

SPQR

On Old Age

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Complete machine-assisted Plain English translation made independently and directly from the Latin in separate source-only production passes, not from Musean or a historical English translation. Latin-source editorial review recorded.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

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GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

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Chapter 1



¹ “Titus, if I give some help or ease the worry
that now torments and troubles you, lodged in your heart,
will there be any reward?”

I can address you, Atticus, in the same lines used to address Flamininus by
“that man with little wealth, but full of loyalty,”
although I know for certain that, unlike Flamininus, you are not
“troubled like this, Titus, both night and day.”

For I know your self-control and steady temper. I understand that you brought
back from Athens not just your nickname, but also culture and good
judgment. Still, I suspect that the same things that deeply trouble me
sometimes trouble you too. Offering comfort for those troubles is a bigger
task and must wait for another time.

For now, though, I have decided to write something to you about old age,

² because I want to relieve both you and myself of this burden we share: old age,
which is either already pressing on us or certainly approaching. Of course, I
know for certain that you bear it, and will bear it, calmly and wisely, as you do
everything. But when I wanted to write something about old age, you came to
mind as someone worthy of a gift that we could both enjoy. Writing this book
was so pleasant for me that it not only wiped away all the troubles of old age

but even made old age easy and enjoyable. We can never praise philosophy enough. Anyone who follows its guidance can pass every stage of life without distress.

- ³ But I have said much about other subjects and will often speak about them again. This book I send you is about old age. I have given the whole discussion not to Tithonus, as Aristo of Ceos did—a mythical story would carry too little authority—but to Marcus Cato in his old age, to give the argument greater weight. I present Laelius and Scipio with him, expressing surprise that he bears old age so easily, and Cato answering them. If his discussion seems more learned than his own books usually are, put that down to Greek literature. We know that he studied it very eagerly in his old age. But why say more? Cato's own discussion will now explain my whole view of old age.

Chapter 2



⁴ Scipio: “Along with Gaius Laelius here, I often admire your outstanding and complete wisdom in everything, Marcus Cato. Most of all, I admire the fact that I have never noticed old age being a burden to you. Most old people find it so hateful that they say they carry a load heavier than Etna.”

Cato: “What surprises you, Scipio and Laelius, does not seem very difficult to me. For someone with no inner resources to live a good and happy life, every age is hard. But those who look within themselves for everything good cannot regard anything that nature inevitably brings as an evil. Old age is a leading example. Everyone hopes to reach it, yet complains about it once they have. That is how inconsistent and unreasonable foolishness is. They say it creeps up on them sooner than they expected. First, who forced them to expect something untrue? How does old age creep up on adulthood any faster than adulthood creeps up on childhood? And then, how would old age be less of a burden if they were in their eight-hundredth year instead of their eightieth? However long their past life had been, once it was gone it could offer no comfort to a foolish old age.”

⁵ “So if you regularly admire my wisdom—and I wish it deserved your opinion of it and the name I bear—I am wise in this respect: I follow nature, the best guide, and obey her as I would a god. Since she has arranged the other stages of life well, it is unlikely that she has neglected the last act like a careless play-

wright. Still, there had to be some final stage. Like the berries on trees and the crops of the earth, something had to ripen at the proper time and then, so to speak, shrivel and become ready to fall. A wise person must accept this calmly. What else is fighting against nature but fighting against the gods, as the Giants did?”

- ⁶ Laelius: “Cato, you would do us a great kindness—I can promise this for Scipio too—if we could learn from you well in advance how we can most easily bear the growing weight of age. After all, we hope to become old, and we certainly want to.”

Cato: “Certainly, Laelius. It is all the more worthwhile if both of you will enjoy it, as you say.”

Laelius: “We certainly want it, Cato, if it is no trouble. It is as though you have completed a long journey that we too must begin. We would like to know what it is like at your end of that road.”

Chapter 3



⁷ Cato: “I will do what I can, Laelius. I have often been present when people my own age complained. As the old proverb says, people of the same age most readily gather together. Two former consuls, Gaius Salinator and Spurius Albinus, were roughly as old as I was. They used to complain that they had lost the pleasures without which they thought life was no life at all. They also complained that people who once honored them now looked down on them. I thought their complaints had the wrong target. If age caused these problems, the same things would happen to me and to everyone else who is getting older. Yet I have known many people whose old age was free from complaint. They were not unhappy to be freed from the chains of desire, and their own people did not look down on them. The fault behind all complaints of this kind lies in character, not age. Old people who are self-controlled, easy to get along with, and considerate find old age bearable. But bad temper and unkindness make life difficult at any age.”

⁸ Laelius: “That is true, Cato. But someone might say that your influence, wealth, and standing make old age seem more bearable to you, and that many people cannot have those advantages.”

Cato: “You have a point, Laelius, but that does not explain everything. They tell a story about Themistocles arguing with someone from Seriphus. The man had said that Themistocles owed his distinction to his country’s glory, not his

own. Themistocles replied, ‘By Hercules, if I had been from Seriphus, I would never have become famous. But neither would you, if you had been from Athens.’ We can say the same about old age. In extreme poverty, old age cannot be easy even for a wise person. But for a foolish person, even great wealth cannot keep it from being a burden.”

- 9 “The best weapons for old age, Scipio and Laelius, are the study and practice of good conduct. Cultivated at every stage of life, they produce wonderful results once you have lived a long and full life. This is not only because they never abandon you, even at the very end of life—though that is certainly a great advantage—but also because knowing that you have lived well and remembering your many good actions brings the greatest pleasure.”

Chapter 4



¹⁰ “When I was young, I loved Quintus Fabius Maximus, who recaptured Tarentum, as though we were the same age, although he was old. His seriousness was softened by friendliness, and old age had not changed his character. When I first became close to him, he was not extremely old, but he was already well along in years. His first consulship came the year after I was born. During his fourth consulship, I went to Capua as a very young soldier under his command, and five years later I went to Tarentum. Four years after that, I became quaestor. I held that office when Tuditanus and Cethegus were consuls. By then he was very old, but he spoke in support of the Cincian law on gifts and presents. Even at an advanced age, he fought wars like a young man. His patience wore down Hannibal, who was bursting with youthful confidence. Our friend Ennius wrote these fine lines about him:

‘One man saved our state by delaying;
He did not put public gossip ahead of our safety;
So now his glory shines brighter and brighter.’”

