch from 'fortune' to 'nature'.]

She calls me; here I am, coming of my own accord; she asks for her deposit back, I return it readily to her; she orders me to die, I die without regret.

We might also usefully take the advice of Lucretius, and

say to ourselves sometimes, 'The greatest and the mightiest kings of the world are dead, and Scipio—the lightning of war, the terror of Carthage—left his bones in the ground like the meanest slave. Anchises, the most pious of men, and Homer, the prince of poets, are dead. And *we will be distressed to die?*' [This is not a direct quotation from Lucretius, but its content is captured in nine somewhat scattered lines of verse by Lucretius, which Gassendi goes on to quote.]

We could also say: 'Gassendi himself is dead. That great man has run his course like the others—he who surpassed human nature in power of mind, knowledge, and wisdom, rising like a sun that extinguishes the light of all the stars.'

Even he is fallen, his lamp of life extinct,
The illustrious Epicurus, whose vast mind
Triumphant rose o'er all men, and excelled
As in the heavens the sun excels the stars.

[An 1851 translation of three lines of Latin verse from Epicurus that Gassendi quotes here, replacing *Epicurus* by *Gassendus*.]

'And you, miserable wretch, can't bring yourself to face death! You whose life is like a half-death, you who spend half your time asleep and who snore (so to speak) when you are awake, who feed only on fantasies, and who live amid troubles and continual fears!

This must be what our famous Malherbe has in mind when he deplores the fate of great men who find themselves subject to the same the laws of death as the lowliest souls. [He quotes six lines of French verse, whose content is this:] 'They are turned to dust, nevertheless. Fate has made its laws even-handed and rigorous. Nothing has been able to turn them aside. Vulgar souls learn to die without murmuring!

But someone will object that ·after death· we will no longer enjoy the blessing of life, no more country cottages, no more wives, children, friends to whom we can bring benefits. Alas (it will be said)—a miserable day when one loses all this! [And

now he quotes Lucretius to this effect (the following translation is a 20th century one by many hands).]

There will be no pleasant house for you to go to,
 your wife and children will not be there to kiss you
 and fill your heart with so much silent sweetness;
 Nor will you be able to protect them any more
 with your prosperity—‘poor man!’, they will say,
 ‘For one fatal day will have taken the lot.’

It is true that this is commonly said, but without adding the fact that this supposedly unhappy man will not feel any desire for any of these things, and that after he has truly died he won’t see *another himself* walking around his tomb complaining, with a broken heart and consumed by pain. [The phrase ‘another himself’ translates *un autre lui-même* in the French, which translates *alium se* in the Latin.]

Plutarch has a line of thought that often comes into my mind—mightn’t I make use of it here? If our natural life, which we believe to be very long when it extends to a hundred years, were instead to last only one day, like those animals that Aristotle said are born in the kingdom of Pontus, so that we were (like them) to enter adolescence in the morning, to be in the prime of life at midday, and elderly in the evening, then

- our being, in that case, satisfied with living until the evening

would be in line with

- our being, as things are, satisfied with living for a hundred years.

And if, on the contrary, our lifespan stretched to a thousand years, like that of our first fathers, then we would be just as upset to die in six hundred years as we are now to die in sixty. Similarly with those who came first into the world: if they had lived until the present, they would undoubtedly have been just as upset about dying as we are.

All that should certainly teach us well that life, whatever it is, should be measured not by its length but by the honesty and sweetness that accompany it, just as the perfection of a circle, as Seneca said, should be measured not by the size of the circle but by how precisely round it is. ‘Oh vain and imprudent diligence,’ Pliny said, ‘to count the number of one’s days instead of inquiring into their worth!’

We don’t attend to the fact that just as

- just as the mass of the earth, and the whole of the world and (if you like) a thousand other worlds, are only a **point** when compared with the immense expanse of the universe, so also
- the longest life of man, if it were as long as that of the Hamadryades, [nymphs in ancient Greek mythology] or a million times longer, is only a **moment** when compared with eternity.

This life is only a point says Seneca; what is to extend it? how far can it be extended?

Know that by prolonging life—remarks Lucretius—we do not reduce at all the long duration of death. He who dies today will not be dead for any less time than he who died a thousand years ago.

What if Nature, he adds, should angrily speak to us in this manner:

‘Why, O mortal, do you weep and whine so much about death? •If your past life was pleasant to you, and if you have been able to make use of the goods and delights I have provided you, why do you not—like a guest ·at the dinner-table·—turn away full and satisfied with life? And why, crazy that you are, do you not good-naturedly accept the secure rest that is offered to you? •If on the other hand life has been a burden to you, and you have wasted my gifts, why would you request more for you to waste? For I

have nothing new to produce for you; if you lived for millions of years, you would never see anything but the same things.'

If Nature spoke to us in this manner, wouldn't we have to admit that her reasoning was sound and that she would be right to reproach us in this way?

At least it should be conceded that a wise man who has lived long enough to contemplate the world should, when he becomes aware that his end is near, willingly submit himself to the necessity of nature; and he should conclude that he has run his course, that the circle he has completed is perfect, and that if this circle is not comparable with eternity, it is at least comparable to the duration of the world.

As for matters relating to the face of nature: he has often surveyed the sky, the earth, and the other things contained in the world. He has often seen the rising and setting of the stars; he has seen many eclipses, many other phenomena, the cycles of the seasons, and finally various individual cases of things coming into existence, falling to pieces, being transformed. And as for matters relating to men, if he hasn't *seen* them at least he has *read* or *heard* about all that has happened since the beginning:

- peace and war,
- faith kept and violated,
- civilisation and barbarousness,
- laws established and repealed,
- republics founded and overturned,

and generally all the other things that he knows, and of which he is informed as though he had been present when they happened. So he should think that all the preceding time has to do with him, and thus that his life began with the events themselves. And because the future should be judged on the basis of the past, he should also think that all the time that is to follow relates to him in the same way, in that there

will be nothing in the future except what has already been, that it is only circumstances that change. The universal flow of things always stays on its ordinary track, and always replays the same themes. So it is not without reason that the sacred text has pronounced: 'Nothing lies in the future except what is past; nothing requires to be done except what has been done; there is no new thing under the sun, nor can there be anything of which it may be said *Look! This is new.*' [Ecclesiastes 1:9-10] From this we may conclude that a wise man should not consider his life short, for by casting his eyes on the past and forecasting the future he can make it as long as the duration of the universe.

Moreover, although Epicurus had reason to say that

'Someone is a fool if, while agreeing that there's nothing bad about death when it is present, he nevertheless fears it and suffers from the thought that it is bound to come; as if there were the slightest reason why something that won't sadden us when it is present should afflict us when it is absent',

it seems nevertheless that there is still some reason to fear death, in that it can be preceded or followed by certain evils. That leads Seneca to pile up reasons to show that if death is not an evil, it nevertheless appears so much like an evil that it cannot be treated as altogether indifferent [see Glossary]. He said:

....Death is one of those things which, though they aren't evils, nevertheless appear to be evils. One loves oneself, one naturally wants to exist and stay in existence, and one has a natural horror of dissolution, because it seems to take many good things from us, and to draw us away from the abundance of things that we are accustomed to.... We also have a natural fear of the darkness that we think death will lead us into. So even if death is indifferent, it is not one of

the things that can easily be ignored. A long exercise of the mind is needed if one is to cope with seeing it approach.'

The **third principle**—which runs to page 12—relates to the abominable opinion of the Stoics, who maintain that in certain situations one could bring on one's own death. Here is what they say in Seneca:

'It is certainly a bad thing to live in want, but nothing absolutely forces us to continue in it; for whatever direction we look in, we see the end of these sufferings and our deliverance—a precipice, a river, a dagger, a tree, a vein to be opened, fasting. We should thank God that no-one can be kept alive by force. The eternal decree has done nothing better than to give us a single door through which to enter the world and many through which to leave it. Death can be met with anywhere; God has very wisely ordained anyone can take away a man's life but no-one can take away his death, for it has a thousand passages open to it. He who can die can free himself; the door of his prison is always open. There is indeed a chain that holds us fast, namely the love of life; this love should not be rejected, but it should be diminished, so that if the need arises it won't hold us back—won't prevent us from being ready to do right now something that will have to be done some day, ·namely to die·.

Here is something else from the same ·Stoic· school:

'The wise man lives as long as he ought, not as long as he can; he sees where he should live, with whom, and how, and what he will do. He thinks always about the quality of his life and not its length. If he meets with many misfortunes, he frees himself, and doesn't wait until the last possible moment to do it; but as soon as fortune begins to frown on him, he seriously considers

whether he oughtn't right then to end his days. He believes that it doesn't matter to him whether his end is brought about by himself or by someone else; and he doesn't trouble himself over whether it happens soon or later. Nevertheless, sometimes though his death is certain, settled, and he knows he is destined for execution, yet he won't lend his helping hand, nor will he be overwhelmed with sorrow. It is a folly to die for fear of death. If he who is to kill you is coming, wait for him. Why get in ahead of him? Why take on yourself the task of others' cruelty? Are you envious of your executioner, or do you want to spare him the trouble? Socrates could have ended his life by fasting, dying from starvation rather than from poison; yet he waited for death for thirty days in prison; not because the time gave him hopes ·of a reprieve·, but to show himself obedient to the laws, and to give his friends the pleasure of his company when he was approaching death. So there are no general and absolute guidelines concerning whether, when an external force threatens one with death, one should get in ahead of it or wait for it to come; for there are many circumstances to be considered. But if there are two ways of dying, one accompanied by great torments and the other simple and easy, why not choose the latter?'

This was the opinion of Hieronymus, of all the Stoics and especially Pliny, who calls the earth 'good mother' because, *having compassion for us, she has instituted poisons*. It is also supposed to be the opinion of Plato, for although Cicero has him saying:

'The mind should be kept in the body's care; and without the command of him who gave it, we should not depart from life, so as not to seem to despise God's gift to man'.

yet in his book *The Laws* he maintains:

'Someone who kills himself is not to be blamed unless he does this without being forced to it by a judicial sentence, or by some unbearable and unavoidable accident of fortune, or by misery and public shame.'

Not to mention Cicero, who •in one place praises Pythagoras because 'he forbids departure from the fortress or abandonment of one's post without orders from the emperor', that is, from God, yet •in another place he teaches that 'In life we should keep to the same rule that is observed in Greek banquets: *Either drink or leave*; so that if we can't bear the injuries of fortune, we should escape them by fleeing'. Not to mention Cato, who seems to have sought death not so much to escape from Caesar as to follow the decrees of the Stoics, whom he was proud to obey, and to make his name famous to posterity by some great action; for, as Lactantius said, 'Cato was a life-long imitator of the vanity of the Stoics'.

In regard to Democritus, that same Lactantius informs us that 'his opinion was quite different from that of the Stoics; yet he finally let himself die by fasting, when he found in his extreme old age that his powers—of body as well as of mind—were failing.... Which can be said to be altogether criminal; for if a murderer is a criminal because he kills a man, someone who kills himself is guilty of the same crime, because he also kills a man. It may even be a greater crime, because punishment for it is reserved to God alone; for just as we do not enter into life of our own accord, so neither are we to leave it of our own accord, but by the order of him who has placed us in the body to inhabit it. And if any violence or injury is done us, we should bear it patiently, because extinguishing the life of a guiltless person cannot go unpunished, and we have a powerful Punisher to whom punishment is always reserved.'

Finally, with regard to Epicurus, it is believable that he

too disagreed with the Stoics •about suicide•, both because he said 'The wise man is happy in his torments' and because when he himself was tormented by kidney-stones that caused him extreme pains, he nevertheless did not hasten his own death, but awaited it steadily. And Seneca said 'Epicurus reproaches those who desire death as much as those who fear it; and •says• that it is unwise and even stupid to bring about one's death through the fear of death.'

Yet that happens quite often, not only because (as Lucretius said)

- the excessive fear of death sometimes throws a person into a certain dark melancholy that makes him utterly discontented, and finally brings him to the point of *hating* life as difficult, distressing, and unbearable, and at last seeks the weirdest ways to free himself from it by bringing about his death; but also because

- this excessive fear gradually causes a certain sadness which, by constricting one's heart and spirits, upsets all the functions of life, impedes digestion, and finally brings on fatal diseases.

Be that as it may, the opinion of the Stoics not only conflicts with the sacred dogmas of religion—

though religion doesn't disapprove of it when some persons, by a certain particular and divine instinct, hastened their own death, like Sampson and Razis in the Old Testament, and Sophronia and Pelagia in the New Testament

—but it also conflicts with nature and with reason. For nature gave a natural love of life to every kind of animal; and there is no animal, apart from man, that doesn't do all it can to preserve its life and escape death, whatever evils are tormenting it. This is a sign that since *only* man corrupts the institution of nature through his erroneous opinions, if

he rejects the use of life and procures his own death, he does this by a **particular** debasement. For the true state of nature should be seen in animals in **general**, not in a few members of the only species who procure their own destruction and doom themselves before the time assigned by nature. From which we should infer that those who

- destined to run a certain course, stop in the middle of it, and
- having been posted as sentinels, desert and abandon their post without waiting for the order and the command

insult nature and its Author.

And another point: Reason forbids the use of cruelty towards an innocent person who has done us no harm, and consequently forbids us to be cruel to ourselves, from whom we never experienced hatred but rather too much love.

Moreover, on what occasion can virtue be more apparent than when courageously suffering the evils that the hardness of fortune necessitates? Aristotle said: 'To die because of poverty, because of love, or because of some other regrettable thing, is not the act of a strong and courageous man, but of a weak and timid soul; avoiding things that are hard to endure is a sign of feebleness.' Curtius adds: 'It is the part of brave men to scorn death rather than to hate life; often through distaste for toil, cowards are driven to hold themselves cheap. But valour leaves nothing untried. Assuredly death is the end of everything, and we may as well go to meet it in no passive spirit.' [Translation by J.C.Rolfe of the passage Gassendi quotes from Quintus Curtius's *Life of Alexander*.]

I shall not linger on those who (I am quoting Lactantius) 'having a vague idea that souls are eternal, have killed themselves, like

- Cleanthes, Chrysippus, and Zeno, in the hope of being instantly transported to heaven; or

- Empedocles, who threw himself into the crater of Mount Aetna one night, so that his disappearance would lead people to believe that he had gone to the gods; or
- Cato, a life-long follower of Stoic stupidity, who before he killed himself is aid to have read Plato's book called *The eternity of souls*, or finally
- Cleombrotus, who after reading that same book threw himself down a precipice.

This is a cursed and abominable doctrine, which drives men out of their lives.'

Nor shall I linger on that Cyrenaic philosopher Hegesias, who so eloquently preached the miseries of life and the happiness of souls after death that King Ptolemy was obliged to order that he be forbidden to speak in public, because (according to Cicero and others) several of his disciples killed themselves after hearing him.

Admittedly, the evils we endure in life can become so great and so numerous that when the occasion to die is presented, the loss of life is not distressing, and death is regarded as the door through which to escape the miseries and tempests of life. But to exaggerate this to the point of inciting contempt and hatred for life is to be insulting and ungrateful towards nature; as if the gift of life that had been bestowed for our use must be rashly rejected, or as if we should not rather accept it gratefully and prolong it as honestly and gently as possible!

It is true that what Theognis once said, that *it would be much better for men not to be born, or to die at soon as they were born*, has become celebrated. So have the examples of Cleobis, Biton, Agamedes, Pindarus, and some others, who having prayed to the gods to reward them for their piety with something better and more desirable ·than life·, received as a very great favour *dying soon*. And then there

is the Thracian custom of crying for those who are born and congratulating the dying. Not to mention Menander, who wished that a certain young man was dead, because he was loved by the gods. Not to mention that celebrated judgment ·of Seneca· that *No-one would accept life if it were given to people who knew it.* [Gassendi sprinkles this paragraph with Latin quotations relating to Theognis (who was Greek), Menander, and Seneca.]

But, I ask you, who will believe that Theognis and the rest spoke seriously, or ·that they spoke· without restriction? I say ‘without restriction’ because *it would be better not to be born or to die immediately after birth* would be in some way tolerable if it were confined to those who were going to be miserable all their life; but to say this about all men is to insult Nature, who is the mistress of life and of death, and who has established and instituted our birth and our destruction, just like all the other things ·that begin and end· for the perfection of the universe. And anyone who says it lays himself open to being contradicted if not by all men then anyway by the great majority, who are not displeased with their life and who take great care to preserve it. For life, as I have already observed, always has about it something pleasant which anyone who holds these sorts of views ·about suicide· will feel the attraction of and be held back by. He would, I believe, resemble the old man in Aesop’s fables who sent death away, even though he had called for it. . . .

Certainly, the man who said that *to live or to die was something indifferent* [see Glossary], and who, when someone objected ‘Then why don’t you die?’ answered ‘Because it is indifferent to me’, was just teasing; and I’m sure that if somebody—unsheathed sword in hand—had obliged him to choose, he would have preferred life to death. Someone else who was scolded for being frightened by danger though he claimed to be wise, answered very ingeniously: ‘You are right

not to be afraid, your soul being of no great value; but I fear for the soul of Aristippus.’ And another who was reproached for having a great passion fore life, given how old he was, replied, ‘Having only lately acquired wisdom, I wish for some time to enjoy it; just as those who marry late wish for a long life to raise their children.’ But nothing is more memorable than what Cicero records concerning a certain Leontinus Gorgias: having reached the age of 107 years without ever stopping his work and ordinary occupations, he answered those who asked him why he wanted to live so long, ‘I have no reason to complain about old age.’

The **fourth principle** concerns the future, forbidding us from being *anxiously hopeful or impatiently hopeless*; so that we are habituated •to being even-minded about future events and not basking in futile hopes and •to not depending on things that are not the case and perhaps never will be. Since fortune is intrinsically erratic and fickle, nothing that depends on its power can be foreseen or awaited with such certainty that it doesn’t often deceive those who foresee or who wait. The more secure way is •not to despair absolutely about what one foresees, but also •not to promise it to oneself as something indubitable, yet •to prepare for any outcome in such a way that if things turn out differently from how one hopes, one does not believe one has been robbed of something absolutely necessary. This kind of maxim, *Don’t be too hopeful or too hopeless*, comes close to what I have just been saying. For hoping with too much confidence leads one to neglect everything and let one’s mind wander, and having no hope makes one go slack and abandon everything. Whereas someone whose mind is between these two extremes is in an admirable state of soul, and doesn’t want to exclaim ‘Oh what a great evil hope is!’

This is what Torquatus expresses so well in Cicero, when he says:

'The wise man awaits future events as if they might actually happen; but nevertheless he doesn't depend on them, because they may very well not happen; and in the meantime he enjoys present things and remembers past ones with pleasure.'

That is ·along the same lines as· what he also says elsewhere: 'We should avoid ·rashly despairing in a mean, abject and cowardly manner, and ·being led by an overpowering desire to have too much confidence.' Thus Epicurus, contrasting the fool with the wise man, says that a fool's life is unpleasant, apprehensive, and wholly tied up with the future.

The **fifth principle** is simply a reproach to men: they put things off from tomorrow to tomorrow, so that their life passes by uselessly and in a constant dependence on the future. Seneca, following Epicurus, said:

'Think how pleasant it is to desire nothing, and what greatness of soul is involved in being always fulfilled and not depending on fortune. Seize the present! That will free you from depending on the future. If we postpone *living*, our life runs on and vanishes.'

He said the same thing in Plutarch: 'Someone who does not *need* the next day, and who does not yearn for it, comes gently to the next day'; as if he wanted to say that the wise man should view his life in such a way that he considers each day as his last, the one that is to close the circle. Because in this way he won't let the hope of the next day suspend the pleasantness ·of the present day·; and the less the next day is expected, the more pleasant it will be if he *does* reach it. For it will be a sheer add-on, like interest on capital, and counted as a pure gain.'

Pacuvius, viceroy of Syria, had a tradition that when he was carried from the table after spending a whole day on wine and good cheer, he had people chant, to music, *Vixit, vixit*—'he has lived, he has lived'. Seneca commented on

this:

'What this wretch did in a spirit of debauch let us do in good faith: having spent the day mildly and honestly, let us rest and say with joy and contentment *Vixi, et quem dederas cursum fortuna peregi*—"I have lived, and I have completed the course that fortune had assigned to me". If God adds another day, let us receive it joyously. Anyone who waits *peacefully* for the next day is happy and securely self-possessed. Whoever has said "I have lived" greets each day as a sheer gain.'

Horace gives very nearly the same advice. [This segment from Horace is quoted from various places in his works.] He said: 'We should imagine that each day is the last of our life; the ·future· time that we are not expecting will bring pleasure ·if it comes·. Let us pleasantly enjoy the present, and not count on the next day. Don't worry about what is to happen tomorrow; as though you were due to die this very day, count any further days that fortune grants you as something to be added to the profit column.'

'Accept with pleasure the time that God will give you, and don't postpone the leisure and mildness of life until next year.' 'Each best day of their lives is the first to flee for wretched mortals' [This is from Virgil.] 'As if day by day one approached the dregs of the life, as if the very pure pleasures that one postponed could no longer be recovered, and that those that come later are not comparable with the ones that went before. That is the source of those frequent complaints about time badly spent.'

'Oh, if only Jupiter would restore to me the ·bygone· years!' [We are given that in Latin and not in French.] And yet we do not force ourselves to live in the present in such a way that if God brought it back to us we could say "I do not see how I could have spent the time better". We always imagine that

good times and happy living have never arrived, that the good that we desire is infinitely above all the goods that we have enjoyed or could enjoy. Writing off the whole past, we never look to anything but the future, always as passionately desirous of life as ever.

'As if we shouldn't count the past as something agreeable, and rejoice over what it has secured; and the rightness of doing that is all the greater because there are many who look for a similar fortune and their expectations are frustrated.'

Seneca said:

'We should do this justice to Epicurus, that he continually complains about our being ungrateful for the past, not keeping in mind the good things that we have enjoyed and counting them among the true pleasures, for there is no pleasure more certain than the one that can't be taken from us.'

