

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

nam circa id effugit, quo urgetur; quemadmodum aer verbere atque ictu non laeditur, ne scinditur quidem, sed circa id, cui cessit, refunditur; sic animus, qui ex tenuissimo constat, deprehendi non potest nec intra corpus effligi, sed beneficio subtilitatis suae per ipsa, quibus premitur, erumpit. Quomodo fulmini, etiam cum latissime percussit ac fulsit, per exiguum foramen est relictus, sic animo, qui adhuc tenuior est igne, per omne corpus fuga est. Itaque de illo quaerendum est, an possit immortalis esse. Hoc quidem certum habet: si superstes est corpori, praeteri¹ illum nullo genere posse, propter quod non perit, quoniam nulla immortalitas cum exceptione est nec quicquam noxium aeterno est. VALE.

LVIII.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Quanta verborum nobis paupertas, immo egestas sit, numquam magis quam hodierno die intellexi. Mille res inciderunt, cum forte de Platone loqueremur, quae nomina desiderarent nec haberent, quaedam vero, quae² cum habuissent, fastidio nostro perdidissent.
- 2 Quis autem ferat in egestate fastidium? Hunc quem

¹ *praeteri* Buecheler; *preter* p; *propter* VLPb; *proteri* Haupt.

² *quae* added by Hense, after Koch and G. Gemoll.

^a For this belief compare Xenophon, *Mem.* iv. 3. 14, "No one sees the bolt either on its way down or on its way back." Seneca himself was much interested in lightning, *cf.* *N. Q.* ii. 40. 2.

^b This theme was emphasized by Lucretius, i. 136 and 832, and iii. 260. Munro thinks, however, that "Lucretius had too much instead of too little technical language for a poet." Seneca knew Lucretius; *cf.* *Epp.* lviii. 12, xc. 11, etc.

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will escape round the edges of the body which overwhelms it; just as the air cannot be damaged by lashes and blows, or even cut into, but flows back about the object to which it gives place; similarly the soul, which consists of the subtlest particles, cannot be arrested or destroyed inside the body, but, by virtue of its delicate substance, it will rather escape through the very object by which it is being crushed. Just as lightning, no matter how widely it strikes and flashes, makes its return through a narrow opening,^a so the soul, which is still subtler than fire, has a way of escape through any part of the body. We therefore come to this question,—whether the soul can be immortal. But be sure of this: if the soul survives the body after the body is crushed, the soul can in no wise be crushed out, precisely because it does not perish; for the rule of immortality never admits of exceptions, and nothing can harm that which is everlasting. Farewell.

LVIII. ON BEING

How scant of words our language is, nay, how poverty-stricken, I have not fully understood until to-day. We happened to be speaking of Plato, and a thousand subjects came up for discussion, which needed names and yet possessed none; and there were certain others which once possessed, but have since lost, their words because we were too nice about their use. But who can endure to be nice in the midst of poverty?^b There is an insect, called

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Graeci oestron vocant pecora peragentem et totis saltibus dissipantem, asilum nostri vocabant. Hoc Vergilio licet credas :

Est lucum Silari iuxta¹ ilicibusque virentem
Plurimus Alburnum volitans, cui nomen asilo
Romanum est, oestrum Grai vertere vocantes,
Asper, acerba sonans, quo tota exterrita silvis
Diffugiunt armenta.

3 Puto intellegi istud verbum interisse. Ne te longe differam, quaedam simplicia in usu erant, sicut "cernere ferro inter se" dicebant.² Idem Vergilius hoc probabit tibi :

Ingentis genitos diversis partibus orbis
Inter se coiisse viros et cernere ferro.

Quod nunc decernere dicimus. Simplicis illius verbi
4 usus amissus est. Dicebant antiqui "si iusso,"
id est iussero. Hoc nolo mihi credas, sed eidem³
Vergilio :

Cetera, qua iusso, mecum manus inferat arma.

5 Non id ago nunc hac diligentia, ut ostendam, quantum tempus apud grammaticum perdiderim, sed ut ex hoc intellegas, quantum apud Ennium et Accium verborum situs occupaverit, cum apud hunc quoque, qui cotidie excutitur, aliqua nobis subducta sint.
6 "Quid sibi," inquis, "ista praeparatio vult? Quo spectat?" Non celabo te; cupio, si fieri potest,

¹ for *lucum* and *iuxta* Vergil MSS. give *lucos* and *circa*.

² *dicebant* Mentel; *dicebantur* MSS.

³ *eidem* Haase; *fidem* MSS.

• The gad-fly.
• *Aeneid*, xii. 708 f.

• *Georgics*, iii. 146 ff.
• *Aeneid*, xi. 467.

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by the Greeks *oestrus*,^a which drives cattle wild and scatters them all over their pasturing grounds; it used to be called *asilus* in our language, as you may believe on the authority of Vergil :—

Near Silarus' groves, and eke Alburnus' shades
Of green-clad oak-trees flits an insect, named
Asilus by the Romans; in the Greek
The word is rendered *oestrus*. With a rough
And strident sound it buzzes and drives wild
The terror-stricken herds throughout the woods.^b

By which I infer that the word has gone out of use. And, not to keep you waiting too long, there were certain uncompounded words current, like *cernere ferro inter se*, as will be proved again by Vergil :—

Great heroes, born in various lands, had come
To *settle matters* mutually with the sword.^c

This “settling matters” we now express by *decernere*. The plain word has become obsolete. The ancients used to say *iusso*, instead of *iussero*, in conditional clauses. You need not take my word, but you may turn again to Vergil :—

The other soldiers shall conduct the fight
With me, where I *shall bid*.^d

It is not my purpose to show, by this array of examples, how much time I have wasted on the study of language; I merely wish you to understand how many words, that were current in the works of Ennius and Accius, have become mouldy with age; while even in the case of Vergil, whose works are explored daily, some of his words have been filched away from us.

