

PD03 - Comparison of PD3 With Seneca Moral Letter to Lucilius 66

Post by “Cassius” of February 9, 2019 at 7:56 AM

The full text of this letter is [here](#).

Among the key passages:

Now, though Claranus and I have spent very few days together, we have nevertheless had many conversations, which I will at once pour forth and pass on to you.

5. The first day we investigated this problem: how can goods be equal if they are of three kinds? For certain of them, according to our philosophical tenets, are primary, such as joy, peace, and the welfare of one's country. Others are of the second order, moulded in an unhappy material, such as the endurance of suffering, and self-control during severe illness. We shall pray outright for the goods of the first class; for the second class we shall pray only if the need shall arise. There is still a third variety, as, for example, a modest gait, a calm and honest countenance, and a bearing that suits the man of wisdom.

6. Now how can these things be equal when we compare them, if you grant that we ought to pray for the one and avoid the other? If we would make distinctions among them, we had better return to the First Good, and consider what its nature is: the soul that gazes upon truth, that is skilled in what should be sought and what should be avoided, establishing standards of value not according to opinion, but according to nature, – the soul that penetrates the whole world and directs its contemplating gaze upon all its Phenomena, paying strict attention to thoughts and actions, equally great and forceful, superior alike to hardships and blandishments, yielding itself to neither extreme of fortune, rising above all blessings and tribulations, absolutely beautiful, perfectly equipped with grace as well as with strength, healthy and sinewy, unruffled, undismayed, one which no violence can shatter, one which acts of chance can neither exalt nor depress, – a soul like this is virtue itself.

7. There you have its outward appearance, if it should ever come under a single view and show itself once in all its completeness. But there are many aspects of it. They unfold themselves according as life varies and as actions differ; but virtue itself does not become less or greater. For the Supreme Good cannot diminish, nor may virtue retrograde; rather is it transformed, now into one quality and now into another, shaping itself according to the part which it is to play.

8. Whatever it has touched it brings into likeness with itself, and dyes with its own colour. It adorns our actions, our friendships, and sometimes entire households which it has entered and set in order. Whatever it has handled it forthwith makes lovable, notable, admirable. Therefore

the power and the greatness of virtue cannot rise to greater heights, because increase is denied to that which is superlatively great. You will find nothing straighter than the straight, nothing truer than the truth, and nothing more temperate than that which is temperate. **9.** Every virtue is limitless; for limits depend upon definite measurements. Constancy cannot advance further, any more than fidelity, or truthfulness, or loyalty. What can be added to that which is perfect? Nothing otherwise that was not perfect to which something has been added. Nor can anything be added to virtue, either, for if anything can be added thereto, it must have contained a defect. Honour, also, permits of no addition; for it is honourable because of the very qualities which I have mentioned. What then? Do you think that propriety, justice, lawfulness, do not also belong to the same type, and that they are kept within fixed limits? **The ability to increase is proof that a thing is still imperfect.**

Post by “Cassius” of February 9, 2019 at 1:02 PM

This is a clear statement of the "mixture" argument, applied by Seneca to virtue, but the same argument requires the conclusion, from Epicurus' point of view, that nothing can be added to pleasure to make it better:

16. For if things which are extrinsic to virtue can either diminish or increase virtue, then that which is honourable ceases to be the only good. If you grant this, honour has wholly perished.

To me this sounds like a word game - a logic game - no wonder the Epicurean separated themselves from "logic" and dialectic. It's almost as if - if PD3 was required as a response to a word game like this, then the enemies of human happiness have to be ranked as:

- (1) Priests - Overcoming fear of domination by gods in this life
- (2) Death - Overcoming fear of being dead and what might happen in a next life
- (3) False philosophy - Overcoming logicians and their twisting of words about how we should spend our time.