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Aliquid and mores : the prefaces and epilogues of Seneca's Naturales Quaestiones

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Aliquid ad mores

The prefaces and epilogues of Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones*

PROEFSCHRIFT

TER VERKRIJGING VAN
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Cover illustration: Pompeii, House of the Chaste Lovers (IX 12.6), triclinium, west wall, indoor banqueting scene (ca. 35-45 AD).

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PREFACE

The task of writing a preface to a study concerned with ancient Latin prefaces and epilogues is rendered somewhat complex by the combined awareness of ancient prefatory rules and modern dissertation conventions. In contrast to the book that follows, this preface will therefore be brief.

This dissertation is a study of the prefaces and epilogues of Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* or, as I often described it, 'a study of the less well-known work of the Roman philosopher Seneca, the tutor of the emperor Nero'. In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, a work devoted to the analysis of several natural phenomena, a large place is taken up by prefaces and epilogues with a moralizing message. This thesis aims at clarifying the nature of these moralizing passages.

There is no doubt about it that the study of the prefaces and epilogues of Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* leads to the discussion of great matters: to give but a few examples, such questions are dealt with as the degree of literary unity one may expect from a work, the correct understanding of Seneca's repetitive texts, and the true nature of Seneca's beliefs on the question whether it is possible to obtain knowledge of god. Great literary talent would be required to do justice to these subjects; if such literary talent is not found in this dissertation written in a foreign language, I hope that this shortcoming will be compensated by a zealous intent to discover the truth about arduous matters.

The feeling that has accompanied me in my research is well described by the ancient historian Livy. At the beginning of Book 31 of the *Ab urbe condita*, he says, considering the greatness of his task: 'I see that I am like people who are tempted by the shallow water along the beach to wade out to sea; the further I progress, the greater the depth, as though it were a bottomless sea into which I am carried. I imagined that as I completed one part after another the task before me would diminish; as it is, it almost becomes greater'. Spending several years on the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* has given me the possibility to place these texts in the literary and philosophical context in which I believe they should be understood. However, each stage of my research has opened up new questions. Thus, this dissertation is the crystallization of an ongoing research process.

It remains to me to express my gratitude to all those, from colleagues and friends to fellow flamenco addicts, who contributed to this study in some way or other, with sound advice or a break from my research.

From this general expression of gratitude I single out NWO, whose grant made it possible to spend a month at the haven of peace that is the Fondation Hardt nearby Geneva, and realise much work there. The research institute of the Faculty of Arts at Leiden, Pallas, as well as OIKOS, the national research school in classical studies, also contributed to several shorter journeys from which my research profited.

I would further like to thank the corrector of my English, who removed as many errors as was humanly possible from this book. Of course, I alone am responsible for any dubious subsequent rewritings.

Finally, I am particularly grateful to my family, who has kindly given me support and borne with me through the different stages of my research.

INTRODUCTION

1. *Main question of this study*

Students of Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* (*NQ*) have long been able to say that the subject of their interest had been neglected by modern research. However, the situation is now beginning to change, as the following overview of modern scholarship will show.¹ One of the aspects of the *Naturales Quaestiones* that has long attracted the attention of researchers is the way it combines discussions of natural phenomena with moralizing passages (prefaces, epilogues and some digressions). This combination has been questioned: judgements on the *Naturales Quaestiones* vary from 'a badly composed work' to 'a successful mixture of physics and ethics'. The study of physics will serve man's moral improvement, Seneca says at the end of the preface to *NQ* 3 (§18). Here, natural and moral philosophy seem combined, and the moral disquisition in the preface seems related to the subsequent discussion about the origin of water. How, and to what extent these two kinds of text are related in the *Naturales Quaestiones* is the central question of this study. There are two sides to the problem, the literary and the philosophical. From the literary perspective, it is the possibly awkward combination of different parts of a work that researchers remark upon; from the point of view of philosophy, the combination of two parts of philosophy, ethics and physics, presents difficulties, too.

A remark in O. and E. Schönberger's annotated German translation of the *Naturales Quaestiones* (1998) shows that this question has become a well-known aspect of the study of the work:

¹ In monographs on the *NQ* the tendency has been to begin with a review of the (little) research previously done on various aspects of the *NQ*. See Stahl 1960, Waiblinger 1977, 5ff., Gross 1989, 1ff., Gauly 2004, 12. See also the bibliographical articles by Galdi 1924 and Cubeddu 1978.

Immer schon wurde bei den *Naturales Quaestiones* nach dem Verhältnis von Fachwissenschaft und ethischen Teilen gefragt. Es ist ein alter Vorwurf, das Werk klappe in Naturerklärung und ethische Lehre auseinander.²

It is my opinion that in spite of this statement, and in spite of the work recently done on the *Naturales Quaestiones*, there is still much to add to our understanding of this subject – as I hope will become clear from this study. The different views on the question of the unity of the *Naturales Quaestiones* presented in two recent works, i.e., the monographs by Berno (2003) and Gauly (2004), confirm that clarification of the matter requires yet more thorough study.³

In her monograph on the *Naturales Quaestiones* (1960), Stahl was the first to focus on the question of the general structure of the work. She argues that the *Naturales Quaestiones* is a unified work, and indicates the connections between its different parts – connections that point to the presence of greater themes underlying the work. As she formulates it:

Daß die rein naturwissenschaftlichen Partien aber auch inhaltlich nicht isoliert dastehen, sondern immer wieder...auf philosophisch-weltanschauliche Fragestellungen als die wesentlichen bezogen sind, zeigt ein Netz von naturwissenschaftlichen und -philosophischen sowie moralphilosophischen Gedankenkorrelationen...⁴

Stahl also argues that the scientific discussions in themselves are not the most important part of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, but that the work is really about these

² 1998, 521. Compare Rosenmeyer's slightly irreverent formulation: 'it has been a perennial scholarly exercise to ask whether the moralizing insets...bear a meaningful relationship to the science which is the manifest focus of the work' (2000, 105). See also Berno 2003, 15.

³ Compare Gauly 2004, 14: 'dementsprechend hat sich die Forschung weiterhin mit der Frage, wie sich aitiologische Hauptteile und moralische Epiloge zueinander verhalten, beschäftigt; Konsens besteht bis heute nicht, zumal die Antwort nicht nur auf philosophischer Ebene, sondern auch auf literarischer gesucht wird' (cf. p.18).

⁴ 1987, 268 (in this publication Stahl summarizes and develops the most important aspects of her 1960 thesis). Cf. Gauly's reference to Stahl, 2004, 13-14.

greater themes she speaks of, which appear mostly in the prefaces and epilogues.⁵ Thus, the question of the relationships between the different parts of the work has also been linked to the question where in the work the author's interest lies. Commentators have sometimes stated that Seneca, not being a natural philosopher but only a moralist, had written the work for its moral message.⁶

Stahl's ideas form a reaction to earlier, negative views on the structure of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁷ An example of such a negative judgement is found in a study by Holl (1935). Holl argues that, in spite of promising statements in some of the prefaces, the combination of ethics and physics in the work is not successful: the ideas formulated in the prefaces remain isolated.⁸ Whereas in earlier scholarship negative opinions on the structure of the *Naturales Quaestiones* are more frequent,

⁵ 1987, 267.

⁶ See, e.g., Haase's statement in the introduction to his edition of the *NQ* (1881-1886): *libri V praefationem amissam esse arbitror, neque id incertum cuiquam videbitur, qui consideraverit, quam studiose Seneca ea tractet, quae ad rem propositam non nimis necessaria sunt, adeo ut videri possit ipsos libros praefationum et epilogorum causa scripsisse*. Cf. Galdi 1924, 66. Parroni 2000, 437 comments: 'troppo spesso le *Naturales Quaestiones* sono state viste in questa luce: ci si è fermati ai proemi e agli epiloghi di natura morale e si è trascurato il resto, quasi che Seneca si fosse impegnato in un genere così arduo e complesso per avere l'occasione di ricondurre il tutto ad una dimensione etica'.

⁷ See the introduction to Stahl's work (1960), and the negative judgements on the relationships between the different parts of the work assembled by Galdi 1924. On pp.70-71 of his article, for instance, Galdi mentions the opinion of J. Müller (*Über die Originalität der Naturales Quaestiones Senecae*, Innsbruck 1893). Müller *studet ostendere quam futili vinculo observationes, quas Seneca hic illic inspergit operi, rebus physicis connectantur...Müller temperare sibi non potest quin vitio det Senecae quod singulae res minime inter se cohaereant, et scientiae argumenta ad arbitrium libidinemque interrumpantur*.

⁸ See the introduction to Holl's study (1935, 5-10). Holl contrasts Seneca's work with Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, saying: 'während es aber Lukrez gelungen ist, physikalische Erklärung und Paränese in eine Einheit zu bringen und sich gegenseitig ergänzen zu lassen, klaffen bei Seneca beide auseinander und bilden keine Einheit' (p.9).

and are sometimes formulated quite bluntly, more recently the tendency among researchers has been to defend the unity of the work.

Following Stahl's line of interpretation, Waiblinger (1977) focuses mainly on the general structure of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. He analyses the work in relation to poetical structures such as those of Virgil's *Georgics*. Major elements in this theory are the pairing of books, and the principle of contrast and symmetry. Waiblinger pairs Books 1 and 2 (phenomena related to fire), 3 and 4a (water), 4b and 5 (air) and 6 and 7. Within each pair, one book, emphasizing destructive or terrifying phenomena, has a dark tone, whereas the other book discusses beneficial or beautiful phenomena, and has a positive or 'light' tone: Books 2, 3, 5 and 6 belong to the former category, Books 1, 4a, 4b, and 7 to the latter. Within the context of this theory, Waiblinger often argues that a light or dark tone is found in a specific preface or epilogue. Like Stahl, he also analyzes each book as a whole, pointing out connections between its different parts.

Subsequent researchers have pointed to the somewhat strained character of Waiblinger's theory.⁹ It is often difficult to agree with the type of mood Waiblinger attributes to a particular book and its preface and epilogue.¹⁰ For instance, the position of the preface of Book 4a and the epilogue of Book 4b among the 'light' books is debatable. Although both descriptions certainly have an amusing or satiric character, they also stigmatize the moral degeneration of mankind.

In reaction to the ideas of Stahl and Waiblinger, Gross (1989) points to the importance of Seneca's discussions of natural phenomena. In his overall study of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, it is this aspect, and the related question of Seneca's

⁹ See especially Gross' reaction to Waiblinger in his monograph on the *NQ* (1989); cf. Gauly 2004, 67-68. See also the reviews of Waiblinger's book by H.M. Hine (*CR* 29 (1979), 64-65), G. Stahl (*Gnomon* 52 (1980), 620-626), H. Strohm (*AAHG* 33 (1980), 178-182); the reviewers are, however, fair in also mentioning the good points of Waiblinger's study.

¹⁰ Or, as Gauly puts it: 'die Schwächen dieser Konzeption...liegen...vor allem darin, dass durchaus complex und differenziert argumentierende Bücher jeweils auf ein Charakteristikum reduziert werden, was nicht ohne Gewaltigkeit abgeht' (2004, 68).

sources, that receives most attention. Gross also reacts to the theories expressed by Stahl and Waiblinger about the composition of various books. Although on a more general level he considers the scientific and moralizing passages to be interrelated, Gross disagrees with the extent to which his predecessors establish specific connections.¹¹

Codoñer (1989) also reacts to the idea of a lack of cohesion between the various parts of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, mentioning that the presence of the moralizing passages has led to the (negatively valued) idea of a melange of genres.¹² In her opinion, both the physical and ethical passages have the same goal, which they reach in different ways. The moralizing passages show that the physical knowledge presented in the *Naturales Quaestiones* must be placed in a broader context. In this sense, both parts of the work form a whole: ‘on doit les [sc. the prefaces and epilogues] considérer comme inséparables du travail scientifique, parce que ils expliquent son véritable sens’.¹³

The recent appearance of two monographs on the *Naturales Quaestiones* has further developed the discussion about the question of the relationship between physical and moralizing passages. The positive line of thought on the question of the unity of the different parts of the work culminates in Berno’s study on the moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones* (2003). As appears from her introduction, Berno sets out to demonstrate the primacy of ethics over physics in

¹¹ See for instance the discussion in Chapters 5 and 7 of this study. In his reaction to Stahl’s ideas, Gross follows Strohm (1977). Gross also distinguishes between the prefaces and epilogues on the one hand (linked to the main text, with the exception of *NQ* 4a), and the digressions on the other (only superficially connected); this distinction seems artificial to me.

¹² 1989, 1803ff., 1816 (‘mélange de genres’). In his discussion of the digressions in Seneca’s work, Grimal concludes that digressions invite an author not to refuse ‘le mélange des genres’ (1991, 245). For a discussion of Grimal’s ideas on digression see Chapter 1, section 1.4.

¹³ 1989, 1821-1822. Compare the statement about ‘un cadre conceptuel qui confère un sens à l’ensemble de la recherche’ (p.1815), apropos of the prefaces to *NQ* 1 and 3.

the context of the unity of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.¹⁴ For each book, she points out several connections, on different levels, between the physical and moral passages. Although the subject of Berno's monograph is the same as that of this study, the handling of the subject, and the answers provided, are largely different.¹⁵

Gauly's point of view (2004) is quite different from Berno's.¹⁶ He argues that the connections between the different parts of a book are not smooth. As he says: 'diese einzelnen Bestandteile der Bücher werden blockartig nebeneinander gestellt, bald völlig unverbunden, bald durch formelhafte Formulierungen aneinander gefügt'.¹⁷ He illustrates this with *NQ* 6: the preface and epilogue form an independent consolation for the fear of dying in an earthquake, which is added, but not related to, the (consolation by the) explanation of the causes of the earthquake.¹⁸

Thus, Gauly points out the same aspect that earlier scholars saw as a flaw of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. However, what is interesting about his reaction is that he takes a positive view of this situation. To explain the breaks ('Brüche') within the books he mentions, he refers to the notion of 'Dialogizität', as found in the writings of Bakhtin.¹⁹ According to Gauly, the different parts of the *Naturales Quaestiones*

¹⁴ 2003, 15-17. For a more elaborate discussion of Berno's ideas, see my review of her study (2005b).

¹⁵ Berno has done much work on the *NQ*, as has Gauly, whose work I discuss next: although I disagree with both on several main points, some similarity on minor issues is inevitable. I read the publications by Berno and Gauly in the last stage of my research, when my ideas had already largely been determined. However, Berno and Gauly have helped me to specify these ideas. Moreover, the discussion of their theories enlivens this study.

¹⁶ Gauly was unable to include Berno's study in his research. For a more elaborate discussion of Gauly's views, see my review of his book (2005a).

¹⁷ 2004, 73, cf. 73-74, 77-78.

¹⁸ Cf. Holl 1935, 9.

¹⁹ 'Die leitende These soll dabei sein, dass die Bücher in sich jeweils nur eine unvollkommene strukturelle Einheit bilden, dass also auch scharfsinnige Interpretation aus den disparaten Elementen kein harmonisch gefügtes Ganzes zu schaffen vermag. Positiv formuliert lautet die These, dass die verschiedenen Teile der Bücher in einem dialogischen

are involved in a dialogue with each other (p.85), as ‘Greek’ discussions of natural phenomena versus ‘Roman’ moralizing passages. Besides these ideas, Gauly also sometimes risks symbolic interpretations of certain passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, in the line of, e.g., Waiblinger’s theories.²⁰

2. Subject of the study

Although the starting point for this inquiry is the question of the relationship between the different passages that make up the *Naturales Quaestiones*, its *subject* is the actual text of the prefaces and epilogues. In these prefaces and epilogues, different moral themes are discussed related to the inquiry into natural phenomena; philosophical questions are asked that still occupy people’s minds nowadays. The tsunami that hit SE Asia in December 2004 raised questions that are also discussed

Verhältnis zueinander stehen’ (p.74). Bakhtin’s notion of ‘Dialogizität’ is discussed by Gauly on pp.74-75.

²⁰ In this survey, I have restricted myself to the main studies dealing with this question. Other explanations of the *NQ* as a unified whole also exist, as well as other views on the lack of cohesion between the different parts of the work. Among the ‘unitary’ interpretations, see for instance Scott 1999, who argues that the different parts of the work are united by Stoic doctrine. However, in his discussion of the different moralizing passages it is not always clear how this works. Parroni (2000, 444) concludes an article about the *NQ* with the idea that Seneca had found a ‘soluzione unitaria’ for the question of the relationship between ethics and physics. A statement about the loose connection between the moralizing passages and the rest of the work is for instance also found in Dihle 1990, 88: ‘die moralphilosophische Zielsetzung dieser naturwissenschaftlichen Schrift erweist sich auch in den Prooemien der Bücher 1, 2, 3 und 4, die ausgedehnte moralphilosophische Darlegungen ohne engere Bezugnahme auf den naturwissenschaftlichen Inhalt des Werkes erhalten’; cf. the introduction to the Loeb edition of the *NQ* (p.xiv). Inwood (1999 and 2002) takes another approach to the understanding of the *NQ*: he points to the appearance of one specific theme in (different parts of) the *NQ*, ‘the relationship between god and man, and most particularly the epistemic limitations of human nature’, which, he suggests, is more important to Seneca than the discussion of natural phenomena, the apparent subject of the work (1999, 26; 2002, 125).

in the *Naturales Quaestiones*: these concern the theme of death and our attitude towards it, and the idea of god's involvement in nature's functioning – and in its catastrophes.²¹ In *NQ* 6 and 2, consolation is offered for the fear of dying buried by an earthquake or struck by lightning. The theme of god's involvement in natural phenomena is touched upon in *NQ* 3, 5 and 6. Man's use of technology and its moral implications also forms one of the points of interest of the work (Books 5, 1).²²

I will discuss each moralizing passage in relation to the specific theme it develops. The main element of the prefaces and epilogues is the moralizing also familiar from Seneca's other works. Seneca's moralizing vituperations will be mainly studied in Chapter 7 ('The moralizing epilogues', covering the epilogues of *NQ* 4b, 5 and 1). Lately, the phenomenon of the Roman moralistic discourse and Seneca's place in it have received some attention, especially from Italian researchers. S. Citroni Marchetti's study (*Plinio il vecchio e il moralismo romano*, 1991) is an important contribution in this respect.

In other prefaces and epilogues, the theme of death and consolation appears, as said (*NQ* 6 and 2; Chapter 8). Seneca's treatment of this theme will be related to the nature and hortatory function of the prefaces and epilogues. The epilogue of Book 7 (Chapter 9) and the preface of Book 1 (Chapter 10) both touch on matters related to the divine: the epilogue questions the possibility of achieving knowledge of god, while the preface will lead to a discussion about the nature of god. In the

²¹ See for instance the reflections on these themes in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*: 'Leren sterven' by Marjoleine de Vos, *NRC* 07-01-2005, 17 ('Learning to die', containing a discussion of the Dutch translation by V. Hunink of a selection of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*), 'Moeder Aarde zal ons nooit zekerheid verschaffen' ('Mother Earth will never give us full assurance'), by Arnold Heumakers, *NRC* 08/09-01-2005, 13.

²² For this theme, see especially the study by Heinonen, *Prometheus revisited. Human interaction with nature through technology in Seneca* (2000), which focuses on the relevance of Seneca's message to the modern use of technology. For the question of human interaction with technology in modern times see also, for instance, the discussion by Prof. J. Lever, in *NRC Handelsblad*, 15-12-1983: 'Een gouden toekomst ligt niet voor het grijpen' ('A golden future is not within reach').

preface, a philosophical image related to the study of nature is developed: the elevation of the mind above the world.

The discussion of the preface to Book 3 (Chapter 4) centres on its probable function as a preface to the entire work, but also offers an analysis of a very Senecan hortatory text. The final chapters of *NQ* 3 (discussed in Chapter 5) have a somewhat different nature, since they continue the central scientific inquiry of the book. *NQ* 4a opens with a preface in the form of a letter (Chapter 6).

In this introduction I will also briefly discuss two preliminary matters: the order of the books in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, and its subject range.²³ In the three chapters following this Introduction, I discuss aspects that are relevant to the study of the prefaces and epilogues, investigating the literary (Chapter 1) and the philosophical (Chapter 2) contexts of the work. In Chapter 3, 'Hortatory texts', I set out to explain the nature of the text of the prefaces and epilogues in the context of Seneca's philosophy. These three introductory chapters, which identify the different threads running through this study, are followed by discussions of the separate prefaces and epilogues.

I have chosen to limit my inquiry to the prefaces and epilogues, and not to discuss the digressions in *NQ* 3 and 5 unless as parallel passages; their situation resembles that of the moralizing prefaces and epilogues.²⁴ Some texts are examined in less detail, for instance the epilogues of *NQ* 6 and 2: the discussion of a consolatory text is exemplified by that of the preface of *NQ* 6. I have chosen not to examine the first chapters of Book 2, since these form a beginning of a different kind than the other prefaces and epilogues.²⁵

²³ For the dating of the *NQ*, a reasonably straightforward matter, I refer to Gaully, 2004, 19-28. For the title *Naturales Quaestiones*, see Chapter 2, section 2.2, n.50.

²⁴ Cf. the discussion of digressions in Chapter 1, section 1.4.

²⁵ Hine states: 'in the introductions S. likes to explore some topic which is to some extent related to the central subject of the particular book or of the whole work; in Book II the topic happens to be scientific rather than ethical' (1981, 13). This statement obscures the difference between the beginning of *NQ* 2 and other prefaces: the opening of *NQ* 2 does not have the same characteristics (cf. the discussion of Seneca's 'hortatory text' in Chapter

Since my study of the prefaces and epilogues is related to a central question and focuses on specific themes occurring in these texts, it will certainly not have the completeness of a commentary. For many interesting parallels and useful comments I refer to the notes in the various editions of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, especially Vottero's elaborate notes (1989). Commentary on many details (especially the terminology in the moralizing passages) is also found in Berno's monograph.

3. *The order of the books in the Naturales Quaestiones*

The original order of the books composing the *Naturales Quaestiones* has been, and still is, a much-disputed question. I find myself agreeing with the sequence proposed by Codoñer and Hine. A short discussion will therefore suffice here.²⁶

All editions of the *Naturales Quaestiones* adopt the 1-7 book order. However, there are objections to the idea that this is either the order of the archetype or that devised by the author himself.²⁷ Besides the 1-7 sequence (called *Quantum*, after the first word of Book 1), some manuscripts adopt the order 4b-7, 1-4a (called *Grandinem*).²⁸ Research of the manuscript tradition has shown that this was the order of the books found in the archetype. The fact that all manuscripts have a

3). It rather resembles the beginning of *NQ* 5, which has no preface: the difference being that Book 5 turns directly to the specific subject of the book, whereas Book 2 starts with more general reflections. *NQ* 7 also begins with a few general remarks related to the subject of the book, in this case the comets. Since the nature of comets plays a role in the epilogue of the book, I do discuss this opening briefly.

²⁶ For a more elaborate discussion, see Gauly, 2004, 53ff.; see further Hine's introduction to his edition of the *NQ* (1996, with reference to his earlier work on the question, as for instance 1981, 2-23), Codoñer 1989, 1784-1795 (with reference to the introduction of her 1979 edition of the *NQ*). Cf. also Parroni's introduction to his 2002 edition of the *NQ*, pp.xliii ff. (with reference to earlier publications).

²⁷ Gauly 2004, 59ff. provides an interesting discussion of the reasons that led to the preference for this book order in the editions. See also Codoñer 1989, 1791-1795.

²⁸ For a few minor variations, see Gauly 2004, 54 and Hine 1996, xxii-xxiii.

lacuna at the end of 4a and one at the beginning of 4b shows that they go back to one archetype.

However, there are indications against the idea that the book order of the archetype was the original (author's) choice. Codoñer and Hine have (separately) proposed one alternative: a few manuscripts mark Book 4b as the third book, Book 5 as the fourth, etc. According to this numbering, two books would have preceded Book 4b. These two books may have been lost, or misplaced: this last possibility leads to the sequence 3-4a-4b-5-6-7-1-2.²⁹

Certain elements within the *Naturales Quaestiones* help to confirm this arrangement. Many hypotheses concerning the book order have involved internal evidence; since this kind of evidence is to some extent subjective, these arguments have also led to other proposed book orders than those mentioned above. However, it is certain that Book 4a followed Book 3 (see *NQ* 3.1.2, 4a.1.1), and Book 5 preceded Book 6 (*NQ* 5.14.4). Especially important is the reference to Book 7 found in Book 1 (*NQ* 1.15.4: *...cometas nostri putant, de quibus dictum est*). Advocates of the 1-7 book order have had to change the meaning or text of this passage.³⁰ Moreover, several scholars agree that the preface of Book 3 probably introduced the entire work. This aspect is discussed in Chapter 4.

The combination of manuscript evidence and internal evidence leads to 3-7, 1-2 as a plausible original book order. However, not all researchers have agreed on this point since the publications by Hine and Codoñer.³¹

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion, see Hine 1996, xxiii, Codoñer 1989, 1791ff.

³⁰ See Hine 1981, 8 n.12.

³¹ Gauly presents this as the original book order (and I agree), but Hine himself is more cautious. He mentions that firm arguments are lacking (*de hac re homines docti...fortasse semper dissentient, propter argumentorum firmiorum egestatem*, 1996, xxiv). Agreement with the 3-7, 1-2 order is also found in Parroni (as in n.26 above), and Inwood 1999 and 2002. Disagreement is found in Gross 1989 (who discusses the book order pp.307-320): he thinks that the order of the archetype was the original order (and that some of the books of the *NQ* were lost); cf. Vottero's edition of the *NQ* (1989), 109-113. See also the short references in Berno 2003 (index *s.v.* 'ordine dei libri'); see further Gauly 2004, 66-67 with notes.

Some scholars have linked their interpretation of the work to the order of the books; in the case of Stahl and Waiblinger, this is the 1-7 order.³² According to Stahl, the preface of *NQ* 1 is an appropriate beginning for the entire work, and the end of Book 7 a suitable ending. In her opinion, the search for knowledge mentioned in the preface of *NQ* 1 corresponds to the beginning of an undertaking while the pessimism concerning the achievement of knowledge found in the last chapters of Book 7 represents the state of mind of the author at the end of his work.³³ Waiblinger's theory about the structure of the entire work, which involves correspondences and contrasts between the books, is inextricably linked to the 1-7 book order.³⁴ The fact that this order has been refuted by several scholars inevitably lends an uncertain character to the theories of Stahl and Waiblinger.

In this study, I will assume the original book order to have been 3-4a-4b-5-6-7-1-2. The topic will come up at certain points, that is, in the chapters concerning the prefaces of *NQ* 3 (Chapter 4) and *NQ* 1 (Chapter 10). However, in the remainder of my study the subject will not receive much attention, since the books of the *Naturales Quaestiones* have been written quite independently from each other, as several scholars have indicated.³⁵

4. *The range of subjects in the Naturales Quaestiones*

When one accepts the sequence *NQ* 3-7, 1-2, a certain positioning of the subjects discussed in the work is discernible, as pointed out by Codoñer.³⁶ The phenomena examined move from the earthly realm to the heavens: Seneca opens with water

³² Cf. Gauly 2004, 64, Codoñer 1989, 1788-1791. As Codoñer demonstrates, arguments involving the content of the work have also influenced views on the order of its book (cf. Gauly, as mentioned in my previous note).

