

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

- ait ex his, quae videntur, nihil esse uno excepto¹ universo. Zenon Eleates omnia negotia de negotio deiecit: ait nihil esse. Circa eadem fere Pyrrhonei versantur et Megarici et Eretrici² et Academici, qui
- 45 novam induxerunt scientiam, nihil scire. Haec omnia in illum supervacuum studiorum liberalium gregem coice; illi mihi non profuturam scientiam tradunt, hi spem omnis scientiae eripiunt. Satius est supervacua scire quam nihil. Illi non praeferunt lumen, per quod acies derigatur ad verum; hi oculos mihi effodiunt. Si Protagorae credo, nihil in rerum natura est nisi dubium; si Nausiphani, hoc unum certum est, nihil esse certi; si Parmenidi, nihil est praeter unum; si Zenoni, ne unum quidem.
- 46 Quid ergo nos sumus? Quid ista, quae nos circumstant, alunt, sustinent? Tota rerum natura umbra est aut inanis aut fallax. Non facile dixerim, utris magis irascar, illis, qui nos nihil scire voluerunt, an illis, qui ne hoc quidem nobis reliquerunt, nihil scire. VALE.

LXXXIX

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Rem utilem desideras et ad sapientiam³ prope-

¹ uno excepto inserted by Kalbfleisch; nihil esse universo Vb.

² Eretrici Lipsius; cretici Vb.

³ ad sapientiam later MSS.; sapientem B.

^a In other words, the unchangeable, perfect Being of the universe is contrasted with the mutable Non-Being of opinion and unreality.

^b i. e., the universe.

^c See §§ 9 ff., which give the normal division.

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exists of all this which seems to exist, except the universe alone.^a Zeno of Elea removed all the difficulties by removing one; for he declares that nothing exists. The Pyrrhonian, Megarian, Eretrian, and Academic schools are all engaged in practically the same task; they have introduced a new knowledge, non-knowledge. You may sweep all these theories in with the superfluous troops of "liberal" studies; the one class of men give me a knowledge that will be of no use to me, the other class do away with any hope of attaining knowledge. It is better, of course, to know useless things than to know nothing. One set of philosophers offers no light by which I may direct my gaze toward the truth; the other digs out my very eyes and leaves me blind. If I cleave to Protagoras, there is nothing in the scheme of nature that is not doubtful; if I hold with Nausiphanes, I am sure only of this—that everything is unsure; if with Parmenides, there is nothing except the One^b; if with Zeno, there is not even the One.

What are we, then? What becomes of all these things that surround us, support us, sustain us? The whole universe is then a vain or deceptive shadow. I cannot readily say whether I am more vexed at those who would have it that we know nothing, or with those who would not leave us even this privilege. Farewell.

LXXXIX. ON THE PARTS OF PHILOSOPHY^c

It is a useful fact that you wish to know, one which is essential to him who hastens after wisdom

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ranti necessariam, dividi philosophiam et ingens corpus eius in membra disponi. Facilius enim per partes in cognitionem¹ totius adducimur. Utinam quidem quemadmodum universa mundi facies in conspectum venit, ita philosophia tota nobis posset occurrere, simillimum mundo spectaculum. Profecto enim omnes mortales in admirationem sui raperet relictis iis, quae nunc magna magnorum ignorantia credimus. Sed quia contingere hoc non potest, est sic² nobis aspicienda,³ quemadmodum mundi secreta cernuntur.

- 2 Sipientis quidem animus totam molem eius amplectitur nec minus illam velociter obit quam caelum acies nostra; nobis autem, quibus perrumpenda caligo est et quorum visus in proximo deficit, singula quaeque ostendi facilius possunt universi nondum capacibus. Faciam ergo quod exigis, et philosophiam in partes, non in frustra,⁴ dividam. Dividi enim illam, non concidi, utile est. Nam comprehendere quem-
- 3 admodum maxima ita minima difficile est. Describitur in tribus populus, in centurias exercitus. Quicquid in maius crevit, facilius agnoscitur, si discessit in partes, quas, ut dixi, innumerabiles esse et parvulas non oportet. Idem enim vitii habet nimia quod nulla divisio; simile confuso est, quidquid usque in pulverem sectum est.

¹ *cognitionem* later MSS.; *cogitationem* B.

² *est sic* Buecheler; *et sic* B; *et sic erit* later MSS.

³ *aspicienda* Mentel.; *abscondenda* B.

⁴ *frustra* later MSS.; *frustra* B.

^a See Plato, especially *Symposium* 211 ff.

^b *i.e.*, an infinitely small *divisio* is the same as its opposite — *confusio*.

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—namely, the parts of philosophy and the division of its huge bulk into separate members. For by studying the parts we can be brought more easily to understand the whole. I only wish that philosophy might come before our eyes in all her unity, just as the whole expanse of the firmament is spread out for us to gaze upon! It would be a sight closely resembling that of the firmament. For then surely philosophy would ravish all mortals with love for her^a; we should abandon all those things which, in our ignorance of what is great, we believe to be great. Inasmuch, however, as this cannot fall to our lot, we must view philosophy just as men gaze upon the secrets of the firmament.

