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EPISTLES 93–124



*Translated by*  
RICHARD M. GUMMERE

SENECA

EPISTLES

江苏工业学院图书馆

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY  
RICHARD M. GUMMERE

藏书章



HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
LONDON, ENGLAND

*First published 1925*  
*Reprinted 1943, 1953, 1962, 1971, 1989, 2006*

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ISBN 0-674-99086-2

*Printed on acid-free paper and bound by*  
*Edwards Brothers, Ann Arbor, Michigan*

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SENECA

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# THE EPISTLES OF SENECA



# L. ANNAEI SENECAE AD LUCILIUM EPISTULAE

## XCIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 In epistula, qua de morte Metronactis philosophi querebaris tamquam et potuisset diutius vivere et debuisset, aequitatem tuam desideravi, quae tibi in omni persona, in omni negotio superest, in una re deest, in qua omnibus. Multos inveni aequos adversus homines, adversus deos neminem. Obiurgamus cotidie fatum : " quare ille in medio cursu raptus est ? Quare ille non rapitur ? Quare senectutem et sibi et aliis gravem extendit ? "
- 2 Utrum, obsecro te, aequius iudicas te naturae an tibi parere naturam ? Quid autem interest, quam cito exeas, unde utique exeundum est ? Non ut diu vivamus curandum est, sed ut satis ; nam ut diu vivas, fato opus est, ut satis, animo. Longa est vita,

---

\* A philosopher of Naples, mentioned as giving lectures there : *cf. Ep. lxxvi. 4.*

<sup>b</sup> *i.e.*, "adequately," equivalent to *ὡς δεῖ*.

# THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

## XCI. ON THE QUALITY, AS CONTRASTED WITH THE LENGTH, OF LIFE

WHILE reading the letter in which you were lamenting the death of the philosopher Metronax <sup>a</sup> as if he might have, and indeed ought to have, lived longer, I missed the spirit of fairness which abounds in all your discussions concerning men and things, but is lacking when you approach one single subject, —as is indeed the case with us all. In other words, I have noticed many who deal fairly with their fellow-men, but none who deals fairly with the gods. We rail every day at Fate, saying : “ Why has A. been carried off in the very middle of his career ? Why is not B. carried off instead ? Why should he prolong his old age, which is a burden to himself as well as to others ? ”

But tell me, pray, do you consider it fairer that you should obey Nature, or that Nature should obey you ? And what difference does it make how soon you depart from a place which you must depart from sooner or later ? We should strive, not to live long, but to live rightly <sup>b</sup> ; for to achieve long life you have need of Fate only, but for right living you

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si plena est ; impletur autem, cum animus sibi bonum  
3 suum reddidit et ad se potestatem sui transtulit. Quid  
illum octoginta anni iuvant per inertiam exacti ? Non  
vixit iste, sed in vita moratus est, nec sero mortuus  
est, sed diu. Octoginta annis vixit. Interest, mortem  
4 eius ex quo die numeres. At ille obiit viridis. Sed  
officia boni civis, boni amici, boni filii executus est ;  
in nulla parte cessavit. Licet aetas eius imperfecta  
sit, vita perfecta est. Octoginta annis vixit. Immo  
octoginta annis fuit, nisi forte sic vixisse eum dicis,  
quomodo dicuntur arbores vivere.

Obsecro te, Lucili, hoc agamus, ut quemadmodum  
pretiosa rerum sic vita nostra non multum pateat,  
sed multum pendeat. Actu illam metiamur, non  
tempore. Vis scire, quid inter hunc intersit vegetum  
contemptoremque fortunae functum omnibus vitae  
humanae stipendiis atque in summum bonum eius  
evectum, et illum, cui multi anni transmissi sunt ?  
Alter post mortem quoque est, alter ante mortem  
periit.

5 Laudemus itaque et in numero felicitum reponamus  
eum, cui quantulumcumque temporis contigit, bene  
conlocatum est. Vidit enim veram lucem. Non fuit

---

<sup>a</sup> For a complete definition of the Supreme Good *cf.*  
*Ep.* lxxi. 4 ff.

<sup>b</sup> *i.e.*, the Metronax mentioned above.

<sup>c</sup> For the same phrase see *Ep.* lxvi. 30 and footnote.