¹¹ “And what watchfulness and planning he showed in recapturing Tarentum! Salinator had lost the town and escaped into the citadel. I was there when he boasted to him, ‘It was through my efforts, Quintus Fabius, that you recaptured Tarentum.’ He laughed and replied, ‘Certainly. If you had not lost it, I could never have recaptured it.’ He was just as outstanding in civilian life as in

war. During his second consulship, while his colleague Spurius Carvilius did nothing, he resisted Gaius Flaminius as far as he could. Flaminius, a tribune of the people, was dividing the Picentine and Gallic territory into individual allotments against the Senate's wishes. And as an augur, he dared to say that whatever was done to keep the state safe was done under the best omens. Anything directed against the state went against the omens."

- 12 "I saw many outstanding qualities in that man. The most remarkable was his response to losing his son, a man of distinction who had himself held the consulship. His funeral speech is still available. Reading it makes us look down on every philosopher. He was great not only in public, before the eyes of his fellow citizens. He was even more remarkable in the privacy of his home. What conversation! What advice! How much he knew about the past and the rules governing augury! For a Roman, he was also very well read. He remembered everything, not just wars at home but foreign wars too. I listened eagerly to his conversation, as though I already foresaw what did happen: once he died, no one would be left for me to learn from."

Chapter 5



¹³ “Why have I said so much about Fabius Maximus? Because you surely see that it would be outrageous to call an old age like his miserable. Still, not everyone can be a Scipio or a Fabius Maximus, able to look back on captured cities, battles on land or sea, wars they commanded, and triumphs. A life lived quietly, honestly, and with good taste can also lead to a peaceful, gentle old age. We are told that Plato had that kind of old age. He died while writing, in his eighty-first year. Isocrates also had a peaceful old age. He says he wrote the book called *Panathenaicus* in his ninety-fourth year, and he lived another five years after that. His teacher, Gorgias of Leontini, lived to be a hundred and seven. He never stopped studying and working. When someone asked why he wanted to stay alive so long, he said, ‘I have no complaint to make against old age.’”

¹⁴ “An excellent answer, worthy of an educated man!
“Foolish people blame old age for their own faults and failings. Ennius, whom I mentioned just now, did not do that:

‘Like a strong horse that often won at Olympia in the final stretch,
Now worn out by age, he rests.’

He compares his own old age to that of a strong, winning horse. You can certainly remember him well. Titus Flamininus and Manius Acilius, the consuls this year, entered office in the nineteenth year following his death. He died when Caepio and Philippus were consuls, Philippus for the second time. I had

just spoken in support of the Voconian law, at the age of sixty-five, with a loud voice and strong lungs. At seventy—that was how long Ennius lived—he bore the two burdens people think heaviest, poverty and old age, so well that he almost seemed to enjoy them.”

Chapter 6



15 “When I think the matter over, I find four reasons why old age seems miserable. First, it takes us away from active work. Second, it weakens the body. Third, it takes away almost every pleasure. Fourth, it is close to death. If you agree, let us examine each reason and see how much weight it carries and how fair it is.

“Old age takes us away from active work. What work? The kind that needs youth and physical strength? Are there no tasks suited to older people, tasks managed by thought and intelligence even when the body is weak? Was Quintus Fabius Maximus doing nothing, then? Was Lucius Paulus, your father and the father-in-law of my excellent son, doing nothing? And what about other old men, men like Fabricius, Curius, and Coruncanus? Were they doing nothing when they defended the state through their advice and authority?

“Besides being old, Appius Claudius was blind;”

16 “yet when the Senate began favoring a peace agreement and treaty with Pyrrhus, he readily spoke the words Ennius put into verse:

‘Where have your minds, once steady and straight,
Turned aside onto a path of madness?’

The rest was just as forceful. You know the poem, and Appius’s own speech also survives. He did this seventeen years after his second consulship. Ten years had passed between his two consulships, and he had been censor before his

first. This shows that he must have been very old during the war with Pyrrhus. Still, that is the account handed down to us by our fathers.”

- 17 “So people who say that old age takes no part in active work have no case. They are like someone who says that a ship’s pilot does nothing during a voyage because others climb the masts, run along the decks, or pump out the bilge, while he sits quietly at the stern holding the tiller. The pilot’s job is different from the young men’s work. It is much more important and valuable. Great achievements do not depend on strength, speed, or quick movements of the body. They depend on planning, authority, and judgment. Old age usually does not lose these qualities. It gains more of them.”
- 18 “Unless, perhaps, you think I am doing nothing now because I no longer fight wars, although I have served in all kinds of wars as a soldier, military tribune, senior officer, and consul. But I tell the Senate what needs to be done and how to do it. I give Carthage plenty of advance warning of war. It has been plotting harm for a long time, and I will not stop fearing it until I know it has been destroyed. May the immortal gods reserve that victory,”
- 19 “Scipio, for you, so that you can finish the work your grandfather left unfinished. This is the thirty-third year since his death, but every year to come will preserve his memory. He died the year before I became censor, nine years after my consulship. He had been elected to his second consulship while I was consul. Suppose he had reached a hundred. Would being old have made him unhappy? His work would not have depended on running, jumping, hurling spears, or using swords in close combat. He would have relied on planning, reasoning, and judgment. These qualities in old men explain why our ancestors named their supreme council the Senate. In Sparta, those”

20 “who hold the highest office are called old men, which is what they are. If you choose to read or hear about foreign nations, you will find that young men have undermined the greatest states, while old men have supported and restored them.

‘Tell me, how did you lose your great state so quickly?’

That is the question asked in the poet Naevius’s *The Wolf*. Among the answers, this one stands out:

‘New speakers were coming forward, foolish young men.’

Clearly, recklessness belongs to youth, and sound judgment to old age.”

Chapter 7



- ²¹ “‘But memory gets weaker.’ I agree, if you do not exercise it, or if your mind is naturally slow. Themistocles knew the names of all his fellow citizens. Do you think that when he grew older, he used to greet Aristides as Lysimachus? I know not only the people alive today but their fathers and grandfathers too. When I read gravestone inscriptions, I am not afraid of losing my memory, as people say you will. Reading those very inscriptions brings the dead back to my mind. No old person I have ever heard of forgot the hiding place of buried treasure. People remember everything they care about: their court dates, money due to them, and debts they must pay.”
- ²² “What about elderly legal experts, priests, augurs, and philosophers? How much they remember! Older people keep their mental abilities, provided they keep their interest and work at them. This applies not only to famous and respected men but also to ordinary people living quietly, out of public life. Even at a very great age, Sophocles kept writing tragedies. His sons believed his devotion to writing was making him neglect the family property, so they took him to court. Under our custom, fathers who mismanage their property can be barred from controlling it. In the same way, his sons wanted the judges to remove him from managing the family property as mentally unfit. The old man

is said to have read the judges the play he was working on and had recently written, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and asked whether they thought that poem was the work of someone who had lost his mind,”

23 “and after he had read it, the judges voted to clear him. Did old age force him to stop his work? Did it silence Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, or Stesichorus? What about Isocrates and Gorgias, whom I mentioned earlier? Or those leading philosophers, Pythagoras and Democritus? Or Plato and Xenocrates, or later Zeno and Cleanthes? And did age silence Diogenes, the Stoic you yourselves once saw in Rome? Or did all of them keep working at their studies for as long as they lived?”

