My dear Brutus, the following essay, I am well aware, attempting as it does to present in a Latin dress subjects that philosophers of consummate ability and profound learning have already handled in Greek, is sure to encounter criticism from different quarters. Certain persons, and those not without some pretension to letters, disapprove of the study of philosophy altogether. Others do not so greatly object to it provided it be followed in dilettante fashion; but they do not think it ought to engage so large an amount of one’s interest and attention. A third class, learned in Greek literature and contemptuous of Latin, will say that they prefer to spend their time in reading Greek. Lastly, I suspect there will be some who will wish to divert me to other fields of authorship, asserting that this kind of composition, though a graceful recreation, is beneath the dignity of my character and position.

To all of these objections I suppose I ought to make some brief reply. The indiscriminate censure of philosophy has indeed been sufficiently answered already in the book which I wrote in praise of that study, in order to defend it against a bitter attack that had been made upon it by Hortensius. The favorable reception which that volume appeared to obtain from yourself and from others whom I considered competent to sit in judgment encouraged me to embark upon further undertakings; for I did not wish to be thought incapable of sustaining the interest that I had aroused.

The second class of critics, who, however much they approve of philosophy, nevertheless would rather have it less eagerly prosecuted, are asking for a restraint that it is not easy to practice. The study is one that when once taken up admits of no restriction or control. In fact, the attitude of the former class, who attempt to dissuade us from philosophy altogether, seems almost less unreasonable than that of those who would set limits to what is essentially unlimited, and expect us to stop halfway in a study that increases in value the further it proceeds. If wisdom be attainable, let us not only win but enjoy it; or if attainment be difficult, still there is no end to the search for truth, other than its discovery. It were base to flag in the pursuit, when the object pursued is so supremely lovely. Indeed if we like writing, who would be so churlish as to debar us from it? Or if we find it a labor, who is to set limits to another man’s exertions? No doubt it is kind of Chremes in Terence’s play to wish his new neighbor not:

“To dig or plough or any burden bear.”

For it is not industry in general, but toil of a menial kind, from which he would deter him; but only a busybody would take exception to an occupation which, like mine, is a labor of love.

A more difficult task therefore is to deal with the objection of those who profess a contempt for Latin writings as such. What astonishes me first of all about them is this, why should they dislike their native language for serious and important subjects, when they are quite willing to read Latin plays translated word for word from the Greek? Who has such a hatred, one might almost say for the very name of Roman, as to despise and reject the Medea of Ennius or the Antiope of Pacuvius, and give as his reason that though he enjoys the corresponding plays of Euripides he cannot endure books written in Latin? What, he cries, am I to read The Young Comrades of Caecilius, or Terence’s Maid of Andros, when I might be reading the same two comedies of Menander?

With this sort of person I disagree so strongly, that, admitting the Electra of Sophocles to be a masterpiece, I yet think Atilius’s poor translation of it worth my while to read. ‘An iron writer,’ Licinius called him; still, in my opinion, a writer all the same, and therefore deserving to be read. For to be entirely unversed in our own poets argues either the extreme of mental inactivity or else a refinement of taste carried to the point of caprice. To my mind no one can be styled a well-read man who does not know our native literature. If we read:

“Would that in forest glades.” just as readily as the same passage in the Greek, shall we object to having Plato’s discourses on morality and happiness set before the reader in Latin? And supposing that for our part we do not fill the office of a mere translator, but, while preserving the doctrines of our chosen authorities, add thereto our own criticism and our own arrangement: what ground have these objectors for ranking the writings of Greece above compositions that are at once brilliant in style and not mere translations from the Greek originals? Perhaps they will rejoin that the subject has already been dealt with by the Greeks already. But then what reason have they for reading the multitude of Greek authors either that one has to read? Take Stoicism: what aspect of it has Chrysippus left untouched? Yet we read Diogenes, Antipater, Mnesarchus, Panaetius, and many others, not least our friend Posidonius. Again, Theophrastus handles topics previously treated by Aristotle, yet he gives us no small pleasure all the same. Nor do the Epicureans cease from writing as the spirit moves them on the same questions on which Epicurus and the ancients wrote. If Greek writers find Greek readers when presenting the same subject in a different setting, why should not Romans be read by Romans?

Yet even supposing I gave a direct translation of Plato or Aristotle, exactly as our poets have done with the plays, would it not, pray, be a patriotic service to introduce those transcendent intellects to the acquaintance of my fellow-countrymen? As a matter of fact, however, this has not been my procedure hitherto, though I do not feel I am debarred from adopting it. Indeed I expressly reserve the right of borrowing certain passages, if I think fit, and particularly from the philosophers just mentioned, when an appropriate occasion offers for so doing; just as Ennius regularly borrows from Homer, and Afranius from Menander. Nor yet shall I object, like our Lucilius, to all the world’s reading what I write. I only wish his Persius were alive today! And still more Scipio and Rutilius, in fear of whose criticism Lucilius protests that he writes for the public of Tarentum, Consentia and Sicily. This no doubt is neat enough, like the rest of Lucilius; but there were not such learned critics in his day, to tax his best efforts; and also his writings are in a lighter vein: they show consummate wit, but no great erudition.

I, however, need not be afraid of any reader, if I am so bold as to dedicate my book to you, who rival even the Greeks as a philosopher. Still, you yourself challenged me to the venture, by dedicating to me your delightful essay On Virtue. But I have no doubt that the reason why some people take a dislike to Latin literature is that they have happened to meet with certain illiterate and uncouth productions which are bad Greek books in worse Latin versions. I have no quarrel with these persons, provided that they also refuse to read the Greek writers on the same subjects. But given a noble theme, and a refined, dignified and graceful style, who would not read a Latin book? Unless it be some one ambitious to be styled a Greek out-and-out, as Albucius was greeted by Scaevola when the latter was prisoner at Athens. I am again referring to Lucilius, who relates the anecdote with much neatness and point; he puts the following excellent lines into the mouth of Scaevola:

“You vowed, Albucius, that to suit ye; ‘Twas as a Greek we must repute ye;

‘Roman’ and ‘Sabine’ being names; Your man of ton and taste disclaims!

