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SO MANY NAMES WILL PERISH:
Apocalypse and Afterlife
in Seneca's *Natural Questions*[1]

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In the *Natural Questions*, Seneca both imparts and combats anxiety about death: the reader's, his own, and even that of philosophy. As a culminating *memento mori* in *Q. Nat.* 3 he rewrites Ovid's flood narrative as the Stoic cataclysm. Following Stoic cyclical theory, however, Seneca claims that humankind will be reborn, implying a potential exceeding of death. By tracing Seneca's numerous hints about postmortem continuity we gain insights into the specific blend of natural investigation, ethical philosophy, and literature in the *Q. Nat.* Through their combinations and mutual corrections Seneca constructs his own afterlife.

Keywords; Seneca, *Natural Questions*, Stoicism, apocalypse, afterlife.

Introduction

"A single day will bury the human race," writes Seneca in the *Natural Questions* (*Q. Nat.*).[2] The ending of the original first book (now referred to as *Q. Nat.* 3) dramatizes mankind's extirpation in a universal apoc-

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[2]   *Unus humanum genus dies condet*, 3.29.9. Quotations of the *Q. Nat.* follow Hine (1996), the Teubner edition, although Díaz (2013) has also been consulted. Quotations from the *Epp.* follow Reynolds 1965, the OCT. Translations mostly follow Hine 2010 for

alypse.[3] In a lengthy and vivid section, unlike anything outside of his tragedies, Seneca forecasts the destruction of the world by an immense conjunction of flooding waters, rain, quakes, and the liquefaction of the earth itself. This cyclical destruction and renewal of the world is a mainstay of Stoic physics, and recent work has examined Seneca's approach to apocalypse within that framework.[4] Yet there is a further theme implied in the end times that has received far less attention: Seneca's repeated comparisons of nature to the human body intimate that the cataclysm applies, mutatis mutandis, to the individual.[5] Seneca himself recurrently insists that his reader see the ending of the world—itself a living organism—as a meditation on human death (3.27.15; 3.30.2). However, the closing lines of *Q. Nat.* 3 quickly—almost as an afterthought—restore the world and revive the human race. This resurrection remains one of the most mysterious elements of the schema. If the world is restored, the question naturally arises, what of the self? Readers are seemingly left to their own devices concerning any potential continuation of the self. This is despite the ubiquitous reframing of approaches to personal cessation, including his own, in what is likely his last work.[6]

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the *Q. Nat.* and Long and Graver (2015) for the *Epp.*, with alterations as necessary for clarity.

[3]   That *Q. Nat.* 3 was originally the first book is maintained convincingly by Hine (1981) 4-28, through internal and manuscript evidence. Cf. Codoñer (1989) 1792-1794 and Williams (2005)a 142, and (2012) 12-14.

[4]   For the Stoic notion of total cosmic destruction, almost always said to be by fire (*ekpyrosis*), and its restoration, see Long and Sedley (1987) sections 46 and 52 and Sellars (2006), 97-99. It has been posited that the flood in *Q. Nat.* 3 might well be imagined as a more delimited version, restricted to the earth and not ending the universe (Gauly (2004) 235-267; Armisen-Marchetti (2006); Mazzoli (2005) 172-173). However, Seneca does not seem to make this distinction, since he repeatedly links the cataclysm with universal destruction—often by fire, sometimes by many causes together, sometimes without a specified cause—both in the *Q. Nat.* (3. *pr.* 5, 3.13.1-2, 3.28, 3.30, 6.4) and elsewhere (*Epp.* 9.16, 71.12-15, *Marc.* 26.6-7, *Ben.* 6.22. Cf. *DRN* 5.380-415, Ovid *Met.* 1.254-255).

[5]   Seneca commonly supplements descriptions of natural phenomena with similes relating the world to a creature, often a human being: "as in our bodies" (*e.g. ut in nostris corporibus*, 3.15.4 cf. 3.15.1, 3.15.5, 3.30.4). In the flood passage, the formation of the world is likened to that of a human, with a mere instant needed to destroy either (3.27.2). For the Stoic background for this analogy, see Long and Sedley (1987), sections 45-46 and 53-54; and Sellars (2006) 125-129.

[6]   For a more detailed introduction to the *Q. Nat.*, including its dating, see Hine (2010) 1-22; and Berno (2015).

Seneca does craft his own responses to the need for some sort of continuity, unique to the *Q. Nat.* He also gives us the tools within the *Q. Nat.* to uncover which of the approaches mentioned or implied are supported by his demonstrations of Stoic philosophy therein. The intellectual labor involves teasing out the interrelation of three modes of thought as they apply to the self, its end, and its subsistence: natural investigation, ethical philosophy, and literature.

The way in which Seneca blends physics with ethics in the *Q. Nat.* is still often jarring to modern readers.[7] Although this is within the usual Stoic framework, the two branches are still understood as having distinct subjects and, as we will see below, modes of thought.[8] Seneca himself distinguishes between the philosophy that deals with humans and the one that deals with celestial matters (1 *pr.*1-2).[9] These two modes the investigating mind must actively probe and conjoin. Seneca performs, models, and theorizes this work of thought for his readers in the *Q. Nat.* To both physics and ethics he fuses well-crafted literary elements, extensive intertextuality with poetry, and even discussions of the genre.[10] There has been a churn of work on each of these three modes in Seneca recently and on the *Q. Nat.* The method here will be

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[7] Gareth Williams (2008) terms this "the special Senecan concoction of physico-moral science," 237, cf. (2012) 11-12, 54-92. Scott (1999) 56-60, reviews the previous scholarship on Seneca's physics and ethics and highlights their thematic connections throughout the *Q. Nat.* The traditional rubric for the *Q. Nat.* has been "meteorology," which in modern terms is misleading for a work that addresses the sources of the Nile, earthquakes, and the destruction of the world. Moreover, Seneca does not address a wide variety of natural phenomena, as Pliny, a contemporary, does far more comprehensively in his *Natural History*. See Hine (2006) for the contrast between the two.

[8] The Stoics considered ethics, that is, how to live one's life and treat others, as one of the three parts of philosophy, along with physics (corresponding to theology) and logic, Long and Sedley (1987), section 26. Both Inwood (2002) 148 and Setaioli (2007) additionally discuss the theological aspects of the *Q. Nat.*, with the latter emphasizing Seneca's exhortations toward practical imitation of the divine in many of the letters and essays.

[9]   It is thus under his own definition that the ethical parts of the *Q. Nat.* fall under the former (1. *pr.* 2): "the one branch teaches what should be done on earth … [it] dispels our wrongdoing and brings a light up close to us so that the uncertainties of life can be clearly discerned" (*altera docet quid in terris agendum sit … errores nostros discutit et lumen admovet quo discernantur ambigua vitae*).

[10] Intertextuality in the *Q. Nat.* has been addressed in several excellent studies, e.g. Althoff (2005); and Trinacty (2018). For an overview of Seneca's use of Augustan poets, especially Vergil and Ovid, see Tarrant (2006), 1-5. For statistics on Seneca's use of poetry, see Mazzoli (1970). For intertextuality in the tragedies, see Trinacty (2014).

the focused application of previous insights to illuminate something new, namely how Seneca makes use of the differences between these modes in relation to death and perpetuation, especially his own.

The first three sections will address the heavy emphasis in the *Q. Nat.* on the end of life—Seneca's, the reader's, and even philosophy's. We will follow out the multiple Stoic answers Seneca gives, with a focus on uncovering prospects for surmounting one's mortality. The next three sections will scrutinize Seneca's approaches to personal perpetuation, which paradoxically are most prominent in relation to universal destruction. The last section presents further twists that demonstrate how the *Q. Nat.* combines the modes of thought in a manner and extent not seen in his other works. Seneca thereby intimates how he himself desires to be remembered.

Personal cessation

The theme of philosophically confronting death, so common throughout Seneca's corpus, is all the more meaningful in the *Q. Nat.* since Seneca wrote them in his 60's.[11] Although the timing of many of the *Epistulae Morales* (*Epp.*) is obscure, they certainly overlap with the *Q. Nat.* in date and themes (Hine (2010) 10). In both works the Senecan persona often reflects on his old age to his addressee, Lucilius, and is greatly concerned with the shortness of time.[12] That the proximity of death is fundamental to the composition of the *Q. Nat.* is strikingly introduced in the preface to *Q. Nat.* 3, which is also the preface for the whole. Seneca depicts his seeming perturbation regarding his age. As one of the few personal comments in the *Q. Nat.*—or, in fact, anywhere in his corpus—this theme demands intense attention.[13] Seneca's shifting approaches demonstrate much about his method:

[11]   We believe he wrote them shortly after his withdrawal from Nero's court in 62 CE. Perhaps they were left incomplete by Seneca's forced suicide at that tyrant's request. Tacitus 15.60-64; Suetonius 35.5; D.C. 62.25.1-3. Cf. Ker (2009) 17-62.

[12]   Cooper (2006) 43-48, analyzes Seneca's relation to his addressee and readers as spiritual adviser. Williams (2008) 219-225, elucidates how Seneca's exhortations to Lucilius in *Q. Nat.* 3 are programmatic for the whole work and contrasts his characterizations of Lucilius in *Epp.* 19-22. Cf. Corcoran (1971) xii.

[13]   Seneca's autobiographical reserve is well-established. Edwards (2008) is a brief biography integrating the few and highly rhetorical hints in Seneca's own writing with later evidence. Griffin (1976) and Veyne (2003) are attempts at fuller treatments. See Graver (2023) 269-283, on Seneca's self-scripting as literary artistry with philosophical purposes.