'The nature of good', Plutarch concludes, 'consists not only in avoiding what is bad but also in remembering and being pleased by the thought that things have come about as they have.'

But to return once more to the topic of these postponements, and of these ridiculous tomorrows: 'It's a strange thing', says Epicurus, 'that considering we are born only once, that our days are to have an end, and that *tomorrow* is a day that is beyond our power, we nevertheless always put off living until tomorrow; so that •our life runs out miserably in these continual delays, and •everyone dies while busy with extraneous matters, occupying himself with anything except *living*.' Martial says 'You will live tomorrow? It is already too late to live today. Whoever lived yesterday is wise.' And this by Manilius: 'Why do we consume our days in care, and in perpetual anxiety, tormented by needless fears

and by blind ambition? We grow old among eternal cares, we lose our life while seeking it, and without experiencing the success of any of our plans we always work to live and never do live.'

The **sixth principle** regards greeds, or covetousnesses. Knowledge of these is of such importance that an objective account of the human condition should be primarily occupied with distinguishing **(i)** the ones that should be called 'natural' and 'necessary' from **(ii)** the ones that are pointless and superfluous. For the happiness of life depends on ridding ourselves of **(ii)** and being sustained by **(i)**. But as I'll have to return to this topic in several places later on, I shall here be content with merely introducing it.

The **last principle** that Epicurus recommends is really an exhortation to us to study philosophy, as the medicine of the mind. Because philosophy, given the etymology of the word, is the study of wisdom; and wisdom relates to the mind not only as •a drug through which the mind becomes and stays healthy, but as •health itself. Indeed, just as the body's health consists in a suitable balance¹ and quality of bodily fluids, so also the mind's health consists in the moderation of passions.

One needs only to listen to Cicero to appreciate the accuracy of this comparison. He said:

"All disturbances and all passions are regarded by philosophers [see Glossary] as sicknesses of the mind; and they say that no fool is exempt from these illnesses. All fools are sick.'

For according to the philosophers, the mind's health consists in a certain tranquility and unshakeable stability, and they describe as 'sick' any mind that is not in this condition. Well, when we suppose with Epicurus and others that usually

¹ [Taking it that *temperature* was meant to be *tempérément*.]

there is nothing dearer or more precious than the health of the body, that shows how dear and precious the mind's health must be; since it is true (as I shall say later) that the mind's goods and evils are greater and more significant than the body's. So, because the goal of a happy life consists in **a** peace of mind and **b** indolence [see Glossary] of the body (as I shall also say later), there is more value in **a** the former; for he whose mind is tranquil and composed, according to laws of wisdom, greatly nurtures temperance, which is the most solid and reliable supporter of health. Epicurus winds up: 'We should philosophise, not in appearance, not for show, but really and seriously; because what matters to us is not seeming healthy but really being so.' The old as well as the young should apply themselves to philosophy, since it is important at either age to be healthy in mind as well as in body; so as not to be open to Horace's scolding: 'Why do you hurry to remove things that hurt the eye, while if something is eating into your soul, you put off the time for cure until next year?'

We should not, in regard to philosophy, follow the example that Thales made in regard to marriage: when his mother pressed him to marry, he may well have been right when he answered that *it was not yet time* and (later on) that *it was too late*; but just as it is ridiculous to say that it is too early or too late to heal the body, so also it is ridiculous to say that the time to philosophise—i.e. to cure the mind—hasn't yet come or has passed; since that is just like saying that it is not yet time, or that the time has passed, to be happy. It is strange that time is thus unfortunately wasted, and that one does not apply something that is just as useful to the rich and poor alike, and when neglected, is as detrimental to young people as with old men. This is one of the reproaches that Horace made to himself: 'Slow and thankless flow for me the hours that defer my hope and purpose of setting myself

vigorously to the task that equally profits the poor and the rich, and if neglected equally harms the young and the old.'

....But to speak especially about what might persuade young folk to study philosophy: there is nothing finer and more laudable than to accustom oneself *early* to good things, and to add to the beauty of youth the gentleness of the wisdom that is the fruit of a more mature age. There is nothing more pleasant than to prepare for and be able to expect an old age which, in addition to the special fruits of maturity, can still shine and burst forth with the same virtues that one shone and burst forth with in youth; so that by remembering fine and virtuous actions—as though making them present again—one continuously rejuvenates (so to speak). As for those who are already advanced in age, it is certain that wisdom is the special and true ornament of old age, that it is a unique support against the difficulties and feebleness of age, and that it is what animates old men with a vigour like that of the young folk.

This is where we should listen to Seneca, who, already very old, went to hear the philosopher Sextus, just as the Emperor Antonius also did (imitating him) at a later time:

'Behold, this is the fifth day that I go to the schools, and that I listen to a philosopher, who argues for eight hours. You will say "This is just the time for it—at *your* age?" And why not at this age? Is there anything more ridiculous than to refuse learning because we have not learned a long while before? Shall I be ashamed to go and meet a philosopher? We ought to learn while we are ignorant, and (according to the proverb) "as long as we live". Go, Lucillus and make haste, lest you should be obliged to study in your declining years, as I am; and make what speed you can, all the more because you have tackled something you will hardly be able to learn when you are old. But what

profit (you will say) will I get from this? As much as you will strive for. What do you expect? No-one has ever become wise by chance. Riches may come to us of themselves, honours may be offered to us, and we may be carried to ·high-level· employments and dignities; but virtue won't seek us out; we must try to find her, for she bestows her blessings only on those who take the trouble to look for her.'

These are the principles that the ancient philosophers, and mainly Epicurus, have recommended for our serious consideration, as being what we need for the way to happiness to be opened up and smoothed for us.

2: What kind of pleasure Epicurus thinks is the goal of the happy life

It is astonishing that the word 'pleasure' was a basis for slandering Epicurus or (to borrow Seneca's words) 'gave rise to a fiction'. For it is certain that this term covers honest pleasures as well as sordid and dishonest ones. I say that it is certain, because Plato, Aristotle, and all the other ancient philosophers, as well as those who have followed them, say in so many words that among pleasures

- some are pure, others impure,
- some are of the mind, others of the body,
- some are true, others false.

'We believe' said Aristotle 'that pleasure ought to accompany happiness. And as it is agreed that among virtuous actions the one that comes from wisdom is the most pleasant of all, wisdom seems for that reason to contain pleasures that are admirable, pure, and stable.' And Cicero said:

'There is a delight in contemplating great and mysterious things, and when there appears something

recognisable, the mind is filled with sweet pleasure. In the discoveries of nature there is an insatiable pleasure, and those who delight in such pursuits often neglect their health and their fortune; they suffer all things, being captivated with the love of knowledge and understanding, and with great labour they pay for the pleasure they acquire by learning.'

And even in the Holy Scriptures we read that 'God in the beginning planted a paradise of pleasure', and that 'the blessed shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house; and he will make them drink from a river of pleasure' [loosely quoted from early Genesis and from Psalm 38:18].

I record these things simply because those who believe that the word 'pleasure' cannot and should not be understood in any but its basest sense are led by this to believe that when Epicurus says that 'Pleasure is the goal' he cannot and should not be understood to mean anything but sordid and forbidden pleasure; so that when they hear or read that there are philosophers known as 'voluptuous', they immediately take him to be their leader.

But to examine this more deeply, let us start with the accusation that is made against him. Among those who accept that there are pleasures other than those of the body, there are some who maintain that what Epicurus says should be understood only in terms of bodily pleasures. So let us see his own words as they are recorded by Laertius, since that is where he states his view, and where he clearly declares what the pleasure is that he believes to be the goal of life or the sovereign good. 'The goal of a happy life', he says, 'is nothing else but the health of the body and peace of the soul, because everything we do ultimately relates to being free from pain and trouble.'

Some people had called this goal 'pleasure', and made this their opportunity to slander him, saying that he meant

sordid and bodily pleasure; which led him to offer his own explanation. Clearing himself from that slander, he declares even more plainly what sort of pleasure he means and what sort he doesn't. After strenuously recommending a sober life that is satisfied with the simplest and most easily obtainable foods, here is what he goes on to say:

'When I say that pleasure is the goal, I am not—contrary to what is alleged by some people who are ignorant, or not of my opinion, or hostile to me

—talking about the pleasures of debauched people, or even the pleasures of others for whom the pleasure consists in the actual episode of enjoyment in which the senses are gratified and pleased. I am talking only about *feeling no pain in the body, and having no trouble in the soul*. For what makes a life agreeable is not •continual drinking and eating, or the pleasure [see Glossary] of love, or that of exotic food and the delicacies on grand tables, but •reason accompanied by sobriety and consequently by a serenity of mind which looks into *why* each thing should be chosen or avoided, and keeps at a distance the opinions that cause disturbance in the soul.'

....This simple and clear statement of his view is enough to safeguard him from any accusation and any blame.

Let us nevertheless take note of how Laertius contrasts Epicurus and Aristippus. Because this contrast or antithesis shows clearly that

- with Epicurus believing that no pleasure can be called the goal except the one that consists in ease, i.e. indolence [see Glossary] •of body• and peace •of mind•, and
- with Aristippus believing that the goal is bodily pleasure, especially the pleasure of movement, in which the senses are being moved and affected,

it's a misunderstanding of Epicurus's opinion to take it to be the same as that of Aristippus—a misunderstanding that led to all the reproaches that ought to come Aristippus's way and all the condemnations that ought to be cast on him are cast instead on Epicurus, with almost none touching Aristippus.

The famous debate between Torquatus and Cicero clearly shows this. Torquatus says: 'I shall explain what the pleasure is •that Epicurus says is the goal•, so as to •remove any excuse for the error of the ignorant, and •show how sober, chaste and severe is the doctrine that is supposed •by them• to be voluptuous and dissolute. We don't pursue the pleasure that gratifies nature and fills the senses with delight; rather, we regard as supreme the pleasure that is felt when all pain is removed. Just as

when hunger and thirst are banished by food and drink, this deliverance from what was upsetting causes pleasure,

so also

deliverance from pain of *any* kind brings pleasure in its train.

So generally, the removal of pain causes pleasure to take its place. So Epicurus did not maintain that there is an intermediate state between pain and pleasure; for the state that some have thought to be this intermediate one—namely a state of complete absence of pain—is what he held to be not just a pleasure but the highest pleasure. Anyone who is conscious of his condition, or of how he is affected, must necessarily feel either pleasure or pain. Well, Epicurus holds that the highest pleasure comes down to or consists in complete absence of pain; and consequently pleasure can be of various different kinds but not of different degrees.

If more witnesses are to be produced, Seneca must surely be heard and credited before all the others. He was

unquestionably a person of great merit and great reputation, with exemplary purity of *mœurs* [see Glossary], and a member of a sect whose misunderstanding of the words of Epicurus made it the principal cause of all the ignominy with which ignorant people had besmirched him instead of Aristippus. Seneca said:

'According to Epicurus, there are two goods that make up the chief happiness or the chief good of man—a body free of pain, a mind free of disturbance. These goods don't increase if they are complete, for how can something that is full increase? When the body is free from pain, what can be added to that ease? When the mind is self-possessed and tranquil, what is there that can be added to this tranquility? Just as the serenity of the sky is perfect, and can't admit of any new degrees of light once it has become very pure and very clear, so also the condition of a man is perfect when he has taken care of his body and of his mind, and—making his chief happiness consist in the welfare of both together—has come to have no pain in his body and no disturbance in his mind, because he can be said to have satisfied all his desires. And if some other pleasantnesses are added to all this, they don't increase his chief good but simply flavour it. For this complete happiness, the perfection of human nature, is comprised in the calmness of the body and of the mind.'

It should be noted that Seneca here expresses plainly and clearly the opinion of Epicurus as presented in the text of Laertius.

Moreover, because Epicurus had given the name 'supreme pleasure' or 'chief good' to the comfort of body and peace of mind, the debauched and voluptuous people of his time used that as a pretext for misusing the word 'pleasure' and

boasted of having a philosopher as the defender of *their* pleasures. For this reason, Seneca in his book *Of the Happy Life* tackles them like this: 'It's not Epicurus who pushes them into luxury and debauchery; rather, being accustomed to vices they try to hide their dissoluteness under the cover of philosophy, and they flock to any place where they hear pleasure being praised. Without a doubt, what they esteem and seek for is not the pleasure of Epicurus; I know how sober and blameless that pleasure is....

'My opinion is (for I will say it in spite of what vulgar [see Glossary] people say) that the things Epicurus teaches are fair and just, and even have something dark about them if they are looked at closely. For his pleasure comes down to very little: the law he prescribes for it is the one that I prescribe for virtue, namely *that it should obey nature*; and there are not many delights that precisely fit nature.

'Do you want to know what that is? Anyone who says that what makes life agreeable is idleness, banqueting, languor, sexual pleasures, and who calls that "happiness", is looking for a good cover for something bad. And when, soothed by the gentleness of the word, he pursues *pleasure*, the pleasure he goes for is not the one that he hears praised but the one he brings with him; and when once he starts to believe that •his vices are like the pleasures he has been taught about, he gives himself over to •them, no longer with fear and in hiding but with head up and open to everyone.

'So I don't say what many do say these days, that the sect of Epicurus is the inspiration for infamous crimes and of debauchery. What I do say is this: it's true that he has a bad reputation, but that is because he is slandered; the word "pleasure" gives rise to the fiction and to the error. No-one can know this if he hasn't been admitted into the interior of the sect.' [The Latin is *nisi interius fuerit admissus*; this seems to refer to admission as a member of the sect, but perhaps it merely concerns

digging into the details of what the sect believes.]

We could add to Seneca's testimony that of Plutarch. Although hostile to Epicurus, he couldn't help saying that 'the charges that have been brought against him owe more to common gossip than to the facts about his doctrine'. And in another place he seems to be mocking the pleasure of Epicurus and his followers when he exclaims: 'Oh what great pleasure and happiness there is in not feeling sadness or pain!' [Gassendi's point here is that although the exclamation is not meant in a friendly way, what Plutarch is mocking Epicurus *for* is the doctrine that Gassendi has been attributing to him.] . . . And in this other passage: 'Young people will learn from the Epicureans •that death has nothing to do with us, •that nature's riches are limited, and •that happiness and the good life does not consist in

- piles of money,
- great possessions,
- authority, or
- power,

but in

- freedom from pain,
- moderation of the passions, and
- the state of the soul that keeps everything within nature's limits.'

Which makes it clear that Epicurus's chief good is not the pleasure that can be had through movement and the gratifying of the senses, but rather the pleasure that can be had through relaxation and freedom from disturbance.

We could add here the testimonies of several of the ancients [he names some] who, though not particularly fond of Epicurus, did nevertheless say

- some that 'the pleasure Epicurus endorsed was nothing other than a quiet natural state, and not a base and sordid pleasure'

•others that 'Epicurus differed from Aristippus in that Aristippus placed the chief good in the pleasure of the body, Epicurus in that of the mind.'

•yet others that 'the pleasure that Epicurus's followers propose to themselves for their goal is certainly not a sensual and bodily pleasure, but a quiet state of the soul that results from a virtuous and honest life.' . . .

I said 'several of the ancients' because after two hundred years, i.e. at the end of that barbaric era, we have among others John Gerson and Gemistus Pletho, of whom **the former**, after having reported various opinions on blessedness, says that there are some who hold

'that man's blessedness consists in the pleasure of the mind, or in the calm peace of the mind, that being the view of Epicurus, mentioned often with much veneration by Seneca in his *Epistles*. Those who placed it in the pleasures of the body—the other Epicurus, Aristippus, Sardanapalus, and Mahomet—are not philosophers.'

If he suspected that there were two Epicuruses, we should forgive him, attributing this to the ignorance of that age and to common gossip.

The latter, Gemistus Pletho, discussing the pleasure of contemplation, shows 'that Aristotle taught exactly the same as Epicurus, who placed the chief good in the pleasure of the mind'.

However, it is not without reason that I insinuate that since then a happier age has come, restoring the good scholarship that had been virtually lost; for since that time there have been countless knowledgeable people who had a better view of this philosopher. [He names four, and says there are many others.]

But what shall we say to those who charge Epicurus with holding an entirely opposite opinion? Only what was said in

the *Apology for his Life*. [This seems to be a reference to the 'Apology' = defence that Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates. It does not mention Epicurus; but it is full of protests that he has been maligned by people who should know better, much like the protests that Gassendi is about to offer on behalf of Epicurus.] Namely that the Stoics and others who wished him ill (for reasons they explained at length) didn't merely •misunderstand his views but also •thought up and published in his name scandalous books that were actually written by themselves—doing this in order to get their interpretation of him believed, and to avoid punishment for going on bad-mouthing him.

Now one of the principal causes of their hatred was the fact that Zeno, their chief and leader, was naturally melancholy, austere, rough, and severe; and that his disciples, imitating their chief, put on the same severe manner and countenance; and this led to the Stoic virtue—wisdom—being described as very austere. Because this made them admired and respected by the common people, and because it is easy to be carried away by vainglory and vanity if one is not careful to prevent it, they came to imagine that they alone had wisdom. They boasted that only a wise man—i.e. one who was nourished and strengthened by Stoic virtue—was fit to be king, captain, magistrate (these are their terms), citizen, rhetorician, friend, handsome, noble, rich; to be someone who

- never regretted anything he had done,
- was incapable of compassion,
- could not be insulted,
- was ignorant of nothing,
- was never in doubt about anything,
- was free from passions,
- was always free,
- was always joyful, like God,

and so on, through several other glittering attributes that

Plutarch mocks when he says that 'the Stoics have taught things much more absurd than the poets have taught!'

In contrast with this, Epicurus—having a gentler and more humane nature, and acting with sincerity and plain-dealing—could not endure such vanity and ostentation. Knowing from experience how weak men are, and examining what their powers are capable of and what they are not, he recognised right away that all those great promises echoing through the Stoic school were—when deprived of the apparatus and the splendour of the words—nothing but vain fictions. This is why he professed a virtue that he knew to be humanly possible. He saw that men, whatever activities they were engaged in, were naturally drawn to some pleasure; and after having examined all types of pleasures, he perceived that there is none

- more general,
- more firm,
- more stable, and
- more desirable

than that which consists in 'the health of the body and the peace of the mind'. For this reason he declared it to be *la fin des biens* [here apparently meaning 'the ultimate good'], adding that virtue alone was the true means of acquiring it. And

- maintaining that the wise or virtuous man was the one who by sobriety and steadiness (i.e. by the virtue of temperance) preserved the health of his body as far as its natural constitution permitted, and who—aided by his virtues, which enabled him to calm the passions of love, greed, avarice and ambition—worked mainly on preserving as far as possible the peace of his mind; and at the same time
- maintaining that true pleasure did not consist in the *action* of moving, as Aristippus held, but in the *state* of steadiness, i.e. having neither pain in the body nor disturbance in the

mind, as I have already said several times; this was the simple and honest way in which Epicurus acted, •without trying to win the public over to his side by splendid words, or a majestic posture that showed vanity in *mœurs* [see Glossary], as Zeno did; and •without wanting to impose on the people, who—Epicurus knew well enough—like nothing better than a showy presentation of things they don't understand and never put into practice.

Now Zeno and the Stoics, recognising the simplicity of his *mœurs* and doctrines, and seeing that many enlightened people were undeceived and could see through their grand and splendid words and promises, came to hate him so much that they put all their efforts into defaming him. Seizing on the word 'pleasure', they maintained that he meant sordid and debauched pleasure, and greed.

This is why one should not believe what is said by them, or by others who, persuaded by their mendacity, have been made hostile to him. And if this happened with some honest people, this was probably because

- they (as Seneca complains) had not entered the interior of the sect and had only the forged books, or because
- they trusted the Stoics, his enemies, or because
- though they knew what his true opinion was, they nevertheless believed that since it would not be easy to correct people's assumptions about this, it was useful to go on defaming this philosopher, so that horror of vice and of debauched pleasures would be increased by the infamy of their supposed author or defender.

As for the Holy Fathers in particular, because they only had piety and good *mœurs* in mind, they preached strongly not only against sordid and debauched pleasures but also against their authors and defenders. Because it was already

widely assumed that Epicurus was the chief of these, they treated him according to common assumption. So it wasn't their fault that he was defamed, since he already had been. And what they did (I repeat) was only intended to inspire a greater horror of vice and of sordid and sensual pleasures.

This is so true that some (like Lactantius) who were otherwise angry with Epicurus nevertheless re-establish his position in its entirety. And Saint Jerome, among others, writing against Jovinian, does not include Epicurus among those who say 'Let us eat, let us drink' etc., but treats him as a man very different from the one the common opinion presents. The great saint said:

'It is wonderful that Epicurus, the great patron of pleasure, fills all his books with herbs and fruits, maintaining that the simplest food is the best, because •meat and other dainty dishes are prepared with a great deal of care and humble kitchen-work; •there is more trouble in seeking them than pleasure in (mis)using them; •our bodies simply need to drink and to eat, and nature is satisfied wherever there is water and bread and the like; •anything beyond that has to do not with need but with wicked pleasure; •our drinking and eating is not for delight, but to extinguish hunger and thirst; •wisdom is inconsistent with the work and care that are needed for the banquet table; and •by simple food and simple clothing we expel cold and hunger.'

There is only one passage that seems to be able to create difficulty. [It is a passage that Cicero claims to quote from a book by Epicurus; and Gassendi piles up evidence that it was not written by Epicurus, and was probably inserted into Cicero's personal copy of the book by malicious Stoics.]

(i) How Epicurus and Aristippus differ

To see now what the exact difference is between Epicurus and Aristippus, we need only study Laertius. They differ, he says, firstly with regard to the word 'pleasure': •Epicurus applies it not only to the pleasure that is in movement and the stimulation of the senses, but also to the pleasure that he says to be stable and permanent, and to consist in the gentle repose that he calls 'tranquility and indolence' [see Glossary] [He gives the phrase also in Greek]; whereas •Aristippus applies it only to the pleasure that is in movement, mocking Epicurus's 'tranquility and indolence' as being 'like the state of a sleeping man or of a corpse'.

