

1. Physical sickness as a metaphor for psychic flaws/vices.

A: **Ep.8.2:** 'There are certain healthy counsels, which may be compared to prescription of useful drugs: I am putting these into writing. For I have found them helpful in ministering to my own sores, which, if not wholly cured, have at any rate ceased to spread.'

B. **Ep.6, 1-3:** 'I feel, my dear Lucilius, that I am being not only reformed (*emendari*), but transformed (*transfigurari*). I do not yet, however, assure myself, or indulge the hope, that there are no elements left in me which need to be changed. Of course there are many that should be made more compact, or made thinner, or brought into greater prominence. And indeed this very fact is proof that my spirit is altered into something better – that it can see its own faults, of which it was previously ignorant. In certain cases sick men are congratulated because they themselves have perceived that they are sick. I therefore wish to impart to you this sudden change in myself. I should then begin to place a surer trust in our friendship, - the true friendship, which hope and fear and self-interest cannot sever, the friendship in which and for the sake of which men meet death. I can show you the many who have lacked not a friend, but a friendship. This, however, cannot possibly happen when souls are drawn together by identical inclinations into an alliance of honourable desires. And why can it not happen? Because in such cases men know that they can have all things in common, especially their troubles. You cannot conceive what distinct progress I notice that each day brings to me.'

2. Body and Soul

A. **Ep.8.5:**

You should stick, then, to this sound and healthy rule of life: indulge the body only so far as it is necessary for good health. The body should be treated more rigorously, so that it does not become disobedient to the mind. Eat merely to relieve your hunger; drink merely to quench your thirst; dress merely to keep out the cold; house yourself merely as a protection against personal discomfort. It matters little whether the house is built of turf or of variously coloured imported marble; understand that a man is sheltered just as well by a thatch than by a roof of gold. Despise everything that useless labour creates as an ornament and an object of beauty. And reflect that nothing except the soul is worthy of wonder; for the soul, if it is great, nothing is great.

B. **Ep.15. 1-6**

The old Romans had a custom which survived even into my lifetime. They would add to the opening words of a letter: "If you are well, it is well; I also am well." Persons like ourselves would do well to say. "If you are studying philosophy, it is well." For this is just what "being well" means. Without philosophy the mind is sickly (*aeger*), and the body, too, though it may be very powerful, is strong only as that of a madman or a lunatic is strong. **2.** This, then, is the sort of health you should primarily cultivate;

the other kind of health comes second, and will involve little effort, if you wish to be well physically. It is indeed foolish, my dear Lucilius, and very unsuitable for a cultivated man, to work hard over developing the muscles and broadening the shoulders and strengthening the lungs. For although your heavy feeding (*sagina* – stuffing, fattening, gladiator’s or athlete’s rations? Link with gladiatorial metaphor, e.g. Also used by Quintilian of style, *Inst.*2.15.25; associated with laziness and *luxuria* at *Ep.*122.4) produces good results and your sinews grow solid, you can never be a match, either in strength or in weight, for a first-class bull. Besides, by overloading the body with food you strangle the soul and render it less active. Accordingly, limit the flesh as much as possible, and allow free play to the spirit. **3.** Many inconveniences beset those who devote themselves to such pursuits. In the first place, they have their exercises, at which they must work and waste their life-force and render it less fit to bear a strain or the severer studies. Second, their keen edge is dulled by heavy eating. Besides, they must take orders from slaves of the vilest stamp, – men who alternate between the oil-flask and the flagon, whose day passes satisfactorily if they have got up a good perspiration and quaffed, to make good what they have lost in sweat, huge draughts of liquor which will sink deeper because of their fasting. Drinking and sweating, – it's the life of a dyspeptic! **4.** Now there are short and simple exercises which tire the body rapidly, and so save our time; and time is something of which we ought to keep strict account. These exercises are running, brandishing weights, and jumping, – high-jumping or broad-jumping, or the kind which I may call, "the Priest's dance" (named after the *Salii* or leaping priests of Mars: cf. Ovid *Fasti* 3.259-391) or, in slighting terms, "the clothes-cleaner's jump." Select for practice any one of these, and you will find it plain and easy. **5.** But whatever you do, come back soon from body to mind. The mind must be exercised both day and night, for it is nourished by moderate labour. and this form of exercise need not be hampered by cold or hot weather, or even by old age. Cultivate that good which improves with the years. **6.** Of course I do not command you to be always bending over your books and your writing materials (*pugillaribus*: *pugillaria* = things held in the fist/hand, i.e. writing materials, but jokes on *pugilatio*, boxing?); the mind must have a change, – but a change of such a kind that it is not unnerved, but merely unbent. Riding in a litter shakes up the body, and does not interfere with study: one may read, dictate, converse, or listen to another; nor does walking prevent any of these things.