Non praeterit me, Lucili virorum optime, quam magnarum rerum funda-
menta ponam senex, qui mundum circumire constitui et causas secretaque
eius eruere atqui aliis noscenda prodere. quando tam multa consequar, tam
sparsa colligam, tam occulta perspiciam? premit a tergo senectus et obicit an-
nos inter vana studia consumptos. tanto magis urgeamus et damna aetatis
male exemptae labor sarciat. nox ad diem accedat, occupationes recidantur,
patrimonii longe a domino iacentis cura solvatur, sibi totus animus vacet et
ad contemplationem sui saltem in ipso fine respiciat. faciet, ac sibi instabit et
cotidie brevitatem temporis metietur; quidquid amissum est, id diligenti usu
praesentis vitae recolliget…
Libet igitur mihi exclamare illum poetae incliti versum:
  tollimus ingentes animos et maxima parvo
  tempore molimur.

hoc dicerem, si puer iuvenisque molirer (nullum enim non tam magnis rebus
tempus angustum est); nunc vero ad rem seriam, gravem, inmensam post-
meridianis horas accessimus.

I am not unaware, Lucilius, excellent man, of how great is the enter-
prise whose foundations I am laying in my old age, now that I have
decided to traverse the world, to seek out its causes and secrets, and to
present them for others to learn about. When shall I investigate things
so numerous, gather together things so scattered, examine things so
inaccessible? Old age is at my back and accuses me of having used up
my years in fruitless pursuits. Let us press on all the more, and let hard
work repair the losses of a misspent life. Let night be added to day, let
business affairs be cut back, let there be no more anxiety about family
estates situated far from their owner, let the mind have time entirely to
itself, let it turn to contemplation of itself, at least in its final stages. It
will do so, it will drive itself on, and each day it will measure the short
time left; whatever has been lost, it will recover by using its present life
with care… So I want to shout out these lines by the eminent poet:
  We raise our mighty spirits and in a brief time
  attempt the greatest deeds.

I would say this if I were embarking on the project as a boy or young
man (for any length of time would be too limited for such a great enter-
prise); but as it is we have started a serious, significant, endless project
in our afternoon hours. (3 *pr.* 1-3)

To follow Seneca's fluid and alternating depictions of his relation
to work and old age is to shift perspective constantly. Some of them
are philosophically congruent with Stoicism, some not. This forces

readers to suspect and correct. First, Seneca's etymologically punning self-characterization within the opening sentence as *senex* ("old," 3 *pr.* 1; cf. *senectus*, "old age," 3 *pr.* 2) leads to a series of contrasts. From the opening lines of the preface Seneca distinguishes himself from Lucilius, whose relative youth he asserts, as in the *Epp.*[14] Seneca links his senescence to the impending termination of his work, that which makes his life meaningful (3 *pr.* 4; 1 *pr.* 4). Instead of representing himself in calm retirement, enjoyment of his wealth, and patient study, Seneca fixates on the enormity of encompassing the entire world in one work of natural philosophy; a task for which life is too brief.[15] He particularly reiterates the rush of this late project.[16] The poetry of an unnamed poet on old age incorporates the genre as quoteworthy and raises the register. On the one hand, the notion of the poet being eminent (*inclitus*) taps into praiseworthy accomplishment in life. On the other hand, since the poet is perhaps Lucilius himself, the quotation adds a winking inside joke, shrewdly echoing the words of the addressee back at himself. With repeated worries about the constraints of time, the upcoming interruption of his efforts, and the closure of his individual achievement, Seneca makes the *Q. Nat.* seem like a product of haste and ambition. Out of context we would characterize the writer as overly concerned with accomplishment, perhaps even bartering necessary reflection for celerity.

But the careful reader will be suspicious: both *ambitio* and the bustle of politics (the heights and depths of which he knew well) are the targets of Seneca's warnings to Lucilius (4a *pr.* 1-2).[17] They result in ethical and mental corruption. This is the lesson of a contrast later in

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[14] 3 *pr.* 1; cf. *Epp.* 26, 30, and 61 where Seneca's old age (in *Ep.* 26 differentiated from Lucilius's relative youth) is connected with his Stoic meditations on death, which also dominate *Epp.* 4, 24, and 82. *Ep.* 35.5 sums up the difference between his approach to Lucilius and himself: *cogita te mortalem esse, me senem,* "think that you are mortal and I old." Cf. Ker (2009) 113-115.

[15] *Ep.* 92.3: "what is a happy life? It is security and lasting tranquility." Tacitus depicts Seneca's later years as a haggard withdrawal from court under pretense of illness to avoid participation in Nero's worsening crimes, necessitating ever more extreme, and ultimately futile, evasive measures against execution (15.45.6-14). The contrast of this outside perspective with the approaches to the end of life in the *Q. Nat.* ought to provoke reflection on the constructedness of his philosophical positions as much as the internal evidence. Cf. Williams (2012) 29-32; and Graver (2023) 17-39, on these themes in *Ot.* and the *Epp.*

[16] "Those who have set out rather late rely on speed to make up the delay. Let us hurry," (*qui tardius exierunt, velocitate pensant moram. festinemus*, 3 *pr.* 4). Cf. *Epp.* 27.4 and 32.3-5 where Seneca advises Lucilius to hurry in his projects so that he can rest secure and blessed.

[17] Williams (2012), 29-48, elaborates on the problems of old age and hurry, specifically

the preface, to Hannibal, who remained agitated with ambition despite being a *senex* (3 *pr*. 6; Williams (2012) 34-36; Ker (2009) 13, 105, 153). It is not activity for its own sake, then, nor political achievement, but intellectual accomplishment that requires this sprint at the end of life. But instead of following up on what this purer desire for accomplishment means, Seneca moves to another, seemingly incongruous claim, namely that it is precisely the sprawling extent of the project that prevents him from measuring out his last years.[18] The reader is led to understand that one occupies the mind as a defense against reflection on death. Work is therapy for the troubling thought of oblivion.

Calming fear through distraction is also patently against Seneca's Stoic positions. As in the *Epp.* and in Greco-Roman exhortations to philosophy more generally, in the *Q. Nat.* contemplation of death is meant to lead to stronger self-understanding.[19] The process is not meant to be avoided. At the end of *Q. Nat.* 6, Seneca encourages the interlocutor, and thus readers, to reflect on death, to remind themselves constantly of their individual mortality.[20] A significant portion of *Q. Nat.* 6 combats the fear of death by inflaming it: Seneca insists that one think of death as ceaselessly threatening on all sides, ready to swallow us and everything about which we care at any moment (6.2.1-7, cf. 6.1.4-15). He claims that even the most solid ground on which one stands can be shattered by an unforeseen, city-burying earthquake. This immediately broadens into a general attitude—*all* things must be feared. Not only those rare concussions of the earth, but even the natural processes of our body can and do prove fatal (6.2.1-5; cf. *Ep.* 30). Eventually Seneca reverses himself, and attributes the agitation he himself has just insti-

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contrasting Seneca's warnings against them to Pliny the Elder's hurry and ceaseless political activity, along with the consequences for the latter's writing.

[18] "My mind grows in stature whenever it sees the size of the undertaking, and it ponders how much of the enterprise, not how much of its own life, still remains" (*crescit animus quotiens coepti magnitudinem aspexit, et cogitat quantum proposito, non quantum sibi supersit*, 3 *pr*. 4). The specific measurement of days remaining that Seneca here resists is elaborated in a balanced apothegm in *Q. Nat.* 2: "we value it a great deal to die a little later" (*magni aestimamus mori tardius*, 2.59.7).

[19] For a treatment of the *Epp.* as Seneca's practice for death, see Ker (2009) 147-176. On the Stoic ways that Seneca frames reading as leading to cognition and change, see Wildberger (2006)a.

[20] "Let us imprint this on our minds, let us constantly say this to ourselves: 'We must die' … forget everything else, Lucilius, and concentrate on this one thing, on not being afraid of the name 'death.' By constant reflection make death a friend of yours" (6.32.12. Cf. 2.59.6).

gated to foolishness and ignorance, directing us to the study of natural phenomena as a remedy.[21] The method is integral to the meaning: Seneca deliberately puts forth diverse ways of negatively construing old age and death, heightens them, and responds with a variety of philosophical counter-positions, only to begin again with further agitations.[22] He thus induces intellectual and emotional whiplash. Readers who experience it are forced to decipher for themselves the fullest teachings of the *Q. Nat.* regarding death. These coalesce through the different modes of thought in the *Q. Nat.*, in each of which Seneca divergently approaches the issue of human continuity.

Philosophical method and transcending the self

Locating Seneca's intense engagement with personal demise within its philosophical tradition allows us to see the specifics of his methods in the *Q. Nat*. Stoicism and Epicureanism share the imperative to cure the fear of death through understanding the workings of the universe.[23] Seneca's Stoicism is always foremost, yet he gives himself room to take up elements of Epicureanism as well.[24] In his philosophical writing in general he posits a specific kind of rational, scientific understanding as

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[21] 6.2.1, 6.3.3-4. Cf. Batinski (1993) 60-62; and Mann (2006) 115-122. On Seneca's relationship to Stoicism and Epicureanism, see the following section, and on Lucretius, his predecessor in Latin literature in taking on this theme, see section VII.

[22] Comparably, Seneca staggers several approaches in his essays of consolation: he begins with attacks on mourning ("I am determined to fight with your grief," *Helv.* 15) before turning to soothing. For the idea that such agitation and repetition are Seneca's deliberate philosophical techniques, see Wildberger (2006)a 75, 96-99. An innovative affective reading recently offered by Graf (2024) 71-83, posits a dual track in response to the instigation of fear: one for the more advanced reader, who can resist it through reason, and another for the insufficiently developed, who through affective overload achieves a faux calm in the face of death.

[23] For a summary of similarities between Stoicism and Epicureanism, including Seneca's relation to the latter, see Althoff (2005) 8-16. By Seneca's time both philosophies had longstanding claims, were widely read, and were taught by professionals at Rome. See Hadot (2002) 146-171; and Trapp (2007) for philosophy in Rome during the imperial period. On philosophers competing for Seneca's allegiance in his youth, see Veyne (2003) 3-6. Inwood (2005) 7-22, covers Seneca's general philosophical environment.

