

THE EPISTLES OF SENECA

LXV.

SENECA LVCILIO SVO SALVTEM

- 1 Hesternum diem divisi cum mala valetudine; antemeridianum illa sibi vindicavit, postmeridiano mihi cessit. Itaque lectione primum temptavi animum. Deinde cum hanc recepisset, plus illi imperare ausus sum, immo permittere; aliquid scripsi et quidem intentius quam soleo, dum cum materia difficili contendo et vinci nolo, donec intervenerunt amici, qui mihi vim adferrent et tamquam aegrum
- 2 intemperantem coercerent. In locum stili sermo successit, ex quo eam partem ad te perferam, quae in lite est. Te arbitrum addiximus. Plus negotii habes quam existimas; triplex causa est.

Dicunt, ut scis, Stoici nostri duo esse in rerum natura, ex quibus omnia fiant, causam et materiam. Materia iacet iners, res ad omnia parata, cessatura, si nemo moveat. Causa autem, id est ratio, materiam format et quocumque vult versat, ex illa varia opera producit. Esse ergo debet, unde fiat aliquid, deinde a quo fiat. Hoc causa est, illud materia.

- 3 Omnis ars naturae imitatio est. Itaque quod de universo dicebam, ad haec transfer, quae ab homine

^a For Seneca's troubles in this regard see also *Epp.* liv. and civ.

^b The *arbiter* was a judge appointed to try a case according to *bona fides* (equity), as contrasted with the *iudex* proper, whose duty was defined by the magistrate.

^c See Zeller's *Stoics* (translated by Reichel), pp. 139 ff.

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LXV. ON THE FIRST CAUSE

I shared my time yesterday with ill health^a; it claimed for itself all the period before noon; in the afternoon, however, it yielded to me. And so I first tested my spirit by reading; then, when reading was found to be possible, I dared to make more demands upon the spirit, or perhaps I should say, to make more concessions to it. I wrote a little, and indeed with more concentration than usual, for I am struggling with a difficult subject and do not wish to be downed. In the midst of this, some friends visited me, with the purpose of employing force and of restraining me, as if I were a sick man indulging in some excess. So conversation was substituted for writing; and from this conversation I shall communicate to you the topic which is still the subject of debate; for we have appointed you referee.^b You have more of a task on your hands than you suppose, for the argument is threefold.

Our Stoic philosophers, as you know, declare that there are two things in the universe which are the source of everything,—namely, cause and matter.^c Matter lies sluggish, a substance ready for any use, but sure to remain unemployed if no one sets it in motion. Cause, however, by which we mean reason, moulds matter and turns it in whatever direction it will, producing thereby various concrete results. Accordingly, there must be, in the case of each thing, that from which it is made, and, next, an agent by which it is made. The former is its material, the latter its cause.

All art is but imitation of nature; therefore, let me apply these statements of general principles to

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facienda sunt. Statua et materiam habuit, quae pateretur artificem, et artificem, qui materiae daret faciem. Ergo in statua materia aes fuit, causa opifex. Eadem condicio rerum omnium est; ex eo constant,
 4 quod fit, et ex eo, quod facit. Stoicis placet unam causam esse, id, quod facit. Aristoteles putat causam tribus modis dici: "Prima," inquit, "causa est ipsa materia, sine qua nihil potest effici; secunda opifex. Tertia est forma, quae unicuique operi inponitur tamquam statuae"; nam hanc Aristoteles *idos* vocat. "Quarta quoque," inquit, "his accedit, propositum
 5 totius operis." Quid sit hoc, aperiam. Aes prima statuae causa est. Numquam enim facta esset, nisi fuisset id, ex quo funderetur ducereturve. Secunda causa artifex est. Non potuisset enim aes illud in habitum statuae figurari, nisi accessissent peritae manus. Tertia causa est forma. Neque enim statua ista doryphoros aut diadumenos vocaretur, nisi haec illi esset inpressa facies. Quarta causa est faciendi propositum. Nam nisi hoc fuisset, facta non esset.
 6 Quid¹ est propositum? Quod invitavit artificem, quod ille secutus fecit; vel pecunia est haec, si venditurus fabricavit, vel gloria, si laboravit in nomen, vel religio, si donum templo paravit. Ergo et haec

¹ *quid* the later MSS.; *quod* pLVPb.

