

CICERO

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*On Moral Ends*

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## Book I

(1) In this work I am putting into Latin themes which philosophers of the highest talent and most refined learning have dealt with in Greek, and I am well aware, Brutus<sup>1</sup>, that this will incur criticism of various kinds. Some people, by no means uneducated, altogether disapprove of philosophizing. Others do not criticize it so long as it is done in an easygoing manner, but consider that one should not devote so much of one's enthusiasm and attention to it. There will also be people, learned in Greek and contemptuous of Latin, who say that they would rather spend their time reading Greek. Finally, I suspect that there will be some who will call on me to follow other literary pursuits, claiming that this kind of writing, however elegantly done, is none the less not worthy of my character and position. (2) Against all of these critics I think that some brief reply ought to be made.

To those who pour scorn on philosophy I made an adequate response in the book in which I defend and laud philosophy against the accusations and attacks of Hortensius.<sup>2</sup> This book appeared to please you and all those whom I consider competent to judge, and so I undertook to write more, fearing that otherwise I might be perceived as exciting people's enthusiasm but unable to sustain it.

As for those who take great pleasure in philosophy, but want it to be practised only to a moderate extent – they are demanding a restraint that is hard to exercise. Philosophy is a pursuit which, once entered upon, cannot be limited or held back. In consequence, I regard as almost more just those who would altogether turn me away from philosophy, than those who would set

<sup>1</sup> Marcus Junius Brutus, c. 85–42, famous as one of the leaders in the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44. He is a suitable dedicatee for this book, since he had considerable philosophical interests (see below, para. 8 and book III, 6). Though he is sometimes considered a Stoic, the evidence is that he identified himself as a follower of Plato, belonging to the hybrid 'Old Academy' school of Antiochus (cf. book V, 8). See David Sedley, 'The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius', *Journal of Roman Studies* (1997), 41–53.

<sup>2</sup> Quintus Hortensius Hortalus (114–49), a famous orator, introduced by Cicero as a partner in discussion in his lost work *Hortensius* (written in the same year as *On Moral Ends*) in which Hortensius argued against the study of philosophy, and Cicero gave the other speaker, Catulus, arguments in its defence.

bounds on the infinite and desire moderation when the greater the study, the greater the reward. (3) If wisdom can be attained, one should not just acquire it but enjoy it to the full. And if its attainment is hard, there is none the less no end to the search for truth except its discovery. To tire of the search is disgraceful given that its object is so beautiful. And if writing philosophy delights, who would be so churlish as to turn one away from it? Even if it is an effort, who is to set a limit on another's industriousness? Terence's Chremes was civil in not wishing his new neighbour 'to dig or plough or bear any burden at all', for he was discouraging him not from industriousness but from menial labour.<sup>3</sup> But those who take offence at a pursuit, such as mine, which gives me nothing but joy, are simply prying.

(4) It is more difficult to satisfy those who claim to despise anything written in Latin. What amazes me above all about these people is that their native tongue gives them no pleasure when it deals with matters of the highest import, and yet they willingly read mere plays in Latin translated word-for-word from Greek. After all, who is so inimical almost to the word 'Roman' itself as to spurn and reject Ennius' *Medea* or Pacuvius' *Antiope* on the grounds that one loves the same plays by Euripides but hates Latin literature? Surely, it may be asked, one does not read Caecilius' *Sunephoboi* or Terence's *Woman of Andros* rather than either of these titles by Menander? (5) I disagree so much with this view that, however wonderfully written Sophocles' *Electra* may be, I none the less think that I should read Atilius' bad translation. Licinus described Atilius as 'a wooden writer, but still, I hold, a writer, and so worthy of being read'. For to be completely unversed in our poets is a sign either of extreme indolence or extreme fastidiousness.

In my view no one is well educated who is ignorant of our literature. So do we read Ennius' 'Would that not, in a glade . . .' no less than its Greek original, but disapprove of Plato's discussions of the good and happy life being set out in Latin?<sup>4</sup> (6) What of it, if I do not perform the task of a trans-

<sup>3</sup> Line 69 from Terence's play *The Self-Tormentor* (see next note).

<sup>4</sup> Sophocles (c. 495–406) and Euripides (c. 480–407/6) are fifth-century authors of tragic dramas in Greek, which became 'classics' and continued to be performed throughout antiquity. Cicero refers to translations and adaptations of their works into Latin by Quintus Ennius (239–169), who also translated Homer into Latin, and Marcus Pacuvius (c. 220–130). The quotation from Ennius is from the opening lines of Euripides' *Medea*. Porcius Licinus is a poet and critic probably of the end of the second century. Menander (c. 344/3–292/1) is the most famous Greek author of 'New Comedy', of which we have many Latin adaptations by Titus Maccius Plautus (active 205–184) and Publius Terentius Afer (Terence), active in the 160s. We have only fragments of Caecilius Statius (active 179–168), the title of whose play here remains in Greek (the *sunephoboi* are 'young companions'). The Atilius mentioned here as a translator of Sophoclean tragedy may be the same as a writer of comedies earlier than Caecilius.

Cicero is referring to Greek classics in Latin translations which by his day were already part of the Roman literary tradition in their own right.

Perhaps Cicero picks Plato (427–347; see Introduction pp. x–xii, xxi–xxii) as the philosopher most famous for his literary style in Greek. Plato's ideas about the good life are conspicuously absent from the *De Finibus*, except as taken up into Antiochus' hybrid theory (see Introduction, pp. xiii–xiv).

lator, but preserve the views of those whom I consider sound while contributing my own judgement and order of composition? What reason does anyone have for preferring Greek to that which is written with brilliance and is not a translation from Greek?<sup>5</sup> If one were to say that these topics have already been covered by the Greeks, then there is no reason to read even as many of the Greek authors themselves as one is supposed to read. For what, in the case of the Stoics, has been left out by Chrysippus?<sup>6</sup> Yet we read Diogenes, Antipater, Mnesarchus, Panaetius and many others, not least our friend Posidonius.<sup>7</sup> Does Theophrastus give us only moderate pleasure when he deals with topics already covered by Aristotle?<sup>8</sup> Do the Epicureans desist from writing in their own fashion on topics which Epicurus and the ancients had already written about?<sup>9</sup> If Greeks are read by Greeks, on the same subjects covered in a different way, why should not our Romans be read by Romans?

(7) Even if I were to translate Plato or Aristotle literally, as our poets did with the Greek plays, I hardly think I would deserve ill of my fellow-citizens for bringing those sublime geniuses to their attention. Though I have not thus far adopted this method, I do not consider that I am disbarred from doing so. If I think fit, I will translate certain passages, particularly from those authors I just mentioned, when it happens to be appropriate, as Ennius often does with Homer or Afranius with Menander.<sup>10</sup> Nor, unlike Lucilius,<sup>11</sup> will I forbid

<sup>5</sup> Cicero lacks modesty but makes a good point; his own excellent philosophical training puts him in a position to make synoptic and creative use of his sources without excessive dependency on any one of them.

<sup>6</sup> Chrysippus of Soli (280/76–208/4), third head of the Stoa after its founder Zeno of Citium (c. 334/3–262/1) and Cleanthes of Assos (c. 331/0–230/29) was regarded in the ancient world as the second founder of Stoicism; at a time when Zeno's ideas were subject to divergent interpretations and the influence of the school was becoming dispersed, Chrysippus wrote voluminously (we have 705 book titles) on all aspects of Stoicism in a way that developed and defended Zeno's ideas with rigour, acumen and force, establishing the basic tradition of Stoic teachings.

<sup>7</sup> Diogenes of Babylon (c. 228–140), Antipater of Tarsus (c. 200–c. 130) were heads of the Stoic school, Mnesarchus of Athens (c. 170–88) a leading figure in it. Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 185–109) and Posidonius of Apamea (c. 135–51) were more cosmopolitan Stoics who associated with leading Romans, introducing them to Stoic thought.

