

## CONTENTS

*Introduction* vii

On the Happy Life 3

Moral Epistles 77

*Notes* 143

## ON THE HAPPY LIFE

[1] All people, Gallio my brother, want to live happily, but when it comes to examining what it is that makes a life happy, a mist is before their eyes. It's so difficult to pursue a happy life that the more excitedly one rushes toward it, the further one is drawn away from it, if the right path has been lost. Whenever that path leads in the wrong direction, then one's very speed only causes an increase in the degree of separation.

We must take up this topic first: What is it we seek? Next we must examine how we can get to that thing more quickly, gaining insight, even as we travel the path (assuming it is the right one), into how much progress

DE VITA BEATA

cotidie profligetur quantoque propius ab eo simus ad quod nos cupiditas naturalis impellit. Quam diu quidem passim vagamur non duces secuti sed fremitum et clamorem dissonum in diversa vocantium, conteretur vita inter errores, brevis etiam si dies noctesque bonae menti laboremus. Decernatur itaque et quo tendamus et qua, non sine perito aliquo cui explorata sint ea in quae procedimus, quoniam quidem non eadem hic quae in ceteris peregrinationibus condicio est: in illis comprehensus aliquis limes et interrogati incolae non patiuntur errare, at hic tritissima quaeque via et celeberrima maxime decipit. Nihil ergo magis praestandum est quam ne

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

we're making day by day and how much closer we are to what our natural yearning is pushing us toward. As long as we stray hither and yon, following no leader but rather the uproar and clamor made by those who summon us in all directions, our life will be worn away amid our wanderings and seem brief, even if we toil night and day toward enlightenment. Let us inquire, then, both where we are heading and how we may get there, and let us have with us some experienced person who has explored the regions into which we are headed, since conditions there are different than on other journeys. In the case of *those* trips, a well-known route, or the answers of locals you question, will prevent you from going astray; but in *this* realm, the best-known and most-worn path is the one that most deceives. Thus, nothing is more important than this: not to follow,

DE VITA BEATA

pecorum ritu sequamur antecedentium gregem, pergentes non quo eundum est sed quo itur. Atqui nulla res nos maioribus malis implicat quam quod ad rumorem componimur, optima rati ea quae magno adsensu recepta sunt, quodque exempla nobis multa sunt nec ad rationem sed ad similitudinem vivimus. Inde ista tanta coacervatio aliorum super alios ruentium. Quod in strage hominum magna evenit, cum ipse se populus premit—nemo ita cadit ut non et alium in se adtrahat, primique exitio sequentibus sunt—hoc in omni vita accidere videas licet. Nemo sibi tantummodo errat, sed

## ON THE HAPPY LIFE

the way that sheep do, the herd of those who have gone before us, heading not where we need to go but where others are going. Yet nothing embroils us in greater ills than the fact that we conform to rumor and believe those things to be best that are greeted with great acclaim, and that, though we have many examples before us, we guide our lives not by reason but by imitation.

That's how such a great heap arises of people dashing toward ruin, one piling on top of another. In a great crush of bodies, when members of a crowd are pushing against their neighbors, it happens that anyone who falls takes another down with him, and those in the front bring ruin on those behind them; you can see that this also happens in life as a whole. No one goes wrong to only his own misfortune; he becomes the

DE VITA BEATA

alieni erroris et causa et auctor est; nocet enim adplicari antecedentibus et, dum unusquisque mavult credere quam iudicare, numquam de vita iudicatur, semper creditur, versatque nos et praecipitat traditus per manus error. Alienis perimus exemplis: sanabimur, si separemur modo a coetu. Nunc vero stat contra rationem defensor mali sui populus. Itaque id evenit quod in comitiis, in quibus eos factos esse praetores idem qui fecere mirantur, cum se mobilis favor circumegit: eadem probamus, eadem reprehendimus; hic exitus est omnis iudicii in quo secundum plures datur.