You scorned to own your native town, Which bore such captains of renown

As Pontius and Tritannus bold, Who in the van Rome’s ensigns hold.

And so, at Athens when I lay; And your respects you came to pay,

My worship, humoring your freak; Gave you good-morrow straight in Greek,

With ‘Chaire, Titus!’ ‘Chaire,’ bawl; Guards, aides-de-camp, javelin-men and all!

Hence comes it that Albucius hates me; Hence as his bitterest foe he rates me.”

Mucius’s sarcasm was however deserved. But for my part I can never cease wondering what can be the origin of the exaggerated contempt for home products that is now fashionable. It would of course be out of place to attempt to prove it here, but in my opinion, as I have often argued, the Latin language, so far from having a poor vocabulary, as is commonly supposed, is actually richer than the Greek. When have we, that is to say when have our competent orators or poets, at all events since they have had models to copy, ever lacked any of the resources either of the florid or the chaste style?

In my own case, just as I trust I have done my duty, at the post to which the Roman people appointed me, by my political activities, and the toils and dangers I have undergone, so it is assuredly incumbent on me also to use my best endeavors, with such zeal, enthusiasm and energy as I possess, to promote the advancement of learning among my fellow-countrymen. Nor need I be greatly concerned to join issue with any who prefer to read Greek, provided that they actually do read it and do not merely pretend to do so. It is my business to serve those who desire to enjoy literature in both languages, or who, if books in their own are available, do not feel any great need of Greek ones. Those again who would rather have me write on other subjects may fairly be indulgent to one who has written much already in fact no one of our nation more and who perhaps will write still more if his life be prolonged.

And even were it not so, anyone who has been a careful student of my philosophical writings will pronounce that none of them are better worth reading than the present treatise. For what problem does life offer so important as all the topics of philosophy, and especially the questions raised in these volumes What is the end, the final and ultimate aim, which gives the standard for all principles of well-being and of right conduct? What does Nature pursue as the thing supremely desirable, what does she avoid as the ultimate evil? It is a subject on which the most learned philosophers disagree profoundly; who then can think it derogatory to such esteem as each may assign to me, to investigate what is the highest good and the truest rule in every relationship of life? Are we to have our leading statesmen debating such topics as whether the offspring of a female slave is to be considered as belonging to the party who has hired her, Publius Scaevola and Manius Manilius upholding one opinion and Marcus Brutus the contrary (not but what such discussions raise nice points of law, as well as being of practical importance for the business of life; and we read and shall continue to read with pleasure the treatises in question and others of the same nature); and shall these questions which cover the entire range of conduct be neglected?

Legal subjects are no doubt more popular, but philosophy is unquestionably richer in interest. However, this is a point that may be left to the reader to decide. In the present work we believe we have given a more or less exhaustive exposition of the whole subject of the Ends of Goods and Evils. The book is intended to contain so far as possible a complete account, not only of the views that we ourselves accept, but also of the doctrines enunciated by all the different schools of philosophy.

To begin with what is easiest, let us first pass in review the system of Epicurus, which to most men is the best known of any. Our exposition of it, as you shall see, will be as accurate as any usually given even by the professed adherents of his school. For our object is to discover the truth, not to refute someone as an opponent.

An elaborate defense of the hedonistic theory of Epicurus was once delivered by Lucius Torquatus, a student well versed in all the systems of philosophy; to him I replied, and Gaius Triarius, a youth of remarkable learning and seriousness of character, assisted at the discussion. Both of these gentlemen had called to pay me their respects at my place at Cumae. We first exchanged a few remarks about literature, of which both were enthusiastic students. Then Torquatus said, “As we have for once found you at leisure, I am resolved to hear the reason why you regard my master Epicurus, not indeed with hatred, as those who do not share his views mostly do, but at all events with disapproval. I myself consider him as the one person who had discerned the truth, and who has delivered men from the gravest errors and imparted to them all there is to know about well-being and happiness. The fact is, I think that you are like our friend Triarius, and dislike Epicurus because he has neglected the graces of style that you find in your Plato, Aristotle and Theophrastus. For I can scarcely bring myself to believe that you think his opinions untrue.”

“Let me assure you, Torquatus,” said I, “that you are entirely mistaken. With your master’s style I have no fault to find. He expresses his meaning adequately, and gives me a plain intelligible statement. Not that I despise eloquence in a philosopher if he has it to offer, but I should not greatly insist on it if he has not. But his matter I do not find so satisfactory, and that in more points than one. However, ‘many men, many minds’: so it is possible that I am mistaken.” “What is it, pray,” he said, “to which you take exception? For I recognize you as a just critic, provided you really know what his doctrines are.” “Oh,” said I, “I know the whole of Epicurus’s opinions well enough, unless you think that Phaedrus or Zeno did not tell me the truth. I have heard both of them lecture, though to be sure they convinced me of nothing but their own devotion to the system. Indeed I regularly attended those professors, in company with our friend Atticus, who for his part had an admiration for them both, and a positive affection for Phaedrus. Every day we used to discuss together in private what we had heard at lecture, and there was never any dispute as to what I could understand; the question was, what I could accept as true.”

“Well then, what is the point?” said he; “I should very much like to know what it is that you disagree with.” “Let me begin,” I replied, “with the subject of Natural Philosophy, which is Epicurus’s particular boast. Here, in the first place, he is entirely second-hand. His doctrines are those of Democritus, with a very few modifications. And as for the latter, where he attempts to improve upon his original, in my opinion he only succeeds in making things worse. Democritus believes in certain things which he terms ‘atoms,’ that is, bodies so solid as to be indivisible, moving about in a vacuum of infinite extent, which has neither top, bottom nor middle, neither center nor circumference. The motion of these atoms is such that they collide and so cohere together; and from this process result the whole of the things that exist and that we see. Moreover, this movement of the atoms must not be conceived as starting from a beginning, but as having gone on from all eternity.