So they differ in that Epicurus placed the goal, i.e. happiness, in the pleasure that is in a state (*in statu*) or at a moment; Aristippus in the pleasure that is in movement (*in motu*); Epicurus in the mind; Aristippus in the body; Epicurus counts as pleasures the recollection of past goods and the expectation of goods to come, while Aristippus places no value on them. But as I have already touched on all this, there are just two things that need to be taken account of.

(1) The first is that when Atheneus said that not only Aristippus but also Epicurus and his disciples embraced the kind of pleasure that is in movement, this involves the slander that eventually got people to believe that Epicurus had the same view as Aristippus, namely the view that I give here in Atheneus's words in reference to Aristippus:

'Aristippus, being wholly devoted to the pleasure of the senses, holds that this pleasure is life's goal, its happiness; and—giving no value to the recollection of *past* enjoyments or the expectation of *future* ones—he recognises only *present* goods, as do the most

debauched persons and those who are immersed in delights. And his life matched his doctrine, for he lived it in every luxury, in all possible softness, in delights of scents, clothing, women.'

Now, I ask you, setting this passage alongside all the authentic testimonies I have presented above in favour of Epicurus, and the authority so many great men who maintained that he was wrongly slandered and agreed that Aristippus is such as Atheneus depicted him, how far this philosopher •Epicurus• should be removed from the life-style and doctrines of Aristippus! And there is also this: Aristippus even boasted of his luxurious life, for it is known that when he was reproached one day for his luxuries and for the great amount he spent on them, he made no attempt to conceal or defend this; he settled for a kind of aphorism, a bit of teasing:

'I have Lais, but she doesn't have me; I live sumptuously, but if that were criminal, it would not be so often practised at the festivals of the gods. I pay fifty drachmas for a partridge that you wouldn't buy for a half-penny; I pay a lot for a stew that you would regret paying three half-pence for. So I don't have as much passion for pleasure as you do for money.'

(2) The second thing we should take account of here is that these words of Seneca: 'I will never call indolence [see Glossary] a good; a worm, a cricket, a flea has it' etc. can't be and shouldn't be taken to refer to the indolence or pleasure that Epicurus finds in a state of rest; because what he meant by that was not a state of idleness, or 'rest' such as that of a flea or a worm, but rather the rest that Seneca himself praises him for when he says 'Why is it that this *rest*—during which he will arrange for and settle the centuries to come, and give lessons to all men, present ones and future ones—will not be suitable for an honest man?' Or when he says, speaking particularly of Epicurus, 'That

person whom we are accustomed to speaking of harshly does not defend a listless and lazy pleasure, but rather a pleasure affirmed by reason.' As if he meant to liken it to the pleasure that Aristotle favours, drawn from the contemplative life, because contemplation—the state of rest and tranquility that is employed in theorising and meditating—should not be called idleness and laziness; for contemplation is rather an action; God's performance of this action is the sole source of his blessedness. [He then quotes Aristotle to the same effect.]

What Seneca teaches regarding the pleasure there is in movement is very relevant here: 'This pleasure is extinguished when the pleasure is at its greatest strength; . . . it goes very quickly, and downright boredom sets in after the first thrust. Now, something that comes and goes very quickly—that is due to perish in the very act—has neither substance, solidity, nor stability, but ceases in the moment when it comes into existence, and in the very beginning looks to the end.'

It is true that Plato, reasoning about this state, maintains that it should not be called a 'pleasure' rather than 'pain', because it may just as well be called pain as pleasure; 'for just as it is a pleasure to rise from pain to this state, so falling from a pleasure into this state is a pain.' But

- stopping enjoying a pleasure, without any ensuing pain

is not nearly as grievous as

- stopping being tormented by pain, without any ensuing pleasure

is gratifying. . . . That is what Torquatus means in Cicero: 'I do not hold that when a pleasure is removed, something unpleasant immediately follows, unless it just randomly happens that some pain follows the pleasure. On the contrary, we rejoice to be delivered from pains even when this is not

followed by any of those pleasures that gratify the senses; which should show us what a great pleasure it is to be free from pain!'

But let us listen to Seneca, who contends that this condition is not only a pleasure, but the chief good of mankind.

(ii) Epicurus on the wise man's condition and joy

Seneca says:

'The wise man is the one who—joyous, peaceful, and undisturbed—lives as contentedly as the gods. Examine yourselves now. If

- you are never sad and exasperated,
- you don't have any unduly fervent hopes that create disturbances in you,
- your mind is in the same condition, day and night, always self-controlled, always upright, and always contented,

then you can claim to have reached the highest level of happiness that men are capable of. But if you are looking everywhere for all sorts of pleasures, I have to tell you that you are lacking in wisdom as much as in joy. You want to reach the sovereign good, but you are mistaken if you hope to do this by means of riches. You seek joy among honours, which is seeking it among cares and vexations. What you believe will give you a pleasure is the origin and cause of a thousand torments. Joy is what all men wish for, but they don't know how to go about it so as to obtain a joy that is firm and assured. Some seek it in banquets and in luxury; others in riches and great offices and command; others in the favours and smiles of a mistress; yet others in an empty show

of their literary skills and their worthless knowledge. [He criticises “short-lived pastimes”—such as drinking bouts—which purchase an hour’s cheerful foolishness at the price of months of displeasure and exasperation; and basking in public applause, bought at great cost in mental disturbance and due to cost more in the future. Then:] So remember that a wise man should procure for himself a joy that is firm, constant, and always level.... So you have reason to want to be wise, since a wise man is never without joy, a joy that comes solely from his own conscience and from his awareness of his virtue, and that can be had only by someone who is just, magnanimous, temperate. “What?”, you will say, “Don’t fools and wicked men rejoice?” No more than lions who have found a prey! When such men have spent the night in debauchery, have gorged themselves with wine and worn themselves out with women, and when their stomachs can no longer contain all the food they have devoured, they cry “What miserable wretches we are! We see now that this night was been spent in false joys!” [He also gives the exclamation in Latin.] The joy of the gods and of those who imitate them is never interrupted and never ends; it would cease if it came from outside them. Fortune cannot take away something that it didn’t give in the first place.’

(iii) The mind’s pains and pleasures are greater than the body’s

The last difference that Laertius puts between Epicurus and Aristippus is that Aristippus holds that the body’s pains are greater and more troublesome than the mind’s, and holds also that the body’s pleasures are much greater and more

considerable than the mind’s; whereas Epicurus maintains the complete opposite. He says:

‘Through the body we can feel only things that are present, but through the mind we can feel the past and the future. It is evident that a very great pleasure (or a very great affliction) of the mind contributes more to making a life happy (or unhappy) than does a very great pleasure (or pain) of the body. If the painful diseases of the body prevent life from being sweet, those of the mind ought to do so even more. Now, the diseases of the mind are those enormous, empty desires for riches, glory, power, and for sordid and unlawful pleasures. Moreover, those vexations and sorrows that overwhelm the mind, those cares that consume it’, and so on.

This seems to be what Ovid has in mind when he scolds us for •enduring the cautery, the scalpel, and thirst to get us out of some bodily infirmity while •refusing to endure anything to heal our mind, which is worth infinitely more. And I suppose Horace had the same notion in the passage I have already called attention to, ‘Why do you hurry... etc.’ [on page 15. He quotes both passages in Latin.]

Certainly, as the mind is infinitely nobler than the body, and according to Aristotle is almost all that a man is, it should be extremely susceptible to impressions—whether of

- good, pleasure [see Glossary] or pleasure, or of
- evil, displeasure, anxiety or vexation.

Moreover the mind’s disorders are made more dangerous than the body’s by the fact that the body’s have recognisable symptoms, while the mind’s often remain hidden from us, because our reason (which should detect them) is disturbed and cannot make sound judgments. Thus, those who are sick in the body resort to medicine, while those who have an ailing mind despise philosophy and refuse to obey its

precepts.

Furthermore, the greatest and the most dangerous of the body's diseases are the ones that cause drowsiness, and are not felt by the patient, like lethargy, epilepsy, and that burning fever that throws one into delirium; almost all diseases of the mind should be supposed to be of that kind—not only because •they are not recognised for what they are, but also because •they masquerade as the opposite virtues, with fury and anger being called *strength*, fear being called *prudence*, and (in brief) vexation—which is a pain of the mind, and a certain general disease that makes other diseases unpleasant, sad and upsetting—is taken to be nothing more than something caused without much provocation, and without reason.

One should not object, as Aristippus does, that criminals are usually punished with *corporeal* pains and punishments because they are greater and more unbearable. The legislator or the judge does not have the same power over the mind as he has over the body, so it's true that he does not directly order that the criminal's mind be tormented; he orders bodily torment so as to be sure that he is punished, and to make it clear to the mass of the people that they should be restrained by the fear of punishment. But it doesn't follow from this that there is not another, greater pain, or that mental suffering cannot still be an even greater torment.

[He develops this theme at some length, quoting Latin verses by Juvenal, Horace, and Persius. He speaks of the 'agony of mind' of someone who is awaiting a public, shameful, painful death, and then moves on to 'the pain and anxiety of mind arising from the a remorse, b craving, or c ambition of a a scoundrel, b a tyrant, or c an ambitious person', and continues thus:] And it can't be said that a scoundrel, by piling up his crimes, could end up having no ordinary remorse of the sort [this is said sarcastically] that

gnaws at the heart of the cruelest tyrants, and thus become happy. Apart from the fact that mere freedom from remorse does not make happiness, I will get in ahead of that and say that in the ordinary course of life this supposition •of a guilt-free scoundrel• is not just very rare, as one could easily prove, but downright impossible: no man, however hardened, could get rid of this inner executioner. Moreover, •if someone could,• such a scoundrel would have to be counted not as a man but rather as •a monster to be strangled, or as •a madman who had lost sense and reason, laying himself open to the rage and fury of all men who would abhor him and regard him as something to be exterminated—like a ferocious beast or a tyrant.

(iv) How Epicurus differs from the Stoics

Laertius also comments on how Epicurus was unlike the Stoics. [He repeats the earlier charge that the Stoics resented Epicurus's fame, and slandered him by misrepresenting what kind of pleasure he said to be the chief goal. Then:] Among others, one named Cleanthes, to strengthen the case and make Epicurus more odious, depicted him in terms of this objection that Cicero brings against •the Epicurean-Torquatus:

'Imagine a painting in which Pleasure, seated on a royal throne, displayed in splendid and magnificent robes, has the virtues standing around her like maid-servants. She does nothing for them; and the only job she gives them is to whisper in her ear the warning: "Be careful not to do anything imprudent that could offend the minds of men, or anything that might lead to some pain. We are the virtues, born to serve you in this way; our role is just precisely this."

You see there the painting that the envy and jealousy of Cleanthes made of the *pleasure* of Epicurus. And that would be as low as they could go if someone hadn't said that 'Epicurus had **imitated Paris**, when of the three goddesses he chose Venus, to whom he gave the golden apple', and that 'Epicurus had only sensual pleasure in mind, charmed by her tousled hair smelling of perfume and honey, her attire, her composure, and her eyes which breathed only love and lasciviousness. Instead, he ought to have **imitated Hercules**, who having met pleasure and virtue, will prefer the latter, although virtue has an austere face, badly combed hair, a stern glance, a masculine stride, decency, and a becoming modesty.' [He quotes eight lines of Latin verse saying roughly these things. They are by the 'someone' in question, namely Silius Italicus.]

(v) According to Epicurus, the virtues aim at pleasure as the goal of the happy life

There is no need to spend time erasing Cleanthes' picture, or examining the output of slander and malice. I have already said more than enough about that, especially in showing clearly this:

The pleasure Epicurus has in mind is not the low and dissolute bodily pleasure that this picture portrays, but rather something utterly different and utterly pure, namely indolence of the body and peace of the mind, chiefly the latter. So there is no way for this sort of pleasure to interfere with the pursuit of virtue, since it is in this pleasure that happiness, or the happy life, consists. What Epicurus holds, therefore, is exactly what the Stoics themselves hold when they maintain that *virtue is all one needs for a good and happy life*.

Certainly, this maxim alone shows plainly enough that the Stoics—whatever evasion or subterfuge they might use—really were connecting virtue with something else, i.e. with •the good and •living happily; and thus it shows that ·in their view· because the happy life is truly desired for itself, virtue is not as wholly desired for itself as a happy life is. Now, when I say that they looked for subterfuges, I include even Seneca in that. . . . When he said:

'You are mistaken when you ask me what "What do we seek virtue *for*?", for that is to ask for something that would be above that which is the highest of all; I seek and ask for virtue itself; I desire it for itself; there is nothing better; it is its own reward',

it is obvious that the question is fair and appropriate; one might say that asking for something beyond virtue is not asking for an absurdity, something beyond what is highest and most elevated. It is quite true that of all the means we can employ to make life happy, we shouldn't look for anything higher, surer, or better than virtue; nevertheless, the happy life should be counted as above virtue, because virtue ultimately relates to the happy life—to happiness—as its goal.

Aristotle seems to be more even-handed when, speaking of the happiness that virtue above all things can procure, he said: 'It is evident that the reward and the goal of virtue is something very good, something divine and happy.' And elsewhere: 'Happiness is not something that comes to us divinely, but—whether it is gained through virtue, or through doctrine, or through the application of doctrine—nothing that could be more divine, nothing more happy, than it is.'¹ Also, agreeing with Plato and Architas: 'Some things are desired for themselves and not as a means to anything else,

¹ Perhaps it should be noted that here and in some other places 'happiness' translates *felicité* and 'happy' translates *heureux*. It is not clear what distinction, if any, is involved.

such as beatitude; others are desired as means to something else, and not for themselves, such as riches; and others are desired for themselves *and* as a means to something else, such as virtue.'

I cite this so as to show what men can be brought against Seneca when he exclaims that virtue cannot and should not be desired for anything but itself. And in doing so, one does not tarnish virtue; because insofar as we value pleasure and happiness (the chief good), so much do we praise and honour virtue, which leads to happiness.

But rather than going on about these matters, it is enough to relate here what Cicero has Torquatus say expressing the views of Epicurus. The passage is long, but it is very beautiful, and it explains everything—one might say that it *settles* everything. After a long disagreement, it was concluded that whatever is just and praiseworthy has to do with 'being able to live with pleasure'. Torquatus continues: [This quotation runs to page 29]

'It must be admitted that the sovereign good is to live gently and pleasantly, given that it is the ultimate good that the Greeks call the *telos*, the goal, because it is not a means to anything else and everything is a means to it.'

Those who identify it [= the chief good] with *virtue* alone—dazzled by the splendour of the word, and not understanding what nature demands—will be rescued from a great error if they will consent to listen to Epicurus. Take the case of your fine and excellent virtues, especially **wisdom**: who would believe them to be praiseworthy or desirable if they didn't cause pleasure? Just as we value the art [here = 'skill'] of physicians not for the art itself but for its contribution to health, so also we would not want to have wisdom, which is the art of living, if it didn't do anything. As things are, it is desired because it directs us in the search for genuine pleasure and enables us to achieve it.... For wisdom is

the only thing that banishes sadness and vexation of mind, that doesn't allow us to shake with fear, and—snuffing out the flame of all the greeds and lusts—enables us to live peacefully. These are the insatiable greeds that ruin not only individual men but families and often whole republics. Greeds give rise to hatreds, dissensions, discords, wars; and the blind impetuosity of these passions is directed not only outward but also at one another *within* our minds. That inevitably embitters one's life; so that the wise man is the only one who—having banished all pointless greed and error, and being contented with the bounds nature has set—can live without vexation, without sadness, and without fear.

If then we observe that ignorance and error reduce the whole of life to confusion, and that wisdom alone can save us from the onslaughts of pointless appetites and fears, teaching us to bear fortune's insults with moderation and showing us the paths that lead to calmness and tranquility, shouldn't we say that wisdom is desirable for the sake of pleasure, and that folly is to be avoided because of what it causes in the way of disturbance and suffering of the mind?

For the same reason we say that even **temperance** is desirable not in itself but because it brings peace to minds, soothes them, and keeps them in harmony with one another. For it is temperance that advises us to follow reason both in choosing •what things to desire and pursue and •what things to avoid. It is not enough to judge concerning what we should or shouldn't do; we also need to remain firm and steady in the judgments we have made. Now, there are many who cannot stick firmly by the decisions they have made: overwhelmed by the glitter of a pleasure that presents itself •as available•, they let themselves fall into slavery to their lusts, failing to foresee the inevitable result of that. And so it happens that in order to obtain a pleasure which

- is small and unnecessary, or

- could have been obtained in some other way, or
- could have been forgone without suffering,

they incur serious disease, loss of fortune, disgrace, and (often) vulnerability to the penalties of the laws and of the law-courts. Whereas those who are willing to enjoy pleasures in a way that doesn't lead to any suffering, who remain constant in their judgment, and—from fear of being conquered by pleasure—refrain from doing what they see ought not to be done, get a great pleasure from depriving themselves of pleasure. Often they put up with pain because they fear that they will incur greater pain by not doing so. This shows that intemperance is not undesirable for its own sake, and that temperance is desirable not because it renounces pleasures but because it procures greater pleasures.

The same account will be found to hold good for **fortitude**. We are drawn to

- suffering,
- pain,
- patience,
- assiduity,
- industry,
- courage, and
- watchfulness

not for themselves, but so as to be able to live without anxiety and fear and to be free as possible from distress of mind and body. Just as

- an excessive fear of death disturbs the tranquility of life, and just as
- bowing one's head to pain and bearing it abjectly and feebly is a miserable thing, so much so that through this weakness of mind many men have brought down their parents, others their friends, some their country, and many have utterly brought down even themselves,

•so a big-hearted, strong and lofty mind is free from all care and vexation; because it makes light of death, and is so well prepared for pains that it remembers that

- great pains finish with death,
 - slight ones have frequent intervals of respite, and
 - those of medium intensity are within our control;
- and is aware that if pains are not excessive they are endurable, and if they are unbearable we can choose to leave a life that does not please us, like walking out of a theatre.

This all shows us that indecisiveness, greed, and cowardice are not intrinsically blameworthy, and that fortitude and endurance are not intrinsically praiseworthy: the former are rejected because they beget pain, the latter desired because they beget pleasure.

There remains only **justice** ·to complete the list of the basic virtues·; but this admits of almost the same treatment as the others. I have shown that wisdom, temperance, and fortitude are linked with pleasure in such a way that they cannot possibly be separated from it. The same conclusion should be reached with justice: not only does it never harm anyone, but on the contrary it always provides some benefit, as much by •its own nature and its tranquilising influence on minds as by •the hope ·it warrants· of a never-failing supply of the things that an uncorrupted nature desires. And because indecisiveness, greed, and cowardice always torment the mind, constantly and turbulently calling to it, when injustice dominates a mind it causes trouble and disquiet in it. If it [meaning the person whose mind it is] has performed some bad action, even if it was done in secret, it can never feel assured that it will never be detected. It often happens that the first upshot of a crime is

- suspicion, then
- gossip and rumour, then
- some accuser, then finally

- the judge.

There have even been wrongdoers who testified against themselves.

'If there are any who think that their wealth sufficiently secures them against the conscience of men, they still dread divinity, and believe that these pangs of anxiety that torment them day and night are sent by the gods to punish them. And their bad actions can never contribute to *lessening* their life's annoyances as much as they are *increased* by a guilty conscience, the law, and the hatred of the citizens. Yet there are some who are so insatiable in their desire for

- money,
- honour,
- power,
- debauchery, and
- banquets

that their ill-gotten gains, however great they are, increase rather than lessen their greed; so that *they* should be restrained by punishment rather than by re-education. So those who have sound judgment are summoned by true reason to justice, equity and honesty, which are the means by which one can acquire well-being and the love of each person, this being a crucial contributor to the ability to live gently and peacefully. Especially as there is never any motive for acting badly, because •desires that spring from nature are easily satisfied without harming anyone, whereas •empty desires ought to be resisted. Why? Because they don't aim at anything that is really desirable, and there is more loss in injustice than there is gain in the things than can be acquired through injustice. That is why justice can't be said to be desirable in itself; it is desirable because it brings so much pleasure. For it is very pleasurable to be valued and loved; nothing makes life more secure—or causes more pleasure—than that. Hence, we hold that unrighteousness

should be avoided not simply because of the unpleasant things that happen to the unrighteous, but primarily because a mind that is taken over by it is never allowed to breathe freely or know a moment's rest.' [End of three-page quotation from Cicero's *Torquatus*]

I could report here the objections that are made against this opinion, but they are merely aimed at the sordid and debauched pleasures that Epicurus explicitly rejects. I only take notice of the sort of pleasure that is under consideration here. It is the true and natural pleasure that constitutes the chief good and happiness; which is why virtue is said to be the only thing inseparable from it, because it is its only real, legitimate and necessary cause. When virtue is present, pleasure and happiness follow; and when it is removed, they are necessarily removed too.... The reason why Epicurus held that virtue was the direct cause happiness is that he believed that prudence was a compendium of all the virtues (so to speak), in that all the other virtues arise from prudence and have a necessary connection to it.

3: What constitutes a happy life

What I have said so far has done little except to show clearly what Epicurus' opinion was; now it is time to discuss the substance, and to see whether he was *right* to say that pleasure is the goal. This inquiry should begin by examining two of his principal maxims: •that any pleasure is intrinsically a good whereas any pain is an evil; and •that nevertheless certain pains should sometimes be preferred to certain pleasures. [These are the topics respectively of subsections (i) and (iii) below.]

