

## Tusculan Disputations, Book IV

Cicero

XV. *M.* Since I have spoken before of virtue in other places, and shall often have occasion to speak again (for a great many questions that relate to life and manners arise from the spring of virtue); and since, as I say, virtue consists in a settled and uniform affection of mind, making those persons praiseworthy who are possessed of her, she herself also, independent of anything else, without regard to any advantage, must be praiseworthy; for from her proceed good inclinations, opinions, actions, and the whole of right reason; though virtue may be defined in a few words to be right reason itself. The opposite to this is viciousness (for so I choose to translate what the Greeks call κακία, rather than by perverseness; for perverseness is the name of a particular vice; but viciousness includes all), from whence arise those perturbations which, as I just now said, are turbid and violent motions of the mind, repugnant to reason, and enemies in a high degree to the peace of the mind and a tranquil life, for they introduce piercing and anxious cares, and afflict and debilitate the mind through fear; they violently inflame our hearts with exaggerated appetite, which is in reality an impotence of mind, utterly irreconcilable with temperance and moderation, which we sometimes call desire, and sometimes lust, and which, should it even attain the object of its wishes, immediately becomes so elated that it loses all its resolution, and knows not what to pursue; so that he was in the right who said “that exaggerated pleasure was the very greatest of mistakes.” Virtue, then, alone can effect the cure of these evils.

XVI. For what is not only more miserable, but more base and sordid, than a man afflicted, weakened, and oppressed with grief? And little short of this misery is one who dreads some approaching evil, and who, through faintheartedness, is under continual suspense. The poets, to express the greatness of this evil, imagine a stone to hang over the head of Tantalus, as a punishment for his wickedness, his pride, and his boasting. And this is the common punishment of folly; for there hangs over the head of every one whose mind revolts from reason some similar fear. And as these perturbations of the mind, grief and fear, are of a most wasting nature, so those two others, though of a more merry cast (I mean lust, which is always coveting something with eagerness, and empty mirth, which is an exulting joy), differ very little from madness. Hence you may understand what sort of person he is whom we call at one time moderate, at another modest or temperate, at another constant and virtuous; while sometimes we include all these names in the word frugality, as the crown of all; for if that word did not include all virtues, it would never have been proverbial to say that a frugal man does everything rightly. But when the Stoics apply this saying to their wise man, they seem to exalt him too much, and to speak of him with too much admiration.

XVII. Whoever, then, through moderation and constancy, is at rest in his mind, and in calm possession of himself, so as neither to pine with care, nor be dejected with fear, nor to be inflamed with desire, coveting something greedily, nor relaxed by extravagant mirth—such a man is that identical wise man whom we are inquiring for: he is the happy man, to whom nothing in this life seems intolerable enough to depress him; nothing exquisite enough to transport him unduly. For what is there in this life that can appear great to him who has acquainted himself with eternity and the utmost extent of the universe? For what is there in human knowledge, or the short span of this life, that can appear great to a wise man? whose mind is always so upon its

guard that nothing can befall him which is unforeseen, nothing which is unexpected, nothing, in short, which is new. Such a man takes so exact a survey on all sides of him, that he always knows the proper place and spot to live in free from all the troubles and annoyances of life, and encounters every accident that fortune can bring upon him with a becoming calmness. Whoever conducts himself in this manner will be free from grief, and from every other perturbation; and a mind free from these feelings renders men completely happy; whereas a mind disordered and drawn off from right and unerring reason loses at once, not only its resolution, but its health.—Therefore the thoughts and declarations of the Peripatetics are soft and effeminate, for they say that the mind must necessarily be agitated, but at the same time they lay down certain bounds beyond which that agitation is not to proceed. And do you set bounds to vice? or is it no vice to disobey reason? Does not reason sufficiently declare that there is no real good which you should desire too ardently, or the possession of which you should allow to transport you? and that there is no evil that should be able to overwhelm you, or the suspicion of which should distract you? and that all these things assume too melancholy or too cheerful an appearance through our own error? But if fools find this error lessened by time, so that, though the cause remains the same, they are not affected, in the same manner, after some time, as they were at first, why, surely a wise man ought not to be influenced at all by it. But what are those degrees by which we are to limit it? Let us fix these degrees in grief, a difficult subject, and one much canvassed.—Fannius writes that P. Rutilius took it much to heart that his brother was refused the consulship; but he seems to have been too much affected by this disappointment, for it was the occasion of his death: he ought, therefore, to have borne it with more moderation. But let us suppose that while he was bearing this with moderation, the death of his children had intervened; here would have started a fresh grief, which, admitting it to be moderate in itself, yet still must have been a great addition to the other. Now, to these let us add some acute pains of body, the loss of his fortune, blindness, banishment. Supposing, then, each separate misfortune to occasion a separate additional grief, the whole would be too great to be supportable.