24 “But let us leave these godlike pursuits aside. I can name Roman farmers in the Sabine countryside, neighbors and friends of mine, without whose presence hardly any major work on the land is done, whether planting, gathering, or storing crops. This is less surprising with other kinds of work. However old they are, everyone thinks they might live for one more year. But these same men also work hard at things they know will do them no good at all:

‘He plants trees to benefit another generation,’
as our Statius says in his *Synephebi*.”

Chapter 8



- 25 “And however old a farmer is, he has no hesitation when someone asks whom he is planting for. He answers, ‘For the immortal gods. The gods wanted me to take these things from earlier generations and then pass them on to later ones.’
“Caecilius writes better about the old man who looks ahead to another generation than he does in these lines:
‘By Pollux, old age, even if you bring no other trouble with you when you arrive, this one thing is enough: a long life makes you see many things you do not want to see.’
And perhaps many things you do want to see. Young people, too, often encounter things they do not want. The same Caecilius is still more mistaken here:
‘But I think the saddest part of old age is this: to feel at that age that someone else dislikes you.’
Liked, rather than disliked!”
- 26 “Wise old men enjoy young people of good character. Old age becomes easier for those whom the young respect and love. In the same way, young people welcome advice from older men that guides them toward virtue. I can see that you enjoy my company no less than I enjoy yours. But you see that old age is not weak and idle. It is hardworking, always doing something and making plans. These activities naturally follow the interests each person had earlier in life.

What about those who even keep learning something new? We see Solon proudly saying in his verses that he is growing old while learning something every day. I did that too: I learned Greek in my old age. I took it up as eagerly as someone trying to satisfy a long thirst, so that I could become familiar with the very examples you now see me using. When I heard that Socrates had done this with the lyre, I would certainly have liked to do that too. People in earlier times did learn to play the lyre. But at least I worked hard at literature.”

Chapter 9



²⁷ “Even now, I do not miss a young man’s strength—this was the second complaint about old age—any more than I missed the strength of a bull or an elephant when I was young. The right thing is to use whatever strength you have, and to do everything within your powers. What remark could deserve more contempt than the one made by Milo of Croton? When he was already old and saw athletes training on the track, he is said to have looked at his arms and said through his tears, ‘But these are dead now.’ It is not so much those arms that are dead as you yourself, you fool! Your fame never came from your own worth, but from your chest and arms. Sextus Aelius never said anything like that. Neither did Tiberius Coruncanius many years before him, nor Publius Crassus just recently. They gave their fellow citizens legal advice, and their expert knowledge lasted right up to their final breath.”

²⁸ “I do worry that old age may weaken a public speaker. His work calls not only for mental ability but also for strong lungs and physical strength. Yet somehow the ringing quality of the voice actually stands out in old age. I certainly have not lost it yet, and you can see how old I am. Still, a quiet, relaxed style of speaking suits an old man. The calm and gentle speech of an articulate older man often wins an attentive audience by itself. Even if you can no longer deliver such a speech yourself, you can still teach Scipio and Laelius how to do it. What could be more enjoyable than old age surrounded by devoted young people?”

- 29 “Are we denying old age even the strength to teach young people, train them, and prepare them for every duty? What work could be finer than that? I thought Gnaeus and Publius Scipio were fortunate to have groups of distinguished young men around them. So were your two grandfathers, Lucius Aemilius and Publius Africanus. We should consider all teachers of worthwhile skills happy, even if their strength has declined with age and failed them. “Yet this loss of strength is more often caused by the bad habits of youth than by old age. A youth spent in uncontrolled pleasure and excess hands old age an exhausted body.”
- 30 “In Xenophon, Cyrus says in the speech he made as he was dying, when he was very old, that he had never felt himself weaker in old age than he had been in youth. I remember Lucius Metellus from my boyhood. He became chief priest four years after his second consulship and held that priesthood for twenty-two years. His strength was so good at the very end of his life that he felt no need for youth. There is no need for me to say anything about myself, though that is an old man’s habit and is allowed at our age.”

Chapter 10



- ³¹ “Notice how often Nestor talks about his own brave deeds in Homer. He was seeing his third generation of people. When he told the truth about himself, he had no need to worry that he might sound too proud or talk too much. Homer says that words sweeter than honey flowed from his tongue. That sweetness needed no physical power. Yet the Greek commander never asks to have ten men like Ajax. He asks for ten like Nestor. If he gets them, he is sure Troy will soon be destroyed.”
- ³² “But let me speak about myself again. I am now in my eighty-fourth year. I wish I could claim what Cyrus did. I can at least say this, though. I am not as strong as when I served in the Punic War, first as a soldier and then as quaestor, or when I was consul in Spain. Nor am I as strong as four years after that, when I fought at Thermopylae as a military tribune during Manius Glabrio’s consulship. Even so, you can see that getting old has not drained all my energy or knocked me down. I have enough strength for the Senate and the speakers’ platform, for my friends, my clients, and my guests. I have never accepted that familiar, much-admired proverb: become old early if you want a long old age. I would prefer fewer years of old age to becoming old before my time. So far, nobody wanting to see me has found that I was too busy for them.”

33 “Still, either of you is stronger than I am. Well, neither of you is as strong as Titus Pontius the centurion. Does that make him a better man? We only need to manage our energy and exert ourselves within our abilities. Then we will not greatly miss having more strength. People say Milo took an ox onto his shoulders and walked the length of the stadium at Olympia. Would you rather have that bodily power or the mental power of Pythagoras? In short, make use of strength while you have it. Once it is gone, do not wish it back. Otherwise young people should wish to be children again, and people a little older should wish to be young. Life follows a definite course. Nature has a single, straightforward road, and each stage has its proper season. Children’s weakness, young people’s boldness, the seriousness of settled adulthood, and the maturity of old age all have a natural quality we should enjoy at the right time.”