Cicero is not just showing off his learning here; in *On Duties*, for example, he further develops a work of Panaetius and contributes to a debate between the positions of Diogenes and Antipater. However, the intended audience for the present work is not expected to be knowledgeable in such detail.

<sup>8</sup> Theophrastus of Eresus (372/1–288/7) was the pupil and successor of Aristotle of Stageira (384–322). Little of Theophrastus' voluminous work survives; in the ancient world it was popular and well regarded for its style. Cicero is aware that Aristotle's more serious philosophical works were different from his more popular works (see Introduction, pp. xxii and n. 20).

<sup>9</sup> Epicurus of Athens (341–270) encouraged his followers to study and memorize his own words, and the school did not value originality, but there is a large Epicurean philosophical literature.

<sup>10</sup> Lucius Afranius (second half of the second century) was a dramatist who made adaptations from Menander (see note 4 above).

<sup>11</sup> Gaius Lucilius (c. 180–102/1) was a Roman author best known for cutting satires and invectives, a friend of Scipio Aemilianus (see next note).

anyone from reading my work. How I wish that a Persius were alive today! Still more a Scipio or Rutilius.<sup>12</sup> Lucilius, fearing the criticism of such people, said that he wrote for the ordinary folk of Tarentum, Consentia and Sicily. Here as elsewhere he writes with panache: but really in his day there were no critics learned enough to make him struggle to meet their favourable judgement, and his writings have a lightness of touch which reveals a consummate elegance but only moderate learning.

(8) Besides, which reader should I fear, given that I have been bold enough to dedicate my book to you, Brutus, a man who yields not even to the Greeks as a philosopher? Indeed it was you who roused me to the task by dedicating to me your wonderful book *On Virtue*. However, I believe that the reason why some people are averse to Latin literature is that they have tended to come across certain rough and unpolished works which have been translated from bad Greek into worse Latin. I sympathize with these people, provided only that they consider that the Greek versions too are not worth reading. On the other hand, if a Latin book has a worthy subject and is written with dignity and style, who would not read it? The only exception would be one who wanted to be called a Greek pure and simple, as in the case of Albucius when he was greeted by Scaevola who was praetor in Athens. (9) Lucilius again narrates the occasion with great charm and perfect wit, and has Scaevola say brilliantly:

‘Albucius, rather than a Roman or Sabine, a fellow-citizen of those distinguished centurions Pontius and Tritanius, who held the standard in the front line, you preferred to be called a Greek. And so when I was praetor in Athens, and you came to pay your respects, I greeted you in the way that you preferred. “*Chaire*, Titus!” I cried, and “*Chaire*, Titus!” cried my lictors, my whole cavalry and my infantry. Hence your hostility to me, Albucius, hence your enmity.’<sup>13</sup>

(10) Scaevola was right. I for my part never cease to wonder where this excessive distaste for home-grown products comes from. This is certainly not the place for a lecture on the subject, but my view is, as I have often argued, that, far from lacking in resources, the Latin language is even richer than the

<sup>12</sup> Lucilius wrote that he did not wish his works to be read either by the ignorant or by the very learned, using a certain Persius as an example of the latter (see Cicero’s *On the Orator* II, 25). Here Cicero wishes for a learned and sympathetic audience such as was available to the earlier writer.

Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus (185/4–129), prominent Roman statesman and general, in 146 captured and destroyed Carthage. He was friendly with various intellectuals, and interested in Greek culture, and has been seen as the centre of a ‘Scipionic circle’ of aristocrats with intellectual interests. Cicero presents an idealized picture of him in his earlier work *On the State*.

Publius Rutilius Rufus (c. 160–c. 80) a friend of Scipio’s, but less successful, went into exile in 92 after a conviction for corruption; he thereupon wrote an influential history of his times.

<sup>13</sup> *Chaire* is a Greek greeting. By having his official Roman entourage greet the Roman Albucius in Greek, the poem’s Scaevola implies that Albucius’ love of all things Greek has made him lose his pride in his Roman identity. This kind of anxiety and chauvinism about Greek culture was not uncommon among Romans.

Greek.<sup>14</sup> When, after all, have we, or rather our good orators and poets, lacked the wherewithal to create either a full or a spare style in their work, at least since they have had models to imitate?

As for me, as far as my public duties are concerned, and their attendant struggles and dangers, I consider myself never to have deserted the post at which the Roman people placed me. Surely, then, I ought to strive as hard as I can to put my energy, enthusiasm and effort into improving the learning of my fellow-citizens as well? There is no need to waste time picking a fight with those who prefer to read Greek texts, provided only that they do read them, and do not just pretend to. My task is to serve those who either wish to enjoy writings in both languages, or, if they have available to them works in their native tongue, do not feel any need of works in Greek.

(11) On the other hand, those who would rather I wrote on a different topic should be equable about it, given the many topics on which I have written, more indeed than any other Roman. Perhaps I shall live to write still more. In any case, no one who has habitually and carefully read my philosophical works will judge that any is more worth reading than this one. For nothing in life is more worth investigating than philosophy in general, and the question raised in this work in particular: what is the end, what is the ultimate and final goal, to which all our deliberations on living well and acting rightly should be directed? What does nature pursue as the highest good to be sought, what does she shun as the greatest evil?

Given that there is violent disagreement on these matters among the most learned philosophers, who could think that it is beneath whatever dignity one may care to bestow on me to inquire into the question of what is best and truest in every area of life? (12) We have our leading citizens debate the question of whether the offspring of a female slave is to be regarded as *in fructu*, with Publius Scaevola and Manius Manilius on one side, and Marcus Brutus dissenting.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, this kind of question is an acute one, and far from irrelevant for the conduct of civil society – I am happy to read such writings and others of the same sort, and shall go on doing so. But shall questions that relate to life in its entirety then be neglected? Legal discussions might have better sales, but philosophical discussions are certainly richer. However, this is a point which one may leave the reader to decide. For my part, I consider that this work gives a more or less comprehensive discussion of the question

<sup>14</sup> Cicero defends the capacity of Latin to translate Greek philosophy, given the relative paucity in Latin of developed abstract vocabulary and lack of the syntactical devices (such as the definite article) which are heavily used in philosophical Greek. For Cicero as a philosophical translator, see J. G. F. Powell, 'Cicero's translations from Greek' in J. G. F. Powell (ed.), *Cicero the Philosopher*, Oxford 1995, 273–300.

<sup>15</sup> A legal dispute: if a female slave is hired by B from her owner A, does a child born to her during this period belong to A or to B? Publius Mucius Scaevola, consul in 133, Manius Manilius, consul in 149 (who appears as a character in Cicero's *On the State*) and Marcus Junius Brutus (active in the early first century, a distant relative of Marcus Junius Brutus the assassin of Caesar) were all famous jurists and legal theorists of the past.



of the highest goods and evils. In it I have investigated not only the views with which I agree, but those of each of the philosophical schools individually.

(13) To start from what is easiest, let us first review Epicurus' system, which most people know best. You will discover that the exposition given by me is no less accurate than that given by the school's own proponents. For we wish to find the truth, not refute anyone adversarially.

An elaborate defence of Epicurus' theory of pleasure was once given by Lucius Torquatus, a man learned in every philosophical system. I gave the response, and Gaius Triarius, a young man of exceptional seriousness and learning, was present at the discussion.<sup>16</sup> (14) They had each come to call on me in my house at Cumae, and after a short discussion on literature, of which they were both keen students, Torquatus said: 'Since we have for once found you at leisure, I am determined to hear what it is about my master Epicurus which I shall not say you hate, as those who disagree with him generally do, but which at any rate you do not approve of. I myself regard him as the one person to have seen the truth, and to have freed people's minds from the greatest errors, and handed down everything which could pertain to a good and happy life. I feel that you, like our friend Triarius, dislike him because he neglected the stylistic flourish of a Plato, Aristotle or Theophrastus. For I can hardly believe that his views do not seem to you to be true.'