^a The statue figure is a frequent one in philosophy; cf. *Ep.* ix. 5. The "form" of Aristotle goes back to the "idea" of Plato. These four causes are the causes of Aristotle,—matter (*ὑλη*), form (*εἶδος*), force (*τὸ κινεῖν*), and the end (*τὸ τέλος*); when they all concur, we pass from possibility to fact. Aristotle gives eight categories in *Phys.* 225 b 5; and ten in *Categ.* 1 b 25,—substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, situation, possession, action, passion. For a definition of *εἶδος* see Aristotle, *Phys.* 190 b 20 γίγνεται πᾶν ἐκ τε τοῦ ὑποκειμένου καὶ τῆς μορφῆς (i.e. τοῦ εἶδους).

^b Well-known works of Polyclitus, fifth century B.C.

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the things which have to be made by man. A statue, for example, has afforded matter which was to undergo treatment at the hands of the artist, and has had an artist who was to give form to the matter. Hence, in the case of the statue, the material was bronze, the cause was the workman. And so it goes with all things,—they consist of that which is made, and of the maker. The Stoics believe in one cause only,—the maker; but Aristotle thinks that the word “cause” can be used in three ways: “The first cause,” he says, “is the actual matter, without which nothing can be created. The second is the workman. The third is the form, which is impressed upon every work,—a statue, for example.” This last is what Aristotle calls the *idos*.^a “There is, too,” says he, “a fourth,—the purpose of the work as a whole.” Now I shall show you what this last means. Bronze is the “first cause” of the statue, for it could never have been made unless there had been something from which it could be cast and moulded. The “second cause” is the artist; for without the skilled hands of a workman that bronze could not have been shaped to the outlines of the statue. The “third cause” is the form, inasmuch as our statue could never be called The Lance-Bearer or The Boy Binding his Hair,^b had not this special shape been stamped upon it. The “fourth cause” is the purpose of the work. For if this purpose had not existed, the statue would not have been made. Now what is this purpose? It is that which attracted the artist, which he followed when he made the statue. It may have been money, if he has made it for sale; or renown, if he has worked for reputation; or religion, if he has wrought it as a gift for a temple. Therefore this also is a cause contributing towards the making of the statue;

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causa est, propter quam fit; an non putas inter causas facti operis esse numerandum, quo remoto factum non esset?

- 7 His quintam Plato adicit exemplar, quam ipse ideam vocat; hoc est enim, ad quod respiciens artifex id, quod destinabat, effecit. Nihil autem ad rem pertinet, utrum foris habeat exemplar, ad quod referat oculos, an intus, quod ibi ipse concepit et posuit. Haec exemplaria rerum omnium deus intra se habet numerosque universorum, quae agenda sunt, et modos mente complexus est; plenus his figuris est, quas Plato ideas appellat, immortales, inmutabiles, infatigabiles. Itaque homines quidem pereunt, ipsa autem humanitas, ad quam homo effingitur, permanet, et hominibus laborantibus, intereuntibus illa nihil
- 8 patitur. Quinque ergo causae sunt, ut Plato dicit: id ex quo, id a quo, id in quo, id ad quod, id propter quod. Novissime id quod ex his est. Tamquam in statua, quia de hac loqui coepimus, id ex quo aes est, id a quo artifex est, id in quo forma est, quae aptatur illi, id ad quod exemplar est, quod imitatur is, qui facit, id propter quod facientis propositum est, id
- 9 quod ex istis est, ipsa statua est. Haec omnia mundus quoque, ut ait Plato, habet: facientem: hic deus est. Ex quo fit: haec materia est. Formam: haec est habitus et ordo mundi, quem videmus. Exemplar, scilicet, ad quod deus hanc magnitudinem

^a Explaining the derivation of the Greek word, — *ιδεῖν*, "to behold." For a discussion of Plato's "ideas," those "independent, separate, self-existing, perfect, and eternal essences" (*Republic* vi. and vii.) see Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, ii. 168-179. According to Adam, Plato owes his theory of ideas to Socrates, the Eleatics, and the study of geometry; but his debt is not so great as his discovery.