³³ 1960, 12-13 and 129. Cf. Waiblinger 1977, 97, 99.

³⁴ See 1977, 99ff. Citroni Marchetti has briefly indicated the possibility that the moralizing passages of several books form a series. She speaks of a 'progressione psicologica negli episodi di vita romana dei libri I, III, IV B' (1991, 145 n.114).

³⁵ For the statement that the books have been written independently, cf. Hine 1981, 31, Gross 1989, 321, Gauly 2004, 72.

(*NQ* 3, 4a), proceeds to what occurs in the air or involves air (*NQ* 4b, 5, 6), and ends with phenomena involving fire (*NQ* 7, 1, 2). Gauly adds that in other works discussing a range of subjects similar to that of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the sequence is usually the reverse, going from heavenly to earthly phenomena.³⁷ The effect of gradual ‘elevation’ towards the heavenly realms in the *Naturales Quaestiones* may well have been intentional.³⁸ However, I should add that this ascending line is not entirely consistent: the truly heavenly comets of Book 7 are followed by the phenomena of Books 1 and 2, which belong to the *aer*, instead of the divine *aether*.

This arrangement indicates that the four elements may be regarded as an ordering principle within the *Naturales Quaestiones*, as indeed they have been.³⁹ They certainly form the basis for the different natural phenomena discussed. However, not all elements are represented in equal measure: earth is missing. Book 6, which discusses earthquakes, must be placed under the element air, since this was believed to cause earthquakes. At the beginning of Book 2, Seneca divides the inquiry into the cosmos into three parts: *caelestia*, *sublimia* and *terrena*. The first category concerns the nature of phenomena such as the stars and questions related to the universe, the second covers the phenomena that belong to the area between heaven and earth, and the third contains earthly phenomena such as water, earth, trees, etc. Seneca has an anonymous interlocutor ask him why he puts earthquakes

³⁶ 1989, 1799-1801, cf. 1786, 1784-1785. Gauly 2004, 67-72 has followed up on this thought; he also discusses the matters touched upon in this short section of my Introduction (pp.67-72). Hine 1981, 31 thinks that ‘there is no consistent spatial arrangement of the topics’.

³⁷ On p.69, with a reference (n.85) to Waiblinger 1977, 29f. and W. Hübner, ‘Der *descensus* als ordnendes Prinzip in der ‘*Naturalis Historia*’ des Plinius’, in C. Meier (ed.), *Die Enzyklopädie im Wandel vom Hochmittelalter bis zur frühen Neuzeit*, München 2002, 25-41.

³⁸ Such a gradual elevation is certainly present at the end of the *Ad Marciam*, when Seneca says that the mind first studies the earth and the sea, then goes on to what lies between heaven and earth, and finally breaks through to the highest subjects, enjoying the spectacle of the divine part of the cosmos (20.2).

³⁹ Cf. Hine 1981, 31, Parroni, pp.xlix-l of the introduction to his edition of the *NQ*, and Gauly 2004, 69-70, with reference to earlier research, such as Waiblinger 1977, 35-37.

among the *sublimia*; his answer is that this is because air causes earthquakes (2.1.3). Likewise, questions about the position of the earth may belong to the area of the *caelestia*.

When we consider the subjects of the *Naturales Quaestiones* from the point of view of the division in *sublimia*, *caelestia* and *terrena* given in *NQ* 2.1.1, we find that they are mainly in the area of *sublimia*.⁴⁰ Books 3 and 4a discuss *terrena*, Books 4b, 5, 6, 1 and 2 *sublimia*. Only about Book 7 might one say that it discusses *caelestia*, since Seneca regards the comets as divine phenomena belonging to the area of the *aether*.

A parallel to the range of subjects of the *Naturales Quaestiones* is found in Aristotle's *Meteorologica*.⁴¹ There are, of course, certain differences (for instance, Aristotle does not discuss the Nile, and Seneca does not examine the Milky Way and the sea), but the overall similarity is clear. This places the subjects of the *Naturales Quaestiones* in the area of meteorology. There has been some discussion among researchers about the question whether the work should be regarded as meteorology or cosmology. The treatment of the comets could, strictly speaking, be an argument in favour of the latter option: although Aristotle, too, discusses them in his *Meteorologica*, Seneca considers the comets to belong to the *aether*, as stated earlier.⁴²

A question related to this argument is whether the *Naturales Quaestiones* as we have it is complete, and if not, whether some books were lost in transmission, or Seneca left the work unfinished. Some researchers argue that Seneca wanted to

⁴⁰ Much has been said about the idea that the passage at the beginning of Book 2 was a *dispositio* for the *NQ* in a stricter sense; this idea should certainly be rejected. See Hine 1981, 12-14, Codoñer 1989, 1795-1799. Gross 1989, 315-317, on the other hand, believes that the passage functions as an introduction to (lost) books on *terrena* and *caelestia*.

⁴¹ See Hine 1981, 33-34, Graver 1999, 48-49.

⁴² Some scholars consider the entire *NQ*, including the discussion of the comets (but with the exception of the preface to *NQ* 1), to cover the area of *sublimia* (meteorology) only (Rehm 1907, 378, 388f., Gross 1989, 14, 320-321, 330, Maurach 1987, 321 n.62, Abel 1985, 740-741, Weber 1995, 89). Others assert that *NQ* 7 is a discussion of *caelestia* (Gercke 1896, 112, Stahl 1987, 266, Waiblinger 1977, 15, 18, Gauly 2004, 71). Still other scholars mention that Seneca's discussion of the divine comets in a work on meteorology is problematic (Hine 1981, 31, Brok 1995, 4-5).

write a more complete overview of the universe, including (more) *caelestia*.⁴³ It is certain that the subjects that could have been of greatest interest because they would have created a stronger link with questions such as that of the divine providence, are not discussed in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. The area of inquiry suggested in the preface to *NQ* 1, touching on the divine, is only represented in the *Naturales Quaestiones* by Book 7.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the similarity to Aristotle's work shows that the *Naturales Quaestiones* need not necessarily have had a larger scope.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, it seems difficult to take this discussion beyond such probabilities.⁴⁶

⁴³ This view is mentioned (largely formulated as a hypothesis) by Gross 1989, 315-320, Chaumartin 1996, 180, 182 (cf. Chaumartin 2003), Abel 1985, 741, 743. The book order 4b-7, 1-4a, ending and beginning with an incomplete book, has led to the assumption that other books have been lost, too. The question is also discussed in Gauly 2004, 70-72 and Hine 1981, 32-34.

⁴⁴ Those who believe that the *NQ* was left incomplete point to the preface of *NQ* 1 as an argument in favour of their thesis: they argue that the preface would originally have introduced a book on *caelestia* (see Gross 1989, 14-15, 318).

⁴⁵ Moreover, it is possible to understand the aim of Seneca's discussion of natural phenomena without this larger context: compare the discussions in Chapters 2 and 5.

⁴⁶ As Hine cautiously states (1981, 32, 34): 'it might be that he wrote more books than survive, or else that he intended to do so...S. may have decided to proceed into non-meteorological areas. The opening of Book II may reflect such a decision, but there is no need to suppose so'.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LITERARY CONTEXT

1. *Prefaces, epilogues, digressions and transitions*

1.1 *The function of a preface*

When studying the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, and their relation to the texts they accompany, it seems useful to ask what prefaces and epilogues were supposed to do. Much material is available about the ancient rhetorical theory concerning prefaces.¹ As is well-known, prefaces were supposed to make the listener or reader *attentus* (attentive), *benevolus* (well-disposed towards the author) and *docilis* (willing to hear the account that follows). One could catch the audience's attention by (for instance) telling the readers or listeners about the importance of the subject to be discussed, or about its usefulness (to quote two key arguments). To make the listeners and readers well-disposed towards author and speech, the author could present himself in a positive light. Finally, to make the audience *docilis*, it helped to sum up what was going to be said, or to promise that the speech would not be too long. The different arguments were adapted to the situation in which the orator found himself; for example, when the importance of his subject was not clear, he had to remedy this particular point.²

As appears from such themes as the importance of a work and its usefulness, the different goals of the preface were achieved through standard arguments or 'prefatory commonplaces'. These have been listed in several studies, which demonstrate that prefatory commonplaces not only occur in the basic genre of

¹ See especially the collection of material in Lausberg 1973, 150ff. and Calboli Montefusco 1988. For a shorter version of the subject matter covered by this chapter see Limburg 2004.

² This short overview of the theory does not address those aspects that are relevant to oratory only.

oratory, for which these rules were originally devised, but also in various other genres, such as historiography.³

We can recognize the presence of some of these prefatory commonplaces in the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁴ Some prefaces contain arguments that belong in the category of catching the reader's attention. Seneca indeed speaks a few times about the importance and interest of his undertaking (notably in the prefaces to *NQ* 1 [§1-3, 17], 3 and 6 [6.3.4, 6.4.2]). He also mentions the usefulness of the work, when he points to the moral effect of the study of nature (notably in *NQ* 3 preface §18).

The task of catching the readers' attention and making them well-disposed towards the author is undertaken by Seneca particularly in the first part of the preface to Book 3. I therefore refer to the discussion of this text (Chapter 4) for an exemplification of the presence of the ancient rhetorical prescriptions about prefaces in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁵

An interesting modern discussion of the function of prefaces is found in Genette's *Paratexts*. Genette discusses different forms of 'paratext', i.e., additions to the text as varying as the book cover, title and preface.⁶ His discussion of the preface also

³ Such prefatory commonplaces are listed in Engel 1910, Janson 1964, Herkommer 1968, Polara 1979. For a study of prefatory texts which involves their prefatory commonplaces, see Mansfeld 1994 and 1998 and Den Hengst 1981. For the idea that the prefatory rules also apply to other areas than that of oratory cf. Leeman-Pinkster 1981, 14.

⁴ The relation of the epilogue to the preface is discussed in section 1.1.2 below.

⁵ It is remarkable that arguments aimed at making the reader *docilis* are lacking in the *NQ*. Seneca's prefaces do not contain any practical references (for example to subjects he has already discussed), in contrast to the prefaces by Lucretius and Vitruvius. The first sentence of the main (scientific) text sometimes indicates the specific questions discussed in the book.

⁶ According to Genette, the paratext is always subordinate to the main text (1997, 12); in the case of the *NQ*, the subordination of prefaces and epilogues to the main text may seem somewhat problematic, as appears from the discussion in modern scholarship (see the Introduction). The prefaces and epilogues tend to be regarded as having 'their own life', independently of the main text. The 'paratextuality' is only one aspect of the prefaces and

covers classical antiquity, and examples from classical texts are quoted.⁷ Genette argues that as the paratext in general is meant to make sure the book is read properly, so is the preface.⁸ More specifically, a preface should indicate ‘why’ to read a book, and ‘how’ to read it. In arguing why the book should be read, the author points to the importance of the subject, its usefulness, and so on. This corresponds to the category of arguments just mentioned under ‘catching the reader’s attention’. By indicating ‘how’ one should read the book the author shows what his intentions were in writing it, how he wanted it to be understood. Thus, in Genette’s theory the function of the preface is presented in more general terms than in the rhetorical theory mentioned above.

Genette’s idea that a preface indicates ‘how’ the book should be read is of interest. When one applies it to the *Naturales Quaestiones*, one finds that the prefaces (and epilogues) show that the work should be understood in an ethical context. The clearest indication for such a reading is found in *NQ* 3 preface §18, where Seneca explicitly states that the study of nature will have an effect on the moral state of the student.

The other prefaces and epilogues also contain moral themes. While *NQ* 3 preface §18 states in general terms that the study of nature leads to moral improvement, other prefaces and epilogues develop specific moral themes, mostly related to the subject of the book. The epilogue of *NQ* 4b (4b.13), for instance, reveals the excessive consumption of snow and ice during dinner parties. In the main part of the book, the causes of the natural phenomena snow and ice have

epilogues; in the next part of this chapter another aspect will emerge. Compare Genette’s remark: ‘like all relays, the paratext sometimes tends to go beyond its function and to turn itself into an impediment, from then on playing its own game to the detriment of its text’s game’ (1997, 410).

⁷ He regards the difference between early and modern prefaces as a difference of presentation rather than content; before it became normal practice to edit texts, prefaces and epilogues were part of the text, instead of being separately printed (pp.163-164, cf. p.14). This period (running from Homer to Rabelais) Genette calls the ‘prehistory’ of the preface (p.163).

⁸ See Chapter 9, about ‘The functions of the original preface’ (pp.196ff.); also Chapter 8 (pp.161ff.).

been explained. Such a passage also places the scientific inquiry of the *Naturales Quaestiones* in a moral context.

It has been argued that the combination of physics and ethics Seneca proposed is not successful, since it is not clear how the scientific inquiry leads to moral improvement. When dealing with this reproach it seems that we should distinguish between the author's intentions and the extent to which these are visible to the reader in the book.⁹

To argue that the prefaces and epilogues show 'why' and 'how' the *Naturales Quaestiones* should be read is one way of stating that these texts have a function. It is also possible to phrase their function in other terms, as has indeed been done in other interpretations. Codoñer, who reacts to the idea that the prefaces and epilogues are not related to the main texts, provides an example. Of the prefaces to Books 1 and 3 she says that they have a 'programmatic character'.¹⁰ They form 'le cadre conceptuel qui confère un sens à l'ensemble de la recherche' (1989, 1821-1822). Similarly, of the epilogues she says that they are more than simple parenetic passages, since they, too, justify the inquiry of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. The prefaces and epilogues place the scientific inquiry in a more general philosophical context. In her recent monograph on the moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Berno also argues that these texts must be understood through their function. She has further defined this function as the development of a particular theme inherent in the scientific investigation, or a general aspect of the research (2003, 24).

⁹ Regarding this situation, compare Genette's remark about the difference that can exist between an author's intentions (as stated in the preface) and their realisation in the book itself; the author's intentions are not always clearly visible in the book (pp.222-223). See also Parroni's remark, p.xxxv of the introduction to his edition of the *NQ*: 'le *Naturales Quaestiones* sono un'opera unitaria perché unitaria è la concezione che ne è alla base'.

¹⁰ 1989, 1811, 1813: 'le caractère programmatique du prologue du livre III est une *communis opinio*. C'est, avec le prologue du livre I, l'unique endroit de l'oeuvre où est établie théoriquement la portée que Sénèque entend donner à l'investigation entreprise'.

The view I have adopted so far on prefaces (and epilogues) explains their content by the function they have, by giving a reason for their presence. To put it in the most general terms, we have seen that these texts place a work in a larger context. A good example of this is the end of *NQ* 7, which places the inquiry concerning the nature of the comets on a higher plane by pursuing its theological implications. This also explains why and in what sense the content of prefaces (and epilogues) is different from the main text; a preface introducing a main text must necessarily differ from that text to some extent.¹¹

While certain functions of the preface still presuppose a closer relation between preface and main text, other tasks can coincide with a looser connection. This applies to one function of the preface (and epilogue) that has not yet been mentioned, namely that of providing variation and pleasure for the reader. This function is especially important in genres such as that of didactic poetry, in which the difficulty of the subject requires some variation for the reader from time to time. Speaking about the occurrence of ‘multiple’ prefaces in Virgil’s *Georgics*, Servius says (in his commentary on *Georgics* 3.1) that it is well-known that writers may offer the readers respite from their efforts by adding prefaces in the different books of a work; various authors do so.¹² In offering some relief from a difficult, technical argument the preface will necessarily differ from that exposition. This line of reasoning will be pursued further in the following part of this chapter, concerning ‘The elusive preface’.

Sometimes one comes across the idea that a preface is not complete without certain elements, such as a dedication of the book or the mention of an addressee. The

¹¹ Cf. Mazza 1965, 27.

¹² Cf. Engel 1910, 15 about the habit to preface each book in didactic poetry: *volumina enim didactica exiguum rerum copiam continere solebant, ne animi legentium fatigarentur aut deterrentur. Certum spatium concedebatur ipsis proemiis, quibus lectores quasi per vestibula splendida ad argumentum exile plerumque et aridum perducerentur. Itaque etiam hoc explicatum habet, quod scriptores, imprimis poetae, his proemiis sententias non necessarias, sed quae ornamento essent, inserebant.* Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.14.12 (speaking about deliberative oratory) also recognizes this aspect of prefaces: they may also serve the purpose of ornamentation.

vocative *Lucili* occurs at the beginning of the prefaces to Books 1, 3, 4a and 6: it has been thought that the introductions to Books 2, 5 and 7, which lack this allocution and do not form such ‘complete’ prefaces as those to the other books, had not been revised by Seneca before his death, and were left incomplete.¹³

The idea that a preface is unfinished without dedication or allocution is interesting. It demonstrates that a preface may be expected to have certain characteristics of its own, different from that of the main text. Even more important is the thought that a book is unfinished without a (complete) preface. *NQ* Book 5 lacks a preface: should we then consider it unfinished?

1.1.1 Middle prefaces

Almost every book in the *Naturales Quaestiones* has a preface. In addition to the preface that introduces the entire opus, a work that is composed of different books may have ‘middle prefaces’ introducing subsequent books. Middle prefaces are found especially in technical or scientific works consisting of several books, such as Vitruvius’ *De architectura*, Manilius’ *Astronomica*, Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, etc. This tradition goes back (at least) to Aristotle, as Cicero mentions (*Ad Atticum* 4.16.2).¹⁴

In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the distinction between a ‘first preface’ and other, middle prefaces is related to the question of the order of the books within the work.

¹³ The idea comes from Ilgen 1889, 19. For similar ideas see also Mansfeld 1998, 37, 39 with n.132, in connection with Apollonius’ *Conica*. Mansfeld adds the idea that a book is unfinished without a preface. For dedication and address in the *NQ* see the discussion of the preface to *NQ* 4a (Chapter 6, section 2.1). In order to explain differences in the forms of the prefaces (and epilogues), such as their length and the presence or absence of an addressee, I would also want to consider the factor of variation.

¹⁴ *Quoniam in singulis libris utor prooemiis ut Aristoteles in iis, quos ἐξωτερικαὺς vocat* (cf. Ross’ edition of Aristotle’s fragments, 1955, 3). Compare the idea of ‘middle epilogues’ used in longer speeches (Quintilian 6.1.54-55: *sunt, qui hos μερικαὺς ἐπιλόγους vocent quo partitam perorationem significant*). Pöhlmann 1973, 887-888 explores the origin of the habit of didactic poetry (beginning with Lucretius) to preface each book. He argues that the influence of the genre of technical prose must be taken into account.

As has been explained in the Introduction, the original book order is not that preserved in the manuscript tradition. This implies that, according to the most probable book order, the preface of Book 3 rather than the preface of Book 1 introduced the entire work. For further discussion of this question I refer to Chapter 4.

The function of a preface introducing the entire work is considered to differ from that of the subsequent prefaces. It has to introduce the inquiry in a more general way than is done in later books. In his study of prose prefaces, Janson states that the first preface is almost always the most important, containing a dedication and a presentation of the entire work.¹⁵

Conte (1992) devotes more attention to 'proems in the middle'. He, too, distinguishes the function of the first preface from that of subsequent prefaces. He relates the appearance of various proems in literary works to historical and cultural changes that complicated the author's position. The author had to state not only the *quid* of his work, but also the *quale*, its 'individual artistic character'. Hence, next to the thematic proem, the programmatic proem came into existence.¹⁶ Conte argues that the 'preface in the middle' was the place to express programmatic statements: declarations about 'how' the poet was proceeding, what his 'poetics' was, etc.

Conte's theory implies (correctly, I think) that the primary function of the preface was to state the theme of the work, and that the announcement of other topics was secondary, i.e. reserved for middle prefaces. Of course, there are bound to be prefaces that do not fit this theory, as Conte himself recognizes, for example middle prefaces in which thematic matters are discussed.¹⁷

¹⁵ 1964, 33: 'it is only natural that authors should prefer to touch on the essential facts concerning their approach already at the very beginning of the work. If they return to problems of the same kind later on, it is often just to expand and vary the themes already dealt with'. Cf. Leeman-Pinkster 1981, 16, speaking about the three prefaces of Cicero's *De oratore*: 'aber während der erste Prolog das ganze Werk einleitet, haben die beiden folgenden Prologe eine andere Funktion'. The two following prefaces offer an 'Ergänzung' to the first one. Cf. also Engel 1910, 6 for the distinction general preface/middle preface.

¹⁶ 'One is concerned with what will be said, the other with how poetry will be made' (p.149). Conte's use of the word 'programmatic' differs from that of Codoñer, as mentioned above.

¹⁷ While discussing Virgil's *Georgics* and Ennius' *Annales* he mentions middle prefaces that are thematic only (pp.150, 154).

1.1.2 Epilogues

The ancient rhetorical theory concerning epilogues is of less interest for the study of the *Naturales Quaestiones* than that concerning prefaces. Epilogues were thought to consist of two main components: a summary of the preceding argumentation and an appeal to the emotions.¹⁸ In its task of appealing to the emotions of the listeners or readers, the epilogue was thought to resemble the preface, since both were aimed at influencing the audience rather than presenting information.¹⁹ In the epilogue, pathos could attain a higher degree than in the preface, which was more careful in tone and emotions. The epilogue was the place to demonstrate *eloquentia* (Quintilian 6.1.51). These ideas are less relevant to the *Naturales Quaestiones* than the rhetorical theory concerning prefaces – apart from the clear presence of *pathos* in the epilogues.²⁰ For the study of the epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the comparison with other works of a similar structure is also relevant (see below, section 2 of this chapter).

As far as I have been able to ascertain, few modern studies pay attention to the epilogue.²¹ Genette does not give it a separate treatment: he considers it a variant of

¹⁸ Quintilian 6.1.1, cf. *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 2.47. Useful renderings of classical rhetorical theory about the epilogue are found in Lausberg 1973, 236ff. and Calboli Montefusco 1988, 79ff.

¹⁹ See Cicero, *De partitione oratoria* 4, Quintilian 6.1.9. Compare Lausberg 1973, 237.

²⁰ Curtius 1967, 99 observes that the rhetorical theory concerning epilogues did not have such a wide application as that of prefaces. The rhetorical rules concerning epilogues indeed do not seem to have been applied much outside the genre of oratory, unlike the situation with prefaces, apart perhaps from the use of pathos. The ‘Schlusstopik’ Curtius mentions pp.99-101 refers to topical closure/last sentences rather than epilogues. For closure, cf. the following note.

²¹ In modern research, it is especially the phenomenon of ‘closure’ that has been studied. This kind of ending differs from the epilogue in that it concerns the ‘closing’ of a book or work, i.e. its last sentences (compare Spina 1999a, 11). On this topic, see especially

the preface.²² However, he does mention a distinctive feature of epilogues: prefatory commonplaces are far less prominent there than in prefaces. Since the readers are assumed to have read the book by the time they reach the epilogue, this does not need to present the work as important and useful to the audience in the same way as the preface. The epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* resemble the prefaces in their moralizing discussions. To a certain extent, we may therefore regard both types of texts as one category of moralizing passages.²³

1.2 *The (somewhat) elusive preface*

Although the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* must be understood in relation to the scientific texts of the work, and as having a function relative to these texts – a function we can (partly) clarify with the help of rhetorical theory, or with such statements as that of Codoñer about the ‘cadre conceptuel’ of the *Naturales Quaestiones* – this approach is not sufficient. In some cases, the prefaces and epilogues force one to stretch this explanation quite far.

This is especially clear when one takes into consideration a text such as the preface of *NQ* 4a. It discusses the phenomenon of *adulatio* (flattery), whereas the main text of the book studies the causes of the flood of the Nile.²⁴ Seneca begins the preface as a letter to Lucilius, who is procurator in Sicily; soon, the ‘letter’ turns into an elaborate discussion of the danger of flatterers (§3ff.). In paragraphs 14ff.

Roberts, Dunn and Fowler 1997, and for a study on closure in Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales* Spina 1999b.

²² 1997, 161: ‘the “postface” will be considered a variety of preface; its specific features – which are indisputable – seem to me less important than the features it shares with the general type’. Cf. the remarks equating preface and epilogue at p.163 and 174. Genette says that he has encountered notably fewer epilogues than prefaces in his research. He discusses the epilogue on pp.237-239. See Polybius, *Histories* 1.1.2 for a passage showing that the same thought (and prefatory commonplace), i.e. the importance of historiography, can be expressed at the beginning and end of a genre (historiography).

²³ Cf. Berno 2003, who speaks of moralizing digressions, without distinguishing between prefaces and epilogues.

²⁴ See also the discussion of the preface of *NQ* 4a (Chapter 6, section 1).

follows the account of a flattering discourse Lucilius might address to himself, assessing his good life. Seneca concludes the moralizing passage by saying that he will provide moral guidance for Lucilius in their letters (§19-20). He then affirms that he will take Lucilius' thoughts away from his province, Sicily, which might make him too proud of himself (§21-22). This thought provides the transition to the scientific discussion of the book: it is the Nile that will serve to divert Lucilius' thoughts from his province (§1.1).

It is possible to extend the explanation of the prefaces and epilogues as a moral context for the work to include this preface as well: the discussion of flattery also forms a moral theme. However, another approach is perhaps more fruitful in this case. Indeed, the discussion of flattery is not specifically connected to the account of the Nile, but also seems to have been developed for its own sake. Seneca only establishes a link with the scientific discussion of the book at the end of the preface.

1.2.1 A case for comparison: the prefaces of Vitruvius' *De architectura*

At this point I would like to extend the scope of the discussion. Indeed, it does not only concern the *Naturales Quaestiones*: other works, too, contain prefaces that are not directly related to the main texts.

Vitruvius' *De architectura* may serve as an example.²⁵ I will start by giving a short summary of the preface of *De architectura* Book 7. Vitruvius begins the preface by saying that it was a wise idea of earlier generations to write down what they knew, and so pass it down to posterity. He goes on to say that, however, the practice of stealing from earlier work is not commendable but deserves punishment. Then follows the account of such a case of literary theft, with its discovery and punishment, at a poetry contest on the occasion of the founding of the library of Alexandria. Another such account is added, about Zoilus who in his writings criticized Homer: it brought him an unhappy fate. Vitruvius then relates this theme to his own situation, stating that he will make good use of his sources (§10). A list of

²⁵ On Vitruvius' prefaces, cf. André 1985. Concerning the organisation of *De architectura*, see also Callebat 1989.

his predecessors follows. At the end of the preface, he mentions the subjects of the preceding and following books.

The pattern of this preface follows a more general trend: Vitruvius often begins his prefaces with a subject not directly related to his inquiry.²⁶ At a certain point, he connects the subject to a theme related to his undertaking: in Book 7 this is his use of sources. At the end of the preface, the transition to the central discussion in the book is made by summing up the subject of earlier books and mentioning that of the present one. This structure (also found in Books 2, 3, 6, 9) is interesting, since it shows that Vitruvius often purposefully begins his prefaces with something else than the scientific discussions, a subject he afterwards relates to his own situation.²⁷

Besides this type of preface there are also shorter prefaces that are more directly related to the subject of the work (Books 4, 5, 8, 10). They may form a more general introduction to the subject discussed in the book (as in Book 8), express thoughts concerned with writing about architecture (Book 5), or discuss a topic related to architecture (Book 10). The preface of Book 1 associates the publication of the work with the emperor.