Chapter 11



³⁴ “Scipio, I suppose you hear about what Masinissa does today, at ninety. The friendship between your families goes back to your grandfather. If he starts a journey on foot, he does not get on a horse at any point. If he starts on horseback, he does not get off. No rain or cold can make him cover his head. His body is exceptionally lean and tough. This lets him carry out all a king’s responsibilities and tasks. So exercise and self-control can keep some of our earlier strength even when we are old.

“Suppose there is no strength in old age. Strength is not even required of it. Our laws and customs release people our age from jobs that cannot be done without physical strength. We are not forced to do what is beyond us. We are not even forced to do everything still within our powers.”

³⁵ “But plenty of old people are so weak that they cannot fulfill any duty or do any of life’s tasks at all. That problem is not specific to age. It comes with poor health at any age. Think how weak the son of Publius Africanus was—the man who adopted you. His health was so frail that he almost had none. Without that weakness, he would have become another great light for our country. Besides his father’s greatness of spirit, he had a fuller education. Why be surprised, then, if older people are sometimes weak, when even young people cannot avoid it?

“Laelius and Scipio, we have to stand up to old age and work carefully to offset its disadvantages. We should fight it as we fight an illness. We must look after our health,”

36 “exercise in moderation, and eat and drink enough to restore our energy without weighing ourselves down. But care for the body is not enough. Our mind and spirit need much more care. They too die out as we age unless we keep feeding them, like adding oil to a lamp. Bodies grow sluggish when exercise tires them, but exercising makes minds more alert. The people Caecilius calls the foolish old men of comedy are the gullible, forgetful, irresponsible ones. Those are not the faults of age itself. They belong to an idle, lazy, sleepy old age. Rudeness and uncontrolled desire occur more in youth than in old age, but not in all young people, only those with bad characters. In the same way, the foolishness people commonly call dotage belongs to old men who lack good judgment, not to every old man.”

37 “Appius was old and blind, but he managed four strong sons, five daughters, an enormous household, and a large body of clients. He kept his mind taut, like a bowstring. He did not lose heart and give in to age. He kept not just his family’s respect but his power to direct them. The slaves were afraid of him. His children treated him with reverence. They all loved him. The old family customs and discipline were strong in that home.”

38 “Old age earns honor by defending itself and keeping its rights. It must not place itself under someone else’s control, and it must remain in charge of its household until its last breath. I like a young person who has some qualities of age, and an old person who has some qualities of youth. Someone who follows that rule may grow old physically, but will never grow old in spirit.

“The seventh book of my *Origins* is on my desk. I gather every record of the past. Right now I am writing up my speeches in all the important cases I have defended. I work on the law of augury, priestly law, and civil law. I also make extensive use of Greek literature. To train my memory, I follow the Pythagorean practice of going over each evening what I said, heard, and did

that day. That is how I train my abilities and put my mind through its paces. Working hard at these things, I do not much miss physical strength. I help my friends and attend Senate meetings regularly. Without waiting to be asked, I raise matters I have thought about at length and defend my views with mental rather than physical energy. Even if I could not do these things, I would enjoy lying on my couch and thinking about the activities I could no longer carry out. But it is my earlier life that allows me to keep doing them. Someone who has always lived with these interests and tasks does not notice when age starts to creep in. Life grows old so slowly that we do not feel it. It does not break suddenly, but goes out over time.”

Chapter 12



- ³⁹ “Now comes the third criticism: people say that old age has no pleasures. What a wonderful gift from our years, if they remove the worst fault of youth! My excellent young friends, listen to a speech from long ago by Archytas of Tarentum, one of the greatest and most remarkable men. I heard it passed down when I was a young man at Tarentum with Quintus Fabius Maximus. He said that nature had given human beings no more deadly danger than bodily pleasure. The greedy cravings for it drive people recklessly, without any restraint, toward getting it.”
- ⁴⁰ “He said it gave rise to betraying one’s country, overthrowing states, and secretly dealing with enemies. In short, the desire for pleasure could push people into any crime or evil action. Sexual misconduct, adultery, and every disgrace of that kind had no other attraction behind them but pleasure. Whether it was nature or some god that gave us our minds, nothing better had been given to human beings. And nothing was more hostile to this divine gift than pleasure.”
- ⁴¹ “When desire is in control, there is no room for restraint. Where pleasure rules, good character cannot survive at all.

“To make his point clearer, he asked people to imagine someone experiencing the most intense bodily pleasure possible. He thought nobody would doubt that while enjoying it the person could not think anything through or reach any result by reasoning or reflection. Nothing, then, was more hateful or destructive than pleasure. In a strong and prolonged form, it put out every light in the mind. Nearchus of Tarentum, our family friend who had stayed loyal to the Roman people, said he had heard the following account from older men. Archytas had said this to Gaius Pontius the Samnite. It was Pontius’s son who won at Caudium against Spurius Postumius and Titus Veturius, the two consuls. Plato of Athens was also present for the conversation. My research shows that he came to Tarentum when Lucius Camillus and Appius Claudius were consuls.”

42 “Why am I telling you this? So you understand how grateful we should be to old age if our own reason and wisdom cannot make us reject pleasure. It stops us wanting what we ought not want. Pleasure gets in the way of good decisions. It works against reason and, so to speak, blinds the mind’s eyes. It has nothing to do with virtue.

“I was unwilling to expel Lucius Flamininus, the brother of the very brave Titus Flamininus, from the Senate seven years after he had been consul. But I decided that his uncontrolled desire deserved an official mark of disgrace. When he was consul in Gaul, a prostitute persuaded him at a dinner to have one of the prisoners beheaded. The prisoner was under sentence of death for a capital crime. He went unpunished in the censorship of his brother Titus, the censor just before me. Flaccus and I, however, could not possibly accept such shameful, ruinous desire. It brought disgrace on his command as well as shame on his private life.”

Chapter 13



⁴³ “I have often heard older men tell a story they themselves had heard from old men when they were boys. Gaius Fabricius used to express his amazement at something he had heard while serving as an envoy to King Pyrrhus. Cineas of Thessaly had told him that there was a man in Athens who called himself a philosopher and said that everything we did should be judged by the pleasure it brought. When Manius Curius and Tiberius Coruncanius heard this from Fabricius, they hoped that Pyrrhus himself and the Samnites would come to accept the idea. They would be easier to defeat once they gave themselves over to pleasure. Manius Curius had lived at the same time as Publius Decius, who had sacrificed his life for his country during his fourth term as consul, five years before Curius became consul. Fabricius and Coruncanius had known Decius too. Their own lives, as well as the deed of this Decius I am speaking of, convinced them that something truly noble and splendid exists by nature. It deserves to be sought for its own sake, and the best people pursue it while rejecting pleasure and treating it as unimportant.”

