

## Counting Out Time: Senecan Stoicism and Human Temporality

- 1) *Ep. 1.1*: Ita fac, mi Lucili: vindica te tibi, et tempus quod adhuc aut auferebatur aut subripiebatur aut excidebat collige et serva.

Make it thus, my Lucilius: lay claim to yourself for yourself, and gather up and protect that time which was as yet either carried away or stolen or fell away.<sup>1</sup>

- 2) **Chrysippus**: ...τὸν χρόνον πάντα ἄπειρον εἶναι ἐφ' ἑκάτερα· καὶ γὰρ τὸν παρεληλυθότα καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα ἄπειρον εἶναι... οὐδεὶς ὅλως ἐνίσταται χρόνος. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ εἰς ἄπειρον ἢ τομὴ τῶν συνεχόντων ἐστὶ, κατὰ τὴν διαίρεσιν ταύτην καὶ πᾶς χρόνος εἰς ἄπειρον ἔχει τὴν τομὴν· ὥστε μηθένα κατ' ἀπαρτισμὸν ἐνεστάναι χρόνον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ πλάτος λέγεσθαι. Μόνον δ' ὑπάρχειν...τὸν ἐνεστῶτα, τὸν δὲ παρωχημένον καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα ὑφεστάναι...

...All time is without limit in both ways; for both that which has passed and that which will happen are without limit... no time is wholly present. For since the cutting of what is kept together is infinite, also because of this division all time is cut infinitely; so that no time is completely present, but it is said so widely... Only the present exists, and some that the past and the future subsist...<sup>2</sup>

- 3) **Apollodorus**: ... οὕτως δ' ἐστὶν ἄπειρος ὡς ὁ πᾶς ἀριθμὸς ἄπειρος λέγεται εἶναι· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ παρεληλυθὸς τὸ δὲ ἐνεστηκὸς τὸ δὲ μέλλον. ἐνεστάναι δὲ τὸν πάντα χρόνον, ὡς τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν ἐνεστηκέναι λέγομεν, κατὰ μείζονα περιγραφὴν, καὶ ὑπάρχειν ὁ πᾶς χρόνος λέγεται οὐδενὸς αὐτοῦ τῶν μερῶν ὑπάρχοντος ἀπαρτιζόντως.

... It is just as infinite as all of number is said to be infinite; for on the one hand there is in it the past, the present, and the future; and on the other all time is present, as we say this year is present, according to a greater outline, and all time is said to exist with none of its parts precisely existing.

- 4) **Posidonius**: τὸ δὲ νῦν καὶ τὰ ὅμοια ἐν πλάτει χρόνον καὶ οὐχὶ κατ' ἀπαρτισμὸν νοεῖσθαι. λέγεσθαι δὲ τὸ νῦν καὶ κατὰ τὸν ἐλάχιστον πρὸς αἴσθησιν χρόνον περὶ τὸν διορισμὸν τοῦ μέλλοντος καὶ παρεληλυθότος συνιστάμενον

What is “now” and similar things are conceived broadly and not precisely regarding time. And what is now is also said to be made up in the least part of time by perception around the division of the future and of the past.

- 5) *De Brev. 10.2*: in tria tempora uita diuiditur: quod fuit, quod est, quod futurum est.

---

<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Given the fragmentary evidence we have from only very few sources, I will not commit to saying that this or the views of the following figures was Stoic dogma as such, but such selections highlight common threads among different thinkers that can provide a coherent, albeit inchoate, foundation for a Stoic conception of time.

Life is divided into three times: that which was, that which is, and that which is about to be.

- 6) **De Brev. 10.6:** praesens tempus brevissimum est, adeo quidem, ut quibusdam nullum videatur; in cursu enim semper est, fluit et praecipitatur

The present time is the shortest, so much indeed, that for certain people there should seem to be none. For it is always in motion, it flows and is cast headlong.

- 7) **Ep. 58.23:** Hoc est, quod ait Heraclitus: "In idem flumen bis descendimus et non descendimus." Manet enim idem fluminis nomen, aqua transmissa est. Hoc in amne manifestius est quam in homine. Sed nos quoque non minus velox cursus praetervehit, et ideo admiror dementiam nostram, quod tantopere amamus rem fugacissimam, corpus, timemusque, ne quando moriamur, cum omne momentum mors prioris habitus sit.

This is what Heraclitus says: "We do and do not step into the same river twice." For the name of the river stays the same, the water has been sent across. This is clearer in a river than in a person. But a no less swift course carries us beyond, and thus I marvel at our madness, that we love the most fleeting thing, the body, so much, and we are afraid that we will die at some point, when every moment is the death of the prior state.