In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, too, we encounter this kind of variation: in addition to the more elaborate prefaces of *NQ* 1, 3, 4a and 6, we also find a book without preface, and two books containing an introduction to the subject of the book itself (Books 2 and 7).

Thus, Vitruvius' prefaces are liable to lead to similar remarks about a lack of connection between prefatory passages and main texts as have been voiced for the *Naturales Quaestiones*. One could also argue, however, that the prefaces place *De*

²⁶ Book 9 is also a clear case of a preface in which a question not directly related to the *De architectura* is discussed; Vitruvius' speaks about the fact that athletes receive more honours than philosophers and writers, whereas the latter are more useful to society. Only at the end of the preface does he (briefly) mention his own intention. The examples given in the course of the preface have a clearly digressive character.

²⁷ In §3 of the preface to Book 7, Vitruvius introduces the account of the case of literary theft with the qualification 'it is not out of place to discuss this here' (*non est alienum...explicare*). Cf. André 1985, 380. This shows an apparent concern for appropriateness: the digressive passage is intentionally introduced in the preface.

architectura in a larger context, since they address matters related to the subject of architecture and writing about architecture. In his discussion of *De architectura*, Von Albrecht states ‘die Vorreden wollen die Architektur als Kunstgattung aufwerten’, as well as ‘die Prooemien sind unabhängig von den ihnen zugeordneten Büchern konzipiert’.²⁸ Pointing to the function of prefaces such as I have mentioned in the first part of this chapter does not always suffice to explain the nature of these texts.

The question of the relationship between preface and main text for instance also arises concerning Cicero’s and Sallust’s works.²⁹ In the volume *Beginnings in classical literature* (1992), which discusses ‘beginnings’ by various authors, the question of the relation between preface and main text also comes up a few times.³⁰

One reaction of modern critics, faced with a non-matching preface and main text, has been to declare such works badly composed. This reaction, found

²⁸ 1994, 696-697. See also Soubiran’s introduction to the Budé edition of *De architectura* Book 9: ‘à lire les huit premiers livres, on se familiarise vite avec cette manie qu’a Vitruve de déverser dans de longues prefaces des considerations sans grand rapport avec la question qu’il se propose de traiter’ (p.xv, cf. p.xix, xxx, xxxiv) and ‘c’est un usage bien établi.. que l’auteur d’un traité quelconque expose..[sc. in a preface] des réflexions d’ordre general, sur le sujet qu’il se propose, ou encore donne le nom et fasse l’éloge du dédicataire’ (p.xvii-xviii).

²⁹ See for Cicero Ruch 1958, 9-12 who speaks of ‘préjugés à vaincre’ concerning prefaces, Grilli 1971, 9ff. For Sallust see La Penna 1959, 23ff. In the case of these two authors, the discussion is probably influenced by the passages from Cicero’s *Ad Atticum* 16.6.4 and Quintilian 3.8.8 which are quoted below. See also Mazza 1965, 26ff. who states that the connection between preface and main text is a case for discussion with regard to Livy’s *Ab urbe condita*, and prefaces generally.

³⁰ See Clay’s article about ‘Plato’s first words’ (pp.113ff.) and Rosenmeyer’s contribution about Plutarch’s prefaces (pp.205ff.). Clay mentions that some of Plato’s beginnings are somewhat problematic from the point of view of the connection with the rest of the work; he undertakes a unified interpretation of some of these texts. Plutarch’s prefaces seem to show a design which resembles that of Vitruvius’ prefaces. Rosenmeyer states that these prefaces are failures (p.228). I would prefer to understand them in the context sketched in this chapter.

especially in earlier modern criticism, especially occurs in connection with what are not considered to be the best works written in antiquity, such as Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones*, or Vitruvius' *De architectura*. The opposite reaction has been to try to demonstrate that preface and main text of the work in question are in fact well-connected. This second tendency is found especially in more recent studies.³¹

1.2.2 Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 16.6.4

A passage in a letter from Cicero to his friend Atticus provides some interesting information on contemporary views on the relation of a preface to its main text.

Now I must confess my carelessness. I sent you the work *On glory*. But the preface to it is the same as that to the third book of the *Academics*. That is due to my having a volume of prefaces, from which I select one when I have begun a composition. So, when I was at Tusculum, forgetting I had used that preface, I put it into the book I sent you. But when I was reading the *Academics* on the boat I noticed my mistake. So I dashed off a new preface at once, and have sent it to you. Please cut off the other one and glue this one on (*Ad Atticum* 16.6.4).³²

³¹ Compare for these reactions the discussion of Heath 1989, in section 1.3.1 below.

³² Unless indicated otherwise, English translations are borrowed and adapted from the Loeb series. *Nunc neglegentiam meam cognosce. De gloria librum ad te misi. At in eo prohoemium idem est quod in Academico tertio. Id evenit ob eam rem, quod habeo volumen prohoemiorum. Ex eo eligere soleo, cum aliquod 'suggramma' institui. Itaque iam in Tusculano, qui non meminissem me abusum isto prohoemio, conieci id in eum librum, quem tibi misi. Cum autem in navi legerem Academicos, agnovi erratum meum. Itaque statim novum prohoemium exaravi et tibi misi. Tu illud desecabis, hoc adglutinabis.* These last words provide interesting details as to the practicalities of text-editing in antiquity. The few times I have mentioned this passage, while giving a presentation of my research, reactions have always been enthusiastic. I received worthwhile comments, such as the idea of a possible distinction between a volume of complete prefaces and models for prefaces. Once someone even expressed doubts about the veracity of Cicero's account. Neither *De gloria* nor the third book of the *Academica* survive.

This passage demonstrates that it was possible to attach a preface to a text without there being any connection between them, since Cicero was apparently able to make the mistake of using one preface twice for two different books. This changes our view on the composition of prefaces in antiquity (if I may be allowed this somewhat generalizing statement). It leads us to consider the possibility that prefaces were rhetorical pieces written for their own sake, without relation to the following work.³³

The fact that Cicero carefully explains his habit may be an indication of an uncommon practice.³⁴ Still, the existence of such volumes of prefaces is confirmed by the preservation of one such collection, under the name of Demosthenes.³⁵ We do not know if Cicero's volume of prefaces contained only models, i.e. sketches of prefaces, or complete prefaces. The mistake he says to have made seems to point in the direction of complete prefaces (since they cannot be used twice).³⁶

³³ Compare G. Boissier, 'Les prologues de Salluste', *Journal des savants* 1 (1903), 59-60: prefaces in antiquity were not concerned with what was to follow and therefore contained especially general thoughts. See also La Penna 1959, 24.

³⁴ In his commentary on Cicero's *Laelius* (Heidelberg 1985), K.A. Neuhausen expresses surprise that Cicero tells Atticus so late and so succinctly about such an important matter as a volume of prefaces (p.120).

³⁵ Cf. Mazza 1965, 27. In the Budé edition (by Clavaud, 1974) of the volume of prefaces preserved under the name of Demosthenes other such collections are mentioned (p.32 n.6). Grilli 1971, 11, n.5 says that it was a habit of orators to have such volumes at hand. On p.11 Grilli wrestles with the fact that Cicero possessed such a volume; he considers it 'senza dubbio un elemento negativo', but adds 'ma non è affatto privo di significato profondo'.

³⁶ It is also difficult to determine the function of Demosthenes' volume of prefaces. Clavaud (Budé, cf. my previous note) argues 'la collection n'est pas une provision pour des besoins imprévus' (pp.44-45); the prefaces rather serve to help Demosthenes start his speech (p.48). Some of the prefaces contain quite specific historical references. On the other hand, they do not indicate the subject of the speech that follows: 'le prologue apparaît comme plaqué sur le discours; il aboutit au sujet plutôt qu'il ne le pose' (p.39). This is what we also see in for instance Vitruvius' prefaces.

1.2.3 Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.8.8-9

A passage in Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.8.8-9, mentioning ideas from Aristotle (*Rhetorica* 3.14), also testifies to the occurrence of prefaces that were not connected with the main text:

Aristotle thinks that in epideictic oratory the preface may be treated with the utmost freedom, since it is sometimes drawn from irrelevant material, as for example in Isocrates' *Praise of Helen*, or from something akin to the subject, as for instance in the *Panegyricus* of the same author, when he complains that more honour is given to physical than to moral excellence, or as Gorgias in his speech delivered at the Olympic games praises the founders of the games.³⁷ Sallust seems to have imitated these authors in the introductions in his *Jugurthine War* and his *Catiline*, which have no connection with his narrative.³⁸

This passage shows that it was possible to write a preface that did not have any connection to the main text. What also appears is the importance of the genre to which a work belongs: it is in the demonstrative genre, the freest form of oratory, that the material of prefaces can be quite, or somewhat, remote from the subject of the speech. When Quintilian indicates that Sallust followed the example of those who wrote prefaces without direct connection to the main text, he enlarges the group of such prefaces to include historiography.

By the term 'these authors' Quintilian indicates that in the composition of his prefaces Sallust follows several authors just mentioned. Accordingly, Sallust is not

³⁷ Aristotle mentions Gorgias' *Olympicus* and Isocrates' *Panegyricus* in *Rhetorica* 1414b30-34, when he speaks about epideictic prefaces on the subject of praise or blame. However, the idea that these prefaces are 'drawn from something akin to the subject' does not occur in his text. Possibly Quintilian (or his intermediary source) rearranged the passage.

³⁸ *Aristoteles... in demonstrativis vero proemia esse maxime libera existimat: nam et longe a materia duci, ut in Helenae laude Isocrates fecerat, et ex aliqua rei vicinia, ut idem in Panegyrico cum queritur plus honoris corporum quam animorum virtutibus dari, et Gorgias in Olympico laudans eos qui primi tales constituerint conventus. Quos videlicet secutus C. Sallustius in bello Iugurthino et Catilinae nihil ad historiam pertinentibus principiis orsus est.*

specifically said to follow Isocrates' *Praise of Helen*, with its preface 'drawn from irrelevant material'. In a general way Quintilian indicates that Sallust has followed the 'free prefaces' of the demonstrative genre.³⁹

Not everybody will agree with Quintilian's statement that Sallust's prefaces are unrelated to the following narration of events.⁴⁰ However, it is clear that Sallust begins his prefaces with ideas that are not directly related to the narrative: both prefaces, that of the *Bellum Catilinae* and the *Bellum Iugurthinum*, open with general thoughts about man's position and his ambitions.⁴¹ Further on in each preface, Sallust makes a transition to the theme of historiography and to his own situation. At the end of each preface he mentions the theme of each work (and its importance).⁴²

Sallust's two prefaces thus resemble Vitruvius' prologues. Since they discuss the writing of history, the prefaces can be said to place the work in a larger context.

³⁹ This interpretation of Quintilian's passage implies that Quintilian also thinks the prefaces written *ex aliqua rei vicinia* to fall outside the subject of the speech; he makes a distinction between prefaces that had nothing to do at all with the speech, and prefaces that were slightly related to it. For this interpretation, cf. Adamietz' commentary (München 1966) on the passage: 'so wie Isokrates und Gorgias ihren genannten Reden Prooemien vorausschickten, die nicht aus dem Inhalt der Reden direkt herauswachsen, sondern in mehr oder weniger weiter Entfernung von ihm stehen, so began Sallust beide Schriften mit Einleitungen, die nichts mit dem Gegenstand der eigentlichen Erzählung zu tun haben. (Der Krieg gegen Cat. und Jug. kommt nicht auch in den Einleitungen zur Sprache.)' Adamietz thinks that Quintilian's commentary on Sallust's prefaces is correct, but that Isocrates and Gorgias were not Sallust's immediate examples.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of Sallust's prefaces see La Penna 1959 (with a review of previous opinions on pp.25-26); he thinks that the prefaces are, to some extent, 'pezzi a sé stanti', but they also discuss themes related to Sallust's work. For a large part they deal with the 'valore dell'attività storiografica' and thus place the narrative in a larger context (pp.25-26, 41 especially). See also A.D. Leeman, *Mnemosyne* 7 (1954), 323ff. about Sallust's prefaces.

⁴¹ In both prefaces Sallust also speaks about the body - mind opposition, a theme that also occurs in the preface of Isocrates' *Panegyricus*, as Aristotle and Quintilian mention.

⁴² At the end of the preface to the *Bellum Iugurthinum*, Sallust also says: *verum ego liberius altiusque processi, dum me civitatis morum piget taedetque. Nunc ad inceptum redeo* (4.9). Such a statement does not mean that Sallust's *excursus* was uncontrolled.

However, the prefaces are also to some extent unrelated to the subject of the books, since they are interchangeable: apart from their last paragraph, they fit both works. For my purposes it is moreover sufficient to observe that these prefaces have been regarded as not related to the main text by at least one person (Quintilian), who links this fact to a tradition in writing prefaces.

1.2.4 Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.14

In his *Rhetorica*, Aristotle devotes a chapter to prefaces (3.14). He states, as Quintilian recalls, that the beginning of epideictic speeches can be either related to or foreign to the subject of the speech (1414b21-1415a8). Aristotle compares the practice of writing prefaces for epideictic speeches to that of flute playing (1414b21-30); the flute player begins by playing a piece of his choice, and then attaches this prelude to the ἐνδόσιμον, 'that which gives the key to the tune'. In the same way, the writer of epideictic prefaces should first write about something he likes, give the key-note to the speech, and attach it to the rest of the speech.⁴³ Aristotle mentions the beginning of Isocrates' *Praise of Helen* as an example of such a procedure, saying that the 'eristics' that form the subject of the first part of the preface have nothing in common with Helen (Quintilian, too, mentions this example in his reference to Aristotle).

In this passage Aristotle speaks about a free prelude, attached to what is the key-note of the song (ἐνδόσιμον), and which in literary terms may be seen as the introduction to the theme of the speech; this is followed by the speech itself.⁴⁴ Further on, in *Rhetorica* 1415a7-8, Aristotle says about the ἐνδόσιμον (then understood as introductory piece) that it is either related to or foreign to the speech.

⁴³ Quintilian 4.1.2 mentions that one of the possible origins of the word *proemium* was the habit of prefacing either songs with a free piece (*nam sive propterea quod οἴμη cantus est et citharoedi pauca illa, quae ante quam legitimum certamen inchoent, emerendi favoris gratia canunt, prohoemium cognominaverunt, oratores quoque ea, quae prius quam causam exordiantur ad conciliandos sibi iudicum animos praelocuntur, eadem appellatione signarunt, sive...*).

⁴⁴ So Heath 1989, 36.

This seems a somewhat imprecise use of terminology.⁴⁵ In Quintilian's text, the distinction between free prelude, ἐνδόσιμον and speech has disappeared, leaving only a distinction between preface and speech.

Aristotle adds that the material for epideictic prefaces comes from specific subjects, such as praise and blame, advice, exhortation, dissuasion (1414b30-1415a8). Thus, the prefaces also have some common ground in the choice of subjects. Later on, when he is discussing the more specific functions of the preface (catching the hearer's attention etc.), in connection with forensic oratory, Aristotle adds an interesting remark (3.14.7-8). He says that all these things are 'outside the *logos*': we here see how such prefatory commonplaces as have a clear function in regard to the argumentation can also be characterized as unrelated to the main text.⁴⁶

The concept of a preface formed by writing about a subject of your choice and afterwards attached to the theme of the discussion seems useful to understand the prefaces of Vitruvius' and Sallust's works, and those of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. It explains a situation like that of *NQ* 4a, in which Seneca first writes a piece on flattery, and then attaches it as a preface to the main text. It is also relevant to the comprehension of other passages, I believe. Although a text such as the epilogue to *NQ* 4b, for example, has a starting point in the inquiry into snow and other related phenomena, it also 'leads its own life'.

1.2.5 Prefaces in forensic oratory

We have seen that genre plays a role in determining how much liberty one has in writing a preface. Cicero, whom we have met as the possessor of a volume of prefaces to be used freely, also offers evidence that in the genre of forensic oratory the rules for writing a preface were very strict. In *De inventione* 1.26 he says:

⁴⁵ Cf. Heath 1989, 36 n.16.

⁴⁶ Compare this reference by Quintilian to an opinion of Celsus: *negat haec prohoemia esse Cornelius Celsus, quia sint extra litem. Sed ego...tum pertinere ad causam puto quidquid ad dicentem pertinet* (4.1.12).

The following are surely the most obvious faults of exordia, which are by all means to be avoided: it should not be general (*vulgare*)...unconnected (*separatum*)...a general exordium is one which can be tacked to many cases, so as to seem to suit them all...the unconnected preface is one which is not derived from the circumstances of the case nor closely knit with the rest of the speech, as a limb to a body.⁴⁷

In this passage Cicero sums up the errors one can make in writing a preface; some of these concern the cohesion between preface and main text. The preface should be closely connected to the main text, not taken from a subject foreign to the speech, and not written in such a manner that it could fit different cases. Here we see how widely the rules for writing prefaces differ per genre: the preface Cicero wanted to attach to *De gloria*, after he had already used it for the third book of the *Academica*, would, according to the rules for forensic oratory, be a case of a flawed preface (*vulgare* or *separatum*). We must accept that in some cases to write a proem *separatum* was the right thing to do.⁴⁸

Another interesting Ciceronian passage is *De oratore* 2.325:

⁴⁷ *Vitia vero haec sunt certissima exordiorum quae summopere vitare oportebit: vulgare...separatum...vulgare est quod in plures causas potest accommodari, ut convenire videatur...separatum, quod non ex ipsa causa ductum est, nec sicut aliquod membrum annexum orationi.* Compare *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.11. Compare also Lausberg 1973, 161-162, under *exordii virtutes et vitia*. There is also an *exordium translatum, quod aliunde trahitur*.

⁴⁸ As Lausberg 1973, 161 indicates, the *vitia* of the preface could become *virtutes* in a different context: ‘grundsätzlich können alle *vitia* für besondere Zwecke zu *virtutes* werden’ (cf. p.155 under α). Cf. also the enumeration in Quintilian (4.1.71). Regarding one specific type of flawed preface (the *vulgare* form), he adds that it could also be useful and was indeed often used by great orators.

The opening passage should be so closely connected to the speech that follows as to appear to be not an appendage, like the prelude to a piece of music played on the cither, but an integral part (a limb) of the whole structure (the body).⁴⁹

Here, too, the coherence between the preface and the rest of the speech is emphasized. Cicero says that it should not be attached to the text 'like some prelude to a cither play': this seems a reference to *Rhetorica* 3.14 (unless the comparison with a cither song was known outside Aristotle's text). Cicero wants the preface of a forensic oration to be connected to the speech 'as a limb to the body'. As in *De inventione* 1.26, the comparison with the human body serves to indicate the strong coherence between the various parts of a speech that was usual in forensic oratory.⁵⁰

1.3 *Modern research on the concept of unity*

1.3.1 Heath

The question of the (lack of) coherence of a literary work is discussed in some recent scholarship. In his study on *Unity in Greek poetics*, Heath appears to have been prompted to investigate ancient ideas on the composition of a work by a state of affairs that resembles the situation found in modern literature on the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁵¹

The starting point for Heath's inquiry was the fact that he often saw researchers try to achieve a coherent interpretation of a work by far-fetched theories. Euripides'

⁴⁹ *Connexum autem ita sit principium consequenti orationi, ut non tamquam citharoedi proemium affictum aliquid, sed cohaerens cum omni corpore membrum esse videatur.*

This passage about prefaces in forensic oratory begins in 2.315; similar statements about the unity of preface and main part of the speech are found in §315, 318-320. In §325 Cicero adds that there are also some orators who, having declaimed a preface prepared with care, proceed with the rest of the speech as if they did not want to be listened to.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the metaphor of 'organic unity' in rhetorical texts, see Heath 1989, 97-101.

⁵¹ See his introduction, 1989, 1-11.

tragedy *Suppliants* provides an example: several of its features have been found problematic in modern research. These features, such as the ‘extended action’ of the tragedy⁵² and its digressive character, hinder a coherent interpretation of the play. Heath adds that these facts have been considered problematic despite their recurrent appearance in Greek tragedy.

He mentions three reactions to this situation. The first, to consider these tragedies bad examples of literature, he finds unsatisfactory. The second reaction has been the most widespread: it consists in an ‘assimilation’ of the play ‘to modern standards’. By means of an in-depth interpretation of the play, researchers try to demonstrate that the incoherence is only superficial; the play has coherence at a deeper level, since one general theme – Heath speaks about ‘the characteristic modern preference for a single theme’ – is found at the basis.⁵³ By way of example, he shows how researchers of the *Suppliants* have interpreted the play in such a manner. Heath recognizes that these ‘techniques of thematic integration’ form one possible way to interpret a work. Indeed, they even provide many possibilities for interpretation, since opinions about what is the underlying theme of a tragedy may (and will) differ.⁵⁴

What Heath has established about this line of interpretation of Greek tragedy corresponds to the situation of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Researchers have also tried to find a deeper coherence in this work by pointing to more general, abstract or symbolic themes that unite the different parts of the work. This has also resulted in a plurality of interpretations, as will become clear in the discussion of specific chapters. Often, there are no good grounds to prefer the nuances of one such interpretation to another. Sometimes the interpreters have not asked themselves whether their interpretation fits within the context of the work or the genre.

⁵² ‘The action is pursued beyond the point of rest implied by the resolution of its initial situation’ (p.4).

⁵³ On p.15, cf. p.16.

⁵⁴ As Heath puts it (p.8): ‘indeed, we are offered an embarrassment of possibilities for their [i.e. the texts’] reclamation’.

As Heath says, unitary interpretations form one way to understand a play, but they have not been checked as to historical correctness. He therefore suggests (and this is the third reaction) that the writer could have had a different concept of what formed a well-composed play. Heath states the importance of trying to discover what the classical writer is doing, and why. In his *Unity in Greek poetics*, he investigates ideas related to the theme of unity in ancient literary theory and criticism. He finds that these agree with a concept of unity that allows for and includes digressions and diversity (ποικιλία) in certain genres.⁵⁵ As Heath himself puts it, it is a concept of unity that is not only 'centripetal', but also 'centrifugal'.⁵⁶

The element of genre we have just discussed is also mentioned by Heath. He demonstrates that the degree of coherence required of a work varied according to the genre to which it belonged; in Greek literature, too, there is a clear distinction between the genres of forensic and epideictic oratory.⁵⁷ Heath also traces this distinction in the writings of Cicero and Quintilian. Their works demonstrate that

⁵⁵ On the idea of variety cf. Drijepondt 1979. Although he is mainly concerned with stylistic *varietas*, Drijepondt also offers some remarks about *varietas* in structure. Thus, he mentions the *varietas* between the different parts of a work, preface, main text and epilogue (see pp.9ff.).

⁵⁶ Schenkeveld 1992 has written a critical review of Heath. His main reproach to Heath is that he overly emphasizes statements about diversity in ancient sources, while he does not pay attention to the fact that they imply unity to be a primary prerequisite. Schenkeveld demonstrates, especially in connection with the Homeric scholia (Heath's Chapter 8), that there are statements about unity that Heath disregards: 'the poet strives firstly after coherence and secondly after diversity' (p.6). Heath's study is a reaction to a certain modern approach rather than that he presents a balanced view of the situation in classical antiquity. Schenkeveld's criticism of Heath does not impede my cautious utilization of parts of his work. This is a line of interpretation which must certainly be taken into account for the understanding of Seneca's prefaces and epilogues.

⁵⁷ 1989, 36-37; cf. his conclusion on pp.150-151: 'in fourth-century rhetorical theory... genre is decisive. Forensic oratory, a strictly utilitarian genre, eschews digression and is obliged to concentrate on the point at issue; there is a task in hand, and everything is subordinated to that task. But in epideictic oratory these constraints do not apply, and digression is in order'.

different rules existed for forensic and epideictic oratory, and other genres tended to follow the greater liberty of epideictic oratory.⁵⁸

Speaking about Plato's *Phaedrus*, Heath also contrasts forensic oratory with philosophy. The philosopher is freer in the additions that may help to constitute a well-formed work, as long as what he says pertains to the general philosophical goal of the work.⁵⁹ In his conclusion, Heath summarizes the results of his research concerning the factor of genre as follows:

It should be stressed that we are concerned...also in every instance with the characteristic end or ends of each genre; one must ask whether a segment of text, or a sequence of such segments, achieves the (primary or ancillary) effects appropriate to a text of that genre, subject to any constraints imposed by that genre (p.154).

The different parts of a work should be understood in connection with the end of that work. This idea seems helpful for the understanding of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

1.3.2 Hutchinson

In his study of Latin literature 'from Seneca to Juvenal', Hutchinson also devotes a chapter to 'Structure and cohesion'.⁶⁰ Like Heath, he argues that interpretations should not try to enforce unity on a work, or consider a work with a low level of unity badly written. As he phrases it:

Yet in justly stressing how works cohere, scholars perhaps fail to stress sufficiently how bold and strange these works can be. It is not enough to attack disunity or defend unity:

⁵⁸ Cicero and Quintilian are discussed on pp.95-97 (cf. the conclusion on p.151). Heath does not discuss prefaces, but focuses on digression.

⁵⁹ P.22, with reference to *Theaetetus* 172d-e; p.26: 'Plato's conception of philosophical discourse is not dominated by the idea of exploring a given theme but...by that of achieving through a broader discussion which may range widely over different themes a certain end – instilling virtue or promoting philosophical understanding'.

⁶⁰ 1993, 145-183.

unity of one kind (say in theme) can effectively be combined with disunity of another (say in plot), and rupture and excursion can be positively valued.⁶¹

Hutchinson disagrees with the idea that the literature of the period he studies was especially focused on the episode and lacked attention to the overall structure of a work. He argues that when an author is seen to elaborate on a subject not directly related to the subject he is discussing, this is done with a purpose.

Seneca's work is given a prominent place among the texts Hutchinson discusses.⁶² Concerning the *Naturales Quaestiones*, he states that the moral digressions are also part of the plan of the work.⁶³ He concludes that 'cohesion and apparent looseness intermingle richly, and neither must be ignored' (1993, 151). Hutchinson's statement that 'digressions often help to enrich a work by placing in a larger context its tautly constructed discourse' constitutes the same kind of interpretation as Codoñer gives of the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. We here see how the idea that digressive passages place the work in a larger context can be used both in a unitary explanation of the work and in an explanation 'through disunity'.⁶⁴

⁶¹ P.145. Cf. his conclusion, p.183: 'we have seen how unsatisfactory it would be either to play down their [sc. the authors'] audacity or to make it prove a work lacking in cohesion'.

⁶² Among these are Seneca's tragedies. Hutchinson's discussion is not exhaustive, since it is part of a general overview. Seneca's tragedies form a field of inquiry that could profit much from a study of unity in Latin literature; indeed, it has been remarked that the tragedies show a lack of unity. Specifically, they contain choruses that are not related to the theme of the tragedy. Some choruses can be understood as placing the action of the tragedy in a wider context, but others are rather more difficult to explain in this manner.