[24] For a study of Seneca's attitudes to Epicureanism on different topics, see Graver (2023) 87-108. Whereas Seneca expresses Stoic hostility to much of Epicurean physics and its hedonist ethics, he charts common ground on the individual's psychology, therapeutic practices related to death, and concern for moral improvement. Seal (2021) 74-107, argues that Seneca engages with the schools not only as textual sets of ideas, but also as groups that offer social support for philosophical progress. Important for Seneca's idea of philosophy are philosophical interactions such as

the antidote to this fear.[25] In the *Q. Nat.* this approach manifests on a grander scale. As we saw above, Seneca creates a rhetorically catalyzed chain reaction: dread of the final moment impels investigation of the natural world, which demonstrates the naturalness and proximity of death, which results in a forced reexamination of human nature and the self.[26]

Precisely what sort of research is able to effect for humanity an escape from existential terror at that which we were born to fulfill, the internal seed of our own death (3.29.3)? Seneca's particular method of investigation in the *Q. Nat.* suggests post-mortem continuity on two fronts. The combination of scientific and philosophical methods demonstrates his correlation of intellectual work with self-transformation.

On the first front, in the *Q. Nat.* Seneca distinguishes his method in the negative. He takes aggressive stances against a number of approaches to knowledge, both lay and philosophical. In several passages he explicitly invalidates observation; uncritically believing one's eyes is censured as misjudgment.[27] In parallel, Seneca undercuts named authorities, combining a critique of political morality with his scientific methodology. He characterizes exploration of foreign regions as an activity generally performed under absolute rulers, who might intend conquest. Neither a Neronian expedition seeking the sources of the Nile (6.8.3-5) nor the spelunking ordered by Philip of Macedon that discovered reservoirs of hidden waters (5.15.1-4) are conceded any scientific value.[28] Although many of his facts derive from secondary sources, Seneca makes a point of refusing to rest his arguments on the

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(especially Epicurean) friendship, community, and tradition. Cf. Hadot (2002) 91-145 and Mitsis (2003).

[25] On the connection between epistemology, fear, and moral improvement in Seneca and Stoicism, see Scott (1999), Gauly (2004) 90-134, and Inwood (2005), Ch. 4 and 9.

[26] *Et cum timendi sit causa nescire, non est tanti scire, ne timeas? quanto satius est causas inquirere, et quidem toto in hoc intentum animo!* "Since the cause of fear is ignorance, is it not worth acquiring knowledge in order to remove your fear? How much more worthwhile is it to investigate causes, with your whole mind focused on this goal!" 6.3.4.

[27] *Nihil esse acie nostra fallacius*, "Nothing is more deceptive than our eyesight," 1.3.9; natural events are only unusual (and therefore cause fear) because we use our eyes to study them, not reason, 6.3.2; humans are too subject to their eyes and cannot extend their mind beyond them, 6.7.5. Cf. 1 *pr.* 1 for the idea that the unseen portion of philosophy relates to the gods. See Williams (2005)a for the connection between Seneca's explication of visual effects in the atmosphere and the moral and philosophical implications of vision in *Q. Nat.* 1. Cf. Leitão (1998).

[28] Corcoran (1971), ad loc., suggests that Nero was surveying for a war. Cf. Pliny's *HN* 6.181. Philip of Macedon's explorers are ridiculed as leaving the upright posture of men facing the stars to crawl below ground motivated purely by *avaritia*.

reports of "great men," explicitly denying their *auctoritas* (6.26.1).[29] Whereas he often cites ancient theories, they are not to be trusted. Instead, he designates the opinions of antiquity "uneducated."[30] This is even the case with Stoic theories.[31] In this way, Seneca strips all ancient and contemporary works of their potential status as unquestionable authorities. He is curating tradition, loosening the hold that impressive names have on us.

The second front is his positive method of scientific thought, which provides an avenue for self-transformation. Instead of depending on the senses, politically motivated expeditions, the authority of notables, or the received truth of a philosophical school, Seneca urges and models a more intellectually active process. His own methods involve observation, analogy, and debate, but little reliance on personal experience.[32] He aggregates arguments from previous sources and tests their validity using reason.[33] Natural investigation is the recurrent work of

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[29]   Cf. *Ep.* 33.9-11 where Seneca insists that there will be no progress if we are content with previous discoveries or walking in the exact footsteps of our forerunners.

[30]   *Rudis adhuc antiquitas credebat*, "Antiquity, still primitive, used to believe," 4b.7.3. In *Ep.* 90 Seneca strongly emphasizes the development of intellectual thought and philosophy from the primitivism of earliest times. On Seneca's use of his predecessors in natural investigation, see Hall (1977), Gross (1989), Setaioli (2007), and Hine (2010) 3-6.

[31]   An example of Seneca's critique of Stoic positions can be found in 4b.5-6, cf. *Ep.* 33. See also *Q. Nat.* 7, where he discusses and sometimes refutes Stoic theories. Batinski (1993), 67, finds his tone there harsh and his position skeptical. On Seneca's asserted independence from following Stoicism dogmatically, with various emphases on whether he was actually diverging or mostly rhetorically repackaging, see Rist (1989), Inwood (2005), Wildberger (2006)b, Seal (2021) 78-82, and Graver (2023) 40-56.

[32]   One of the few examples of Seneca explicitly incorporating his own observations is from his experience as a vine-gardener in 3.7.1. See Hine (2010) 8-9; and Roby (2014) for Seneca's scientific methodology.

[33]   E.g. Thales' view that the earth is a disk floating on water is refuted by multiple arguments, including that no part of a ship can be shaken without the whole ship moving as well, 6.6.3. On his arguments with antiquity about the reasons for the flooding of the Nile, see especially 4a.2.17 ff. For further points on Seneca's argumentative style, see Inwood (2002) 128-56, esp. 128, 135, 140; Hine (2010) 6-7, and Roby (2014). Rosenmeyer (2000) declares that the *Q. Nat.* reveals Seneca as an unsystematic thinker about nature: "outside of the prefaces, Seneca puts no premium on accountability or rational order. As he looks at his natural phenomena, the accent is often on the unexpected and the exciting, on disasters and catastrophe, with little effort to accommodate their strangeness to a divinely constituted whole." Williams (2005)b, esp. 160-163, and (2012) 37-48, disagrees entirely, emphasizing Seneca's concern with wholeness and seamlessness both in the natural world and in structured critical thinking. He contrasts Pliny, whose method is analytical separation, which results in a tumult of details.

critical reading. This is not only the process of philosophy, but is also meant to alter the individual radically (1 *pr*. 17):

> *Haec inspicere, haec discere, his incubare, nonne transilire est mortalitatem suam et in meliorem transcribi sortem?*

> To look into all this, to learn about it, to brood over it—is that not to transcend one's mortality and be re-registered with a higher status?

Research as enterprise is meant to move the mind, to ameliorate one's place regardless of starting point.[34] In contradistinction to the caprice of fortune, intellection provides some control over life. The work of thought is said to help overcome even mortal boundaries.[35] Could this intimation of immortality be taken literally?

To understand what type of continuity for the individual is possible in the *Q. Nat.* we must examine how the work presents the self.[36] Since animals and trees can perish without the loss of a whole class of similar beings, they are only a quasi-part of the universe in Seneca's Stoic schema (2.4.2). What about a singular human? Since everybody sins (4a *pr*. 19), Seneca repeatedly demands an abandoning of one's selfhood (4a *pr*. 20): *Fugiendum ergo et in se recedendum est, immo etiam a se recedendum*, "so one must flee and retreat into oneself, or better still, actually retreat *from* oneself."[37] Seneca warns that the self is under siege by society's immorality, the contamination of politics, and the avarice, gluttony, and concupiscence of the body. The single solution explicitly articulated in the *Q. Nat.* is to turn to the study of nature and thus extricate the self from fear of death; "to have life on the very lips" makes one free of the moral degradations of Roman society but also of

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[34] Wildberger (2006)a addresses the demand of Seneca's philosophical work for "therapeutic reading," which activates our own beliefs and changes them as we think through the text's arguments.

[35] Williams (2016) 175-177, ties these passages in Seneca's work to the sublime. Cf. Mazzoli (2016) 15-26; and Garani (2023).

[36] The discussion of selfhood in Seneca was reinvigorated by Foucault's interest, in his *History of Sexuality*, lectures in the early 80's, and other works late in his life. Important recent treatments include Edwards (2008); the essays in Bartsch and Wray (2009), Williams (2016) 187-190, and Graver (2023) 262-283.

[37] Setaioli (2007) 339-340, draws our attention to Seneca's "nearly revolutionary use of the reflexive pronoun, which serves as a powerful spur toward the linguistical reduplication, or rather the splitting, of the subject."

servitude to self (3 *pr*. 6).[38] The contrast between self and society—the leisure of study versus the agitation of politics—is the general theme of those passages that advocate for the benefit of such study.[39]

Since the authorial voice is the paradigm of critical thought in the *Q. Nat.*, a reader might expect Seneca's own life to be the measure of philosophy's potency. Yet even a hint of metamorphosis in Seneca himself is rare in the *Q. Nat*. The exaltation of the self-improving effects of study is in fact incongruent with one of the only mentions of himself outside of the preface to *Q. Nat.* 3. In *Q. Nat.* 6 Seneca divulges that he is writing on earthquakes for a second time after a hiatus of many years. But it is not the "sweet" process of investigation (*dulcis inspectio*) that Seneca marks as possibly having changed his knowledge or diligence. Rather, the only difference that he discloses between the first and second writing is age (*aetas*, 6.4.2).[40] Just at the point where Seneca ought to support his sweeping declarations one comes away with no exemplar, no template in the author.[41]

One may attribute this to Seneca's disinclination to call himself complete or a sage, and thus to absorb the criticism such a claim would entail.[42] He marks himself as a *proficiens*, an exemplum only intended for a community of those "on the way to philosophy."[43] The fact

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[38]   Seneca takes up the question of whether to act in politics or retreat into seclusion continually in his *Epp.* and *Ot.* See Star (2023) and Hine (2006), esp. 43-53.