You will say, I suppose: “What is the purpose and meaning of this preamble?” I shall not keep

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propitiis auribus tuis "essentiam"¹ dicere; si minus, dicam et iratis. Ciceronem auctorem huius verbi habeo, puto locupletem. Si recentiorem quaeris, Fabianum, disertum et elegantem, orationis etiam ad nostrum fastidium nitidae. Quid enim fiet, mi Lucili? Quomodo dicetur *ὄψια* res necessaria, natura continens fundamentum omnium? Rogo itaque permittas mihi hoc verbo uti. Nihilominus dabo operam, ut ius a te datum parcissime exerceam; 7 fortasse contentus ero mihi licere. Quid proderit facilitas tua, cum ecce id nullo modo Latine exprimere possim, propter quod linguae nostrae convicium feci? Magis damnabis angustias Romanas, si scieris unam syllabam esse, quam mutare non possum. Quae sit haec, quaeris? Τὸ ὄν. Duri tibi videor ingenii; in medio positum,² posse sic transferri, ut dicam "quod est." Sed multum interesse video; cogor verbum 8 pro vocabulo ponere. Sed si ita necesse est, ponam "quod est." Sex modis hoc a Platone dici amicus noster, homo eruditissimus, hodierno die dicebat. Omnes tibi exponam, si ante indicavero esse aliquid genus, esse et speciem.

¹ *essentiam* Muretus; *quid sentiam* MSS.

² *positum* Muretus; *positam* MSS.

^a Cicero usually says *natura*. The word, according to Quintilian, was first used by a certain Sergius Flavius. It is also found in Apuleius, Macrobius, and Sidonius.

^b See *Ep. c.* Papirius Fabianus, who lived in the times of Tiberius and Caligula, was a pupil of the Sextius of *Ep. lix.*, and was (Pliny, *N. H.* xxxvi. 15. 24) *naturae rerum peritissimus*. He is praised by the elder Seneca (*Cont. 2. Praef.*) who, however, says of him *deerat robur—splendor aderat*.

^c *i. e.*, I must use other imported words to explain *essentia*, which is not a native Latin word, but invented as a literal translation of *ὄψια*.

^d *cf.* § 16.

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you in the dark ; I desire, if possible, to say the word *essentia* to you and obtain a favourable hearing. If I cannot do this, I shall risk it even though it put you out of humour. I have Cicero^a as authority for the use of this word, and I regard him as a powerful authority. If you desire testimony of a later date, I shall cite Fabianus,^b careful of speech, cultivated, and so polished in style that he will suit even our nice tastes. For what can we do, my dear Lucilius? How otherwise can we find a word for that which the Greeks call *οὐσία*, something that is indispensable, something that is the natural substratum of everything? I beg you accordingly to allow me to use this word *essentia*. I shall nevertheless take pains to exercise the privilege, which you have granted me, with as sparing a hand as possible ; perhaps I shall be content with the mere right. Yet what good will your indulgence do me, if, lo and behold, I can in no wise express in Latin^c the meaning of the word which gave me the opportunity to rail at the poverty of our language? And you will condemn our narrow Roman limits even more, when you find out that there is a word of one syllable which I cannot translate. "What is this?" you ask. It is the word *ὄν*. You think me lacking in facility ; you believe that the word is ready to hand, that it might be translated by *quod est*. I notice, however, a great difference ; you are forcing me to render a noun by a verb. But if I must do so, I shall render it by *quod est*. There are six ways^d in which Plato expresses this idea, according to a friend of ours, a man of great learning, who mentioned the fact to-day. And I shall explain all of them to you, if I may first point out that there is something called *genus* and something called *species*.

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Nunc autem primum illud genus quaerimus, ex quo ceterae species suspensae sunt, a quo nascitur omnis divisio, quo universa comprehensa sunt. Invenietur autem, si coeperimus singula retro legere; sic
9 enim perducemur ad primum. Homo species est, ut Aristoteles ait; equus species est; canis species est; ergo commune aliquod quaerendum est his omnibus vinculum, quod illa complectatur et sub se habeat. Hoc quid est? Animal. Ergo genus esse coepit horum omnium, quae modo rettuli, hominis,
10 equi, canis, animal. Sed quaedam¹ animam habent nec sunt animalia. Placet enim satis et arbustis animam inesse. Itaque et vivere illa et mori dicimus. Ergo animantia superiorem tenebunt locum, quia et animalia in hac forma sunt et sata. Sed quaedam anima carent, ut saxa. Itaque erit aliquid animantibus² antiquius, corpus scilicet. Hoc sic dividam, ut dicam
11 corpora omnia aut animantia esse aut inanima. Etiam nunc est aliquid superius quam corpus. Dicimus enim quaedam corporalia esse, quaedam incorporalia. Quid ergo erit, ex quo haec deducantur? Illud, cui nomen modo parum proprium inposuimus, "quod est." Sic enim in species secabitur, ut dicamus: "quod est" aut corporale est aut incorporale.
12 Hoc ergo est genus primum et antiquissimum et, ut ita dicam, generale. Cetera genera quidem sunt,

¹ *quaedam* later MSS. ; *quaedam quae* pLVPb.

² Hense conjectures *et animantibus*.

^a *Categories* 2 b 11 and often.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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