⁶³ See p.151: 'In Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* the carefully placed digressions on vice help to bring out by contrast the true nobility and order of nature, and the spiritual significance of man's moral departure from that order'.

⁶⁴ Cf. Genette 1997, 205-206 about the dangers of an interpretation through disunity: 'the trap, or the ruse, of asserting the claim of diversity...could be that the very word *diversity* would become – from the inescapably unifying effect of discourse and language – a unifying theme'.

1.3.3 Genette

Finally, Genette, whose theories about prefaces have been quoted earlier, also recognizes the complexity of the concept of unity. He shows an awareness of the unquestioned status of the concept as a principle of interpretation.⁶⁵ Genette also mentions the type of preface we have encountered in classical testimonies, (more or less) unrelated to the main text, which he calls the ‘elusive preface’. In such a preface, the author has purposefully refrained from establishing a connection with the rest of the work; ironically, classical scholarship often tries hard to find such a connection, without succeeding.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See pp.201-206: speaking of the prefatory theme of the ‘announcement of unity’ in prefaces introducing collections of essays etc., he remarks in a comment on one passage: ‘obvious discomfort, here, with the ideological cliché that *a priori* makes unity (of subject, method, or form) into a sort of dominant value, a value as imperious as it is unconsidered, almost never subjected to scrutiny, accepted from the beginning of time as a matter of course. Why should unity be superior in principle to multiplicity?’ (p.204) Genette goes on to mention prefaces that treat the theme of diversity instead of unity.

⁶⁶ 1997, 169-170, 235. Genette for instance mentions prefaces by Rabelais. The French writer Aragon thus concludes one such elusive preface: ‘it will certainly be said that there is some disproportion between this preface and the book that follows it. I couldn’t care less’. The name ‘passepartout preface’ is also used to design the occurrences of this type of preface in modern times. More interesting material comes from Carolus Sigonius’ Renaissance study *De dialogo* (published in 1562 in Venice. See also K.A.E. Enenkel, *Kulturoptimismus und Kulturpessimismus in der Renaissance. Studien zu Jacobus Canter’s ‘Dialogus de solitudine’ mit kritischer Textausgabe und deutscher Übersetzung*, Frankfurt am Main etc. 1995, 152ff.). Sigonius mentions three possible ways in which a dialogue can begin (see f.30v. and ff. in the 1562 edition; cf. Enenkel 1995, 160). Its beginning can be the theme of the dialogue itself, a theme that is relevant to the subject of the dialogue, or a theme that differs from it. The different possibilities are illustrated by examples from classical antiquity, mainly dialogues from Plato and Cicero. According to Sigonius, the best beginning is one that uses a theme that differs from the subject of the dialogue. Cicero’s *De legibus* exemplifies this: the work begins with a walk in Arpinum and gradually leads, via a few different themes, to the subject of the dialogue.

1.4 *Digressions*

As stated earlier, it is possible to regard the prefaces and epilogues themselves as moralizing ‘digressions’ in a wider sense.⁶⁷ The digressions of the *Naturales Quaestiones* in the stricter sense, that is, the moralizing passages that interrupt the discussion of natural phenomena instead of beginning or ending it (*NQ* 3.17-18 and *NQ* 5.15) are not discussed in this dissertation. In the case of digressions, similar questions arise concerning the relation with the main text as for prefaces and epilogues. Hence, a short discussion of the concept of digression seems in order at this point.⁶⁸

In his discussion of the digressions in Seneca’s work, Grimal (1991) states that these digressions have been considered problematic – just as the (apparently) unplanned character of Seneca’s work in general has been found problematic. Grimal reacts with an inquiry into the function of Seneca’s digressive passages.

He remarks that in classical antiquity digressions were used with certain aims, such as embellishing a speech and providing pleasure for the reader or listener. His conclusion is that Seneca follows the practice of his time when he inserts such freer pieces in his work. The digressive element in itself was popular: ‘la digression se déroule librement, elle est traitée pour elle-même et ne se rattache que par la morale que l’on peut en tirer au discours théorique où elle s’inscrit’.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Berno 2003 has given them this common denomination. On p.23 she states: ‘se i concetti di prefazione e di epilogo sono di immediata evidenza, in quanto basati sul criterio puramente formale della loro posizione (iniziale o finale) in ciascun libro, quello di ‘digressione’, *exemplum o fabula*. .è molto più sfuggente’. In the preceding discussion, I have questioned the clarity of the concept of preface/epilogue. Berno’s remark is somewhat strange, since she calls all moralizing passages digressions, including the prefaces and epilogues. (Lausberg 1973, 163 says that a preface can also contain a digression, with reference to Quintilian 4.3.17)

⁶⁸ My discussion here is necessarily limited; this also applies to the following discussion of transitions.

⁶⁹ P.241; cf. p.240: ‘il y eut un moment, à Rome, où les poètes mirent à la mode les digressions brillantes, les morceaux à effet, qui s’inséraient tant bien que mal dans le corps du poème, un récit épique, par exemple, et en brisaient l’unité’.

Grimal further argues that the digressions in Seneca's work do not solely serve the rhetorical purposes of ornamentation and related aspects. In his survey of these digressive passages, he shows the different functions they have in varying contexts; Seneca made digression a tool for his philosophical aims, an instrument of persuasion (p.239). Concerning the digressions of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Grimal states that they show 'la fin véritable de l'exposé scientifique, qui ne trouve pas en lui-même sa justification, qui, s'il est séparé d'une réflexion sur la nature de l'univers, n'est qu'une de ces "occupations oisives"...'.⁷⁰

Thus, Grimal's discussion of Seneca's digressions contains two elements mentioned earlier in this chapter, in connection with the concept of prefaces. On the one hand such passages have a function. On the other hand, they have a purposefully digressive character, the importance of which must not be reduced.

Classical rhetorical theory mentions both these elements in its discussion of the nature of the digression. In the works of Cicero and Quintilian, digression is said to be used with certain purposes, such as amplification and ornamentation.⁷¹ The following passage sums up the different purposes that a digression ('that proper and as good as legitimate task of the orator', as it is called) may serve: 'to digress from the business in hand for embellishment, to delight the listeners, to move them, to amplify the theme, to use pathos and commonplaces' (Cicero, *Brutus* 82).⁷²

Quintilian, speaking about forensic oratory, agrees that in certain situations it is possible and helpful to use a digression.⁷³ However, caution is also needed, he adds. Some orators, under the influence of declamation, use digression too much. A

⁷⁰ P.244. Berno 2003 has followed Grimal in explaining Seneca's digressions by their function. On pp.23-24 she briefly discusses the concept of digression, with reference to Grimal.

⁷¹ So Cicero, *De oratore* 2.80, cf. 2.311-312. See also Heath 1989, 90-93 on Cicero's and Quintilian's opinions about digression.

⁷² *Ut egrederetur a proposito ornandi causa, ut delectaret animos, ut permoveret, ut auget rem, ut miserationibus, ut communibus locis uteretur.*

⁷³ Quintilian discusses digressions in 4.3: he first talks about the habit of inserting a digression at a specific point in the oration, after the *narratio*, but then becomes more general.

digressive passage must serve the purpose of the oration: one must know when to insert it. If it is added at a suitable moment, it provides embellishment for the oration ('I admit however that this form of digression can be advantageously appended...so long as the case demands, or at any rate permits it. Indeed such a practice confers great distinction and adornment on a speech, but only if the digression fits in well with the rest of the speech and follows naturally on what has preceded, not if it is thrust in like a wedge, parting what should naturally come together', 4.3.4).⁷⁴

Certain functions of the digression, such as pleasing the judges, can also be fulfilled when there is no connection between the digression and the main text. As Quintilian says:

There are however a number of topics that are inserted in the middle of matter that has no connexion with them, when for example we strive to excite, admonish...the judge. Such passages are innumerable (4.3.16).⁷⁵

Thus, different categories of digressive passages existed: a digression could be thematically connected or unconnected to the speech. A digression that was unrelated to the content of the speech could also fulfil such a function as providing pleasure to the listener.⁷⁶ Sometimes, one finds a more restricted opinion than that expressed by Quintilian, allowing only for digressive material more closely connected to the speech.⁷⁷ This shows that there was some discussion about the

⁷⁴ *Ego autem confiteor, hoc exspatiandi genus...opportune posse subiungi, cum res postulat aut certe permittit, atque eo vel maxime inlustrari ornarique orationem, sed si cohaeret et sequitur, non si per vim cuneatur et quae natura iuncta erant, distrahit.*

⁷⁵ *Sed plurima sunt, quae rebus nihil secum cohaerentibus inseruntur, quibus iudex reficitur, admonetur...innumerabilia sunt haec.*

⁷⁶ As Heath 1989, 93 says, 'in Quintilian, therefore, as in Cicero, we have a broad category of digression...This includes much that is thematically integral to the case itself, and thus not digressive in a substantial sense; but it also includes...material unrelated to the case...introduced for ornamentation and to give pleasure. Though not thematically integral, such ornamentally digressive matter is justified functionally in so far as it pleases, refreshes, and allures the judges; and that is all the justification that Quintilian requires'.

⁷⁷ Heath 1989, 94-95, and 91 about Cicero.

extent to which it was possible to insert digressive passages, and about the kind of digressions one could use.

The discussion in these texts primarily concerns forensic oratory. Although we do not know exactly to what extent this theory can be applied to other genres, we may presume that the rules for other genres were less strict, reflecting the situation of prefaces.⁷⁸ Whereas a preface could take the form of a free piece that was subsequently attached to the rest of the speech, a digression could have its starting point in the text, and then follow its own course (eventually to be reattached to the main text).

1.5 *Transitions*

Transitions form another aspect of the connections between the different parts of a work. Sometimes, digressions (or prefaces and epilogues) are very consciously introduced or concluded by transition formulas.⁷⁹ These formulas also occur in the *Naturales Quaestiones*; there has been some disagreement about them, too (including disapproval). Some of these formulas will be discussed in the following chapters.⁸⁰

Transitions are mentioned a few times in ancient rhetorical theory. In the passage from *Rhetorica* 3.14 mentioned earlier, Aristotle speaks about attaching a preface to the text that follows.⁸¹ In his discussion of prefaces, Quintilian adds a few paragraphs

⁷⁸ Cf. Heath 1989, 96-97.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Isocrates' transitions mentioned in Heath 1989, 32-34 and the transition formula in Sallust's preface to the *Bellum Iugurthinum* (4.9) mentioned in n.42 above. See also e.g. Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.4.109: *non obtundam diutius: etenim iamdudum vereor ne oratio mea aliena ab iudiciorum ratione et a cotidiana dicendi consuetudine esse videatur*. These formulas show a certain caution in the introduction of digressions.

⁸⁰ See especially the discussion of the preface of *NQ* 3 (Chapter 4, section 8) and the epilogues of *NQ* 3 (Chapter 5, section 2) and *NQ* 1 (Chapter 7, section 3.4.1).

⁸¹ Heath 1989, 36 speaks of 'smooth links' concerning this passage: 'thus we have the prelude and the introduction, with the smooth link between them to which Aristotle here

about transitions (4.1.76-79). He states that the preface must always be clearly connected to what follows ('the end of a preface must be of such a kind that it provides a smooth and easy transition to what follows').⁸² Affected transitions such as those found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are criticized. A transition must not be too abrupt or obscure either: 'just as we should not be too abrupt in passing to our *narratio*, so it is best not to conceal the transition' (§79). According to ancient literary theory, transitions between the different parts of a work should be smooth, modern scholarship has concluded.⁸³

Did Seneca take care to connect the different parts of the *Naturales Quaestiones commodissime*? It is of course difficult to know what a 'smooth transition' looked like in practice.⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that the transitions in historiographical works are of the same kind, clear and matter-of-fact, as those of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Still, for historiographical works, too, there was an injunction to write smooth transitions.⁸⁵ Such formulas might then be regarded as 'smooth transitions', or, at least, as the kind of transition formulas that was usual.

refers (συνάψαι, 1414b26)'. Heath also argues that this kind of link was regarded as a norm of composition by Isocrates (p.36).

⁸² *Id debet in principio postremum esse, cui commodissime iungi initium sequentium poterit* (§76).

⁸³ See Lausberg 1973, 163: 'der Abschluß des *exordium* soll mit dem Beginn der *narratio* harmonisieren...aber es muß auch deutlich werden, daß das *exordium* abgeschlossen ist und nun die *narratio* beginnt'. He refers to the passage in Quintilian I just mentioned. Cf. also Heath, as mentioned in n.81 above.

⁸⁴ Yet again genre may here play a role. See for the specific question of transitions in technical treatises the discussion of the transition from the preface of *NQ* 3 to the main text (Chapter 4, section 8).

⁸⁵ Herkommer 1968, 122ff. mentions that the transitions in historical works should be smooth, with reference to Lucian, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit* 55. Herkommer's work contains much material (i.e. examples of transitions in historiographical works). He distinguishes between formulas indicating the end of a passage and formulas referring to the passage that follows.

Hutchinson gives a positive interpretation of such transitions as are found in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. He mentions the tendency, in the prose composition of Seneca's time, 'to seek an appearance of firm and lucid organization. It [sc. the prose work] promotes this appearance particularly by overt announcements of the next topic' (1993, 149). Further

The treatment of digressions is especially interesting in this regard. It is part of a tradition in prose often to signal openly movements away from the main exposition, commonly in dry and standard phrases that justify at the opening or proclaim a return at the close: 'this topic urges me', 'it will be apt', 'briefly', 'to return to my subject' (p.149).

One of the examples provided to illustrate this feature is the transition in *NQ* 3.27.1. By using such formulas, Hutchinson argues, the author shows a consciousness of the theme delimited for discourse.⁸⁶ An author could also play (or 'achieve more complicated effects') with these phrases. This idea is exemplified by the transitions that introduce the two digressions in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, in 3.18.1, 'let me set aside the subject and castigate luxury' (*permitte mihi quaestione seposita castigare luxuriam*) and 5.15.1, 'now permit me to tell a story' (*nunc mihi permitte narrare fabulam*).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ For an example of criticism of such transitions see Engel 1910, 17, who calls the transition from the preface to the main discussion in Cato's *De agricultura* (*nunc, ut ad rem redeam, quod promisi institutum principium hoc erit*) abrupt.

⁸⁷ Hutchinson 1993, 150. In *NQ* 3.18.7, an emotional outburst is followed by the words *sed ut ad propositum revertar*...As Hutchinson says, we cannot assume that Seneca was really so beyond discipline here as he professes to be (p.151).

2. *A brief comparison of the *Naturales Quaestiones* with works of a similar structure*

To understand the form of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, it is also important to place it in the general context of the genres of didactic poetry and technical prose, which show a similar structure. This section offers a brief survey of the comparative material for the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

2.1 *Didactic poetry*

Lucretius', Virgil's and Manilius' works form interesting comparative material for the *Naturales Quaestiones*, in form as well as in content. The various books of which these didactic poems are composed are introduced by prefaces and concluded by epilogues, although the latter are not always as prominent as the former – in contrast to the situation in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁸⁸ A comparison of the epilogue to Book 4 and the preface to Book 2 of Manilius' *Astronomica* shows that the epilogues and prefaces may contain similar thoughts. Although the epilogue does not contain such prefatory themes as occur at the beginning of the book (the announcement of the subject, etc.), it further develops the philosophical questions discussed in the preface.⁸⁹

Like some of the prefaces of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the prefaces of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (*DRN*) clearly have a programmatic character: they indicate the

⁸⁸ About Lucretius' epilogues cf. Pöhlmann 1973, 888 and Gale 2000, 20: 'Lucretius also rounds off each of his six books with a resounding conclusion, though these tend to be less clearly demarcated than Virgil's finales'. G. Müller, 'Die Finalia der sechs Bücher des Lucrez', in *Lucrèce, Vandoeuvres-Genève* 1978 (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 24), 197 argues against Pöhlmann: 'Finalia als gesonderte poetische Teile, von den beweisenden Partien zu unterscheiden wie die Finalia in Vergils *Georgica*, gibt es bei Lukrez nicht'.

⁸⁹ In his discussion of the prefaces (pp.73ff.) and epilogues (pp.137ff.) of the *Astronomica*, Reeh 1973 asks whether the epilogues have the same function at the prefaces. He does not, however, give a clear answer to the question. The *Astronomica* are especially relevant to the discussion of *NQ* 7; see Chapter 9, section 3.1.5.

importance and meaning of the explanation of the world contained in the work.⁹⁰ The prefaces and epilogues of *De rerum natura* are also distinguished from the didactic passages. In his short discussion of this matter, Kenney speaks of a difference between the expository and non-expository passages, ‘a discrepancy in tone and emotional impact’.⁹¹ In so far as the expository passages are also subordinate to their conclusions, which are formulated in the non-expository pieces, Kenney further argues, both types of text also complement each other. He therefore does not consider it wholly appropriate to call the non-expository texts ‘digressions’. The resemblance to the situation of the *Naturales Quaestiones* is clear: it will be further explored in Chapter 3, in which I discuss the nature of the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* (section 6.1).

There is also a certain difference between the *Naturales Quaestiones* and *De rerum natura* on the question of the relation between the scientific and ethical passages of the work. Indeed, one might argue that Lucretius has achieved a better mixture of parenetic and theoretic passages than Seneca.⁹² Lucretius and Seneca may best be compared on the subject of the elimination of the fear of death. In Book 3 of *De rerum natura*, Lucretius argues on the basis of the nature of *animus* and *anima* that nothing survives after death. The adhortation not to fear death follows from this conclusion. In the discussion of the preface to *NQ* 6, one of the *consolationes* of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, we will be able to determine clearly what is the distinct character of Seneca’s combination of physics and ethics.

In the study of didactic poetry, similar questions as have arisen for the *Naturales Quaestiones* play a role. Pöhlmann (1973) provides a good example. He argues that Roman didactic poetry was influenced by the Hellenistic technique of the ‘Einlage’, the insertion of less integrated pieces within the main structure of a poem

⁹⁰ Compare for example Cox 1971.

⁹¹ 1971, 15 (in the introduction to his edition of *DRN* Book 3). Likewise, Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 85 speaks of a distinction between an expository and a persuasive style apropos of Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia*. Compare the remarks of Von Albrecht 1994, 771-772 on the prefaces and epilogues of Manilius’ *Astronomica*.

⁹² As was done by Holl 1935, 9.

(pp.885ff.). Whereas in Greek times the different parts composing the didactic poem were well-integrated, in Hellenistic times the non-didactic parts became merely decorative. Although this general statement may not be justified, it shows that, as I said, questions concerning the unity of a work also play a role in the genre of didactic poetry.

Pöhlmann regards Virgil's *Georgics* as the best example of a combination of didactic and non-didactic passages. He believes that only this work has achieved the inner connection found in Hesiod (1973, 885, 890). The prefaces and epilogues serve to underline the structure of the work, its division in two pairs of books. It is clear that there is a difference between Lucretius' and Virgil's works in the manner in which didactic and non-didactic passages are combined; in the *Georgics* the distinction between both types of passages is less strong.⁹³ About the prefaces of Manilius' *Astronomica* Pöhlmann remarks that they are formally distinguished from the didactic parts.⁹⁴

Thus, the matter of the connection between main text and framing passages also comes up in the study of didactic poetry.⁹⁵ In certain poems the framing parts are

⁹³ Cf. Kenney 1971, 16-17. Gale 2000 argues (Chapter 2, 'Beginnings and endings', pp.18ff.) that the proems and finales of the *Georgics* form a response to the proems and finales of *De rerum natura*. They 'can be read as a series, and fall into a distinctive pattern' (p.57). This approach diminishes the distance between Lucretius' and Virgil's work, and moreover states that *De rerum natura* is not without a planned composition either.

⁹⁴ Cf. Reeh 1973, 73 about the *Astronomica*: '...bilden die Proömien jeweils einen selbständigen, in sich geschlossenen Teil, dessen Thema meist über das spezielle Thema des Gesamtwerkes hinausgreift'. Pöhlmann 1973, 895 makes an interesting remark apropos of the end of *Astronomica* Book 2, saying that since it is not 'sachfremd' enough, it cannot form a 'real' epilogue. This remark implies that an epilogue (or preface) should to some extent be dissimilar from the main text; this idea has also appeared in section 1 of this chapter.

⁹⁵ The older study by G. Härke, *Studien zur Exkurstechnik im römischen Lehrgedicht (Lukrez und Vergil). Mit einem Anhang über Manilius*, Würzburg 1936, also testifies to this. According to Härke, Virgil is the acme of the tradition, while Manilius shows its decay. She distinguishes between different sorts of excursus in didactic poems: those that are there for ornamentation's sake, and those that have a connection with the content of the work.

considered to form more of a unity with the main text than in others. The opinions of modern scholarship about this situation differ.

2.1.1 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.75ff.: Pythagoras' speech and the structure of didactic natural philosophy

The speech that is put in Pythagoras' mouth in Book 15 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a parody of the genre of didactic poetry (and more specifically, but not only, of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*).⁹⁶ The structure of the speech is comparable to the structure of works such as *De rerum natura* and the *Naturales Quaestiones*, and thus adds interesting material to this discussion. I will first briefly summarize the content of the passage, and then point out the features that are relevant to our discussion.

Pythagoras is represented as a natural philosopher who teaches his audience about nature and the causes of the world (vv.60-72).⁹⁷ He is described as the first person to

According to her, digressions should be separate from the central text, but at the same time closely connected to it (p.61).

⁹⁶ Compare for this opinion Volk 2002, 67 (the passage is discussed on pp.64-67): 'Ovid intended the Pythagoras speech as the imitation of a particular type of poetry, which may not have had a name, but which had clear and recognizable characteristics. While it appears that he wished in the first place to imitate – or, perhaps rather, parody – Lucretius (both in diction and content, the speech is close to the *De rerum natura*...), I still think that we can regard the Pythagoras speech as an indication that Ovid and his contemporaries had some concept of didactic poetry as a genre'. Volk does not speak about the point I am interested in, the structure of didactic poetry. See also Myers 1994, 133ff. about the speech, with pp.139ff. a discussion of the its resemblance to 'didactic natural philosophy' (a more general term than 'didactic poetry'). Like Volk, Myers does not pay attention to the structure of the speech.

⁹⁷ The list of subjects Pythagoras is said to teach his followers resembles the subjects discussed in the *NQ*, although the scope of Pythagoras' teachings is more complete (*... magni primordia mundi / et rerum causas et, quid natura, docebat / quid deus, unde nives, quae fulminis esset origo / Iuppiter an venti discussa nube tonarent / quid quateret*

have reproached man for consuming animal meat (vv.72ff.). His speech begins with an exhortation to vegetarianism, which contains anaphora, enumerations, complaints about man's depravity and rhetorical questions.⁹⁸ It is followed by a description of a primeval golden age, when 'all was well' and man did not eat meat. This primeval paradise gradually evolved into a decadent society in which animal meat was eaten (vv.96-142). In the transition to the next passage, Pythagoras claims to speak by divine inspiration. He will discuss great and unknown matters, and wishes to leave the earth by means of a flight through the skies.⁹⁹ An argument against the fear of death follows (vv.150-175). After death the soul moves from one body to another, including animal bodies (the Pythagorean theory of metempsychosis). Death therefore need not be feared. The other conclusion from this passage is that one should not eat animal meat, since one risks expelling a kindred soul from its body. By another transition, Pythagoras proceeds to the main part of his discussion, the affirmation that 'everything changes' (vv.176ff.). Proof from different areas contributes to this statement of 'natural philosophy'. At the end of this long passage comes the conclusion (vv.453-478): everything changes, including one's soul, which moves from body to body and also inhabits animal bodies. Animals should therefore not be killed or eaten. More admonitions, exclamations, rhetorical questions and enumerations form the parenetic passage that concludes Pythagoras' speech.¹⁰⁰

terras, qua sidera lege mearent / et quodcumque latet, vv.67-72). As Myers 1994, 141 points out, these subjects are not actually treated in Pythagoras' speech. The lines rather characterize him as a natural philosopher.

⁹⁸ Cf. about the theme of vegetarianism Myers 1994, 137-138 with further references. Cf. also *EM* 108.17ff., about the teachings of Sotion and Sextius on the subject and their effect on Seneca. §20 of the letter contains a sample of the hortatory kind of text also represented in Ovid's passage.

⁹⁹ Compare also, in the description of Pythagoras before he begins his speech, the idea that he reached the gods in thought (vv.62-64). Cf. the description of Epicurus in *DRN* 1.72ff.

¹⁰⁰ Galinsky (www.utexas.edu/depts/classics/faculty/Galinsky/pythag.html) speaks of the "hyperdidactic" mode of the speech, which is marked by a profusion of protreptic injunctions and didactic pronouncements'.

Ovid has constructed Pythagoras' speech with great skill. In my opinion, it imitates (and parodies) the structure of a work like Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Indeed, the speech begins with an ethical, hortatory appeal: in other words, a moralizing preface. The main part of the speech is formed by a discussion of natural phenomena. It is followed by another moralizing passage (or epilogue). The different parts of the speech are linked by transitions. The 'scientific' discussion forms the basis of the ethical message of the speech: the teaching concerning the natural law that 'everything changes' leads to two conclusions on a moral (or practical) level: death need not be feared and meat should not be eaten. The speech therefore testifies to the existence of a genre in which such a structure, composed of a didactic exposition related to moralizing openings and conclusions, was usual.¹⁰¹ If we accept the idea that the speech is a parody, the elements it contains must be key elements of the genre that is parodied: the transition from ethics to physics (and the reverse), the moral themes of golden age, gradual decadence and the fear of death, but also the flight of the mind mentioned by Pythagoras must have been representative for the genre.

The structure of the speech also corresponds to the form of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Besides the elements I have just mentioned, the phrasing of the hortatory parts of Pythagoras' speech is similar to that of the moral passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. This aspect will be further explained in Chapter 3 and in the chapters concerning the different prefaces and epilogues. The account of a primeval golden age and the subsequent gradual decadence is found in its clearest form in the last chapter of *NQ* 1. The flight of the mind Pythagoras wishes to undertake, which introduces his discourse in natural philosophy, is mentioned in the preface to *NQ* 1.

¹⁰¹ Pythagoras' speech also adds a level to this structure: it proceeds from the theme of vegetarianism (and the image of a golden age followed by a gradual decadence) to the argument against fear of death, and then to the 'scientific' discussion.

2.2 *Technical prose*

In addition to the genre of didactic poetry, useful comparative material for Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* is also found in the genre of technical prose.¹⁰² The prefaces of Vitruvius' *De architectura* have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter. In technical prose works one also encounters several prefaces (in those works composed of various books); however, there seem to be no elaborate epilogues.¹⁰³

As an example of this genre I refer to Columella's *De re rustica*. It offers interesting comparative material for the *Naturales Quaestiones* in its first (and most important) preface. This preface, introducing a work on agriculture, develops the theme of decadence that is also found in the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.¹⁰⁴ This demonstrates that this theme also accompanied other technical works on aspects of nature.