(i) Whether all pleasure is a good in itself

With regard to the first maxim, it seems reasonable for Epicurus to maintain that all pleasure is good in itself, even if some pleasures happen to turn out badly. For any animal seems to be naturally so much drawn to pleasures [see Glossary] or to pleasure that •this is the foremost thing it naturally desires, and •there is no pleasure that it turns down except one that would be accompanied by some evil that would then cause pain and make the animal regret choosing the pleasure. And certainly, as the nature of good consists of inspiring the desire to like it and pursue it, one cannot say why every pleasure or all pleasure is not of itself likeable and desirable. Thus, there is none that

- does not, in itself, please,
- is not agreeable,
- does not, in itself, attract desire,

so that if we turn down some of them, it is not exactly *them* that we reject but rather the annoying effects that are bound to follow from them.

This example makes the point. No-one would deny that honey is naturally sweet; but if poison were mixed into it in such a way that the poison became sweet, then we really would have an aversion for the sweetness of honey. But this would be by accident, because the sweetness is still, in itself and by its own nature, delightful and appealing. Thus, one can say that if we have such an aversion, it is not so much for the sweetness itself as for the poison mixed into it, and for the harm that would be caused by the poison, not by the sweetness.... Look at any pleasure in the light of this example and you'll see that it never turns out otherwise: the harm never comes from the pleasure itself but rather from

- the thing from which it comes, or
- the action that accompanies it, or

- the harm that results from the thing or from the action, or
- the pain that result from the thing, the action, or the harm.

To show that this is so, •suppose that a particular instance of pleasure can come from a thing and an action that are not prohibited by any law, any custom, or any standard of honesty; •suppose that no loss of health, reputation or benefits results from this thing or action; and finally •suppose that it entails no punishment, no pain, no repentance, in the present life or in the hereafter. With all this supposed, you will clearly recognise that nothing precludes this pleasure from being considered a good; and that if it is not considered such, this is due not to its nature but to the circumstances I have indicated.

Aristotle also proves this by reasoning from the pain/pleasure contrast: 'Everyone agrees that pain is a bad thing and should be avoided. Well, anything that is contrary to a bad thing that should be avoided is a good thing; so pleasure is a good thing.' [Gassendi proceeds to build on this reasoning by strengthening the case for saying that pain is in itself a bad thing, using an argument that runs parallel to that of the preceding paragraph.]

It may be objected •that a temperate man avoids pleasures, whereas he who is prudent seeks indolence [see Glossary]; •that certain pleasures are an obstacle to prudence, especially those that are intense, as are especially sexual pleasures; •that some pleasures are not only harmful—in how they dull thinking, generate diseases, and cause poverty—but are also debauched and infamous.

First off, those who are temperate and those who are prudent do not avoid all pleasures, for sometimes, obviously, they seek pleasures that are pure and honourable. And if they avoid some of them, it's not just because they are

pleasures, but because they are linked to actions that cause harm which a prudent and temperate man shouldn't let himself be led into by the enjoyment of such a pleasure. Just as when one avoids sweetened poison—not because it is pleasurable but because it brings a harm that is certainly too high a price to pay for such sweetness.

It is certain that what goes against prudence is not pleasures themselves but rather the actions that accompany them, actions by which spirits are exhausted, the understanding is weakened, and judgment is clouded. So when these evils are attributed to pleasure, that is a fallacy that Aristotle calls *non causae ut causae* (that which is not the cause, taken as the cause), just as when the harm that should be attributed to the poison is attributed to the honey or to its sweetness.

As for diseases, poverty, and other drawbacks that commonly follow pleasure: they are caused not by pleasure as such, but by gluttony [and he lists some other culprits, including the 'shameful' actions that generate sexually transmitted diseases.]

That is why—to take one example—the laws do not forbid the adulterer's *pleasure* but rather his *adultery*. Because this conduct is forbidden and scandalous, the pleasure that goes with it is condemned as also forbidden and scandalous. To see that this is wrong, suppose there was no law against adultery, as in the state of pure nature; the pleasure of it would be the same, and there would be no reason to condemn it. [He gives a second example, a slightly weird one that is supposed to make the same point: it concerns a man's committing adultery with his now-remarried former wife.]

Some people object that although pleasure is not an evil, it is nevertheless better to count it among evils, because the populace, being inclined towards pleasure, ought to be bent

in the opposite way so that they can be brought upright—like straightening crooked trees. But Aristotle counters that it is not productive to use these kinds of arguments with people, because when (as here) it concerns passions and actions, less trust is put in words than in the thing itself; so that if the words don't square with what is perceived by the senses, they are discounted; and even if there's something good beneath them, they spoil it. This is why Aristotle seems to suggest that rather than •counting pleasure among evils, when the senses plainly oppose this and consider pleasure to be in itself a good, it is better to •make known and emphasise the evils that accompany or follow some pleasures, so that a prudent and temperate man would rather abstain from these kinds of pleasures than undergo such great evils because of them.

If Aristotle's response does not satisfy, then there's nothing to stop us from exclaiming against *pleasure*, intending it to be understood that our real target is pleasures that cause much more evil than they contain any good. . . .

(ii) Whether the Stoics' opinion about good and evil is tenable

We could, at this point, argue with the Stoics who claim that there is no other **good** than that which is honest, and no other **evil** than that which is dishonest. But that would be wasting time on pointless arguments, because (to put it briefly) they have made it a merely verbal matter: they have taken words, **good** and **evil**, to which all mankind gives certain meanings, and given them *much* narrower meanings of their own invention. For the rest of mankind count many things besides virtues as goods, such health, pleasure, fame, wealth, friends; and they count many things besides vices as evils, such as disease, pain, disgrace, poverty, enemies, etc.

The Stoics preferred to call these things *indifferent*—neither good nor bad—and because it was so obviously absurd to maintain that there is nothing to choose between health and disease, pleasure and pain, etc., they came up with some new terminology. They called health, pleasure, fame and the others *promota* [Latin for ‘preferable things’; he also gives it in Greek], meaning that they were not truly goods but *approached* virtue, which was the chief and unique good. They did likewise for disease and pain, naming them *abducta, remota* [Latin for ‘things that are taken away’, ‘things that are kept at a distance’; also given in Greek], which meant keeping less noble things further away from virtue; because whenever it is a matter of choice, the former are preferred and the latter dropped.

That is how they dealt with this matter, but it would be beneath me to give them any response except Cicero’s [The first sentence and a half of this are also given in Latin]:

‘Oh what great strength of mind, and what a fine basis for new doctrine! The Stoics’ feeble arguments lead them to conclude that pain is not evil, as if men were troubled only about the word and not about the thing! Why must you, Zeno, deceive me with your hair-splitting and your new words [he gives several in Greek]. For when you tell me that something which strikes me as horrible is not an evil, you greatly surprise me, and I want to know how it can be that what seems to me very hurtful is not an evil at all. Nothing is evil, you say, except what is dishonest and vicious; but these are merely words, and you can’t remove the difficulty with them. I know that pain is not a criminal evil; you needn’t trouble yourself to teach us that! But show me that the difference between suffering pain and not suffering it does not matter to me. You say that it doesn’t matter for the happiness

of life, since that consists solely in virtue; yet what you call “pain” is one of the things to be avoided, and is consequently evil. When you say that pain is not an *evil* but only *something hard to endure* etc., you are saying in several words what everyone says in one, *evil*. And when you say that there is nothing good but what is honest, nothing evil but what is dishonest, this is a verbal victory and a substantive defeat, expressing your wishes and proving nothing. Certainly, what can be said more sincerely and more truthfully is this: Everything that nature hates should be counted among the evils; everything that is agreeable to nature should be counted among the goods.’

(iii) Whether one might sometimes prefer pain to pleasure

The second thing that must be examined before reaching a conclusion about the opinion of Epicurus is: Whether pain should sometimes be chosen rather than pleasure. It is a question that depends entirely on the preceding one [for which see the first paragraph of this chapter on page 29]. For if there is a prospect of

- a pleasure of the kind that Plato calls ‘pure, and free of any admixture of trouble’, i.e. that will never be followed by any pain, now or in the future, in this life or in the next; or of
- a pain that could also be called ‘pure’, separated from all pleasure, i.e. that will never be followed by any pleasure, no-one could give a reason why that pleasure should not be embraced, or why that pain should not be avoided.

Conversely, if there is a prospect of

- a pleasure that would be an obstacle to obtaining a greater

pleasure, or that would be followed by a pain that would make us heartily sorry that we let the pleasure grab us; or of •a pain that would circumvent some greater pain, or that would be followed by a considerable pleasure,

there is every reason to think that that pleasure should be avoided and that pain embraced.

This is why Aristotle observed that pleasure and pain are the criterion, the standard, or the scales by which to judge whether a thing should be accepted or avoided. So a wise man will **a** forgo a pleasure or **b** accept a pain if he sees that **a** the pleasure would be followed by regret for having accepted it or **b** the pain is small, and would enable him to avoid a greater one. Torquatus explains the matter clearly:

'So that you can see the source of the error of those who condemn pleasure and praise pain, I will clearly reveal it to you, and expound to you what has been said by ·Epicurus·, that discoverer of the truth, that architect of the happy life. No-one despises, hates, or avoids pleasure just because it is pleasure, but because those who don't know how to pursue pleasure rationally encounter great pains. And no-one loves or seeks pain just because it is pain, but because occasionally hardship and pain are the route to some great pleasure. To take a trivial example: have any of you ever undertaken laborious physical exercise except to get some advantage from it? Well, could we reasonably find fault with someone who chooses to accept a pleasure [see Glossary] that would have no harmful consequences, or someone who avoids a pain that would not cause any pleasure? But we rightly denounce and dislike those who—drawn and corrupted by the pleasures of the moment—are so blinded by their passion that they cannot foresee the evils and

troubles it will bring to them. And equally wrong are those who abandon their duty and their post through weakness in the soul, i.e. through shrinking from hardship and trouble. Nothing is easier than to draw the line in this matter. In a free hour, when we are free to choose and nothing prevents us from doing what we like best, every pleasure should be taken, every pain should be avoided. But there are often circumstances where pleasures should be rejected and distressing options should be accepted. So the wise man in his prudence draws the line in this way: he rejects pleasures to secure other greater pleasures, or else he endures pains to avoid worse pains.'

Add to that the general agreement of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, who all make use of the same rule and the same criterion. Add the agreement of Cicero, who holds that you should behave as though all pleasures and all displeasures, either present or to come, were in front of you and you were weighing them up: 'For if you weigh present pleasures against future ones, you should always choose the greatest and most numerous; but if we weigh evils with evils, we choose the least and the fewest. But if you weigh present pleasures against future displeasures, or present displeasures against future pleasures, you should choose the pleasures if they tip the balance, and choose the displeasures if they weigh more.'

(iv) The chief good intended by nature

Coming at last to Epicurus's opinion that *Pleasure is the goal*, it should be noted that his reason for this view has to do •partly with pleasure as such and •partly with pleasure considered as needing to be guided by wisdom. For that is how Alexander indicates that the matter should be managed,

when he says:

'According to Epicurus, pleasure is truly the chief good that nature requires, or the chief good we are naturally inclined to, but afterwards this pleasure is kept in order, and directed by wisdom and prudence.'

[He also quotes it in Latin.]

Reserving until later a discussion of this **last**, which for Epicurus is simply indolence and tranquility, I shall now say something about the **first**, and see whether pleasure—taking this word in its common meaning—really is this *Primum naturae familiare*, i.e. the first thing, the first good, that nature requires. For this is a great question among philosophers; and it seems that just as there is a **last** in the chain of desirable goods, there should also be a **first**, which is the beginning, as it were, of all desires. Cicero said: 'Some claim that this first good is

a pleasure or pleasure;

others say that it is

b freedom from pain; for as soon as any animal is born
it puts an effort into keeping away pain;

still others identify the first good with

c the first goods of nature, which they take to include being, life, the wholeness and preservation of all the parts ·of one's body·, health, perfect senses, strength, beauty, and other such things.'

Of these opinions, **a** and **b** are included in Epicurus's position, as he counts freedom from pain as a pleasure. The Stoics' opinion **c** seems the least probable, because, although the animal can be said to desire existence, life, health, and the others, if you look carefully you'll see that •all those things are desired only because it is pleasurable to exist, to be alive, to be healthy etc., and thus that •it is for the sake of pleasure that these things are desired, and that consequently •pleasure is the first of them, i.e. it holds the

first rank among the things that are desired. And this seems to be what Aristotle is claiming when he says:

'Pleasure is common to all animals, and is the inseparable companion of everything that we *choose* to do. For we see that what is honest, as well as what is useful, is pleasurable [see Glossary]. Besides, pleasure has been with us since our earliest infancy—sharing the maternal breast with us, so to speak—so that it is futile to try to wean ourselves from this inclination with which our life is tinted, indeed saturated.'

This plainly leads us to notice two things. **(i)** Although goods are commonly taken to be of three sorts—the honest, the useful, and the pleasant—the third of these (which is nothing other than pleasure itself) is mixed in with the other two in such a way that it seems to be not so much •a separate type distinct from the others as •the genus to which they belong, i.e. a common property that causes the others to be goods or desirable, as though what is honest or useful is desired only because it is pleasant and agreeable. **(ii)** Pleasure, being common to all the animals and implanted in them since their earliest youth, and also being involved in all our decisions about what to desire, seems to be entitled to be the *first* of all goods that are desired, for the ordinary terms for it are [and he gives three Latin phrases, each beginning with *primum*].

So Epicurus seems to be handling this matter more sincerely and more straightforwardly than all the others when he declares that pleasure 'is nature's first convenience' [he gives that in Latin, as he does a longer bit expanding that idea]. We have only to listen to Torquatus in Cicero:

'Epicurus teaches that every animal right from its birth •desires pleasure as its chief good, and delights in having it, but •hates pain as its chief evil, shunning it and keeping it as far off as possible, and avoids it as much as it is able; doing these things while it

is in good condition and nature is judging soundly and without corruption. There is no need for argument, dispute or research concerning *why* pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. We pick this up naturally—finding it self-evident—as we do that fire is hot, snow is white, honey is sweet.'

Maximus of Tyre teaches the same doctrine:

'Pleasure is more ancient than reason and art, goes before experience, and does not wait on time. But our ardent love of it, which is as old as our bodies, is the foundation of the animal's well-being, so that if it is taken away, everything that is born will immediately perish. A man can acquire knowledge, reason, and that much-vaunted *understanding*, through advances in years, experience and the course of observable events; but from his infancy, and self-taught, he has been knowledgeable about pleasure and has known to love it and to declare war on pain, because it is pleasure that saves him and pain that destroys him. If pleasure were a thing of no value, it would not be born with us, nor would it be—as it is—the oldest of all the things necessary for our survival.'

There is no need here to announce that from all this we should infer that pleasure is the chief good. Eudoxus of Cnidas is reported by Aristotle as arguing:

- Whatever is desired is good, so whatever is sovereignly desired should be the sovereign good.
- Something that everything desires is sovereignly desired; so
- what everything desires must be the sovereign good; but
- that is pleasure; so
- pleasure is the sovereign good.

Rather than arguing in this manner, let us admire the

wisdom and foresight of the sovereign Author of nature, as shown in this: Though all our operations are in themselves troublesome and annoying, He has caused to be sweetened with pleasure the ones that Aristotle calls "natural", such as seeing, hearing, etc.; He has even brought it about that the pleasure attached to a given operation is greater in proportion to how necessary the operation is for the preservation of the species or of the individual. For the animals would neglect or forget not only sexual intercourse but even drinking and eating, if there were not certain natural *stings* that arouse us and by causing some kind of pain and uneasiness remind us of the action whose accompanying pleasure would appease this pain and uneasiness; which is a sure sign that these sorts of pleasures are not inherently bad, though men—unlike other animals—misuse them by intemperance.'

There is no need, either, to go on announcing that by the word 'pleasure' I do not refer to sordid and dishonest pleasures—

- a** extravagance,
- b** feeble softness,
- c** the delicacies of the table,
- d** dancing,
- e** women

—short, the pleasures which, as Maximus observes, the sophists usually objected to, calling them **a** *Sardanapali scilicet luxus*, **b** *medica mollities*, **c** *Ionicae deliciae* and *siculae mensae*, **d** *sybariticae saltationes*, **e** *Corinthiae meretrices*, etc. Rather, I am referring quite generally to all the states that can be and ordinarily *are* called

- 'joy',
- 'pleasure' [see Glossary],
- 'contentment',
- 'satisfaction',

- ‘delectation’,
- ‘comfort’,
- ‘gaiety’,
- states that are ‘peaceful’, ‘tranquil’, ‘serene’, ‘secure’, ‘untroubled’,
- ‘indolence’ [see Glossary],
- ‘tranquility’,

and so on, which are nothing but synonyms of ‘pleasure’.

The only thing there is a need for is to recall what I have already noted to be one of Aristotle’s doctrines: •that everything we choose is accompanied by pleasure, and—using the common division of goods into the honest, the practical, and the pleasant—•that the pleasant is something general •that mixes with the other two•, in that the honest and the practical seem also to be pleasant. ·This needs to be remembered· because it implies that ‘good’ and ‘pleasant’ are synonyms, and that what makes good *good* and deserve its definition as *what all things desire* is its being pleasant. Thus, given the undoubted truth that a pleasant good is desired for the pleasure ·it provides·, it remains only to prove that honest goods and practical goods are also desired for pleasure.

(v) Practical good has to do with pleasure

Now, it is not very hard to show that practical good has something to do with [see Glossary] pleasant good, i.e. with the pleasure that comes from it; since it is obvious that we desire a practical good not for the sake of practicality but for something else, and that either *is* pleasure or has something to do with pleasure.

To begin with, eating, drinking, song, perfumes and other such things obviously relate directly to pleasure; and that also holds for various arts [here = ‘professional skills’] such

as those of cooking, hunting, painting, even medicine and surgery, which serve to deliver us from troubles from which it is pleasurable to be free. The same goes for navigation, marketing, and warfare—all of which tend towards profit in money or some equivalent, by which one can achieve some pleasure that one is looking for. And when someone works industriously to earn what he needs to buy a house, clothes, medications, books, a government job, etc., isn’t it true that he is thinking of the pleasure that he will enjoy •when he has enough to retire, working only as much as he wants to; •when he will have the means to eat when he is hungry, to drink when he is thirsty, to warm himself when he is cold, to study and to satisfy his curiosity when the whim takes him; in short, •when he will see himself in a position to pass his life pleasurable, securely, honestly, honourably?

That is the general goal of everyone: the ploughman, the perfidious innkeeper (as Horace depicts him), the soldier, the merchant, the pilot. [He quotes some lines of Latin verse, which someone has translated thus:]

The soldier fights, the busy tradesman cheats,
And finds a thousand tricks and choice deceits,
The heavy plough contents the labouring hind,
The merchant strives with every tide and wind;
And all this toil to get vast heaps of gold,
That they may live at ease when they are old.

It is the goal of courtiers, and of those who busy themselves with grand careers and high offices. They endure so much work, so many difficulties, such long hours, only (they say) so as to be able eventually to retire, to pass the remainder of their life on their own terms, pleasurable and agreeably.

There is not anyone among the miserly and most sordid who does not dream of the pleasure they will have while contemplating their coffers full of gold and silver. [He quotes

five Latin lines from Horace, in which a disgraceful and widely disliked man congratulates himself on his ability to stay at home and gloat over his wealth. Then:] Not to mention those who, not realising that nature is satisfied with little, are pleased with excess and spend their plunder on luxury, and try in all sorts of ways to amass riches so as to have the pleasure of wasting them in prodigality. This is what gave rise to these justified complaints of Manilius: ‘Though nature has only modest needs, we build higher and higher the peak from which to fall, and purchase luxury with our gains, and with love of luxury the fear of dispossession, until the greatest boon that wealth can confer is the squandering of itself.’ [This is a translation by G.P.Gould of four lines of Latin verse quoted by Gassendi.]

(vi) Honest good has to do with pleasure

[For ‘has to do with’, see Glossary.] It seems a bit more difficult to prove the same thing regarding honest good, because this type of good is supposed to be desirable solely and precisely for its own sake, and not for something else. Cicero, among others, appears extremely agitated towards Epicurus when—after offering what he thinks to be a correct account of what honesty is—he says this to Torquatus:

Your Epicurus says about

those who measure the chief good only by honesty, who say that everything has to do with honesty and that **a** in honesty there is no pleasure

that he doesn’t know what they mean, that these are empty words which he doesn’t understand, that he hasn’t the faintest idea of what they can mean by this word “honesty”. Speaking as people ordinarily do

(he says), something is called “honest” only if general approval makes it splendid and admirable; although that is often more pleasing than some pleasures, it is nevertheless desired for pleasure’s sake. Do you see the great dispute? A famous philosopher who has made so much clamour in the world, his fame spreading not only through Greece and Italy but through all the barbarian lands, says that he does not know what honesty is if **b** it isn’t contained in pleasure.¹

That is how Cicero presents the opinion of Epicurus. As for the crucial words *something is called ‘honest’ only if the approval of men makes it approvable*, Aristotle puts the matter this way: ‘Either nothing is honest or it [= honesty] should be measured by men’s opinions.’ [He also gives this in Greek.]

To start the discussion of this definition or description of honesty, I ask: what harm is there in applying it to men who merit praise and approval? Honesty is so-called in Latin because of the honour that it merits, and the Greek phrase *τὸ καλὸν* does not seem to have any other meaning. If you maintain that ‘honest’ also means ‘beautiful’, ‘honourable’, ‘praiseworthy’ etc., you will find that those words come into play not with regard to honesty itself but with regard to men who approve something as honest and to whom, therefore, it appears beautiful and honourable and something that could or should be praised. The same ought be understood of the Greek word that is the opposite of *τὸ καλὸν*; because when we interpret it as ‘ignoble, unpleasant, or blameworthy, and shameful’, we always mean it to be bringing in men to whom it appears as such.