The wise man's mind, to be sure, embraces the whole framework of philosophy, surveying it with no less rapid glance than our mortal eyes survey the heavens; we, however, who must break through the gloom, we whose vision fails even for that which is near at hand, can be shown with greater ease each separate object even though we cannot yet comprehend the universe. I shall therefore comply with your demand, and shall divide philosophy into parts, but not into scraps. For it is useful that philosophy should be divided, but not chopped into bits. Just as it is hard to take in what is indefinitely large, so it is hard to take in what is indefinitely small. The people are divided into tribes, the army into centuries. Whatever has grown to greater size is more easily identified if it is broken up into parts; but the parts, as I have remarked, must not be countless in number and diminutive in size. For over-analysis is faulty in precisely the same way as no analysis at all; whatever you cut so fine that it becomes dust is as good as blended into a mass again.^b

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- 4 Primum itaque, si videtur¹ tibi, dicam, inter sapientiam et philosophiam quid intersit. Sapientia perfectum bonum est mentis humanae. Philosophia sapientiae amor est et adfectatio. Haec eo tendit,² quo illa pervenit. Philosophia unde dicta sit, apparet. Ipso enim nomine fatetur quid amet.³
- 5 Sapientiam quidam ita finierunt, ut dicerent divinorum et humanorum scientiam. Quidam ita: sapientia est nosse divina et humana et horum causas. Supervacua mihi haec videtur adiectio, quia causae divinorum humanorumque pars divinorum sunt. Philosophiam quoque fuerunt qui aliter atque aliter finient. Alii studium illam virtutis esse dixerunt, alii studium corrigendae mentis, a quibusdam dicta
- 6 est adpetitio rectae rationis. Illud quasi constitit, aliquid inter philosophiam et sapientiam interesse. Neque enim fieri potest ut idem sit quod adfectatur et quod adfectat. Quomodo multum inter avaritiam et pecuniam interest, cum illa cupiat, haec concupiscatur, sic inter philosophiam et sapientiam. Haec enim illius effectus ac praemium est; illa venit, ad
- 7 hanc venit.⁴ Sapientia est, quam Graeci σοφίαν vocant. Hoc verbo Romani quoque utebantur, sicut philosophia nunc quoque utuntur. Quod et togatae

¹ *si videtur* Haase; *si ut videtur* MSS.

² *eo tendit* Cornelissen; *ostendit* B.

³ *quid amet* Madvig; *quidam et* B.

⁴ *venitur* Hense; *itur* MSS. W. Schultz argues that § 7 (*sapientia . . . Dossenni lege*) has by some error been transferred from its proper position after *quo illa pervenit* in § 4 to its present place, where it disturbs the sequence of the thought.

^a "Love-of-Wisdom."

^b Θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων ἐπιστήμη, quoted by Plutarch, *De Plac. Phil.* 874 E.

^c Cicero, *De Off.* ii. 2. 5.

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In the first place, therefore, if you approve, I shall draw the distinction between wisdom and philosophy. Wisdom is the perfect good of the human mind; philosophy is the love of wisdom, and the endeavour to attain it. The latter strives toward the goal which the former has already reached. And it is clear why philosophy was so called. For it acknowledges by its very name the object of its love.^a Certain persons have defined wisdom as the knowledge of things divine and things human.^b Still others say: "Wisdom is knowing things divine and things human, and their causes also."^c This added phrase seems to me to be superfluous, since the causes of things divine and things human are a part of the divine system. Philosophy also has been defined in various ways; some have called it "the study of virtue,"^d others have referred to it as "a study of the way to amend the mind,"^e and some have named it "the search for right reason." One thing is practically settled, that there is some difference between philosophy and wisdom. Nor indeed is it possible that that which is sought and that which seeks are identical. As there is a great difference between avarice and wealth, the one being the subject of the craving and the other its object, so between philosophy and wisdom. For the one is a result and a reward of the other. Philosophy does the going, and wisdom is the goal. Wisdom is that which the Greeks call σοφία. The Romans also were wont to use this word in the sense in which they now use "philosophy" also. This will be proved to your satisfaction by our old national

^a The ἀσκησις ἀρετῆς of the earlier Stoics. Seneca (Frag. 17) also calls it *recta vivendi ratio*.

^e *i. e.*, to make a *bona mens* out of a *mala mens*.

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tibi antiquae probabunt et inscriptus Dossenni monumento titulus :

Hospes resiste et sophian Dossenni lege.

- 8 Quidam ex nostris, quamvis philosophia studium virtutis esset et haec peteretur, illa peteret, tamen non putaverunt illas distrahi posse. Nam nec philosophia sine virtute est nec sine philosophia virtus. Philosophia studium virtutis est, sed per ipsam virtutem; nec virtus autem esse sine studio sui potest nec virtutis studium sine ipsa. Non enim quemadmodum in iis, qui aliquid ex distante loco ferre conantur, alibi est qui petit, alibi quod petitur. Nec quemadmodum itinera quae ad urbes perducunt, sic viae ad virtutem sunt¹ extra ipsam; ad virtutem venit per ipsam; cohaerent inter se philosophia virtusque.
- 9 Philosophiae tres partes esse dixerunt et maximi et plurimi auctores: moralem, naturalem, rationalem. Prima conponit animum. Secunda rerum naturam scrutatur. Tertia proprietates verborum exigit et structuram et argumentationes, ne pro vero falsa subrepant. Ceterum inventi sunt et qui in pauciora
- 10 philosophiam et qui in plura diducunt. Quidam ex Peripateticis quartam partem adiecerunt² civilem, quia propriam quandam exercitationem desideret et

¹ sic . . . sunt added by Buecheler, giving the general sense; there is a lacuna in B, in which traces of a corrupt text can be made out.

² adiecerunt later MSS.; adicerent B.

^a It is doubtful whether this was the name of a real person, or a mere "Joe Miller" type from the Fabula Atellana. The character in Horace, *Ep.* ii. 1. 173, is certainly the latter; and the testimony of Pliny (*N.H.* xiv. 15), who quotes a line from a play called *Acharistio*, is not reliable.

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