

VIRTVS

Stoic Paradoxes

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA

VIRTUS

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Plain English Translation

Translated by Michael Berardi

MOUSEIA

THIS EDITION

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TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

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GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

Three losses in section 27 are marked [...]. Source brackets and supplements are retained; English follows the deletion of non in section 17. No human specialist review.

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Preface



SECTION 1

Brutus, I've often watched your uncle Cato give his opinion in the Senate. He takes up serious points of philosophy that have little to do with our usual courtroom arguments or public business. Yet he speaks so well that even ordinary people find those points reasonable.

SECTION 2

That's harder for him than it is for you or me. The philosophy we mostly follow has given rise to a full, expressive style of speaking. Its positions aren't very different from what people generally believe. Cato, on the other hand, is a thorough Stoic, as I see it. He believes things that don't appeal much to the public. His school doesn't aim at elegant language or spell out its arguments at length. It establishes a point with tiny questions, rather like needle pricks.

SECTION 3

Still, an argument can make the most unbelievable claim seem reasonable. Language can polish and brighten even the roughest, least cultivated material. That was my thinking when I went further than Cato himself. He usually speaks as a Stoic, adding the resources of public speaking, only about courage of spirit, restraint, death, all the merits of virtue, the immortal gods, and devotion to one's country. For your amusement, I've taken the very claims the Stoics struggle to establish even in their classrooms and leisure hours and made them subjects for general arguments.

SECTION 4

These claims surprise people and contradict what everyone believes [the Stoics themselves even call them “paradoxes”]. I wanted to see whether I could bring them out into public view [in other words, into the Forum] and argue for them convincingly. Or is addressing educated people quite different from addressing the public? I was particularly glad to write these arguments because I find these so-called paradoxes very much in Socrates’ spirit, and truer by far than other views.

SECTION 5

So here’s a small piece of work for you, done by lamplight in these nights that have already grown shorter. The gift that took much longer nights of work has already appeared with your name on it. This will give you a taste of my usual exercises: I take what the schools discuss as general questions and put it into the kind of language we use in public speaking. But I’m not asking you to enter this on the credit side of my account. It’s no Minerva by Phidias to be set up on the citadel. You should, however, be able to tell that it came out of the same workshop.

Paradox 1



Paradox I

Nothing is good except what is morally right.

SECTION 6

CHAPTER 1

Some of you may think I'm borrowing this speech from the debates of Socrates' followers instead of expressing what I believe myself. I'm worried about that. All the same, I'll tell you my view, in fewer words than this great subject really needs. By Hercules, I've never thought we should count those people's cash, grand houses, resources, commands, or the pleasures that have such a grip on them as good things or things worth wanting. I could see that, even with all these things pouring in, they were still hungry for exactly what they had so much of. Greed's thirst can never be filled or put to rest. People who own these things suffer from two torments: wanting to add to them and being afraid they'll lose them.

SECTION 7

Here I often wonder how wise our ancestors were, despite their remarkable restraint. They decided to use the word "goods" for these weak, unstable things [the parts of a fortune]. Yet their actual behavior showed that they judged them very differently. Could something good harm a person? Could someone be sur-

rounded by good things and not be good himself? We can see that every one of these possessions turns up in bad people's hands and is missing from good people's lives.

SECTION 8

Laugh if you want. I'll still give a sound argument more weight than what the crowd thinks. When a man loses his animals or his household belongings, I'll never say he has lost what is good. And I'll often speak well of that wise man, Bias, I think, one of the Seven. The enemy took his city, Priene. Everyone else ran away carrying plenty of their belongings, and someone told him to do the same. "I already am," he answered. "I carry everything I own with me."

SECTION 9

He didn't even count those toys of fortune as his own, although we go so far as to call them good. Someone will ask, "Well, what is good?" If it's true that we call an action well done when it's done rightly, honorably, and with virtue, my view is that nothing but right, honorable, virtuous conduct is good.

