On Pleasure / On The True and The False Good - Lorenzo Valla

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2020 at 3:17 PM

Wikipedia on Lorenzo Valla. Entry on Valla in Stanford Enclycopedia of Philosophy

I am delinquent in adding this to the forum. It appears that the page from which I originally took this is no longer available, but below is the version I have available now. Also, here is an archive.org link to the page from which this text was taken.

Lorenzo Valla: Of the True and the False Good (1431)

http://www2.idehist.uu.se/distans/ilmh/Ren/valla-good.htm

From: The Renaissance in Europe: An Anthology, ed. P. Elmer et. al, (Yale UP, 2000), pp. 72-87.

(i) Book I (ii) Book II (iii) Book III

When Valla first wrote this treatise in 1431 he called it On Pleasure and it was only in a later version that it became known as Of the True and the False Good. It seeks to debate the question of how humanity can achieve the good: by following the precepts of the ancient philosophical schools, notably Epicureanism and Stoicism, or by accepting the guidance of Christian teachings. The matter is debated by a number of eminent orators, poets and clerics and, at the end, it is agreed that Christianity provides the best way of achieving the good life. In choosing to prefer the arguments of the Epicureans over those of the Stoics, he was being deliberately provocative. The ideas of the latter, who advocated virtue for its own sake, were clearly more compatible with conventional Christian teachings than those of the former, who argue in favour of pleasure as the guiding principle of moral behaviour The imaginary discussion takes place in the porch of a church in Milan and the garden of one of the speakers. Text 4 gives details of Valla’s life.

Source: Lorenzo Valla, On Pleasure: De Voluptate (Of the True and the False Good), ed. M. Lorch, trans. A. Kent Hiett and M. Lorch, (New York: Albaris Books Inc., 1977), pp. 49-65, 73-7, 91, 121-3, 133-7, 167, 235-7, 259-65, 267-9, 279, 297-301, 305 (English text only)

i) Book I

HERE BEGINS THE PROEM OF THE FIRST BOOK OF LORENZO VALLA ON THE TRUE AND THE FALSE GOOD

When I undertook the discussion of the cause of the true and the false good, which is dealt with in the three following books, it seemed best to follow a most compelling division of the subject

according to which we are to believe that only two goods exist, one in this life, one in the next. I have to deal with both of them, but in such a way that I shall seem to have gradually moved from the first to the second. All of my treatise is directed to the matter of this second good, which, as tradition holds, we reach through two means: religion and virtue. However, it is not my purpose to speak of religion, since others, especially Lactantius and Augustine, have dealt with it sufficiently and fully: one of them, as the earlier, appears to have confuted the false religions; and the other to have confirmed the true one with greater distinction. I have been seized instead with the desire of dealing as far as is humanly possible with those true virtues through which we reach the true good. […]

There are quite a few people and (even more shamefully) learned men with whom I have often talked, who ask and inquire: Why is it that many of the ancients and of our contemporaries as well, who either did not know or did not venerate God as we do, are said not only to be excluded from the celestial city but also to be cast out into hellish night? They ask: Are such great honesty, justice, faith, piety, and the chorus of their other virtues in no way able to aid them so that they should not be consigned to the company of the impious, the impure, and the evil, and thrust down into eternal torture – these men we call saintly and blessed? It is difficult to count all whom those questioners rank above the latter. They ring forth philosophers and many others about whom philosophers and writers talk, to whose irreproachable lives, say these people, almost nothing could be added. Why continue? These questioners imitate those whom they praise, and at the same time (most unbearable of all), they most actively induce others to accept their opinion, not to say their madness. What can this be, I ask, but the claim that Christ came into the world in vain? Or indeed that he did not come at all? For my part, not being able to bear this abuse and the offense committed against the name of Christ, I have taken it upon myself to restrain or to cure these men. And since the arguments of very powerful, are not completely accepted, my predecessors, although certainly very powerful, are not completely accepted, I have instituted a new method of reasoning. Whereas those I mention attribute so much to antiquity – I mean, to pagans – asserting that these pagans are endowed with every virtue, I on the contrary shall make plain, with the arguments not of our side but of these same philosophers, that paganism has done nothing virtuously, nothing rightly. This is truly a great and difficult task, and I am not sure whether it is not more audacious than that of any of my predecessors. […]