(15) 'You are quite mistaken, Torquatus', I replied. 'It is not the style of that philosopher which offends: his words express his meaning, and he writes in a direct way that I can comprehend. I do not reject a philosopher who has eloquence to offer, but I do not demand it from one who does not. It is in his subject-matter that Epicurus fails to satisfy, and in several areas at that. Still, since there are "as many views as people", perhaps I am wrong.' 'Why is it that he does not satisfy you?' asked Torquatus. 'For I consider you a fair judge, provided you have a good knowledge of what Epicurus says.' (16) 'All of Epicurus' views are well-enough known to me', I replied, 'assuming that you do not think that Phaedrus or Zeno, both of whom I have heard speak,<sup>17</sup> were misleading me – though they persuaded me of absolutely nothing except their earnestness. Indeed I frequently went to hear these men with Atticus, who was an admirer of both, and who even loved Phaedrus dearly. Atticus and I would discuss each day what we had heard, and there was never any dispute over my understanding, though plenty over what I could agree with.'<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The dialogue is set in 50 at Cicero's country house at Cumae, on the coast north of Naples. On Torquatus and Triarius see Introduction, pp. xv–xvi and n. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Phaedrus (probably of Athens, 138–70), whom Cicero heard in Rome; see Introduction p. xi. Cicero admired his character and his elegant style, unusual for an Epicurean. Zeno of Sidon (c. 150–after 79/8) was head of the Epicurean school in Athens, and Cicero heard him lecture there in 79–78. Cicero dislikes his abusive style; for example he called Socrates 'the clown from Athens'. Zeno's works have all been lost, but the content of some of his lectures and classes survives in the work of Philodemus of Gadara, one of his pupils, especially his work *On Signs*.

<sup>18</sup> Titus Pomponius Atticus (111–32), a lifelong friend of Cicero's and recipient of many of his letters. His sympathy for Epicureanism, though Cicero dislikes it, made him a safely neutral

(17) ‘Then tell me about it’, said Torquatus, ‘I very much want to hear what you take issue with.’ ‘Firstly’, I replied, ‘his physics, which is his proudest boast, is totally derivative. He repeats Democritus’ views,<sup>19</sup> changes almost nothing, and what he does try to improve, he seems to me only to distort. Democritus believes that what he calls “atoms” – that is, bodies which are indivisible on account of their density – move in an infinite void, in which there is no top, bottom or middle, no innermost or outermost point. They move in such a way as to coalesce as a result of collision, and this creates each and every object that we see. This atomic motion is not conceived to arise from any starting-point, but to be eternal.

(18) ‘Now Epicurus does not go greatly astray in those areas where he follows Democritus. But there is much in both that I do not agree with, and especially the following: in natural science, there are two questions to be asked, firstly what is the matter out of which each thing is made, and secondly what is the power which brings a thing into being. Epicurus and Democritus discuss matter, but neglect the power or efficient cause. This is a defect common to both men.

‘I turn to the failings peculiar to Epicurus. He believes that those same solid and indivisible bodies move downwards in a straight line under their own weight and that this is the natural motion of all bodies. (19) At the same time our brilliant man now encounters the problem that if everything moves downwards in perpendicular fashion – in a straight line, as I said – then it will never be the case that one atom can come into contact with another. His solution is a novel one. He claims that the atom swerves ever so slightly, to the absolutely smallest extent possible. This is how it comes about that the atoms combine and couple and adhere to one another. As a result, the world and all its parts and the objects within it are created.

‘Now this is all a childish fiction, but not only that – it does not even produce the results he wants. The swerve itself is an arbitrary invention – he says that the atom swerves without a cause, when the most unprincipled move that any physicist can make is to adduce effects without causes. Then he groundlessly deprives atoms of the motion which he himself posited as natural to all objects that have weight, namely travel in a straight line in a downwards direction. And yet he fails to secure the outcome that motivated these inventions. (20) For if all the atoms swerve, none will ever come together; while if some swerve and others follow their natural tendency to fall in a straight line, then, firstly, this will be equivalent to placing the atoms in two separate classes, those that move in a straight line and those that move

political figure on whom Cicero could rely. He acquired his nickname of Atticus through his love of Attica – that is, Athens and its culture (this is referred to in v, 4).

<sup>19</sup> Cicero frequently accuses Epicurus of taking much of his philosophy from Democritus of Abdera (c. 460–c. 350), the major defender of atomism. The charge is repeated at book II, 102 and book IV, 13. (In book V Democritus figures as an ethical philosopher; see v, 23 and 87.) Atomism may not have been as basic to Epicurus as Cicero suggests; he took it over as being the best science of his day, but gave it his own philosophical role.

off-line; and secondly, the disorderly clash of atoms which he posits – and this is a problem for Democritus too – could never bring about our ordered universe.<sup>20</sup>

‘Then again it is highly unscientific to believe that there is an indivisible magnitude. Epicurus would surely never have held that view had he chosen to learn geometry from his friend Polyaenus rather than make Polyaenus himself unlearn it.’<sup>21</sup> Democritus thought the sun was of great size, as befits a man of education, well-trained in geometry. Epicurus thought that it was maybe a foot across. He took the view that it was more or less as big as it looked.<sup>22</sup>

(21) ‘Thus when he changes Democritus he makes things worse; when he follows Democritus there is nothing original, as is the case with the atoms, the void, and the images (which they term *eidōla*)<sup>23</sup> whose impact is the cause of both vision and thought. The notion of infinity (what they call *apeiria*) is wholly Democritus’, as is the notion of innumerable worlds being created and destroyed on a daily basis. Even if I have no agreement with these doctrines myself, I would still rather Epicurus had not vilified Democritus, whom others praise, while taking him as his sole guide.

(22) ‘Take next the second main area of philosophy, the study of inquiry and argument known as logic.’<sup>24</sup> As far as I can gather, your master is quite defenceless and destitute here. He abolishes definition, and teaches nothing about division and classification. He hands down no system for conducting and concluding arguments; he gives no method for dealing with sophisms, or for disentangling ambiguities; he locates judgements about reality in the senses, so that once the senses take something false to be true, he considers that all means of judging truth and falsehood have been removed.<sup>a</sup>

(23) ‘Pride of place he gives to what he claims nature herself ordains and approves, namely pleasure and pain. For him these explain our every act of pursuit and avoidance. This view is held by Aristippus, and the Cyrenaics<sup>25</sup> defend it in a better and franker way than Epicurus does; but I judge it to be

<sup>20</sup> Cicero is prejudicial in his presentation of the ‘atomic swerve’, whose nature and role are extremely controversial; for survey and discussion see W. Englert, *Epicurus on the Swerve and Voluntary Action*, Atlanta, Ga. 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Polyaenus of Lampsacus (c. 340–278/7) was an early convert to Epicureanism and became one of the four major founding figures of the school. Originally a prominent mathematician, he abandoned this when Epicurus, according to Cicero (*Varro* 106) convinced him that geometry was all false, since atomism precludes infinite divisibility.

<sup>22</sup> Cicero is again being unsympathetic; the Epicurean view is more complex. See J. Barnes, ‘The size of the sun in antiquity’, *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis* 15, (1989), 29–41.

<sup>23</sup> *Eidōla* are thin films of atoms which constantly stream from the surfaces of things and whose impact on our sense organs accounts for the ways we represent things in perception and thought.

<sup>24</sup> Epicurus ‘abolishes’ definition in rejecting traditional philosophical arguments about things’ nature as futile, relying instead on direct evidence from the senses; this issue comes up below at 29 (and see note 31) and book II, 4 (and see note 6). <sup>25</sup> See Introduction p. xviii.