Columella laments the decay of agriculture; this also leads him to speak about the decadence of the *mores* in more general terms. Like Seneca does in *NQ* 7.31-32, he says that there are only schools for the education in the vices (such as luxurious cuisine and hair dressing). Agriculture, on the other hand, has no teachers or students anymore. Attention rather goes to theatres, circuses and *effeminatī*: an important *ars* has disappeared, while despicable *artes* thrive (§5-7). Columella compares agriculture to other occupations, all less recommendable (§7-10). Such a comparison between different *artes* is used by Seneca in the preface to *NQ* 3, when he introduces the moral theme of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

¹⁰² The *NQ* does not belong to this genre. In his study of the combination of 'scienza e produzione letteraria', Parroni 1989 discusses the *NQ* in the category 'scienza e filosofia'; others categories are 'la prosa tecnico-scientifica' and 'scienza e poesia'. I agree with this categorization: for the classification of the *NQ* as natural philosophy see Chapter 2, section 2.

¹⁰³ Many prefaces of works that belong to this genre have been discussed in Santini and Scivoletto (1990, 1992, 1998). The preface of *NQ* 1 is also discussed in this context (Flammini 1990). About technical treatises and their prefaces see also Schrijvers 1987.

¹⁰⁴ Dihle 1985, 197 n.24 (speaking about Columella) states: 'Landwirtschaft erscheint als umfassende Wissenschaft von der Natur und als Weg zu sittlich vollkommener Lebenspraxis'. The connection of the subject of the work to moral excellence is comparable to the *NQ*.

2.3 *Pliny the Elder's Naturalis Historia and the two discourses*

Although he does not write such clearly delineated moral prefaces or epilogues, Pliny the Elder also adds moralizing statements to his survey of the world.¹⁰⁵ Earlier judgements on the *Naturalis Historia* (*NH*) have been negative: its combination of science and rhetoric was found problematic.¹⁰⁶

In an interesting discussion of the *Naturalis Historia*, Wallace-Hadrill points to another way of looking at its structure. He contrasts the two main parts of Pliny's work, the description of 'nature' and the stigmatization of 'luxury', as Greek and Roman parts, respectively (1990, 92ff.). In Rome, the Greek discourse on science came up against Roman requirements of social/moral relevance. 'Latin prose literature, particularly of a philosophical and scientific nature, was confronted with the problem of reconciling two radically different intellectual and cultural traditions, or "modes of discourse"' (p.94). Pliny, Wallace-Hadrill argues, solved this question by pointing to the importance of the moral component of the study of nature, which he considered to be an element that could matter to the Romans.

Wallace-Hadrill demonstrates one possible approach to the mixture of ethics and physics in works such as the *Naturalis Historia* and the *Naturales Quaestiones*. To Greek science the Romans added an important moral aspect.¹⁰⁷ The idea of a mixture of two discourses, one moralistic and the other scientific, is also useful for the understanding of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. This approach has been adopted by Gauly in his study of this work. Gauly uses Bakhtin's concept of 'Dialogizität' to describe the relation of the different parts of the work to each other; the

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Locher 1986, 28. Although, as said, Pliny's ethical deliberations are less 'compartmentalised' than in the *NQ*, they are also often found at the beginning of a book.

¹⁰⁶ See Wallace-Hadrill 1990. More recent literature has undertaken the rehabilitation of Pliny the Elder.

¹⁰⁷ See however Chapter 2, sections 1.1-1.2 for evidence that this moralizing strand of thought was also already present in Greek thought.

doxographical parts (the discussion of physical phenomena) form a dialogue with the Roman 'frame'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ 2004, 73ff. The *NQ* also forms a dialogue with the Greek doxographical material at its base.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

1. *Physics and ethics*

1.1 *Early evidence*

The relation between physics and ethics is an important question in the study of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. It was also an item for debate throughout antiquity. In this chapter, I will present a short sketch of this debate, as a background for the understanding of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

The evidence begins with Socrates: after the theories of the Presocratic philosophers, Socrates was known to 'have brought down philosophy from the skies' and focused on ethics (Cicero, *TD* 5.10). A passage from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (1.1.11-16) provides information about Socrates' criticism of the study of nature.¹ Socrates himself did not say anything about this subject, Xenophon reports: he thought it foolish to do so. He asked those who did concern themselves with this area of research whether they thought that the knowledge of human matters was complete, so that new areas of knowledge could be sought out, or whether they thought it their task to neglect human affairs and only to occupy themselves with the divine. Socrates added that questions of natural philosophy could not be solved; this was proved by the great disagreement among the different theories about the cosmos. Another argument against this area of study was that knowledge of nature could not immediately be put into practice; who could create rain, wind and other natural phenomena?

In another passage, *Memorabilia* 4.7.2-8, Socrates is said to have recommended the study of certain subjects such as geometry and astronomy only in so far as they had a practical utility. Concerning the study of heavenly phenomena in general, he

¹ Cf. the short references in Diogenes Laertius' life of Socrates, 2.21, 2.32. The Xenophon passage is also mentioned by Citroni Marchetti 1991, 27 in connection with Pliny the Elder, in whose *Naturalis Historia* some 'Socratic moralism' is also found.

disagreed with the attempt to discover how these were brought about by god. Such knowledge could not be discovered by man: the gods did not want what they had kept secret to be discovered.²

Socrates' criticism of the study of nature recurs in later discussions. The Stoic Aristo of Chios' radical rejection of physics (as well as logic) is most well-known.³ The Socratic demand for the pre-eminence of ethics was later also incorporated within the study of nature, which was said to have an ethical aim. Thus, a way was found to give a practical application (in the field of ethics) to the study of physics.⁴

Another interesting, relatively early passage containing arguments that recur in the ethics-physics discussion comes from Isocrates' work (*Antidosis* 261-268). Isocrates indicates that many people think the study of astronomy, geometry and related disciplines is useless. He himself reacts to this opinion with a more balanced view. While he agrees that such studies have no practical utility, there is something to say for them: they provide an exercise for the brain and improve one's ability to learn. They form a 'gymnastic of the mind and a preparation for philosophy' (266). One should therefore spend some time on these studies, but not too much. This passage provides evidence of a reserved attitude that saw only limited interest in the study of non-ethical matters.

² It is perhaps interesting to add here that Socrates' reserved attitude towards the study of physics did not impede him from making observations about the order of the world, in relation to a divine cause. See on this aspect of Xenophon's Socrates, in connection with later Stoic theories: D. Sedley, 'Les origines des preuves stoïciennes de l'existence de dieu', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 (2005), 461-487.

³ For Aristo see for instance A.M. Ioppolo, *Aristone di Chio e lo Stoicismo antico*, Napoli 1980, with pp.78-90 a discussion of Aristo's opinion on physics. For an indication of the (little) study of physics done by the early Stoics, especially Zeno, in the context of the Socratic (and Cynic) rejection of this area of study, see K.A. Algra, 'Zeno of Citium and Stoic cosmology: some notes and two case studies', *Elenchos* 24 (2003), 26ff.

⁴ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 28. Gigon 1966, 25-26 sees the Socratic attitude towards science as one of the reasons that led to the decline of natural science in antiquity.

1.2 *The Hellenistic creed*

The idea of the relevance of physics to ethics was particularly prominent in the Hellenistic period, in the Stoic, Epicurean and Peripatetic schools.⁵ Certain passages in Cicero's philosophical works provide information about this line of thought. *De finibus* 4.11, for instance, mentions the opinion of the philosophical schools about the relevance of natural philosophy. It states that the *explicatio naturae* was thought relevant by the Stoics and the Peripatetics for more than the two reasons favoured by the Epicureans, i.e. the elimination of superstition and the fear of death.⁶ For the other two schools, the study of nature also contributed to moral improvement. The knowledge of divine matters gave a certain humility to those who saw how great the moderation and order among the gods was, a greatness of mind to those who saw the deeds of the gods, and a sense of justice provided by the knowledge of the power, plan and will of the world's great organiser.

The passage in *De finibus* continues with an additional argument for the study of nature: the pleasure derived from it (4.12). Like the moral aim of these studies, this idea seems to have been more widespread (cf. section 1.4 below). The study of nature is also said to be a meaningful way to fill one's leisure time (and an occupation reserved for this time only).

Cicero further declares that the Stoics followed the Peripatetics in most of their doctrines on physics, for instance concerning the idea that everything is formed out

⁵ About the Epicureans and Stoics cf. Lloyd, *Greek science after Aristotle*, London 1973, 21-32. Lloyd also points to the existence of the moral theme in the study of nature throughout antiquity (p.175). See also Taub 2003, 8-9, 125ff.

⁶ The Epicurean opinion on the utility of the study of nature also appears in the short overview of Epicurean philosophy in Diogenes Laertius (Book 10; see §37, 76-83, 85). It is also expressed, at greater length, in *De finibus* 1.63-64. Besides the idea that knowledge of nature helps against superstition and fear of death, various other elements are added here (the understanding of matters related to speech and of the value of knowledge gained through the senses). Physics is also said to play a role in the achievement of moral virtues (in line with the opinion of the other schools); *denique etiam morati melius erimus cum didicerimus quid natura desideret* (63), *sic e physicis et fortitudo sumitur contra mortis timorem...et moderatio, natura cupiditatum generibusque earum explicatis* (64).

of four basic elements. The only difference between the two schools was that the Peripatetics investigated natural phenomena in detail.⁷

There are a few other passages in which Cicero mentions the ethical aim or result of the study of nature. In *De natura deorum* (*DND*) 2.153, knowledge of the world (the stars, days, months, years and the eclipse of sun and moon) is said to lead to knowledge of the gods. From this arises a sense of piety as well as a sense of justice and the other virtues, which will result in a happy life similar to that of the gods.

A passage from the *Tusculanae Disputationes* (*TD*; 5.68ff.) also provides information about the moral knowledge and attitude that arise from the study of nature. Cicero is describing what the wise man knows. The knowledge of the world he achieves provides him with knowledge about his own mind and its divinity.⁸ The understanding of the divine also leads to a desire to resemble the gods. Having viewed the universe, man looks back on earthly matters with tranquillity. Out of the contemplation of nature also arises knowledge of virtue.⁹

In *De finibus* 3.73 a list of the effects of the study of nature is given. The Stoics have done physics the honour of calling it a virtue, because those who are to live in accordance with nature must take the entire world and its government as their starting point.¹⁰ It is not possible to form correct judgements about things good and evil unless one understands nature and the life of the gods, and knows the answer to the question whether man's nature agrees with that of the universe. Also, it is not possible to discern the great value of those ancient precepts of the wise, telling us to

⁷ *De finibus* 5.9-10 also mentions that the Peripatetics studied natural philosophy in detail. Gigon 1991 places the *NQ* in a Peripatetic context.

⁸ *Haec tractanti animo et noctes et dies cogitanti exstitit illa a deo Delphis praecepta cognitio, ut ipsa se mens agnoscat coniunctamque cum divina mente se sentiat, ex quo insatiabili gaudio completur* (*TD* 5.70).

⁹ *Haec ille intuens atque suspiciens vel potius omnes partes orasque circumspiciens quanta rursus animi tranquillitate humana et ceteriora considerat! Hinc illa cognitio virtutis exstitit...*

¹⁰ For the idea that physics is a virtue see S. Menn, 'Physics as a virtue', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1995), 1-45 (with a 'Commentary on Menn' by M. Nussbaum, pp.35-44).

‘obey the moment’, ‘follow god’, ‘know oneself’, and ‘do nothing in excess,’ without knowledge of physics. Moreover, only this knowledge shows us the value of nature for preserving justice and maintaining friendships and the other affections; finally, piety towards the gods or the gratitude one owes them cannot be understood either without the study of nature.

Chrysippus is known to have made similar statements in his works on theology and physics. Plutarch mentions passages in which Chrysippus says that moral knowledge (involving the idea of justice, good and evil, virtue and happiness) arises out of the study of physics.¹¹ Plutarch contrasts such declarations with the respective places of physics and ethics in Chrysippus’ classification of the three parts of philosophy: students first learned logic, then ethics: physics, including theology, was the last part of the philosophical curriculum.

As is well-known, different arrangements of the three parts of philosophy existed in the Stoic school. In one version physics had to be learned last, while in another ordering ethics was the crown on the study of philosophy.¹² These different versions show that on the one hand ethics was valued as the most important part of

¹¹ Plutarch *De Stoicorum repugnantiiis* 1035c-d, referring to the third book of Chrysippus’ work ‘On the Gods’ and to a work ‘Physical theses’. Plutarch also mentions (1035b) that Chrysippus used to preface his works on ethics with a reference to the power of providence and the unity of the universe (i.e. with a statement about theology, the culmination of physics). Modern researchers have valued such statements about the connection between physics and ethics differently: for reactions on Chrysippus’ statement see Betegh 2003, 276, and further the discussion under 1.3 below.

¹² Plutarch *De Stoicorum repugnantiiis* 1035. The main witnesses to the different classifications are Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.18ff. and Diogenes Laertius 7.40. Both authors mention that different classifications existed. The division of philosophy in three parts was illustrated by well-known comparisons; when philosophy is compared to an egg, one text may state that ethics is the white and physics the yolk, whereas in another text ethics is the yolk and physics the white (the nutrition of the yolk). Similarly, when philosophy is compared to a living being, both physics and ethics can be considered its soul. Betegh 2003, 274-275 also mentions the different orderings of the parts of philosophy in connection with the problematic relationship between ethics and physics; cf. also Gauly 2004, 30.

philosophy, since achieving a rational, virtuous attitude was philosophy's main goal. From another point of view, physics, which touched on the divine with the study of heavenly matters, was considered most elevated.¹³ The various statements one finds in the *Naturales Quaestiones* concerning the mutual relation of ethics and physics mirror the different versions of the Stoic classification of the parts of philosophy.

The passages I have just mentioned show that the study of physics was believed to have a bearing on ethics, even if the exact manner in which this influence functioned remains unclear. Only for the Epicurean philosophy does Lucretius' *De rerum natura* offer more information on how the elimination of superstition and fear of death was achieved by the study of nature.

1.3 *The modern debate*

In recent scholarship, there has been some debate about the question how far Stoic ethics relied on physics. Annas argues that Stoic ethics was in fact independent of physics.¹⁴ She takes a strict view on the matter: even if for the Stoics the world provides a rational pattern that is studied and imitated by man (the argument brought forward by scholars who agree that Stoic ethics depended on physics), this does not give a sufficient basis for the rules of ethics leading to the Stoics' moral goal in life, happiness. According to Annas, physics to the Stoics was therefore not the foundation of ethics, but no more than a background against which to understand ethical rules, which had been previously, independently learned.

¹³ Cf. I. Hadot 1969, 113: 'Einmal hat er [sc. Chrysippus] mit dem Blick auf den gesamten Kosmos und ausgehend von der Stufenfolge des Seins, die Theologie als die Lehre von den höchsten Seinsformen und damit die Physik als den erhabensten Gegenstand und sozusagen als die letzte Weihe der Philosophie angesehen, ein andermal zog er die eigentliche Bestimmung und den Zweck der Philosophie: die Lebenshilfe für den Menschen, in den Mittelpunkt seiner Betrachtung und stellte somit die Ethik als Ziel der Philosophie hin'.

¹⁴ Annas 1993, 159-179, with reference to earlier literature on the question. For the following see especially pp.159-165, 173ff.

Knowledge of physics did not influence the content of moral rules, nor one's motivation for being virtuous: 'nothing can be added by the cosmic perspective except a deepened grasp of the significance of Stoic ethics as part of a wider world-view' (1993, 166). The situation was different for the later Stoics, Annas argues: the idea that man is part of a larger whole did have ethical implications for them.¹⁵

Several scholars have reacted to Annas' position by saying that, on the contrary, Stoic ethics and physics were intertwined.¹⁶ The Ciceronian passages mentioned above show that it does indeed seem difficult to deny the Stoics' intention to consider physics a basis for ethics.¹⁷ However, it is difficult to determine how Stoic physics helped achieve a correct ethical attitude. One may ask to what extent knowledge of physics was required for a good life according to Stoic thought; it has

¹⁵ About the later Stoics see especially p.175-176; cf. what is said about Cleanthes on p.174. It should be borne in mind here that the nature of the texts we possess from later Stoicism differs from what remains of the earlier Stoics. For the idea of 'ethical strategies' deduced from cosmic nature by the later Stoics, compare Chapter 3, section 7. Annas mentions that it is somewhat paradoxical that physics actually seems so little prominent in the moral works of the later Stoic authors. Compare also Todd 1989 (p.1371ff.): 'in these brief observations on individual thinkers I have tried to counter the thesis that in later Stoicism an interest in practical ethics somehow precluded knowledge of, and interest in, physical theory' (p.1375).

¹⁶ The discussion is mentioned in Betegh 2003, 273ff. Besides Betegh, reactions are found in B. Inwood's review of Annas' book, *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995), 647-666, and in J.M. Cooper, 'Eudaimonism, the appeal to nature and "moral duty" in Stoicism', in S. Engstrom and J. Whiting (eds.), *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, Cambridge 1996, 261-284. The discussion largely focuses on the Stoic maxim of living in accordance with nature. Betegh 2003, 278ff. points to the relevance of a passage from Plato's *Timaeus* (90b 1-d 7) for the understanding of the relation between ethics and physics in Stoicism (and, more specifically, for the Stoic idea of living according to nature). Among other things, he mentions the epistemological doctrine that the knower becomes like the known (pp.280-281).

¹⁷ Annas also argues against the idea that one of the Ciceronian passages I mentioned, *De finibus* 3.72-73, shows that there was a physical basis for ethical theories. In his review of her book, Inwood (as mentioned in my previous note, pp.657-659) reacts to this point.

been suggested that in fact such knowledge was not necessary.¹⁸ Betegh states that the amount of physical knowledge that was considered essential for ethics is uncertain.¹⁹ He argues that it was not so much a strict knowledge of physics which was required, but rather an ‘awareness of the rationality, teleology, and providentiality of cosmic divine rationality as it manifests itself in the constitution and functioning of terrestrial living beings, and, further, the understanding of how human rational action can be in accordance with, mirror, and promote this cosmic rationality’.²⁰

Thus, next to the idea that physics did not provide a foundation for Stoic ethics, but only a larger background against which it may be understood (Annas), there is the idea that physics does provide a basis for ethics, but only in the general sense of an awareness of one’s affinity with cosmic rationality (Betegh). The two theories do not seem to me to differ much from each other. In any case, they both show that it is somewhat problematic to substantiate the Stoics’ belief that knowledge of the world contributed to a moral aim.

This discussion is of importance for the understanding of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, since it shows that the problematic character of the foundation of ethical questions in physics is not restricted to this work, but can be considered characteristic of Stoic philosophy in general. See section 1.5 below for a short assessment of the *Naturales Quaestiones* in this context.

¹⁸ See White 1985.

¹⁹ 2003, especially pp.298-299 (cf. p.292): ‘a clear grasp on the fundamental causal structure of the cosmos, and thus a fair degree of physics and cosmology, is certainly indispensable for the understanding of the goodness and teleology of the world. It is not entirely obvious, however, whether the Stoic sage is supposed to be able to give a teleological account of each particular phenomenon’. Betegh also refers to G.B. Kerferd, ‘What does the wise man know?’, in J.M. Rist (ed.), *The Stoics*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978, 125-136.

²⁰ P.299. Cf. also p.300: ‘for the Stoics...the cognitive basis of the wise person’s rational ethical disposition is the understanding of the functioning of the cosmic divine rationality and the reflection on the relationship between cosmic and human rationality’.

1.4 Cicero, *De republica* 1.15ff.: the ancient debate

A passage from Book 1 of Cicero's *De republica* (1.15ff., unfortunately a fragmentary passage) also contributes to a better understanding of the philosophical context of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. At the beginning of *De republica*, a natural phenomenon – two suns have been seen simultaneously in the sky – is proposed as the subject for a preliminary discussion.²¹ In the course of the discussion, different opinions about inquiries into such (natural) phenomena are expressed: positive and negative remarks alternate. This shows that there was an ongoing discussion about natural philosophy in Rome. The attitude towards this part of philosophy was less positive than appears from the statements of the philosophical schools mentioned above.

Some reserve towards the study of natural phenomena soon becomes apparent in the discussion. One of the speakers, Scipio, desires the presence of Panaetius, who is familiar with the subject of natural philosophy. However, he adds that Panaetius is a bit too confident about subjects 'the nature of which we can barely guess through conjecture'; he speaks about them as if he could see them clearly (ch.15). Scipio adds that Socrates, who had abandoned the study of nature, was wiser, since the subject was too complex to be understood by the human mind or else did not affect man's life. Here two main arguments against the study of nature appear: the fact that it is too complicated for man and too remote from moral or social questions.²²

After an interruption, the discussion is taken up again in chapters 19-20, where some more objections against the inquiry into natural phenomena are expressed, followed by positive reactions. A participant (Laelius) asks the rhetorical question: 'is everything that pertains more directly to man already clear, if the heavens form

²¹ This phenomenon (*parhelia*) is also discussed by Seneca in the *NQ* (1.11.2-3). This passage in *De republica* is a fine example of a preliminary discussion that is not directly connected with the subject of the dialogue, but only attached to it (a procedure discussed in Chapter 1).

²² At this point, the discussion goes on to the fact that, though Socrates was known not to occupy himself with other than ethical matters, in Plato's works he is depicted in a different manner.

the subject of our inquiry?’ Again the idea that moral or social matters are more important than natural philosophy appears. Laelius’ argument is truly ‘Socratic’: in the passage from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we saw that this was one of the reproaches Socrates made to those who wanted to study nature.

The answer to Laelius’ question mentions the Stoic idea that the world is our *domus*; we should have knowledge of this ‘home’, common to men and gods, which concerns us. Ignorance of the world implies ignorance of great questions. Another argument is added: such knowledge is a pleasure (*omnisque avidos sapientiae cognitio ipsa rerum consideratioque delectat*). This reasoning is accepted by Laelius, who agrees with such a study – in one’s free time (*non impedio, praesertim quoniam feriati sumus*). The study of nature is a proper occupation for holidays (only). Another positive argument appears in chapter 20, when the study of nature is said to provide knowledge about ethical matters, too (it is a science ‘without which no one can know what belongs to him and what does not’).

In the next part of the text, one of the participants speaks about a *sphaera*, a rotating mechanism representing the sun, the moon and the five planets. This discussion probably leads to an explanation of the phenomenon of the two suns; however, the rest of the text is missing. The discussion resurfaces at a point where two interesting examples of the practical utility of the knowledge of physics are recounted (chs.23-25). Scipio relates how fear and superstition befell an army at the occurrence of an eclipse of the moon. The day following the eclipse, Scipio’s father, a commanding officer in the army, explained that it need not cause fear and superstition, since it was a natural phenomenon occurring at certain intervals (*nullum esse prodigium idque et tum factum esse et certis temporibus esse semper futurum*). In spite of another gap in the text, we hear that this elimination of fear through *ratio* was successful. The explanation was not an unnecessary show of learning (again, some reserve against knowledge of physics is apparent): it succeeded in removing the soldiers’ fear (ch.24).

In chapter 25, a second anecdote about an army’s fear of the solar eclipse is told; Pericles had also succeeded in explaining to his army that an eclipse was

brought about by natural and necessary causes.²³ These two stories provide evidence for the moral or social function of the knowledge of nature, which serves to take away the fear caused by certain natural phenomena.

After another lacuna in the text there follows a speech by Scipio in favour of the study of nature (chs.26-29).²⁴ Scipio here voices a thought that will also appear in the *Somnium Scipionis*, later on in *De republica*: human matters seem different when they are viewed from the perspective of the universe. When one has seen the greatness of the divine sphere the earth appears small. Scipio goes on to praise the person who does not consider terrestrial possessions *bona*. Only such a person has the right to consider everything his property, on the basis of a 'general law of nature' stating that something belongs to the person who makes good use of it (ch.27; compare the reference in 28 to the wise man who wishes for no more riches than nature desires). A more general praise of the wise man follows. The pursuit of theoretical knowledge is part of his activities; it is described as preferable to certain practical activities. The argument in favour of the study of nature here leads to the kind of moral development also found in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.²⁵

In the last part of the discussion (chs.30-32, following another lacuna), a reserved attitude towards the study of nature reappears. Once more the thought that there are matters that more immediately require our attention is brought up. Philosophical study is only allowed in small quantities, and must be restricted to subjects that have a moral or social relevance. The valuation of natural philosophy is not entirely negative, but the speaker is very critical. The only utility granted to the study of nature is that it somewhat sharpens the minds of young people and thus

²³ Compare the account in Plutarch's life of Pericles (ch.35), in which, however, the explanation given by Pericles is less rational. Compare also Seneca, *De beneficiis* 5.6.3-5 (where *beneficia* consisting of philosophical knowledge are contrasted with those of riches), Pliny *NH* 2.54, where the philosophers who have liberated men of fear for eclipses are praised.

²⁴ Earlier, Scipio voiced some arguments against the study of nature (ch.15). An only partially preserved remark at the beginning of ch.26 also seems to indicate a change in Scipio's opinion (*videsne, Africane, quod paulo ante secus tibi videbatur, doc...*).

²⁵ Laelius' reaction to Scipio's speech (at the beginning of ch.30), of which we have only the first words, seems to imply that he agrees with Scipio (and other speakers in favour of natural philosophy), but still...

prepares them for more important questions (*istae quidem artes, si modo aliquid, valent ut paulum acuant et tamquam irritent ingenia puerorum, quo facilius possint maiora discere*). We already encountered this idea in the passage from Isocrates' work mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The discussion ends with a repeated assertion of the greater importance of more evident matters than the study of nature. Not the appearance of two suns, but the situation of the Republic, which is divided into two senates and almost two peoples, is a matter of concern.²⁶ Problems of natural philosophy cannot be solved, or, if they can, they do not make a person better or happier (*aut scire istarum rerum nihil, aut etiamsi maxime sciemus, nec meliores ob eam scientiam nec beatiores esse possumus*).

This text provides important background material for the *Naturales Quaestiones*.²⁷ Different valuations of the study of nature are given. Negative considerations involve the idea that the study of nature does not apply to man or to ethical or social matters, and therefore has no utility. The study of nature is sometimes also called too difficult for human understanding. These ideas already occur in Xenophon's account of Socrates' criticism of the study of nature.

Positive reactions to this criticism state that the study of nature does have a certain relevance; it leads to knowledge of important questions, and specifically to moral knowledge (and corresponding behaviour). The two accounts of an army struck by fear because of an eclipse demonstrate how knowledge of physics can be used to achieve a practical effect on the mind. Thus, this passage provides us with some information about the way in which knowledge of physics was thought to have an ethical relevance (although again the information remains succinct).

Several of these ideas and themes also occur in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. The theme of the elimination of fear of dangerous phenomena through the *ratio* is

²⁶ Thus Cicero connects the preliminary subject, the two suns, to the main question he will discuss, the fear of a division into two senates.