Since the Stoics assert more bitterly than all others the value of virtue, it seems to me sufficient to single out the Stoics as our adversaries and to assume the defense of the Epicureans. […] While all three of these books aim to destroy the race of the Stoics, the first book shows that pleasure is the only good, the second that the virtue of philosophers is not even a good, and the third distinguished the true good from the false. In this third book, it will not be irrelevant to compose a kind of eulogy of Paradise in the most splendid possible manner, in order to recall the souls of the listeners to the hope of the true good, as far as it is within my power. I must add that this last book derives a kind of dignity from the subject matter itself. In Books I and II, and especially in Book I, I have interspersed gayer and almost (I would say) licentious material, for which no one will blame me if he considers the character of the matter, and if he listens to

the reason for my enterprise. In fact, as for the character, what would be further from defending the cause of pleasure than sad, severe style and the behavior of a Stoic when I am taking the part of the Epicureans? Instead, it was necessary to exchange the rude, strong, and excited style that I often use in favor of this other more relaxed and agreeable way of speaking. Certainly, an orator's greatest strength is in pleasing, and this expedient has been followed here expressly (to speak of my intentions) in order to reproach more strongly those ancients who professed any religion whatever that differed from ours. For not only do I prefer the Epicureans, despised and rejected men, to the custodians of what is virtuous [honestum], but I also prove that the aforementioned followers of wisdom have followed not virtue but the shadow of virtue, not honor but vanity, not duty but vice, not wisdom but folly; for they would have done better had they worked for the cause of pleasure, if they did not indeed do so. I introduce as interlocutors on the subject very eloquent men who are also my good friends, assigning to each a discourse according to his character and position and consistent with the conversations they recently held among themselves. […]

THE STOIC OPENS THE DISCUSSION:

Fixing his gaze upon the ground for a while and then lifting it to his audience, Catone began in the following way: […]

I often ask myself with astonishment about the wickedness of mind or weakness common to almost all men, qualities that are evident in many things, but most clearly in this: that men, as I see it, are strongly inclined to acquire things that are not by nature good or certainly are not to be matched from any point of view with virtue; on the other hand, the true and noble qualities – the only good ones – are, I see, not only desired by very few but are also ignored or despised or hated. And what are these goods? They are, indeed, those pertaining to right behavior [honestas], such as justice, fortitude, temperance. For, if the countenance of virtue could be seen with the corporeal eye, as Socrates says in the Phaedrus, it would incite an incredible love for wisdom. Truly, that countenance is too noble and divine to become visible and subject to our eyes. Instead, we must contemplate it with the mind and with the soul, and each of us will see the countenance of virtue as the face of the sun, the more perfectly the more he is gifted with a penetrating mind. […]

Here is what comes to my mind after having thought at length and deeply on this problem. Here is my opinion. As far as I can judge, I find only two causes for this human perversity, and both derive from Nature herself. One is that the army of the vices is more numerous than that of virtue, so that, even if we wanted to, we could not win the fight against such forces. The other cause (and it seems monstrous) is that we do not want to conquer these most troublesome and dangerous enemies, not even if we could. Nature has engendered in us a certain calamitous love of delighting in our own sickness, and the vices that are the plagues of our minds are a source of our pleasure. On the other hand, Virtue [honestas], who teaches and participates in the divine blessings, seems to most to be harsh, sour, and bitter. But more of this later.

Now, pray, let us consider what we pointed out before, that is, let us talk about the disproportionate number of enemies. […]

Fortitude has its antitheses, cowardice and temerity. Prudence has guile and folly. Civility has scurrility and rusticity. And so on, successively, with all the other qualities with which Aristotle has dealt, as usual with the greatest care, in those books entitled Ethics, although he does not mention prudence among the moral virtues but relegates it to the intellectual virtues. I pass over philosophers who have assigned to each virtue as its contraries not merely two vices but many. I beg you to observe and to consider how unjust it is that this multitude of vices has been created. For there is no color contrary to white but black, no sound contrary to a sharp one but a dull one, no taste contrary to sweet but bitter. All other colors, sounds, or tastes are said to be not contrary but various, not opposite but diverse.

However, a virtue like diligence is placed between two contraries, curiosity and negligence; and it is so placed that when you withdraw your foot from one, you are in danger of falling into the other, as the proverb says, 'When I flee from Scylla I am dragged into Charybdis.' The same circumstance occurs in what I was saying about solitary philosophers and in what Cicero says: 'While, O judges, you avoid the one censure (which you did not deserve at all) of being considered cruel, you meet with the other of being thought timid and slothful.' We are provided with a thousand and more examples of this kind.

Nor am I indignant because a great many kinds of vices have been found (I am willing to ignore the fact, I endure it, I bear it); rather am I angered because too few kinds of virtues have been discovered, and – most shamefully – because the vices, although dissenting among themselves, still make common cause against us as though by treaty, assemble against us and, as it were, encircle us, who, not having enough to do to avoid one sin, are also in danger of yielding to another, not of a dissimilar variety (such as falling from avarice into cowardice), but of the very same sort (like falling from the avarice that I have mentioned into prodigality, both of which vices are the contrary of liberality). And how great a task will that be? How much prudence, vigilance, and diligence must we employ against this enemy that falls upon us on both sides, and actually in front of us and to our rear as well? […]

Let us now move to the second cause of human perversity. Should we not deplore what has been deplored by many, namely that we have absorbed with our mother's milk the love of vices? That we have done so should be blamed in no way on us but on Nature, if we wish to admit the truth. To be sure, we can see children from infancy turning toward the vices of gluttony, games, and luxury, more than toward virtue and honor; they hate punishment and love caresses; they flee instruction and seek out lasciviousness. I pass over in silence with what pain good habits are inculcated. Not only children but some adults, and indeed most people in general, take punishment badly, although they should be happy to be corrected and to be informed of the cause of their sins. Moreover, and worst of all, they are enraged at the very persons from whom they have received the benefit of correction.