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

cause and creator of another's going astray. Thus, it's dangerous to link oneself to those walking on ahead. So long as each person prefers to make choices by trust rather than judgment, no judgments are used to evaluate life, only trust, and mistakes passed on from hand to hand come to work upon us and dash us to destruction. We perish by the examples of others; we'll recover our health if we separate from the crowd. As things stand, the populace, in defending its own wrongdoing, obstructs the use of reason. Thus, we see the same result as in election assemblies, where the same people who got the praetors appointed show amazement that the appointment was made, once a shift has occurred in unstable public approval. We first applaud things, then detest the very same things. That's the outcome of every decision that's guided by majority opinion.

DE VITA BEATA

[2] Cum de beata vita agetur, non est quod mihi illud discessionum more respondeas: 'haec pars maior esse videtur.' Ideo enim peior est. Non tam bene cum rebus humanis agitur ut meliora pluribus placeant: argumentum pessimi turba est. Quaeramus ergo quid optimum factu sit, non quid usitatissimum, et quid nos in possessione felicitatis aeternae constituat, non quid vulgo, veritatis pessimo interpreti, probatum sit. Vulgum autem tam chlamydatos quam coronatos voco; non enim colorem vestium quibus praetexta sunt corpora aspicio. Oculis de homine non credo, habeo melius et certius lumen quo a falsis vera diiudicem:

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

[2] When we're discussing the happy life, you have no call to reply to me, in the manner of those casting a vote, "This side appears to be in the majority." For that very reason, it's the worse side. Human affairs are not conducted well enough that better things are pleasing to greater numbers; a throng is evidence of what's worse. Therefore, let's try to discover what's best to do, not what's most often practiced, and what will put us in possession of everlasting happiness, not what's approved by the mob (the worst interpreter of truth). By "mob" I'm referring to those wearing the chlamys as well as to those wearing crowns; I don't pay attention to the color of the clothes by which bodies are covered.<sup>1</sup> I don't trust my eyes when it comes to humankind, but I have a better and surer light by which to distinguish true things from false: Let the soul

DE VITA BEATA

animi bonum animus inveniatur. Hic, si unquam respirare illi et recedere in se vacaverit, o quam sibi ipse verum tortus a se fatebitur ac dicet: ‘quidquid feci adhuc infectum esse mallet, quidquid dixi cum recogito, mutis invideo, quidquid optavi inimicorum execrationem puto, quidquid timui, di boni, quanto levius fuit quam quod concupii! Cum multis inimicitias gessi et in gratiam ex odio, si modo ulla inter malos gratia est, redii: mihi ipsi nondum amicus sum. Omnem operam dedi ut me multitudini educerem et aliqua dote notabilem facerem: quid aliud quam telis me opposui et malevolentiae quod morderet ostendi? Vides istos qui eloquentiam laudant, qui

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

find what's good in the soul. If the soul ever finds a space in which to take a deep breath and withdraw into itself, how much will it torture itself into confessing the truth, saying: "Whatever I've done to this point, I'd prefer to be undone; what I've said makes me envy the mute when I call it to mind; what I've wished for, I now consider a curse cast by my enemies; what I feared, great gods!, was less of a burden than what I yearned for. I showed enmity to many, then got back into favor where I had been hated (if any favor exists between the wicked); yet I'm no friend to myself. I've exerted every effort to separate myself from the multitude and distinguish myself by way of some talent, but what else have I done but expose myself to their darts and offer to ill will the spot where it can bite? Do you see those people who praise your eloquence, who fawn upon

DE VITA BEATA

opes sequuntur, qui gratiae adulantur, qui potentiam extollunt? omnes aut sunt hostes aut, quod in aequo est, esse possunt; quam magnus mirantium tam magnus invidentium populus est. Quin potius quaero aliquod usu bonum, quod sentiam, non quod ostendam? ista quae spectantur, ad quae consistitur, quae alter alteri stupens monstrat, foris nitent, introrsus misera sunt.’

[3] Quaeramus aliquod non in speciem bonum, sed solidum et aequale et a secretiore parte formosius; hoc eruamus. Nec longe positum est: invenietur, scire tantum opus est quo manum porrigas; nunc

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

your wealth, who court your favor, who exalt your power? All are your enemies, or they *could* be, which amounts to the same thing. The crowd of those who admire you is just as large as the crowd of those who envy you. Why don't I rather look for some practical good, something I could feel and not just use for display? Those things that people gawk at, that cause them to stop and stare, that one person points out to another with jaws agape, may gleam on the outside but they are wretched within."

