

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

LII

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quid est hoc, Lucili, quod nos alio tendentes alio trahit et eo, unde recedere cupimus, inpellit? Quid conluctatur cum animo nostro nec permittit nobis quicquam semel velle? Fluctuamur inter varia consilia. Nihil libere volumus, nihil absolute, nihil semper.
- 2 "Stultitia," inquis, "est, cui nihil constat, nihil diu placet." Sed quomodo nos aut quando ab illa revellemus? Nemo per se satis valet ut emergat; oportet manum aliquis porrigat, aliquis educat.
- 3 Quosdam ait Epicurus ad veritatem sine ullius adiutorio exisse, fecisse sibi ipsos viam. Hos maxime laudat, quibus ex se impetus fuit, qui se ipsi protulerunt. Quosdam indigere ope aliena, non ituros, si nemo praecesserit, sed bene secuturos. Ex his Metrodorum ait esse; egregium hoc quoque, sed secundae sortis ingenium. Nos ex illa prima nota non sumus; bene nobiscum agitur, si in secundam recipimur. Ne hunc quidem contempseris hominem, qui alieno beneficio esse salvus potest; et hoc multum est, velle servari.
- 4 Praeter haec adhuc invenies genus aliud hominum ne ipsum quidem fastidiendum eorum, qui cogi ad rectum conpelli que possunt, quibus non duce tantum opus sit, sed adiutore et, ut ita dicam, coactore. Hic

^a Frag. 192 Usener.

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LII. ON CHOOSING OUR TEACHERS

What is this force, Lucilius, that drags us in one direction when we are aiming in another, urging us on to the exact place from which we long to withdraw? What is it that wrestles with our spirit, and does not allow us to desire anything once for all? We veer from plan to plan. None of our wishes is free, none is unqualified, none is lasting. "But it is the fool," you say, "who is inconsistent; nothing suits him for long." But how or when can *we* tear ourselves away from this folly? No man by himself has sufficient strength to rise above it; he needs a helping hand, and some one to extricate him.

Epicurus^a remarks that certain men have worked their way to the truth without any one's assistance, carving out their own passage. And he gives special praise to these, for their impulse has come from within, and they have forged to the front by themselves. Again, he says, there are others who need outside help, who will not proceed unless someone leads the way, but who will follow faithfully. Of these, he says, Metrodorus was one; this type of man is also excellent, but belongs to the second grade. We ourselves are not of that first class, either; we shall be well treated if we are admitted into the second. Nor need you despise a man who can gain salvation only with the assistance of another; the will to be saved means a great deal, too.

You will find still another class of man,—and a class not to be despised,—who can be forced and driven into righteousness, who do not need a guide as much as they require someone to encourage and, as it were, to force them along. This is the third

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tertius color est. Si quaeris huius quoque exemplar, Hermarchum ait Epicurus talem fuisse. Itaque alteri magis gratulatur, alterum magis suspicit; quamvis enim ad eundem finem uterque pervenerit, tamen maior est laus idem effecisse in difficiliore materia.

5 Puta enim duo aedificia excitata esse, ab imo¹ disparia, aequae excelsa atque magnifica. Alterum puram aream accepit; illic protinus opus crevit. Alterum fundamenta lassarunt in mollem et fluidam humum missa multumque laboris exhaustum est, dum pervenitur ad solidum. Intuenti ambo² quicquid fecit alter in aperto est, alterius³ magna pars et difficilior

6 latet. Quaedam ingenia facilia, expedita, quaedam manu, quod aiunt, facienda sunt et in fundamentis suis occupata. Itaque illum ego feliciorum dixerim, qui nihil negotii secum habuit, hunc quidem melius de se meruisse, qui malignitatem naturae suae vicit et ad sapientiam se non perduxit, sed extraxit.

7 Hoc durum ac laboriosum ingenium nobis datum scias licet. Imus per obstantia. Itaque pugnemus, aliquorum invocemus auxilium. "Quem," inquis, "invocabo? Hunc aut illum⁴?" Tu vero etiam ad priores revertere, qui vacant; adiuvare nos possunt

¹ *ab imo* Buecheler; *ambo* MSS.

² *intuenti ambo* Buecheler; *inveniebo* LPb.

³ *fecit alter in aperto est, alterius* Hense (*alter* in the later MSS); *fecit alterius* LPb.

⁴ I have included *hunc aut illum* in the question of Lucilius. Hense gives to Seneca.

^a *i.e.*, that of Metrodorus, who had the happier nature.

^b *i.e.*, a representative of this school or that. Seneca's reply is, in effect, "Upon no present school; go to the ancients."

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variety. If you ask me for a man of this pattern also, Epicurus tells us that Hermarchus was such. And of the two last-named classes, he is more ready to congratulate the one,^a but he feels more respect for the other; for although both reached the same goal, it is a greater credit to have brought about the same result with the more difficult material upon which to work.

Suppose that two buildings have been erected, unlike as to their foundations, but equal in height and in grandeur. One is built on faultless ground, and the process of erection goes right ahead. In the other case, the foundations have exhausted the building materials, for they have been sunk into soft and shifting ground and much labour has been wasted in reaching the solid rock. As one looks at both of them, one sees clearly what progress the former has made, but the larger and more difficult part of the latter is hidden. So with men's dispositions; some are pliable and easy to manage, but others have to be laboriously wrought out by hand, so to speak, and are wholly employed in the making of their own foundations. I should accordingly deem more fortunate the man who has never had any trouble with himself; but the other, I feel, has deserved better of himself, who has won a victory over the meanness of his own nature, and has not gently led himself, but has wrestled his way, to wisdom.