⁴⁴ “Why, then, have I said so much about pleasure? Because old age deserves not blame but the highest praise for having no strong desire for pleasures. It goes without feasts, heavily loaded tables, and cup after cup of wine. So it also goes without drunkenness, indigestion, and sleepless nights. Still, perhaps we must make some allowance for pleasure, since its charms are hard to resist. Plato was

wonderfully right to call pleasure the bait of evil: people are caught by it just as fish are caught by bait. Although old age goes without excessive feasting, it can still enjoy modest dinner parties. When I was a boy, I repeatedly watched the elderly Gaius Duilius on his way home from dinner. He was Marcus's son and the first to beat a Carthaginian fleet. He enjoyed having a wax torch and a flute player accompany him. Although he held no public office at the time, he had adopted this practice without any precedent. His glory gave him that much freedom."

- 45 "But why am I talking about other people? Let me return to myself. To begin with, I have always had companions to dine with. These dining societies were founded when I was quaestor, after we adopted the rites of the Great Mother from Mount Ida. So I used to dine with my companions, quite moderately, though there was still some of the warmth of youth about it. As we grow older, everything becomes gentler day by day. Even then, I measured my enjoyment of these dinners less by bodily pleasures than by the gathering of friends and their conversation. Our ancestors gave a good name to friends gathering around a dinner table. Because it brought people together in a shared life, they called it a 'living together.' That is better than the Greek names for the same thing, 'drinking together' or 'eating together.' Those names make the Greeks seem to value most what matters least on such occasions."

Chapter 14



⁴⁶ “For my part, I enjoy even dinners that begin early, because I enjoy the conversation. My dinner companions include you and other people of your generation, as well as the few survivors of my own. Getting old has given me much to be grateful for. It has increased my appetite for conversation and taken away my appetite for food and drink. Still, suppose someone continues to enjoy those things. I do not want to seem to have declared total war on pleasure, which may have a natural limit of its own. I see no reason to think old age has lost all feeling even for these pleasures. I myself enjoy the custom our ancestors established of choosing someone to direct the drinking. I enjoy the conversation that, following their custom, begins with the person in the highest place as the cup goes around. I also enjoy small cups that sprinkle us with a little wine, as Xenophon describes in his Symposium, and coolness in summer, and, in their turn, sunshine or a fire in winter. I regularly seek these pleasures even in the Sabine country. Every day I fill out a dinner party with my neighbors, and we keep it going far into the night with as much varied conversation as we can.”

⁴⁷ “‘But pleasures do not give old people the same sort of tingle.’ I agree. But neither do old people feel the same longing for them. And nothing you do not miss can trouble you by its absence. Sophocles gave a good answer when someone asked him, in his advanced old age, whether he still enjoyed sex. ‘The gods spare me that!’ was his reply. ‘I got away from it as one gets free of a harsh and

furious master.’ People who crave such things may find it hateful and distressing to go without them. But for people who have had their fill, going without is more pleasant than taking part. Strictly speaking, someone who does not want something is not deprived of it. So my point is that not wanting it is more pleasant.”

48 “Even if people in their prime enjoy these very pleasures more eagerly, first, as I have said, the things they enjoy are of little importance. Second, they are pleasures that old age does not entirely lack, even if it does not have them in abundance. Someone watching Ambivius Turpio from the front rows of the theater enjoys him more, but someone in the back rows enjoys him too. In the same way, youth may take greater delight in pleasures because it sees them close up. But old age, watching them from a distance, also enjoys them—as much as it needs.”

49 “And how valuable these other things are! The mind has, so to speak, finished its military service under sexual desire, ambition, rivalries, feuds, and every kind of craving. It can be with itself and, as the saying goes, live with itself. If it also has study and learning to feed on, nothing is more pleasant than an old age free from public duties. Scipio, we used to see Gallus, your father’s friend, absorbed in his efforts to measure almost the whole of heaven and earth. How often daylight caught him still working on a diagram he had begun at night! How often night overtook him at work he had started in the morning! How he enjoyed telling us about eclipses of the sun and moon long before they happened!”

50 “And what about studies that are less serious but still call for a sharp mind? How Naevius enjoyed his Punic War! How Plautus enjoyed his Truculentus and his Pseudolus! I also saw Livius in his later years. A play of his had been staged six years before my birth, when Cento and Tuditanus were consuls, and he lived on into my youth.

“Why should I speak of Publius Licinius Crassus and his devotion to religious and civil law? Or of this Publius Scipio, who became chief priest just a few days ago? We saw all the men I have mentioned still burning with enthusiasm for

these studies in their old age. And Marcus Cethegus, whom Ennius rightly called ‘the heart of Persuasion’—how eagerly we saw him practice public speaking even when he was old! What pleasures from feasts, public shows, or prostitutes can compare with these pleasures? These are the pleasures of learning. In sensible, well-educated people, they grow along with age. So there is something noble in that little verse of Solon’s which I mentioned earlier. He says that he grows old learning many new things every day. Surely no pleasure of the mind can be greater than that.”

Chapter 15



- 51 “I turn now to the pleasures of farming, which give me an incredible amount of enjoyment. No degree of old age prevents them, and they seem to me to come very close to the life of a wise person. Farmers deal with the earth, which never refuses their commands and never returns what it has received without interest. Sometimes the interest is smaller, but usually it is larger. Yet it is not just the harvest that delights me. I also enjoy the power and nature of the earth itself. When its lap has been softened and worked, it receives the scattered seed. First it holds the seed hidden out of sight. This hiding gives the Latin word for harrowing its name, since harrowing does this work. Then the earth warms the seed with its heat and pressure, opens it up, and draws green growth out of it. Supported by its root fibers, this growth gradually develops. It rises on a jointed stalk and is enclosed in sheaths, as if it were coming into its youth. Once it emerges from them, it produces grain arranged in the orderly rows of an ear. A fence of bristles protects it against the pecking of smaller birds.”
- 52 “Why should I describe how vines start, how they are planted, and how they grow? I can never get enough of this pleasure, and I want you to understand what gives my old age rest and enjoyment. I pass over the sheer power of everything that grows from the earth. From a tiny fig seed, a grape seed, or the very small seeds of other crops and plants, it produces such great trunks and branches. Cuttings with a piece of old wood attached, young plants, vine shoots,

rooted cuttings, and layered shoots—surely these can fill anyone with wonder and delight? A vine naturally tends to fall and sinks to the ground unless it has support. Yet to raise itself, it wraps its tendrils like hands around whatever it finds. As it creeps along, twisting and wandering in many directions, the farmer’s skill checks it by cutting it back with a knife. This keeps it from growing wild with shoots and spreading too far in every direction.”