SECTION 10

CHAPTER 2

Argue these points too slowly and they can become tiresome. The way the greatest men lived and acted has made the points clear [points that seem to be argued in language more subtle than it needs to be]. Let me put a question to you. The men who founded our republic so well and handed it down to us—do you think they were dreaming of silver to satisfy greed, beautiful surroundings to enjoy, household luxuries to indulge themselves, or feasts to give them pleasure? Bring each man [among the kings] to mind.

SECTION 11

Shall we start with Romulus? Or, once the community was free, with the men who freed it? What were the steps that took Romulus up to heaven? Those things that these people label good? Or what he did and the virtues he showed? Consider Numa Pompilius too. Do we think the gods liked his sacrifici-

cial cups and little earthenware jars less than the fern-patterned bowls belonging to the Salian priests? I'll pass over the other kings. Apart from Tarquin the Proud, they all stand on the same level.

SECTION 12

Ask Brutus what he was doing when he freed his country. Ask the others who joined him what they had in view and what they were going after. Would you find even one who seemed to have pleasure, wealth, or anything else at all as his goal, rather than doing what a brave, great man ought to do? What made Gaius Mucius set out to kill Porsenna when he had no chance of coming back alive? What kept Cocles on the bridge by himself against every force the enemy had? What sent the elder Decius, and then his son, into the enemy's armed ranks after each had pledged his own life to death? What was the aim of Gaius Fabricius's restraint or Manius Curius's plain diet? Think of Gnaeus and Publius Scipio, the two defenders in the Punic War. They believed they had to put their own bodies in the way of the Carthaginians' advance. Think of the older Africanus and the younger one, and of Cato, whose life came between theirs. Think of countless more—we have plenty of examples at home. Did they imagine they should want anything from life apart from what seemed worthy of praise and distinction?

SECTION 13

CHAPTER 3

Then let the people who mock this argument and its conclusion come forward and decide for themselves. Would they rather be like one of those men with marble houses shining with ivory and gold, with statues and paintings everywhere, decorated gold and silver, and Corinthian works? Or like Gaius Fabricius, who didn't have any of those things and didn't want them?

SECTION 14

It's usually easy enough to get people to admit that these possessions, which keep changing hands, aren't good things. But there's one position they defend stubbornly and carefully: pleasure is the greatest good. That sounds to me like

an animal speaking, not a person. God, or nature—what you might call the mother of everything—gave you a mind, and nothing is more valuable or divine. Will you drag yourself down so far that you see no difference between yourself and a four-legged creature? How can a thing be good if having it doesn't improve you?

SECTION 15

The more goodness someone has, the more praise he deserves. Anything genuinely good allows the person who has it to take honorable pride in it. Does pleasure meet either test? Does it improve a man or earn him more praise? Does anyone make much of himself by boasting and proclaiming how much pleasure he's had? Pleasure has a huge number of advocates. But if even that doesn't belong among good things—and the more intense it is, the further it knocks the mind off balance—then living a good, happy life can only mean living rightly and honorably.

Paradox 2



Paradox II

Virtue by itself provides happiness.

[Having virtue means having everything needed to live happily.]

SECTION 16

CHAPTER 1

I've never regarded Marcus Regulus as a wretched, unlucky, or unhappy man. When the Carthaginians tortured him, they weren't torturing his great spirit, his dignity, his loyalty, his firmness, or any of his virtues. They weren't torturing his very soul. With all those virtues guarding it and attending it, his soul couldn't possibly be taken prisoner along with his body. We also saw Gaius Marius. In good times I thought him one of the lucky ones; in bad times, one of the greatest men. There's no greater happiness available to a mortal.

SECTION 17

You madman, you have no idea—no idea—what strength virtue has. You use its name without knowing what it can do. A person who draws all his support from himself and keeps everything that is his within himself cannot help being utterly happy. But if chance determines all a person's hopes, calculations, and thoughts, he has nothing secure. He can't be sure anything will stay his for a day. Find a man like that and try frightening him with death or banishment.