Now, when Cicero himself claims that what is ‘honest’

¹ [We have here **a** pleasure in honesty and **b** honesty in pleasure. The difference is there in the French, but seems not to carry any theoretical weight.]

should rather be defined as *that which can be praised in and of itself, apart from any utility and without any reward*, isn't it true that just by saying that *the honest is what can be praised* he aligns himself with those who praise it, i.e. with (in Epicurus's phrase) 'the common voice of the people'? And if anyone said that Epicurus in using the word 'people' or 'multitude' meant to exclude the wise, and didn't mean to be speaking of *all* the men who make up a city or a nation, that would ridiculous and boring joke.

As for Cicero's saying that utility should be removed ·from the picture·, Epicurus will thoroughly agree •that honest people expect no profit or advantage such as money or anything of that kind, but not •that they do not expect some other kind of benefit, such as praise, glory, honour, fame, approval, etc. And Cicero himself agrees with this. In his speech in defence of Milo, assuming that many rewards are available to good people, he says explicitly that 'of all the rewards of virtue, glory is most bountiful'; and in another place that 'virtue does not require any reward for travails and dangers except praise and glory; without those, what is there in this life—this very short life—that should lead us to take so much trouble?'

So Epicurus seems to have given a pretty good definition of 'honest': *that which the people in general declare to be, and approve as, glorious and honourable*. For if at any time a people x regard as glorious and praiseworthy something that is held to be sordid or dishonest, this thing can truly be taken as dishonest •by people other than x, men or nations with other laws and other customs that give them different notions of *honest* and *dishonest*, but not •by the people x whose laws and customs endorse it as honest. Which is why Cicero himself sometimes gives this general definition of 'honour': *a reward for virtue that someone receives through the judgment of ·his fellow-·citizens* [he also gives it in Latin]. He

is saying in effect that honour—and consequently honesty, or what is glorious and honourable by reputation—depends on the judgment of citizens, i.e. of people who apply their own laws and customs.

But in conclusion, here is an important point about the honesty that has something to do with pleasure: it should be noted that this relation to pleasure doesn't prevent honesty from being said to be in some sense desired for its own sake, given that it is (as Aristotle teaches) desired *nulla contingente, sive superveniente re*, i.e. according to Cicero, that it is desired 'with no thought of any utility—no reward, no profit, no upshot in the form of money or anything of that sort'. For someone might desire honour, knowledge, virtue, not to grow richer from this but for a the honour that comes from it, b an understanding that is clear and knowledgeable, c moderation in his passions; all these being things he wants because it is *pleasurable* to be a honoured, b knowledgeable, virtuous, and c to have a peaceful mind.

(vii) Whether the desire for honour is blameworthy

We should observe that though it is very wrong to seek honour •in an aggressive or shameless manner, or •putting on a pretence of virtue, nevertheless it doesn't seem that the pursuit of honour should be condemned across the board, as some do, if it is sought primarily through real virtue and through honest moderation. There is certainly reason to count this desire as natural; for we see that it naturally holds sway in children and even in lower animals, and that there is no-one who, although he purports to have an aversion to it, does not recognise that he always likes it and could not free himself from this passion even if he wanted to. There is certainly reason, also, for such a high value to be placed on honour, since it is usually regarded as the prize of virtue,

and every republic, every state, arouses its citizens to great actions by the hope of it. Also, a noble and high mind differs from a base and mean one in that the latter acts only for gain and profit whereas the former is looking only for glory. Moreover, experience teaches us—and this has always been known—that if the desire for honour and glory is removed from men's minds, that's the end of any talk about those grand and wonderful exploits that sustain nations.

There are two sorts of pleasure for which honour is desired. **(i)** The first is the extreme joy that somebody hopes to experience when his fame spreads among men, so that he will become celebrated in the world. The story of Damocles is well known, as was his expectation to feel a joy beyond words for the royal honour bestowed on him. So is the story of Demosthenes: that great man candidly admits that he was pleased to hear a weak little woman, while returning from the fountain, whispering to her companion 'That's Demosthenes', pointing to him. [He continues with further examples, mostly from his own times.]

(ii) The other sort of pleasure that leads men to desire honour is the security that it is so pleasurable to enjoy, especially because someone who lives in perfect security finds himself empowered to do whatever seems to him to be good, with nobody preventing him from enjoying the pleasures he likes. It is easy to believe that honour *does* confer security; to see why, consider the two cases: the honour is bestowed because of **a** virtue, or because of **b** high offices and distinctions that presuppose virtue. If it because of **a** virtue, there will be no basis for contempt here, and the honoured person does not fall into a state in which he is exposed to the insults and affronts. And if it is because of **b** high offices and distinctions, and thus for some advantage to be expected or some evil to be avoided, this too usually provides reliable security. But there is this

difference: because the honour that is bestowed because of distinctions is more splendid and impresses •common folk even more, one sees many of •them aspire to distinctions and to splendid employments, whereas very few aspire to virtue; the idea being that those who are promoted to distinctions would have the means to grant favours to **a** some and to harm **b** others, and could consequently be secure themselves with regard to **a** the former by hope and with regard to **b** the latter by fear.

4: What good comes from moral virtue

Now in dealing with virtue itself, Aristotle and Cicero express wonder at the pleasures and pleasures of knowledge and learning, which make up the **first part** of moral virtue. Aristotle says:

'Nature, that mother of all, arouses indescribable pleasures in those who can come to understand the causes of things, and philosophise [*philosophent*, here = 'study science'] candidly and in good faith. If we cannot without pleasure look at mere *images* of nature because in looking at them we contemplate the ingenuity and skill of the painter or sculptor who made them, how much more reason there is for the contemplation of nature itself—of its wisdom and its admirable contrivances—to fill our minds with joy and satisfaction?'

Cicero speaks of it just as highly. He says: 'The consideration and contemplation of nature is the true and natural food of minds; it lifts and inspires us; when we think about celestial bodies—so great, large, and of such a vast extent—we scoff at things down here as small and insignificant.'

Seneca is no less striking. He exclaims:

'Oh how contemptible a man is who doesn't raise himself above human affairs! When a man has crushed underfoot all vice, all evil, and then raised himself to sublime matters and dug into the secrets of nature, his mind can be said to have arrived at the greatest happiness its nature is capable of. It is then, while strolling among the stars, that he disdains the green fields, and all the gold that the earth stores for our greedy posterity. There are up there immense spaces that the mind takes possession of. When it has arrived there, it is nourished, it grows, and—as though freed from its earthly ties—it returns to its origin, bearing a mark of its divinity, namely its being pleased with divine objects and regarding them not as foreign but as its own.'

This is the place to mention the pleasures and transports of joy caused by mathematics. [In this context, as you will see, 'mathematics' includes physics and astronomy.] Plutarch relates that Eudoxius would have been willing to have been burnt as Phaeton was, if he could first have been allowed to get close enough to the sun, to see its shape, its greatness, and its beauty. He also relates that Pythagoras was so ravished with joy over finding that famous theorem (no. 47 in Euclid's first book) that he immediately made a solemn sacrifice.

He also says that several times Archimedes had to be forcefully withdrawn from his deep meditations. So much pleasure did he take in them that when he discovered a way to calculate how much brass could be mixed in the gold crown that the king had consecrated to the gods, he •felt he was dying of joy, and •jumped out of his bath, beside himself with joy, and cried 'I have found it, I have found it, *ευρηκα,* *ευρηκα!*' [He adds a quotation from Cicero, exclaiming over the 'sweet repose of a knowledgeable old age'.]

As for the other liberal arts, it is known what pleasures come from the knowledge of history, antiquity, the beauty of poetry, and the grace of rhetoric. Cicero says: These studies are a pleasant entertainment for youth, a pastime in old age, an ornament in times of prosperity, and a sweet refuge in times of adversity. They give us pleasure at home, and do not disappoint us when we are out in the countryside; they sleep with us, they accompany us on our voyages, and wander through the meadows with us; where are the pleasures of the banquets, of games, and of women that can be compared with such sweet pleasures? Studious men spend days and nights in this pursuit, and take any amount of trouble over it, such pleasure there is in learning, in experimenting, in knowing! [All of this is also presented in Latin.]

As for the **other part** of virtue, which is specifically known as moral virtue, I'll have to discuss it more at length when I deal with the four species of it: prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice. [He does this in a different work, entitled *Virtue*.]

Now, supposing that it's an undeniable truth that there is nothing sweeter than

- to have nothing to reproach oneself for,
- to have no temptation to commit any crime,
- to live wisely and in conformity with the rules of honesty,
- to fulfill all the duties of the life,
- to do wrong to no-one, and
- to do as much good as possible to everyone,

with these kinds of maxims (which I will also touch on later) taken for granted, I shall here merely make three observations.

(i) First, that it is not without reason that from time immemorial virtue has been likened to a plant whose root is bitter but whose fruits are very sweet; and that Plato,

Xenophon, and several others have so highly commended the verses of Hesiod which affirm that virtue is acquired only by sweat and toil, and that the way to it is truly long, difficult, and tough going in its early stages, but that when one has reached the top there is nothing sweeter and more pleasant. To which one might add this saying of Epicharmus: 'The gods sell all good things to us with our pains and labours as payment.' [He quotes this and the Hesiod in Latin.] This shows us that we should be willing to endure the travails encountered in the acquisition of virtue, because they will be followed by marvellous pleasures and pleasures.

It is also not without reason that so much has been said about the crossroads where pleasure and virtue eloquently harangued Hercules, each trying to attract him to its side. For this confirms the truth of the rules that I introduced earlier, when I said that we should avoid any pleasure that is bound to be followed by a greater displeasure, just as we should accept hardships and toil that will cause greater goods, and greater pleasures. I'm well aware that Hercules is supposed to have rejected pleasure, i.e. a soft and slack life, and to have followed virtue, i.e. a hard life, full of difficulties. Yet Maximus of Tyre says, excellently, that when Hercules was engaged in the most strenuous of his labours, he felt or had in view marvellous pleasures. He says:

'You see Hercules' enormous labours, but you don't see the incredible pleasures that either accompany or follow them. Anyone who removes pleasure from virtue removes all its strength and efficacy; because without pleasure men would never undertake any great matter; and even someone who out of zeal for virtue willingly tackles the labours does this for the sake of some pleasure that he feels or hopes for. For just as

- no-one trying to amass a fortune will—if he is in his

right mind—exchange a talent for a drachma [worth vastly less], or exchange gold for copper, so also with respect to labour

- no-one labours for labour's sake—that would be a poor arrangement!—but we willingly exchange our present labours for

- honesty*, as the least subtle speakers name it, or for
- pleasure, to put it more accurately.

Anyone who says "honest" says "pleasurable"; and honesty would be neglected if at the same time it were not pleasurable. For my part, I hold the complete opposite of what is commonly said about pleasure: I rate pleasure as the most lovable thing in the world and the most fit to be pursued; and it is for its sake, I believe, that men risk death, and expose themselves to wounds and to all the most frightful hazards. For although you give different names to the causes men suffer for—

- when Achilles voluntarily goes to his death for Patrocles, you call it *friendship*,
 - when Agamemnon stays awake, deliberates, and makes war, you call it *royal care*,
 - when Hector commands, fights, and wins battles, you call it *preservation of his country*,
- all the various terms you use are just names for *pleasures*. Just as

- with the bodily illnesses, the patient's hope for health motivates him to suffer the surgeon's knife, cauteries, thirst, hunger, and other upsetting and unpleasant things, which he would never submit to without that hope, so also

- in the actions of life, the troubles that we undergo

are made up for by the pleasure that you call “virtue” (and so do I).

‘But at the same time I ask, does your mind embrace virtue that you don’t love for itself? And if you concede that it does, don’t you also have to agree also that such virtue brings you pleasure? Modify the words as much as you please, call it neither “pleasure” nor “joy”, but “joy” or “satisfaction”—I shall not quibble about names; I am only concerned with the thing itself, and I recognise ·in it· the pleasure or pleasure that inspired Hercules to action.’

(ii) My second comment is that the philosophers who seem to have declared war on pleasure differ from Epicurus not so much about the thing itself as about the name to give it. I might here speak of their *mœurs* [see Glossary], aligning myself with Lucian, who aptly tells them that if they had the ring of Gyges or the helmet of Pluto, making them invisible to everyone, they would soon be seen to •abandon their cherished pains, their travails, and their discomforts, and to •immerse themselves in the pleasure and the pleasures that they appear to condemn and detest. . . . If these supposedly virtuous people renounce pleasure, it is only in word and in appearance. But saying no more about their *mœurs*, which by no means square with what they preach, it is sufficient to know •that Epicurus holds virtue to be supreme, as they do, and •that when they get so worked up against him because he holds that virtue is simply a very effective *means* of reaching the final goal or the sovereign good—instead of holding, as they do, that virtue *is* the final goal or the sovereign good—they are fundamentally saying the same thing as he does, though in different terms.

In fact this is precisely what they say, putting in their celebrated maxim that *Only the power of Socrates is needed for the virtue that suffices for happiness*, or, as Cicero puts it,

To live happily, virtue doesn’t ask for anything outside itself. Who on hearing this doctrine doesn’t see and understand that virtue is not the sovereign good or final goal but a means that contributes to getting it, contributing in such a way that it is sufficient in itself with no need for any other help? And who doesn’t infer from this that the happy life, or the happiness that is obtained by means of virtue, is the sovereign good and the final goal, because this good, this goal, is possessed for itself and not for something else following from it? Can living happily be anything but living agreeably, pleasurable, with pleasure, or—to bring in the key synonym that shocks them so tremendously—with pleasure?

Certainly, although the Stoics were less straightforward about it than Aristotle, who held that *pleasure is mixed into happiness, and the contemplation or operation of happiness is increased by pleasure*, I don’t doubt that if the happy life could be conceived—or could actually *be*—without sweetness and without pleasure, they would make it entirely desolate; nor do I doubt that in their climb up the rough and difficult mountain of virtue, they undoubtedly would not submit themselves to so many difficulties if they didn’t believe sweetness was waiting for them at the summit.

Even Socrates, whose resolution and courage they desire to have, hasn’t he plainly defined happiness as *a pleasure that is not followed by any repentance*? And Antisthenes, the father of the Cynics and the author of that famous Stoic maxim that he *would rather be mad than feel pleasure*—does he not say (according to Stobeus) that ‘The pleasures that should be sought are not those that precede our travails and sufferings but those that follow them.’ [He also gives this in Latin.]

But to exhibit more clearly how pleasure accompanies even the Cynic lifestyle—which the Stoics take to be genuinely austere, though happy—we have only to listen again

to Maximus of Tyre, who describes this lifestyle better than anyone:

'What put Diogenes in his tub if it wasn't pleasure?
Granted that it was also virtue that put him there,
why do you separate pleasure from reason? Diogenes
is just as pleased

- a** in his tub as Xerxes was in Babylon,
- b** in eating boiled barley and dried bread as Smyndrides was in eating his dainty dishes and exquisite fare,
- c** in the heat of the sun as Sardanapalus was in his purple garments,
- d** with his stick in his hand as Alexander was with his lance,
- e** with his beggar's bag as Croesus was among his treasures.

And if you compare pleasures with pleasures, those of Diogenes are certainly better, because the pleasures of those supposedly fortunate people are always intricately mixed with pain and vexation [see Glossary]. When **a** Xerxes was overcome, he wept; Cambyses being wounded, fell into sorrow; **c** Sardanapalus groaned in the flames, **b** Smyndrides was tormented by banishment, when **e** Croesus was prisoner, he wept, **d** Alexander wailed when he was stopped from making war; whereas the pleasures of Diogenes are free from complaints, cries, tears, and displeasures. . . . I would go so far as to say that no man ever had a more intense desire for pleasure than Diogenes has.

- He has no house; the care of a household is very troublesome.
- He hasn't involved himself in civil affairs; it is

an employment full of disturbances.

- He hasn't married; he had heard tell of Xanthippe.¹
- He has not brought up children; he knew the difficulties of that.

But with all vexation banished, perfectly at liberty, free from care, trouble, fear, or pain, he alone among men took the whole earth as a single and common house, fully enjoying pleasures that are not protected, and are easy to find and abundant. [He also gives that last sentence in Latin, which has influenced the present translation of it.]

(iii) The third remark is that those who seem to be—or who actually *are*—celebrated for acting always out of pure love for virtue, with no regard for themselves or for their pleasure, nevertheless perform all their actions for the sake of pleasure. Those who expose themselves to many dangers for the sake of a friend or the safety of their country, even facing a death that they think is certain, do not do this aiming at a pleasure they are to feel after death; they do it for the pleasure of the present which enraptures them and animates them when they think that what they are about to do •will give freedom to their father and mother, their children, their friends, and other citizens, or that it •will bring *them* some great benefit

- when they think about how dear their memory will be to their descendants and to all posterity;
- when they foresee the trophies, statues, and praises that will come their way;
- when they consider that this brief bad time that still has to be endured will be transformed into an immortal glory;

¹ [She was Socrates' wife, and notoriously a shrew.]

they do it, I say, for the present delight that overjoys them, that inspires them, and that animates them.

This should be understood by anyone who confronts certain death; for when he still has some hope of escaping it, he should see what Torquatus reports concerning one of his ancestors:

'It is true that he tore the lance from the clutches of his enemy, but he did his best to shield himself from being killed. He faced a great danger, but it was before the eyes of the whole army. What did he get from it? Everyone's praise and love, which are strong supports for living one's life without fear.'

See also what Seneca said:

'A great and glorious action sometimes causes much joy soon thereafter; and although it brings no advantage to the man who is dead ·because of the action·, yet the thought of the action he is about to perform pleases him; for when a good-hearted and just man depicts to himself as the reward for his death the liberty of his country, the deliverance of those for whom he sacrifices his life, he is filled with a great pleasure, and ·thus· enjoys the rewards of the peril he is in. And even one who does not have this joy (which happens at the last moment of the action) runs to his death without hesitation, content and satisfied to be doing something that is good, pious, holy.'

The same should be said of those severe fathers who punish their own offspring with death, although they seem to deprive themselves of great pleasures, an objection which Cicero repeatedly brings against ·an ancestor of· that same Torquatus, who by bringing his axe down on his son put the law of the empire ahead of nature and paternal love. Those who come to such extremes know that the nature of their children is such that for them or for their children it is better

that the children die than that they live; because they would only live in perpetual displeasure, and their eternal infamy would not leave them. That is why, as between

- buying off an infamous future by a present pain, purging (so to speak) something that was disgracefully done by some great and illustrious action, and
- sinking themselves through low and deceitful softness into an abyss of misfortunes,

they believe • the former not only to be *better* than • the latter but also *more agreeable*. And see how Torquatus himself responds:

'He procured his son's death. If there was no reason for this, then I would not want to have such a cruel father. If he did it so as to establish and strengthen military discipline, holding over his army the fear of punishment during a very dangerous war, then his concern was for the safety of his fellow citizens, on which he knew his own depended.'

(i) Self-love

But can what everyone says about virtue also be said about piety towards God? The case for saying so: it seems that there can't be sincere piety if God is not purely and precisely loved for himself or because he is infinitely good, and if he is not loved and worshipped because he is infinitely excellent; so that anyone who loves and honours him has no thought of himself and does not consider his utility or his pleasure. For my part, God forbid that I should try to depreciate anyone's piety! There are some who don't just maintain that we *should* love God in this way, and don't just infer from this that we *can* do so, but... proudly assert and believe that they *do*. I certainly don't grudge them that, and shan't quarrel with them over it. Far from it, I approve and revere the individual

good fortune and grace that Heaven bestows on them; for a man's being able to love and worship God in this manner has to be regarded as a divine and **supernatural** gift.

But the present topic is the **natural** piety (or generally the natural virtue) according to which everything a man does is done with some thought of his own interests. On that topic, might it not be said that God has taken account of the infirmity of **our** nature in such a way that

while there are many who—with hardly a passage in the Holy Scriptures that authorises and expresses their doctrine—approve of those who greatly love God because he has forgiven them many sins or has graced them with many favours,

there are also many who love him for the hope promised to them in Heaven, who perform various acts of charity, suffering persecution, keeping the faith, etc., because of

- the kingdom that has been waiting for them since the creation of the world,
- the abundant rewards that wait for them in Heaven,
- the crown of justice that God has promised to those who love him?

Mightn't one (I am asking) venture to look at things in this way, and to infer from all those passages that nothing blocks us from having in view the everlasting delights that will one day come to those who have loved God and honoured him?

I certainly don't want to interrogate anyone's conscience, or ask anyone:

If God was contented to be loved and honoured, and took not the slightest care of those who loved and honoured him, did no good for them, and gave them nothing to hope for in all eternity, what would you do?

I don't ask them:

What would you do? Honestly, would you love and honour him less?

I merely ask them not to take offence if they are asked:

Don't you do this at least ·in part· because it is very pleasurable to love and serve God in this way? And don't you believe, therefore, that it is very pleasurable and satisfying to serve God purely and absolutely for himself and not in the least for oneself?

They should be able to answer Yes to these questions, because he who tells us that *his yoke is light*, to bring us to *love God with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength*, surely did not mean to rule out this pleasurableness.

But this was just an aside, to strengthen or confirm the **reason** that shows—in alignment with the opinion of Epicurus—that pleasure is the sovereign good or final goal, being desired for itself, with all other things being desired for its sake. Now let me say something about this other **reason**, derived from a comparison between pleasure and its opposite, pain. Torquatus says this:

'Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by present pain or by the prospect of future pain: what state could be said to be better and more desirable than that? Isn't it true that such a man will have an unshakable stability of mind, that he won't have pointless and childish fears at the prospect of death, and that he will consider death to be inevitable? Now imagine a contrasting case: someone struggling under the cruellest pains that of mind and body that a poor wretch is capable of, with no hope of any relief, and no present pleasure or prospect of future pleasure. Can one describe or imagine a more pitiable state? Well, if a life full of pains is the thing most to be avoided, which implies that living in pain is (as it certainly is) the sovereign

evil, it follows by the law of contraries that a life of pleasure is the sovereign good.' [The next sentence is obscurely written. Its gist is this: If you are looking for the *ultimate* thing that is worth living for, it is *pleasure*; If you are looking for the *ultimate* thing that should be avoided—that could disturb nature or undermine its foundations—it is *pain*.]