XVIII. The man who attempts to set bounds to vice acts like one who should throw himself headlong from Leucate, persuaded that he could stop himself whenever he pleased. Now, as that is impossible, so a perturbed and disordered mind cannot restrain itself, and stop where it pleases. Certainly whatever is bad in its increase is bad in its birth. Now grief and all other perturbations are doubtless baneful in their progress, and have, therefore, no small share of evil at the beginning; for they go on of themselves when once they depart from reason, for every weakness is self-indulgent, and indiscreetly launches out, and does not know where to stop. So that it makes no difference whether you approve of moderate perturbations of mind, or of moderate injustice, moderate cowardice, and moderate intemperance; for whoever prescribes bounds to vice admits a part of it, which, as it is odious of itself, becomes the more so as it stands on slippery ground, and, being once set forward, glides on headlong, and cannot by any means be stopped.

XIX. Why should I say more? Why should I add that the Peripatetics say that these perturbations, which we insist upon it should be extirpated, are not only natural, but were given to men by nature for a good purpose? They usually talk in this manner. In the first place, they say much in praise of anger; they call it the whetstone of courage, and they say that angry men exert themselves most against an enemy or against a bad citizen: that those reasons are of little weight which are the motives of men who think thus, as—it is a just war; it becomes us to fight for our

laws, our liberties, our country: they will allow no force to these arguments unless our courage is warmed by anger.—Nor do they confine their argument to warriors; but their opinion is that no one can issue any rigid commands without some bitterness and anger. In short, they have no notion of an orator either accusing or even defending a client without he is spurred on by anger. And though this anger should not be real, still they think his words and gestures ought to wear the appearance of it, so that the action of the orator may excite the anger of his hearer. And they deny that any man has ever been seen who does not know what it is to be angry; and they name what we call lenity by the bad appellation of indolence. Nor do they commend only this lust (for anger is, as I defined it above, the lust of revenge), but they maintain that kind of lust or desire to be given us by nature for very good purposes, saying that no one can execute anything well but what he is in earnest about. Themistocles used to walk in the public places in the night because he could not sleep; and when asked the reason, his answer was, that Miltiades's trophies kept him awake. Who has not heard how Demosthenes used to watch, who said that it gave him pain if any mechanic was up in a morning at his work before him? Lastly, they urge that some of the greatest philosophers would never have made that progress in their studies without some ardent desire spurring them on.—We are informed that Pythagoras, Democritus, and Plato visited the remotest parts of the world; for they thought that they ought to go wherever anything was to be learned. Now, it is not conceivable that these things could be effected by anything but by the greatest ardor of mind.

XX. They say that even grief, which we have already said ought to be avoided as a monstrous and fierce beast, was appointed by nature, not without some good purpose, in order that men should lament when they had committed a fault, well knowing they had exposed themselves to correction, rebuke, and ignominy; for they think that those who can bear ignominy and infamy without pain have acquired a complete impunity for all sorts of crimes; for with them reproach is a stronger check than conscience. From whence we have that scene in Afranius borrowed from common life; for when the abandoned son saith, “Wretched that I am!” the severe father replies, Let him but grieve, no matter what the cause.

And they say the other divisions of sorrow have their use; that pity incites us to hasten to the assistance of others, and to alleviate the calamities of men who have undeservedly fallen into them; that even envy and detraction are not without their use, as when a man sees that another person has attained what he cannot, or observes another to be equally successful with himself; that he who should take away fear would take away all industry in life, which those men exert in the greatest degree who are afraid of the laws and of the magistrates, who dread poverty, ignominy, death, and pain. But while they argue thus, they allow indeed of these feelings being retrenched, though they deny that they either can or should be plucked up by the roots; so that their opinion is that mediocrity is best in everything. When they reason in this manner, what think you—is what they say worth attending to or not?

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14988/14988-h/14988-h.htm>