So that no one may be led astray by an empty argument, I affirm that what is good by nature is desired spontaneously, and, contrariwise, that what is bad is naturally avoided. Hence brute animals, to which nothing better than a body has been given, flee from hunger, thirst, cold, heat, fatigue, and death. For us, however, who possess the power of reason and are thus allied with the immortal gods, virtue is the sole good, and vice the only evil. Things being thus, why do we evade what is virtuous and desire and love vices? It is one thing to fall into error, to succumb, to be urged on by some expectation (although this partakes of evil); it is another thing to delight in sin itself. As Quintilian with his usual brilliance says, 'There is a certain wretched love of committing outrage, and the most intense pleasure of shameful action is in defiling virtue.' And Cicero says, 'There was in this man such a desire for sinning that the sin itself delighted him even if there was no cause for it.'

Must I go on with this subject, or is the truth not more than sufficiently self-evident? Why should we delight so in defiling women who are chaste, virginal, pure, and respectable; and why are we more quickly inflamed by the desire to dishonor them than to possess prostituted, depraved, lascivious, and base women, even when these are more beautiful? Certainly Sexus Tarquinius was induced to ravish Lucretia not so much by her beauty (for he had seen her several times before) as by her austere way of life, of which he had previously been ignorant. […] [The Epicurean poet, Maffeo Vegio, then replies:] Truly, the excuse that the wickedness of man derives from Nature seems to me to incriminate Nature (however unjustly) more than it exculpates man. If indeed you are a wise man (as you persuade yourself, and as I grant, considering your labors and your vigils), why don't the others follow wisdom, especially when they have you for an example and teacher? Being wise is denied no one. You have been deceived and led into this censure by the Stoic heresies, which, not in words but in deeds (since the two things always differ from each other), accord no honor to gods or men. The Stoics do indeed cast many a stone at Nature, as if she could be reformed. And they do attempt to reform her, for example, in the case of perturbations of the human mind, which are the passions, and which they believe could be rooted out of us completely; or when they contend that there can be no man not demented, or mad, or possessed of whatever other qualities of the most offensive nature that can be uttered. And being of such an opinion, they nevertheless claim to be not accusers but witnesses. For what concerns myself, therefore, although I agree with you in other matters, I am taking up the defense of Nature together with that of the human race, which cannot be separated from its first cause, as I shall show. […]

To begin with, what you have said about Nature can be answered piously, religiously, and without offending the ears of man: what Nature created and shaped cannot be anything but holy and praiseworthy, like this heaven that revolves above us, adorned with lights for both day and night, and disposed with such rationality, beauty, and utility. Why need I mention the seas, the earth, the air, the mountains, the fields, the rivers, the lakes, the springs, even the clouds and the rain? Why domestic animals, wild beasts, the birds, the fish, the trees, the crops? You will not be able to find anything that is not perfected, furnished, and adorned to the highest degree with rationality, or beauty, or usefulness. Even the structure of our own bodies can be shown to prove this fact, as Lactantius, a man of keen and eloquent genius, most clearly shows

in the book that he entitled De opificio [On the Handiwork of God], although many more points could be mentioned that would not be less important than what he says.

And you should not be surprised if I, who seem to defend Epicurus (because, like him, I identify the highest good with pleasure), do not deny that all things have been created in accordance with the providential care of Nature – a point that he repudiated. […]

Now, to go back to your argument, Catone, the primary reason that it dissatisfies is that you Stoics, unhappy and inflexible as you are, desire that nothing should exist that is not wicked and vile; you measure everything by a hollow wisdom that is in all respects fixed and complete. Thus, while you take joy in flying prodigiously and in striving toward the higher regions, your wings melt (not being natural to you but artificial and made of wax), and like the foolish Icarus [who flew too close to the sun] you fall into the sea. Truly, what kind of farfetched subtlety is it to describe the wise man in such a way that, by your own admission, no example can be found among us men, and to declare that he alone is happy, that he alone is friendly, good, and free? I would gladly endure this if your law did not deem that anyone who is not a wise man is by necessity a fool, a reprobate, an exile, an enemy, and a deserter, 'anyone' meaning all of us, since no one has yet possessed this wisdom. And lest by chance someone could become wise, you barbarians have made vices more numerous than virtues, and have invented an infinity of the most minute kinds of sins so that there are not more diseases of the body, which you say are hardly known adequately by the doctors themselves. If only one of these maladies were to affect the body, its health would not be completely lost; but if even a minimal spiritual evil exists in a man (as is necessarily the case), you pretend not only that this man incompletely lacks the honor belonging to wisdom but that he is also deformed by every shame and infamy. By Hercules, it is amazing that, when the doctors say there is one state of health and many illnesses, you do not also affirm that virtue is also single, although this is the same as declaring that whoever has one virtue possesses them all.