<sup>a</sup> It is likely, given the abruptness of the transition to the next paragraph, that some text has been lost at this point.

the sort of position that seems utterly unworthy of a human being. Nature has created and shaped us for better things, or so it seems to me. I could be wrong, of course. But I am quite certain that the man who first won the name of “Torquatus” did not tear that famous chain from his enemy’s neck with the aim of experiencing bodily pleasure. Nor did he fight against the Latins at Vesperis in his third consulship for the sake of pleasure. Indeed, in having his son beheaded, he even appears to have deprived himself of many pleasures. For he placed the authority of the state and of his rank above nature herself and a father’s love.<sup>26</sup>

(24) ‘Take next Titus Torquatus, who was consul with Gnaeus Octavius. Consider the severity with which he treated the son whom he gave up for adoption to Decius Silanus. This son was accused by a deputation from Macedonia of having taken bribes while praetor in that province. Torquatus summoned him into his presence to answer the charge, and having heard both sides of the case, determined that his son had not held office in a manner worthy of his forebears, and banished him from his sight.<sup>27</sup> Do you think he acted thus with his own pleasure in mind?’

‘I need not even mention the dangers, the efforts, and, yes, the pain that the very best people endure for the sake of their country and family. Far from courting pleasure, such people renounce it entirely, preferring in the end to bear any kind of pain rather than neglect any part of their duty.

‘Let us turn to cases that are no less significant, even if they appear more trivial. (25) Is it pleasure that literature affords you, Torquatus, or you, Triarius? What of history, science, the reading of poetry, the committing to memory of acres of verse? Do not reply that you find these activities pleasurable in themselves, or that your forebears, Torquatus, found theirs so. Neither Epicurus nor Metrodorus<sup>28</sup> ever offered that sort of defence, and nor would anyone who has any sense or is acquainted with Epicurus’ teachings.

‘As to the question why so many people are followers of Epicurus, well, there are many reasons, but what is most alluring to the masses is their perception that Epicurus said that happiness – that is, pleasure – consists in performing right and moral actions for their own sake. These good people fail to realize that if this were so then the whole theory is undermined. For once it is conceded that such activities are immediately pleasant in themselves,

<sup>26</sup> Titus Manlius Imperiosus Torquatus, a fourth century Roman, consul three times, legendary for strict and harsh rule-following, exemplified in various stories. Though abusively treated by his father, he loyally saved him from prosecution for it. He acquired the name Torquatus from the torque he took from a Gaul he killed in single combat in 361. Later, when his own son, serving under him, disobeyed orders to fight a similar duel, Torquatus had him executed on the spot.

<sup>27</sup> This happened in 141. The son thereupon committed suicide; his father refused to attend the funeral.

<sup>28</sup> Metrodorus of Lampsacus (331–278), one of Epicurus’ original associates, regarded as a co-founding figure of the school.

without reference to the body, then virtue and knowledge will turn out to be desirable in themselves, and that is something which Epicurus would utterly reject.

(26) 'These are the aspects of Epicurus' position with which I take issue', I concluded. 'For the rest, I wish that Epicurus had been better equipped intellectually (you must surely agree that he lacks sophistication in those areas which go to make a person well educated), or that he had not at any rate deterred others from study – though I see that at least he has not deterred you.'<sup>29</sup>

I had made these remarks more to draw out Torquatus than to deliver a speech of my own, but Triarius then said with a gentle smile: 'You have pretty much expelled Epicurus in his entirety from the choir of philosophers. What have you left for him except that, however he may have expressed himself, you understand what he is saying? His physics is derivative, and in any case you dispute it. Whatever he tried to improve, he made worse. He had no method of argument. When he called pleasure the highest good, this firstly showed a lack of insight in itself, and secondly was also derivative. Aristippus had said it before, and better. Finally, you threw in his lack of learning.'

(27) 'Triarius', I replied, 'when one disagrees with someone, one must state the areas of disagreement. Nothing would prevent me from being an Epicurean if I agreed with what Epicurus said – especially as it is child's play to master his doctrines. Mutual criticism is therefore not to be faulted; though abuse, insult, ill-tempered dispute and wilful controversy seem to me to be unworthy of philosophers.'

(28) 'I utterly agree', interjected Torquatus. 'One cannot have debate without criticism; but one should not have debate involving bad temper and wilfulness. But I should like to say something in reply to your criticisms, if you do not mind.' 'Do you think', I replied, 'that I would have made them had I not wanted to hear your response?' 'Would you like me to run through all of Epicurus' teaching, or just to discuss the single issue of pleasure, on which our whole debate is centred?' 'That is entirely up to you', I said.

'Then here is what I shall do', he replied. 'I shall expound one question, the most important one. Physics I shall return to on another occasion, and prove to you both the notorious swerve of the atoms and the size of the sun, as well as the full extent of the criticisms and corrections that Epicurus made to Democritus' errors. But for now I shall discuss pleasure. It will certainly not be an original contribution. But I feel sure that even you will agree with it.' 'Rest assured', I said, 'that I will not be wilful. If you persuade me of your claims, I shall gladly assent.' (29) 'I shall persuade you', he replied, 'provided you are as fair as you are presenting yourself to be. But I prefer to speak con-

<sup>29</sup> Probably Cicero means us to think of a notorious saying of Epicurus' to his young follower Pythocles: 'Spread your sails, fortunate one, and flee all culture' (Diogenes Laertius 10.6).

tinuously rather than proceed by question and answer.’ ‘As you wish’, I said, whereupon he began his discourse.<sup>30</sup>

‘I shall begin’, he said, ‘in the way that the author of this teaching himself recommended. I shall establish what it is, and what sort of thing it is, that we are investigating. This is not because I think you do not know it, but in order that my exposition should proceed systematically and methodically.’<sup>31</sup> We are investigating, then, what is the final and ultimate good. This, in the opinion of every philosopher, is such that everything else is a means to it, while it is not itself a means to anything.<sup>32</sup> Epicurus locates this quality in pleasure, which he maintains is the highest good, with pain as the highest evil. Here is how he sets about demonstrating the thesis.

(30) ‘Every animal as soon as it is born seeks pleasure and rejoices in it, while shunning pain as the highest evil and avoiding it as much as possible. This is behaviour that has not yet been corrupted, when nature’s judgement is pure and whole.’<sup>33</sup> Hence he denies that there is any need for justification or debate as to why pleasure should be sought, and pain shunned. He thinks that this truth is perceived by the senses, as fire is perceived to be hot, snow white, and honey sweet. In none of these examples is there any call for proof by sophisticated reasoning; it is enough simply to point them out. He maintains that there is a difference between reasoned argumentative proof and mere noticing or pointing out; the former is for the discovery of abstruse and complex truths, the latter for judging what is clear and straightforward.

‘Now since nothing remains if a person is stripped of sense-perception, nature herself must judge what is in accordance with, or against, nature. What does she perceive and judge as the basis for pursuing or avoiding anything, except pleasure and pain? (31) Some Epicureans wish to refine this doctrine: they say that it is not enough to judge what is good and bad by the senses. Rather they claim that intellect and reason can also grasp that pleasure is to be sought for its own sake, and likewise pain to be avoided. Hence they say

<sup>30</sup> From 29 to 42 Torquatus defends Epicurus’ conception of our final end, pleasure, against misunderstandings; 42–54 outline the virtues; 55–65 defend Epicurus’ end against the Stoics; 65–70 give accounts of friendship; 71–2 concludes.