²⁷ The passage does not seem to have been studied from the point of view I am interested in; I did not find any (relevant) literature. See only Mudry 1986 (especially p.82). *De republica* is mentioned by Seneca in *EM* 108.30ff.; we may assume he knew it.

found in *NQ* 2 and 6, where the frightening phenomena of thunder and lightning and the earthquakes are discussed. The moral effect of watching the earth from the perspective of the greatness of heaven is described in the preface to *NQ* 1. In chapter 30 of *De republica*, the only utility that is conceded to the study of nature is that it sharpens the mind and prepares it for more important subjects. This idea also occurs in the *Naturales Quaestiones* (*NQ* 3, preface §18), when Seneca says that the study of nature will exercise the mind in preparation for moral questions. The idea that the study of nature provides pleasure, besides being useful, is found in *NQ* Book 6 (6.4.2). Finally, in the epilogue to *NQ* 7 ideas appear echoing the negative idea that the study of nature is too complicated for man to understand.

The *Naturales Quaestiones*, like the passage from *De republica*, is a reservoir of ethical thought related to the area of physics. Unlike the Ciceronian passage, the attitude towards the study of nature in the *Naturales Quaestiones* is, of course, mainly positive. Cicero's text demonstrates that opinions about the utility of such studies were divided among Roman intellectuals.²⁸

Thus, interestingly the passage from *De republica* shows that the debate in antiquity resembles to some extent the disagreement in modern scholarship on the ethical value of physical research. Cicero's passage concludes with the idea that the study of nature does not make one happier or better. Some modern scholars think that the *Naturales Quaestiones* is an ineffective undertaking, while others have accepted the moral aim of the study of nature. Although there has been disagreement about the effects of the work, its intention seems clear: the author of the *Naturales Quaestiones* was of the opinion that ethics and physics were intertwined.

²⁸ Cicero ends the discussion, as we have seen, with the negative opinion that the study of nature has no utility. We should not necessarily deduce that this idea was prevalent at that time or in Cicero's opinion. It is interesting that Laelius, one of the speakers who are putting forward arguments against the study of nature, is said to excel in this study (ch.20; *pergisne eam, Laeli, artem inludere in qua primum excellis ipse...*). This suggests that the participants in the dialogue are arguing pro and contra the study of physics for the sake of the discussion.

1.5 *The pre-eminence of ethics in Seneca*

In Seneca's philosophical work, too, statements about the relation between physics (and other non-ethical occupations) and ethics are found. Seneca most often states the pre-eminence of ethics over all other occupations. In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, he also speaks of the precedence of physics over ethics, a fact that is not surprising in a work on physics.²⁹ This theme will reappear at several points in my analysis of the work.³⁰

A short discussion of *Epistulae Morales* (EM) 58 and 65 will link Seneca to the line of thought I have traced so far.³¹ Both letters present a discussion of more general philosophical questions not directly related to ethics. Letter 58 discusses the notions of *genus*, *species* and the six Platonic forms of being; letter 65 offers a discussion of the Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic causes.³² In both cases, Seneca asks what the utility is of such subtle and irrelevant argumentations (EM 58.24, 65.15). In his answer to this question, he shows himself to be of the opinion that each subject should have a moral relevance. In *Epistulae Morales* 58, he admits that such a discussion as he has broached at the beginning of the letter does not have a moral use, but provides a rest for tired minds (58.25, cf. 65.17). He further states that it is his avowed task to search for ethical relevance in each subject (58.26); with some difficulty one may find such a relevance in non-ethical subjects, too. Letter 65 also states that discussions of non-ethical subjects may have a moral interest, if they do

²⁹ The importance of physics is also stated elsewhere in Seneca's work: see the description of *philosophia contemplativa* in EM 95.10 (cf. Gauly 2004, 31). The praise of this part of philosophy in this passage is related to the subject of the letter (the theoretical *decreta*).

³⁰ See especially Chapter 7, section 1.1, where I discuss a few passages from the EM showing that for Seneca the moral element prevailed. See also the discussion of the preface to NQ 1, where the Platonic/Stoic aspect of the question is dealt with (Chapter 10, section 2). Donini 1979, followed by Gauly 2004, argues that the moral aspect is not pre-eminent in the NQ.

³¹ These two letters are also discussed in Chapter 10, section 3.2, in connection with the idea of the flight of the mind.

³² Although these discussions do not concern the area of physics in a stricter sense, as found in the NQ, they do discuss more general questions concerning the universe that receive the kind of negative reaction more common with non-ethical subjects (in particular physics).

not go too far and become occupied with too subtle and useless questions (65.16). Moreover, this letter emphasizes that the discussion of greater questions elevates the soul (65.15ff.). Man is a miserable thing if he restricts himself to earthly matters.³³

In both letters, Seneca also gives examples of the lesson man should learn from the disposition of the universe (*EM* 58.29 and 65.23-24). In letter 58, the protection of the world by providence is compared to the position of the human mind as 'providence' for the body. In letter 65, the distinction between *materia* and *deus* is compared to the distinction between body and soul in man.

These letters are thematically related to the ethics-physics discussion described in this chapter. They ask what the relevance is of non-moral matters, and answer that moral relevance should always be sought in everything. Additional arguments such as the idea of a rest or elevation for the mind are also provided. Several themes recur in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. It is further interesting that in each letter an example is given of the (microcosmic) lesson man must learn from the (macrocosmic) universe. This is one of the elements Betegh (2003) mentions as the result of an awareness of the universe.

In the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* some grand ideas are found about the effect of the study of nature, which are in accordance with the ideas mentioned in *Epistulae Morales* 58 and 65 and in the passages assembled in section 2 ('The Hellenistic creed'). However, the manner in which the ideas of the prefaces and epilogues are put in practice in the discussions on physics has been considered unclear. This problem may be related to the state of affairs in Stoic philosophy we have sketched; rather than a specific knowledge of physics, a general awareness of the providential structure of the world seems to have formed the basis of ethics.

The discussion of physical phenomena in the *Naturales Quaestiones* involves many details, and thus provides more knowledge than the vague understanding of the cosmos that was considered necessary for a virtuous attitude, according to several modern studies of Stoic philosophy. One could add that the *Naturales*

³³ In *EM* 65.15, *me prius scrutor, deinde hunc mundum*, indicates that the first subject of investigation is ethics, the second physics.

Quaestiones involves the kind of details that are considered unnecessary knowledge in certain passages of Seneca's work.³⁴

Moreover, in those texts where Seneca mentions physics as a worthwhile occupation, the lists of questions that represent the relevant knowledge of physics – for example: who is the master of the world, where does one's soul come from – do not contain questions on which the *Naturales Quaestiones* focuses (e.g. *EM* 65.19–20, 117.19). If these matters are present at all in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, it is in the background of the work.³⁵

The *Naturales Quaestiones* therefore remains somewhat problematic in this context. In the second part of this chapter, I will give an indication of what Seneca is doing in his discussions of physical phenomena. This, I believe, will clarify to some extent the context of the work's scientific inquiry. While the *Naturales Quaestiones* certainly has an overall ethical aim, the physical discussions can also be said to have their own purpose.

³⁴ See e.g. *De beneficiis* 8.1.5: *licet nescias quae ratio oceanum effundat ac revocet...* This is part of a quotation from Demetrius Cynicus, but Seneca seems to agree with Demetrius. This contradiction led to statements such as that of Bonhöffer, who speaks of a 'Bekehrung Senecas zur Naturwissenschaft als Selbstzweck' in the *NQ* (1894, 125). I. Hadot 1969, 116 n.85 rejects Bonhöffer's idea. She uses the *De beneficiis* passage (in n.83, p.116) to argue that Seneca only occupies himself with a certain part of physics, that is, with grandiose natural phenomena. This idea does not seem applicable to the *NQ*, however; see also Taub 2003, 142, 161 about the details of Seneca's discussions, and the relevance of this fact for the understanding of the *NQ*.

³⁵ Cf. Gauly 2004, 33. I am therefore not certain whether I agree with the following statement: 'wenn er sich wie in den *Quaestiones naturales* auf die Erklärung einiger Naturerscheinungen wie Blitz, Donner, Kometen einläßt, so befaßt er sich hier mit den ganz großen Erscheinungen der Natur, die durch ihre Erhabenheit geeignet sind, den menschlichen Geist zu ihrer Größe hinaufzuziehen...' (I. Hadot 1969, 116). It must be added that the Stoic formula of living according to nature (an important thought in the physics-ethics question) does not occur either in the *NQ*. The absence of this formula has been used as an argument for the Platonic character of the *NQ* by Donini 1979, 219f., followed by Gauly 2004, 93, cf. 167.

2. *Science and philosophy: the Naturales Quaestiones as naturalis philosophia*

2.1 *Epistulae Morales 88*

For Seneca as for others, ethics was the predominant part of philosophy. Philosophical knowledge aimed at providing advice for living a good life; it was an *ars vitae*. In this context, the attention that should be given to other, more specialized knowledge without direct relevance to this practical aim, was restricted, as we already noticed in Xenophon's rendering of Socrates' view. The sciences were given a role dependent on philosophy, as propedeutic knowledge.³⁶

Epistulae Morales 88 is a clear testimony to the pre-eminence of ethical philosophy over the sciences, in the 'Socratic tradition'.³⁷ The main argument of the letter is that the sciences (*studia liberalia*), such as grammar, music, geometry and astronomy, are not relevant to man's moral goodness.³⁸ They only have a propedeutic function: their (restricted) utility does not affect virtue. Seneca gives many examples of the same thought, using word play to drive home his point. Thus, he speaks accusingly about the interest people take in the wandering Ulysses rather than to undertake an

³⁶ Cf. Dihle 1985 and 1990. The restriction to (morally) useful knowledge is often considered a Roman element (like the restriction to practically useful knowledge); see for instance Mudry 1986, who argues that the Romans added 'conscience' to 'science'. However, it was clearly also a more general evolution in philosophical thought. An intriguing case of a scientist's statement of the ethical goal of his work is found in the preface to Hero of Alexandria's (mid-1st century AD) *Belopoeica*, a treatise on the construction of war engines. Hero begins his work by mentioning that the most important part of philosophical study is that which is concerned with tranquillity of mind (*ἀταραξία*), about which much research has been done. Reasoning (*λόγοι*) will never provide a solution to this question: there is a better way to obtain a tranquil life, i.e. through the construction of war machines, Hero argues. This seems a somewhat ironical adaptation of the philosophers' ideas about the pre-eminence of ethics. About the *Belopoeica* see Mansfeld 1998, 49-50, Cuomo 2002.

³⁷ On this letter see Stückelberger 1965.

³⁸ Argued mainly in the first part of the letter until §23; also 88.29- 32.

effort to combat their own moral erring (*quaeris, Ulixes ubi erraverit, potius quam efficias, ne nos semper erremus?*, §7). Similarly, geometry will teach you what a straight line is; but what is the use, if you do not know what is ‘straight’ in life (*scis, quae recta sit linea: quid tibi prodest, si, quid in vita rectum sit, ignoras?*, §13). Seneca calls philosophy the true ‘liberal art’, since it is the only occupation that affects virtue and frees man.³⁹

Similar examples of the comparison of the *artes* to philosophy (and the difference between the two) are found in other passages. In Diogenes Laertius, the Cynic philosopher Diogenes is represented as reproaching people that although they take some pain to achieve unimportant goals, they do not make any effort to be good persons (6.27).⁴⁰ Some of the comparisons Diogenes uses also occur in letter 88 (testifying to the fact that both authors are part of a similar discourse): Diogenes also mentions Ulysses’ wanderings. Also, he wonders about the fact that musicians tune their instruments, but leave their souls untuned: this is comparable to Seneca’s statement in *EM* 88.9.

Diogenes Laertius also mentions the fact that mathematicians look at the sun and the moon, but do not see the matters that are within one’s reach. This example does not occur in *Epistulae Morales* 88. However, Seneca does mention the astronomer, the specialist on heavenly phenomena and their meaning for human life (*EM* 88.14, the person ‘who boasts his knowledge of the heavenly bodies’).

³⁹ In §21-23, Seneca takes over the division of the *artes* into four categories made by Posidonius. At the lowest level are the *artes vulgares*, necessary for human life; they are followed by the *artes ludicrae*, which are related to the pleasure of eye and ear. Then come the already mentioned *artes liberales*; philosophy is called the true ‘liberal art’. For a correct understanding of this passage see Kidd 1978, 8-9 (who also refers to earlier misunderstandings).

⁴⁰ See also 2.33, about Socrates.

2.2 *The Naturales Quaestiones and Epistulae Morales* 88

Having sketched this situation of sciences subservient to a master (ethical) philosophy, it seems understandable that one should want to ask about the place of the *Naturales Quaestiones* in this picture. Dihle has done so. He establishes that for Seneca, as appears from *Epistulae Morales* 88, the (natural) sciences were propedeutic sciences and the ethical aim was all-important. Dihle finds certain works of Seneca problematic in this context: they are not consistent with his ideas about the relationship between philosophy and sciences.⁴¹ This concerns the works about ‘natural sciences’: besides Seneca’s lost treatises about India and Egypt, Dihle also points to the extant *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁴²

The main problematic point in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, according to Dihle, concerns the manner in which knowledge is described. Indeed, Dihle argues that the concept of philosophy as an *ars vitae* was based on a fixed amount of knowledge.⁴³ The sciences provided a definite knowledge that could be used for philosophical aims, such as the establishment of a rule for living. There was a certain tension between philosophy and the sciences on this point, since science worked with a concept of knowledge in progress.

Dihle shows that in *NQ* Book 7 knowledge is described as something that is not yet complete.⁴⁴ This concept of knowledge was more usual in scientific than philosophical thought. As a solution for the contradiction between the ‘scientific’ *Naturales Quaestiones* and the requirements of philosophy, Dihle mentions that

⁴¹ ‘Es gibt nun eine Reihe von Traktaten im Gesamtwerk Senecas...die zu dem Bild, das wir von seiner Meinung über das Verhältnis zwischen Philosophie und Fachwissenschaften gewonnen haben, nicht so recht passen wollen’ (1990, 87).

⁴² Seneca is also supposed to have written on the nature of fishes and stones. He moreover produced a treatise on earthquakes as a young man (*NQ* 6.4.2), and a work on the form of the cosmos (Cassiodorus *Inst.* 2.6.4). For a list of the lost works see, e.g., Codoñer’s edition of the *NQ*, p.xxviii n.2 and especially Lausberg 1989, 1926-1937, who argues that the existence of complete works *De lapidum natura* and *De piscium natura* is not very certain; we only have a few quotations concerning these subjects.

⁴³ See, besides Dihle 1990, also his 1985 contribution.

⁴⁴ On pp.88-89; see especially *NQ* 7.25.

the inquiry into nature also had a religious aspect: it led to knowledge of god.⁴⁵ This makes Seneca's attention to the study of nature understandable.

Thus, the *Naturales Quaestiones* may give us the idea that Seneca was rather more interested in the sciences than would seem reasonable from the point of view of *Epistulae Morales* 88. Partly in reaction to Dihle 1990, and partly because it is a question of a more general interest, I will try to further determine the situation of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. I do not think we should place this work among the natural sciences, as opposed to philosophy.⁴⁶ We should distinguish between mathematical sciences such as astronomy and geometry, which are considered inferior to ethics in the first part of letter 88, and natural philosophy: the letter provides evidence for such a distinction. Indeed, in §24ff. Seneca makes a distinction between the natural part of philosophy and the natural sciences. This passage provides information that is of interest for the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁴⁷

In the first part of letter 88, Seneca had been distinguishing the *artes* from philosophy. In §24, he introduces an anonymous interlocutor who expresses the polemical idea that the *artes liberales* are part of philosophy, on the basis of the relationship between the sciences and philosophy in the area of natural philosophy. In this way, the anonymous objector introduces the subject of natural philosophy in

⁴⁵ On pp. 90-91. Again, this is especially noticeable in *NQ* 7: cf. the discussion in Chapter 9.

⁴⁶ It will not be possible to say anything about the situation of Seneca's lost works. Neither will I pursue here Dihle's 1990 main point, the notion of a fixed amount of knowledge at the basis of philosophy as *ars vitae*, in opposition to the 'open' knowledge of the sciences. As regards Seneca's view on this problem, I tend to agree with the possibility Dihle formulates p.90: 'es ist schwer zu sagen...ob ihm die Tragweite seiner Einsichten und ihre Unvereinbarkeit mit der für ihn maßgebenden philosophischen Tradition gar nicht klar wurde'.

⁴⁷ Cf. also Cattin 1960 (especially p.327-238) for a correct valuation of *EM* 88 in relation to the *NQ*. Cattin argues that Seneca is interested in the sciences from a philosophical point of view. Dihle is certainly aware of a distinction between natural sciences and natural philosophy (see e.g. 1990, 87), but does not seem to view the *NQ* as natural philosophy. On p.91 he seems to equate the study of nature only with the astronomy mentioned in *EM* 88.14.

the discussion. When discussing *naturales quaestiones*, he argues, one proceeds with the aid of geometry; geometry is therefore a part of (natural) philosophy. In his reaction to (and rejection of) this idea Seneca describes (his view on) the relationship between natural philosophy and the science of geometry (§25-28).

He states that geometry is necessary to natural philosophy without being part of it. Both disciplines have their limits: the philosopher searches for the causes of the phenomena, whereas the mathematician measures them.⁴⁸ The philosopher knows the *ratio*, the force and the nature of celestial phenomena: the mathematician assembles evidence about their movements. To this example involving celestial phenomena Seneca adds other examples concerning mirrors and the sun. The philosopher knows why mirrors reflect images, whereas the mathematician can inform you of details such as the various types of images reflected by various forms of mirrors. Again, the philosopher will prove that the sun is large: the mathematician will determine its size.

Thus, the philosopher and the mathematician focus on different subject matters, the mathematician being especially concerned with measurements.⁴⁹ In §27-28, Seneca adds that the mathematician proceeds through practice and experience. However, to go on, he needs *principia*: philosophy is an independent activity, but mathematics needs basic principles from which to take its point of departure.

The *Naturales Quaestiones* discusses *naturales quaestiones*, the area of research indicated in *EM* 88.24.⁵⁰ If we must decide whether Seneca is acting as a *geometres*

⁴⁸ *Sapiens enim causas naturalium et quaerit et novit, quorum numeros mensurasque geometres persequitur et supputat.*

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the philosopher's knowledge is characterized in words that indicate definite knowledge. The *sapiens* knows (*quaerit et novit, scit*), whereas the mathematician calculates and assembles evidence (*persequitur et supputat, colligit*).

⁵⁰ About the title of the *NQ* see Vottero's edition, introduction pp.19-20, Codoñer 1989, 1779ff. (with a discussion of the term *quaestio*), and Hine 1981, 24-29, with p.27 the cautious remark that the assumption that the title given to the work in the manuscripts was Seneca's own is not entirely certain. However, even if this was not the title of the work, as said above, *naturales quaestiones* are certainly what is discussed in the *NQ*. The combination of words appears a few times in classical texts (cf. Vottero, as mentioned

or as a *sapiens*, a natural philosopher, in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, it seems to me that his undertaking corresponds to the activity of the philosopher as described in this passage from *Epistulae Morales* 88. In each book of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Seneca is establishing the causes of natural phenomena, as is the philosopher's task.

We see a more specific indication of Seneca's position in *NQ* Book 1, where he explains the functioning of the rainbow through mirroring, and speaks about the activity of the *geometres* with a certain distance. He is discussing the way a rainbow appears and uses the theories of the mathematician in his argumentation. The mathematician's reasoning is qualified as something that does not persuade but force acquiescence; the explanation of the rainbow to which this reasoning leads is accepted without any doubt (1.4.1). Seneca also states that his argumentation cannot do without the mathematician's help, which is again characterized as leaving no doubt (1.5.13).⁵¹ Thus, Seneca needs the reasoning of the *geometrae* to establish his theory about the rainbow (in *EM* 88.25 he also says that their work is necessary for natural philosophy); he is not a *geometres* himself.

2.3 Natural philosophy versus mathematical sciences

The passage from *Epistulae Morales* 88 I have discussed fits into a larger context. It is part of a discussion about the respective working areas of natural philosophy and the mathematical sciences. Evidence for such a distinction is found already in the work of Aristotle.⁵² Among the passages that mention a difference between the scientist and the natural philosopher, an important parallel for letter 88 is found in a

above): see Cicero *Partitiones oratoriae* 64, Vitruvius *De architectura* 1.1.7, Quintilian 1.4.4, 7.2.7, Apuleius *Apologia* 36.

⁵¹ *Rationes quae non persuadent sed cogunt a geometris afferuntur, nec dubium cuiquam relinquitur quin arcus imago solis sit male expressi ob vitium figuramque speculi* (1.4.1); *hoc probari nisi geometrae adiuverint non potest, qui argumentis nihil dubii relinquentibus docent solis illam esse effigiem non similem* (1.5.13).

⁵² See *Physica* 2.2, 193b23ff., *Metaphysica* 981a-b. Besides Dihle 1985, see about the subject of philosophy vs. science Kidd 1978 and Stückelberger 1965, 55ff.

fragment of Posidonius' work.⁵³ This passage mentions the same distinction between the natural philosopher (*physicus*) and the scientist in the investigation of natural phenomena as does Seneca's letter 88. The philosopher investigates the causes and nature of the phenomena, whereas the scientist is concerned with aspects in which measurements are involved. Posidonius adds that philosopher and scientist sometimes undertake to prove the same point; they do so by different routes, however. Moreover, the scientist receives his principles from the natural philosopher, who will for example instruct him on the nature of certain phenomena. Because of this important testimony, the question of the relationship between natural philosophy and science has been studied especially in connection with Posidonius.⁵⁴

Other passages testify to a wider spread of the idea of a distinction between philosophy and science. At the beginning of his discussion of Stoic physics, Diogenes Laertius also makes a distinction between mathematicians and philosophers (7.132-133). Within the part of physics that studies the cosmos, certain questions concern the mathematician, too. Other issues are reserved for the natural philosopher. Likewise, in the part of physics occupied with causation, the mathematicians take part in the explanation of different phenomena. This concerns

⁵³ Fragment 18 in the edition of Posidonius' fragments by Edelstein-Kidd (1972):

Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physica* 2.2, p.291.21-292.31 Diels. Kidd gives a detailed commentary on the passage in 1988, 129-136 (see also 1978, 10-11). The Posidonian fragment offers more details about the relation between scientist and philosopher than do other passages.

⁵⁴ Besides the fact that he is known to have had a great interest in causation (see Strabo 2.3.8, a passage contrasting the geographer to a natural philosopher, cf. *EM*95.65), Posidonius has moreover been thought to have had great influence in antiquity. Because of the similarity with F 18 EK, *EM*88.24ff. has also been included among the fragments of Posidonius' work. It constitutes fragment 90 EK: the fragment begins in paragraph 21, with the enumeration of the different categories of *artes*, explicitly attributed to Posidonius, followed by the passage on the distinction between natural philosopher and scientist. It is not possible to discuss here the extent of Posidonius' influence on Seneca in this question. The few remarks in modern research about the relation of this subject to Seneca's *NQ* have been made in connection with the idea of Posidonius as source of the *NQ* (see Maurach 1987, 317-318, Oder 1899, 295).

such phenomena as discussed in the *Naturales Quaestiones*: clouds, thunder, rainbows, halos, comets and the like.⁵⁵

We also find an echo of the distinction between science and philosophy in the criticism of the Stoics voiced in Cicero's *Academica* (2.116ff.). During the discussion of the Stoics' theories *de natura rerum*, the subject of the cooperation between natural philosopher and scientist comes up.⁵⁶ From this passage, too, it appears that the demonstrations of the mathematicians are used by Stoic philosophers to argue their point. The speaker also mentions *illa initia mathematicorum*, without which the *geometrae* are not allowed to do anything:⁵⁷ these seem to be the *principia* mentioned in *EM* 88.27-28.

The speaker's criticism takes the demonstration of the sun as an example: when the *geometres*, on the basis of the *initia mathematicorum* given to him, has established the magnitude of the sun through drawings etc., the philosopher must accept this. The Academic spokesman remarks that this shows contempt for the sun, which the Stoic philosopher (also) regards as a god. This criticism points to the difficulty of combining a purely physical and a theological approach of the sun. However, if the Stoic philosopher does not agree with the mathematician, he will *a fortiori* not believe the arguments of his fellow-philosophers. This criticism demonstrates that the method combining the work of scientist and philosopher was generally used in Stoic natural philosophy.

⁵⁵ Other subjects that are mentioned, i.e. the explanation of vision and the cause of the reflection in the mirror, do not occur in the *NQ*. On this last point, Diogenes Laertius gives a less precise rendering than we find in *EM* 88, which carefully distinguishes between the respective explanations of the phenomenon of mirroring given by a natural philosopher and a mathematician.

⁵⁶ The same formula as in *NQ* 1.4.1 is used to describe the *geometrae*: *geometrae... qui se profitentur non persuadere sed cogere, et qui omnia vobis quae describunt probant*.

⁵⁷ For example the definition of a point: cf. Philo, *De congressu eruditionis gratia* 146-147, who mentions that, as is generally known, the *artes* reach conclusions on the basis of philosophy's initial decisions. For example (concerning the area of geometry): geometry has discovered various kinds of geometrical figures. However, the nature of a point, a line (etc.), that is, the basis of all those geometrical figures, is provided by philosophy.

It seems clear that the *Naturales Quaestiones* was intended to be a work of natural philosophy, which made use of the results of the scientists.⁵⁸ Some researchers have indeed regarded the *Naturales Quaestiones* as such, especially in contrast to Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*.⁵⁹ This categorization places the work in a context and makes it an example of Stoic physics, a remnant of a mostly lost genre.⁶⁰

2.4 *The philosopher at work*

It would be profitable to study the *Naturales Quaestiones* from the point of view that has just been sketched, as a work of natural philosophy. This undertaking does not, however, fall within the scope of the present study. I will therefore only give a short example of how Seneca, in his role of natural philosopher, solves *naturales quaestiones*. My aim is to give a general impression of how the physical parts of the work may be understood, before I begin the more detailed study of the moral parts.

A good example of the philosopher's inquiry into the causes of a phenomenon is found in Book 3 of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Seneca there investigates the origin (or causes) of terrestrial water (i.e. the water of the rivers); in the passage at the end of the book, the causes of the flood that will destroy the world are also

⁵⁸ Cf. the clear, though short, discussion in Cambiano 1999, 410-412. The fact that Seneca is thinking in terms of natural philosophy, not science, also appears from §1 of the preface to *NQ* 1. My argument in this chapter proceeds from the physical inquiry.

⁵⁹ See Gigon 1966, 39 (*NQ*) and 42 ('kein Zweifel: Plinius versteht sich als Wissenschaftler und nicht als Philosoph'); cf. Codoñer 1989, 1782, with a reference to *EM* 88.26-27. At *NH* 11.8, Pliny states: *nobis propositum est naturas rerum manifestas indicare, non causas indagare dubias*. He clearly distances himself from the task of the natural philosopher.

⁶⁰ Todd 1989, 1368-1371 also discusses Cleomedes' work on cosmology, on the basis of F 18 EK, as a sample of Stoic physics. Kidd 1978, 11 says that whereas some material has been preserved about the scientist's point of view, less is known about the natural philosopher. Perhaps Papirius Fabianus, with his *Causae naturales* (not preserved), was Seneca's predecessor in the genre (a teacher of Seneca, he is thought to have been one of the sources of the *NQ*; cf. Gross 1989, 144). Hine 1981, 29 cautions us: 'it is hazardous to regard this particular work of Fabianus as a model for the *NQ*'. See perhaps also *NQ* 6.17.3, about Asclepiodotus (although the text is not sound: cf. Hine 1981, 24-27).

inquired into. I will present a more detailed discussion of the flood (with reference to the theories formulated in the main part of Book 3) in Chapter 5 (The end of Book 3). For the purposes of this chapter a short summary will suffice.