Epicurus for his part, where he follows Democritus, does not generally blunder. Still, there is a great deal in each of them with which I do not agree, and especially this: in the study of Nature there are two questions to be asked, first, what is the matter out of which each thing is made, second, what is the force by which it is made; now Democritus and Epicurus have discussed the question of matter, but they have not considered the question of force or the efficient cause. But this is a defect shared by both; I now come to the lapses peculiar to Epicurus. He believes that these same indivisible solid bodies are borne by their own weight perpendicularly downward, which he holds is the natural motion of all bodies; but thereupon this clever fellow, being met with the difficulty that if they all traveled downwards in a straight line, and, as I said, perpendicularly, no one atom would ever be able to overtake any other atom, accordingly introduced an idea of his own invention: he said that the atom makes a very tiny swerve, the smallest divergence possible; and so are produced entanglements and combinations and cohesions of atoms with atoms, which result in the creation of the world and all its parts, and of all that in them is.

Now not only is the whole of this affair a piece of childish fancy, but it does not even achieve the result that its author desires. The swerving is itself an arbitrary fiction; for Epicurus says the atoms swerve without a cause, yet this is the capital offence in a natural philosopher, to speak of something taking place uncaused. Then also he gratuitously deprives the atoms of what he himself declared to be the natural motion of all heavy bodies, namely, movement in a straight line downwards, and yet he does not attain the object for the sake of which this fiction was devised. For, if all the atoms swerve, none will ever come to cohere together; or if some swerve while others travel in a straight line, by their own natural tendency, in the first place this will be tantamount to assigning to the atoms their different spheres of action, some to travel straight and some sideways; while secondly (and this is a weak point with Democritus also) this riotous hurly-burly of atoms could not possibly result in the ordered beauty of the world we know.

It is also unworthy of a natural philosopher to deny the infinite divisibility of matter; an error that assuredly Epicurus would have avoided, if he had been willing to let his friend Polyaenus teach him geometry instead of making Polyaenus himself unlearn it. Democritus, being an educated man and well versed in geometry, thinks the sun is of vast size; Epicurus considers it perhaps a foot in diameter, for he pronounces it to be exactly as large as it appears, or a little larger or smaller. Thus where Epicurus alters the doctrines of Democritus, he alters them for the worse; while for those ideas which he adopts, the credit belongs entirely to Democritus, the atoms, the void, the images, or as they call them, eid-la, whose impact is the cause not only of vision but also of thought; the very conception of infinite space, apeiria as they term it, is entirely derived from Democritus; and again the countless numbers of worlds that come into existence and pass out of existence every day. For my own part I reject these doctrines altogether; but still I could wish that Democritus, whom every one else applauds, had not been vilified by Epicurus who took him as his sole guide.

“Turn next to the second division of philosophy, the department of Method and of Dialectic, which is termed Logic? Of the whole armor of Logic your founder, as it seems to me, is absolutely destitute. He does away with Definition; he has no doctrine of Division or Partition; he gives no rules for Deduction or Syllogistic Inference, and imparts no method for resolving dilemmas or for detecting Fallacies of Equivocation. The Criteria of reality he places in sensation; once let the senses accept something as true that is false, and every possible criterion of truth and falsehood seems to him to be immediately destroyed. …

He lays the very greatest stress upon that which, as he declares, Nature herself decrees and sanctions, that is the feelings of pleasure and pain. These he maintains lie at the root of every act of choice and of avoidance. This is the doctrine of Aristippus, and it is upheld more cogently and more frankly by the Cyrenaics; but nevertheless it is in my judgment a doctrine in the last degree unworthy of the dignity of man. Nature, in my own opinion at all events, has created and endowed us for higher ends. I may possibly be mistaken; but I am absolutely convinced that the Torquatus who first won that surname did not wrest the famous necklet from his foe in the hope of getting from it any physical enjoyment, nor did he fight the battle of the Veseris against the Latins in this third consulship for the sake of pleasure. Indeed in sentencing his son to be beheaded, it would seem that he actually deprived himself of a great deal of pleasure; for he sacrificed his natural instincts of paternal affection to the claims of state and of his military office.

“Then, think of the Titus Torquatus who was consul with Gnaeus Octavius; when he dealt so sternly with the son who had passed out of his paternal control through his adoption by Decius Silanus when he summoned him into his presence to answer to the charge preferred against him by a deputation from Macedonia, of accepting bribes while prisoner in that province when, after hearing both sides of the case, he gave judgment that he found his son guilty of having conducted himself in office in a manner unworthy of his ancestry, and banished him for ever from his sight, think you he had any regard for his own pleasure? But I pass over the dangers, the toils, the actual pain that all good men endure for country and for friends, not only not seeking pleasure, but actually renouncing pleasures altogether, and preferring to undergo every sort of pain rather than be false to any portion of their duty. Let us turn to matters seemingly less important, but equally conclusive.

What actual pleasure do you, Torquatus, or does Triarius here, derive from literature, from history and learning, from turning the pages of the poets and committing vast quantities of verse to memory? Do not tell me that these pursuits are in themselves a pleasure to you, and that so were the deeds I mentioned to the Torquati. That line of defense was never taken by Epicurus or Metrodorus, nor by any one of them if he possessed any intelligence or had mastered the doctrines of your school. Again, as to the question often asked, why so many men are Epicureans, though it is not the only reason, the thing that most attracts the crowd is the belief that Epicurus declares right conduct and moral worth to be intrinsically and of themselves delightful, which means productive of pleasure. These worthy people do not realize that, if this is true, it upsets the theory altogether. If it were admitted that goodness is spontaneously and intrinsically pleasant, even without any reference to bodily feeling, then virtue would be desirable for its own sake, and so also would knowledge; but this Epicurus by no means allows.