Whatever happens to me in this ungrateful community, I won't even protest, let alone fight against it. Otherwise what was all my work for? What have I achieved? What did my worries and thoughts keep me awake for, if I haven't gained anything that puts me in a position where neither reckless fortune nor attacks from my enemies can shake me? Are you threatening to make me die,

SECTION 18

so I have to leave human company altogether? Or to banish me, so I have to leave bad people's company? Death scares people whose lives end with nothing left, not people whose achievements will always be praised. Banishment scares people who think their home has set boundaries, not people who take the entire world for one city. You think you're happy and doing wonderfully. Yet every kind of misery and trouble weighs you down. Your cravings torment you; you suffer through the nights and days. Your present possessions aren't enough, and you're afraid even those won't last. The knowledge of your crimes keeps pricking at you. Fear of trials and laws leaves you terrified. Turn where you like: your own injustices come at you like avenging Furies, never letting you draw an easy breath.

SECTION 19

A bad, foolish, spineless person cannot have a good life. In the same way, a good person who has wisdom and courage cannot be miserable. If a man's virtue and character merit praise, so must his life. A life worth praising isn't a life to run away from. If it were miserable, though, we ought to run away from it. So whatever merits praise should also count as happy, thriving, and desirable.

Paradox 3



Paradox III

All wrong deeds are equal; all right deeds are equal too.

SECTION 20

CHAPTER 1

Someone says, “It’s only a little thing.” But there’s a serious fault. Don’t measure wrongdoing by how things turn out. Measure it by the faults in the people doing it. The thing they do wrong over can be larger in one case and smaller in another. The act of doing wrong is the same whichever way you look at it. If a pilot capsizes a ship, it matters to the property owners whether the cargo is gold or straw. It makes no difference to how incompetent the pilot is. A man’s sexual desire goes astray with an unknown woman. Fewer people suffer than if he had behaved outrageously toward a girl from a distinguished, noble family. But he has done just as much wrong. Doing wrong is like stepping over a line: once you’ve crossed, you’ve committed the fault. Walking further after crossing doesn’t add to the fault of crossing. No one, surely, has permission to do wrong. When something isn’t allowed, establishing that it isn’t allowed is enough to condemn it. That fact can’t ever be larger or smaller. The wrongdoing lies in acting without the right to do so, which is always the same thing. The wrong deeds that come from it must therefore be equal.

SECTION 21

If the virtues match one another, the vices have to match too. It's easy to see that the virtues match. A good man can't be made better than good, a restrained man more restrained, a brave man braver, or a wise man wiser. Would you call a man good because he returned ten pounds of gold that someone had left in his keeping, with no witness there, even though he could have made off with it safely—if he wouldn't do the same with ten thousand pounds? Would you call him restrained if he held back one desire but let another run wild?

SECTION 22

Virtue is one steady consistency, maintained without a break and agreeing with reason. You can't add something that makes it more virtuous. You can't take something away and still leave it entitled to be called virtue. If a good deed is a right deed, and nothing can be more right than right, then nothing can be better than good either. So the vices must also be equal, if we are right to call them distortions of the mind. Since the virtues are equal, the right deeds that arise from them must match. And since wrong deeds come from vices, they have to be equal as well.

SECTION 23

CHAPTER 2

"You've got that from philosophers," someone says. I was afraid you'd say from pimps. "Socrates argued like that." By Hercules, that's good to hear! The accounts handed down to us describe him as learned and wise. But let me ask you a question. We're competing with words rather than fists: should we investigate the views of porters and laborers, or those of the most learned men? Especially since we couldn't find a position more true than this, or even more useful for human life. What could keep people away from all wrongdoing more effectively than realizing that offenses aren't different in kind? That an attack on an ordinary citizen is just as wrong as an attack on a magistrate? That bringing sexual disgrace into any home leaves the same stain of lust?

SECTION 24

Someone is bound to say, "Then are you saying it makes no difference whether you kill your father or a slave?" State the acts without any circumstances and I can't easily decide what they amount to. If ending a father's life is criminal in itself, the people of Saguntum murdered their parents: they chose to let them die free rather than go on living in slavery. So it is sometimes possible to take a parent's life without a crime, and often impossible to take a slave's life without doing an injustice. The reason for the act makes the distinction, not its nature. Add that reason to one side and it weighs more. Attach it to both, and the two must balance.