[3] Let us seek something that's good not just in appearance, something solid and steady and more lovely in its more hidden part; let us mine for this thing. It's not far away; it will be found. You need only know where to reach out your hand. As things are, though, we pass right by the things that are

DE VITA BEATA

velut in tenebris vicina transimus, offensantes ea ipsa quae desideramus.

Sed ne te per circumitus traham, aliorum quidem opiniones praeteribo—nam et enumerare illas longum est et coarguere: nostram accipe. Nostram autem cum dico, non alligo me ad unum aliquem ex Stoicis proceribus: est et mihi censendi ius. Itaque aliquem sequar, aliquem iubebo sententiam dividere, fortasse et post omnes citatus nihil improbabo ex iis quae priores decreverint et dicam ‘hoc amplius censeo’. Interim, quod inter omnis Stoicos convenit, rerum naturae adsentior; ab illa non deerrare et ad illius legem exemplumque formari sapientia est.

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

nearby, as if they were shrouded by darkness, and we stub our toes on the very things we desire.

But lest I lead you along a circuitous path, I'll pass over the opinions of others, since it's a big job to list them and refute them. Here is *our* opinion—but in saying “our,” I don't tie myself down to one of the Stoic elite; I, too, have the right to express my views. I'll follow one thinker closely, but I'll ask a second to split up his doctrine into separate components;<sup>2</sup> and perhaps, when I'm prompted in turn after all the others have spoken, I'll find fault with none of the doctrines that earlier thinkers have advanced and will say, “I would add the following ....” Meanwhile, I give my assent to Nature, as all Stoics agree to do. To never stray from Nature, to conform to Nature's law and model—that is wisdom.

DE VITA BEATA

Beata est ergo vita conveniens naturae suae, quae non aliter contingere potest quam si primum sana mens est et in perpetua possessione sanitatis suae, deinde fortis ac vehemens, tunc pulcherrime patiens, apta temporibus, corporis sui pertinentiumque ad id curiosa non anxie, tum aliarum rerum quae vitam instruunt diligens sine admiratione cuiusquam, usura fortunae muneribus, non servitura. Intellegis, etiam si non adiciam, sequi perpetuam tranquillitatem, libertatem, depulsis iis quae aut irritant nos aut territant; nam voluptatibus et pro illis quae parva ac fragilia sunt et [...] noxia, ingens gaudium subit, inconcussum et aequale, tum pax et concordia

## ON THE HAPPY LIFE

Happy, then, is the life that accords with its own nature. This can't be attained in any other way except by having, first, a sound mind that has a continuous grasp on its soundness; next, a courageous and lively mind; third, a mind that shows the noblest endurance, adapts to the times, feels concern (but not anxiety) over the body and all the things that affect it, cultivates other things that adorn our lives but is not awed by any of them, and makes use of the gifts of Fortune without becoming enslaved to them. You understand, even if I say nothing more, that serenity and freedom follow when those things that either annoy or frighten us have been driven out; for once we've disdained pleasures and pains, then in place of those things that are petty or frail or harmful [...], a vast joy enters in, unshakable and constant, along with peace, and harmony of

DE VITA BEATA

animi et magnitudo cum mansuetudine;  
omnis enim ex infirmitate feritas est.

[4] Potest aliter quoque definiri bonum nostrum, id est eadem sententia non isdem comprehendi verbis. Quemadmodum idem exercitus modo latius panditur modo in angustum coartatur et aut in cornua sinuata media parte curvatur aut recta fronte explicatur, vis illi, utcumque ordinatus est, eadem est et voluntas pro eisdem partibus standi, ita finitio summi boni alias diffundi potest et exporrigi, alias colligi et in se cogi. Idem itaque erit, si dixerō ‘summum bonum est animus fortuita despiciens, virtute laetus’ aut ‘invicta vis

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

soul, and greatness joined with kindness.<sup>3</sup>  
For all brutality arises from weakness.