In the course of Book 3, Seneca discusses the opinions of different philosophers on the origin of terrestrial water, before giving his own opinion on the matter. His solution to the question lies in the basic rule of the four elements and their interchanging (formulated in *NQ* 3.10 and 3.12). This solution is also applied to the inquiry into the causes of the flood: it shows that Seneca solves the *quaestio* by referring to a basic tenet of his philosophical school – rather than, for instance, by knowledge arisen out of observation. Since the four elements were thought to form the basis of everything that exists, the origin of the water in the rivers was also traced back to them. Seneca's manner of solving the inquiry into the origin of terrestrial water (by referring to a basic philosophical principle), corresponds to the manner in which natural philosophers seems to have proceeded, by explaining specific *quaestiones* in accordance with their convictions about the universe.⁶¹

This short example helps us to realize that the physical parts of the *Naturales Quaestiones* had a goal of their own, and thus contributes to an understanding of what Seneca could have wanted to argue in this work.⁶² The specific aim of the

⁶¹ In his commentary on F 18 EK, Kidd argues that the method of the philosopher, in contrast to that of the scientist, is deductive: 'the philosopher argues deductively from his fundamental universal principles or axioms' (1988, 131, cf. 1978, 10, 12). Cf. Dihle 1985, 189-191: 'es steht zu vermuten, dass Poseidonios mit der scharfen Trennung zwischen deduktiver, von Grundwahrheiten ausgehender Argumentation des Philosophen und induktiver, von der Einzelbeobachtung ausgehender Hypothesenbildung des Fachwissenschaftlers sich durchaus in den Bahnen seiner Schule bewegte' (p.191). Parroni 1989, 475 calls Seneca's method in the *NQ* deductive (cf. Parroni 2000, 443); experimentalism is sometimes added to this deductive method. In the introduction to his edition of the *NQ*, Parroni rather puts the accent on Seneca's experimentalism, speaking of a 'deductive experimentalism' (p.xv).

⁶² Although it must be admitted that this cannot be seen equally clearly in each book of the *NQ*. Here further research is required. The context I have sketched for the *NQ* is a theoretical framework; it is more complicated to explain the practice than the theory.

physical discussions stands next to the moral aim of the work.⁶³ Seneca was determining the causes of several natural phenomena. He did this as a (Stoic) philosopher, often finding the solution to the natural *quaestiones* in the basic tenet of the four elements. Such an observation is not unimportant, especially when one takes into consideration the remarks that have been made about the *Naturales Quaestiones* as a work in which the physical inquiry lacks a clear intent, since it was written by a moralist.⁶⁴

My short inquiry into Seneca's method in the *Naturales Quaestiones* may now also serve to understand an earlier observation made about the work. In her study of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Stahl has paid much attention to the question of the relation between the scientific and ethical parts of the work. In this context, she has also pointed to the appearance of 'ethical' thoughts in the discussions of natural phenomena.⁶⁵ With this term, she refers to reasoning led by 'ethical' presuppositions rather than strict reasoning. As Stahl says, the 'Weltanschauung' of the philosopher determines what is said about a phenomenon ('...[it results] daß das Kriterium der möglichen Wahrheit einer naturwissenschaftlichen These letztlich von der "richtigen" Weltanschauung herzuleiten und an dieser zu messen sei', 1964, 294). Among the passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones* in which she sees Seneca's 'Weltanschauung' presiding over the reasoning, Stahl mentions the argumentation in Book 3 I have just spoken of.⁶⁶ We have indeed seen that a basic principle of Seneca's philosophical world view, the interaction of the four elements,

⁶³ Compare Cambiano 1999, 429: 'il testo di Seneca è attraversato continuamente da questa doppia esigenza, di ottenere effetti etici positivi attraverso la contemplazione e di garantire a essa, al tempo stesso, una propria autofinalità'.

⁶⁴ There has indeed been a tendency in modern scholarship to state that Seneca's moralizing aims prevented the development and quality of the 'science' in the *NQ*. See e.g. Grilli 1992, Capponi 1996; cf. Rosenmeyer 2000, 109-110. Compare the remarks of earlier researchers (Schanz-Hosius and Oder) mentioned in Chapter 4, section 2.7.

⁶⁵ 1960, 205-223, 1964, 294ff.

⁶⁶ 1960, 209; 1964, 295.

determines his opinion on the origin of terrestrial water. However, we should speak about this in other terms than as ‘ethical’ thoughts in the physical discussion.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The distinction Stahl makes (as others do) between ‘naturphilosophisch’ and ‘naturwissenschaftlich’ (e.g. 1964, 296) may be retained.

CHAPTER THREE

HORTATORY TEXTS

1. *Introduction*

The tenor of the prefaces and epilogues of Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* is mainly moral, like the rest of his work. The prefaces and epilogues tend to give an impression that could, with a negative qualification, be described as 'moralistic rambling'. From a more objective point of view, these texts have for example been said to display the characteristics of a *declamatio*. This qualification refers to a text with a low level of argumentation and a high use of rhetorical means.¹ The main purpose of this chapter will be to provide a context in which to understand the nature of these texts.

The preaching character of Seneca's work has been related to the phenomenon of the diatribe.² This is defined by Griffin as 'a popular philosophical discourse invented by Bion the Borysthenite, devoted usually to a single moral theme and aimed at a wider circle than school philosophy, being loose in structure and characterized by a pointed style, vivid imagery, and colloquialisms' (1976, 13). Moral themes, a loose structure, a pointed style and vivid imagery are all found in Seneca. The themes he discusses correspond to what have been considered diatribic themes by Oltramare, in his study of the diatribe (1926, 43ff.). A specific

¹ Gross 1989, 235 uses the term for the epilogue to *NQ* 5. Negative views on such texts have existed from antiquity. For an example of criticism of the *declamatio* see Seneca maior (preface to the ninth *Controversia*, §1-2): declamation is said to leave out argumentation in favour of what will attract the pleasure of the reader. About Seneca and others Fronto said that their major fault was the repetition of the same thought in different forms (p.154 Van den Hout). Cf. on Fronto Moretti 1995, 193-194.

² Cf. Tietze Larson 1992, 49. This has also been the case for Marcus Aurelius' *Meditationes*: see Rutherford 1989, 21-22. See also Kenney 1971, 17ff. on the diatribe, in connection with Lucretius.

element that is thought to belong to the tradition of the diatribe is the fictive interlocutor or opponent, appearing at certain points in Seneca's work.³

Trillitzsch, in his work *Seneca's Beweisführung*, is one of those who trace such elements to the tradition of the diatribe.⁴ This form of philosophy, as he explains, aims at achieving an immediate effect on the listener by the use of strong rhetorical means:

Dieser popularphilosophische Predigtstil kennt keine eigentliche Beweisführung, da er auf persönliche Überzeugung der Hörers und auf die praktische Anwendung der betreffenden Lehren hinarbeitet. Für ihn handelt es sich nicht darum, durch langsames Nachdenken sein Publikum philosophische Sätze gewinnen zu lassen, sondern er arbeitet mit feststehenden Wahrheiten, durch die er unmittelbar beeindrucken will (1962, 20).

The idea of a philosophy that aims at producing an effect on the student is indeed applicable to Seneca's work. However, as Tietze Larson points out, it is possible to trace the 'diatribic' characteristics in Seneca to his own environment and time, without the need to refer to a (previous) diatribic tradition.⁵ I will follow this line of inquiry. Indeed, my interest lies in obtaining a clearer view of the form and aim of Seneca's text, rather than to investigate its sources. In this way, and regardless whether one wishes to relate it to the tradition of the diatribe or not, an image is formed of Seneca's philosophical writing as trying to achieve a certain, practical goal through a parenetic text form.⁶

³ See Trillitzsch 1962, 20, Griffin 1976, 13, Kenney 1971, 18, Stork 1970, 14. More about the interlocutor/Lucilius in Chapter 6, section 2.1.

⁴ 1962, 18ff. ('Die kynisch-stoische Popularphilosophie und ihre Praxis').

⁵ 1992, 49-50, 56. Moreover, the phenomenon of the diatribe (and Seneca's relation to it) is far from straightforward: see Tietze Larson 1992, 49-50, Trillitzsch 1962, 21, Griffin 1976, 13-14. For an attempt to discern the influence of the diatribe in a moralizing text resembling that of Seneca see B.P. Wallach, *Lucretius and the diatribe against the fear of death: De rerum natura III 830-1094*, Leiden 1976 (Mnemosyne suppl. 40).

⁶ The following researchers also deal with the subject of this chapter: Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 45-46, Codoñer 1997, who also mentions that indications are found in Seneca's work of the risks involved in the use of the parenetic form of philosophy (p.300), Tietze Larson

2. *How philosophy should not be practised*

In this respect it appears that the Stoics did not provide an example Seneca wanted to follow.⁷ Indeed, he criticizes them for their ineffective style.⁸ Such criticism is also found in Cicero's work. The early Stoic philosophers are characterized as having a style that only tickles the audience, but does not reach them. Those who are listening to a Stoic philosopher are not changed: therefore, this form of philosophy remains ineffective, however important its lessons may be (Cicero, *De finibus* 4.7).⁹ Such testimonies are important since they also indicate what Cicero and Seneca wanted philosophical instruction to achieve: a change within the listener or reader.

1992, Traina 1978, Trillitzsch 1962, Husner 1924, I. Hadot 1969, who also traces the presence of a hortatory form of philosophy in early thought and in Hellenistic philosophy, Setaioli 1985. My discussion centres on the *NQ*.

⁷ A more elaborate discussion is found in Setaioli 1985, who investigates the sources of Seneca's style and theory of style, and argues that Stoic theories also influenced him (especially pp.811ff.; cf. p.790 about the general Stoic position), and in Moretti 1995, who presents an elaborate discussion of the Stoic style and its transformation, especially in Seneca's work, into a renewed style with a strong hortatory aspect, in which earlier characteristics were adapted to the new aim. For a useful summary of the results of Moretti's research see her conclusion, pp.191-196.

⁸ See *De beneficiis* 1.4.1 about Chrysippus (cf. also *De beneficiis* 1.3.8, which is more positive), and the passage from *EM* 82 quoted next. Cf. Griffin 1976, 15 with n.1.

⁹ *Pungunt enim, quasi aculeis, interrogatiunculis angustis, quibus etiam qui assentiuntur nihil commutantur animo et iidem abeunt qui venerant; res enim fortasse verae, certe graves, non ita tractantur ut debent, sed aliquanto minutius.* The metaphor of tickling instead of penetrating is also used by Seneca in *De beneficiis* 1.4.1 (about Chrysippus' words). About this metaphor see Moretti 1995, 118ff., 125ff. In Books 3 and 4 of his *Tusculanae Disputationes*, Cicero announces that he will first discuss a subject in the Stoic manner, and then proceed with his own, freer (and more rhetorical) approach (3.13, 4.9-10).

Epistulae Morales 82.8-9 offers an example of a negative judgement on this ineffective form of philosophy.¹⁰ Seneca argues that one will achieve firmness of mind by constant meditation (*adsidua meditatio*); fear of death will be conquered by a preparation for death, not by useless quibbles (*cavillationes*). As an example of a misguided and ridiculous approach to this fear, Seneca quotes one of Zeno's syllogisms: 'no evil is glorious; but death is glorious; therefore death is no evil'. Seneca ridicules this: such a syllogism only makes one laugh, and certainly does not free anyone from the fear of death.¹¹ Such useless debating is qualified as 'Greek'. 'Roman' behaviour, on the other hand, implies a more practical attitude, not inclined to waste time on useless argumentation.¹²

The term *cavillationes* was used more generally to designate useless quibbles without any effect on moral improvement. *Epistulae Morales* 111 introduces this term as the Latin translation, coined by Cicero, of the Greek *sophismata*.¹³ The letter contrasts it to the true practice of philosophy, which achieves fortitude and peace of mind. Thus, the use of *cavillationes* implied a combination of an ineffective style and an irrelevant content.¹⁴

¹⁰ This passage is also an example of a text that points to the meditative aspect of philosophy. See for this theme Chapter 8, section 3.7. Compare with this passage Cicero, *TD* 2.29-30. Letter 82 is also discussed in Wilson 1987, 110ff.

¹¹ One may wonder, though, whether Zeno intended to combat fear of death with this syllogism. The discussion is continued later in letter 82: in §19ff. Seneca opposes *exempla* to syllogisms as weapons in the battle against fear of death.

¹² This distinction between the Roman nation and other nations, especially the Greek, is found more often in Seneca's work (*De beneficiis* 1.3.6, 1.4.1, *EM* 59.7, cf. *EM* 111.1), as well as in other Latin authors. Although we have seen in Chapter 2 that a strand of practical or moralizing thinking was already present from Greek times onwards, the Romans, as is well-known, also saw a difference between both nations (cf. Chapter 2, n.54).

¹³ Cf. the use of the term in *De brevitate vitae* 10.1, *EM* 102.20, 108.12. Cf. Tietze Larson 1992, 51 with n.15.

¹⁴ Most often the complaint about the uselessness of content was directed at logic. Compare my discussion in Chapter 7, section 1.1.2. Cf. Barnes 1997, 16-17 who argues that Seneca does not disagree with logic in itself, but with the type of logic that is useless from the point of view of moral protreptic, 'logical trifling' (p.20).

3. *How philosophy should be practiced*

From the negative descriptions quoted above we can also infer, by contrast, what philosophers ought to achieve according to Seneca. This is especially visible in his descriptions of some philosophers he encountered during his life, and in whom he found a model for his teachings: Papirius Fabianus, Attalus, Sextius.¹⁵ They illustrate the effect philosophical teaching should have, and the manner in which this effect should be brought about: a good philosopher made one want to shake off one's vices and become virtuous.¹⁶ Poverty had to be praised in such a manner that the listener also wanted to become poor (*EM* 108.14). Here reappears the practical goal of philosophy that is all-important to Seneca: to achieve moral improvement.

This effect was achieved by speaking strongly against the passions and other wrong feelings. In *De brevitae vitae* 10.1, Seneca quotes Papirius Fabianus:

Fabianus, who was none of your lecture-room philosophers of today, but one of the genuine and old-fashioned kind, used to say that we should fight the passions with great force, not with artifice (*contra affectus impetu, non subtilitate pugnandum*), and that the battle-line must be turned away by a bold attack, not by inflicting pinpricks (*nec minutis vulneribus sed incursu avertendam aciem*); that sophistry is ineffective, for the passions must be not nipped, but crushed (*non probabat cavillationes: enim contundi debere, non vellicari*).

The struggle against the passions, it is clear, should not be conducted with delicacy, but with force.¹⁷

¹⁵ For Seneca's environment cf. especially Tietze Larson 1992, who adds the person of Demetrius (see *De beneficiis* 7.9.1ff.), Inwood 1995, Griffin 1976, 15-16.

¹⁶ See especially *EM* 108.3-4, 13ff., 23 about the effect of Attalus' teachings and about the teachings of Sotion and Sextius (108.17ff.). See also *De ira* 3.36: Sextius asked himself at the end of each day in what sense he had improved himself. For Sextius see also *EM* 64.2ff.

¹⁷ The few details that are known about Papirius Fabianus, from the preface to Seneca maior's second *Controversia* (§1-5), are of interest in connection with the rhetorical aspect of philosophy. Seneca maior advises his son Mela to study eloquence, even if he is

To improve people, they should be put under pressure: further information about this idea is given in *Epistulae Morales* 108. In this letter, Seneca mentions the effect of expressing one's thoughts in a special form, like poetry or *sententiae*: this helps to pass on the message.¹⁸ Thoughts voiced in such a form oblige the listener to admit their truth; it leads the avaricious to proclaim their hatred of money ('when we hear such words as these, we are led towards a confession of the truth. Even men for whom nothing is ever enough wonder and applaud when they hear such words, and swear eternal hatred of money', *EM* 108.12). When people are brought to such a state of mind, Seneca's advice to the speaker is to go on, to impress the truth on the audience – and not in the form of *cavillationes*:

When you see them thus disposed, exert pressure, keep on at it, press the point, dropping all double meanings, syllogisms, hair-splitting and the other side-shows of ineffective smartness. Preach against greed, preach against luxury: when you notice that you have made progress and impressed the minds of your hearers, lay on still harder. You cannot imagine how profitable such an address is, when you are bent on curing your hearers and are absolutely devoted to their best interests (*EM* 108.12).¹⁹

interested in philosophy, because learning to declaim will help him in the study of philosophy. Papirius Fabianus, who had started out as a rhetor, is mentioned as an example. After Fabianus had gone over to philosophy, he continued declaiming, and in such a way that he seemed to prepare himself for this study, while he was preparing himself for philosophy through declaiming. This is a good example of the influence declamation had on philosophy. In the second *Controversia* a sample is found of Fabianus' handling of the theme of the *controversia* (§10-13); it is a general tirade against riches, luxury and man's depravity (involving arguments such as the comparison of men to animals, rhetorical questions, paradox and the idea of vicious inversion of the natural order). This passage would not have been out of place in Seneca's work. It also shows that the *declamatio* could serve as an occasion for a discourse against vice. Cf. Tietze Larson 1992, 52.

¹⁸ Although the form should always remain subordinate to the message: Setaioli 1985, 779ff. points at this difference between oratory and philosophy.

¹⁹ *Hunc illorum adfectum cum videris, urge, hoc preme, hoc onera relictis ambiguitatibus et syllogismis et cavillationibus et ceteris acuminis inriti ludicris. Dic in avaritiam, dic in luxuriam; cum profecisse te videris et animos audientium adfeceris, insta vehementius: veri simile non est quantum proficiat talis oratio remedio intenta et tota in bonum audientium versa.*

Thus we see how the idea of pressure, and therefore of repetition, formed an important component of this vehement, hortatory form of philosophy.²⁰

4. *Hortatory philosophy and written texts*

This form of philosophical teaching seems to concern primarily oral philosophical instruction, as appears from the situation sketched in a text such as *Epistulae Morales* 108, concerning the teaching of Attalus. However, in written texts, too, the characteristics of a hortatory form of philosophy are discernible, as has been recognised in present-day scholarship (and as argued in the rest of this chapter).²¹ However, I will begin by mentioning two passages in Seneca's work from which it appears that philosophical writings provide a wider range of possibilities.

At the beginning of *De beneficiis* (1.4.1), the reference to Chrysippus as a great man whose prose was unfortunately ineffective occurs in the context of a discussion about what constituted relevant and irrelevant matters in a work on benefits (1.3.2ff.). Seneca states that Chrysippus went too far in discussing irrelevant questions in his work on the subject; one should keep in mind the improvement of human behaviour (1.3.8-1.4.6). Those who wish to 'heal the minds' should speak seriously and with great force (*serio loquantur et magnis viribus agant...*, 1.4.6). Speaking effectively is again related to speaking about 'effective' subjects.

We may thus assume that Seneca's work will primarily contain discussions aimed at improving man's conduct, and spoken with great force. However, the

²⁰ Compare Codoñer's definition (1997, 304, cf. p.303) of Seneca's parenetic passages as 'los pasajes parenéticos que derivan su eficacia de la acumulación'.

²¹ Cf. the literature mentioned in n.6 above. The fact that philosophical works were also meant to be read aloud (cf. *EM* 64.2ff. about the lecture of Sextius' work; cf. also I. Hadot 1969, 131) is a factor which may help to understand the hortatory character of written philosophical work, but on which I cannot elaborate here. A distinction between what was heard and pleased through a general impression of force, and what was examined in detail and found less attractive is mentioned in *EM* 100.3.

written work does allow for a larger scope. Seneca goes on to say in *De beneficiis* 1.5.1 that, while he will not discuss any useless issues, he will have to mention some more theoretical questions. In my view, this is a justification for the fact that his discussion contains a more complex and theoretical aspect. If one bases oneself on a concept of philosophy that focuses on what is relevant to moral improvement, the discussion of anything that does not seem to fit within this aim needs to be justified.²²

A similar passage is found in *De brevitae vitae* 10.1, from which Papirius Fabianus' opinion on the battle against the passions has already been quoted. The context of this citation is also interesting. At a certain point in the treatise, Seneca says that he could divide his subject in different parts and arguments, if he wanted to: many arguments would be available to him to prove that life is short. However, Fabianus said that the passions should be fought with force, not subtlety (10.1). This indicates that a discussion of the subject involving a strict division in parts and arguments, that is, a more systematic and theoretical text, does not correspond to Fabianus' prescriptions.

We have seen that Fabianus' ideas were part of a philosophical practice Seneca agreed with. However, in this passage Seneca goes on to say that if one wants to reproach people for their errors, they should not only be lamented but be instructed as well (*tamen, ut illis error exprobretur suus, docendi non tantum deplorandi sunt*). Seneca recognizes the importance and necessity of a form of philosophy he calls *docere*, a discourse that is more systematic than the form called *deplorare*, and has a different style.²³ The use of the term *deplorare* is interesting, since we do find texts that are laments on man's faults, not least in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. In addition to the positive exhortations, a negative form of hortatory philosophy also existed.

²² See also *De beneficiis* 7.1.1-2, which makes a distinction between *inventae in remedium animi* and *in exercitationem ingenii*.

²³ Compare perhaps also the distinction between *probare* and *laudare* in *EM* 76.7, mentioned by Cancik 1967, 18-19.

Although the aim of Seneca's philosophy, moral improvement, primarily involves such a hortatory form of philosophy, we have now seen that his written work provides a wider range of possibilities, involving more systematic forms of instruction. Of course, Seneca's philosophical work is far more complex than can be discussed here. We must for instance take into account differences due to genre. As to the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, they form a kind of text in which a hortatory aspect is strongly present. The aim to improve man could be performed through a not too tightly argued text with the same structure as the spoken 'harangues'. We should also expect to find *deplorationes* in written works.

5. *The evidence of Epistulae Morales 94-95*

Some further information concerning the hortatory form of philosophy is found in *Epistulae Morales* 94. Letters 94 and 95 discuss two different means of philosophical instruction, *praecepta* (EM 94) and *decreta* (EM 95).²⁴ Seneca argues that both are necessary parts of philosophy (see for instance EM 95.64). *Praecepta* instruct on how to act correctly in concrete, specific situations, such as one's behaviour towards one's wife or father (94.5). They have a short and precise form, like *sententiae* (94.46-47). The *pars praeceptiva* of philosophy corresponds to the Greek 'paraenetic part' (95.1).²⁵

The *decreta* (or *scita, placita*), better known by the Greek term of *dogmata*, are more general (and theoretical) rules that provide the knowledge at the basis of *praecepta*. They concern such basic knowledge as, for example, the nature of virtue. In letter 95, Seneca says that it makes no sense merely to prescribe (by

²⁴ See also I. Hadot 1969, 7-9 about EM 94-95 in relation to Seneca's 'Seelenleitung'. For further discussion of *praecepta* and *decreta*, see Bellincioni 1978, 87ff. and 1979, I.G. Kidd, 'Moral actions and rules in Stoic ethics', in J.M. Rist (ed.), *The Stoics*, University of California Press 1978, 247-258, A.M. Ioppolo, 'Decreta e praecepta in Seneca', in A. Brancacci (ed.), *La filosofia in età imperiale: le scuole e le tradizioni filosofiche. Atti del colloquio, Roma 17-19 giugno 1999*, Napoli 2000, 15-36. Rutherford 1989, 31-32 also mentions *praecepta* in connection with Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*.

²⁵ In the rest of Seneca's work, the term *praeceptum* also occurs in a less specific sense.

means of *praecepta*) that one should stick to various virtues (*EM* 95.55). First, one needs to know what virtue is, and other basic matters such as the difference between virtues.

Seneca calls these two parts of philosophy *contemplatio veri* and *actio*, defining them as a theoretical and a practical part.²⁶ To each part of philosophy corresponds a particular form: *actio* is taught through *admonitio*, *contemplatio* through *institutio*.²⁷ Here a division in two styles is made, the one used for improving a person, the other for imparting knowledge.²⁸ This division may be useful in the analysis of Seneca's writings. We must however beware of distinguishing too strictly between the two styles; in practice, distinctions may be less clear than in the theory presented in *Epistulae Morales* 94-95.²⁹

²⁶ *EM* 94.45. In *EM* 94.47 he speaks of a division into *disciplina* (knowledge) versus *exercitatio* (practice); cf. 94.48.

²⁷ *Contemplationem institutio tradit, actionem admonitio*. Letter 38 also makes a distinction between two forms and styles of philosophy, the *disputatio* and the *sermo*. The first serves to make one willing to learn (is of a preparatory character), the other serves to teach, and uses *submissiora verba*. The styles belong to different situations and address diverse audiences: the audience of the *disputatio* is larger. Setaioli 1985, 782ff. equates the two styles of *EM* 38 and those of *EM* 94-5 (the *disputatio* corresponding to the *admonitio* and the *sermo* to the *institutio*). While some correspondences may be noted, there are also differences that make it difficult to agree with Setaioli's equation. Cf. Codoñer 1997, 298 n.16 and 302 n.23, who sees the difference between the two styles of letter 38 mainly as a difference between private and public speech. One could add the distinction between informal and formal.

²⁸ Cf. Setaioli 1985, 779, 782ff. who emphasizes, in a reaction to the attention which has been paid to the presence of a hortatory style in Seneca, that there are two main philosophical discourses in his work. Moretti 1995, 192 also relates *decreta* and *praecepta* to instruction and predication respectively.

²⁹ Codoñer 1997 also discusses *EM* 94-95 in an article about Seneca's 'discurso filosófico' (pp.301-304 especially). She sensibly argues that both *praecepta* and *decreta*, parenthetic passages as well as more theoretical expositions, are found together in Seneca's work and cannot be easily separated as different parts of a text. I argue that the situation in the *NQ* is somewhat different. To *decreta* and *praecepta* Codoñer adds a third element, the *descriptio* mentioned in *EM* 95.65 as a feature of Posidonius' work.

In letter 94, Seneca gives some interesting information about the *pars praeceptiva* of philosophy, which is taught through the *admonitio*: he describes its function. He argues that it is important to repeat things that are already known, since people often do not act as they know they should do. The *admonitio* serves the purpose of repeating the truth, in such a way that it becomes part of a person. Thus, it does not give new information, but rouses the knowledge of what is right (*EM* 94.25ff., cf. §21).

Praecepta cover the area of *aperta*, matters that are immediately evident (*EM* 94.10, 25, 95.64). *Decreta*, on the other hand, belong to the area of *obscura*: they are part of the reasoning that leads to knowledge of *obscura* (*EM* 95.61, 64). Seneca defines *aperta* as ‘that what is grasped through the senses or through memory’ and *obscura* as those things which falls outside these categories (*EM* 95.61).³⁰

In defence of the *praecepta*, Seneca also repeats a few times that the genres of *consolationes*, *exhortationes*, *dissuasiones*, *adhortationes*, *obiurgationes* and *laudationes* are considered useful (*EM* 94.21, 39, 49, cf. 95.34, 65).³¹ These belong to the more general *praeceptiva pars* of philosophy (‘they are all forms of advice: it is by such methods that we arrive at a perfect condition of the mind’, *EM* 94.39). While these forms of adhortation should not be equated with the basic form of *praecepta*, they share in its parenetic character.