SECTION 25

There is one difference. Killing a slave unjustly involves one wrong. Attacking your father's life involves many. You injure the person who gave you life, who fed you, who taught you, and who gave you your place in a home, a household, and the republic. More wrongs have been done, so the punishment deserved is greater. But we should judge our conduct by how far we have a right to act, not by the penalty attached to each offense. We should treat everything we ought not to do as criminal, and every forbidden act as a violation of what is sacred. Even the tiniest matters? Yes. We may not be able to set limits to the things involved, but we can set limits to our minds.

SECTION 26

Let an actor's movement fall slightly out of time, or a line come out one syllable too long or short, and he's hissed and booed away. Your life should be more carefully measured than any stage movement and better fitted together than any verse. Will you claim your error in life was only a syllable? I won't hear a poet make that excuse over trifles. Should I hear it from a citizen, counting out his offenses on his fingers in the life we share? Call them shorter if you want. How can that make them any lighter? Every wrong involves throwing reason and order into confusion. Once that has happened, nothing extra can be added that would make the wrongdoing more wrong.

Paradox 4



Paradox IV

Every foolish person is out of his mind.

[All foolish people are insane.]

SECTION 27

CHAPTER 1

I'm not calling you foolish this time, as I often do, or dishonest, as I always do. I'm calling you mad [...]

[...] can stay unbeaten over the necessities of life [...]. Can anyone defeat a wise man's mind or take it by storm? Sound judgment, the endurance of human troubles, a disregard for fortune—in short, every virtue—stand round it like walls. Why, he can't even be expelled from his civic community! What makes such a community? Does any collection of people qualify, even savage, brutal ones? What about a lot of runaway slaves and robbers gathered together? You'll certainly say it doesn't. Well, there was no civic community here then. Laws counted for nothing. Courts weren't operating. Our ancestors' way of life had died out. Magistrates had been forced out at sword point, and the Senate's name itself had vanished from public life. That mass of looters, that gang of

robbers you set up in the Forum, those leftovers of the conspiracy who turned from Catiline's frenzy to your criminal madness—they weren't a civic community.

SECTION 28

So I wasn't expelled from a community: no such community existed. I was invited back into one when the republic once again had a consul, after having none; when a Senate existed again, after its destruction; when the people could agree freely; when law and fairness, which bind a community together, were remembered again. Look how little I cared about the weapons of your gang. I've always thought you aimed and hurled a terrible injustice at me. I've never thought it hit me. Unless, when you pulled down walls or wickedly set fire to roofs, you imagined that something of mine was falling or going up in flames.

SECTION 29

Whatever can be carried away, grabbed, or lost doesn't belong to me—or to anyone. You could have injured me by taking away my mind's godlike certainty that my work, my wakeful nights, and my decisions were keeping the republic standing against your bitter wishes. You could have wiped out the lasting memory of that permanent service. Above all, you could have taken away the mind that produced those decisions. Then I'd admit I'd suffered an injury. But you didn't and couldn't do any of that. Your wrongdoing gave me an honorable return, not a ruinous departure. I've always remained a citizen, especially when the Senate put my safety in the care of foreign peoples (as) a citizen of the very best kind. You aren't a citizen even now—unless a man can be both a citizen and an enemy. Do you really use someone's birth and whereabouts to tell citizen from enemy, rather than his intentions and deeds?

SECTION 30

CHAPTER 2

You killed people in the Forum. Your armed thugs took over temples. You burned people's houses and holy buildings. If you count as a citizen, why does Spartacus count as an enemy? Can you be a citizen when you once made the

civic community itself disappear? You use your own proper title for me, although everyone thinks the republic itself went into exile when I went away. Will you never take a look at yourself, you complete madman? Will you never think about your actions or your words? Don't you know exile is a penalty for crimes? That journey of mine happened because of the outstanding things I'd done.

SECTION 31

You claim to lead all the criminals and people who defy the gods. The laws mean them to be exiles. They are exiles even if they haven't moved. All the laws order you to be an exile; <won't you be one? Shouldn't we> call a man an exile if he's been carrying a weapon? Your dagger was found before the Senate. If he's killed a person? You've killed a great many. If he's started a fire? You burned down the Nymphs' temple yourself. If he's occupied temples? You made the Forum your camp.