^b *i.e.*, the four categories as established by Aristotle, plus the "idea" of Plato.

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or do you think that we should avoid including, among the causes of a thing which has been made, that element without which the thing in question would not have been made?

To these four Plato adds a fifth cause,—the pattern which he himself calls the “idea”; for it is this that the artist gazed upon^a when he created the work which he had decided to carry out. Now it makes no difference whether he has his pattern outside himself, that he may direct his glance to it, or within himself, conceived and placed there by himself. God has within himself these patterns of all things, and his mind comprehends the harmonies and the measures of the whole totality of things which are to be carried out; he is filled with these shapes which Plato calls the “ideas,”—imperishable, unchangeable, not subject to decay. And therefore, though men die, humanity itself, or the idea of man, according to which man is moulded, lasts on, and though men toil and perish, it suffers no change. Accordingly, there are five causes, as Plato says^b: the material, the agent, the make-up, the model, and the end in view. Last comes the result of all these. Just as in the case of the statue,—to go back to the figure with which we began,—the material is the bronze, the agent is the artist, the make-up is the form which is adapted to the material, the model is the pattern imitated by the agent, the end in view is the purpose in the maker’s mind, and, finally, the result of all these is the statue itself. The universe also, in Plato’s opinion, possesses all these elements. The agent is God; the source, matter; the form, the shape and the arrangement of the visible world. The pattern is doubtless the model according to which God has made this great and most beautiful

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- 10 operis pulcherrimi fecit. Propositum, propter quod fecit. Quaeris, quod sit propositum deo? Bonitas. Ita certe Plato ait: "Quae deo faciendi mundum fuit causa? Bonus est; bono nulla cuiusquam boni invidia est. Fecit itaque quam optimum potuit." Fer ergo, iudex, sententiam et pronuntia, quis tibi videatur verissimum dicere, non quis verissimum dicat. Id enim tam supra nos est quam ipsa veritas.
- 11 Haec, quae ab Aristotele et Platone ponitur, turba causarum aut nimium multa aut nimium pauca comprehendit. Nam si, quocumque remoto quid effici non potest, id causam iudicant esse faciendi, pauca dixerunt. Ponant inter causas tempus; nihil sine tempore potest fieri. Ponant locum; si non fuerit, ubi fiat aliquid, ne fiet quidem. Ponant motum; nihil sine hoc nec fit nec perit. Nulla sine motu ars,
- 12 nulla mutatio est. Sed nos nunc primam et generalem quaerimus causam. Haec simplex esse debet; nam et materia simplex est. Quaerimus, quid sit causa? Ratio scilicet faciens, id est deus.¹ Ista enim, quaecumque rettulistis, non sunt multae et singulae causae, sed ex una pendent, ex ea, quae
- 13 faciet. Formam dicis causam esse? Hanc inponit artifex operi; pars causae est, non causa. Exemplar quoque non est causa, sed instrumentum causae necessarium. Sic necessarium est exemplar artificei,

¹ *id est deus* was regarded as a gloss by Schweighäuser.

^a The Stoic view (see § 2 of this letter), besides making the four categories of "substance," "form," "variety," and "variety of relation," regarded material things as the only things which possessed being. The Stoics thus differ from Aristotle and Plato in holding that nothing is real except matter; besides, they relate everything to one ultimate cause, the acting force or efficient cause.

^b *i.e.*, the λόγος σπερματικός, the creative force in nature, that is, Providence, or the will of Zeus.

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