C. Ep.30.1-4:

1. I have beheld Aufidius Bassus, that noble man, shattered in health and wrestling with his years. But they already bear upon him so heavily that he cannot be raised up; old age has settled down upon him with great, – yes, with its entire, weight. You know that his body was always delicate and sapless. For a long time he has kept it in hand, or, to speak more correctly, has kept it together; of a sudden it has collapsed. **2.** Just as in a ship that springs a leak, you can always stop the first or the second fissure (*uni rimae aut alteri obsistitur*), but when many holes begin to open (*ubi plurimis locis laxari coepit*) and let in water, the gaping hull cannot be saved; similarly, in an old man's body, there is a certain limit up to which you can sustain and prop its weakness (*imbecillitas*). But when it comes to resemble a decrepit building, when every joint begins to spread and while one is being repaired, another falls apart, – then it is time for a man to look about him and consider how he may get out. **3.** But the mind of our friend Bassus is active. Philosophy bestows this boon upon us; it makes us joyful in the very sight of death, strong and brave no matter in what state the body

may be, cheerful and never failing though the body fail us. A great pilot can sail even when his canvas is rent (*scisso...velo*); if his ship be dismantled, he can yet put in trim what remains of her hull and hold her to her course. This is what our friend Bassus is doing; and he contemplates his own end with the courage and countenance which you would regard as undue indifference in a man who so contemplated another's. **4.** This is a great accomplishment, Lucilius, and one which needs long practice to learn, – to depart calmly when the inevitable hour arrives. Other kinds of death contain an ingredient of hope: a disease comes to an end; a fire is quenched; falling houses have set down in safety those whom they seemed certain to crush; the sea has cast ashore unharmed those whom it had engulfed, by the same force through which it drew them down; the soldier has drawn back his sword from the very neck of his doomed foe. But those whom old age is leading away to death have nothing to hope for; old age alone grants no reprieve. No ending, to be sure, is more painless; but there is none more lingering.

3. Just replace bodily with psychic impenetrability?

Shadi Bartsch, *Seneca and the Self* (2009) 204

‘Seneca would have us transfer a normative concern for the integrity of bodily boundaries to a concern, instead, for the integrity of the philosophical boundaries of the soul. For the idealized “you” is not inherent in your body, but in the rational property of that figural space within you, which you must protect from harm or dissipation. Suffer the body to be penetrated, abused, flogged, mutilated: this is no violation of your *libertas*, which is now unyoked from the fate of your body. As the philosopher gives up his body it is his mental impenetrability that is figured as the new sign of masculinity... Seneca’s imagery of precious interiority versus expendable exteriority rings the changes on the sanctity of the elite body per se and allows for a recasting of ethical values without the loss of the combatant metaphor so important to the traditional self-representation of the male upper classes.’

Googledoc exercise

- Turn *Ep.*12 into a dramatic dialogue.

Characters:

Seneca
The Bailiff
Felicio the doorman
Pacuvius.
Lucilius (the addressee)

Epistle 12

1. Wherever I turn, I see evidence of my advancing years. I visited lately my country-place, and protested against the money which was spent on the tumble-down building. My bailiff maintained that the flaws were not due to his own carelessness; "he was doing everything possible, but the house was old." And this was the house which grew under my own hands! What has the future in store for me, if stones of my own age are already crumbling? **2.** I was angry, and I embraced the first opportunity to vent my spleen in the bailiff's presence. "It is clear," I cried, "that these plane-trees are neglected; they have no leaves. Their branches are so gnarled and shrivelled; the boles are so rough and unkempt! This would not happen, if someone loosened the earth at their feet, and watered them." The bailiff swore by my protecting deity that "he was doing everything possible, and never relaxed his efforts, but those trees were old." Between you and me, I had planted those trees myself, I had seen them in their first leaf. **3.** Then I turned to the door and asked: "Who is that broken-down dotard? You have done well to place him at the entrance; for he is outward bound.^[1] Where did you get him? What pleasure did it give you to take up for burial some other man's dead?"^[2] But the slave said: "Don't you know me, sir? I am Felicio; you used to bring me little images.^[3] My father was Philositus the steward, and I am your pet slave." "The man is clean crazy," I remarked. "Has my pet slave become a little boy again? But it is quite possible; his teeth are just dropping out."^[4]