<sup>d</sup> *Cf. Ep.* lx. 4 *mortem suam antecesserunt.*

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need the soul. A life is really long if it is a full life ; but fulness is not attained until the soul has rendered to itself its proper Good,<sup>a</sup> that is, until it has assumed control over itself. What benefit does this older man derive from the eighty years he has spent in idleness ? A person like him has not lived ; he has merely tarried awhile in life. Nor has he died late in life ; he has simply been a long time dying. He has lived eighty years, has he ? That depends upon the date from which you reckon his death ! Your other friend,<sup>b</sup> however, departed in the bloom of his manhood. But he had fulfilled all the duties of a good citizen, a good friend, a good son ; in no respect had he fallen short. His age may have been incomplete, but his life was complete. The other man has lived eighty years, has he ? Nay, he has existed eighty years, unless perchance you mean by " he has lived " what we mean when we say that a tree " lives."

Pray, let us see to it, my dear Lucilius, that our lives, like jewels of great price, be noteworthy not because of their width but because of their weight.<sup>c</sup> Let us measure them by their performance, not by their duration. Would you know wherein lies the difference between this hardy man who, despising Fortune, has served through every campaign of life and has attained to life's Supreme Good, and that other person over whose head many years have passed ? The former exists even after his death ; the latter has died even before he was dead.<sup>d</sup>

We should therefore praise, and number in the company of the blest, that man who has invested well the portion of time, however little, that has been allotted to him ; for such a one has seen the true light. He has not been one of the common herd.

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unus e multis. Et vixit et vigit. Aliquando sereno usus est, aliquando, ut solet, validi sideris fulgor per nubila emicuit. Quid quaeris quamdiu vixerit? Vivit; ad posteros usque transiit et se in memoriam dedit.

- 6 Nec ideo mihi plures annos accedere recusaverim, nihil tamen mihi ad beatam vitam defuisse dicam, si spatium eius inciditur. Non enim ad eum diem me aptavi, quem ultimum mihi spes avida promiserat, sed nullum non tamquam ultimum aspexi. Quid me interrogas, quando natus sim, an inter iuniores adhuc
- 7 censear? Habeo meum. Quemadmodum in minore corporis habitu potest homo esse perfectus, sic et in minore temporis modo potest vita esse perfecta. Aetas inter externa est. Quamdiu sim, alienum est; quamdiu ero,<sup>1</sup> ut sim, meum est. Hoc a me exige, ne velut per tenebras aevum ignobile emetiar, ut agam vitam, non ut praetervehar.
- 8 Quaeris quod sit amplissimum vitae spatium? Usque ad sapientiam vivere. Qui ad illam pervenit, attigit non longissimum finem, sed maximum. Ille vero gloriatur audacter et dis agat gratias interque eos sibi, et rerum naturae inputet, quod fuit. Merito enim inputabit; meliorem illi vitam reddidit quam

<sup>1</sup> *ero* Buecheler; *vero* BA.

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\* *i.e.*, the Sun.

\* As in the original *comitia centuriata*, men between the ages of seventeen and forty-six.

\* As riches, health, etc.

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He has not only lived, but flourished. Sometimes he enjoyed fair skies ; sometimes, as often happens, it was only through the clouds that there flashed to him the radiance of the mighty star.<sup>a</sup> Why do you ask : " How long did he live ? " He still lives ! At one bound he has passed over into posterity and has consigned himself to the guardianship of memory.

And yet I would not on that account decline for myself a few additional years ; although, if my life's space be shortened, I shall not say that I have lacked aught that is essential to a happy life. For I have not planned to live up to the very last day that my greedy hopes had promised me ; nay, I have looked upon every day as if it were my last. Why ask the date of my birth, or whether I am still enrolled on the register of the younger men ? <sup>b</sup> What I have is my own. Just as one of small stature can be a perfect man, so a life of small compass can be a perfect life. Age ranks among the external things.<sup>c</sup> How long I am to exist is not mine to decide, but how long I shall go on existing in my present way is in my own control. This is the only thing you have the right to require of me,—that I shall cease to measure out an inglorious age as it were in darkness, and devote myself to living instead of being carried along past life.

And what, you ask, is the fullest span of life ? It is living until you possess wisdom. He who has attained wisdom has reached, not the furthestmost, but the most important, goal. Such a one may indeed exult boldly and give thanks to the gods—aye, and to himself also—and he may count himself Nature's creditor for having lived. He will indeed have the right to do so, for he has paid her back a better life than he has received. He has set up the

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accepit. Exemplar boni viri posuit, qualis quantusque esset ostendit. Si quid adiecisset, fuisset simile praeterito.