What shall I say? You surpass the doctors in all respects. Even more than I should wish. You believe not that there is one virtue but that there is none. Whoever has one virtue has all virtues; since no one has all of them, therefore no one has any. […]

That pleasure is a good I perceive not only to have been agreed on by many eminent authors but to be the testimony of general opinion, which commonly speaks of goods of our souls, goods of the body, goods of fortune. Of these, the last two are believed by those solemn men, the Stoics, not to contain any element of good, as though, indeed, they were evil. Since the Stoics cannot deny that these things have been produced by Nature and granted to the choice of man, I do not understand why, if we use them well, they should not be numbered among the goods, unless we are everywhere to blame Nature herself and slander her as foolish and unjust. […]

You say, 'But pleasure is very often the cause of evils. Because of pleasure we often grow ill, because of pleasure we cannot recover, because of pleasure we even die.'

You are wrong, believe me, you are wrong. For someone suffering from fever, for example, what is harmful is not the pleasure found in drinking cold water but the quality of the water, which would have harmed him even without the pleasure. I remember having drunk water without any pleasure at all (for sometimes the water at hand is disagreeable); I also remember that a most delicious water, drunk to satiety and with much pleasure, against the doctor's orders and in the very heat of fever, was good for me, so that no blame can be attached to the pleasing taste of the water. Thus, every kind of pleasure is good.

ii) Book II

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT CONDUCT BASED ON VIRTUE AS ADVOCATED BY PHILOSOPHERS IS NOT EVEN A GOOD

Among all the merits of eloquence, which are surely innumerable, by far the most important to my way of thinking is 'fullness in expression,' […] This power is the one that makes a matter clear and places it before our eyes. This quality reigns in demonstrations and refutations, influences the minds of men, and displays all the ornaments, splendors, and riches of eloquence. It carries the listener away and then brings him back to himself, and it gathers around itself almost all other merits of oratory. But we must remember that whatever is of highest excellence is usually not only most difficult but also most dangerous. It is in fact plain that not a few who admire and would imitate what in the greatest writers I call 'fullness in expression' actually achieve an abominable loquacity.

Such is the persistent urging of arguments pro or con, superfluity of illustrations, repetition, and windings and turnings of the arguments so as to attach itself, like a vine, to whatever it meets, until I cannot tell whether the futility of the performance or its shamefulness is the greater. A diffuse and wandering, discourse of this kind is difficult to commit to memory and is an annoyance to listeners' ears, which ought above all to be protected from boredom. It should be added that with the greatest copiousness the greatest attention to order is demanded, as we see in the well-known proverb: The companion of a multitude of things is confusion. How harmful such confusion can be is evident, for example, in warfare for disordered armies are an impediment to themselves; those who are almost at battle with each other cannot conquer an enemy.

Thus, whoever wishes to appear eloquent must achieve two most difficult things: first, he should say only what is useful, lest along with his soldiers he should bring into battle the grooms, camp followers, and cooks; second, he should everyone in his proper place (the infantry of the main line here, the horsemen there, the light infantry in another position, the stingers in yet another, and the archers elsewhere), and he should dispose his host according to the location, the occasion, and the condition of the enemy – an ability that is by far the most admirable part of generalship. […]

I concerned myself as much with carefully arranging the material which I lighted upon as I did with producing that material copiously in the first place, although order itself is the best teacher of both invention and copiousness. Unless we set forth our material carefully, we run an even greater risk. For unnecessary points are heard with tedium, and arguments that are badly arranged are not understood; they get in each other's way, as I said. In just the same way, a general who is ignorant of how to dispose an army and who leads his troops into battle pell-mell, with each man occupying the position he fancies, errs more grievously than the one who stations all the camp rabble among the ranks of his soldiers. If I have not been able to avoid these two vices as I wished, blame it partly on my inexperience, partly on the difficulty of the task. In crossing the unfamiliar Alps even Hannibal, the greatest general of the Carthaginians, could not avoid losing many of his troops and most of his elephants and even one of his eyes because of the difficulty of that territory. […] [Vegio the Epicurean undertakes to show that courage is not a good:] Let us therefore first speak of courage, or fortitude, and then of the other virtues if the matter calls for it. Courage seems indeed to offer the broader scope for the exercise of virtue, and a kind of acknowledged opportunity for exercise against pleasures. We are agreed that the men [Roman heroes] whom we mentioned have exercised themselves, more than all others, in this virtue. You exalt these people to heaven, as I said, but I do not, by Hercules, see any cause for us to say that they did well and offered us a good example. If I, for instance, were not to shun hardships, losses, hazards, and at last what reward or goal would you set before me? You reply, 'The safety, the dignity, and the greatness of your country!' Are you really offering this to me as a good? Do you reward me at this price? Do you exhort me to face death in the hope of achieving this? And if I did not obey, would you say that I deserved badly of my country?