Cicero responds:

'I shan't venture to give *my* opinion about who should be put ahead of your invented fortunate man; I'll let virtue speak for me. It won't hesitate to put Marcus Regulus ahead. Regulus, freely and under no constraint except that of a promise given to an enemy,¹ returned from his native land to Carthage. Virtue will give precedence to this great man, and will declare that while he was tormented by sleeplessness and hunger he was happier than a Thorius carousing on his couch of roses. Regulus had fought great wars, had twice been consul, had celebrated a triumph; yet all his earlier exploits he counted less great and glorious than that final enterprise that was proposed to him by his faith and his constancy. A state that seems to us miserable when we hear about it was for him a state of pleasure and well-being. It is not always joy, wantonness, laughter and games that make men happy; those who are suffering and sad are made happy by firmness and constancy.'

(ii) The false virtue and false happiness of Regulus

Before turning to the eloquence of Cicero, I shall say a few words about the comparison that has been set before us. Although one should not wholly approve of Thorius and

his decadent lifestyle, which Epicurus would not approve of, it nevertheless seems quite difficult to conceive that Regulus really was happier than Thorius. I see indeed a great apparatus—a showy rhetoric—that has customarily been deployed in exaggerating the much-praised virtue of Regulus. However, when his personal history is honestly considered and the various circumstances are weighed objectively, the affair seems not to be such as the common story holds it to be. Polybius reports:

'Regulus, having commanded successfully in the war against the Carthaginians and fearing that he might be replaced by another consul who would deprive him of the fame of his fine actions, urged the Carthaginians to make peace. But the conditions he proposed to their deputies were so harsh that the Carthaginians preferred to risk everything. Choosing for their general Xanthippus the Lacedaemonian, they confronted Regulus in a battle, won the victory, and took him prisoner along with five hundred other men with whom he was fleeing. An undoubted indication of the fickleness of Fortune, and of the little trust we should put in her caresses; since he who a little earlier could not be moved to pity, and had no compassion of the afflicted, was soon after obliged to throw himself at their feet and beg for his life.'

Polyaenus adds:

'Regulus swore to the Carthaginians that if they would let him go, he would persuade the Romans to make peace with them, and that if he could not do so, he would come back to Carthage. But he advised the Senate to the contrary, revealing the weakness of the enemy and how to destroy them, and telling the

¹ [The French says 'contrary to a promise' etc.; obviously a slip.]

senators that their Carthaginian prisoners were young and sturdy captains, whereas he was old,’

‘which he did’, says Appian. ‘in secret, and only to the Roman leaders’. Cicero says: ‘His opinion having prevailed, they kept the prisoners, peace was not made, and he returned to Carthage.’ It is true that this departure was done in a strange manner; for Horace says that while leaving he fixed his gaze on the ground like a criminal, and that he roughly pushed away his wife and little children who cried for him, not allowing them so much as one last embrace. [He quotes 16 lines of Latin verse, reporting this and elaborating on it, stressing the tortures that Regulus knew he was facing in returning to Carthage.] Nevertheless, we should take in what Tuditanus relates:

‘Advising them not to make the prisoner-exchange, he informed them that the Carthaginians had given him a slow poison, so that he could live until the exchange was made and then gradually waste away and die.’

We should also take in something that is to be found among the fragments of Diodorus Siculus:

‘Who doesn’t strongly disapprove of the imprudence and arrogance of Attilus Regulus, who—not being able to support the prosperity that was to him like a heavy burden—deprived himself of the reward of general applause and brought his country into great danger? For when he could have concluded a glorious peace that would have been advantageous to the Roman people, and earned fame for great clemency and humaneness, he arrogantly insulted the afflicted, and imposed on them •terms of peace that were so harsh and intolerable that God was angry about •them and •they caused the conquered to form an implacable enmity, to regain their courage and to venture everything on a single throw. The whole face of things was (by his fault) changed in such a way that

he and his whole army were defeated, 20,000 being slain in the field and 15,000 taken prisoner with him, etc.’

From which one should conjecture that Regulus—thinking that he could never make up for the blunder he had committed, and that from now on he would count in Rome as an imprudent and arrogant man—preferred to be turned over to Carthage, preferring **a** the peril (which he apparently did not think was great, because of the Carthaginian prisoners still held by the Romans) to **b** an unquestionable infamy and to **c** a life that he foresaw as short and languishing, because of the poison the Carthaginians had given him. [That is what the French says, but it seems to be a slip. It would make better sense to say that he preferred the combination of **a** and **c** to **b**.]

Be that as it may, when Regulus—not having accomplished anything in Rome—kept his word by returning to Carthage, he was surely behaving in an admirable fashion; but when he dissuaded the Senate from what he had promised to persuade them to do, how can that count as praiseworthy, since it was an obvious perjury? If he had simply delivered his assigned message, without any persuasion or dissuasion, that might seem tolerable; but so openly breaking the sacred laws of oaths, how can that be excused? Appian notes: ‘And when he did it in secret (as he is credibly said to have done), lest the ambassadors who came with him should know what he was up to, that in itself increases the suspicion and blackens the action.’

•Someone might ask: ‘Wouldn’t you use the safety and the glory of your country as a pretext?’ Indeed, one should help one’s country by good advice, and by fortitude, and courage, but not by wicked tricks and perfidy. One should not, in order to be good citizen, fail to be a good man.

Will you say (as Euripides puts it) that ‘he swore it only with his tongue, not with his heart’? [He gives this also in Latin.]

But that is only looking for a cover-up for perjury. For, as Cicero puts it, ‘it is not a perjury to swear falsely; perjury is not doing what the oath conveys according to the ordinary meaning of its words.’ If it were morally permissible to say one thing and mean another, it would be permissible to *lie* and to deceive those who listen to our words or question us; this would make *everyone’s* word untrustworthy, thus creating a weird confusion in the transaction of human affairs.

[Gassendi develops the case against Regulus, refusing to let him be defended on the grounds that the Carthaginians had not kept their word [it isn’t clear how]. ‘If you are a bad man, that should not stop me from being a good man.’ He speaks of the ‘five hundred [not 15,000?] Roman soldiers who had been taken with him and through his fine virtue cruelly perished in Carthage, as he did’.]

But to return to our topic of happiness, I would still ask that someone look me in eye and tell me how the happiness of Regulus could be greater than that of Thorius, when Regulus was tortured in the way Tubero describes. [He gives gruesome details, some of them drawn from Cicero, Seneca, and Sylvius. We can spare ourselves this dreadful stuff.]

You will say: ‘But Thorius *softly* embraced pleasure, and Regulus for the safety of his country preferred his tortures, and endured them courageously.’ ·I have three things to say in reply to this.. **(i)** Thorius was not so soft or so voluptuous that he didn’t, when the country’s safety required it, go to war and eventually die with weapons in hand, fighting for the Republic in the battlefield, as Cicero himself reports.

(ii) Moreover, although it is a great consolation when undergoing torture to feel a pure and clear conscience, and to see that one is suffering for

- the safety of many,
- the preservation of honour of dignity, and

- honesty,

nevertheless it does not seem that this makes one *happier* than one would be if—living honestly, wronging nobody, trying to do good for many, and fulfilling the duty of a good man and a good citizen—one agreeably lived one’s life with much pleasure and little pain or vexation.

(iii) If someone was in the frame of mind to be entirely ready to expose himself to *any* danger, to undergo all possible travails, and to risk even his life and blood, so as to perform honourably his duty and his job, but was in a position to choose between the two kinds of life that Torquatus illustrates [on pages 45-46], without either choice doing wrong by his duty, I ask you: among those who so greatly blame pleasure and praise pain, who is there who would hold that he should opt for the latter, and would willingly embrace it ·for himself?

[He says that he will now intensify and expand things he has already said about the contrast between pleasure as the chief good and pain as the chief evil. He continues:] So let me now make three remarks. **(i)** The term ‘pain’ is taken to cover not only the so-called pains of the body but also the so-called pains of the mind, all the more because they are harsher and more unpleasant than those of the body, as I showed earlier. **(ii)** Just as it was said that virtue and honesty have within them what it takes to cause very great pleasures, so now it can also be said that vice—whatever is dishonest and scandalous—has within it what it takes to cause very great pains; which makes it the case that virtue (or honesty) is accompanied by very great benefits, just as vice (or whatever is dishonest and scandalous) is accompanied by very great harms. So among the things that one desires in order to obtain the chief good, virtue is what one must chiefly embrace, and among the things that one should avoid in order to escape the chief evil, vice is

what one must mainly flee. (iii) This doctrine seems to be entirely compatible with the sacred doctrines of Faith, by which we believe •that happiness, or the chief good, consists in enjoying eternal delights some day in Heaven and •that unhappiness, or the chief evil, consists in being some day tormented in Hell by unspeakable pain, and the heat of horrific and eternal fires.

5: Only the wise embrace moral virtue

Up to here I have spoken about *pleasure* in general. It now remains to speak about a special particular *kind of pleasure*, namely the kind a wise man limits himself to because it is

- a very natural,
- b very easy to obtain,
- c very long-lasting, and
- d very free from later regret;

in short, because it is the kind of pleasure that I have already described [on page 26 and elsewhere] as *peace of mind and indolence of body*. It is not without reason that I say it is a very natural, because it is this kind of pleasure that nature seems ultimately to aim for. It's as though the other pleasures (that are in motion, ·not rest·) were instituted by nature only to make pleasant the actions that tend towards pleasure of this kind. For example, nature instituted the pleasure of taste so as to make the action of eating pleasant, thus prodding the animal to eat, so that it appeases the pain of hunger. . . . And the comfortable and calm state which one enjoys when hunger is satisfied is what nature aimed at as the ultimate goal, making it the sovereign or final good. Nor is it without reason that I say it is b very easy to obtain; because each person has the power to tame his passions so as to achieve a tranquil spirit, and to obtain the things that

are truly needed for the body to achieve indolence. I also say that it is c very long-lasting, because the other kinds of pleasures last for a moment and then (so to speak) leap away from us, whereas this kind of pleasure is of an even tenor, is hardly ever interrupted, and hardly ever expires except through our fault. I say finally that it is d very free from later regret: all other pleasures can be followed by some evils, whereas this kind of pleasure is absolutely harmless.

It is true that Cicero embarks on a long argument against Epicurus's calling peace and indolence *pleasure*, a word which he says should be applied only to the pleasure that is in movement, i.e. by which the senses are agreeably stimulated. But it seems that Cicero was merely quarrelling about a word. [He goes on to argue that the word 'pleasure', whatever the ordinary usage of it is, is a *good* label for the state in question.]

Moreover, we can bring against Cicero not only Aristotle ('There is a greater pleasure in repose than in movement') but also to St. Chrysostom:

'What is pleasure but being free from vexation, trouble, fear, and despair, and being generally exempt from these sorts of passions? Tell me, as between

- someone who is furiously agitated by passions, is tormented by many desires, and never has command of himself; and
- someone who is free from all these disturbances, and rests in philosophy as in a safe haven

which of the two is enjoying pleasure? I regard pleasure as genuine when the soul is in a state of being in no way troubled or torn by any bodily passion.'

Cicero objects that children and animals, who are the reflection of uncorrupted nature, have no hankering for the pleasure that is in the state of rest I have been describing,

but only the pleasure that is in movement. This point seems to carry more weight. But [it doesn't succeed, he says, in a complex and difficult sentence, contending that *bêtes* and *brutes*, whatever thoughts they have, are educated by nature in such a way that after appeasing the pain of hunger or the like they naturally come to rest.] Unlike many men who, being corrupted in their thinking, •create for themselves needs to stimulate their appetite or •fool themselves into thinking that they have such needs, and never settle down with anything.

Setting aside the case of animals and speaking only about men: isn't it certain that all the objections are easily demolished by what was implied above? For one thing, nature has instituted restful pleasure as the principal goal, and because action has been instituted as a means needed to obtain it, it was beneficial to institute pleasure-in-motion so that the action would be performed with more alacrity. The result of this is that although man (or any other animal) *seems to be* more specifically and more obviously aroused by or carried towards pleasure-in-motion, this doesn't stop it from being the case that *actually* he is tacitly drawn towards pleasure-at-rest, this being an instinct of nature, which holds this kind of pleasure to be the principal aim or primary goal.

Moreover, man is (I repeat) in the course of time corrupted by various beliefs, so that he takes **a** the accessory to be **b** the principal and holds **a** pleasure-in-motion to be the primary aim and—misusing this pleasure by his intemperance—attracts troubles to himself when he loses **b** pleasure-at-rest (which nature has made the primary or principal one), which is followed by sadness and repentance. That is why Epicurus maintained that wisdom comes on the scene and teaches man to *regulate his pleasure*, i.e. to consider the **a** accessory as an accessory and the **b** principal as the principal.

However, one should not be dismayed by the objection of the Cyrenaics, who (according to Cicero) said that Epicurus's pleasure is *like the state of someone who is asleep*. For Epicurus claimed that his peace and his indolence were not like numbness, but rather a state in which all life's actions are undertaken calmly and pleasurable (which was noted above [on page 42]). Although he did not hold that a wise man's life was like a torrent, he also didn't take it to be like a dead and stagnant pool; rather, he thought it to be like the silent water of a gently running river. It is one of his axioms that *when pain is taken away, pleasure does not increase but only varies*; meaning that after •this state of tranquility and freedom from pain is attained, there is nothing greater •than it• to look for, not even anything comparable with it; but there remain pure and guiltless pleasures into which •this state is diversified without being spoiled, like the way a meadow is seen to be diversified by an admirable variety of flowers, once the ground has been brought under control. For •this state is like a well from which all pure and honest pleasure is drawn. For this same reason, one must consider •it to be the sovereign pleasure, in that it is like an all-purpose seasoning by which all life's actions are sweetened, and by which, therefore, all pleasures are seasoned and made pleasurable; or, in short, without which no pleasure would be pleasure.

In fact, what can be pleasurable if the mind is troubled or the body tormented by pain? There is a maxim: 'If the container is not clean, everything that is put into it is spoiled.' [He gives this also in Latin.] That is why anyone who wants pure pleasures should prepare himself to receive them purely, which he achieves by doing his very best to get into this state of rest and tranquility that I have been speaking of. I say 'doing his best to' because, as I earlier remarked [on page 1?], the mortal condition does not allow

one to be absolutely and perfectly happy; and this sovereign happiness—entirely exempt from anxiety and pain, and filled with every kind of pleasure—belongs only to God and to those who through his goodness pass on to a better life. So that in this life, where some are more and others less troubled by anxiety and tormented by pain, anyone who wants to go about it wisely should try, as much as his nature and his weakness permit, to get himself in a state in which he experiences as little anxiety and as little pain *as possible*. In doing this he will obtain the two benefits that constitute *the sovereign good* and that the wise have always recognised to be nearly the only reliable and desirable goods in life: the health of the body and that of the mind.....

That Epicurus did not mean his pleasure to be like a stupor or a lack of feeling and action can be proved by how he conducted himself in his gardens, whether in meditating, or in teaching, or in taking care of his friends. It is enough to say that he believed that this state enabled him to come up with a thought that is the sweetest thing in the world, namely:

When someone passes over in his mind the tempests from which he has had the moral force to extricate himself, and by which others are still agitated, he considers himself as being in a safe port, enjoying a pleasurable calm and tranquility.

How sweet it is, Lucretius said, to view from a mountaintop a ship on the open sea, beaten by winds and waves; not that there is pleasure in seeing the suffering of others, but because it is sweet to see oneself free of the evils that the others are struggling with. [Then four lines of Latin verse, saying the same thing.] It is also a very sweet thing, he adds, to watch from the heights of some tower two powerful armies arrayed in battle, without sharing the danger. [Two more lines of Latin verse.] But nothing is so sweet as seeing oneself elevated,

by learning and by great knowledge, to the top of wisdom's temple, from which—as from a high, serene, and tranquil place—one can see men rushing here and there without knowing what they are doing or what they are looking for, some tormenting themselves over who will show the most intelligence, others arrogantly disputing over their nobility, and others working day and night to acquire great riches, high offices, and positions of command. Miserable as we are, he continues, isn't it clear that nature calls us to something different in which our mind, being free from pain, enjoys a pleasurable tranquility—exempt from care, from fear, and from anxiety? [More Latin verse.]

(i) Tranquility of mind in particular

Now in addressing *tranquility* in particular, I repeat that this word does not mean an apathetic and sluggish laziness, or a languid and semi-conscious idleness, but rather, as Cicero understands it following Pythagoras and Plato, 'a calm and still constancy in the part of the mind that controls reason'. Or, as Democritus says, 'a fine, praiseworthy, level, and sweet temper of mind that makes a man firm and steady', so that whether he applies himself to his affairs or to recreation, whether he experiences prosperity or hardship, he always remains stable, always being himself, without letting himself get carried away by excessive joy, or letting himself be cut down by vexation and sadness—in short, without being disturbed by any such passion. Hence, this peace of mind was called *αταραξία*, meaning freedom from anxiety and from agitation. For just as

•a ship is said to experience tranquility not only when it is adrift in the middle of the sea but also when it is carried by a favourable wind, which makes it go swiftly but also gently and steadily, so also

•a mind is said to be tranquil not only when it is at rest but also when it undertakes fine, big things without being inwardly disturbed and without losing its equanimity.

And on the other hand, just as

•a ship is said to be shaken not only when it is buffeted by headwinds but also when it is thrashed by great waves, so also

•the mind is said to be troubled not only when in action it is carried away by various passions, but also when at rest it is hardened and consumed by concern, vexation, and fear.

These are the passions (and such) that entirely disrupt one's tranquility and disrupt the happy life. Here is what Cicero says about them:

The turbulent movements and troubles of mind that are aroused by an unchecked impulsiveness, and that reject all reason, have no place in the happy life. For how can someone *not* be miserable if he has the terror of death (always present) or of pain (always threatening)? If along with fear of poverty, disgrace, dishonour he is afraid of infirmity and blindness and of what can come not only to individual men but the most powerful communities—I mean *slavery*—can anyone be happy with such fears before him? And a man who doesn't just fear such misfortunes—exile, loss of goods, death of children—in the future· but actually suffers and endures them in the present, doesn't he die of vexation and sadness? If someone is broken down by such events and lets himself be conquered by sadness, how can he possibly not be very miserable? What will you think of someone who is perpetually up and down, and lets himself be carried away by ridiculous and immoderate joy? Doesn't he seem to you more miserable the more he thinks he

is happy? Contrasted with those miserable men are the happy ones •who are not shaken by fear, •who do not let themselves be overcome with sadness, •who are not inflamed with lusts, •who are not moved by immoderate joys, and •for whom the soft pleasures have no attractions except ineffective ones that can't soften them.'

But let us listen to Torquatus:

'Epicurus, whom you denounce as too given to his pleasures, exclaims that •it is impossible to live pleasurable without living wisely, honestly and justly, and that •no-one can live wisely, honestly and justly without living pleasurable. For a city torn by faction cannot prosper, nor can a household whose heads are quarrelling; much less then can a mind prosper if it is in conflict with itself or agitated by different passions. Such a mind is incapable of any pure, free pleasure and sees everything only in disturbance and confusion. If the happiness of life is blocked by diseases of the body, how much more blocked it must be by the diseases of the mind! The diseases of the mind are pointless and extravagant desires for riches, fame, power, and also for low, dishonest pleasures. •You may add the distresses, the vexations and the cares that gnaw and consume the minds of men who do not understand ·things that ought to be understood· [that phrase replaces something that seems to have gone wrong somehow]. •You may add death, which perpetually menaces us, always hanging over our heads like the stone over the head of Tantalus. •You may add superstition, which allows no peace for those who are imbued with it. •You may add that they do not remember their past blessings or enjoy their present ones, and that—seeing the uncertainty

of the ones they are looking forward to—they are consumed by distress, vexation and fear; and they are utterly tormented when they recognise that they have started too late on their pursuit of money, jobs, riches or fame, and feel themselves deprived of the pleasures they had hoped for, pleasures for which they have undergone such arduous toils. There are others, small-minded always pessimistic men; others whose only thought is to do harm, who are envious, hard to please, elusive, slandering, mischief-making; others inconstant and changing in their love-affairs; others who are petulant, cowardly, impudent, intemperate, lazy, always changing their minds, which makes their lives one unbroken round of vexations, of distresses, of disturbances.'

[Then a paragraph repeating things said earlier about calm out of the storm, working around to something that leads into the next section:] One can preserve tranquility of mind, and thus live happily, not only in calm waters away from the encumbrance of business, but also in the midst of great and important occupations.

(ii) Life, and active happiness

This supposes that there are two manners of life, and thus two kinds of happiness: the contemplative one and the active one. Wise men have *always* preferred the contemplative to the active; but the fact remains that those who (because of birth, ability, luck, or necessity) are engaged in affairs are absolutely able to preserve a praiseworthy and agreeable tranquility. Because someone who

- enters a busy career not blindly but after long and mature thought,
- contemplates the state of human affairs not as though

from the middle of the crowd but as though from some high viewpoint,

- knows that in the actual course of affairs a hundred things may happen that all of human wisdom could not have foreseen,
- prepares himself (if not specifically then at least generally) for the difficulties he may encounter,
- is ready for his often being obliged to get advice on the run (as they say),
- recognises that he is indeed the master of what is within him but not of the things outside the scope of his free-will,
- performs as much as he possibly can of the duty of a good man,
- believes afterwards, no matter how things turned out, that he should be content and satisfied, and
- is aware (despite his having *some* confidence that his undertakings will succeed) that things may turn out differently from how he wishes, and prepares himself so that if he does experience misfortune he will bear it steadily and patiently,

will be able, in the very middle of the agitation and disturbance of affairs, to maintain within himself a sweet and tranquil rest.