- 9 Et tamen quo usque vivimus? Omnium rerum cognitione frui sumus. Scimus a quibus principiis<sup>1</sup> natura se adtollat, quemadmodum ordinet mundum, per quas annum vices revocet, quemadmodum omnia, quae usquam erant, cluserit et se ipsam finem sui fecerit. Scimus sidera impetu suo vadere, praeter terram nihil stare, cetera continua velocitate decurrere. Scimus quemadmodum solem luna praetereat, quare tardior velociorem post se relinquat, quomodo lumen accipiat aut perdat, quae causa inducat noctem, quae reducat diem. Illuc eundum est, ubi ista  
10 propius aspicias. "Nec hac spe," inquit sapiens ille, "fortius exeo, quod patere mihi ad deos meos iter iudico. Merui quidem admitti et iam inter illos fui animumque illo meum misi et ad me illi suum miserant. Sed tolli me de medio puta et post mortem nihil ex homine restare; aequae magnum animum habeo, etiam si nusquam transiturus excedo."  
11 "Non tam multis vixit annis quam potuit." Et paucorum versuum liber est et quidem laudandus atque utilis; annales Tanusii<sup>2</sup> scis quam ponderosi

<sup>1</sup> *principiis* Lipsius; *principalis* BA.

<sup>2</sup> *an(n)ale est anusii* BA; corr. edd.

<sup>a</sup> *i.e.*, Nature herself is eternal.

<sup>b</sup> See, however, Seneca, *N.Q.* vii. 2. 3 *sciamus utrum mundus terra stante circumeat an mundo stante terra vertatur*. For such doubts and discoveries cf. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, pp. 178 f.

<sup>c</sup> See Index of Proper Names.

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pattern of a good man, showing the quality and the greatness of a good man. Had another year been added, it would merely have been like the past.

And yet how long are we to keep living? We have had the joy of learning the truth about the universe. We know from what beginnings Nature arises; how she orders the course of the heavens; by what successive changes she summons back the year; how she has brought to an end all things that ever have been, and has established herself as the only end of her own being.<sup>a</sup> We know that the stars move by their own motion, and that nothing except the earth stands still, while all the other bodies run on with uninterrupted swiftness.<sup>b</sup> We know how the moon outstrips the sun; why it is that the slower leaves the swifter behind; in what manner she receives her light, or loses it again; what brings on the night, and what brings back the day. To that place you must go where you are to have a closer view of all these things. "And yet," says the wise man, "I do not depart more valiantly because of this hope—because I judge the path lies clear before me to my own gods. I have indeed earned admission to their presence, and in fact have already been in their company; I have sent my soul to them as they had previously sent theirs to me. But suppose that I am utterly annihilated, and that after death nothing mortal remains; I have no less courage, even if, when I depart, my course leads—nowhere."

"But," you say, "he has not lived as many years as he might have lived." There are books which contain very few lines, admirable and useful in spite of their size; and there are also the *Annals of Tanusius*,<sup>c</sup>—you know how bulky the book is, and



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sint et quid vocentur. Hoc est vita quorundam  
12 longa, et quod Tanusii sequitur annales. Numquid  
feliciorum iudicas eum, qui summo die muneris,  
quam eum, qui medio occiditur? Numquid aliquem  
tam stulte cupidum esse vitae putas, ut iugulari in  
spoliario quam in harena malit? Non maiore spatio  
alter alterum praecedimus. Mors per omnes it; qui  
occidit, consequitur occisum. Minimum est, de quo  
sollicitissime agitur. Quid autem ad rem pertinet,  
quam diu vites, quod evitare non possis? VALE.

### XCIV.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Eam partem philosophiae, quae dat propria cuique  
personae praecepta nec in universum conponit  
hominem, sed marito suadet quomodo se gerat  
adversus uxorem, patri quomodo educet liberos,  
domino quomodo servos regat, quidam solam rece-  
perunt, ceteras quasi extra utilitatem nostram va-  
gantes reliquerunt, tamquam quis posset de parte  
suadere nisi qui summam prius totius vitae complexus  
est.
- 2 Sed Ariston Stoicus contrario hanc partem levem  
existimat et quae non descendat in pectus usque

---

\* For technical terms in *Epp.* xciv. and xcv. see Appendix A.

\* See Cicero, *De off.* i. 3. 7 ff. for a full discussion of principles and duties. As one would expect, the Romans were more interested in practical precepts than were the Greeks.

\* Frag. 358 von Arnim.