“These then,” said I, “are the doctrines of Epicurus that I cannot accept. For the rest, I could desire that he himself had been better equipped with learning (since even you must recognize that he is deficient in that liberal culture which confers on its possessor the title of an educated man) or at all events that he had not deterred others from study. Although I am aware that he has not succeeded in deterring you.”

I had spoken rather with the intention of drawing out Torquatus than of delivering a discourse of my own. But Triarius interposed, with a smile: “Why, you have practically expelled Epicurus altogether from the philosophic choir. What have you left to him except that, whatever his style may be, you find his meaning intelligible? His doctrines in Natural Philosophy were second-hand, and in your opinion unsound at that; and his attempts to improve on his authority only made things worse. Dialectic he had none. His identification of the Chief Good with pleasure in the first place was in itself an error, and secondly this also was not original; for it had been said before, and said better, by Aristippus. To crown all you added that Epicurus was a person of no education.”

“Well, Triarius,” I rejoined, “when one disagrees with a man, it is essential to say what it is that one objects to in his views. What should prevent me from being an Epicurean, if I accepted the doctrines of Epicurus? Especially as the system is an exceedingly easy one to master. You must not find fault with members of opposing schools for criticizing each other’s opinions; though I always feel that insult and abuse, or ill-tempered wrangling and bitter, obstinate controversy are beneath the dignity of philosophy.”

“I am quite of your mind,” said Torquatus; “it is impossible to debate without criticizing, but it is equally impossible to debate properly with ill-temper or obstinacy. But I have something I should like to say in reply to all this, if it will not weary you.” “Do you suppose,” said I, “that I should have said what I have, unless I wanted to hear you?” “Then would you like me to make a rapid review of the whole of Epicurus’s system, or to discuss the single topic of pleasure, which is the one main subject of dispute?”

“Oh,” I said, “that must be for you to decide.” “Very well then,” said he, “this is what I will do, I will expound a single topic, and that the most important. Natural Philosophy we will postpone; though I will undertake to prove to you both your swerve of the atoms and size of the sun, and also that very many errors of Democritus were criticized and corrected by Epicurus. But on the present occasion I will speak about pleasure; not that I have anything original to contribute, yet I am confident that what I say will command even your acceptance.” “Be assured,” I said, “that I shall not be obstinate, but will gladly own myself convinced if you can prove your case to my satisfaction.” “I shall do so,” he rejoined, “provided you are as fair-minded as you promise. But I prefer to employ continuous discourse rather than question and answer.” “As you please,” said I. So he began.

“I will start then,” he said, “in the manner approved by the author of the system himself, by settling what are the essence and qualities of the thing that is the object of our inquiry; not that I suppose you to be ignorant of it, but because this is the logical method of procedure. We are inquiring, then, what is the final and ultimate Good, which as all philosophers are agreed must be of such a nature as to be the end to which all other things are means, while it is not itself a means to anything else. This Epicurus finds in pleasure; pleasure he holds to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature’s own unbiased and honest verdict.

Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?

Some members of our school however would refine upon this doctrine; these say that it is not enough for the judgment of good and evil to rest with the senses; the facts that pleasure is in and for itself desirable and pain in and for itself to be avoided can also be grasped by the intellect and the reason. Accordingly they declare that the perception that the one is to be sought after and the other avoided is a notion naturally implanted in our minds. Others again, with whom I agree, observing that a great many philosophers do advance a vast array of reasons to prove why pleasure should not be counted as a good nor pain as an evil, consider that we had better not be too confident of our case; in their view it requires elaborate and reasoned argument, and abstruse theoretical discussion of the nature of pleasure and pain.

“But I must explain to you how all this mistaken idea of reprobating pleasure and extolling pain arose. To do so, I will give you a complete account of the system, and expound the actual teachings of the great explorer of truth, the master-builder of human happiness. No one rejects, dislikes or avoids pleasure itself, because it is pleasure, but because those who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally encounter consequences that are extremely painful. Nor again is there anyone who loves or pursues or desires to obtain pain of itself, because it is pain, but because occasionally circumstances occur in which toil and pain can procure him some great pleasure. To take a trivial example, which of us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise, except to obtain some advantage from it? But who has any right to find fault with a man who chooses to enjoy a pleasure that has no annoying consequences, or one who avoids a pain that produces no resultant pleasure?

On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation and dislike men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of the pleasure of the moment, so blinded by desire, that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to ensue; and equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duty through weakness of will, which is the same as saying through shrinking from toil and pain. These cases are perfectly simple and easy to distinguish. In a free hour, when our power of choice is untrammeled and when nothing prevents our being able to do what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain avoided. But in certain emergencies and owing to the claims of duty or the obligations of business it will frequently occur that pleasures have to be repudiated and annoyances accepted. The wise man therefore always holds in these matters to this principle of selection: he rejects pleasures to secure other greater pleasures, or else he endures pains to avoid worse pains.

“This being the theory I hold, why need I be afraid of not being able to reconcile it with the case of the Torquati my ancestors? Your references to them just now were historically correct, and also showed your kind and friendly feeling towards myself; but all the same I am not to be bribed by your flattery of my family, and you will not find me a less resolute opponent. Tell me, pray, what explanation do you put upon their actions? Do you really believe that they charged an armed enemy, or treated their children, their own flesh and blood, so cruelly, without a thought for their own interest or advantage? Why, even wild animals do not act in that way; they do not run amok so blindly that we cannot discern any purpose in their movements and their onslaughts. Can you then suppose that those heroic men performed their famous deeds without any motive at all?