SECTION 32

Why go through the laws that apply to everyone? Every one of them makes you an exile. Your closest friend passed a law aimed specifically at you: if you had entered the Good Goddess's secret sanctuary, you had to go into exile. And you're forever boasting that you did exactly that. With so many laws banishing you, how can you hear the word "exile" without shuddering? He says, "I'm in Rome." Yes, and you were in the secret sanctuary too. Simply being somewhere doesn't give you the right to be there when the law says you shouldn't be.

Paradox 5



Paradox V

The wise alone are free; every foolish person is enslaved.

[All wise people have freedom, and all foolish people are slaves.]

SECTION 33

CHAPTER 1

Go on, praise this man as a commander! Call him one, or decide he deserves the name! How can he command anyone who's free when he can't control his own cravings? First he should put a bridle on his sexual urges, reject pleasures, hold his temper, check his greed, and get rid of his other mental faults. Then he can start giving orders, once he himself has stopped taking orders from those worst of masters, disgrace and moral ugliness. While he's obeying them, he shouldn't be regarded as a commander—or even as free at all. The most learned men have made this point very well. I wouldn't rely on their authority if I had to speak to an uncultivated audience. But I'm speaking to people with excellent judgment who have heard these ideas. Why pretend any work I've put into these studies was wasted? As those highly educated men have said, wisdom is the only way anyone can be free.

SECTION 34

What does freedom mean? Being able to live the way you want. Who can do that except someone who lives rightly? He likes doing his duty and has thought ahead about the course his life should take. He doesn't follow even the laws because he's scared of them. He respects and follows them because he judges that course best for his well-being. Everything he says, does, and even thinks is freely and willingly chosen. His decisions and actions all start with himself and come back to himself. Nothing counts for more with him than what he himself chooses and judges. Even Fortune, supposedly the most powerful force there is, gives way before him. As the wise poet said, "Each person's character shapes her for him." So the wise person alone has this advantage: he never acts against his wishes, in distress, or under pressure.

SECTION 35

It takes a longer argument to establish that this is true. But here's a short point you have to admit: unless someone is like that, he isn't free. So all bad people are slaves. The claim sounds stranger and more surprising than the reality behind it. Those thinkers aren't saying bad people are slaves in the legal sense, like human property that has passed to owners through debt bondage or another rule of civil law. But what is slavery? It is obedience by a crushed, degraded mind that has lost its own power of choice. Who can deny, then, that every unstable person, everyone driven by desire—in fact every bad person—is a slave?

SECTION 36

CHAPTER 2

Should I count him free when a woman gives him orders? She sets rules, lays down instructions, commands and forbids whatever she likes. He can't say no to anything she orders and doesn't dare refuse. If she asks for something, he has to hand it over. If she calls, he has to arrive. If she throws him out, he has to go. If she threatens him, he has to shake with fear. I'd call him not merely a slave but a worthless one, even if he comes from the most distinguished family. People who get far too much enjoyment from statues, pictures, decorated silver,

Corinthian pieces, and magnificent buildings are every bit as foolish. Someone says, "But we're the community's leading men." You don't even lead your fellow slaves.

SECTION 37

In a big household, some slaves fancy themselves better turned out, though they're still slaves. Hall stewards, for instance. The ones who handle those objects, wipe and oil them, sweep and sprinkle, don't occupy a particularly honored place among the slaves. In just the same way, people who give themselves over to a craving for these things rank almost at the bottom of slavery in our community. Someone says, "I've fought major wars. I've held great military commands and governed great provinces." Then display a mind worth praising. Aetion's painting leaves you staring blankly, or a statue by Polyclitus does. Never mind where you took it from or how you got hold of it. When I see you stare, marvel, and shout with delight, I judge you enslaved to every kind of nonsense.

