(XXIII) ON THE TRUE JOY WHICH COMES FROM PHILOSOPHY

Do you suppose that I shall write you how kindly the winter season has dealt with us,—a short season and a mild one,—or what a nasty spring we are having,—cold weather out of season,—and all the other trivialities which people write when they are at a loss for topics of conversation? No; I shall communicate something which may help both you and myself. (And what shall this “something” be, if not an exhortation to soundness of mind? Do you ask what is the foundation of a sound mind? It is, not to find joy in useless things.) I said that I was the foundation; it is really the pinnacle. We have reached the heights if we know what it is that we find joy in and if we have not placed our happiness in the control of externals. The man who is loaded ahead by hope of anything, though it be

1 Hense inserts iactura after vitae.
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proritatem, licet ad manum sit, licet non ex difficili
petatur, licet numquam illum sperata deceperint.
3 Hoc ante omnia fac, mi Lucili: disce gaudere.

Existimas nunc me detrahere tibi multas voluptates, qui fortuita summo veo, qui spe, dulcissima
oblectamenta, devitandas existimo? Immo contra
nolo tibi umquam deesse laetitiam. Volo illam tibi
domi nasci; nascitur, si modo intra te ipsum sit.
Ceterae hilaritates non implent pectus, frontem
remittunt, leves sunt, nisi forte tu iudicas eum
gaudere, qui ridet. Animus esse debet alacer et
fidens et super omnia erectus.

4 Mihi crede, verum gaudium res severa est. An
tu existimas quemquam soluto vultu et, ut isti deli-
cati locuntur, hilariculo mortem contemnere, paupe-
rtati domum aperi, voluptates tenere sub freno, me-
ditari dolorum patientiam? Haec qui apud se versat,
in magnu gaudio est, sed parum blando. In huius
gaudii possessione esse te volo; numquam deficiet,
cum semel unde petatur inveneris. Levium metal-
lorum fructus in summo est; illa opulentissima sunt,
quorum in alto latet vena adsidue plenius responsura
fodienti. Haec, quibus delectatur vulgus, tenuem
habent ac perfusoriam voluptatem, et quodcumque
invecticum gaudium est, fundamento caret. Hoc, de
quo loquor, ad quod te conor perducere, solidum est

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* Death, poverty, temptation, and suffering.

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within reach, though it be easy of access, and though
his ambitions have never played him false, is troubled
and unsure of himself. Above all, my dear Lucilius,
make this your business: learn how to feel joy.

Do you think that I am now robbing you of many
pleasures when I try to do away with the gifts of
chance, when I counsel the avoidance of hope, the
sweetest thing that gladdens our hearts? Quite the
contrary; I do not wish you ever to be deprived of
gladness. I would have it born in your house; and
it is born there, if only it be inside of you. Other
objects of cheer do not fill a man’s bosom; they
merely smooth his brow and are inconstant,—unless
perhaps you believe that he who laughs has joy.
The very soul must be happy and confident, lifted
above every circumstance.

Real joy, believe me, is a stern matter. Can one,
do you think, despise death with a care-free counten-
ance, or with a "blithe and gay" expression, as
our young dandies are accustomed to say? Or can
one thus open his door to poverty, or hold the curb
on his pleasures, or contemplate the endurance of
pain? He who ponders these things in his heart
is indeed full of joy; but it is not a cheerful joy.
It is just this joy, however, of which I would have
you become the owner; for it will never fail you
when once you have found its source. The yield
of poor mines is on the surface; those are really rich
whose veins lurk deep, and they will make more
bountiful returns to him who delves unceasingly.
So, too those baubles which delight the common
crowd afford but a thin pleasure, laid on as a coating,
and every joy that is only plated lacks a real basis.
But the joy of which I speak, that to which I am
endeavouring to lead you, is something solid, dis-

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6 et quod plus pateat introsum. Fac, oro te, Lucili carissime, quod unum potest praestare feliciem: dissice et conculca ista, quae extrinsecus splendent, quae tibi promittuntur ab alio vel ex alio, ad verum bonum specta et de tuo gaude. Quid est autem hoc "de tuo"? Te ipso et tui optima parte. Corpusculum quoque, etiam si nihil fieri sine illo potest, magis necessariam rem crede quam magnam; vanas suggerit voluptates, breves, paenitendas, ac nisi magna moderatione temperentur, in contrarium abituras. Ita dico: in praecipi voluptas ad dolorem vergit, nisi modum tenuit.

Modum autem tenere in eo difficile est, quod bonum esse credideris. Veri boni aviditas tuta est. 7 Quid sit istud, interroglas, aut unde subeat? Dicam: ex bona conscientia, ex honestis consiliis, ex rectis actionibus, ex contemptu fortuitorum, ex placido vitae et continuo tenore unam prementis viam. Nam illi, qui ex aliis propositis in alia transiliunt aut ne transiliunt quidem, sed casu quodam transmittuntur, quomodo habere quicquam certum mansurum ye 8 possunt suspensi et vagi? Pauci sunt, qui consilio se suaque disponant, ceteri eorum more, quae fluminibus innatant, non eunt, sed feruntur. Ex quibus alia lenior unda detinuit ac mollius vexit, alia vehe-

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...closing itself the more fully as you penetrate into it... Therefore I pray you, my dearest Lucilius, do the one thing that can render you really happy: cast aside and trample under foot all those things that glitter outwardly and are held out to you a by another or as obtainable from another; look toward the true good, and rejoice only in that which comes from your own store. And what do I mean by "from your own store"? I mean from your very self, that which is the best part of you. The frail body, also, even though we can accomplish nothing without it, is to be regarded as necessary rather than as important; it involves us in vain pleasures, short-lived, and soon to be regretted, which, unless they are reined in by extreme self-control, will be transformed into the opposite. This is what I mean: (pleasure, unless it has been kept within bounds, tends to rush headlong into the abyss of sorrow)

...But it is hard to keep within bounds in that which you believe to be good. The real good may be coveted with safety. Do you ask me what this real good is, and whence it derives? I will tell you: it comes from a good conscience, from honourable purposes, from right actions, from contempt of the gifts of chance, from an even and calm way of living which leads but one path. For men who leap from one purpose to another, or do not even leap but are carried over by a sort of hazard,—how can such wavering and unstable persons possess any good that is fixed and lasting? There are only a few who control themselves and their affairs by a guiding purpose; the rest do not proceed; they are merely swept along, like objects afloat in a river. And of these objects, some are held back by sluggish waters and

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* By the various sects which professed to teach how happiness is to be obtained.

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mentior rapuit, alia proxima ripae cursu languescente deposuit, alia torrens impetus in mare eiecît. Ideo constituendum est, quid velimus, et in eo perseverandum.


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are transported gently; others are torn along by a more violent current; some, which are nearest the bank, are left there as the current slackens; and others are carried out to sea by the onrush of the stream. Therefore, we should decide what we wish, and abide by the decision.

Now is the time for me to pay my debt. I can give you a saying of your friend Epicurus and thus clear this letter of its obligation: "It is bothersome always to be beginning life." Or another, which will perhaps express the meaning better: "They live ill who are always beginning to live." You are right in asking why; the saying certainly stands in need of a commentary. It is because the life of such persons is always incomplete. But a man cannot stand prepared for the approach of death if he has just begun to live. We must make it our aim already to have lived long enough. No one deems that he has done so, if he is just on the point of planning his life. You need not think that there are few of this kind; practically everyone is of such a stamp. Some men, indeed, only begin to live when it is time for them to leave off living. And if this seems surprising to you, I shall add that which will surprise you still more: Some men have left off living before they have begun. Farewell.