- 53 “So, at the beginning of spring, something called a bud appears on the shoots that have been left, at what we might call their joints. From this bud the developing grape cluster shows itself. Fed by moisture from the earth and warmth from the sun, it grows. At first it tastes very sour; then, as it ripens, it becomes sweet. Covered by vine leaves, it receives enough warmth while being protected from the sun’s excessive heat. What could be more delightful to eat or more beautiful to look at?

“As I said before, it is not just the vine’s usefulness that delights me. I also enjoy its cultivation and its very nature: the rows of supports, the crossbars joining their tops, the tying up and layering of the vines, and the pruning I mentioned, in which some shoots are cut away and others are allowed to grow.

“Why should I describe irrigation, digging the soil, and digging it over again, which make the earth much more productive? Why speak of the value of spreading manure? I discussed it in the book I wrote about farming.”

- 54 “Learned Hesiod did not say a single word about this when he wrote about cultivating the land. But Homer, who I think lived many centuries earlier, presents Laertes easing his longing for his son by working the land and spreading manure on it. And it is not just grainfields, meadows, vineyards, and trees trained with vines that make country life delightful. There are also gardens and orchards, grazing flocks, swarms of bees, and flowers of every kind. Nor is planting the only pleasure. There is also grafting, the cleverest practice farming has discovered.”

Chapter 16



- 55 “I could describe many more pleasures of country life. But I realize that even what I have already said has gone on too long. You will forgive me. My enthusiasm for farming carried me away, and old age is naturally rather talkative. I would not want to seem to clear it of every fault. It was in this kind of life that Manius Curius spent his final years, after celebrating triumphs over the Samnites, the Sabines, and Pyrrhus. His farmhouse is not far from mine. Whenever I look at it, I cannot admire enough either the man’s own self-restraint or the standards of his time.”
- 56 “The Samnites once brought Curius a large amount of gold while he was sitting by his fireplace. He turned them away. He said that what he considered glorious was not owning gold, but ruling over people who owned it. Could a spirit as great as his have failed to make old age happy?
- “But let me return to farmers, so that I do not stray from my own experience. In those days senators—that is, old men—lived on their farms. Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was plowing when he was told that he had been appointed dictator. It was on this dictator’s orders that Gaius Servilius Ahala, his cavalry commander, caught Spurius Maelius before he could act and killed him for trying to make himself king. Curius and the other old men were summoned from their farms to the Senate. That is why the messengers who summoned them were called ‘travelers.’ Was old age miserable, then, for these men

who enjoyed farming? In my opinion, there may be no happier kind of old age. There is the duty it fulfills, since farming benefits the whole human race. There is also the pleasure I have described, and the plentiful supply of everything needed to feed people and for religious worship too. Some people miss such comforts, so let us make peace with pleasure now. A good, attentive landowner always has his wine cellar, oil store, and pantry full. His whole farm is well stocked. There are pigs, young goats, lambs, chickens, milk, cheese, and honey in abundance. Farmers even call their garden a second supply of meat. Bird-catching and hunting in their spare time add further flavor to all this.”

- 57 “Why keep describing the meadows’ green color, the lines of trees, and how fine the vineyards and olive plantations look? I will cut it short. Nothing can be more productive or more beautiful than a well-farmed estate. Far from keeping us from enjoying it, old age actually invites and draws us to it. Where else can people of that age warm themselves better, either in the sun or by a fire? Or where can they cool themselves more healthfully in the shade or beside water? So let others keep their weapons,”
- 58 “their horses, their spears, their clubs and balls, their swimming and running. Out of all the games, let them leave us old men the knucklebones and dice. Even that can be as they please, since old age can be happy without them.”

Chapter 17



59 “Xenophon’s books are very useful for many purposes. Please keep reading them carefully, as you already do. How fully he praises farming in his book about managing a household, called *Oeconomicus*! To show you that he thought nothing was more suitable for a king than an interest in farming, consider a story Socrates tells Critobulus in that book. Cyrus the Younger, king of the Persians, was a man of outstanding intelligence and famous for his rule. Lysander of Sparta, a man of exceptional ability, came to visit him at Sardis and brought him gifts from the allies. Cyrus treated Lysander in a friendly and courteous way in every respect. He also showed him an enclosed piece of land that had been carefully planted. Lysander admired the tall trees, the straight rows arranged in a five-point pattern, the well-worked, weed-free soil, and the sweet scents drifting from the flowers. He said he admired not only the care but also the skill of the person who had measured and laid out the grounds. Cyrus answered, ‘But I measured all this myself. I arranged the rows and planned the layout. I even planted many of those trees with my own hand.’ Lysander looked at his purple robe, his well-groomed body, and his Persian ornaments with their plentiful gold and jewels. Then he said, ‘People are certainly right to call you happy, Cyrus, since good fortune has joined your excellence!’”

⁶⁰ “Old men can enjoy this good fortune too. Age does not stop us from keeping up our interests, especially farming, to the very end of old age. We are told that Marcus Valerius Corvinus lived to be a hundred. In his later years he lived on his land and farmed it. Forty-six years passed between his first and sixth terms as consul. So his career in public office lasted the full span of years that our ancestors thought came before a person entered old age. Compared with his middle years, his last years brought greater happiness in one way: more respect and less toil.”

⁶¹ “The crowning reward of old age is the respect it earns. How much respect Lucius Caecilius Metellus enjoyed! And how much Aulus Atilius Calatinus enjoyed! His epitaph says:

‘Many different peoples agree: this man
was his nation’s leading citizen.’

The whole poem carved on his tomb is well known. He rightly carried weight, since everyone agreed in praising him. Think of the impressive Publius Crassus we saw recently as chief priest! Later, Marcus Lepidus was just as impressive in that priestly office. Need I mention Paulus and Africanus, or return once more to Fabius Maximus? Their authority showed itself not just in their opinions but even in a nod. Old age, especially when honored, carries so much authority that it is worth more than all the pleasures of youth.”