SECTION 38

"So aren't those things charming?" Yes, they are. Our eyes have been educated too. But please, let their charm make them children's amusements, not shackles on adult men. What do you think Lucius Mummius would have made of one of these men handling a little Corinthian chamber pot with desperate longing? He himself had thought nothing of all Corinth. Would he have seen an outstanding citizen or a hall steward looking after things carefully? Bring Manius Curius back to life, or any of those men whose farms and houses contained nothing splendid or decorated except themselves. Let him see a man who has enjoyed the highest honors the people can give, fishing small bearded mullets out of a pond, stroking them, and bragging about all his moray eels. Wouldn't he think the fellow such a slave that he couldn't be trusted with any larger responsibility even in a slave household?

SECTION 39

Can we doubt the slavery of people who want a private purse so badly that they'll accept every condition of the harshest slavery? What unfair treatment won't the hope of inheriting money put up with? What sign from a rich old

man without children won't it watch for? It says what he wants to hear, does anything it's told, tags along, sits by him, and brings gifts. Does any of that mark a free man?

SECTION 40

CHAPTER 3

Does it mark even a slave who isn't worthless? Then consider the supposedly more respectable craving: wanting public honors, military commands, and provinces. What a cruel, overbearing, forceful mistress! It made people who considered themselves the grandest of men serve Cethegus, a man with a far from spotless reputation. They had to send gifts, come to his house at night, appeal to him, and finally beg. If you can call that freedom, what would slavery be? And suppose desire's rule ends and another master takes over: fear, produced by knowing you've done wrong. What a miserable, cruel enslavement that is! You have to serve rather talkative young men. Anyone who seems to know something frightens you like a master. Think of a judge's power and the terror he causes the guilty! Doesn't every fear amount to slavery?

SECTION 41

Then what does that speech by the wonderfully eloquent Lucius Crassus amount to? It has more words than wisdom: "Pull us out of slavery." What slavery threatens a man with such standing and such noble birth? Every fearful impulse in a weak, low, broken mind is slavery. "Don't let us be anyone's slaves." Does he want his freedom? Not at all. Look at what he adds: "Except all of you as a body." He wants a different master, not freedom. "You, whom we're both able and obliged to serve." But if our minds are great and high and heaped with virtues, we are neither obliged nor able to be slaves. Say you're able, since clearly you are. Don't say you're obliged. Nobody owes anything unless it would be disgraceful not to give it. That's enough about this. Let him work out how he can be a commander when reason and truth themselves establish that he isn't even free.

Paradox 6



Paradox VI

The wise alone have wealth.

[Wisdom is the only way to be rich.]

SECTION 42

CHAPTER 1

Why this arrogant showing off every time you talk about your money? You're the only rich man, are you? Immortal gods! Shouldn't I be glad I've heard a few things and learned something? The only rich man? What if you don't count as rich at all? What if you even count as poor? What do we understand by a rich man, anyway? Who gets that title? I'd say a man who owns enough to feel easily satisfied with a generous way of life, who isn't looking for, reaching for, or wishing for anything beyond it.

SECTION 43

It's your mind that has to find itself rich, not other people's chatter or the property you own. If your mind sees nothing missing, has no further concerns, and has had its fill of money—or is even just satisfied with it—then I'll agree it's rich. But what if your appetite for cash makes every kind of profit seem acceptable, even though your social rank rules out even respectable money-making? What if, day after day, you swindle, trick, demand, strike deals, take things, and

snatch them? If you strip our allies and rob the public treasury? If you can't even wait for friends to leave wills, but forge the wills yourself? Do those actions indicate plenty or a shortage?

SECTION 44

When we call someone rich, we usually mean his mind, not his money chest. Fill that chest as much as you like: if I still see emptiness in you, I won't call you rich. People judge how much wealth a person has by how much will satisfy him. Suppose a man has a daughter. He needs money. With two, he needs more; with more daughters, more still. Give him fifty, as Danaus supposedly had: all those marriage portions need a great deal of money. As I said earlier, the standard for wealth adjusts to each person's needs. So how can I describe someone as rich if, instead of many daughters, he has endless desires that could empty the largest fortune quickly? He feels short of money himself.