[4] “Our good” can also be defined in another way<sup>4</sup>—the same idea framed in different words, just as when the same army is at one time spread out more widely, at another compacted into a narrow space, and is either bent into a curve with its middle portion recessed to form horns or stretched out with a straight front line, yet however it’s marshaled, it has the same strength and the same will to stand fast on behalf of the selfsame cause—just so the definition of the highest good can at times be drawn out and expounded at length, at other times made concise and dense. In this way it will amount to the same thing if I say, “The highest good is a soul that has contempt for the workings of chance and finds happiness in virtue,” or if I say, “The unvanquished strength of the

DE VITA BEATA

animi, perita rerum, placida in actu cum humanitate multa et conversantium cura'. Licet et ita finire, ut beatum dicamus hominem eum cui nullum bonum malumque sit nisi bonus malusque animus, honesti cultorem, virtute contentum, quem nec extollant fortuita nec frangant, qui nullum maius bonum eo quod sibi ipse dare potest noverit, cui vera voluptas erit voluptatum contemptio. Licet, si evagari velis, idem in aliam atque aliam faciem salva et integra potestate transferre; quid enim prohibet nos beatam vitam dicere liberum animum et erectum et interritum ac stabilem, extra metum, extra cupiditatem positum, cui unum bonum sit honestas, unum malum turpitude, cetera vilis

## ON THE HAPPY LIFE

soul, practiced in ways of the world, serene in action, accompanied by much kindness and concern for those it deals with.” One can also define it thus: We call the person “happy” for whom no other good or evil exists except the good and bad soul, who cultivates what’s honorable, who’s content with moral virtue, whom chance events neither exalt nor shatter, who knows of no greater good than that which he can give to himself, whose true desire is the disdain of desires. One can, if one wants to expatiate, translate the same content into more and more forms while keeping its message intact and whole. So what prevents us from calling “a happy life” a free and upright and fearless and constant mind? A mind that resides beyond fear and desire, that holds moral behavior to be the only good and baseness the only evil, and that considers the rest only a base

DE VITA BEATA

turba rerum nec detrahens quicquam beat-  
ae vitae nec adiciens, sine auctu ac detri-  
mento summi boni veniens ac recedens?  
Hunc ita fundatum necesse est, velit nolit,  
sequatur hilaritas continua et laetitia alta  
atque ex alto veniens, ut qui suis gaude-  
at nec maiora domesticis cupiat. Quidni  
ista bene penset cum minutis et frivolis et  
non perseverantibus corpusculi motibus?  
Quo die infra voluptatem fuerit, et infra  
dolorem erit; vides autem quam malam et  
noxiosam servitutem serviturus sit quem  
voluptates doloresque, incertissima do-  
minia inpotentissimaque, alternis posside-  
bunt: ergo exeundum ad libertatem est.

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

heap of stuff that neither takes away from a happy life nor adds to it but arrives and departs without gain or loss to the highest good.<sup>5</sup>

When a person's grounded in this way, constant cheerfulness must attend him, whether he wills it or no, and a happiness that's both deep and from a deep source because what he delights in is his own and he desires nothing greater than his internal resources. Shouldn't *those* things weigh more in his estimation than the tiny, meaningless, transitory sensations of his insignificant body? The day that he moves beyond pleasure, he'll also move beyond pain; but you can see what a bad and harmful servitude he will undergo if pains and pleasures, those most unstable and despotic masters, take possession of him by turns. For this reason we must make our way to freedom.

DE VITA BEATA

Hanc non alia res tribuit quam fortunae negligentia: tum illud orietur inaestimabile bonum, quies mentis in tuto conlocatae et sublimitas expulsisque erroribus ex cognitione veri gaudium grande et inmotum comitatusque et diffusio animi, quibus delectabitur non ut bonis sed ut ex bono suo ortis.

[5] Quoniam liberaliter agere coepi, potest beatus dici qui nec cupit nec timet beneficio rationis, quoniam et saxa timore et tristitia carent nec minus pecudes; non ideo tamen quisquam felicia dixerit quibus non est felicitatis intellectus. Eodem loco pone homines quos in numerum pecorum et animalium redegit hebes natura et ignoratio

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

But nothing else will bring us there except indifference to Fortune. Then will arise that invaluable good, the peace and loftiness of a mind that's established in safe territory, the great and immovable joy that comes from understanding of truth when errors have been banished, and a warmth and expansiveness of spirit—things that will give him delight not because they are good in themselves but because they arise from his own goodness.