What their motive was, I will consider later on: for the present I will confidently assert, that if they had a motive for those undoubtedly glorious exploits, that motive was not a love of virtue in and for itself. He wrested the necklet from his foe. Yes, and saved himself from death. But he braved great danger. Yes, before the eyes of an army. What did he get by it? Honor and esteem, the strongest guarantees of security in life. He sentenced his own son to death. If from no motive, I am sorry to be the descendant of anyone so savage and inhuman; but if his purpose was by inflicting pain upon himself to establish his authority as a commander, and to tighten the reins of discipline during a very serious war by holding over his army the fear of punishment, then his action aimed at ensuring the safety of his fellow-citizens, upon which he knew his own depended.

And this is a principle of wide application. People of your school, and especially yourself, who are so diligent a student of history, have found a favorite field for the display of your eloquence in recalling the stories of brave and famous men of old, and in praising their actions, not on utilitarian grounds, but on account of the splendor of abstract moral worth. But all of this falls to the ground if the principle of selection that I have just mentioned be established, the principle of forgoing pleasures for the purpose of getting greater pleasures, and enduring pains for the sake of escaping greater pains.

“But enough has been said at this stage about the glorious exploits and achievements of the heroes of renown. The tendency of all the virtues to produce pleasure is a topic that will be treated in its own place later on. At present I shall proceed to expound the essence and qualities of pleasure itself, and shall endeavor to remove the misconceptions of ignorance and to make you realize how serious, how temperate, how austere is the school that is supposed to be sensual, lax and luxurious. The pleasure we pursue is not that kind alone which directly affects our physical being with a delightful feeling, a positively agreeable perception of the senses; on the contrary, the greatest pleasure according to us is that which is experienced as a result of the complete removal of pain.

When we are released from pain, the mere sensation of complete emancipation and relief from uneasiness is in itself a source of gratification. But everything that causes gratification is a pleasure (just as everything that causes annoyance is a pain). Therefore the complete removal of pain has correctly been termed a pleasure. For example, when hunger and thirst are banished by food and drink, the mere fact of getting rid of uneasiness brings a resultant pleasure in its train. So generally, the removal of pain causes pleasure to take its place.

Epicurus consequently maintained that there is no such thing as a neutral state of feeling intermediate between pleasure and pain; for the state supposed by some thinkers to be neutral, being characterized as it is by entire absence of pain, is itself, he held, a pleasure, and, what is more, a pleasure of the highest order. A man who is conscious of his condition at all must necessarily feel pleasure or pain. But complete absence of pain Epicurus considers to be the limit and highest point of pleasure; beyond this point pleasure may vary in kind, but it cannot vary in intensity or degree.

Yet at Athens, so my father used to tell me when he wanted to air his wit at the expense of the Stoics, in the Ceramicus there is actually a statue of Chrysippus seated and holding out one hand, the gesture being intended to indicate the delight which he used to take in the following little syllogism: ‘Does your hand want anything, while it is in its present condition?’ Answer: ‘No, nothing.’ ‘But if pleasure were a good, it would want pleasure.’ ‘Yes, I suppose it would.’ ‘Therefore pleasure is not a good.’ An argument, as my father declared, which not even a statue would employ, if a statue could speak; because though it is cogent enough as an objection to the Cyrenaics, it does not touch Epicurus.

For if the only kind of pleasure were that which so to speak tickles the senses, an influence permeating them with a feeling of delight, neither the hand nor any other member could be satisfied with the absence of pain unaccompanied by an agreeable and active sensation of pleasure. Whereas if, as Epicurus holds, the highest pleasure be to feel no pain, Chrysippus’ interlocutor, though justified in making his first admission, that his hand in that condition wanted nothing, was not justified in his second admission, that if pleasure were a good, his hand would have wanted it. And the reason why it would not have wanted pleasure is, that to be without pain is to be in a state of pleasure.

“The truth of the position that pleasure is the ultimate good will most readily appear from the following illustration. Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away, but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.

Suppose on the other hand a person crushed beneath the heaviest load of mental and of bodily anguish to which humanity is liable. Grant him no hope of ultimate relief in view; also give him no pleasure either present or in prospect. Can one describe or imagine a more pitiable state? If then a life full of pain is the thing most to be avoided, it follows that to live in pain is the highest evil; and this position implies that a life of pleasure is the ultimate good. In fact the mind possesses nothing in itself upon which it can rest as final. Every fear, every sorrow can be traced back to pain; there is no other thing besides pain which is of its own nature capable of causing either anxiety or distress.

“Pleasure and pain moreover supply the motives of desire and of avoidance, and the springs of conduct generally. This being so, it clearly follows that actions are right and praiseworthy only as being a means to the attainment of a life of pleasure. But that which is not itself a means to anything else, but to which all else is a means, is what the Greeks term the Telos, the highest, ultimate or final Good. It must therefore be admitted that the Chief Good is to live agreeably.

“Those who place the Chief Good in virtue alone are beguiled by the glamour of a name, and do not understand the true demands of nature. If they will consent to listen to Epicurus, they will be delivered from the grossest error. Your school dilates on the transcendent beauty of the virtues; but were they not productive of pleasure, who would deem them either praiseworthy or desirable? We esteem the art of medicine not for its interest as a science but for its conduciveness to health; the art of navigation is commended for its practical and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success.

So also Wisdom, which must be considered as the art of living, if it effected no result would not be desired; but as it is, it is desired, because it is the artificer that procures and produces pleasure. (The meaning that I attach to pleasure must by this time be clear to you, and you must not be biased against my argument owing to the discreditable associations of the term.) The great disturbing factor in man’s life is ignorance of good and evil; mistaken ideas about these frequently rob us of our greatest pleasures, and torment us with the most cruel pain of mind.