[39]   Williams (2012) 38-48, Graver (2023) 17-39.

[40]   This revelation of a recurrence to the same subject, in fact, also subtly contradicts the only "biographical" hint about Seneca's mental or moral development, the trope of earlier years misspent: *Annos inter vana studia consumptos,* "Years consumed among empty pursuits," 3 *pr*. 2. See Hine (2006) 48-49, for a discussion of this phrase as a reference to and possible renunciation of Seneca's career in politics. Cf. De Vivo (2012) 94-97.

[41]   Edwards (2008) esp. 99-101, attributes the difficulty of pinning down Seneca's incessantly examined "self" in the *Epp.* to the shrewd discretion of a political survivor and creativity of a master of theater.

[42]   Renouncing the title of sage or the possibility that he might think himself faultless is a common device in Seneca's *Epp.*, used to fend off *ad hominem* attacks against inconsistency in his life or in Stoic ideals in general. Cf. *Epp.* 20.2, 41.4-9; and *Tranq.* 7.4-6 as examples of the rareness and superiority of the consistent sage. For the whole *Q. Nat.* as a work of the *proficiens* aspiring to the knowledge of the *sapiens* but indentured to our state of eternally deficient human perspective, see Graf (2024) 19-20; and Inwood (2002).

[43]   In *Ep.* 27.1-4 Seneca reiterates the impossibility of himself being already cured of all vices and characterizes his current state as that of a fellow-patient hurrying to achieve some progress before death. See Wildberger (2006)a 100-102; and Edwards (2008) 94-95.

remains, nevertheless, that Seneca only provides one self-description, the sole "transformation" that he mentions in the *Q. Nat.*: his youth has gone and he is an old man redeeming time before the inevitable. If cessation is Seneca's concern and philosophy is not demonstrably transformative in life, we return to whether he seriously posits any postmortem transition that retains selfhood.

The limits of philosophy: individual and group continuity

We gain more insight into Seneca's approach to continuity by extending it in two directions related to philosophy: his writings that are explicit about the afterlife and the unusual issue, raised in the *Q. Nat.*, of the survival of philosophy itself. Overall, selfhood in the philosophies of the Roman Empire involved the bifurcation of body and soul, with the possibility of the preservation of the latter after the former's demise (Trapp (2007) 98-109). This explanation was occasionally, but by no means universally, proffered in Stoicism (Trapp (2007) 103 n. 19). Of his philosophical works, Seneca only devotes attention to this possibility in three: two consolations and *Ep.* 102. In each of these Seneca touches very closely on the language of Plato's *Apology* and *Phaedo*, although his education and sources range across Pythagorean, Platonic, and Stoic philosophy, all the way to Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (6.29).[44]

In *De Consolatione ad Marciam* of the late 30's CE, Seneca takes the notion of continuity after death to an extreme: Marcia's deceased father returns as a ghost to lecture on the superiority of death to life. Death—at least according to the ghost—involves meandering among the stars in the company of great men and ancestors until an apocalypse returns even them to their original elements (*in antiqua elementa*, 25-26).[45] In *De Consolatione ad Polybium* 9.2-3 and 9.8 Seneca again depicts an ancestor floating above the world gazing at stars, yet this time only as a possibility.[46] Here and in his other works Seneca assumes a

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[44]   For further on the philosophical background of Seneca's eschatological images see Mazzoli (1967) 226–244; and Tutrone (2023) 241-246.

[45]   On the afterlife in the *Marc.* see Setaioli (2000)a, esp. 294-307. Among other letters, see *Ep.* 65.18, where the Stoic sage has figuratively freed his mind from his body to meander among the stars. On the link here between the afterlife and the apocalypse, including *ekpyrosis* (of which this is one of the most detailed examples in Stoicism), flooding, and earthquakes, see Star (2021) 134-137.

[46]   "If I grieve on his account, I must decide that one or the other of the two following views is true. For, if the dead retain no feeling whatever, my brother has escaped

stance of potentiality or indeterminacy: "What is death? Either an end or a crossing over" (*mors quid est? aut finis aut transitus*, *Ep.* 65.24).[47]

In *Ep.* 102, since the addressee is his fellow-traveler in philosophy, we are privy to an unusual set of relations to the afterlife, both more explicit and more subtle. Seneca begins by joking that when Lucilius's letter reached him, he was not only investigating, but even on the verge of believing the immortality of the soul (*iuvabat de aeternitate animarum quaerere, immo mehercules credere*, 102.2). He likens the circumstance to being awakened from a dream pleasant, even if false (*etiam si falsam*, 102.1). This initial move does not prevent Seneca from devoting the later parts of his letter to a prosopopoeia of the soul in philosophical contemplation leaving all constraints to traverse the universe and eternity (102.21-22).[48] Seneca then embellishes and amplifies the theme. In a lengthy lyrical section he depicts the body as an encumbrance, and muses that perhaps postmortem existence is a new birth, real life compared to the gestation period before corporeal death (*per has mortalis aevi moras illi meliori vitae longiorique proluditur*, 102.23-29).

Yet at this point Seneca makes two unexpected deviations, which undercut the notion of the soul freed from the body. Instead of ending on an exhortation to philosophy and morality, near the end of the letter he insists that this notion of immortality would make one fearless in war (*nullos horret exercitus, non terretur tuba*, 102.29). In a second twist, at the very end he switches: claiming that even if one believes the soul will be dissolved and scattered after death one strives to become useful.[49] This is both a final acknowledgement of the possibility of ma-

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[47]   from all the ills of life, and has been restored to that state in which he had been before he was born, and exempt from every ill, he fears nothing, desires nothing, suffers nothing." (9.2, translation Basore (1935)). Cf. *Ep.* 24.18.

[47]   In both the consolation and *Ep.* 65.24 Seneca is paraphrasing *Apology* 40c (Trans. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy (2017)): "You see death is one of two things, for either it's as if the dead person has no existence (μηδὲν εἶναι), and has no perception of anything (μηδὲ αἴσθησιν μηδεμίαν μηδενὸς ἔχειν), or according to what we're told, it's actually a change and removal (μετοίκησις) of the soul from its place here to another place." The relationship to ancestors interacts with Socrates' possibility of continuing on in the afterlife in the company of heroes and demigods in *Apology* 40e-41c. Cf. Shilo (2013) 29-36, on the proliferation of afterlife possibilities in the *Apology* without choosing between them as an incitement to critical thought. On Seneca's relation to Plato and Cicero on the soul, see Setaioli (2013).

[48]   For comparison, among other letters see *Ep.* 65.18, in which the Stoic sage (in life, not after death) has figuratively freed his mind from his body to meander among the stars. Cf. Williams (2016) 181-182.

[49]   "But even he who judges that the mind lasts only as long as it is held by the body's

terialism tout court and a concern with becoming an exemplum for posterity. Seneca ends the letter with "the memory of great men is no less useful than their presence" (102.30). This is Seneca's way of ingeniously reenacting his opening lines: the body of the letter reinflates the dream of the immortal soul only for the ending to puncture it with the materialism Stoicism insists on and the lack of individual continuity except in the minds of others. In his own persona, Seneca never claims that he believes in life after death, nor that death is superior to life, but retains the possibility in a consolatory or moral register.[50] The afterlife remains a philosophical foil.

Keeping in mind these three examples in Seneca's philosophical essays and letters we must beware not to take any Senecan statements about the soul's life after death at face value.[51] What we find in the *Q. Nat.* supports this caution. For therein Seneca fancies no literal floating about the universe after death; the idea of a soul that splits from the body in the afterlife is completely absent. The *Q. Nat.* are firmly grounded in materialism. The only rebirth Seneca gives in the *Q. Nat.* is the world being reborn after its great destruction. As for any particular human, they rejoin nature, with no concession to discrete identity (6.32.6). Rather than focus on this post-mortem reunification, the *Q. Nat.* emphasize union with the universe as a mental activity accomplished while alive: "overleaping one's mortality" remains a metaphor (1 *pr.* 17, quoted above). Life is where defeating the fear of death presumably leads to a pacific, godlike existence.[52] This aligns with an overarching theme in the *Q. Nat.* that the human perspective on the

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chain, and that once released it is immediately dissipated, still strives to make himself useful after death" (*animum…solutum statim spargi, id agit ut etiam post mortem utilis esse possit*, 102.30). See Leeman (1951) on the text.

[50] This mirrors the conditional and coy ways in which Socrates presents his ideas about the soul to his continually unconvinced internal audience in the *Phaedo* (107c, Trans. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy (2017)): "if the soul is immortal then it needs attending to, not only for the sake of this period of time in which what we call life occurs, but for all time." On the twists in belief and unbelief in the afterlife in the *Phaedo* see Shilo (2013) 37-49.

[51] Setaioli (2000)a traces the afterlife in all Senecan texts, demonstrating that he is reacting to Platonic ideas of existence after death, as well as the Stoic ones of the survival of at least the sage's soul, but that ultimately Stoic monism of soul and matter mean that throughout Seneca is committed to the finality of the individual at the end of their natural life. Seneca never firmly expresses his convictions about the afterlife, Busch (2009) esp. 262-265.

[52] 1 *pr*. 7-8; 6.32.5; cf. Setaioli (2000)a 312; and Veyne (2003) 120.

world is focused on limits. The work of the mind is to both understand and overcome those limits, especially through seeing the whole (Williams (2012) 29-48).