But consider how far this error of yours goes, if it ought to be called an error and not just a piece of malice: you set before us illustrious and splendid words as my rewards – 'safety,' 'freedom,' 'greatness'; and then you don't give these things to me. In dying I am so far from obtaining these promised rewards that, if I had already possessed some of them, I should now lose them too. For what is left to the man who has given himself to death? 'But,' you will say, 'wasn't the death of those men for the good of their country?' Certainly. 'Then,' you will ask, 'isn't the safety of one's country a good?' I do not see that this is true unless you can explain it to me. 'Because a state freed from danger enjoys peace, freedom, quiet, and wealth,' you say? You are right, you speak truly, I agree with you. Here is the reason why virtue is so greatly praised and exalted to the stars: it gains the things of which the greatest pleasure consists. But those men themselves displayed the courage, while their country got the resulting security and greatness. Is it not the case, then, that those who gave their country security and greatness were alone excluded from these goods? Oh, you fools – Codrus, Curtius, Decius, Regulus, and all you other most courageous men – what you have obtained from your godlike virtue is to die and be defrauded of the things which are the rewards of bravery and toil! You are like the vipers, which, when they bear, give the light of day to their young, and they themselves lose it [by going blind], so that they would have done far better not to bear young at all. Similarly, you encounter death of your own accord so that others may not die, while they, on their side, would not think of undergoing any hardships for the sake of your merit. […] Nevertheless, the Stoics

do not really seek fame by way of mute solitude or of their consciences. In fact, when they cannot obtain it in the right way, they seek it crookedly. […]

And now let us add that this fame that we are discussing aspires not only to pleasure for the ears and, so to speak, to a harvest of poetic praise, but also to something further. Why are we glad to be considered good, just, active? Surely so as to obtain authority and trust. In what way? By having others say this of us: 'He is brave and vigorous; let us make him our leader in war. He is careful, hardworking, and honest in administrative affairs; how can we do better than to assign the administration of our state to him? He is full of good ideas and eloquence; let us elect him to our body to be both a support and an ornament for us.' It is with this aim in mind, I say, that people desirous of glory will take pains. Not merely many, but almost infinite, examples are at hand. But I offer only one as being needed. Caesar ran after eloquence and popularity harder than anyone else. What was he thinking of? Of being virtuous in protecting the rights of the Roman people? Not this at all (the result proves it), but of attaining the highest rank and power, which he succeeded in doing. The point can also be proved in a contrary fashion. No one shudders at infamy and dishonor for fear of moral disgrace, but for fear of becoming an object of ridicule to others, of being hated, of losing people's trust, of becoming universally suspect, and, finally, of losing his life. […] As Quintilian wisely says, 'No one is so evil to wish to appear evil.' From all this it is to be concluded that all fame aims at pleasure, as all avoidance of infamy has as its goal the escape of mental pain.

iii) [Book III]

THE CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATIVE ANTONIO DA RHO, A MONK AND THEOLOGIAN, NOW ADJUDICATES BETWEEN CATONE AND VEGIO

I say that both sides of the argument – that of virtue and the right and that of pleasure – ought to be both approved and disapproved. They ought to be approved because the virtuous and pleasure are both excellent things; they ought to be disapproved because they should be understood differently from the ways that your arguments intended. Although I trust that you both agree with me, my business will be mainly with you, Catone, who began the argument. As for Vegio, I hope to satisfy him with an oration as short as his was long.

For what concerns the first part of the argument, Catone, where you bewail the lot of mankind, who cannot, even if they wish, overcome the great number of their enemies with the few resources at their command, I approve of your complaint and praise it. I remind you that anyone who feels pain for the troubles of others is of a gentle, good character. As to your attack on Nature for having treated us badly, I boldly accept and subscribe to the accusation, if only you will make clear what crime it is that you reproach her with. You do not really prove what you consider manifest and take for granted, namely that the number of the vices is greater than that of the virtues. Your bringing in of Aristotle, with his enormous genius, as an authority, does not immediately make us agree. In fact, Aristotle did not discover this idea for himself but borrowed it from his master, Plato, from whom he usually likes to dissent. You see that I am helping your side: we have not only the authority of Aristotle but, what is more, that of Plato,

which in my opinion has always been, and ought to be, of greater value. But remember that we do not always have to take the authorities' word. Although they were right many times, yet, being human, they erred. I therefore consider anyone most foolish who entrusts himself entirely to books and does not examine them carefully to see whether they tell the truth; and although it is necessary to do this in all cases, it is particularly important in reference to the virtues, on which the whole design of our life depends. This being so, let us see whether your Aristotle was right to establish a greater number of vices than of virtues. You agree with him in this, but I do not at all, since it can be shown by the plainest reasoning that each individual vice is confronted by an individual virtue; it can be shown further that the theory is false according to which excess stands on one side, deficiency on the other, with virtue in the middle, defined as a certain point of moderation between too much and too little, and that it is useless to argue about which of the two extremes is more contrary to the mean.