This is what Claudian said so well about the great Theodosius (and that we could without flattery apply to our monarch, the real Theodosius of France, the model of a wise prince):

'Neither the great plans that he ponders, nor the heavy burden of the state that he bears, ever disturbs the tranquility of •his mind. Like the lofty summit of Mount Olympus, •it is always clear and serene, above the rain, clouds, and thunderstorms. With the winds and the winters far below him, the storm clouds dissolve under his feet, and he laughs at the

thunder and lightning. So his patient, steady and free mind—in the midst of such a variety of great affairs—remains always serene, always calm, and always true to itself.

'A divine modesty accompanies his voice; an offensive word never drops from his lips; never does one see his eyes glow with anger and veins swell with blood and fury; he can suppress crimes without being carried away, and can correct the vicious without passion.'

The Nile flows gently, without vaunting its strength by noise and fuss, and yet it is the most useful of all the rivers of the world; the Danube, which is longer and faster, also flows silently along its banks; and the water of the immense river Ganges rolls majestically into the depths of the ocean. Let the torrents roar through the rocks, let them threaten and overturn bridges, and let them in their foaming rage envelop and overwhelm forests. Peacefulness and gentleness are the hallmarks and the character of great things; a tranquil power and an imperious restfulness press more strongly, and more powerfully demand obedience, than violence and impetuousness.

'Moreover, when some large enterprise is over, the wise man does not boast if it was a success or sink into dejection if it was a failure; and he never regrets the measures he has taken, because—with everything carefully weighed and examined—it was more probable ·than not· that they would succeed; so that if the same situation occurred again, he would go about it in the same way.'

The example of Photon comes to mind, who counseled against war, which nevertheless turned out victorious; "I am", he said, "very glad that things

turned out as they did; but I don't apologise for the advice that I gave." [This long passage is interspersed with four bits of Latin verse, saying the same things.]

That is pretty much Cicero's view. He said:

'It becomes a wise man to do nothing that he might repent of, to do nothing he'll regret, to do everything splendidly, steadily, gravely, honourably, not relying on anything as certain to happen, not being astonished by anything new and unexpected that happens, and remaining firm in his judgment.'

Not that the wise man should dismiss the advice of others and trust too confidently in his own beliefs; but after maturely deliberating on some matter, he ought not—through an undue distrust in himself—to allow the judgment of the mob to prevail over his own. For this reason, the famous Quintius Fabius Maximus, 'the delayer', is praised. He put the safety of his country ahead of vain whining of the people....

(iii) Is contemplative happiness preferable to active happiness?

Whatever may be the case regarding this active tranquility or happiness, Aristotle has reason to favour the contemplative; because contemplation is an activity of the most excellent and most divine part of us, aa well as being the activity that is the noblest action, the purest, the most constant, the most durable, and the easiest to engage in.

To show the happiness of a wise philosopher and the satisfaction there is in the contemplation of things, I shan't repeat here what I said earlier about the primary role of virtue. It will be enough to recall what Cicero so astutely writes about this:

'What pleasures a wise man's mind enjoys, occupied

night and day in these studies! What sweetness fills his soul when he considers the circular movement of the universe, the countless stars that shine in the sky, the seven planets which—being more or less distant from one another depending on how high or low they are in the sky—seem to be wandering and uncertain in their movements but never fail to run their course in their appointed time! The consideration of so many beautiful things prodded the ancient philosophers into new inquiries, into examining

- the causes and driving forces of the universe,
- where things started and how they are caused,
- what different qualities enter into their composition,
- where life comes from,
- where death comes from,
- how things are changed, including the change of one thing into another,
- what weight supports and balances the earth,
- in what concavities the earth stores its waters, and
- how everything pressed by its own weight naturally tends towards the centre of the world.

It's by discussing so many marvels, going over them repeatedly, day and night, that one acquires the item of knowledge that God once confided to Delphos, namely that *the soul that is pure and free of all vice should know itself, and feel its unity with the divine understanding*; which causes it to have everlasting and indescribable joy; for its meditations on the power and nature of the gods give it a passionate desire for eternity; and—once it sees how the causes ·in the world·, guided and a governed by an eternal wisdom, hang together in a single system—it believes itself not

to be confined to the narrow limits of this life. Because of that, it •looks on human affairs with a marvellous tranquility, •conducts itself virtuously, •seeks to find what the chief good and the chief evil consist of, which is what all our actions should have something to do with [see Glossary], and •has the kind of life that we ought to choose and follow.'

Let me add that anyone who will have considered the striking ups and downs of things in all the years that the world has existed—

- the rise, progress, maturity, decline, and ruin of kingdoms, republics, religions, opinions, laws, customs;
- the *mœurs* [see Glossary] and particular ways of life
 - that are now in effect, and that our forefathers would have rejected,
 - that were taken seriously in earlier times and we now laugh at,
 - that our descendants will like and we would laugh at now if we could see them;
- how *mœurs* and customs, though they change in details, can nevertheless be called 'the same' in a general way, and are always a sign of men's constant shallowness and incompetence;
- how it always happens that men are led by their blindness to live perpetually in misery, when—being carried away by ambition, avarice, or some other passion—they don't recognise how much they would gain if they got rid of these concerns and were satisfied with little, lived within themselves, and passed their lives tranquilly and without so much agitation
- will undoubtedly have felt extreme joy, and will have been very happy in his contemplation, especially if he has considered all things as if from the top of a tower, from which I have said [on page 51] virtue looks down on men's various actions

and occupations, their foolish ambition, their arrogance, their vanity, their low avarice, and the other things that I have already mentioned above.

(iv) Freedom from pain in particular

[In this section, ‘freedom from (bodily) pain’ translates *indolence*. This version’s usual translation, ‘indolence’ [see Glossary] is always awkward and here it is intolerable.] It is time to say something about freedom from pain. It seems to be less in our power to be free of bodily pain than to be free of disturbance in the mind. For although it is difficult to curb the passions and calm their agitations, still—setting aside those that are connected to pain, notably hunger and thirst—it seems that the other passions, arising in us only because of our beliefs, can be repressed or prevented if we keep watch over our beliefs. But as for the pains of the body: though we take precautions against bringing them on us from outside or arousing them from within, it often happens that we are born with a constitution that condemns us to suffer many pains (from that direction, at least) in the course of life. It is certainly not without reason that Aesop imagines that Prometheus, moistening the clay from which he formed man, did not use water but tears, meaning by this that the nature of the *human* body makes it subject to external injuries and to internal ones; and because it’s impossible always to escape both sorts, it is inevitable that one suffers some pain. There would be no end to the list of sources of misery that can befall us:

- tyrants,
- fools,
- careless people,
- various animals,
- heat,

- cold,
- fever,
- gout,
- infections,

and so on. I merely remark that someone who has at some time been tormented can say how passionately he wanted to be freed from that, and how much he would have given for such freedom.

Certainly there is no-one who, being ill and tormented by pain and seeing others who are doing well, •doesn’t believe those others to be very fortunate, and •isn’t amazed that they don’t recognise that they are enjoying a benefit that is so great and so significant that any other benefit •would be worth giving up in exchange for it and •is of no value compared to health. Health has *always* been celebrated; but since all the books are full of its praises, I will just mention what an ancient poet says, that ‘the best thing that can be given to fragile man is to be in good health’. Another poet says: ‘If stomach, lungs, and feet are all healthy, the wealth of kings can’t add anything to your welfare.’ [The two poets—Lucretius and Horace—are also quoted in Latin, which has influenced the translations given here.]

Now, I say all this to show that it is not without reason that we hold that freedom from pain is a *part* of happiness. Although pains that are mild or brief can easily be endured, and although we do well enough in bearing severe pains if they are a means to avoiding even greater pains or to obtaining greater pleasures, there is no-one who when in pain doesn’t absolutely want to be out of it, and would readily let himself out of it if he could obtain the same things without pain as with it.

Zeno and Anaxarchus are celebrated for the constancy they showed against tyrants in their greatest tortures. Calanus and Peregrinus are similarly praised for

their willingness to be burned to death. But suppose they had the option of achieving as much glory in some way other than through this suffering, I leave you to think (honestly, now!) what they would have done. Cicero also highly praises Posidonius for this:

'While Posidonius was tormented by gout, Pompey came to visit him at Rhodes, and said that he was very sorry that he could not have a conversation with him. Posidonius replied: "You *can!* I will not allow that such a great man should come to find me in vain." He added that he was starting to develop a fine argument to show Pompey that *there is nothing good but what is honest*; and when in the ensuing dispute the pain pressed him extremely, he said several times "You gain nothing, pain! However grievous you are, I will never admit that you are an evil."

But although Posidonius patiently bore those unavoidable pains, don't you think he would have preferred—if this had been possible—to be without pain and to argue without pain?'

It could be added here that if pain is the chief evil (as I have said it is), it surely follows that freedom from pain is the chief good; especially since it seems to be the only thing that nature has given us an inclination for. When some pain—whether from hunger or from some other need—comes upon us, we are *naturally* drawn to the action by which we could relieve it. And if some pleasure-in-motion intercedes, I have remarked that this is because nature has brought it in to improve the flavour of the action that is needed to obtain freedom from pain.

It seems that one might also say something about *how* such a great good can be acquired; but—in addition to

the various remedies gained from appropriate precautions and the art of medicine, which have nothing to do with morals—we should say that the most general and easiest means to freedom from pain is temperance, and chiefly enormous moderation in eating and drinking; especially since this is a way if not to cure then at least to greatly mitigate hereditary diseases, to avoid ones that we contract by our own fault, and deliver us from those that have already been contracted.

And let me add just this: someone who enjoys freedom from pain can fully enjoy pleasures of different kinds, ones relating to the body as much as ones relating to the mind. For this freedom from pain is the same thing as *health itself*, and Plutarch rightly likens health to the tranquility of the sea, in this:

- the sea provides the means for the halcyons¹ to breed and comfortably raise their young; and •health provides the means for men to carry out all the functions of life comfortably and without trouble.

This is why, he says,

'health is a divine seasoning, because no soup or roast or other food, however seasoned, can bring any pleasure to those who are ill or upset by debauchery, whereas mere routine hunger makes every morsel is pleasant and appetising to a man who enjoys good health.'

Now, just as

- the same can be said of the pleasures relating to the other senses, since pleasures that are ordinarily permissible and honest displease in a sick body; the sense of smell is not refreshed by aromas, nor is the ear gratified by harmony, nor does the sight rejoice in beautiful objects; and conversations,

¹ [A bird said by the ancients to breed in a nest floating on the sea...and to charm the...waves so that the sea was calm for this purpose' (OED).]

games, plays, walks, hunting, and other such diversions cannot please, lacking the seasoning without which (I repeat) pleasure is not pleasure, so also

•these truths about the pleasures of the body are even more true for the pleasures of the mind, since it is certain that someone who is ill or in acute pain cannot study, read, or meditate. For as long as the understanding is joined to this fragile and mortal body, there is such a *tie* between the two that the body cannot suffer without the understanding feeling it and being unwillingly distracted from its more pleasant occupations, with the tormenting pain drawing to itself all the thought and all the attention of the mind.

So those are fortunate people **a** whose natural constitution allows them to live free of pain, and to take pleasure in the study of wisdom! Fortunate also are **b** those who, although they have an infirm body, manage it with so much forethought and discipline it with so much temperance, that if they don't entirely avoid pains, they at least keep them at a level that is mild and tolerable enough for them not to be hindered much from enjoying the pleasures of the mind! And so **a** those in the first category ought to beware of disturbing or corrupting their naturally good constitution by over-indulgence; and **b** the others should focus on correcting theirs, getting it as free from pain as possible; and both groups should take care of their body, if only for the sake of the mind, which cannot be well when the body is ill. It should be openly acknowledged that although the principal part of happiness consists in tranquility of mind, the other part—freedom from bodily pain—should not be underestimated.

It is true that some people believe that it is a crime, when considering the sovereign good or the happiness of man, to connect the benefits of the mind with benefits of the body, and who consequently believe that it is disgraceful

to associate freedom from bodily pain with tranquility of mind. But as these are Stoics or their would-be imitators, I can't refrain from putting in here what Cicero himself says against them. Addressing Cato, he starts with this principle •or set of principles• of the Stoics:

- We have an affection for ourselves, and the first desire nature has imprinted on us is a desire for self-preservation.
- We should study what we ourselves *are*, so as to be able to conserve what we *should be*.
- We are men, composed of mind and body, and in conformity with our first and natural appetite we should love these things, and make out of them the goal of our sovereign and ultimate good, to consist in the acquisition of things that are in conformity with nature.'

He continues:

'Since those are our premises, and you set as the goal living according to nature, tell us now: How can you say that living honestly is simply and absolutely the sovereign good? How have you so quickly abandoned the body and all the things that are according to nature, and how comes it that so many things that nature strongly recommends have been suddenly abandoned by wisdom? If we were seeking the sovereign good not of man but of some animal consisting solely of a mind, the goal that you proclaim would not be the goal even of •that mind. For •it would want health and freedom from pain, and would also desire its own preservation and whatever could contribute to that, and it would set for itself the goal of living according to nature, which is . . . to possess all or many of the most important things that are in accordance with nature. Virtue alone, they say, is

sufficient for being happy or for living happily, and the goods of the body are merely like little accessories that don't make life happier; but this way of talking is really just a joke. There is no doubt that a man suffering some great pain would be greatly obliged to anyone who delivered him from it, and that a wise man who had been sentenced to torture by a tyrant would strenuously prepare himself—as having to do battle with his chief enemy, pain—and would summon up all his principles of courage and endurance to come to his aid in this severe and trying combat.'

And then he goes straight on to say:

'Self-love is inherent in every species; for what species ever abandons itself, or any part of itself, or any habit or power of such a part, or any of the things—whether processes or states—that are in accordance with its nature and its constitution? So how could it be that the human species alone relinquished its own nature, forgot the body, and found its sovereign good not in the whole man but in a part of the man? Wisdom did not create man; it found him already started by nature. If there had been nothing to be perfected in man except a certain operation of the **mind**, namely *reason*, wisdom would have needed no other goal than *virtue*, which is reason's consummation. Similarly, if there had been nothing to be perfected except the **body**, wisdom's ultimate goal would have been health, freedom from pain, beauty, and so on. But what we are discussing here is the sovereign good of **man**, who is a composite of mind and body; so aren't we looking for the sovereign good of him in his complete nature? Those who place his sovereign good in only one of his parts are, as it were, paying careful attention to the right hand and neglecting the left. What! Just because

virtue has (as everyone agrees) the highest and most excellent place in man, and we count as perfect those who are wise, will you take account only of virtue and dazzle our minds with its splendour?.... You are not giving enough thought to *yourself*; we want virtue to *protect* nature, not *abandon* it; yet according to you it protects one part and lets the other go. If man's constitution were to speak, it would say that its earliest beginnings of desire were to preserve itself in the nature it was born into the world with.'

I know what is usually said in the litany against pleasure—that it is man's major plague, that it is reason's mortal enemy, that it dims the eyes of wisdom, that it has no connection with virtue, that it is the source of treacheries, the ruin of nations, the root of all crimes, that it squanders inheritances, causes loss of reputation, that it weakens the body and makes it vulnerable to diseases, and finally that it hastens old age and death. [The verse that follows is an approximate translation (author unknown) of some lines of Latin poetry by Silius Italicus, quoted in Latin by Gassendi.]

Not heaven's high rage, nor swords or flames
combined,
Can bring such plagues as pleasure to the mind.
One's mad with dice, one melts in vicious love,
But when the knotty gout forbids his joints to
move;
How sweet an evil luxury appears,
Which drowned in flesh, and deaf to heavenly
cares,
The sluggish senses of their force disarms,
And worse transforms the limbs than Circe's
charms,
Without it cheers the man, within destroys,
Bears serpents in its gold, and torments in its

joys.

But as I have already explained and protested many times: when I say that *pleasure* is the goal, the happiness, the sovereign good, what I am referring to is not sordid and debauched pleasure but simply tranquility of mind and freedom from bodily pain. So these objections are irrelevant to what I am saying.

6: How much good and virtue there is in being able to live on little

It is not without reason that I have implied that the true and general means of obtaining and preserving the pleasure that makes life happy is to cultivate temperance, which would lead us to go so far in moderating our desires—cutting back on what is unnecessary and useless, and limiting ourselves to what is necessary and natural—that we would become accustomed to being content with living on little. For that is how one can preserve that sweet *tranquility of mind* that is the main ingredient of happiness. For someone who limits himself to things that are naturally necessary has no occasion to join in the usual disturbance and self-torment over acquisitions, because those things are found everywhere and are very easy to obtain. Turmoil and mental anguish afflict only those who are not satisfied with necessities and are constantly thinking about superfluities:

- if they don't get them, they are violently distressed;
- if they do get them, they are afraid of losing them;
- if they do lose them, they die of vexation over this;
- while they still have them, they are never satisfied;

so that—using their mind as though it were a *sieve*—they never let themselves rest, but are always roused by some new desire as if by some kind of madness, so that we see

them always undertaking some new labour.

Temperance is also the sure way to obtain and preserve that pleasurable freedom from bodily pain that constitutes the other part of happiness; because someone who is satisfied with necessities does not inflict on himself the immense trouble and labour that are inevitable for those who pursue superfluities. He doesn't do anything contrary to health, or draw on himself any of those discomforts that intemperance causes. Illnesses ordinarily come not to •those who live frugally and simply but to •those who eat too much or who consume food that is not natural, corrupted by sauces and by the artifice of cooks.

Epicurus must have recognised the importance and the excellence of this modesty or moderation that is satisfied with little, when he exclaims:

'To be satisfied with necessities is to be wealthy indeed! Poverty in proportion to the law of nature—what a great treasury of riches that is! Do you want to know what limits are set for us by this law of nature? *Do not go hungry, do not be thirsty, do not be cold*'. [He gives these also in Latin.]

And he experienced this within himself, according to the testimony of Juvenal:

If any ask me what would satisfy
To make life easy, thus I would reply:
As much as keeps out hunger, thirst and cold
As much as made wise Epicurus blessed,
Who in small gardens spacious realms possessed.

Seneca says: 'Cheerful poverty is an honest thing; but if it is cheerful it is not poverty, for anyone who is satisfied with poverty is rich. What makes a man poor is not having little but wanting more than he has.' Indeed, riches should be valued in terms of their goal, which is nothing other than joy, satisfaction, pleasure; and poverty in terms of the

deprivation of this goal; so it is certain that a cheerful poverty is not poverty but great wealth, and that melancholy wealth is not wealth but great poverty. The ·penniless· traveler who sings in full view of thieves is really rich; the one who is laden with money and is afraid of guns and swords, and trembles with fear on seeing the shadow of a reed waving in the moonlight, is poor. . . . Please tell me, if two men die at the same time—

- one who has lived joyfully despite being destitute of riches, ordinarily so-called, and
- one who, while being loaded with material goods, has lived his life in anxiety and vexation,

—which of the two dies richer?

Cicero seems to be taken with this virtue and moderation of mind that leads us to live contentedly with little. For after showing by the examples of Socrates and Diogenes that the burden of poverty is lightened if one reflects on Epicurus's words 'Oh, what little does nature desire, how few things it takes to suffice it!', he maintains that 'wisdom is often found under an unwashed cloak'. And as if he had undertaken to write in praise of this philosopher, he continues:^{zx}

'What! Are those glorious orators stronger and more big-hearted than Epicurus in confronting the poverty that troubles men so much? All the other philosophers seem to be as well-prepared as him against all evils, but is there one who is not afraid of poverty? As for Epicurus himself, it takes very little to satisfy him, and no-one has ever written better about frugality than he did. As he was averse to everything that causes desire for money, sex, ambition, sumptuous daily expenses etc., why would he take care to obtain them, or be eager to pursue them? What! Shall Anacharsis the Scythian be able to despise riches and our philosophers not be able to do likewise? One of

that Scythian's letters included this:

"Greetings from Anacharsis to Hanno: Instead of rich and glorious apparel, I wear a Scythian cloak, my shoes are the hardened soles of my feet, my bed is the earth, my food is seasoned only by hunger, and I live on milk, cheese and meat. So if you come to see me, you will find a man very much at peace. And as for the gifts you have been pleased to honour me with, give them to your fellow citizens or offer them to the immortal gods."

All philosophers, no matter what sect they belonged to (except for those whose brutal nature has driven them away from right reason) have been capable of looking at things in this way. Socrates, seeing the quantity of gold and silver carried about at a public ceremony, exclaimed "How many things there are that I don't desire!" When Xenocrates understood that the ambassadors of Alexander had brought him fifty talents, which was a very considerable sum at that time in Athens, he invited the ambassadors to supper in the Academy, and had them entertained with simple food and no fuss; and when the next day they asked him whom he wanted that money to be given to, he replied: "What! Didn't the meal I gave you yesterday tell you that I have no need for money?" However, seeing that this refusal displeased them, he accepted thirty minae, so as not to seem to despise the king's liberality. As for Diogenes, being a cynic he treated him more freely; for when Alexander asked him if he didn't need anything, he answered that the only thing he needed right then was for Alexander to move so that he didn't get between him and the sun. . . .'

What you have just read about Diogenes reminds me what Seneca and Maximus of Tyre have written about him. The former, after showing

- that great estates are often vexatious and mischievous,
- that the rich don't take the loss of goods more easily than the poor do,
- that it is far more tolerable not to acquire something than to lose it, and thus
- that those whom fortune has *never favoured* seem to be happier than those whom it has *forsaken*,

continues as follows:

'This is what Diogenes, that great mind, had understood when he put himself into a state such that nothing could be taken from him.... Truly if anyone doubts the happiness of Diogenes, he may as well doubt the condition of the immortal gods—whether they are less happy because they have no possessions subject to fortune's caprice, possessions they can be deprived of.'