Hence we need the aid of Wisdom, to rid us of our fears and appetites, to root out all our errors and prejudices, and to serve as our infallible guide to the attainment of pleasure. Wisdom alone can banish sorrow from our hearts and protect us from alarm and apprehension; put yourself to school with her, and you may live in peace, and quench the glowing flames of desire. For the desires are incapable of satisfaction; they ruin not individuals only but whole families, nay often shake the very foundations of the state. It is they that are the source of hatred, quarreling and strife, of sedition and of war. Nor do they only flaunt themselves abroad, or turn their blind onslaughts solely against others; even when prisoned within the heart they quarrel and fall out among themselves; and this cannot but render the whole of life embittered.

Hence only the Wise Man, who prunes away all the rank growth of vanity and error, can possibly live untroubled by sorrow and by fear, content within the bounds that nature has set. Nothing could be more useful or more conducive to well-being than Epicurus’s doctrine as to the different classes of the desires. One kind he classified as both natural and necessary, a second as natural without being necessary, and a third as neither natural nor necessary; the principle of classification being that the necessary desires are gratified with little trouble or expense; the natural desires also require but little, since nature’s own riches, which suffice to content her, are both easily procured and limited in amount; but for the imaginary desires no bound or limit can be discovered.

If then we observe that ignorance and error reduce the whole of life to confusion, while Wisdom alone is able to protect us from the onslaughts of appetite and the menaces of fear, teaching us to bear even the affronts of fortune with moderation, and showing us all the paths that lead to calmness and peace, why should we hesitate to avow that Wisdom is to be desired for the sake of the pleasures it brings and Folly to be avoided because of its injurious consequences?

“The same principle will lead us to pronounce that Temperance also is not desirable for its own sake, but because it bestows peace of mind, and soothes the heart with a tranquillizing sense of harmony. For it is temperance that warns us to be guided by reason in what we desire and avoid. Nor is it enough to judge what it is right to do or to leave undone; we also need to abide by our judgment. Most men however lack tenacity of purpose; their resolution weakens and succumbs as soon as the fair form of pleasure meets their gaze, and they surrender themselves prisoners to their passions, failing to foresee the inevitable result. Thus for the sake of a pleasure at once small in amount and unnecessary, and one which they might have procured by other means or even denied themselves altogether without pain, they incur serious disease, or loss of fortune, or disgrace, and not infrequently become liable to the penalties of the law and of the courts of justice.

Those on the other hand who are resolved so to enjoy their pleasures as to avoid all painful consequences therefrom, and who retain their faculty of judgment and avoid being seduced by pleasure into courses that they perceive to be wrong, reap the very highest pleasure by forgoing pleasure. Similarly also they often voluntarily endure pain, to avoid incurring greater pain by not doing so. This clearly proves that Intemperance is not undesirable for its own sake, while Temperance is desirable not because it renounces pleasures, but because it procures greater pleasures.

“The same account will be found to hold good of Courage. The performance of labors, the undergoing of pains, are not in themselves attractive, nor are endurance, industry, watchfulness, nor yet that much lauded virtue, perseverance, nor even courage; but we aim at these virtues in order to live without anxiety and fear and so far as possible to be free from pain of mind and body. The fear of death plays havoc with the calm and even tenor of life, and to bow the head to pain and bear it abjectly and feebly is a pitiable thing; such weakness has caused many men to betray their parents or their friends, some their country, and very many utterly to ruin themselves. So on the other hand a strong and lofty spirit is entirely free from anxiety and sorrow. It makes light of death, for the dead are only as they were before they were born.

It is schooled to encounter pain by recollecting that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight ones have frequent intervals of respite; while those of medium intensity lie within our own control: we can bear them if they are endurable, or if they are not, we may serenely quit life’s theatre, when the play has ceased to please us. These considerations prove that timidity and cowardice are not blamed, nor courage and endurance praised, on their own account; the former are rejected because they beget pain, the latter coveted because they beget pleasure.

“It remains to speak of Justice, to complete the list of the virtues; but this admits of practically the same treatment as the others. Wisdom, Temperance and Courage I have shown to be so closely linked with Pleasure that they cannot possibly be severed or sundered from it. The same must be deemed to be the case with Justice. Not only does Justice never cause anyone harm, but on the contrary it always adds some benefit, partly owing to its essentially tranquillizing influence upon the mind, partly because of the hope that it warrants of a never-failing supply of the things that uncorrupted nature really needs. And just as Rashness, License and Cowardice ever torment the mind, ever awaken trouble and discord, so Unrighteousness, when firmly rooted in the heart, causes restlessness by the mere fact of its presence; and if once it has found expression in some deed of wickedness, however secret the act, yet it can never feel assured that it will always remain undetected.

The usual consequences of crime are, first suspicion, next gossip and rumor, then comes the accuser, then the judge; many wrongdoers have even turned evidence against themselves, as happened in your consulship. And even if any think themselves well fenced and fortified against detection by their fellowmen, they still dread the eye of heaven, and fancy that the pangs of anxiety night and day gnawing at their hearts are sent by Providence to punish them.

But what can wickedness contribute towards lessening the annoyances of life, commensurate with its effect in increasing them, owing to the burden of a guilty conscience, the penalties of the law and the hatred of one’s fellows? Yet nevertheless some men indulge without limit their avarice, ambition and love of power, lust, gluttony and those other desires, which ill-gotten gains can never diminish but rather must inflame the more; insomuch that they appear proper subjects for restraint rather than for reformation. Men of sound natures, therefore, are summoned by the voice of true reason to justice, equity and honesty. For one without eloquence or resources dishonesty is not good policy, since it is difficult for such a man to succeed in his designs, or to make good his success when once achieved.

On the other hand, for the rich and clever generous conduct seems more in keeping, and liberality wins them affection and good will, the surest means to a life of peace; especially as there really is no motive for transgressing: since the desires that spring from nature are easily gratified without doing any man wrong, while those that are imaginary ought to be resisted, for they set their affections upon nothing that is really wanted; while there is more loss inherent in Injustice itself than there is profit in the gains it brings. Hence Justice also cannot correctly be said to be desirable in and for itself; it is so because it is so highly productive of gratification. For esteem and affection are gratifying, because they render life safer and fuller of pleasure. Hence we hold that Unrighteousness is to be avoided not simply on account of the disadvantages that result from being unrighteous, but even far more because when it dwells in a man’s heart it never suffers him to breathe freely or know a moment’s rest.