You may be sure that this refractory nature, which demands much toil, has been implanted in us. There are obstacles in our path; so let us fight, and call to our assistance some helpers. "Whom," you say, "shall I call upon? Shall it be this man or that^b?" There is another choice also open to you; you may go to the ancients; for they have the

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8 non tantum qui sunt, sed qui fuerunt. Ex his autem, qui sunt, eligamus non eos, qui verba magna celeritate praecipitant et communes locos volvunt et in privato circulantur, sed eos, qui vita¹ docent, qui cum dixerunt, quid faciendum sit, probant faciendo, qui docent, quid vitandum sit, nec umquam in eo, quod fugiendum dixerunt, deprehenduntur.

Eum elige adiutorem, quem magis admireris, cum
9 videris quam cum audieris. Nec ideo te prohibuerim hos quoque audire, quibus admittere populum ac disserere consuetudo est, si modo hoc proposito in turbam prodeunt, ut meliores fiant faciantque meliores, si non ambitionis hoc causa exercent. Quid enim turpius philosophia captante clamores? Numquid
10 aeger laudat medicum secantem? Tacete, favete et praebete vos curationi. Etiam si exclamaveritis, non aliter audiam, quam si ad tactum vitiorum vestrorum ingemescatis. Testari vultis adtendere vos moverique magnitudine rerum? Sane liceat; ut quidem iudicetis et feratis de meliore suffragium, quidni non permittam? Apud Pythagoram discipulis quinque annis tacendum erat; numquid ergo existimas statim illis et loqui et laudare licuisse?

11 Quanta autem dementia eius est, quem clamores inperitorum hilarem ex auditorio dimittunt? Quid laetaris, quod ab hominibus his laudatus es, quos non

¹ *vita* Muretus; *vitam* LPb; Hense suggests *vitam vita*.

^a *Circulatores* were travelling showmen who performed sword-swallowing and snake-charming feats, or cheap stump speakers who displayed their eloquence at the street-corners in the hope of a few pence. The word is also found in the sense of "pedlar".

^b This and what follows, to § 11, are the words with which a true philosopher is supposed to address his hearers.

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time to help you. We can get assistance not only from the living, but from those of the past. Let us choose, however, from among the living, not men who pour forth their words with the greatest glibness, turning out commonplaces, and holding, as it were, their own little private exhibitions,^a—not these, I say, but men who teach us by their lives, men who tell us what we ought to do and then prove it by practice, who show us what we should avoid, and then are never caught doing that which they have ordered us to avoid.

Choose as a guide one whom you will admire more when you see him act than when you hear him speak. Of course I would not prevent you from listening also to those philosophers who are wont to hold public meetings and discussions, provided they appear before the people for the express purpose of improving themselves and others, and do not practise their profession for the sake of self-seeking. For what is baser than philosophy courting applause? Does the sick man praise the surgeon while he is operating? In silence and with reverent awe submit to the cure.^b Even though you cry applause, I shall listen to your cries as if you were groaning when your sores were touched. Do you wish to bear witness that you are attentive, that you are stirred by the grandeur of the subject? You may do this at the proper time; I shall of course allow you to pass judgment and cast a vote as to the better course. Pythagoras made his pupils keep silence for five years; do you think that they had the right on that account to break out immediately into applause?

How mad is he who leaves the lecture-room in a happy frame of mind simply because of applause from the ignorant! Why do you take pleasure in being praised by men whom you yourself cannot praise?

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- potes ipse laudare? Disserebat populo Fabianus, sed audiebatur modeste. Erumpebat interdum magnus clamor laudantium, sed quem rerum magnitudo evocaverat, non sonus inoffense ac molliter orationis
- 12 elapsae. Intersit aliquid inter clamorem theatri et scholae; est aliqua et laudandi decentia.¹ Omnia rerum omnium, si observentur, indicia sunt et argumentum morum ex minimis quoque licet capere: inpu-
dicum et incessus ostendit et manus mota et unum interdum responsum et relatus ad caput digitus et flexus oculorum. Inprobum risus, insanum vultus habitusque demonstrat. Illa enim in apertum per notas exeunt; qualis quisque sit, scies, si quemadmodum laudet, quemadmodum laudetur, aspexeris.
- 13 Hinc atque illinc philosopho manus auditor intentat et super ipsum caput mirantium turba consistit; non laudatur ille nunc, si intellegis, sed conclamatur. Relinquantur istae voces illis artibus, quae propositum
- 14 habent populo placere; philosophia adoretur. Permittendum erit aliquando iuvenibus sequi impetum animi, tunc autem, cum hoc ex impetu facient, cum silentium sibi imperare non poterunt. Talis laudatio aliquid exhortationis adfert ipsis audientibus et animos adolescentium exstimulat. Ad rem commoveantur, non ad verba composita; alioquin nocet illis eloquentia, si non rerum cupiditatem facit, sed sui.

¹ *decentia* Koch; *licentia* LPb; *scientia* later MSS. Gertz conj. *diligentia*.

^a The scratching of the head with one finger was for some reason regarded as a mark of effeminacy or of vice; cf. the charge brought against Pompey, Plutarch, *Moralia*, 89 E and Ammianus, 17. 11 *quod genuino quodam more caput digito uno scalpebat . . . ut dissolutum*. Compare also Juvenal, ix. 133 *scalpere caput digito*.

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