Chapter 18



- ⁶² “But throughout this discussion, remember that I am praising an old age built on foundations laid in youth. This leads to something I once said with everyone’s strong approval: an old age that has to defend itself with words is a miserable one. Gray hair and wrinkles cannot suddenly win respect. Rather, an earlier life lived honorably earns respect as its final reward.”
- ⁶³ “The very things that seem minor and ordinary are marks of honor: being greeted, having people seek your company, being given the right of way, having others stand up for you, being escorted when you leave and when you return, and being asked for advice. These customs are observed both among us and in other states. The better a community’s standards, the more carefully it observes them. Lysander of Sparta, whom I just mentioned, is said to have often remarked that Sparta was the most honorable home for old age. Nowhere is so much importance given to age, and nowhere is old age more respected. There is even a story that an elderly man came into the theater during the games at Athens. Among the large audience, none of his fellow citizens gave him a seat. But he approached the Spartans, who were there as ambassadors and were sitting in a reserved area. They all stood up, we are told, and made room for the old man to sit down;”

⁶⁴ “and the whole audience responded with loud, repeated clapping. At that, one of the Spartans remarked, ‘The Athenians understand right conduct, but will not act on it.’

“Our college of augurs has many excellent customs. One of the best concerns the very matter we are discussing: the oldest member has the first right to give his opinion. Older augurs take precedence not only over those above them in official rank, but even over those who hold the power of command. How could any physical pleasure match the benefits that come with such authority? Men who have enjoyed these rewards with distinction seem to me to have played life’s drama through to the end, rather than collapsing in the final act like untrained actors.”

⁶⁵ “‘But old men are cranky, anxious, quick-tempered, and difficult.’ If we look into it, they are greedy too. But these are faults of character, not of old age. Still, irritability and the other faults I mentioned have some excuse—not a fair excuse, but one that may seem plausible. Old people think they are treated with contempt, looked down on, and made fun of. Besides, when the body is frail, every hurt is hard to bear. Yet good habits and education soften all these things. We can see this both in life and on the stage, in the brothers in *Adelphi*. How harsh one is, and how friendly the other! This is how things stand: just as not every wine turns sour with age, neither does every character. I approve of strictness in old age, but, as with other things, it should be moderate. I do not approve of bitterness at all. As for greed in old age, I cannot understand what purpose it serves.”

Chapter 19



⁶⁶ “Could anything be sillier than wanting more supplies for a journey when there is less road left to travel?

“One reason remains, the fourth. It seems to cause people our age the most anxiety: death is coming closer. It certainly cannot be far away when we are old. How unfortunate is an old man who has not learned in all those years that death is nothing to fear! If it destroys the soul completely, we should give it no thought at all. If it takes the soul somewhere it will live forever, we should actually want it. There is certainly no third option.”

⁶⁷ “So what should I be afraid of? After death I will either not suffer or will even be happy. Besides, who is foolish enough, however young, to be sure of surviving until tonight? In fact, young people face far more ways of dying than we do. They get sick more easily, are more seriously ill, and need more painful treatment. That is why few people become old. If things were different, people would live better and more wisely. Old people have intelligence, reasoning, and judgment. Without them, there would never have been any organized states at all.

“But back to the threat of death. Why blame old age for something you can see is just as true of youth?”

- 68 “Scipio, my very fine son taught me through his death that people of any age can die. Your brothers, who were expected to reach the highest positions, taught you the same thing. But a young person hopes to have many years ahead, and an old person cannot have that hope. It is a foolish hope. What could make less sense than treating doubtful things as certain, or false things as true? But an old person has nothing left even to hope for. Then he is better off than a young person. He has already achieved what the young person hopes for. One wants a long life. The other has had one.”
- 69 “And yet, good gods, what does a long time mean for a human being? Give us the longest possible life. Let us look forward to the age reached by the king of Tartessus. I read that a man called Arganthonius at Gades ruled for eighty years and lived for a hundred and twenty. But to me, nothing that comes to an end seems long-lasting. Once the end arrives, everything before it has slipped away. All that remains is what you gained by being good and doing right. Hours, days, months, and years go by. Lost time never comes back, and we cannot know what is next. We should each be satisfied with the amount of living time we are given.”
- 70 “An actor does not have to finish the whole play to please the audience. It is enough to be good in whatever act he appears in. Wise people likewise do not need to reach the final call for applause. Even a short life gives enough time to live well and decently. If life goes on longer, we should feel no more sadness than farmers feel when the pleasant spring ends and summer and fall arrive. Spring is like youth: it points to and shows the crops that are going to come. The later seasons are for cutting and gathering them.”
- 71 “As I have said often, old age’s harvest is remembering and enjoying good things gained earlier. We should count everything that happens in line with nature as good. And what could be more natural than for old people to die? When young people die, nature fights against it. To me, their dying is like a blaze being smothered by a great rush of water. Old people die like a fire that burns itself out, without any force being used. Unripe fruit is hard to pull off a tree. When

it is ripe and ready, it falls. In the same way, violence takes the young out of life, while ripeness takes the old. I enjoy this ripeness so much that, as I get closer to death, I feel as though I can see land and will at last reach port after a long sea journey.”

Chapter 20



⁷² “There is no set limit to old age. We can live it well for as long as we can carry out our duties, stand by them, and face death without concern. This can make older people even bolder and braver than the young. That is the point of Solon’s answer to the tyrant Pisistratus. The tyrant asked what he was relying on when he opposed him so fearlessly. Solon is said to have replied, ‘My old age.’ But the best end comes when our minds are sound and our senses clear, and nature takes apart the work she put together. The person who built a ship or a house can most easily take it down. Similarly, the nature that put a human being together can best take that person apart. Anything freshly joined is hard to separate; an old join comes apart easily.
“So older people should neither grasp greedily at the little time left nor give it up for no reason;”

⁷³ “and Pythagoras tells us not to leave our guard duty and our post in life without an order from our commander, meaning God. Solon the wise wrote a verse saying that he did not want his death to pass without his friends’ grief and mourning. I suppose he wanted to be loved by the people close to him. But perhaps Ennius put it better:

Let nobody honor me with tears or weep at my funeral.

He does not think we should mourn a death that is followed by immortality.”

74 “We may feel something as we die, but only briefly, especially if we are old. After death, either our experience will be something to wish for or we will have no experience at all. But we should have practiced thinking about this since youth, so that death does not worry us. Without that preparation, nobody can feel at peace. We are certain to die, and for all we know it could be today. How can anyone stay calm while fearing a death that could come at any hour?”

75 “I do not think we need a long argument about this when I remember certain examples. I do not mean Lucius Brutus, killed while freeing his country; the two Decii, who rode their horses straight toward a death they had chosen; Marcus Atilius, who went to be tortured rather than break his promise to an enemy; the two Scipios, who tried to stop the Carthaginians’ advance even with their own bodies; your grandfather Lucius Paulus, whose death paid for his colleague’s recklessness in the disgrace at Cannae; or Marcus Marcellus, whom even a supremely cruel enemy would not allow to die without an honorable burial. I mean our legions. As I wrote in the *Origins*, they often went willingly and proudly into positions they never expected to come back from. If young men—not just without education but also brought up in the country—think death is nothing to fear, should educated old men be frightened by it?”