“If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.

“The doctrine thus firmly established has corollaries which I will briefly expound. The Ends of Goods and Evils themselves, that is, pleasure and pain, are not open to mistake; where people go wrong is in not knowing what things are productive of pleasure and pain. Again, we aver that mental pleasures and pains arise out of bodily ones (and therefore I allow your contention that any Epicureans who think otherwise put themselves out of court; and I am aware that many do, though not those who can speak with authority); but although men do experience mental pleasure that is agreeable and mental pain that is annoying, yet both of these we assert arise out of and are based upon bodily sensations.

Yet we maintain that this does not preclude mental pleasures and pains from being much more intense than those of the body; since the body can feel only what is present to it at the moment, whereas the mind is also cognizant of the past and of the future. For granting that pain of body is equally painful, yet our sensation of pain can be enormously increased by the belief that some evil of unlimited magnitude and duration threatens to befall us hereafter. And the same consideration may be transferred to pleasure: a pleasure is greater if not accompanied by any apprehension of evil.

This therefore clearly appears, that intense mental pleasure or distress contributes more to our happiness or misery than a bodily pleasure or pain of equal duration. But we do not agree that when pleasure is withdrawn uneasiness at once ensues, unless the pleasure happens to have been replaced by a pain: while on the other hand one is glad to lose a pain even though no active sensation of pleasure comes in its place: a fact that serves to show how great a pleasure is the mere absence of pain. But just as we are elated by the anticipation of good things, so we are delighted by their recollection. Fools are tormented by the memory of former evils; wise men have the delight of renewing in graceful remembrance the blessings of the past. We have the power both to obliterate our misfortunes in an almost perpetual forgetfulness and to summon up pleasant and agreeable memories of our successes. But when we fix our mental vision closely on the events of the past, then sorrow or gladness ensues according as these were evil or good.

“Here is indeed a royal road to happiness open, simple, and direct! For clearly man can have no greater good than complete freedom from pain and sorrow coupled with the enjoyment of the highest bodily and mental pleasures. Notice then how the theory embraces every possible enhancement of life, every aid to the attainment of that Chief Good which is our object. Epicurus, the man whom you denounce as a voluptuary, cries aloud that no one can live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably and justly, and no one wisely, honorably and justly without living pleasantly. For a city rent by faction cannot prosper, nor a house whose masters are at strife; much less then can a mind divided against itself and filled with inward discord taste any particle of pure and liberal pleasure.

But one who is perpetually swayed by conflicting and incompatible counsels and desires can know no peace or calm. Why, if the pleasantness of life is diminished by the more serious bodily diseases, how much more must it be diminished by the diseases of the mind! But extravagant and imaginary desires, for riches, fame, power, and also for licentious pleasures, are nothing but mental diseases. Then, too, there are grief, trouble and sorrow, which gnaw the heart and consume it with anxiety, if men fail to realize that the mind need feel no pain unconnected with some pain of body, present or to come.

Yet there is no foolish man but is afflicted by some one of these diseases; therefore there is no foolish man that is not unhappy. Moreover, there is death, the stone of Tantalus ever hanging over men’s heads; and superstition, that poisons and destroys all peace of mind. Besides, they do not recollect their past nor enjoy their present blessings; they merely look forward to those of the future, and as these are of necessity uncertain, they are consumed with agony and terror; and the climax of their torment is when they perceive too late that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame, have come to nothing. For they never attain any of the pleasures, the hope of which inspired them to undergo all their arduous toils.

Or look again at others, petty, narrow-minded men, or confirmed pessimists, or spiteful, envious, ill-tempered creatures, unsociable, abusive, brutal; others again enslaved to the follies of love, impudent or reckless, wanton, headstrong and yet irresolute, always changing their minds. Such failings render their lives one unbroken round of misery. The conclusion is that no foolish man can be happy, nor any wise man fail to be happy. This is a truth that we establish far more conclusively than do the Stoics. For they maintain that nothing is good save that vague phantom which they entitle Moral Worth, a title more splendid than substantial; and say that Virtue resting on this Moral Worth has no need of pleasure, but is herself her own sufficient happiness.

“At the same time this Stoic doctrine can be stated in a form which we do not object to, and indeed ourselves endorse. For Epicurus thus presents his Wise Man who is always happy: his desires are kept within bounds; death he disregards; he has a true conception, untainted by fear, of the Divine nature; he does not hesitate to depart from life, if that would better his condition. Thus equipped he enjoys perpetual pleasure, for there is no moment when the pleasures he experiences do not outbalance the pains; since he remembers the past with gratitude, grasps the present with a full realization of its pleasantness, and does not rely upon the future; he looks forward to it, but finds his true enjoyment in the present. Also he is entirely free from the vices that I instanced a few moments ago, and he derives no inconsiderable pleasure from comparing his own existence with the life of the foolish.

More, any pains that the Wise Man may encounter are never so severe but that he has more cause for gladness than for sorrow. Again, it is a fine saying of Epicurus that ‘the Wise Man is but little interfered with by fortune: the great concerns of life, the things that matter, are controlled by his own wisdom and reason’; and that ‘no greater pleasure could be derived from a life of infinite duration than is actually afforded by this existence which we know to be finite.’ Logic, on which your school lays such stress, he held to be of no effect either as a guide to conduct or as an aid to thought. Natural Philosophy he deemed all-important. This science explains to us the meaning of terms, the nature of predication, and the law of consistency and contradiction; secondly, a thorough knowledge of the facts of nature relieves us of the burden of superstition, frees us from fear of death, and shields us against the disturbing effects of ignorance, which is often in itself a cause of terrifying apprehensions; lastly, to learn what nature’s real requirements are improves the moral character also.