[5] Now that I've begun to discuss this more expansively: A person can be called happy who feels neither desire nor fear through the generous gift of Reason; since even stones can be free of fear and grief, no less sheep, but no one for that reason will call "happy" things that have no understanding of happiness. The same applies to people whom a dull nature and obliviousness

DE VITA BEATA

sui. Nihil interest inter hos et illa, quoniam illis nulla ratio est, his prava et malo suo atque in perversum sollers; beatus enim dici nemo potest extra veritatem proiectus. Beata ergo vita est in recto certoque iudicio stabilita et inmutabilis. Tunc enim pura mens est et soluta omnibus malis, quae non tantum lacerationes sed etiam vellicationes effugerit, statura semper ubi constitit ac sedem suam etiam irata et infestante fortuna vindicatura. Nam quod ad voluptatem pertinet, licet circumfundatur undique et per omnis vias influat animumque blandimentis suis leniat aliaque ex aliis admoveat

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

to themselves have thrust into the company of sheep and dumb beasts. There's no distinction between one and the other, since the latter possess no Reason, while the former belong to a twisted kind that's expert in achieving perverse goals, to its own detriment. No one can be called happy who has been thrust out beyond the borders of truth. The happy life, then, is one that has been made fixed and changeless because it is rooted in correct and sure judgment. Then indeed is the mind pure and free of all ills, when it has escaped not only injuries but even insults and is set on standing firm in its place and laying claim to its ground in the face of an angry and hostile Fortune. As for pleasure: Suppose it surrounds us on all sides and flows in along every route and soothes our souls with its blandishments and deploys now this means, now that to

DE VITA BEATA

quibus totos partesque nostri sollicitet, quis mortalium, cui ullum superest hominis vestigium, per diem noctemque titillari velit et deserto animo corpori operam dare?

[6] ‘Sed animus quoque’ inquit ‘voluptates habebit suas.’ Habeat sane sedeatque luxuriae et voluptatum arbiter; inpleat se eis omnibus quae oblectare sensus solent, deinde praeterita respiciat et exoletarum voluptatum memor exultet prioribus futurisque iam immineat ac spes suas ordinet et, dum corpus in praesenti sagina iacet, cogitationes ad futura praemittat: hoc mihi videbitur miserior, quoniam mala pro bonis legere dementia est. Nec sine sanitate quisquam beatus est nec

ON THE HAPPY LIFE

trouble us, wholly or partly; yet who among mortals, if some shred of humanity remains intact, would want to be titillated all day and night and attend to the needs of the body, leaving the soul behind?

[6] But someone objects: “The mind, too, has its own pleasures.”<sup>6</sup> Fine, let it have them, and let it preside as arbiter of luxury and pleasures. Let it fill itself with everything that works toward the delight of the senses; let it look back to the past and remember faded pleasures, exulting in those gone by, then let it look forward to those yet to come and marshal its expectations, projecting its thoughts to the future, even while the body wallows and stuffs itself in the present; it will be made more wretched, in my view, by this pleasure-seeking, since it’s madness to choose the bad over the good. No one is happy who is not also sound, and no one

DE VITA BEATA

sanus cui futura pro optimis adpetuntur. Beatus ergo est iudicii rectus; beatus est praesentibus qualiacumque sunt contentus amicusque rebus suis; beatus est is cui omnem habitum rerum suarum ratio commendat.

[7] Vident et in iliis qui summum bonum dixerunt quam turpi illud loco posuerint. Itaque negant posse voluptatem a virtute diduci et aiunt nec honeste quemquam vivere ut non iucunde vivat, nec iucunde ut non honeste quoque. Non video quomodo ista tam diversa in eandem copulam coiciantur. Quid est, oro vos, cur separari voluptas a virtute non possit? videlicet, quia omne bonis ex virtute principium est, ex huius radicibus etiam ea quae vos et amatis et