Seneca's approach to the social-intellectual life of the Roman Empire in the *Q. Nat.* unexpectedly parallels and amplifies his treatment of the individual's demise. In numerous passages—seemingly digressions—Seneca burlesques a Rome captive to the pleasures of the eyes. Underlying each of these is a systematic representation of the Roman abasement of critical thought and its goals.[53] For instance, the long excursus on the evils of lavish dining in *Q. Nat.* 3 portrays wealthy Romans as the diametrical opposite to the true student of nature (Berno (2002)). The preparation for a feast offers a depraved version of natural science. Seneca caricatures an aristocrat doubting the testimony of his fishmonger: "I can't trust you on this important matter" (*nescio de re magna tibi credere*, 3.18.3).

To be sure of its freshness the gourmand must see his food die *coram*, "face to face." Egocentric luxury investigates only the visible and the edible. In excoriating such corrupted uses of vision Seneca implicitly contrasts the Stoic's pure act of scrutinizing the *ratio* of the universe.[54] Since dissolute Romans only utilize their eyes for pleasure, the façade of beauty blinds them to mortality: "None of these people sits by a dying friend, none can endure seeing the death of his own father, though he has prayed for it" (*ex his nemo morienti amico adsidet, nemo videre mortem patris sui sustinet, quam optavit*, 3.18.6).

Roman communal debauchery, neglect of study, and inability to face death are responsible for miring the forward progress of research into nature and for a collective forgetting of past discoveries (7.32.4).[55] Seneca interlinks death and science in their negative formulation—contortions away from the former correspond with the decline of the latter.

Seneca's arguments about society support a devastating claim about the place of philosophy in Rome. The schools of philosophy are perishing: "that is why so many philosophical lineages are dying out without a successor" (*itaque tot familiae philosophorum sine successore deficiunt*, 7.32.2). Such phrasing appropriates for the perpetuation

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[53] Seneca himself marks the banquet scene as a digression in 3.18.1 and 3.19.1, on which see Williams (2008) 236-237 and (2012) 54-92.

[54] Cf. 3.18.6. 3.17.2, 3.18.7; and Williams (2005)a, (2012) 54-92.

[55] Seneca opposes any sort of study to the world of affairs of aristocratic Romans, who only have time for philosophical reading when rain interrupts their business, 7.32.1.

of philosophy both the language of the household and biological or legal succession: a lineage, *familia*, lacking an heir, *successor*.[56] The *Q. Nat.* marries this metaphor of continuity with the notion of tradition: "Who is there to hand on (*tradat*) the teachings of Pyrrho?" (7.32.2) The phrasing demonstrates that Seneca's focus is not only on the writings of a philosopher, but on the active perpetuation of their ideas by others.[57] Seneca sharpens the characterization of Roman folly through a contrast of the dying philosophical schools with the flourishing school or "house" (*domus*) with its many heirs (*successores*) of the pantomime actors Pylades and Bathyllus (7.32.3). The Roman interest in such arts is purely, uncritically visual and therefore leads unavoidably to moral depravity. The only native Roman sect of philosophy, that of Quintus Sextius, has already vanished (7.32.2). The *Q. Nat.* bemoans philosophy's inability to improve Roman society on the whole and even to ensure its own survival.

Perpetuation through the *nomen*

There is no explicit solution in the *Q. Nat.* to the related issues of continuity after death and the failures of philosophy in Rome, only an implicit one. *Names* in the *Q. Nat.* are the device for continuation beyond the end. Scholars have examined Seneca's use of *fama, gloria,* and *claritas/clarus* in his prose works (Habinek (2000) and Seal (2021) 96-100). At stake are his ideas about what political, literary, and philosophical life paths are worth pursuing and what sort of exemplum one should leave for others after death. Yet these terms scarcely appear in the *Q. Nat. Fama* and *gloria* are not used at all. *Claritas/clarus* occurs only once outside of physical depictions, in a negative exemplum: in 3 *pr.* 5 Phillip and Alexander are lambasted for being *clari,* "famous, well known," solely for their destructiveness. In fact, the closest Seneca comes to these is describing the unnamed poet, potentially Lucilius, as "famous" (*poetae incliti,* 3 *pr.* 3), which we saw was in the context of addressing personal demise.

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[56] *Ep.* 64.7 models responsibility to the past on a *paterfamilias* and tradition on a bequest (*hereditatem*). Cf. Seal (2021) 83-85.

[57] See Seal (2021) 83-86, on this theme in *Ep.* 64, especially as related to Quintus Sextius.

Instead, *nomen* is the term Seneca uses in the *Q. Nat.* for the continuity of reputation.[58] At one point in the *Q. Nat.* Seneca distinctly points to the creative author's ability to assign names, terms, or categories at will to natural phenomena (1.11.2).[59] Neither science nor philosophy per se regulates the *nomen*, rather this is the purview of literature. As an extremely common term, *nomen* broadens the semantic range and dilutes the specificity to anything named in writing.[60] In the *Q. Nat.*, *nomen*, when used as a term, interacts with the themes of differentiation and individuation. For the divine, names are inconsequential; whether one labels the spirit that orders all things "Jove," "fate," "providence," "world," or "nature," its existence and function remain unchanged. The immortal, self-sustaining, structuring force of the universe need not rely on human language or categorization: "every name (*nomen*) suits it."[61] For man, living on the razor's edge of time (6.32.10), this dynamic is inverted. Seneca himself combats the fear caused by the name of death (*mortis nomen*, 6.32.12). Seneca also highlights the traditions and individuality of each philosophical school by naming them at the very moment in which he laments their abandonment: Plato's Academy, the Skeptic school of Pyrrho of Elis, the Pythagoreans, the Roman school of the Sextii (7.31.2). He heightens the contrast further by proclaiming that Roman society zealously eternalizes the name (*nomen*) of each pantomime actor (7.32.3).[62]

Through names and naming the *Q. Nat.* demonstrate more precisely Seneca's approach to genres and their modes of thought concerning personal continuity. Seneca not only denies the worthiness of actors for the perpetuation of name, he overturns the legacies of the glorious rulers of the past that he names, Hannibal, Philip, and Alexander.[63] Conquerors are unworthy of being written about, of having their

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[58] When referring to people, *nomen* is technically the gens name for Romans but can be used to refer to them tout court and commonly to their reputation: *nomen habere.*

[59] "What name (*quod nomen*) do we give them? Am I to do what Vergil did, who was in doubt about a name (*de nomine*), then put down the one about which he was in doubt."

[60] *Nomen* also means "noun," in grammar and can be extended to "term," in the technical sense, as in the quotation.

[61] *Iovem… rectorem custodemque universi, animum ac spiritum mundi, operis huius dominum et artificem, cui nomen omne convenit,* 2.45.1, cf. 2.45.2-3, 1 *pr.* 13-14. See Long and Sedley (1987), section 46B, Wildberger (2006)b 21-48, and Setaioli (2007) 348.

[62] Cf. *Ep.* 5.2: "the very name of philosophy (*ipsum nomen*)… excites hatred."

[63] Critique of Philip: 3 *pr.* 5 and 5.15.1-4, Alexander: 3 *pr.* 5, 5.18.10, and Hannibal: 3

names memorialized. Seneca devalues their deeds by emphasizing their transgressing of just boundaries. He explicitly likens them to the universal flood and the conflagration (3 *pr*. 5). In this way, Seneca comprehensively condemns history, undercutting the worth of the activity of military leaders and the worth of the genre devoted to recording it.[64] He praises natural science in its place, as investigating the works of the gods. The unifying concern is with human continuity as lasting reputation and, in the positive, becoming a virtuous example to others through the work of thought.

Instead of historical names, the *Q. Nat.* cultivate two other sets of names and interact with them as part of a tradition: the names of philosophers and of poets. A range of natural philosophers—such as Thales, Aristotle, Stoic thinkers, and Fabianus—serve to introduce specific problems about the natural world that can be understood by inquiry and reason.[65] With the Stoics Seneca gives himself room to disagree, while praising the school as holding the correct philosophy overall. The philosophers of other schools Seneca names and even defends to a certain extent, while making it clear that they are largely wrong. Why are they then deserving of being named and even praised? Both in their writings and lives they sought wisdom through critical thought.[66] It is their exercise of mind that makes their names worth preserving and their examples worth following, if one corrects the flawed premises of their doctrines.

Seneca regulates this scientific tradition as he did the historical one, but positively: he insists on crediting his forerunners by name even after their theories are no longer considered true (6.5.2). In doing so, Seneca demonstrates progressive thinking about tradition. At the start of *Q. Nat.* 3 he represents himself not only as an explorer, but as a conduit of knowledge (3 *pr*. 1): "I have decided to traverse the world, to seek out its causes and secrets, and to present them (*prodere*) for others to learn about." Seneca programmatically addresses his work to posterity, not his own time, since *prodere,* as putting forth in writing, or

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pr. 6. Cf. 6.23.2-3, where Seneca counters all of Alexander's achievements with the irredeemable murder of the natural philosopher Callisthenes.

[64]   3 *pr*. 5-7, 4b.3.1, 7.16.1-2. Cf. Williams (2005)b 436-444. Hine (2006) 49-50, adds that Seneca is here turning his back on a traditional Roman occupation. Cf. Master (2015) on Seneca's relation to history in the *Q. Nat.*

[65]   On Seneca's use of earlier scientific thought, see Hall (1977).

[66]   Seal (2021) 74-107, follows out this dynamic in Seneca's other prose works.

"publication," is part of the complex of terms for transmission to the future within a tradition (Hine (2010) 9). Seneca thus inserts himself into the continuous chain of natural scientists and philosophers that he does his part to actively maintain. Just as the tradition successively improved up to him, Seneca predicts that future discoveries will demonstrate the ignorance of his own time (7.25.5, cf. 7.30.1-6). This raises the question about tradition related to our main inquiry: when Seneca's value as a natural philosopher fades, by what mechanism does he understand his own reputation to continue? Seneca hints that the *Q. Nat.* themselves are the demonstration of specifically his ability to apply Stoic physical and ethical ideas to the natural world, even when the former are superseded by new discoveries.