For example, take a man who fears and flees from what ought to be fled from. Does he seem to you to possess fortitude? Certainly he should not be called timid. Again, take a man who embraces certain licit pleasures. Will he be called temperate on that account? Not at all. Someone is said to possess fortitude not because he flees from dangers, but because he does not flee; someone is said to be temperate not because he embraces pleasures, but because he sets himself limits in their use. […]

Let us now return to the matter of judging your debate and to the description of the true good. One of you defines the sole and highest good as virtue; the other, as pleasure: between two schools of philosophers, one contrary to the other, each one defends his own. That you should have spoken like some of the ancient philosophers came at the right time, and I took it without objections. With this method, the error common to all of them will be apparent. And what you have done has turned out the more happily because you have debated, as if with set intent, on what I think are the two noblest of all the philosophical schools. Among many other indications of this preeminence, there is one in the Acts of the Apostles, where only the Epicureans and Stoics are remembered; at that time they seem to have flourished more than all other philosophical schools in Athens, home of studies and nurse of philosophy.

Yet, Catone and Vegio, you would have done better to assert God's doctrine rather than the Stoic one or the Epicurean one, and not to have chosen, for the sake of exercise and novelty, to delight in reproducing the ancients' material and habits in debating. Vegio, although your speech was more adapted to the perversion of souls (I am not yet judging between you), yet which of us doubts that you have not been yourself, since usually not only do you live but also speak differently from the way you have just spoken? To omit other things, you said that after the death of man's body nothing more remained, which many philosophers have said and also thought. But do you really call this matter into doubt, being as you are a soldier, and wanting to be known as a soldier of the Christian religion, properly called the Christian faith? I am not so ignorant of your ideas, or so far from them, as to be able to persuade myself that you think what you have been saying. I suspect you of having spoken not seriously but playfully (as you usually do) in the manner of Socrates. […] Why do I say 'I suspect'? You have confessed the fact by word and even by deed, so that unless I knew you were speaking under false pretense I

could reproach you for speaking and acting against your own argument. You said, as though you had forgotten you were defending pleasure, that very often you are exhausted, weakened, and tormented by your studies, and nearly made ill in mind and body. Besides, I saw nothing in your banquet today that could not be praised: splendid, indeed, as is required by your standing, but also sober, moderate, and virtuous.

Therefore, as I said, you spoke under false pretenses. You would certainly not have done this, or would not have been right in doing it, before a different audience. You did not have to fear just now that you would corrupt such men as these with your oration, all the more because it was not out of place to reply in kind to Catone, who had begun according to the custom of the ancients. I myself have followed your procedure as best I could. But so as not to seem to be confuting the thought of Epicurus more by your confession than by logic, I ask you to accept à propos of the animals a better analogy for our purpose than the one you have used. You say that men's souls are like those of brutes. What is more similar than the light of the stars to that of a lantern? Yet the latter is mortal, the former eternal. Thus the soul, which the ancients said has the energy of a flame, differs between men and animals. You compared act with act; I am comparing substance with substance.

I have said these things not against you but against the philosophers. You, as I said, were a simulator or an ironist – more Socrates than Epicurus; but Catone, whose speech seemed to come closer to the truth, no doubt spoke seriously and did not begin the debate as a joke. What shall we say then? That he erred? By no means; what is less likely than that to happen to Catone? Instead he wanted to show himself as an admirer of the ancient world. To that world I concede humane letters, the study of doctrines, and – always most important – eloquence; I deny, however, that the ancients arrived at wisdom and the knowledge of true virtue.

But, Catone, I don't wish to debate with you as a defender of the Stoics, because I know you to be a most scrupulous defender of the faith, no less than of your arguments; I once heard you say that you had gone through all the books relating to our religion that are worth reading in order to dare to compare them and to say what was best in each of them. Why then do I need to contradict you when you agree with me, even though you have spoken otherwise? If anyone else had spoken as you have done, thinking differently from you, and if he had really assumed the role of a Stoic although he was a Christian, I would have answered him thus:

Why have you spoken as though you were not a Christian when you are one? Why is there in your speech such a surprising silence concerning our religion, as if it were something superfluous. created and shaped out of the teaching of the philosophers? Why have you preferred to call upon Nature rather than God, the author of all? I am not concerned about your talking of the immortal gods. The angels are immortal gods, as Augustine plainly declared, and not only the angels but also men who have been consecrated to the angelic city, although I do not know whether you were talking of these. Why, finally, did you turn your discourse toward Nature rather than toward Jesus Christ, who can appear anywhere and stand forth before our eyes, who is always present, and is present in this gathering, and who is always ready to help those who call upon him, as he is at this very moment? Not, then, the Nature whom you have

placed before us, which is nothing, but God himself, creator of the things of nature, whom you have affronted, replies through me or commands me to reply. It is manifest that all things holy are commanded by him. […]