4. I owe it to my country-place that my old age became apparent whithersoever I turned. Let us cherish and love old age; for it is full of pleasure if one knows how to use it. Fruits are most welcome when almost over; youth is most charming at its close; the last drink delights the toper, the glass which souses him and puts the finishing touch on his drunkenness. **5.** Each pleasure reserves to the end the greatest delights which it contains. Life is most delightful when it is on the downward slope, but has not yet reached the abrupt decline. And I myself believe that the period which stands, so to speak, on the edge of the roof, possesses pleasures of its own. Or else the very fact of our not wanting pleasures has taken the place of the pleasures themselves. How comforting it is to have tired out one's appetites, and to have done with them! **6.** "But," you say, "it is a nuisance to be looking death in the face!" Death, however, should be looked in the face by young and old alike. We are not summoned according to our rating on the censor's list.^[5] Moreover, no one is so old that it would be improper for him to hope for another day of existence. And one day, mind you, is a stage on life's journey. Our span of life is divided into parts; it consists of large circles

enclosing smaller. One circle embraces and bounds the rest; it reaches from birth to the last day of existence. The next circle limits the period of our young manhood. The third confines all of childhood in its circumference. Again, there is, in a class by itself, the year; it contains within itself all the divisions of time by the multiplication of which we get the total of life. The month is bounded by a narrower ring. The smallest circle of all is the day; but even a day has its beginning and its ending, its sunrise and its sunset. **7.** Hence Heraclitus, whose obscure style gave him his surname,^[6] remarked: "One day is equal to every day." Different persons have interpreted the saying in different ways. Some hold that days are equal in number of hours, and this is true; for if by "day" we mean twenty-four hours' time, all days must be equal, inasmuch as the night acquires what the day loses. But others maintain that one day is equal to all days through resemblance, because the very longest space of time possesses no element which cannot be found in a single day, – namely, light and darkness, – and even to eternity day makes these alternations^[7] more numerous, not different when it is shorter and different again when it is longer. **8.** Hence, every day ought to be regulated as if it closed the series, as if it rounded out and completed our existence. Pacuvius, who by long occupancy made Syria his own,^[8] used to hold a regular burial sacrifice in his own honour, with wine and the usual funeral feasting, and then would have himself carried from the dining-room to his chamber, while eunuchs applauded and sang in Greek to a musical accompaniment: "He has lived his life, he has lived his life!" **9.** Thus Pacuvius had himself carried out to burial every day. Let us, however, do from a good motive what he used to do from a debased motive; let us go to our sleep with joy and gladness; let us say: 'I have lived; the course which Fortune set for me is finished.'^[9] (*Aeneid* 4.653)

And if God is pleased to add another day, we should welcome it with glad hearts. That man is happiest, and is secure in his own possession of himself, who can await the morrow without apprehension. When a man has said: "I have lived!", every morning he arises he receives a bonus. **10.** But now I ought to close my letter. "What?" you say; "shall it come to me without any little offering?" "Be not afraid; it brings something, – nay, more than something, a great deal. For what is more noble than the following saying^[10] of which I make this letter the bearer: "It is wrong to live under constraint; but no man is constrained to live under constraint." Of course not. On all sides lie many short and simple paths to freedom; and let us thank God that no man can be kept in life. We may spurn the very constraints that hold us. **11.** "Epicurus," you reply, "uttered these words; what are you doing with another's property?" Any truth, I maintain, is my own property. And I shall continue to heap quotations from Epicurus upon you, so that all persons who swear by the words of another, and put a value upon the speaker and not upon the thing spoken, may understand that the best ideas are common property. Farewell.

Notes:

- 1 A jesting allusion to the Roman funeral; the corpse's feet pointing towards the door.
- 2 His former owner should have kept him and buried him.
- 3 Small figures, generally of terra-cotta, were frequently given to children as presents at the Saturnalia. Cf. Macrobius, i. 11. 49 *sigila . . . pro se atque suis piaculum*.
- 4 i.e., the old slave resembles a child in that he is losing his teeth (but for the second time).
- 5 i.e., *seniores*, as contrasted with *juniores*.
- 6 ὁ σκοτεινός, "the Obscure," Frag. 106 Diels².
- 7 i.e., of light and darkness.
- 8 *Usus* was the mere enjoyment of a piece of property; *dominium* was the exclusive right to its control. Possession for one, or two, years conferred ownership. See Leage, *Roman Private*

Law, pp. 133, 152, and 164. Although Pacuvius was governor so long that the province seemed to belong to him, yet he knew he might die any day.