Poetry and cataclysm

Literature, specifically poetry, grounds a further thematic confluence between the work of thought and continuity. As in his essays and letters, in the *Q. Nat.* Seneca quotes and often names several Greek poets, Vergil, Ovid, Vagellius, Lucilius, and even Nero as his entrée into specific topics of investigation, analogously to the named philosophers.[67] Seneca often presents them as depicting phenomena in ways that are to be interpreted or refuted.[68]

Two examples of Seneca's relationship to poetry in the *Q. Nat.* are the most pertinent, for they are concerned both with language and with the relation between individual and universal destruction. The first is a conscious reshaping of a poetic quotation, which comes at a high point of rhetorical agitation about death. The passage touches on a number of themes concurrently, especially Seneca's distinctions between the workings of philosophy and poetry (6.2.9):

Egregie Vagellius[69] *meus in illo incluto carmine, 'si cadendum est' inquit 'mihi, e caelo cecidisse velim.' item licet dicere, 'si cadendum est, cadam orbe concusso,*

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[67]   *E.g.* Lucilius: 3.1.1, and Nero: 1.5.6. On Vagellius, see below.

[68]   Interpreted: Ovid on waters that turn organic beings to stone, 3.20.3-6; cf. Parroni (2002) ad loc., Vottero (1989) ad loc., and Garani (2020). Refuted: Vergil on winds in a cave, 6.18.4-5.

[69]   Thus, in the manuscripts, with unconvincing editorial attempts at emendation. For more on Vagellius, if he existed, see Mazzoli (1968) n. 2.

non quia fas est optare publicam cladem, sed quia ingens mortis solacium est terram quoque videre mortalem.'[70]

My friend Vagellius says in splendid fashion, in that famous poem of his: "If I have to fall, I should like to fall from heaven." In the same way one can say, "If I have to fall, may I fall while the earth is shaken," not because it is right to wish for a public disaster, but because it is a great comfort in the face of death to see that the earth too is mortal."

The physically incongruous notion of falling from the sky (*e caelo cecidisse*) is likely a poetic allusion to Icarus or Phaethon.[71] Seneca clearly enjoys the poetic paradox, as he marks it with *egregie*, "singularly, excellently." He even integrates into his own language the alliteration of hard c sounds and supplements the assonance: *In illo incluto carmine, 'si cadendum est' inquit 'mihi, e caelo cecidisse velim.'*[72] However, Seneca alters something fundamental when he adapts the poetic line. Instead of the inconcinnity of a human falling from the sky, which conflicts with his view of physics, Seneca substitutes a different idea entirely, the earthquakes (*orbe concusso*) that are the topic of *Q. Nat.* 6. The play between the literal meaning of *cado*, "to fall" in the original and its figurative ones, either "to suffer a reversal of fortune" or "to perish," is downgraded in Seneca's more literal version. Instead, Seneca links *cado* to the destruction of the world (*terram … mortalem*). The reworking of poetry thus simultaneously addresses the fear of death and the Stoic periodic cataclysm that destroys the Earth.[73] Seneca here does not blame the poets for improper understanding of physical laws, as he does elsewhere (*e.g.* 6.18.4). Rather, he refracts the linguistic force of poetry on behalf of philosophy by reorienting its content. At the start

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[70] On the position of *mihi* and the lack of meter in the quotation, see Hine (1996) 95; Trappes-Lomax (2002) 586.

[71] Mazzoli (1970) 48; and Williams (2012) 228-230. For Seneca seeing himself as Phaethon in this passage, see Garani (2023) 209-213.

[72] Trappes-Lomax (2002) 586, suggests here an abbreviation for *cum* (c) instead of e. This would lead to further consonance: *cum caelo*. For an overview of Seneca's prose style, which includes such poetic touches, see Williams (2003) 25-32.

[73] Death and the destruction of the world are connected also in *Marc.* 26.6-7 and *Polyb.* 1.1-3, cf. 2.59.1-13. Note also the possible sly allusion to a story about Nero concerning the great fire of 64: the Emperor, hearing someone say, "when I am dead let fire devour the world (ἐμοῦ θανόντος γαῖα μιχθήτω πυρί)," replied, "no, rather while I am living (ἐμοῦ ζῶντος)," Suetonius *Ner.* 38.

of *Q. Nat.* 3, the end of life is the end of work; here it is poetically akin to the end of the world.

This short passage serves as an entrée for reading the second example, at the end of *Q. Nat.* 3, which is the fullest, most potent transfiguration of poetry in the *Q. Nat.* The long *ekphrasis* of a cataclysm by waters reworks the Ovidian flood episode from *Met.* 1.255-312. Seneca's particular treatment of Ovid, a central poetic influence throughout his oeuvre, provides insight into his approach to poetry as a whole.[74] In the *Q. Nat.*, excerpts from the poet emblematize the difficulty of reconciling poetic playfulness with philosophical seriousness. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is often quoted, yet it is also characterized as an example of *poeticam...licentiam* (2.44.1), "poetic license"—simultaneously imaginative freedom and verbal unruliness.[75] When *Q. Nat.* 3 turns to the flood that will exterminate humanity, Seneca refers to Ovid as "that most inventive of poets" (*ille poetarum ingeniosissimus*, 3.27.13).[76] This epithet intensifies the immediately following criticism of Ovid's handling of the flood scene in the *Metamorphoses*.[77] Seneca quotes this highly stylized, often whimsical work, only to accuse the author of "childish silliness" (*pueriles ineptias*, 3.27.13). He generalizes that if left to its own devices poetry seeks effect without regard "to the grandeur of the subject" (*pro magnitudine rei*, 3.27.13). Seneca is concurrently confronting both the physically false images poets evoke and the ethical ramifications of such conceits. Poets privilege visual effect over consistency with the laws of nature, the purview of natural philosophy. Poetry's imaginative indulgence therefore must be re-enclosed within natural boundaries by the scientific mind.[78]

Something graver than mere lack of seriousness or infringement of rhetorical dignity is at stake.[79] Seneca's critique indicates that poetry

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[74] For recent treatments of Seneca's relationship to Ovid's poetry with bibliography, see Trinacty (2018) and Garani (2023).

[75] Cf. *Ep.* 114, where Seneca ties style (especially of emptily bombastic poetry) to ethics, both of a person and their era.

[76] See Graver (2023) 274-277, on *ingenium* in Seneca as distinctly referring to a writer's style.

[77] 3.27.13-14. Besides Ovid, we have flood depictions in Manilius 4.828-834 and the storm in Seneca's own *Agamemnon* 431-556. See Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1984) 152.

[78] Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1984) 154. For scientific investigation putting limits (*terminos ponere*) on the natural world, see 1 *pr.*16.

[79] On Ovid's playfulness and Seneca's seriousness, see Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1984) 147-149, Hutchinson (1993) 128-131, Setaioli (2000)b 177-179, Morgan (2003) 69-73, and Garani (2022).

needs philosophy to avoid degeneration into purely aesthetic practices, which themselves lead inevitably to ethical decline, as they have in Rome.[80] Essentially, Seneca is translating his method of critical reading from science to poetry. This implies that there could be a poetry purified of these excesses.

The second basis for conjoining poetry and philosophy returns us to the problem of philosophy's own continuity. Just as poetry must attend to natural philosophy to avoid lapsing into absurdity, the *Q. Nat.* hints that philosophy requires a type of poetry to survive in the Roman world. Since the Romans prefer spectacle to philosophic reading (7.32.1), the poetic prose of certain parts of the *Q. Nat.* seems designed precisely to integrate poetic vividness.[81] Throughout the sections gravid with scientific discussion, Seneca lures the reader with poetic images and language, and supplements them with an occasional vocabulary of marvel and wonder.[82] Yet Seneca never fails to return the reader to the necessity and order of everything natural, rather than the exceptionality of marvels.[83] He first draws attention to poetic paradoxes (chained winds, men falling from the sky, sheep and wolves swimming together), then reworks them scientifically.[84] Poetry is thus co-opted not only for embellishing philosophical writing, but also for a linguistic and imaginative reminder that we must change our own perspective from marveling to understanding.

The consummation of all the elements of Seneca's occasional integration of poetry is the grandiose flood scene at the end of *Q. Nat.* 3. The subtle, but multidimensional use of poetry in the *Q. Nat.* is evident in nearly every line.[85] The details of his language specifically imitate the content, from the very first. For the abruptness of the transition to

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[80] Williams (2008) 239-240, and (2012) 129-132, links Seneca's rebuke of Ovid's "literary corruption" (*licentia*) to the poet's moral corruption (*lascivia*) and the Roman corruption that the *Q. Nat.* regularly chastises. Cf. Mazzoli (1970) 245-247.

[81] Human rebellion against the necessity of death does not yield to reason without poetic convincing. Seneca's depiction of sailing over two sunken towns, for instance, is an ekphrastic *memento mori* 6.32.8. Cf. *Met.* 1.296-312.

[82] E.g. *miraris…mireris*, 3.10.2, 16.3, 17.1-2, 24.4, 25.1-11. See further Garani (2020).

[83] Williams (2012) 43-44, demonstrates that, while using these terms, the *Q. Nat.* actually downplay *mirabilia*, "miracles, wonders" and the rhetoric of *mirum*, "the astonishing."

[84] On these impossibilities (ἀδύνατα, ἀπροσδόκητα), see Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1984) 151-161.