To give my decision finally, I pronounce thus: since the philosophers who praised the principle of virtue claimed that there were no rewards, or only uncertain and empty ones, after this life in which we are living, and defined the highest good as virtue, and since the Epicureans defined it as pleasure, therefore, although I disapprove of both sides,. I make my decision in favor of the Epicureans (not in favor of you, Vegio, nor against you, Catone, who are each bound by your faith to another army) and against the Stoics, whom I condemn for two reasons: one, because they say virtue is the highest good; the other because they were guilty of dishonesty, living a different life from the one they professed – praisers of the virtues and lovers of pleasures (if less so than others) and surely of fame, which they followed after with their hands and their feet. If anyone does not believe me, let him believe our wise men, who did not hesitate to say 'A philosopher is an animal that wants fame.'

If anyone asked me about the origin and cause of that false goodness and the false virtues, I should say that, because there was from the beginning one set of criteria for observing divine requirements and another for earthly ones, men called the former the 'rightful' and the 'virtues,' and the latter 'expediency.' But with the irruption of false religions and the prevalence of the vices, the science of things divine fell into oblivion or was confined to very few people. Only the names of the virtues remained, preserving something of their pristine majesty because the memory of praiseworthy ancient deeds and sayings had not completely faded away. Yet the memory was like a shadow without substance.

Since later generations were ignorant of what these virtues depended on, some people, moved by the splendor of the virtues themselves, said that these should be desired for their own sake, being alien to all earthly things; these people were for the most part the Stoics. Other people, unconscious of any other possible end or goal, said that the virtues ought to be desired for their profit to one's own interest; these people are chiefly the Epicureans, with whom the majority of nations agreed, believing that it was for personal advantage that the gods ought to be worshiped. Virtuous behavior as we Christians understand it, however, is the same as I have said it was in the first place, before the other conceptions of it: virtue is not to be desired for itself, as something severe, harsh, and arduous, nor is it to be desired for the sake of earthly profit; it is to be desired as a step toward that perfect happiness which the spirit of soul, freed from its mortal portion, will enjoy with the Father of all things, from whom it came.

Who would hesitate to call this happiness 'pleasure,' or who could give it a better name? I find it called by this name, as in Genesis, 'paradise of pleasure' and in Ezekiel, 'fruit and tree of pleasure,' and the like, when the goods associated with the divine are spoken of. We find in Psalms, 'Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of pleasure, 'although in Greek the meaning is rather 'of joy,' or ' of delights' than 'of pleasure'. […]

From all of which it is to be understood that not virtue but pleasure must be desired for itself by those who wish to experience joy, both in this life and in the life to come.

This experience is twofold: one pleasure now on earth, the other hereafter in the heavens (I say ‘heavens’ according to our usage, not that of the ancients, who thought there was only one heaven); one pleasure is the mother of vices, the other, of virtues. Let me speak more plainly. Whatever is done without hope of the later pleasure and in hope of the present pleasure is a sin: not only in major matters, as when we build a house, buy property, enter trade or get married, but also in the least important, as when we eat, sleep, move about, talk, and wish for something. In all these things both a reward and a punishment are offered to us. Therefore we must abstain from the pleasure here below if we want to enjoy the one above. We cannot enjoy both of them, because they differ from each other as do heaven and earth, soul and body. Our pleasure here is more uncertain and deceptive; that pleasure above is certain and stable. Indeed a kind of probable pleasure is not lacking in this life, and the greatest such comes from the hope of future happiness, when the mind, which is aware of right action, and the spirit, which unceasingly contemplates divine things, consider themselves a kind of candidate for the heavenly, represent to themselves the promised honors, and in a way make them present – the more happily and zestfully, the more candidates and competitors it has seen. Thus it is said: ‘He who gives up earthly things for God shall receive much more here below, and eternal life in the time to come,’ by which is signified the joy of him who hopes in God. Nothing is done rightly without pleasure, nor is there any merit in serving in the army of God only with patient endurance and not with a good will. ‘God loves a cheerful giver,’ [Psalms 36:4] […]

But beyond doubt the main condition for obtaining happiness is the possession of a sense of virtue, by which I mean Christian virtue, not the virtue of the philosophers. I do not deny that many things in their writings are fruitful and salutary, but these things acquired value and began to bear fruit only after Christ, the deliverance of the quick and the dead, being sent by his Father, cleansed the face of the earth of the thorns and weeds with which it was filled and made it ready to bear fruit. […]