<sup>31</sup> Torquatus begins, as a good Epicurean, by examining our *prolēpsis* or concept of pleasure. This is the idea we build up, as we learn the use of a word by reference to our experiences; it can be articulated as a belief and thought of as a mental image. A *prolēpsis* is clear and reliable as long as it is drawn from experience and not contaminated by our other beliefs. Thus our idea of pleasure is clear and accurate as long as we stick to experience, one reason for beginning here with infants, who have no beliefs to confuse their ideas of pleasure and pain. Belief and argument are, however, required to clear away misconceptions (para. 31). Torquatus conspicuously does not mention the Epicurean distinction between static and kinetic pleasure which will play a large role later.

<sup>32</sup> Epicurus here and in 42 clearly accepts that ethical theory is about a correct specification of our final end; see Introduction, pp. xvii–xix.

<sup>33</sup> This is what Antiochus at v, 55 refers to as ‘visiting the cradle’; young children and animals, since they have no beliefs, are not influenced by false beliefs in their behaviour, which therefore reveals what our natural aim is. Both Stoics (in iii, 16–17) and Aristotelians (in v, 30–1) reject the Epicurean claim here that this is in fact pleasure.

that there is as it were a natural and innate conception in our minds by which we are aware that the one is to be sought, the other shunned. Still others, with whom I agree myself, observing the mass of arguments from a multitude of philosophers as to why pleasure is not to be counted a good, nor pain an evil, conclude that we ought not to be over-confident of our case, and should therefore employ argument, rigorous debate and sophisticated reasoning in discussing pleasure and pain.

(32) 'To help you see precisely how the mistaken attacks on pleasure and defences of pain arose, I shall make the whole subject clear and expound the very doctrines of that discoverer of truth, that builder of the happy life. People who shun or loathe or avoid pleasure do not do so because it is pleasure, but because for those who do not know how to seek pleasure rationally great pains ensue. Nor again is there anyone who loves pain or pursues it or seeks to attain it because it is pain; rather, there are some occasions when effort and pain are the means to some great pleasure. To take a slight example, which of us would ever do hard bodily exercise except to obtain some agreeable state as a result? On the other hand, who could find fault with anyone who wished to enjoy a pleasure that had no harmful consequences – or indeed to avoid a pain that would not result in any pleasure?

(33) 'Then again we criticize and consider wholly deserving of our odium those who are so seduced and corrupted by the blandishments of immediate pleasure that they fail to foresee in their blind passion the pain and harm to come. Equally blameworthy are those who abandon their duties through mental weakness – that is, through the avoidance of effort and pain. It is quite simple and straightforward to distinguish such cases. In our free time, when our choice is unconstrained and there is nothing to prevent us doing what most pleases us, every pleasure is to be tasted, every pain shunned. But in certain circumstances it will often happen that either the call of duty or some sort of crisis dictates that pleasures are to be repudiated and inconveniences accepted. And so the wise person will uphold the following method of selecting pleasures and pains: pleasures are rejected when this results in other greater pleasures; pains are selected when this avoids worse pains.<sup>34</sup>

(34) 'This is my view, and I have no fear that I will be unable to accommodate within it your examples of my forebears. You recalled them accurately just now, and in a way which showed considerable amity and goodwill towards me. But your praise of my ancestors has not compromised me or made me any less keen to respond. In what way, I ask, are you interpreting their deeds? Are you imagining that they took up arms against the enemy and treated their sons, their own blood, with such harshness, with no consideration for utility or their own advantage? Not even wild animals behave in such a disorderly and turbulent fashion that we can discern no purpose in their movements and

<sup>34</sup> Torquatus is echoing Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* 129: 'Sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when more discomfort follows for us from them, and we consider many pains superior to pleasures, whenever greater pleasure follows for us when we stand the pains for a long time'.

impulses. So do you really think that such distinguished men would have acted without a reason?

(35) 'What their reason was I shall consider later. Meanwhile, I maintain that if they performed those undoubtedly illustrious deeds for a reason, their reason was not virtue for its own sake. "He dragged the chain from the enemy's neck." Indeed, and so protected himself from death. "But he incurred great danger." Indeed, but in full view of his army. "What did he gain from it?" Glory and esteem, which are the firmest safeguards of a secure life. "He sentenced his son to death." If he did so without a reason, I would not wish to be descended from someone so harsh and cruel; but if he was bringing pain upon himself as a consequence of the need to preserve the authority of his military command, and to maintain army discipline at a critical time of war by spreading fear of punishment, then he was providing for the security of his fellow-citizens, and thereby – as he was well aware – for his own.

(36) 'Now this principle has wide application. The kind of oratory you practise, and especially your own particular brand, with its keen interest in the past, makes great play of recalling brave and distinguished men and praising their actions for being motivated not by gain but by the simple glory of honourable behaviour. But this notion is completely undermined once that method of choice that I just mentioned is established, namely that pleasures are foregone when this means obtaining still greater pleasures, and pains endured to avoid still greater pains.

(37) 'But enough has been said here about distinguished people and their illustrious and glorious deeds. There will be room later on to discuss the tendency of all virtues to result in pleasure. For now I shall explain the nature and character of pleasure itself, with the aim of removing the misconceptions of the ignorant, and providing an understanding of how serious, sober and severe is Epicurean philosophy, notwithstanding the view that it is sensual, spoilt and soft.

'We do not simply pursue the sort of pleasure which stirs our nature with its sweetness and produces agreeable sensations in us: rather, the pleasure we deem greatest is that which is felt when all pain is removed. For when we are freed from pain, we take delight in that very liberation and release from all that is distressing. Now everything in which one takes delight is a pleasure (just as everything that distresses one is a pain). And so every release from pain is rightly termed a pleasure. When food and drink rid us of hunger and thirst, that very removal of the distress brings with it pleasure in consequence. In every other case too, removal of pain causes a resultant pleasure. (38) Thus Epicurus did not hold that there was some halfway state between pain and pleasure. Rather, that very state which some deem halfway, namely the absence of all pain, he held to be not only true pleasure, but the highest pleasure.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Torquatus is making use of, without having formally introduced, the Epicurean distinction between 'kinetic' pleasure and 'static' pleasure, the latter consisting in tranquillity and freedom from pain and disturbance. It is the latter which is our final end.



‘Now whoever is to any degree conscious of how he is feeling must to that extent be either in pleasure or pain. But Epicurus thinks that the absence of all pain constitutes the upper limit of pleasure. Beyond that limit pleasure can vary and be of different kinds, but it cannot be increased or expanded. (39) My father used to mock the Stoics with wit and elegance by telling me how, in the Ceramicus at Athens, there is a statue of Chrysippus sitting with an outstretched hand, that hand symbolizing the delight Chrysippus took in the following little piece of argument: “Does your hand, in its present condition, want anything?” “Not at all.” “But if pleasure were a good, it would be wanting it.” “I suppose so.” “Therefore pleasure is not a good.”

‘My father remarked that not even a statue would produce such an argument, if it could speak. Though the reasoning has some force against a Cyrenaic position, it has none whatsoever against Epicurus. If pleasure were simply the kind of thing which, so to speak, titillated the senses and flooded them with a stream of sweetness, then neither the hand nor any other part of the body could be satisfied with mere absence of pain and no delightful surge of pleasure. But if, as Epicurus maintains, the highest pleasure is to feel no pain, well then, Chrysippus, the initial concession, that the hand in its present condition wants nothing, was correct; but the subsequent one, that if pleasure were a good the hand would have wanted it, is not. For the reason that it did not want it was that to have no pain is precisely to be in a state of pleasure.