[85] One may contrast the prosaic list of events in the earliest version of Seneca's universal destructions in *Marc.* 26.6-7 and the brief versions in *Polyb.* 1.1-3 and *Ben.* 6.22.

the flood (3.27.1) reflects how quickly it will arrive. Those who have neither studied nature nor heeded Stoic warnings will be caught unaware.[86] The inundation follows directly upon and is explicitly linked to the descriptions of self-purging waters.[87] Seneca insinuates that the opulent Romans he castigated for precisely this disregard earlier in *Q. Nat.* 3 are the muck washed away by the earth in the process of cleansing itself.[88] Whereas Roman feasting provided the material background for Seneca's condemnation of human gluttony, avarice, and hypocrisy in the face of death at the start of *Q. Nat.* 3, the flood now masterfully inverts many of its depictions. For those gluttonous with their eyes Seneca hosts a diluvian banquet: Roman aristocratic diners feast without end; the flood returns humanity to the simple food of old.[89] The elite relished a mullet's color-changing death struggle to breathe out of water (3.18.4); the depiction of the apocalypse provides the entertainment of a liquidating world that leads to humanity's own drowning. Such dizzying language and imagery cause stupefaction.[90] The untranscendable shock is the opposite of the active mind the Romans refuse to exercise. The Senecan literary counter-spectacle is simultaneously a scientific and moral corrective.[91]

What seem to be only poetic flourishes are closely tied to the philosophical content.[92] One of many disquieting passages exemplifies

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[86]   The language of abruptness and surprise is prominent in 3.27.2. Cf. Berno (2019) 83.

[87]   *Omnis aquarum stantium clusarumque natura se purgat,* 3.26.8. For the connections of this cyclical destruction of the world to morality in the *Q. Nat.*, see Gauly (2004) 235-267, Williams (2008) 235-238 and (2012) 125-132, and Berno (2012) 68.

[88]   Volk (2006) 192: "What Seneca has done is blend the Stoic idea of the mechanical and morally neutral destruction of the universe with the traditional idea of natural disaster, especially deluge, as a punishment for mortals and a wiping out of their sinful race." Cf. Star (2021) 144-146. For the earth's cleansing as both similar to human bodily functions and as catharsis, see Williams (2012) 127-129, Star (2021) 149-150.

[89]   3.27.5. This ironically resonates with Tacitus's description of Seneca's own diet at this time of only wild fruit and spring water, to avoid poisoning (15.45).

[90]   Graf (2024) 57-83, theorizes the flood through the concept of "stuplimity," as writing that not only shocks the system like the sublime does, but prevents the return to rational understanding.

[91]   The sins of the rest of humanity who will also be killed are not emphasized, although not even *pietas* will save mankind. In 3.29.8 even the *templa* will be destroyed. Degl'Innocenti Pierini (1984) 155-156, points out the inversion of Ovid's Deucalion and Pirra, who were *cultores numinis, Met.* 1.364.

[92]   Many aspects of this poetic vividness and intertextual play are covered in discussions of the flood in Hutchinson (1993) 128-131, Berno (2003) 65-110; Gauly (2004) 96-104, Mazzoli (2005), Williams (2012) 75-80, Trinacty (2018) 377-378, and Garani (2020), (2022), and (2023).

the mixtures of poetic language and highly descriptive *ekphrasis* in the whole flood scene (3.27.6):

> *Labant ac madent tecta, et in imum usque receptis aquis fundamenta desidunt ac tota humus stagnat. Frustra titubantium fultura temptatur; omne enim firmamentum in lubrica figitur et lutosa humo; nihil stabile est.*

> Buildings become unsteady and sodden, foundations subside as the water penetrates down to their base, and all the ground is under water. There are fruitless attempts to shore up unsteady buildings, for all the props are planted in slippery, muddy soil; nothing is firm.

The fluttering alliterations of t and f (*frustra titubantium fultura temptatur*) echo the futile hammering of stakes into muddy ground. Sound and its arrangements augment the emotion of the visual depiction, which in turn illustrates the argument. Yet the poetry of the passage goes further, since it echoes Seneca's critique of *fortuna* at the start of the book. There he states that, rather than recounting human history, the plaything of fortune, one should teach men that *nihil stabile esse ab illa datum* ("nothing given by (fortune) is firm," 3 *pr.* 7).[93] By repeating *nihil stabile est* in a physical context in this scene, Seneca leverages the vividness of the image. He prompts the reader to spontaneously recall the earlier claim about fortune. The echo is almost a revelation. Through such skillfully contrived associations throughout the flood scene, Seneca strengthens the engagement of poetry with philosophy.

The ethical point and the poetic description come together here in a way that literalizes a metaphor concerning human achievement in the preface to *Q. Nat.* 3: there the destructiveness of those glorified human conquerors such as Hannibal is critiqued using the language of the Stoic flood (*inundatio*) or conflagration (*conflagratio*) that will end the world (3 *pr.* 5).[94] In its extent and power, this flood is like nothing in

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[93]   On Seneca's approach to fortune in a Stoic context and in his plays, see Fischer (2008) 11-177.

[94]   Williams (2005)b 436-444. Berno (2019) 82-92, sees a political dimension as well: the destructive flooding of the Tiber, an ever-present danger for Romans, is hinted at, but never referred to in the many discussions of rivers and flooding in the *Q. Nat.* The eliding of the Roman context in *Q. Nat.* 3 thus constitutes an attack on Nero's corruption and destructiveness. It is deliberately substituted for the *ekpyrosis*, which would too obviously refer to the burning of Rome. Star (2021) 147, connects the uses of *solutus legibus* ("released from laws") and *res novae* ("new things," but also "revolution") in 3.28.7 and freedom and *licentia* in 3.30.6-7 to argue that

Seneca's moral works or letters; rather, it evokes his tragedies.[95] In the latter, however, although the vividness of visual images inflames the mind into aesthetic responsiveness, their ethical function is indirect.[96] In the *Q. Nat.* Seneca's approach is, on the surface, more direct: Ovid's attempt at a visually striking flood scene is capped by Seneca's flood, written to conform to Stoic ethics and physics.[97]

As we saw above, Seneca focuses readers on constraints. He presents limits and endings as they exist in the world and chastises those who would overflow them, such as leaders who live for conquest, aristocrats who overindulge in luxury, and poets whose language devolves into paradoxes. The *Q. Nat.* instead emphasizes the unifying aspects of thought. The notion here of overcoming human limits through thought extends to poetry, although this point is merely implied.

Seneca is infusing the *Q. Nat.* with poetry's elevated frenzy (*Tranq.* 17.10-11) and its overcoming of limits through unity (*Ep.* 33.5). He thus conjoins destabilizing poetic vividness with the feeling of harmony that comes from understanding the *ratio* of the universe. The sum of these mental movements accounts for the only overcoming of their mortal conditions seemingly allowed to humans: the metaphorical transcribing of self beyond ostensible human confines.

Posterity and tradition

Bringing together the threads in the sections above allows us to understand a further, tacit approach to continuity after death. For the nearness of the flood is a link to the imminence of death for everyone, but implicitly ties back to Seneca's concern about his own upcoming end (*nec longa erit mora exitii*, 3.30.5.). In decoupling the factual value of

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these passages also play on Roman fears of the excessive freedoms in government, especially democracy.

[95] *E.g. Thy.* 813-843 and *Ag.* 485-488. Cf. Rosenmeyer (1989) 128-130 and Star (2021) 157-190.

[96] Their Stoic character is far from obvious, and, while generally accepted, its mechanisms are still a matter of much scholarly debate. Staley (2010) 16-20, 54-65, argues that Stoic epistemological ideas are the background for the structure of Seneca's tragedies. He maintains that Seneca engages *phantasia, enargeia*, and *phantasma* to lead to his audience grasping (*comprehensio*) a "lively image" and thus mentally differentiating themselves from the unbalanced main characters. Cf. Armisen-Marchetti (1989). Cf. Fischer (2008) and Mazzoli (2016), esp. 417-451.

[97] Garani (2023) frames Seneca's flood (and references to the Phaethon myth) as engaging in a three-legged literary-philosophical contest with Ovid and Plato regarding the sublime.

their writings from the continuing worth of natural philosophers Seneca accentuates individual continuity specifically through tradition.[98] This is opposed to two other types of continuity: the living philosophical schools whose perpetuation Seneca sees threatened, or the exemplum of dying gloriously for philosophical values, which Socrates and Cato exemplify in his work, and Seneca himself performed outside of it.[99] Seneca's philosophical treatment of poetry helps him address this the issue of continuity more fully than do other genres. Through his integration and correction of poetry Seneca hints that the Q. Nat. will remain not only philosophically, but also *literarily* valuable past its scientific obsolescence.

Seneca unifies philosophy and poetry in *himself*, as author of the *Q. Nat.* Through the sphragis-like identification of himself at the start of the *Q. Nat.* as a *senex*, an old man constantly facing death, Seneca is putting forward a claim to a *nomen* for himself. He thus situates himself in the traditions of Rome beyond his already established reputation as a writer of tragedies, master politician, and Stoic thinker.[100] In the *Q. Nat.* Seneca takes advantage of the relatively short tradition of philosophical literature in Latin (Seal (2021) 17). Conjoining the varied strands of his oeuvre, the *Q. Nat.* can be seen as a culminating attempt to propel his name into posterity as a Latin "literary Stoic."

A lacuna provides a piece of evidence for where Seneca might see himself in the Latin literary-philosophical tradition. For Seneca suppresses one of his most crucial literary precursors, the one whose project most conspicuously interweaves poetry, materialistic natural science, and philosophical polemic against the fear of death.[101] Although

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[98]   Cf. *Ep.* 21.3-6 where Seneca states that men of genius and their interlocutors are remembered by name: *Nomen Attici perire Ciceronis epistulae non sinunt… possum mecum duratura nomina educere.* He promises to repeat Epicurus's immortalization of his addressee, Idomeneus, with his own, Lucilius. Additionally, Seneca quotes Vergil's *Aen.* 9.446-449 in this context, concerning song's ability to perpetuate for all time. Cf. Seal (2021) 91-100.

[99]   *E.g.* Socrates: *Epp.* 70.9, 104.27; Cato: *Ep.* 95.72, *Prov.* 2.10. On Seneca's own death and its use as an exemplum, see Habinek (2000) and Ker (2009) 254-257, 281-324.