As for Maximus of Tyre, discussing the question of whether the way of life of the cynics was preferable to any other, here is what he said about Diogenes:

'Diogenes was neither an Attic nor a Dorian, nor tutored in the schools of Solon or Lycurgus (for neither the places nor the laws ·that they taught· provided virtue). He was born in the town of Sinope on the southern shore of the Black Sea. After consulting Apollo, he abandoned all occasions of vexation and trouble, broke his chains, and—in the manner of a wise and free bird—passed through the world without

- fearing tyrants,
- binding himself to any one system of laws,
- working on the administration of civic affairs,
- being troubled by the education of children,
- being bound by marriage,
- occupying himself with farming,
- engaging in military pursuits, or
- trafficking in merchandise by sea or land;

laughing at all these sorts of men, and at all these sorts of conditions, as we commonly laugh at children we see playing knucklebones so assiduously that they fight and rob one another. He led the life of a free king, exempt from fear and anxiety.... His royal palaces were the temples, the colleges,¹ and the sacred woods. His riches very large, very secure, with no risk of being stolen from him because they consisted in the whole earth with all the fruits it bore.... He habituated himself to all sorts of weather, as lions do, and did not avoid the changing of the seasons appointed by Jupiter; nor did he devise any means to spare himself from them. Rather, this way of life adjusted him to the *whole* of nature, so thoroughly that he secured his health and strength without

- any need for medicines,
- experiencing iron or fire [scalpel or cautery],
- imploring the help of Chiron or Esculapius or Asclepiades, or
- submitting to the prophecies of soothsayers, or to magical and superstitious purifications, or to the vain words of wizards.

And at a time when all Greece was in arms and all the ·neighbouring· nations were at war with one

¹ The French is *colleges*. It refers to buildings that were something like pre-Christian monasteries.

another, he alone—as if there were a general truce and he had formed an alliance with all the earth—was without arms in the midst of armed men and of combatants. Even the scoundrels, the tyrants and the slanderers left him alone and refrained from doing him any harm, though he reproved them, not indeed in the manner of the sophists but by objecting to them and putting their own actions before their eyes, which is a very salutary and very convenient way of turning minds towards peace and reason.'

We may at this point add what Seneca reports as coming from the school of Epicurus: 'Those who happily enjoy luxury are those who have no need for it, and the one who has no *need* for riches is the one who enjoys them.' For as luxury consists mainly in a show of riches, someone who believes he has no need of them, and who consequently isn't afraid of losing them, can assuredly make a very pleasant use of them; whereas someone who does need riches is anxious about losing them, and in this anxiety he doesn't enjoy them, because it's not possible to enjoy a good that one is anxious about. He goes on to say:

'The miserable wretch is always wanting to add something to his riches, and while he is blinded by this passion, he

- forgets to enjoy them,
- examines his receipts,
- prepares his accounts,
- goes to the exchange, and
- leafs through his engagement-book;

and so we see the rich man's transformation into a property-manager! We'll be much more *securely* rich when we understand that poverty is not such a bad thing.'

But let us leave this here.

It was a lovely thing that Socrates, considering the quantity and variety of things in the marketplace, could say 'What a lot of things there are that I have no need of!' Likewise, if a man somehow comes to possess all these things, but finds himself able to say—considering his houses, his pieces of furniture, his servants, his table, his clothing, and so on—

'I do indeed have all that, but I could very well do without it, I don't absolutely need it, I could sleep comfortably in a house that was less grand and less ornate; I could easily do without this great number of servants, these exquisite meals, and these magnificent clothes',

he will surely be able to enjoy his prosperity very pleasurable. For he will understand that he can very comfortably do without an infinity of things which greatly disturb life's tranquility through the passion to own them. And his knowledge that these things are not absolutely necessary to him will make him all the more prepared to bear their loss gracefully, if some misfortune takes them away from him. He will distance himself from the usual pains, labours, and troubles to increase them, when he realises •that greater wealth cannot bring him a greater true and pure pleasure than does the wealth he now has or even than what he would have from a much lower level of wealth; and •that any more that he might amass would not be for him, but for

- heirs,
- ingrates,
- spendthrifts,
- sycophants, or
- robbers,

and that to obtain it he would have had to forgo easy living and plunge into a sea of problems, pains, and vexations.

Here we may also observe that Seneca had good reason to report this other maxim of Epicurus:

'If any man having all the *necessities* of life thinks himself not rich enough, then even if he were the lord of the entire world, he would still be miserable.'

For if anyone of modest means does not believe he can live as happily as those he believes to be more eminent and more splendid than him, then it's quite sure that if his fortune were to rise to the level of theirs, or even higher, this would not make him any happier for it. He would always be just as unhappy, and would never be satisfied, because of the nature of his passion, his covetousness, which, once it has surpassed the bounds prescribed by nature, goes out of control and never finds anything that can fulfill it.

As for Epicurus's other celebrated maxim,

'What is necessary to nature is easy to acquire; if something is difficult, it is not necessary',

this is a maxim that Stobeus and others got from Epicurus and passed along in these other words:

'Let thanks be returned to kind Nature, which has so arranged everything that necessary things are easy to obtain, and difficult things are not necessary.'

That is what Cicero meant when he said of Epicurus that 'he held that Nature alone was sufficient to make a wise man rich, and that natural riches are easy to acquire· because Nature is content with little.'

And Seneca:

'According to Epicurus, the limits that nature prescribes to itself are

- not to be hungry,
- not to be thirsty,
- not to feel cold.

He holds that to banish hunger and thirst one doesn't need to live in luxurious palaces, to restrain oneself with supercilious and hostile coldness, to venture on the ocean, or to follow armies. What nature requires

is easily obtained, and obvious to all the world. What one has to sweat for are superfluous things, the sort of things that make the magistrates attend courts, the generals their tents, and the pilots their ships surrounded by the dangers of the sea.'

It's the greatest wealth to live content
With little, such the greatest joy resent
And bounteous Fortune still affords supply
Sufficient for a thrifty luxury.

It is true that there are men through whose tyranny or harshness innocent people sometimes lack life's necessities; and some people, through bad luck or their own folly, are put into a state in which they too lack those necessities; but as for Mother Nature, she is surely not a wicked stepmother with regard to men— she who is the nursing mother of all the animals!

- If she has subjected them to hunger, she has given them her fruits, her herbs, and her grains to appease it;
- if she has subjected them to thirst, she also provides them abundantly with water;
- if the air is **a** cold, or if it is **b** hot, she has provided them with leather that is thick and durable enough to endure these assaults, as can be seen in the skin of the face;
- if she made the other parts of their body more tender and delicate, she gave them **b** on the one hand the shade of trees, caves and other ways of cooling down, and **a** on the other the sun, fire, sheep's wool, and many other helps of that sort.

She has also given them the foresight and prudence to provide themselves with things they'll need in future, right down to the ant. Though they very often fail to follow the example of that little animal which, when winter approaches,

never leaves its cave and—as Horace says—‘in a wise and prudent manner calmly enjoys the winter with what it has piled up during the summer’. [Then three lines of Horace’s verse, saying the same thing.] For when we see the greater part the populace working incessantly to acquire possessions, one might suppose that they had forgotten how to use them and had been born for no other purpose than to accumulate things!

Considering men in this civilised society, are there any who could not find what’s needed to get through hunger, thirst, and the various onslaughts of weather? What if someone has a sumptuous table, fine wines, superb outfits, a splendid house, precious vases, well-behaved and smartly dressed servants, and so on? Those are not things we should thank kind Nature for, as we do for things that are absolutely necessary. The use of things that are easy to obtain is certainly no less pleasant than the use of ones that are so difficult to come by; and it is a mistake to believe that only the rich can taste joy and have pleasure [adapted from Horace, who is quoted in Latin.] But we will speak later about this. Here it will suffice to note this fine passage of Seneca which addresses the subject marvellously.

‘God, the father of all men, has put in our hand everything that is for our good. He has not waited for us to ask for it; he has freely given it to us of his own accord. The things that could have hurt us he has hidden from us, so that when in defiance of nature we have dug them out of the bowels of the earth, we have only ourselves to blame for the harm they have caused.. The source of all evils has been our throwing ourselves blindly into pleasures. We have allowed ourselves to be carried away towards ambition, glory, and vanity. So what advice can I give you now? Nothing new, for the ills we are seeking a

remedy for are not new. The first thing we should do is to look into ourselves, and accurately distinguish necessities from superfluities. Necessities abound everywhere; it’s only superfluities that give us trouble and aggravation as we search for them. Don’t think you have any great cause to be proud of yourself if you have despised gilded beds, jewels, and magnificent furnishings; you will wonder at yourself when you have despised necessities. It is no great matter to be able to live without these great and royal trappings, without wanting your dinner to include the brains of peacocks, the tongues of pheasants, or any of the other extravagancies of luxury which these days favour some parts of animals and despise the rest. I will admire you when you don’t despise a piece of dry bread, when you become convinced that the herbs grow in time of need not only for the benefit of animals but for men’s benefit also, and when you have learned that the branches of the trees hold what you need to satisfy you.’

[Then some quotations from Lucretius, Epicurus, Elian and Seneca, all about the delights of *simple* pleasures. Leading on to:] If you do not spend the nights at your banquets with golden torches and music that makes your gilded walls resound, you can at least recline gently on the grass, at the edge of a brook, in the shade of a large tree, and—without all these great luxuries—have a little picnic, diverting yourself comfortably in the season that invites us to it, when spring carpets the ground with flowers. [This sentence translates verse by Lucretius, which Gassendi quotes here in Latin.]

Will your fever leave you sooner if you lie in a painted and gilded room under embroidered quilt than it will if you lie a plain bed under a poor man’s blanket?

We shouldn’t believe that a an Apricius gets more pleasure

from his exquisite and splendid meals than **a** a labourer gets from simple and ordinary ones. For **a** the former, being always full, is in an almost continual state of disgust; while **b** the latter, being almost always hungry, finds all that he eats to be excellent; so that as **a** one finds his pheasant and turbot bland, **b** the other finds that his nuts and onions taste marvellous. Certainly the former seems never to have experienced hunger or thirst, so he cannot be persuaded that a common man may also eat as pleasurable as a prince, though he may be delayed from being seated at his small and humble table until an hour after the prince sits at his splendid table. Once men understood these truths, they would recognise how useless it is to work so hard to acquire immense riches to satisfy their gluttony; for they can without all this trouble obtain the same pleasures—ones that are more pure and more innocent. This is what our poet must have had in mind when he advises us ‘to shun grandeur, because one can in a small house live happier than kings and the friends of kings’. [This is also quoted in Horace’s Latin.]

But let us learn from Porphyry how thoroughly Epicurus lived a simple and frugal life, believing that he could even go as far as totally abstaining from meat. Here are his words:

‘We have recognised something that the common people find incredible, namely that the Epicureans—the very ones who hold that pleasure is the goal—have since the days of their chieftain mostly been content with fruits, vegetables, and broth; and that their books are full of nothing else, showing that nature is satisfied with little, that our *needs* are abundantly met by the food that is plainest and easiest to obtain, and that anything beyond that

- involves greed,
- is not in itself necessary,
- is not something the absence of which would

threaten to ruin peace of mind; but
•springs from vain and foolish prejudices.

They say also that a philosopher should be confident that for the remainder of his days he will lack nothing. Now, nothing is better able to get him to look at things in this way than his believing from his own experience •that very few things are necessary for him, •that those things are common and easy to acquire, and •that anything beyond them is superfluous, having to do with nothing but luxury and excess, and acquirable only with much difficulty—so that all the benefit and pleasure they might bring don’t justify giving oneself all that trouble, because they aren’t comparable with the anxieties one must undergo to obtain and preserve them. Besides, when the thought of death comes, we are easily reconciled to leaving the little things, or those that are mediocre and vulgar [see Glossary].

They say further that the consumption of meat compromises our health, rather than helping it, because health is maintained by the same things that restore it when we have lost it—dietfing, frugality and abstinence from meat. But it is not surprising (they say) that a vulgar person believes that consumption of meat is necessary for health, because he believes that all the pleasures that involve motion are good for health—including the pleasures of love, which never do any good and are usually harmful.’

Horace too must have clearly recognised the advantages brought by a sober and frugal life, when he writes:

‘Nothing contributes as much to health as drinking and eating little and being satisfied with the simplest meals and beverages. To be convinced of the truth of this, one needs only to recall a small, simple and

meagre supper that one ate on some past occasion and to set that alongside what happens when one gorges oneself with all kinds of foods—some converted into bile and others into mucus, which causes flatulence and indigestion.’ [Followed by eight lines of Horace’s verse saying the same as the French version, with a bit at the end going beyond it: ‘See how pale each guest is as he rises from this dubious feast!']

It is certainly astonishing that men, who in general are capable of intelligence and reason, put so little thought into what they eat and drink, and don’t stay aware of the following six things (there are others).

(i) We should postpone eating until the proper time; and all we need to tell us that the time has come is hunger; and that is at once the safest seasoning and the sweetest and most pleasant.

(ii) A simple and frugal meal replenishes the strength of the body and invigorates the mind, effects that can’t be expected from the variety, abundance, concoction and alteration of food presented on splendid tables. Why? Because although the animal pleasures of gourmands don’t last long, their conduct does weigh down the body and dull the mind; and if they don’t experience *at the time* the inflammations, the fevers, the arthritic attacks and other maladies, the seeds of these evils remain hidden in the body, having been carried to its parts by superfluous and impure blood formed by the superfluous and impure food they have eaten.

(iii) After hunger is appeased and the table cleared, he who has eaten and drunk modestly has the agreeable thought that he has done nothing to compromise his health and that he will profit from his moderation. He doesn’t mind not having experienced the pleasure that the gourmands have stuffed themselves with, especially since that pleasure is already gone, leaving nothing but the likelihood of regret.

He has no such prospect, unlike someone who, after stuffing his stomach with meats and sauces, is already sorry about the trouble his gluttony *has* given him, or suspects that he *will* experience such trouble—if not soon, then at least some day.

(iv) It is very prudent to avoid putting into one’s body—because of an appetite for a short-term pleasure—matter that causes so many grueling and protracted diseases, matter that one can get rid of only by submitting to various medicines, purgings, vomitings, and bleedings. They ruin the body, yet they can easily be avoided by simple abstinence so that one is not obliged to say, as Lysimachus did after surrendering to the Getae to allay his thirst and that of his entire army, ‘Oh gods, the great good I have just lost for such a fleeting pleasure!’

(v) With the exception of a few hereditary diseases (which, if they cannot be completely cured, can at least be treated), the general cause of all other diseases is drinking and eating unhealthily or excessively. Though stress, heat, cold, and other such causes *can* generate diseases, they usually *don’t* unless they stir up the stagnant and superfluous humors that were previously produced in the body by excess wine and good food.

It might also be noted that during the great plague that infected all of Attica, only Socrates was untouched by it, because of his extraordinarily restricted diet; and I am acquainted with a man who was saved by similar means from a great plague. Not to mention a person of great eminence who, being severely tormented by gout, was persuaded somewhat by my advice to live very abstemiously for a year, eating hardly any meat (in the manner of the Indians who are healthy and vigorous without it). He is now delivered from all his discomforts, just as long before him the senator Rogatianus was, whom Porphyry speaks about in *The Life*

of Plotinus. So how true it is that a light diet is a sovereign remedy to avoid diseases or to cure them!

(vi) For each person who is sick from malnutrition there are twenty who are sick from repletion; so that Theognides was quite right to say that gluttony kills many more people than hunger does. [Followed by the same thing in Latin.] And Horace, following Epicurus, tells us ‘that an abstemious man, who drinks and eats little, is always vigorous, and always ready for the activities of his job and of his duty; whereas junk food makes the body and the mind heavy, and pulls down to the earth our divine soul’. [Followed by five lines of verse, saying the same thing.]

One can similarly add that someone who eagerly pursues the pleasure of the palate loses the pleasure that he would have if—being accustomed to living abstemiously and simply—he only rarely allowed himself a feast. There is no impropriety in that. This is sometimes permissible for the most honest people, whether, as the poet says, ‘a formal celebration invites them to rejoice, or they want to restore their strength weakened by fasting or old age.’ [Followed by five lines of Horace, saying the same thing.] Not that one should make that special pleasure of the palate our goal; rather, being able to consider it as a kind of interlude, one finds that an abstemious and frugal life is good over-all. A wise man should always live in the same way and by the same rules, *so far as the circumstances of his life allow*; but that qualification is needed, because the kind of life we have creates situations where it is difficult to maintain exactly the rule and manner of life that we have prescribed for ourselves. Nevertheless, it is not very difficult to maintain them and to abide by them pretty closely, provided a man has as much integrity and resolution as a really wise and virtuous man should have. But if he is so soft and flexible that he is carried away with overindulgence at the slightest

temptation, it is an obvious sign that wisdom and virtue are not rooted very deeply in his mind.

Certainly, if we are sometimes obliged to attend a banquet where it seems that it would be impolite to resist requests and invitations that are made to us, *that* is the main occasion when strength and firmness should be shown. And if a civil excuse and honesty is not enough, we should then avoid that *dusopia* or ridiculous shyness condemned by the Greeks, and—following the advice of Plutarch—say clearly and boldly to our host what Creon says in one of his tragedies: ‘it is better that you should be angry with me today than that I be ill tomorrow from having obeyed you.’ [Followed by the same thing in Latin.] Plutarch continues: ‘For to cast oneself into the miseries of colic or even into delirium because one doesn’t want to be regarded as a buffoon and as impolite is to *be* both a buffoon and a madman, and shows no understanding of how one should behave among men with regard to wine and rich food.’

We should not here forget that fine saying of Epicurus, that ‘a modest and frugal life-style that we have adopted and grown used to makes us resolute against the assaults of fortune.’ For, as Horace says,

‘Who will be more able to trust himself and his own strength in the face of bad things that may happen?’

- Someone who will have accustomed his mind to enormous desires, and his body to rich and grandiose clothing? or
- Someone who is content with little, and—looking ahead—will have wisely made provisions during peace-time for what is necessary in war?

Let fortune go after the latter and take from him all that she can; how much can she deprive him of what is necessary?’ [Followed by six lines of Horace’s verse, saying

the same thing.]

Nor should we forget. . . .this excellent advice that Seneca delivered so well:

'You don't believe that such a small amount of food is enough to satisfy nature? It is more than enough, and there is pleasure in it—not a light and transitory pleasure that has to be renewed every moment, but a fixed and assured pleasure. For water, gruel and a piece of barley bread are things not very pleasant to the taste, but it's a great pleasure to be able to get pleasure from them and to confine ourselves to that which misfortune cannot deprive us of. The allowance of a prison is more plentiful, and a convict who is condemned to death has more to live on, than that. There is something splendid about willingly settling for that which is not dreaded by those who are reduced to the lowest state! That is the way to get ahead of fortune and block all her ways in. For what power can fortune have over someone who •disowns the things that she rejoices in giving and taking away, and •settles for things that she doesn't subject to her arrogant empire because she thinks them too low-down?'

I'll cite here •what Xenophon says about Socrates: 'He lived on so little that any artisan, however little he worked, would earn more than Socrates spent on his food'; and •what has already been said [on page 61] about Anacharsis, 'that he sent back the money offered him, because he didn't need it for his slight expenses'; and •what is reported of Epaminondas, namely that he sent back the king's ambassadors with the gold they had brought; and, after giving them a very simple meal, said to them 'Go and give your master an

account of this dinner, so that he understands that a man for whom this is sufficient is not to be bought with money.'

I could add several more famous examples showing that he who is satisfied with so few things that even in poverty he could have them, has no reason to fear the iniquity of fortune or to fear poverty. But rather than going into those, I shall adduce what Bion says so well in the writings of Theletes the Pythagorean, against the fear of poverty. Here are his words:

'If **things** could speak as we do and (so to speak) challenge us, isn't it true that **poverty** would say "Why, man, do you quarrel with me? Do I deprive you of any good—of temperance, of justice, of fortitude? Are you afraid that things you *need* will be lacking for you? What! Aren't the roadsides full of plants and the fountains full of water? Don't I provide you, all over the earth, with beds to lie on and leaves to cover you? Are you unable to rejoice with me? Don't you see ·the beggar· Gradiaphyrtus singing cheerfully while he eats his meal? Haven't I provided you with a no-cost no-trouble sauce, namely hunger? And doesn't someone who has *that* eat with pleasure, without needing any other seasoning? And doesn't someone who is thirsty drink large draughts of pure water without wanting to mix anything into it? Do you think anyone is *hungry* for a cake or *thirsty* for snow? Aren't those the ·sorts of· things that are called for by the extravagance and the decadence of spoiled men?"'

¹ In the French text, Diogenes is called *Diogene*, so that it admits of a routine plural, *Diogenes*. The only way to express this plural in English, in which the singular is 'Diogenes', is with the clumsy device adopted here.

An account of India's Diogeneses¹

In connection with all this, it seems that I shouldn't omit what I know concerning the lifestyle of the Eastern Indians, if only to show that all these fine things I have been saying are not simply philosophical theories and that there are whole populations who lead as frugal a life as did the Cynics, Stoicks, and Epicureans, and are like them in being satisfied with little for drinking, for eating, or for clothing,

There are in India many fakirs, or religious idolaters, who (like Diogenes) go about in the nude, and (like him) have for shoes only the hardened soles of their feet.

- For a hat, long oiled hair, braided and coiled on top of their heads;
- for finger-ornaments, nails that are curved and sometimes more than half the length of the little finger;
- for a home, the galleries surrounding their temples;
- for a bed, a few inches of ashes, though when they go

on a pilgrimage it's a sun-dried tiger-skin or leopard-skin laid on the ground;

- for their drink, pure water;
- for their food, when it is supplied by means of alms: a pound of kichery, which is certain a mixture of rice and of two or three kinds of lentils, the whole cooked with water and salt, and topped with a bit of brown butter.

The lifestyle of the Brahmans (or Brahmins) hardly differs from that of the fakirs either in quantity or quality, for their basic and main meal is always kichery—never meat, and never any beverage except water. The same goes for most of the so-called Banyan merchants; however wealthy they are, their food is neither more abundant nor more delicious than that of the Brahmans, and yet they live at least as peacefully, happily, and contentedly as we do, and they are much healthier than we are, and at least as strong and vigorous.