SECTION 45

Many people have heard your claim that you can't count as rich unless the returns on your own property can feed an army. Even the Roman people, drawing enormous tax revenues, have long struggled to do that. Set that goal and you'll never be rich until your property produces enough to keep six legions, plus substantial additional cavalry and infantry forces. You're already admitting you're not rich: so much is still missing before your wish can come true. You've never concealed this poverty—or rather, this state of destitution and begging.

SECTION 46

CHAPTER 2

We recognize that someone who makes money honestly through trading, working, or taking public contracts needs to earn. Now look at the teams of accusers and informers linked together in your house. Look at the wealthy, guilty defendants trying to buy a corrupt trial, with you running the affair again. Look at your deals over payment for defending cases, † the money you cut for yourself in candidates' alliances, the freedmen you send to the provinces to strip them through lending and robbery. Think back over the neighbors

you've driven out, the banditry in the countryside, the partnerships with slaves, freedmen, and clients, the properties without owners, the wealthy people outlawed, the towns ruined, the harvest you gathered under Sulla, the fake wills, all the people removed. Finally, think of everything on sale: an edict or decree, another person's decision or your own, the Forum, your home, speaking, keeping quiet. Wouldn't anyone take this as your admission that you need earnings? And if a person still needs to acquire more, who has ever truthfully described him as rich?

SECTION 47

Wealth benefits us by giving us plenty. To show you have plenty, you have to have enough to satisfy you and something beyond that. You'll never reach that point, so you'll never become rich at all. You think little of my money, and rightly. To the public it looks middling; to you, nonexistent; to me, an adequate amount. But I'll stop talking about myself and discuss the issue instead.

SECTION 48

If we have to assess and price these things, which deserves the higher value: the payment Pyrrhus offered Fabricius, or Fabricius's self-control in turning it down? The Samnites' gold, or Manius Curius's reply? The property Lucius Paullus left, or Africanus's generosity in handing his share to his brother Quintus Maximus? Surely those acts of the greatest virtue are worth more than those amounts of money. If we must count a man richest when he owns what's most valuable, how can anyone doubt that virtue is where wealth lies? We shouldn't put any property, any mass of silver or gold, above virtue in value.

SECTION 49

Immortal gods! People don't grasp how much income comes from thrift. I'm leaving that profit-hunter now and turning to big spenders. His estates bring in six hundred thousand sesterces; mine bring in a hundred thousand. He puts gold on his country-house ceilings and marble on the floors. His appetite for statues, paintings, furnishings, and clothes has no limit. His revenue isn't enough for his spending, or even for the interest he has to pay. Take the cost of my wants out of my small return, and I'll still have a surplus. So which man is

richer? The one with a shortfall or the one with a surplus? The one who needs more or the one who has plenty? The man whose larger holdings demand still more money to keep them up, or the one whose property can support itself?

SECTION 50

But why use myself? Perhaps I too have some share in the mistaken attitude of this age, thanks to our habits and our times. Let's stop always citing men like Curius and Luscinus. Was Manius Manilius, who lived in our fathers' time, really poor? He had a little house in the Carinae district and a farm in the Labican territory. Does having more make us richer than him? I wish it did! But how much money is enough depends on our living habits and upkeep, not on the assessed value of our possessions.

SECTION 51

Being without greed is a fortune. Not wanting to buy is a revenue stream. Being satisfied with your own possessions, though, is wealth of the greatest, most dependable kind. Clever property valuers set a high price on meadows and certain plots because that sort of holding can, so to speak, suffer very little damage. What price, then, should we put on virtue? Nobody can rob you of it by force or steal it secretly. A wreck at sea or a fire won't lose it for you. Neither storms nor disturbances in human affairs can alter it.

SECTION 52

Only people who have virtue are rich. They're the only ones who hold assets that are both productive and permanent. They're also the only ones with the defining mark of wealth: satisfaction with their own possessions. They find their present resources sufficient. They don't reach for more, don't need anything, don't feel anything is missing, and don't look for anything else. Dishonest, greedy people are different. Their holdings are insecure and left to chance. They're always reaching for more. Not one has yet turned up who found his possessions sufficient. We must consider them not simply short of wealth and plenty, but actually needy and poor.