[100]   In *Ep* 21.5 Seneca claims his own enduring reputation and ability to bring names into the future with him: *Habebo apud posteros gratiam, possum meum duratura nomina educere.* This Seneca connects with the ability to make an interlocutor famous both in philosophy (Epicurus and Cicero) and poetry (Vergil). See further Seal (2021) 92-100.

[101]   For some connections to Lucretius in the *Q. Nat.* and a contrast in their approach to the end of the world, see recently Star (2021) 139-142; cf. Schiesaro (2019). Setaioli (2000)a compares Seneca's multiple views of the afterlife to Epicurean and Lucretian

Seneca uses several images from him and once quotes him directly (*DRN* 1.314), it is at that very point Lucretius is made conspicuously nameless: "as another poet says" (*ut alius poeta ait*, 4b.3.4).[102] The historical opposition of Stoicism to Epicureanism may account for part of the reason, but not all, for Epicurus himself is named (though not quoted) in 6.20.5.[103] Seneca uses his own control over naming to treat a literary precursor's name oppositely from the name of the philosopher who inspired the poetry.[104] The contested ground is the masterful use of literary language in the service of true philosophy.

Erasure and return

As often in Seneca's work, there is a further complication that adds layers of meaning: in this case, it concerns the loss of *nomen*. The *Q. Nat.* present a seemingly unbridgeable rupture in the very event Seneca so heightened with his philosophical poetry. What will happen in the apocalypse? *peribunt tot nomina … peribit omne discrimen* (3.29.8), "so many names will perish … all distinctions will perish."[105] The flood voids the human separation of the world into named places. The cataclysm does not just erase geographical boundaries but, through the destruction of mankind, it annuls all human language. Hope for individuality, for continuation, even for tradition, seems to be obliterated with it.[106] How could Seneca's own name survive this final *vastation*?

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models, arguing that despite their similar materialism the Stoic tradition prevails in Seneca's consistent reference to a beneficent divinity. Cf. Garani (2023). On other examples of relations to Lucretius in the *Q. Nat.*, see Althoff (2005) 16-33; and Williams (2016).

[102] Cf. 3.16.5 on underground chasms, a topic treated in *DRN* 6.536-542. Both allusion and quotation, as well as the fact that Lucretius is unnamed in the *Q. Nat.* are pointed out by Corcoran (1971), *ad loc.* In this latter passage, although not quoting, Seneca seems quite conscious of his Lucretian model, as his parenthetical *nihil enim usquam inane est*, "for there is no void anywhere," shows that he is bluntly criticizing *DRN*'s Epicurean ideas.

[103] In the *Ep.* Seneca quotes Epicurus so often (Motto (1970) counts 29 letters with direct quotations) that it manifests as an inside joke; Seneca is again using the "words of the enemy." See esp. *Ep.* 12.9.

[104] Many have seen a further similarity to Lucretius in the shared consolation for death through the total end of the universe both in the *Q. Nat.* and in *Polyb.* 1.1-3. Star (2021) 137-139.

[105] Cf. Sen. *Medea* 344-350; Ovid *Met.* 1.291-292: *Iamque mare et tellus nullum discrimen habebant: omnia pontus erat.*

[106] As with the dying off of *tot familiae philosophorum*, 7.32.2, discussed above.

A contradiction such as this may haunt any hybrid of literature and materialistic philosophy. A similar one has been posited for Lucretius's project (Segal (1989) and (1990)). As with Seneca's treatment of poetic paradoxes and his shaking of the reader before presenting solutions, the problem of the loss of names prompts a return. The final lines of *Q. Nat.* 3 are devoted to this. In the cycle that Stoicism posits, after the annihilative flood the waters will recede, and all will be recreated anew (3.30.7-8):

> *Antiquus ordo revocabitur. omne ex integro animal generabitur, dabiturque terris homo inscius scelerum at melioribus auspicīs natus. sed illis quoque innocentia non durabit, nisi dum novi sunt. cito nequitia subrepit; virtus difficilis inventu est, rectorem ducemque desiderat; etiam sine magistro vitia discuntur.*

> The old order will be restored. Every kind of animal will be created again, and earth will acquire human beings who are unacquainted with wickedness and born under better auspices. But even their innocence will not last except while they are newly formed. Wickedness soon creeps in. Virtue is difficult to discover; it needs a guide and leader; vice is learned even without a teacher.

Overhurriedly, as it might seem, Seneca spins us into the next cycle of life. So few words restore the whole of our universe to its current state (similarly in *Marc.* 26.7). The natural mechanism of these prognostications at the end of *Q. Nat.* 3 remain unexplained, as in Stoicism more generally. Seneca's nearly instantaneous translation of mankind to this newly purified world acts as an affirmation that life will continue after all is destroyed. Loss will not be permanent. We now return to the question we asked at the start: how do Seneca's repeated analogies between world and human being carry over to this resuscitation?

For one, Seneca does not refer to what our evidence shows to be an occasional notion in Stoicism that the same self recurs in all future worlds.[107] If this is to be present, it must be brought to the work entirely by the reader. In the *Q. Nat.* themselves the answer that builds on this passage suggests an additional facet of Seneca's implied self-characterization. There is an immaculate innocence in the imagined revival

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[107] See Long and Sedley (1987), section 52, 1.308-312; and Setaioli (2000)a 291-294. Cf. *Ep.* 36.10-11 where Seneca insists that death is only an interruption and that all of nature is cyclical. What happens to the individual is left deliberately vague.

of humanity. This purity ruptures it from the debaucheries of Roman society that Seneca has described, seemingly annulling any need for recommencing ethical thought. However, Seneca prophesies an immediate recrudescence of sin.[108] The moral purgation of the flood turns out to be only temporary. In the *Q. Nat.*, the comfort of humanity's ethical unity with the natural world is only allowed one line. The need for teachers inevitably returns. Answering this call provides the third element of Seneca's crafting of his own legacy, as a moral guide.[109]

Conclusions

Seneca provides himself a synergistic continuity through his use of three modes of thought. The imperative for perpetuation so strongly implied at the start of the work is answered by an involution of their approaches to exceeding the self: natural investigation allows a transcendent rationality and a chain of scientific progress; poetic craft controls naming, and thus memory and tradition; and ethical teaching is presented as timeless, needed anew at every cycle. Each mode follows its own vector, having a unique approach to the world and a its own tradition. Each is incomplete in regards to the world or in appealing to imperfect humans. It is only the activity of combining the three that advances both Seneca and his readers.

Regarding the natural world and science, differentiation itself is understood as crucial to the world order and to investigating it. Differentiation will reconstitute even after doomsday—it is part of the natural schema. This is a countercurrent to the emphasis on wholeness and undifferentiation, as well as to the idea that bodily dissolution is the endpoint. Those who understand the Stoic schema can see that nature itself is continuous. The return of the world after the deluge gives just the slightest opening. Seneca is careful not to use this as one of his tactics for combatting death—it remains a glimmer. Instead, individual continuity in this strand comes from a different avenue: the self is distinct in personally striving to investigate the world, taking one's place in a long line of natural scientists. Their names are handed down

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[108] Cf. the lengthy description of the evolution of humanity from earliest times in *Ep.* 90. At the start humans have a natural innocence, not knowing how to sin (cf. *Med.* 329–334). With money they take on luxury and crime. Philosophy, however, only develops over time and study. See Star (2021) 130-132.

[109] On the sage imagining and "surviving" the apocalypse in *Ep.* 9, see Star (2023) 10-20.

and given their due for the work of thought, despite the obsolescence of their ideas. In preserving the names of previous theorists, Seneca implies that his will remain.

The literary elements of the *Q. Nat.* augment both of these scientific strands of continuity. Through depicting the physical world's destruction and return, Seneca gives readers a chance to revive the world in their mind. His integration of poetic quotations and energetic language into these scenes demands that readers fire up their visual imagination and whisper the words to themselves. Augmenting his scientific investigation with poetry's synthesizing force allows Seneca to transcend merely critical, negative philosophical investigation. It also implicitly rekindles the life force of philosophy at Rome, which is losing its competition with spectacle.

In terms of the second strand, the insinuation of continuity through scientific tradition is supplemented by the preservation through poetic tradition. Intermingling poetry's immortalizing tropes into his text and praising poetic genius implicates Seneca's ideas about his own place. Yet the license of poetry needs to be checked and reformed, for both its unnatural play, and its ethical content. Seneca corrects Epicureanism. He thus corrects Lucretius, differentiating himself through both physics and ethics from his Roman predecessor, whose language and ideas are sometimes so close, but whose name Seneca deliberately cuts out from the tradition.

It is only when one adds the ethical—here patently conjoined with the poetic in a way it is not in Seneca's plays—that the full picture of his place in the tradition comes forth. The future is lacking, Seneca has us understand. The revived world will need a guide, leader, and teacher. It is as ethical preceptor combined with scientific investigator and literary figure that Seneca most forcefully reinserts himself into the tradition, in strands that only come together in the *Q. Nat.*, of all his works. Seneca dynamically conjoins the three modes one to the next with a half twist, creating a type of Möbius strip that curves in upon itself to infinity.

Continuity through these three modes is not only Seneca's claim for himself, it is his model for the reader. Through the action of uncovering the subtle connections between these fields, the *Q. Nat.* encourage Seneca's readers to reperform critical thought on language and nature, follow out the ethical modifications Seneca makes to poetry, and reconsider the end of the world. Neither readers nor Seneca thereby be-

come sages, but they become active in relation to creative thought, the universe, and their own death. It is a type of ethical therapy by example that Seneca often claims but here enacts most fully of all his work. Fittingly, he does so in this massive work of old age, in the rush of his last stretch of time. Through the *Q. Nat.* Seneca anchors his name on the other side of cataclysm.

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