9 Vergil, *Aeneid*, iv. 653.

10 Epicurus, *Sprüche*, 9 Wokte.

Latin text

XII. SENECA LUCILIO SUO SALUTEM

[1] Quocumque me verti, argumenta senectutis meae video. Veneram in suburbanum meum et querebar de impensis aedificii dilabentis. Ait vilicus mihi non esse neglegentiae suae vitium, omnia se facere, sed villam veterem esse. Haec villa inter manus meas crevit: quid mihi futurum est, si tam putria sunt aetatis meae saxa? [2] Iratus illi proximam occasionem stomachandi arripio. 'Apparet' inquam 'has platanos neglegi: nullas habent frondes. Quam nodosi sunt et retorridi rami, quam tristes et squalidi trunci! Hoc non accideret si quis has circumfoderet, si irrigaret.' Iurat per genium meum se omnia facere, in nulla re cessare curam suam, sed illas vetulas esse. Quod intra nos sit, ego illas posueram, ego illarum primum videram folium. [3] Conversus ad ianuam 'quis est iste?' inquam 'iste decrepitus et merito ad ostium admotus? foras enim spectat. Unde istunc nactus es? quid te delectavit: alienum mortuum tollere?' At ille 'non cognoscis me?' inquit: 'ego sum Felicio, cui solebas sigillaria afferre; ego sum Philositi vilici filius, deliciolum tuum'. 'Perfecte' inquam 'iste delirat: populus, etiam delictum meum factus est? Prorsus potest fieri: dentes illi cum maxime cadunt.'

[4] Debeo hoc suburbano meo, quod mihi senectus mea quocumque adverteram apparuit. Complectamur illam et amemus; plena <est> voluptatis, si illa scias uti. Gratissima sunt poma cum fugiunt; pueritiae maximus in exitu decor est; deditos vino potio extrema delectat, illa quae mergit, quae ebrietati summam manum imponit; [5] quod in se iucundissimum omnis voluptas habet in finem sui differt. Iucundissima est aetas devexa iam, non tamen praeceps, et illam quoque in extrema tegula stantem iudico habere suas voluptates; aut hoc ipsum succedit in locum voluptatum, nullis egere. Quam dulce est cupiditates fatigasse ac reliquisse! [6] 'Molestum est' inquis 'mortem ante oculos habere.' Primum ista tam seni ante oculos debet esse quam iuveni - non enim citamur ex censu -; deinde nemo tam sene est ut improbe unum diem speret. Unus autem dies gradus vitae est. Tota aetas partibus constat et orbis habet circumductos maiores minoribus: est aliquis qui omnis complectatur et cingat - hic pertinet a natali ad diem extremum -; est alter qui annos adolescentiae excludit; est qui totam pueritiam ambitu suo adstringit; est deinde per se annus in se omnia continens tempora, quorum multiplicatione vita componitur; mensis artiore praecingitur circulo; angustissimum habet dies gyrum, sed et hic ab initio ad exitum venit, ab ortu ad occasum. [7] Ideo Heraclitus, cui cognomen fecit orationis obscuritas, 'unus' inquit 'dies par omni est'. Hoc alius aliter excepit. Dixit enim *** parem esse horis, nec mentitur; nam si dies est tempus viginti et quattuor horarum, necesse est omnes inter se dies pares esse, quia nox habet quod dies perdidit. Alius ait parem esse unum diem omnibus similitudine; nihil enim habet longissimi temporis spatium quod non et in uno die invenias, lucem et noctem, et in alternas mundi vices plura facit ista, non <alia>: *** alias contractior, alias productior. [8] Itaque sic ordinandus est dies omnis tamquam cogat agmen et consummet atque expleat vitam. Pacuvius, qui Syriam usu suam fecit, cum vino et illis funebribus epulis sibi parentaverat, sic in cubiculum ferebatur a cena ut inter plausus exoletorum hoc ad symphoniam caneretur: 'beb'TMtai, beb'TMtai«. [9] Nullo non se die extulit. Hoc quod ille ex mala conscientia faciebat nos ex bona faciamus, et in somnum ituri laeti

hilaesque dicamus,
vixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi.
Crastinum si adiecerit deus, laeti recipiamus. Ille beatissimus est et securus sui
possessor qui crastinum sine sollicitudine exspectat; quisquis dixit 'vixi' cotidie ad
lucrum surgit.
[10] Sed iam debeo epistulam includere. 'Sic' inquis 'sine ullo ad me peculio veniet?'
Noli timere: aliquid secum fert. Quare aliquid dixi? multum. Quid enim hac voce
praeclarius quam illi trado ad te perferendam? 'Malum est in necessitate vivere, sed in
necessitate vivere necessitas nulla est.' Quidni nulla sit? patent undique ad libertatem
viae multae, breves faciles. Agamus deo gratias quod nemo in vita teneri potest:
calcare ipsas necessitates licet. [11] 'Epicurus' inquis 'dixit: quid tibi cum alieno?'
Quod verum est meum est; perseverabo Epicurum tibi ingerere, ut isti qui in verba
iurant nec quid dicatur aestimant, sed a quo, sciant quae optima sunt esse communia.
Vale.