76 “In my view, getting our fill of every interest makes us get our fill of life. Children have particular interests. Do young people miss them? Early youth has its own interests. Do people of settled, middle age want those back? Middle age also has its interests, but people do not keep looking for those in old age. Finally, old age has interests of its own. Just as the interests of earlier years fade away, the interests of old age fade too. When that happens, having had enough of life brings the right time to die.”

Chapter 21



⁷⁷ “I see no reason to hold back from telling you my own thoughts about death. I seem to see it more clearly as I get nearer to it. Publius Scipio, and you, Gaius Laelius, I believe your fathers are still alive. They were outstanding men and very dear friends of mine. Now they live the only life that really deserves the name. Here, shut inside the body’s structure, we carry out a necessary service and a hard task. The soul comes from heaven. It has been pushed down from its home high above and, as it were, buried in the earth, a place opposed to its divine, everlasting nature. But I believe the immortal gods placed souls in human bodies so there would be beings to care for the earth. By studying the order of the heavens, they could copy it in the measure and steadiness of their own lives. Reason and argument are not the only things that brought me to this belief. The standing and authority of the greatest philosophers helped too.”

⁷⁸ “I used to hear about Pythagoras and his followers. They lived almost next door to us and were once known as the Italian philosophers. They never doubted that our souls are portions drawn from the divine mind of the universe. I was also shown what Socrates said on his last day about souls never dying. He was the man Apollo’s oracle called wisest of all. Why go on at length? This is what I believe, and I am convinced of it. The mind works so quickly, remembers so much of the past, and understands so much about what is coming. It has so

many skills, so much knowledge, and so many inventions. A nature that holds all these things cannot be mortal. The soul is always moving. Its movement has no beginning because it moves itself. It will have no end either, because the soul will never abandon itself. Its nature is simple. It has nothing mixed into it that is different or unlike itself. So it cannot be split up, and if it cannot be split up, it cannot die. There is also strong evidence that people know many things before they are born. When children learn difficult skills, they grasp an immense number of things at such speed that it looks as if they are remembering and recalling them rather than learning them for the first time. Those are roughly Plato's arguments."

Chapter 22



- 79 “In Xenophon’s account, Cyrus the Elder says this while dying: ‘My dearest sons, do not think that when I leave you I will be nowhere or will no longer exist. Even when I was with you, you could not see my soul. You knew it was in my body because of the things I did. So believe that it still exists, even when you cannot see it.’”
- 80 “‘The honors given to famous men would not continue after their deaths if their own souls did nothing to make us remember them longer. Nobody has ever been able to convince me that souls are alive when they are inside mortal bodies but die when they get out. Nor do I think the soul loses its understanding when it leaves a body that has no understanding. Instead, it becomes wise when it is free from every bodily mixture and starts to exist pure and complete. Also, when death takes a human being apart, it is obvious where each of the other parts goes. They all go back to where they came from. The soul alone is unseen, both while it is here and after it has left. And you can see that nothing is as much like death as sleep.’”

Chapter 23



- ⁸¹ “Yet souls show their divine nature most clearly when people are asleep. Relaxed and free, they foresee many future events. That tells us what they will be like once they have completely shaken off the body’s restraints. So if this is true,’ he said, ‘honor me as a god. But if my soul is going to die with my body, you will still respect the gods who watch over and rule this whole beautiful world. You will keep my memory faithfully, without harming it.’ That was what Cyrus said at his death. Now let us look at our own situation, if you agree.”
- ⁸² “Scipio, nobody will ever convince me that your father Paulus, your grandfathers Paulus and Africanus, Africanus’s father and uncle, or the many other great men I need not list would have attempted such achievements for later generations to remember unless they believed that those generations would matter to them personally. Let me boast a little about myself, as old men do. Do you think I would have taken on all those tasks, working day and night at home and on military service, if my reputation was going to end when my life ended? Would it not have been much better to spend my years peacefully, without work or struggle? Somehow, though, my spirit kept rising up and looking ahead to future generations, as if it would only really begin living once it had

left this life. If souls were not in fact immortal, it would not be the best people's souls that strove hardest for lasting glory. And consider this: the wisest people die most calmly,"

- 83 "while the most foolish die with the greatest distress. Does it not seem to you that the soul that can see more clearly and further ahead sees that it is going somewhere better? The one with duller sight does not see it.

"I am certainly filled with eagerness to see your fathers, whom I respected and loved. But I am not only keen to meet the people I knew. I also want to meet those I have heard about, read about, and written about myself. Once I am on my way there, nothing will easily bring me back or boil me young again like Pelias. If a god offered to take me from my present age back to being a baby crying in a cradle, I would firmly say no. After running the race, I would not want to be sent from the finish back to the starting gates."

- 84 "What benefits does life offer? What is not, rather, hard work? Still, let it have its benefits. Even then, either we have enough of it or it reaches its limit. I do not want to complain about life, as many people, including educated ones, have often done. I do not regret having lived. I have lived in a way that makes me think I was not born for nothing. And I am leaving life as one leaves a place to stay, not one's own home. Nature gave us an inn for a visit, not a permanent residence.

"What a wonderful day it will be when I go to that divine gathering of souls and leave this crowded mess behind! I will go not only to the men I spoke of earlier, but also to my Cato. No better man was ever born, and nobody was more devoted to his duties. I burned his body on the funeral pyre, when it should have been his task to burn mine. But his soul did not abandon me. It looked back toward me and surely went to the place where it saw that I too must come. People thought I bore that loss bravely. It was not because I felt calm about it. I comforted myself by thinking that we would not be parted and separated for long."

85 “That is why, Scipio, old age is easy for me—the very thing you said you and Laelius often found surprising. It is not just free from trouble. It is pleasant too. If I am wrong to believe that human souls cannot die, I am happy to be wrong. While I am alive, I do not want anyone to take away a belief that gives me pleasure. But suppose that after death I feel nothing, as some small-minded philosophers think. Then I need not worry about dead philosophers laughing at my mistake. Even if we are not going to live forever, it is still a good thing for a person to die at the right time. Nature puts a limit on living, just as it does on everything else. Old age brings a life to its end, like the last act of a play. We should avoid becoming worn out by it, especially when we have had enough. “Those are the things I had to say about old age. I hope you reach it, so that your own experience can show you that what you have heard from me is true!”