(40) ‘That pleasure is the highest good can be seen most readily from the following example: let us imagine someone enjoying a large and continuous variety of pleasures, of both mind and body, with no pain present or imminent. What more excellent and desirable state could one name but this one? To be in such a state one must have a strength of mind which fears neither death nor pain, since in death there is no sensation, and pain is generally long-lasting but slight, or serious but brief. Thus intense pain is moderated by its short duration, and chronic pain by its lesser force. (41) Add to this an absence of terror at divine power, and a retention of past pleasures which continual recollection allows one to enjoy, and what could be added to make things any better?<sup>36</sup>

‘Imagine on the other hand someone worn down by the greatest mental and physical pain that can befall a person, with no hope that the burden might one

<sup>36</sup> Torquatus is paraphrasing the first four of Epicurus’ *Principal Doctrines*: ‘(1) What is blessed and indestructible neither has troubles itself nor produces them for anything else, so that it is affected by feelings neither of anger nor of gratitude. For everything of that kind is due to weakness. (2) Death is nothing to us; for what has been dissolved has no sensation, and what has no sensation is nothing to us. (3) The limit of magnitude of pleasures is the removal of everything that pains. Wherever there is pleasure, as long as it is there, there is nothing that pains or distresses or both. (4) What pains does not last continuously in the flesh. The extreme kind lasts the shortest time, while what merely exceeds pleasure in the flesh does not last many days. Ailments which last a long while contain pleasure in the flesh which exceeds what pains.’ These were sometimes simplified down to the ‘Fourfold Remedy’: ‘God provides no fears; death no worries; the good is easy to get; the dreadful is easy to endure.’

day be lifted, and with no present or prospective pleasure either. What condition can one say or imagine to be more miserable than that? But if a life filled with pain is to be above all avoided, then clearly the greatest evil is to live in pain. And from this thesis it follows that the highest good is a life of pleasure. Our mind has no other state where it reaches, so to speak, the final point. Every fear and every sorrow can be traced back to pain, and there is nothing other than pain that by its own nature has the power to trouble and distress us.

(42) ‘Furthermore, the impulse to seek and to avoid and to act in general derives either from pleasure or from pain. This being so, it is evident that a thing is rendered right and praiseworthy just to the extent that it is conducive to a life of pleasure. Now since the highest or greatest or ultimate good – what the Greeks call the *telos* – is that which is a means to no other end, but rather is itself the end of all other things, then it must be admitted that the highest good is to live pleasantly.

‘Those who locate the highest good in virtue alone, beguiled by the splendour of a name, fail to understand nature’s requirements. Such people would be freed from egregious error if they listened to Epicurus. Those exquisitely beautiful virtues of yours – who would deem them praiseworthy or desirable if they did not result in pleasure? We value medical science not as an art in itself but because it brings us good health; navigation too we praise for providing the techniques for steering a ship – for its utility, not as an art in its own right. In the same way wisdom, which should be considered the art of living, would not be sought if it had no practical effect. As things are, it is sought because it has, so to speak, mastered the art of locating and obtaining pleasure. (43) (What I mean by “pleasure” you will have grasped by now, so my speech will not suffer from a pejorative reading of the term.)

‘The root cause of life’s troubles is ignorance of what is good and bad. The mistakes that result often rob one of the greatest pleasures and lead to the harshest pains of mental torment. This is when wisdom must be brought to bear. It rids us of terror and desire and represents our surest guide to the goal of pleasure. For it is wisdom alone which drives misery from our hearts; wisdom alone which stops us trembling with fear. Under her tutelage one can live in peace, the flame of all our desires extinguished. Desire is insatiable: it destroys not only individuals but whole families; often it can even bring an entire nation to its knees. (44) It is from desire that enmity, discord, dissension, sedition and war is born. Desire not only swaggers around on the outside and hurls itself blindly at others: even when desires are shut up inside the heart they quarrel and fight amongst themselves. A life of great bitterness is the inevitable result. So it is only the wise person, by pruning back all foolishness and error, who can live without misery and fear, happy with nature’s own limits.

(45) ‘There is no more useful or suitable guide for good living than Epicurus’ own classification of desires. One kind of desire he laid down as

both natural and necessary; a second kind as natural but not necessary; and a third as neither natural nor necessary. The basis for this classification is that necessary desires are satisfied without much effort or cost. Natural desires do not require a great deal either, since the riches with which nature herself is content are readily available and finite. But there is no measure or limit to be found in the other, empty desires.<sup>37</sup>

(46) 'So we see that life becomes completely disordered when we err through lack of knowledge, and that wisdom alone will free us from the onrush of appetite and the chill of fear. Wisdom teaches us to bear the slings of fortune lightly, and shows us all the paths that lead to tranquillity and peace. Why then should we hesitate to declare that wisdom is to be sought for the sake of pleasure and ignorance to be avoided on account of distress?

(47) 'By the same token we should say that not even temperance itself is to be sought for its own sake, but rather because it brings our hearts peace and soothes and softens them with a kind of harmony. Temperance is what bids us follow reason in the things we seek and avoid. But it is not enough simply to decide what must or must not be done; we have also to adhere to what we have decided. Very many people, unable to hold fast to their own decisions, become defeated and debilitated by whatever spectre of pleasure comes their way. So they put themselves at the mercy of their appetites, and fail to foresee the consequences; and thus for the sake of some slight and non-necessary pleasure – which might have been obtained in a different way, or even neglected altogether without any ensuing pain – they incur serious illness, financial loss, a broken reputation, and often even legal and judicial punishment.

(48) 'On the other hand, those who are minded to enjoy pleasures which do not bring pain in their wake, and who are resolute in their decision not to be seduced by pleasure and act in ways in which they feel they ought not to, obtain the greatest pleasure by foregoing pleasure. They will also often endure pain, where not doing so would result in greater pain. This makes it clear that intemperance is not to be avoided for its own sake, and temperance is to be sought not because it banishes pleasures but because it brings about still greater ones.

(49) 'The same rationale applies in the case of courage. Neither hard effort nor the endurance of pain is enticing in its own right; nor is patience, persistence, watchfulness, nor – for all that people praise it – determination; not even courage. We seek these virtues because they enable us to live without trouble or fear, and to free our mind and body as much as possible from distress. Fear of death can shake to the roots an otherwise tranquil life; and succumbing to pain, bearing it with a frail and feeble spirit, is pitiable. Such

<sup>37</sup> A paraphrase of Epicurus' *Principal Doctrine* 29: 'Of desires, some are natural and necessary, others natural and not necessary, and others neither natural nor necessary but come about dependent on empty belief.' These desires are themselves called 'empty' at *Letter to Menoeceus* 127.

weak-mindedness has led many to betray their parents, their friends, in some cases even their country; and in most cases, deep down, their own selves. On the other hand, a strong and soaring spirit frees one from trouble and concern. It disparages death, in which one is simply in the same state as before one was born; it faces pain with the thought that the most severe pain ends in death, slight pain has long intervals of respite, and moderate pain is under our governance. Thus if the pain is tolerable, we can endure it, and if not, if life no longer pleases us, we can leave the stage with equanimity. Hence it is clear that cowardice and faint-heartedness are not condemned in their own right, nor courage and endurance praised. We reject the former because they lead to pain; we choose the latter because they lead to pleasure.

(50) 'Only justice remains, and then we will have discussed all the virtues. But here too there are pretty similar things to be said. I have demonstrated that wisdom, temperance and courage are so closely connected with pleasure that they cannot be severed or detached from it at all. The same judgement is to be made in the case of justice. Not only does justice never harm anyone, but on the contrary it also brings some benefit. Through its own power and nature it calms the spirits; and it also offers hope that none of the resources which an uncorrupted nature requires will be lacking. Foolhardiness, lust and cowardice unfailingly agitate and disturb the spirits and cause trouble. In the same way, when dishonesty takes root in one's heart, its very presence is disturbing. And once it is activated, however secret the deed, there is never a guarantee that it will remain secret. Usually with dishonest acts there first arises suspicion, then gossip and rumour, then comes the accuser, and then the judge. Many wrongdoers even indict themselves, as happened during your consulship.<sup>38</sup>

(51) 'But even those who appear to be well enough fortified and defended against discovery by their fellow humans still live in fear of the gods, and believe that the worry which eats away at their heart day and night has been sent by the immortal gods to punish them. Any contribution that wicked deeds can make to lessening the discomforts of life is outweighed by the bad conscience, the legal penalties, and the hatred of one's fellow-citizens that looms as a result. Yet some people put no limit on their greed, their love of honour or power, their lust, their gluttony, or any of their other desires. It is not as if ill-gotten gain diminishes these desires – rather it inflames them. They must be choked off, not reformed. (52) That is why true reason calls those of sound mind to justice, fairness and integrity. Wrongdoing is of no avail to one who lacks eloquence or resources, since one cannot then easily get what one is after, or keep hold of it even if one does get it. For those, on the other hand, who are well-endowed materially or intellectually, generosity is more appropriate. Those who are generous earn themselves the goodwill of

<sup>38</sup> Cicero seldom resists the chance to make a favourable reference to his consulship in 63, during which he uncovered an attempted coup by the disaffected aristocrat Lucius Sergius Catilina.

others and also their affection, which is the greatest guarantor of a life of peace.