- 8) **Ep. 1.2:** in hoc enim fallimur, quod mortem prospicimus; magna pars eius iam praeterit. quicquid aetatis retro est, mors tenet

In this we are deceived, that we look forward for death: a great part of it has already now gone past; whatever of life is behind us, death holds.

- 9) **Ep. 120.18:** non ille gradus lassitudinem facit, in quo deficimus, sed ille profitetur. ad mortem dies extremus pervenit, accedit omnis.

That step on which we fail does not make for tiredness, but that one confesses it. The final day arrives at death, but every day approaches it.

- 10) **Ep. 1.3:** omnia, Lucili, aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est

All things, Lucilius, are foreign, only time is ours.

- 11) **De Brev. 10.4:** Quod egimus, certum...haec est pars temporis nostri sacra ac dedicata, omnis humanos casus supergressa, extra regnum fortunae subducta, quam non inopia, non metus, non morborum incursus exagitet. haec nec turbari nec eripi potest: perpetua eius et intrepida possessio est.

What we have done is certain... This is the part of our time that is sacred and devoted, all having gone beyond human happenings, drawn away out of the kingdom of fortune,

which neither lack, nor fear, nor the onset of diseases stirs up. This is not able to be disturbed nor snatched away: its possession is continuous and untroubled.

- 12) **De Brev. 7.3:** vivere tota vita discendum est et, quod magis fortasse miraberis, tota vita discendum est mori.

It takes the whole of life to learn how to live, and—what will perhaps make you wonder more—it takes the whole of life to learn how to die”

- 13) **Ep. 1.1:** turpissima tamen est iactura, quae per negligentiam fit

The most disgraceful loss is that which comes from neglect.

- 14) **De Brev. 10.2-6:** hoc amittunt occupati; nec enim illis vacat praeterita respicere, et si vacet, iniucunda est paenitendae rei recordatio... solum igitur ad occupatos praesens pertinet tempus, quod tam breve est, ut arripi non possit, et id ipsum illis districtis in multa subducitur.

Those have busied themselves lose this [i.e., the past]. For there is no freedom for them to look back at by-gone things, and if there should be, the recollection of a shameful thing is unpleasant... Therefore the present time alone pertains to those having busied themselves, since it is so brief that is not able to be laid hold of, and it itself is led away into many things after those guys have been distracted.

- 15) **De Brev. 15.5:** solus generis humani legibus solvitur; omnia illi saecula ut deo serviunt. transit tempus aliquod? hoc recordatione comprehendit. instat? hoc utitur. venturum est? hoc praecipit).

He alone is freed from the laws of the human race. All times are subservient to him as to God. Has some time passed? This he embraces by recollection. Is some present? This he uses. Is some about to come? This he seizes beforehand.

**Jean-Paul Sartre:**

“‘[M]y’ past is first of all *mine*; that is, that it exists as the function of a certain being which I *am*... it would be absurd even to imagine that it can *exist* as such. It is originally the past *of this* present” (163).

“The past is what I am without being able to live it. The past is substance” (173).

“Death reunites us with ourselves... At the moment of death we *are*... Thus the past is the ever-growing totality of the in-itself which we are” (169).

“The unique characteristic of a dead life is that it is a life of which the Other makes himself the guardian” (692-3).

### Works Cited

- Arnim, Hans von. *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta Volumen II, Volumen II*. München: K.G. Saur, 2004. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10591499>.
- Baltzly, Dirk. "Stoicism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014., 2014. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/Stoicism/>.
- Barnes, Jonathan, Malcolm Schofield, Richard Sorabji, and GEL Owen, eds. "Articles on Aristotle," 1978.
- Dressler, Alex. *Personification and the Feminine in Roman Philosophy*. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Foucault, Michel. "Self-Writing." In *Dits et Ecrits*, 415–30, 1983. <https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.hypomnemata.en.html>.
- Inwood, Brad. *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Ker, James. *The Deaths of Seneca*, 2012.
- Roller, Matthew B. *Constructing Autocracy: Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1966.
- Schofield, Malcolm. "The Retrenchable Present." Edited by Symposium Hellenisticum, Jonathan Barnes, and Mario Mignucci. *Matter and Metaphysics: Fourth Symposium Hellenisticum*, 1988.
- Viparelli Santangelo, Valeria. *Il senso e il non senso del tempo in Seneca*. Napoli: Loffredo, 2000.