Besides, it is only by firmly grasping a well-established scientific system, observing the Rule or Canon that has fallen as it were from heaven so that all men may know it only by making that hope always to stand fast in our belief, unshaken by the eloquence of any man. On the other hand, without a full understanding of the world of nature it is impossible to maintain the truth of our sense-perceptions. Further, every mental presentation has its origin in sensation: so that no certain knowledge will be possible, unless all sensations are true, as the theory of Epicurus teaches that they are. Those who deny the validity of sensation and say that nothing can be perceived, having excluded the evidence of the senses, are unable even to expound their own argument. Besides, by abolishing knowledge and science they abolish all possibility of rational life and action.

Thus Natural Philosophy supplies courage to face the fear of death; resolution to resist the terrors of religion; peace of mind, for it removes all ignorance of the mysteries of nature; self-control, for it explains the nature of the desires and distinguishes their different kinds; and, as I showed just now, the Canon or Criterion of Knowledge, which Epicurus also established, gives a method of discerning truth from falsehood.

“There remains a topic that is preeminently germane to this discussion, I mean the subject of Friendship. Your school maintains that if pleasure be the Chief Good, friendship will cease to exist. Now Epicurus’s pronouncement about friendship is that of all the means to happiness that wisdom has devised, none is greater, none more fruitful, none more delightful than this. Nor did he only commend this doctrine by his eloquence, but far more by the example of his life and conduct. How great a thing such friendship is, is shown by the mythical stories of antiquity. Review the legends from the remotest ages, and, copious and varied as they are, you will barely find in them three pairs of friends, beginning with Theseus and ending with Orestes. Yet Epicurus in a single house and that a small one maintained a whole company of friends, united by the closest sympathy and affection; and this still goes on in the Epicurean school.

But to return to our subject, for there is no need of personal instances: I notice that the topic of friendship has been treated by Epicureans in three ways. Some have denied that pleasures affecting our friends are in themselves to be desired by us in the same degree as we desire our own pleasures. This doctrine is thought by some critics to undermine the foundations of friendship; however, its supporters defend their position, and in my opinion have no difficulty in making good their ground. They argue that friendship can no more be sundered from pleasure than can the virtues, which we have discussed already. A solitary, friendless life must be beset by secret dangers and alarms. Hence reason itself advises the acquisition of friends; their possession gives confidence, and a firmly rooted hope of winning pleasure. And just as hatred, jealousy and contempt are hindrances to pleasure, so friendship is the most trustworthy preserver and also creator of pleasure alike for our friends and for ourselves. It affords us enjoyment in the present, and it inspires us with hopes for the near and distant future.

Thus it is not possible to secure uninterrupted gratification in life without friendship, nor yet to preserve friendship itself unless we love our friends as much as ourselves. Hence this unselfishness does occur in friendship, while also friendship is closely linked with pleasure. For we rejoice in our friends’ joy as much as in our own, and are equally pained by their sorrows. Therefore the Wise Man will feel exactly the same towards his friend as he does towards himself, and will exert himself as much for his friend’s pleasure as he would for his own. All that has been said about the essential connexion of the virtues with pleasure must be repeated about friendship.

Epicurus well said (I give almost his exact words): ‘The same creed that has given us courage to overcome all fear of everlasting or long-enduring evil hereafter, has discerned that friendship is our strongest safeguard in this present term of life.’ Other Epicureans though by no means lacking in insight are a little less courageous in defying the opprobrious criticisms of the Academy. They fear that if we hold friendship to be desirable only for the pleasure that it affords to ourselves, it will be thought that it is crippled altogether.

They therefore say that the first advances and overtures, and the original inclination to form an attachment, are prompted by the desire for pleasure, but that when the progress of the intercourse has led to intimacy, the relationship blossoms into an affection strong enough to make us love our friends for their own sake, even though no practical advantage accrues from their friendship. Does not familiarity endear to us localities, temples, cities, gymnasia and playing-grounds, horses and hounds, gladiatorial shows and fights with wild beasts? Then how much more natural and reasonable that this should be able to happen in our intercourse with our fellowmen! The third view is that wise men have made a sort of compact to love their friends no less than themselves. We can understand the possibility of this, and we often see it happen. Clearly no more effective means to happiness could be found than such an alliance.

“All these considerations go to prove not only that the theory of friendship is not embarrassed by the identification of the Chief Good with pleasure, but also that without this no foundation for friendship whatsoever can be found.

“If then the doctrine I have set forth is clearer and more luminous than daylight itself; if it is derived entirely from Nature’s source; if my whole discourse relies throughout for confirmation on the unbiased and unimpeachable evidence of the senses; if lisping infants, nay even dumb animals, prompted by Nature’s teaching, almost find voice to proclaim that there is no welfare but pleasure, no hardship but pain and their judgment in these matters is neither sophisticated nor biased ought we not to feel the greatest gratitude to him who caught this utterance of Nature’s voice, and grasped its import so firmly and so fully that he has guided all sane-minded men into the paths of peace and happiness, calmness and repose? You are pleased to think him uneducated.

The reason is that he refused to consider any education worth the name that did not help to school us in happiness. Was he to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, in perusing poets, who give us nothing solid and useful, but merely childish amusement? Was he to occupy himself like Plato with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which starting from false premises cannot be true, and which moreover if they were true would contribute nothing to make our lives pleasanter and therefore better? Was he, I say, to study arts like these, and neglect the master art, so difficult and correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living?

No! Epicurus was not uneducated: the real philistines are those who ask us to go on studying till old age the subjects that we ought to be ashamed not to have learned in boyhood.” Thus concluding, he added: “I have explained my own view, but solely with the object of learning what your verdict is. I have never hitherto had a satisfactory opportunity of hearing it.”