I have now confuted or condemned both the Epicurean and Stoic dogmas, and have shown that the highest good, or the good that ought to be desired, is not found in either school or among any philosophers, but does exist in our religion, being attainable not on earth but in the heavens. However, it is not enough to have shown what this good is, and where it is, unless we also explain to the best of our ability what sort of thing it is, and what is its extent. […]

Since we are dealing with the exchange of earthly goods for divine ones, let us consider whether there will be pleasures up above that are the equal of all those that we have felt here below and have repudiated; thereafter we shall return to the agreed order of this discourse. Many, in fact (including those whom, as I said, we are trying to recall to the faith), can be only painfully detached from these earthly pleasures, partly because no greater pleasures than these seem to such people to be discoverable (we carefully dissuade them from this), and partly because they believe that once the body is dead, the pleasures of the body will never return. It thus happens that they do not abstain from delights of the senses but indulge in them

even more, like those who fill themselves with food before setting out on a trip through desert places. […]

Here the questioners may object: 'But if that is the way it is, and if, as is true, body comes before spirit (for the animal nature is said to be prior to the spiritual one), then why don't the rewards of the body come first – the pleasures that we experience here? For those pleasures of the soul are very unfamiliar; not knowing them, we can't love them.' […] Aren't you by what you say putting a higher value on physical goods than on spiritual ones? If you have come into possession of infinitely better goods, why, stupid men, do you continue to tickle yourselves with the desire for trifles? When you are already dowered with such marvelous goods, why don't you wait a little for the rest? I swear by those eternal joys of the souls that you would not think in this way if you had reached that spiritual happiness. Are those who have been received into the eternal tabernacles not completely happy, or do people live better on earth than they do in heaven? But you talk in this way because you have very little faith; that impels you to make such shameless demands. For what do you want with this request of yours unless it is to see angels carrying the corpses on high or devils dragging them to hell as the earth gapes open to receive them? Is this faith? Is this hope? Even if these things could be seen, may it never happen that they will be seen! No one would sin if the punishment and the reward were so evident to him. Do you perhaps not know that a ground for your being given rewards is that you should believe of those whom you see dead that they have a life elsewhere, and that the parts now reduced to dust will be returned to their former state?

[I]n order to satisfy you, let us imagine that the soul's goods are corporeal, and let us assign to the soul what will be the body's goods, and let us bring it about that these goods will arrive immediately, although they will really come later. […]

Our body, then, will be more brilliant than the noonday sun, yet not so as to have so lovely a fragrance, can we doubt that many more of the kind will be found there? Even our very bodies, as can be discerned from the bones and powdery remains of the saints, exhale a certain odor of immortality. I said 'our' bodies, meaning the bodies of individual persons, for as do the appearance and the speech of the bodies of the blessed, so also their fragrance will delight themselves and each other. Also concerning food and drink, many things can be conjectured. But this pleases me more than all the rest (and let it be said with your goodwill): that the body and blood of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, will be ministered to us, even from his very hands, in that most honorable, celebrated, and in truth Godly banquet. This food and drink will be of such sweetness that I might almost say the sense of taste will conquer the other senses. We shall never be satiated with this nourishment; it will not permit hunger and thirst to return, but will leave a continuous sweetness in our mouths – not only a sweetness in our mouths but also its power and suavity in all our parts. And this suavity will be so intimately diffused through all the body, even to the marrow of our bones, that even if all other things were lacking, yet you could be satisfied with this. How much pleasure there is, each time that we are restored and refreshed by shade or breeze during the hottest summer, or by a fire when we have been pinched and nipped by snow and wind! To my way of thinking this is the most gratifying of all the kinds of pleasure. With the others, individual parts of the body are given pleasure as the

palate by food, the nostrils by the rose and the violet; but with this kind, the whole body is partner to the pleasure. It is a kind of joy, also, that is felt by not one but many senses; let it be touched upon only most briefly here because it relates to formerly mentioned matters, like your banquets, dances, and games, Maffeo Vegio; in the state of eternal felicity that kind of pleasure will be much richer and more plentiful. […]

We should not, therefore, fear to renounce the affairs of man. Rather, we must take good hope: nothing of us will perish; all things will be restored that we have entrusted to God here, and be restored a hundred for one, of the same kind or of another, and yet always better and more sanctified, whatever its kind, as I have said. So that whatever honor, praise, fame, delight, gaiety, or pleasure attract us, from which our spiritual health might in any way take harm, let us then promptly turn the eyes of our mind to the future reward, and let us always remember (it delights me to repeat these words, an delight is a holy one) – let us always remember, I say, that for each thing we renounce, we shall be repaid a hundred times and more. I do not yet say what I think: every time that we are attracted by something delightful, we shall be all the more strongly drawn toward the hope of heavenly things, and we shall marvel, sometimes at the power and wisdom of God in these present things, sometimes at his loving kindness toward us, who promises us things a thousand times more excellent than these things that it hardly seems possible to exceed, and invites us through these present goods to partake of the future ones. […]