'Above all there is never any reason to do wrong. (53) Desires which arise from nature are easily satisfied without resort to wrongdoing, while the other, empty desires are not to be indulged since they aim at nothing which is truly desirable. The loss inherent in any act of wrongdoing is greater than any profit which wrongdoing brings. Thus the right view is that not even justice is worthy of choice in its own right, but only in so far as it affords the greatest abundance of pleasure. To be valued and esteemed is agreeable just because one's life is thereby more secure and full of pleasure. Hence we consider that dishonesty is to be avoided not simply because of the troublesome turn of events which it leads to, but much rather because its presence in one's heart prevents one ever breathing freely or finding peace.

(54) 'So if not even the virtues themselves, which other philosophers praise above all else, have a purpose unless directed towards pleasure, but it is pleasure above all which calls us and attracts us by its very own nature, then there can be no doubt that pleasure is the highest and greatest of all goods, and that to live happily consists entirely in living pleasantly.<sup>39</sup>

(55) 'Now that this thesis has been firmly and securely established, I shall briefly expound some corollaries. There is no possibility of mistake as far as the highest goods and evils themselves – namely pleasure and pain – are concerned. Rather, error occurs when people are ignorant of the ways in which these are brought about. Pleasures and pains of the mind, we say, originate in bodily pleasures and pains – and so I concede your earlier point that any Epicurean who says otherwise cannot be defended. I am aware that there are many of this sort, albeit ignorant. In any event, although mental pleasure does bring one joy and mental pain distress, it remains the case that each of these originates in the body and is based upon the body.

'But this is no reason for denying that mental pleasure and pain may be much greater than physical pleasure and pain. For in the case of the body, all we can feel is what is actually now present. With the mind, both the past and future can affect us. To be sure, when we feel physical pain we still feel pain; but the pain can be hugely increased if we believe there is some eternal and infinite evil awaiting us. The same point applies to pleasure: it is all the greater if we fear no such evil. (56) It is already evident, then, that great mental pleasure or pain has more influence on whether our life is happy or miserable than does physical pleasure or pain of equal duration. But we do not hold that when pleasure is removed distress immediately follows, unless it is a pain that happens to take its place. Rather, we take delight in the removal of pain even

<sup>39</sup> Notice that Torquatus' account of all four standard virtues has revised ordinary views about them in a way favourable to the idea that they are practised for the sake of pleasure. Courage, for example, has been removed from the context of the need for self-defence and restricted to that of withstanding internal motives such as fear of death. These virtues make most sense in the unthreatening and co-operative context of an Epicurean community.

if this is not followed by the kind of pleasure that arouses the senses. One can see from this the extent to which pleasure consists in the absence of pain.

(57) 'Still, we are cheered by the prospect of future goods, and we enjoy the memory of past ones. But only fools are troubled by recollected evils; the wise are pleased to welcome back past goods with renewed remembrance. We have within us the capacity to bury past misfortune in a kind of permanent oblivion, no less than to maintain sweet and pleasant memories of our successes. But when we contemplate our whole past with a keen and attentive eye, the bad times will cause us distress, though the good ones happiness.

'What a splendid path to the happy life this is – so open, simple and direct! There can certainly be nothing better for a person than to be free of all pain and distress, and to enjoy the greatest pleasures of body and mind. Do you see, then, how this philosophy leaves out nothing which could more readily assist us in attaining what has been set down as life's greatest good? Epicurus, the man whom you accuse of being excessively devoted to pleasure, in fact proclaims that one cannot live pleasantly unless one lives wisely, honourably and justly; and that one cannot live wisely, honourably and justly without living pleasantly.<sup>40</sup> (58) For a state cannot be happy if it is engaged in civil strife, nor a household where there is disagreement over who should be its head. Still less can a mind at odds and at war with itself taste any part of freely flowing pleasure. One who constantly entertains plans and projects that compete amongst themselves and pull in different directions can know nothing of peace or tranquillity. (59) Yet if life's pleasure is diminished by serious illness, how much more must it be diminished by a sickness of the mind! And sickness of mind is the excessive and hollow desire for wealth, glory, power and even sensual pleasure. Additionally it is the discomfort, distress and sadness that arises to eat up and wear out with worry the hearts of those who fail to understand that there need be no mental pain except that which is connected to present or future physical pain.

'Yet there is no foolish person who does not suffer from one of these sicknesses; there is none therefore who is not miserable. (60) Consider also death, which hangs over such people like Tantalus' rock.<sup>41</sup> Then there is superstition – no one steeped in it can ever be at peace. Moreover foolish people are forgetful of past successes, and fail to enjoy present ones. They simply await success in the future, but because that is necessarily uncertain, they are consumed with anxiety and fear. They are especially tormented when they realize, too late, that they pursued wealth or power or possessions or honour to no avail, and have failed to obtain any of the pleasures whose prospect drove them to endure a variety of great suffering.

(61) 'Look at them! Some are petty and narrow-minded, or in constant

<sup>40</sup> A close rendering of *Principal Doctrine* 5.

<sup>41</sup> A Greek myth: Tantalus, for offending the gods (there are a number of different stories) was punished in the Underworld by being offered food and drink but either never being able to reach them or, as here, by being under constant threat of being crushed by a huge boulder.

despair; others are spiteful or envious, surly or secretive, foul-mouthed or moody. There are still others who are dedicated to the frivolity of romances; there are the reckless, the wanton, the headstrong, lacking at the same time both self-control and courage, constantly changing their mind. That is why there is never any respite from trouble for such people. So no fool is happy, and no one wise is unhappy. We support this maxim in a much better and truer way than do the Stoics. For they deny that there is any good except for some sort of shadowy thing which they call “morality”, a term of more splendour than substance.<sup>42</sup> They also deny that virtue, which rests upon this morality, has any need of pleasure. Rather, it is sufficient unto itself as far as a happy life is concerned.

(62) ‘But there is a way in which this theory can be stated which we would not only not repudiate but actually approve. Epicurus represents the wise person who is always happy as one who sets desire within limits; is heedless of death; has knowledge of the truth about the immortal gods, and fears nothing; and will not hesitate to leave life behind if that is best. Equipped with these principles, the wise are in a constant state of pleasure, since there is no time in which they do not have more pleasure than pain. They recall the past with affection; are in full possession of the present moment and appreciate how great are its delights; have hopes for the future, but do not rely on it – they are enjoying the present. They are entirely lacking in the faults of character that I just listed above. A comparison of their life with that of the foolish affords them great pleasure. If the wise suffer any pain, the pain will never have sufficient force to prevent them having more pleasure than distress. (63) Epicurus made the excellent remark that “Chance hardly affects the wise; the really important and serious things are under the control of their own deliberation and reason. No more pleasure could be derived from a life of infinite span than from the life which we know to be finite.”<sup>43</sup>

‘Epicurus considered that the logic of your Stoics provides no way of improving the quality either of one’s life or one’s thought. But he deemed physics to be of the very highest importance.<sup>44</sup> It is through physics that the meaning of terms, the nature of speech, and the rules of inference and contradiction can be understood. By knowing the nature of all things we are freed from superstition and liberated from the fear of death. We are not thrown into confusion by ignorance and by the chilling fear that often results from ignorance alone. Finally, we will even have a better character once we have learned what nature requires.

<sup>42</sup> Epicureans take a reductive, debunking view of the conception of virtue and morality which the Stoics and other philosophers defend.

<sup>43</sup> A paraphrase of two *Principal Doctrines*, 16 and 19.

<sup>44</sup> Perhaps maliciously, Cicero gives Torquatus a muddled account of the relation of the parts of philosophy, ascribing to physics both its own role and that of logic. The criterion ‘sent from heaven’ is an (absurdly deferential) reference to Epicurus’ *Kanôn* or work on the basis of knowledge.

‘Moreover, if we possess solid scientific knowledge, and hold to that criterion which has as it were been sent from heaven to enable us to understand all things, and to which we refer all our judgements, then we will never allow anyone’s rhetoric to sway us from our views. (64) But if we do not clearly grasp the nature of the universe, then there is no way in which we will be able to defend the judgements of our senses. And everything that comes before our mind has its origin in sense-perception. If all sense-perceptions are true, as Epicurus’ system teaches,<sup>45</sup> then knowledge and understanding are in the end possible. Those who do away with sense-perception and deny that anything can be known, are unable, once sense-perception is removed from the scene, even to articulate their own argument. Besides, once knowledge and science have disappeared, with them go any rational method for conducting one’s life and one’s activities.

‘Thus physics gives us the courage to face down fear of death, and the strength of purpose to combat religious terror. It provides peace of mind, by lifting the veil of ignorance from the secrets of the universe; and self-control, by explaining the nature and varieties of desire. Finally, as I just showed, it hands down a criterion of knowledge, and, with judgement thereby given a foundation, a method of distinguishing truth from falsity.

(65) ‘There remains a topic that is absolutely essential to this discussion, and that is friendship. Your view is that if pleasure is the highest good then there is no room for friendship. But Epicurus’ view is that of all the things which wisdom procures to enable us to live happily, there is none greater, richer or sweeter than friendship. This doctrine he confirmed not simply by the persuasiveness of his words but much more so by his life, his actions and his character. The mythical stories of old tell how great a thing is friendship. Yet, for all the quantity and range of these stories, from earliest antiquity onwards, you will scarcely find three pairs of friends among them, starting with Theseus and ending with Orestes. Epicurus, however, in a single household, and one of slender means at that, maintained a whole host of friends, united by a wonderful bond of affection.<sup>46</sup> And this is still a feature of present-day Epicureanism.

‘But to return to our theme, since there is no need to speak of individual cases: (66) I understand that friendship has been discussed by Epicureans in three ways. Some deny that the pleasures which our friends experience are to be valued in their own right as highly as those we experience ourselves. This

<sup>45</sup> Epicurus’ claim that all perceptions are true (64) is a particular butt of Cicero’s scorn, though the theory is less naive than is apparent here. See S. Everson, ‘Epicurus on the truth of the senses’, in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology*, Cambridge 1990, 161–83.

<sup>46</sup> Epicurean communities were famous for their closeness and mutual support, but it is probably malicious of Cicero to make Torquatus compare these to famous friendships like that of Theseus, mythical king of Athens and Pirithous his companion, and that of Orestes, son of Agamemnon and his friend Pylades, since these are examples of close and intense bonds between particular individuals, something Epicureans have reason to deplore, as being a source of anxiety and of laying oneself open to fortune.



position has been thought to threaten the whole basis of friendship. But its proponents defend it, and acquit themselves comfortably, so it seems to me. As in the case of the virtues, which I discussed above, so too with friendship, they deny that it can be separated from pleasure. Solitude, and a life without friends, is filled with fear and danger; so reason herself bids us to acquire friends. Having friends strengthens the spirit, and inevitably brings with it the hope of obtaining pleasure. (67) And just as hatred, jealousy and contempt are the enemies of pleasure, so too is friendship not only its most faithful sponsor, but also the author of pleasures as much for our friends as for ourselves. Friends not only enjoy the pleasures of the moment, but are cheered with hope for the near and distant future. We cannot maintain a stable and lasting enjoyment of life without friendship; nor can we maintain friendship itself unless we love our friends no less than we do ourselves. Thus it is within friendship that this attitude is created, while at the same time friendship is connected to pleasure. We delight in our friends' happiness, and suffer at their sorrow, as much as we do our own.

(68) 'Hence the wise will feel the same way about their friends as they do about themselves. They would undertake the same effort to secure their friends' pleasure as to secure their own. And what has been said about the inextricable link between the virtues and pleasure is equally applicable to friendship and pleasure. Epicurus famously put it in pretty much the following words: "The same doctrine that gave our hearts the strength to have no fear of ever-lasting or long-lasting evil, also identified friendship as our firmest protector in the short span of our life."<sup>47</sup>

(69) 'Now there are certain Epicureans who react a little more timidly to your strictures, though still with some intelligence. They fear that if we hold that friendship is to be sought for the sake of our own pleasure, then the whole notion of friendship will look utterly lame. And so these people hold that the early rounds of meeting and socializing, and the initial inclination to establish some closeness, are to be accounted for by reference to our own pleasure, but that when the frequency of association has led to real intimacy, and produced a flowering of affection, then at this point friends love each other for their own sake, regardless of any utility to be derived from the friendship. After all, familiarity can make us fall in love with particular locations, temples and cities; gymnasia and playing-fields; horses and dogs; and displays of fighting and hunting. How much more readily and rightly, then, could familiarity with our fellow human beings have the same effect?

(70) 'A third group of Epicureans holds that, among the wise, there exists a kind of pact to love one's friends as much as oneself. We certainly recognize that this can happen, and often even observe it happening. It is evident that nothing more conducive to a life of pleasure could be found than such an association.

<sup>47</sup> A translation of *Principal Doctrine* 28.

‘All of this goes to show not only that the theory of friendship is not threatened by the identification of the highest good with pleasure, but it even demonstrates that the whole institution of friendship has no basis without it.

(71) ‘So if the philosophy I have been describing is clearer and more brilliant than the sun; if it is all drawn from the fount of nature; if my whole speech gains credibility by being based on the uncorrupted and untainted testimony of the senses; if inarticulate children and even dumb beasts can, under the direction and guidance of nature, almost find the words to declare that there is nothing favourable but pleasure, and nothing unfavourable but pain – their judgement about such matters being neither perverted nor corrupted; if all this is so, then what a debt of thanks we owe to the man who, as it were, heard nature’s own voice and comprehended it with such power and depth that he has managed to lead all those of sound mind along the path to a life of peace, calm, tranquillity and happiness.<sup>48</sup>

‘He seems to you to lack education: the reason is that he thought all education worthless which did not foster our learning to live happily. (72) Should he have spent his time reading poetry, as you urge me and Triarius to do, in which there is nothing of real use to be found but only childish amusement? Should he, like Plato, have wasted his days studying music, geometry, arithmetic and astronomy? Those subjects start from false premises and so cannot be true. And even if they were true, they have no bearing on whether we live more pleasantly – that is, better. Should he really have pursued those arts, and neglected the greatest and most difficult, and thereby the most fruitful art of all, the art of life? It is not Epicurus who is uneducated, but those who think that topics fit for a child to have learned should be studied until old age.’

Torquatus then concluded: ‘I have set out my own view, with the intention of hearing your opinion of it. I have never before now been given this latter opportunity, at least to my own satisfaction.’

<sup>48</sup> Torquatus ends with exaggerated personal deference to Epicurus, rather than further rational defence of his ideas.