³⁰ A well-known distinction in ancient philosophical thought: see further the discussion of *aperta* and *obscura* in Chapter 9, section 3.1.8.

³¹ *Obiurgatio*, *cohortatio*, *consolatio* are also mentioned in Cicero, *De oratore* 2.50. On these passages and terms in *EM* 94-95, see also Garbarino 1982, 6ff., who points out that these kinds of speech, which Seneca attributes to the philosopher, are attributed by Cicero to the orator. Setaioli 1988, 336-349 discusses *EM* 95.65 and the terms appearing there. From the fragments of Seneca’s unpreserved writings it appears he also wrote a work *Exhortationes*.

6. *The Naturales Quaestiones*

The existence of a hortatory style, a 'linguaggio di predicazione' (Traina 1974), has been taken into account for the study of Seneca's work in general, and used for the interpretation of the *Epistulae Morales* in particular.³² This concept seems to me of great importance for the understanding of the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. The information provided by letter 94 allows us to further specify the nature (or genre) of these prefaces and epilogues. Some of them are *consolationes* (Books 6 and 2); other texts can be regarded as *adhortationes* or *exhortationes* (for instance the preface of Book 3, §7ff.); more often their negative counterparts appear, which can be considered as *obiurgationes* (the epilogues of *NQ* 4b and 5).³³

This categorization makes us realize how we should view these texts: not as providing new information, but as aiming at activating certain knowledge. The prefaces and epilogues correspond to a form of text whose primary function is to achieve an effect on the listener or reader, such as the elimination of their fear of death. To this end the right view is repeated and impressed on the audience's minds. It is important to see these preaching, repetitive texts in this context; it explains their form and may also prevent unjust criticism.

³² Compare the literature mentioned in n.6. For the *EM*, see for instance the recent study by M. von Albrecht, *Wort und Wandlung: Senecas Lebenskunst*, Leiden 2004. Cancik 1967 argues that the first part of the *EM* is parenetic, and the second theoretical, though it retains parenetic passages (cf. Bellincioni 1978, 111 with n.7; see section 10 below for a discussion of Cancik's theory). Wilson 2001 argues against the overly strong interpretation made by Habinek 1992 of the *EM* as hortatory (especially p.169-171); Habinek e.g. 'interprets the absence of the hortatory in large stretches of his texts as a flaw in Seneca's literary competence'. M. Griffin, in a paper held at the conference 'Philosophy from 100 BC to 200 AD' (London, 19-23 July 2004), 'Seneca's paedagogic strategies: *Letters* and *De beneficiis*' has applied a distinction in *praecepta* and *decreta* to Seneca's *De beneficiis*.

³³ However, I do not think it possible to arrive at such a categorization as Cassanmagnagno's (www.rivistazetesis.it/SenecaI.htm, n.27): '*suasio* negli epiloghi dei libri I e II; *consolatio* in quelli dei libri III e VI; *exhortatio* nel VII e IVB; inoltre l'*obiurgatio* nei libri I, V, VII'.

What about the rest of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, i.e., the discussions of natural phenomena? These were certainly not written in the hortatory style, they form no *admonitio*.³⁴ They might belong to the other style, the *institutio*, meant to inform rather than persuade. We saw that the *institutio* was used for *decreta*. At the beginning of letter 95 (95.10ff.), Seneca says that philosophy goes beyond the narrow field of human behaviour: it investigates the entire world. This indicates that *decreta* also cover the area of natural philosophy. The discussions of natural phenomena in the *Naturales Quaestiones* involve *decreta*, since they are based on certain major philosophical tenets.³⁵ As mentioned earlier, *decreta* are part of the reasoning that leads to knowledge of *obscura* (EM95.61), *obscura* such as Seneca investigates in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

While we cannot simply say that the *Naturales Quaestiones* is divided into *praecepta* and *decreta*, the physical discussions do contain *decreta*, and the prefaces and epilogues do belong to the *pars praeceptiva* of philosophy. In a more general sense, one could add that the discussion of natural phenomena forms a specimen of theoretical knowledge, a *contemplatio veri*. This knowledge is meant to lead to a change in practical attitude, to moral improvement. This combination of theory and practice resembles the combination of *decreta* and *praecepta*; the theoretical *decreta* form the basis of practical *praecepta*.

In the preface to *NQ* 3, §18, a distinction between *aperta* and *obscura* is mentioned. Seneca states what will be the moral use of the study of nature. The mind will be exercised through the study of *obscura* (non-evident things), that is, through the following discussions of natural phenomena; this will be of use in relation to *aperta*. *Aperta* are further defined as the salutary lessons that combat the passions. This passage indicates that the prefaces and epilogues are the primary area of moral *aperta* (the field of the *pars praeceptiva* of philosophy), whereas the physical discussions contain *obscura*.

³⁴ Although Parroni, in his discussion of the language of the *NQ* (in his edition of the *NQ*, p.xxvi ff.) points to the use of similar rhetorical means in the entire work (p.xxxi, xxxv), the dissimilarity is also evident.

³⁵ Cf. Chapter 2, section 2.4.

Highlighting the distinction between *decretal institutio* and *praeceptal admonitio* for the understanding of the *Naturales Quaestiones* takes us to certain questions that have already been formulated concerning this work. Indeed, it directs the attention to the division in different parts. In *EM* 95.64, Seneca mentions that whereas *praecepta* are known to everyone, *decreta* are for initiates.³⁶ Strictly speaking, this would relate the different parts of the *Naturales Quaestiones* to different types of public: the physical discussions would be destined to a more advanced audience. This argumentation receives strong support from the preface to *NQ* 6 (6.2.1), in which Seneca distinguishes two forms of consolation, one for the more intelligent people, the consolation provided by knowledge of causes, and one for less intelligent persons, the argumentation of the preface.³⁷ On the other hand, *decreta* also serve as the basis of *praecepta*: the knowledge provided by the former would enhance the understanding of the latter.

6.1 The *Naturales Quaestiones* and Lucretius' *De rerum natura*

In Lucretius' work, too, a distinction between two styles appears, the style of the physical discussions and that of the framing parts. In the introduction to his edition of *De rerum natura* Book 3, Kenney refers to this distinction as 'The two traditions and the two styles'.³⁸ According to Kenney, 'one of the most striking features of the D.R.N. is the discrepancy in tone and emotional impact between the scientific, or expository, and the non-expository passages'. The non-expository passages are characterised by an emotional effect, while the expository passages are mainly 'rationally and logically argumentative'. To these differences correspond differences in style: 'for rational persuasion a low-keyed style is suitable, for emotional conviction a highly-charged style'. Such distinctions were in accordance with rhetorical theory: a good speaker (and writer) ought to be able to use both styles (Cicero, *Orator* 100). In determining the style and content of the non-expository

³⁶ Cf. P. Hadot 2002, 69 'lorsqu'on exhorte des débutants – c'est le genre littéraire de la parénèse...'.
³⁷ Cf. Chapter 8, section 2.5.1.
³⁸ 1971, 14-20; especially p.15-16.

passages, Kenney also notes a satirical and a diatribic element.³⁹ The similarity in composition between *De rerum natura* and the *Naturales Quaestiones* is clear.

6.2 The *Naturales Quaestiones* and Musonius Rufus' *Diatribes*

For some of the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, parallels exist in the texts that have been preserved as Musonius Rufus' *Diatribes*.⁴⁰ Although many of the subjects discussed by Musonius Rufus in these short lessons are foreign to Seneca's work, some resemble the themes of the moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. This concerns the diatribes 12 (on sexual pleasure), 18 a and b (on food), and 21 (on hairdressing). These subjects are treated in *NQ* 4b and 1: specific elements in the texts of the two philosophers correspond to each other. The parallel confirms that the themes of the prefaces and epilogues could form the subject matter of independent lessons. This helps to place Seneca's moralizing passages in a tradition of moral philosophy.⁴¹

³⁹ P.17ff. Cf. Pöhlmann 1973, 886, who speaks about hymns and the panegyric. Stork 1970, 156 lists the 'Mittel zur parainetischen Einwirkung' Lucretius uses in the passage at the end of *DRN* 3. She also points to the attention Lucretius devotes to the criticism of 'das falsche Leben' (pp.162-163), like Seneca.

⁴⁰ P. Hadot 2002, 25 n.1 mentions the sixth diatribe as one of the few preserved texts that speak about the actual practice of philosophy. One of Musonius Rufus' fragments, n.42 (in Jagu 1979), presents a good example of the idea that an ethical effect was achieved by the contemplation of physical knowledge. It argues that by reflecting upon the nature and the state of the universe, in which men, gods and the four elements partake, one will live a harmonious life.

⁴¹ In Chapter 7, section 3.3.3, the parallel with Musonius Rufus' diatribe on hairdressing is used in the interpretation of *NQ* 1.17. Of course, there is also a great difference between Musonius and Seneca: unlike the prefaces and epilogues of the *NQ*, the texts containing Musonius' teachings do not have a dramatic and strongly rhetorical style. Cf. A.C. van Geytenbeek, *Musonius Rufus en de Griekse diatribe*, Amsterdam 1948, 13-14.

7. 'Spiritual exercises'

In antiquity, philosophy was generally meant to have a practical effect, 'to form more than to inform'.⁴² Besides the hammering style intended to revive familiar information, other indications of this aspect of philosophical instruction are also found in ancient texts. Meditation was an important part of philosophical practice: thoughts should be repeated to oneself, to make them effective. The idea of meditation appears at several points in ancient texts, including Seneca's work. For example, letter 24 contains the injunction to repeat important thoughts to oneself (§15). Meditation is clearly present in the *consolatio*, and will therefore be discussed together with the *consolationes* of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

In this context, P. Hadot, following Rabbow (1954), further points to the presence of 'spiritual exercises' in ancient philosophy.⁴³ Exercises were meant to help achieve the goal of moral improvement. For instance, people ought to ask each day in what sense they had improved themselves (cf. *De ira* 3.36). Some themes that occur in the *Naturales Quaestiones* belong to the area of 'spiritual exercises'. The *praemeditatio malorum*, for example, the act of imagining beforehand the evil that could befall one, was thought by the Stoics to prepare against the effect of *mala* (see Cicero, *TD* 3.28-29, 3.52). The *praemeditatio malorum* can be discerned especially in the preface to *NQ* 6 (see Chapter 8, section 2.6).

An important idea in connection with the *Naturales Quaestiones* is the role the study of physics plays in the spiritual exercises.⁴⁴ One important exercise that has

⁴² Davidson 1995, 20. The formula comes from V. Goldschmidt, *Les dialogues de Platon. Structure et méthode dialectique*, Paris 1947, 3; cf. I. Hadot 1969, 37.

⁴³ 1995, 81ff., 2002, 19ff. See also I. Hadot 1969, 48-70. P. Hadot pays much attention to the practice of philosophy in his work. He also points out that this aspect can help explain the form of certain texts (e.g. in 2002, 66ff.). Of course it is not always easy to see to what extent the practical aspect of philosophy influences, for instance, texts like Seneca's, which also have a literary dimension. Compare the discussion in Chapter 8, section 3.7. See also the idea of 'starting points' for meditation mentioned by Erler 1997 while discussing Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.

⁴⁴ See P. Hadot 1972 ('La physique comme exercice spirituel ou pessimisme et optimisme chez Marc Aurèle', reprinted 2002, 145ff.); 1995, 23ff., 87f., 97f.; 2002, 32, 35.

been singled out in several studies is the ‘alienation strategy’. This consists in seeing things in their true physical perspective, reducing them to the bare elements of which they consist.⁴⁵ Examples of this strategy are found in Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditationes* (3.11, 6.13). In this perspective, a culinary delicacy becomes the corpse of a bird.⁴⁶

This exercise can also be discerned in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. We find it, I believe, in the epilogue to Book 4b. In defending his explanation of the nature of certain phenomena against the reproach of moral uselessness, Seneca says (4b.13.2) that, in the case of ice and snow, it will make people more ashamed to know that what they buy at such a high price is something consisting largely of air, not even of water. This statement reduces a luxurious object to its true nature, with a moral aim.⁴⁷ This type of unmasking fits the general idea of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, in which knowledge of physics must lead to a moral attitude.

Other ‘spiritual exercises’ with a physical dimension can also be discerned in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. An obvious example is the ascent of the mind to heaven. From the immense heavenly spaces it is able to view the tiny earth in the right perspective (preface to Book 1).⁴⁸ Such a reaction should follow from the study of physics.

⁴⁵ The term ‘alienation strategy’ comes from Annas 1993, 176 (who believes such a strategy, involving physics and ethics, to be present only in the later Stoics); see also P. Hadot 1972; 2002, 32. Erler 1997, who discusses meditative elements in Lucretius’ *DRN*, also mentions this strategy (p.85-88, with reference to Schrijvers 1970, 134ff.). *De rerum natura* contains a famous example of it, concerning the true nature of love (at the end of Book 4). See also Rabbow 1954, 42ff., 328, 331, who calls this exercise ‘Entwertung und Verekelung der Dinge durch vernichtigende Analysis’. One may also consider the strategy in the context of the Stoic principle of *indifferentia*. Cf. Newman 1989, 1498-1499, 1508-1509.

⁴⁶ Concerning Marcus Aurelius cf. Erler 1997, 86-76, Annas 1993, 176, Newman 1989, 1508ff., who considers the reduction of everything to its true nature the basic principle of Marcus Aurelius’ meditation. Rabbow 1954, 42ff. also mentions many passages from Marcus Aurelius.

⁴⁷ However, this idea does not seem to have Seneca’s main interest in the epilogue; cf. the discussion of the passage.

⁴⁸ Considered a spiritual exercise by P. Hadot 1995, 238ff., 2002, 52ff.; cf. Rabbow 1954, 41. Further discussion of the flight of the mind is found in the chapter concerning the

The spiritual exercises have an important rhetorical character, which must help achieve the intended effect.⁴⁹ One aspect in which rhetoric is strongly involved is the idea of visualizing ('putting before one's eyes') what should be avoided and what should be pursued.⁵⁰

Such a procedure also appears in Seneca's work. In *De tranquillitate animi* 2.5, Seneca indicates the utility of the portrayal of the vice that must be fought.⁵¹ The vice under discussion (i.e. the opposite of *tranquillitas animi*) must be wholly revealed, so that everyone may recognize their own form of that vice (and remedy it) (*totum...vitium in medium protrahendum est, ex quo agnoscet quisque partem suam*). Different forms of unrest are described in the text.

De ira 3.5.3 presents a similar procedure, involving the description of the power of the vice in question. Seneca explains how one must proceed to keep anger away: it should be painted in all its horror.

We shall forestall the possibility of anger if we repeatedly set before ourselves its many faults and rightly appraise it. We must charge it and convict it: we must search out its evils and lay them out into the open.⁵²

preface of *NQ* 1. Compare another strategy mentioned by Annas 1993, 175-176, the 'only a part' strategy, by which people look at things from a wider perspective and recognize they are merely part of a much greater whole. This idea also occurs in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditationes* (e.g. 12.26).

⁴⁹ So Davidson 1995, 21, P. Hadot 2002, 28, with reference to Rabbow 1954, 55-90, B.L. Hijmans, *Askesis: notes on Epictetus' educational system*, Assen 1959, 89, I. Hadot 1969, 17, 184.

⁵⁰ P. Hadot 2002, 28. Compare Rabbow 1954, 72ff., 330 (with reference to the rhetorical technique of *evidentia*), I. Hadot 1992, 19. Compare the role of the imagination in the *praemeditatio malorum* (see Armisen-Marchetti 1986).

⁵¹ The passage is also mentioned by I. Hadot 1969, 120, who argues that the (sometimes elaborate) description of vice as well as virtue (for this she refers to *De clementia* 1.1), is part of the task of the 'Seelenleiter', who must study the appearance of evil to know what he must combat (pp.119-120).

⁵² *Ne irascamur praestabimus, si omnia vitia irae nobis subinde proposuerimus et illam bene aestimaverimus. Accusanda est apud nos, damnanda: perscrutanda eius mala et in*

Presenting a fault with its full force should help one to refrain from it.

An elaborate description of the vice that must be cured, as exposed in these passages, is clearly part of Seneca's method (whether one wishes to apply the term 'spiritual exercise' to it or not).⁵³ In my opinion, the descriptions in the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* should be related to this technique. They become functional in this perspective.

8. *Means of persuasion*

Some important tools that help to achieve the goal of hortatory texts are: metaphorical language or imagery, *exempla* and *sententiae*.⁵⁴ I will discuss these because theoretical statements about them are found in Seneca's work.

As is well-known, many metaphors and images are found in Seneca's work, especially military and medical metaphors.⁵⁵ Seneca discusses the use of metaphorical language by philosophers in *Epistulae Morales* 59 (§6-7). He argues that philosophers, too, should use metaphors, but not for the same purpose as poets. For philosophers, metaphors serve to further clarify their ideas: they are used 'so that they may serve as support for our feebleness, to bring both speaker and

medium protrahenda sunt. A description of *ira* follows in the text. The passage from *De tranquillitate animi* uses the same term *in medium protrahere*.

⁵³ Compare Davidson 1995, 21 (quoting P. Hadot) about the role of rhetoric in philosophy: 'in order to rectify distorted opinions, tenacious prejudices, irrational terrors, the philosopher might have to twist them in the other direction, to exaggerate in order to compensate'.

⁵⁴ Cf. Newman 1989, 1488ff., who discusses these three rhetorical devices in context of the *meditatio*. Trillitzsch 1962 discusses *exempla*, comparisons and images among Seneca's 'Beweismittel'.

⁵⁵ Cf. Tietze Larson 1992, 54-55, and Wilson 1997, 61-62, 62ff. about images in consolatory letters. On Seneca's use of images see especially Armisen-Marchetti 1989, to which I refer for an extensive discussion of the subject. See also D. Steyns, *Étude sur les Métaphores et les Comparaisons dans les oeuvres en prose de Sénèque le Philosophe*, Gand 1906.

listener face to face with the subject under discussion'.⁵⁶ Seneca continues by giving an example he has found in Sextius, one of those philosophers he admired for their 'Roman manner' of practising philosophy. Sextius compares the formation of an army, ready to expect the enemy from all sides, to the defence of the wise man, who is prepared for an attack from any side.⁵⁷

Seneca's use of *sententiae* is especially interesting: they are known as the characteristic feature of his style *par excellence*, but also have an educational function, since they enable the philosopher to formulate his lesson in a short and pregnant form, which can easily be remembered.⁵⁸ The *sententia* is one of the forms in which *praecepta* are voiced: in *EM* 94, Seneca gives some indication of its functioning (94.27-8, 43, 46-7). As we have seen, ideas phrased in a special form have a stronger effect. One is struck while hearing them, and does not dare to question them ('such maxims need no special pleader: they straightforwardly arouse our emotions and help because of their natural force', 94.28, cf. §43). In 94.46, Seneca mentions the example of M. Agrippa, who claimed to have become a good person by repeating to himself a *sententia*. Through repetition, *sententiae* can 'mould a soul'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ This is explained as achieving *evidentia* by Husner 1924, 13. Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 22ff. discusses the philosopher's use of images; pp.313ff., she speaks about the function images have in the context of Seneca's parenetic philosophy ('l'image militante'). She more specifically undertakes case studies of Seneca's *De constantia sapientis* and *Apocoloquintosis*.

⁵⁷ Cf. also the image of the attack of the passions used by Papirius Fabianus (*De brevitate vitae* 10.1), quoted in section 3 above.

⁵⁸ Cf. Newman 1989, 1489, who quotes I. Hadot 1969, 125: 'es ist auch keine Frage, daß der kurze pointierte Satzbau Senecas in Verbindung mit einer Fülle von Metaphern in weit höherem Maße als die Ciceronische Periode zu einer suggestiven Wirkung befähigt ist, und das ganz unabhängig von der Entwicklung des Modegeschmacks in Bezug auf den Stil'. Cf. also I. Hadot 1992, 16: 'le style de Sénèque correspondait admirablement à toutes les exigences de la parénèse'. *Sententiae* are also discussed by Moretti 1995 (see especially pp.167ff.).

⁵⁹ Quintilian's description of the effect of *sententiae* corresponds to Seneca's: *feriunt animum et uno ictu frequenter inpellunt et ipsa brevitate magis haerent* (12.10.48)

In the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones sententiae* often occur: for instance, a few of them conclude the epilogue of Book 5, and serve as summary for the lesson that is developed there. *Sententiae* often (but not necessarily) appear in final positions, concluding a portion of text so that it may be remembered.⁶⁰

The function and use of *exempla* is similar to that of *sententiae*.⁶¹ Glimpses of the function of *exempla* are offered in *Epistulae Morales* 94 and 95.⁶² In *EM* 95.72, Seneca states that it is useful, besides describing what a virtuous man is, to provide examples of virtuous men.⁶³ In *EM* 94.40 the effect of keeping company with good men is mentioned: it takes away bad thoughts and promotes good ones, with the force of *praecepta*. One should make the good conduct of the good men one's own. The idea that the company of good men gradually sinks into the heart resembles the working of the *sententia*.

Thus, *exempla* must clearly be seen as an integral part of Seneca's way of doing philosophy. Quite interesting is a remark Seneca makes in letter 24. After a series of *exempla*, he adds a complaint from Lucilius that these are all well-worn (*decantatae fabulae*, §6). Seneca's reply is that he does not accumulate examples for the purpose of exercising his wit, but to exhort Lucilius to be courageous in the face of death (§9).

The category of *exempla* comprises not only examples of virtue, which must be followed, but also examples of vice, which must be avoided: these too occur in

⁶⁰ Cf. Kühnen's remark (1962, 46 n.3) that Seneca is in the habit of concluding an *exemplum* with a *sententia*.

⁶¹ On *exempla* see also Kühnen 1962, 39ff. and Mayer's useful survey of 'Roman historical *exempla* in Seneca', 1991, 141-176. Mayer makes interesting remarks about the rhetorical form of *exempla* and their moral value. *Exempla* form a manner of instruction that rivals *praecepta*: their lesson is more direct, and immediately shows what to do or avoid; see Mayer 1991, 145, 166-167, Kühnen 1962, 46.

⁶² Compare Rutherford 1989, 25.

⁶³ In letter 120.3-7 he also explains that we come to know the idea of virtue through the contemplation of *exempla*. Cf. Mayer 1991, 165.

Seneca's work.⁶⁴ Alexander the Great, for instance, is often mentioned as the great conqueror who could not conquer himself.⁶⁵ The concept of negative examples also contributes to the explanation of the nature of certain of the epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, which give elaborated descriptions of different vices.⁶⁶

9. An example of a hortatory text

Seneca ends the discussion of *praecepta* in letter 94 with a concluding formula in §52 ('these are the arguments that prove the *praeceptiva pars* of philosophy useful'). However, the letter is not yet at its end. In the last section, in spite of the conclusive formula in §52, Seneca continues to argue that *praecepta* are useful (the statement occurs at §52, 55, 59, 72). However, the manner in which he does so is different. The argumentation consists of a more general discourse on vice and virtue; *praecepta* are said to be useful because there is so much vice. Man's vicious behaviour is described at length. Seneca also introduces the theme of nature's goodness: nature had put evil things such as gold far away, and has given man the world to contemplate. Humans have themselves taken gold out from where it was hidden and behaved wrongly in other ways, too (§56-58). In a longer passage descriptions of negative behaviour are given as well as many *exempla* of vice (§61-68). The conclusion is that one should replace evil by virtue. The letter ends with another description of bad and good behaviour. The final sentence contains a concluding *sententia* (§74).

⁶⁴ Cf. Mayer 1991, 144, 145, 163-164 about *exempla fugienda*. Kühnen 1962, 48 states that Seneca has a 'zweispältige Haltung' towards negative *exempla*; besides *De ira* 3.22.1 (*et haec cogitanda sunt exempla quae vites et illa ex contrario quae sequaris*), he points to *EM* 104.21, where Seneca says that anyone who wishes to avoid vice should stay far away from examples of evil.

⁶⁵ Cf. the discussion in Chapter 4, section 3.2.

⁶⁶ Mayer 1991, 164 mentions Hostius Quadra when he speaks about negative *exempla*. In the discussion following Mayer's article, compare the remark J. Soubiran makes (pp.175-176) about different 'procédés d'écriture' which belong to one category: metaphors, *exempla* and longer developments, 'plus ou moins directement rattachés au sujet principal', which are found in the didactic genre (in Pliny, Lucretius, Virgil, Manilius).

This passage contains a more general kind of argumentation applied to the subject of the *praecepta*. The argumentation consists of descriptions of vice, *exempla*, repetition, strong stylistic features, moral themes of a more general application such as nature's bounty, and so on. It is less systematic and less closely connected to the argument of the letter; it is an example of a parenetic text appended to the discussion of the parenetic part of philosophy.

One finds such hortatory passages in all of Seneca's work. In the *Naturales Quaestiones* we encounter specific forms of them. Often, Seneca will conclude a more complex discussion in the *Epistulae Morales* with such a freer passage. One very important addition to make is that the elements found in the last part of *EM* 94 (as in other such passages) also occur in the rest of the letter. This shows that we should not make too strict delineations between hortatory and non-hortatory passages. However, in some texts the hortatory elements are more strongly condensed.

10. 'Präskriptive Sprache' and 'directives'

Having established the presence of a 'hortatory text' in Seneca's work, a further analysis of the form of this text is tempting. Cancik has made such an attempt: she distinguishes between two forms of argumentation, the one 'theoretisch-doxographisch', the other 'paränetisch' (1967, 16). Her aim has been to describe these forms through their smallest element, the sentence. The basic element of the 'präskriptive Sprache' is formed by the 'imperativische Satz', that of the 'deskriptive Sprache' is the 'indikativische Satz'.⁶⁷ With the term 'imperativische Satz', Cancik refers not only to sentences containing a verbal form in the imperative, but also to sentences with the same 'imperative intent' expressed by other means, for instance a subjunctive or gerundive.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ In n.16, p.16 Cancik refers to earlier literature in which the area of moral discourse was investigated, such as R.M. Hare, *The language of morals*, Oxford 1952.

⁶⁸ 1967, 23 n.42: 'als imperativisch bezeichnen wir hier auch Sätze, die zwar vom morphologischen Gesichtspunkt her keinen Imperativ enthalten, die aber ihrer Funktion nach einen Imperativ ersetzen – so vor allem die Formen des Adhortatives und des Jussives

In *EM*95, Seneca himself makes a distinction between ‘imperative’ and ‘indicative’ sentences. We have already seen that the two parts of philosophy that are discussed in *Epistulae Morales* 94 and 95 each have their own style; a more specific distinction is given in *EM*95.60.⁶⁹ In a reaction to those who argue that *decreta* should be removed from philosophy, Seneca says that, instead, these critics confirm the existence of *decreta* by their statements. They say ‘that precepts are sufficient to develop life, and that the doctrines of wisdom are superfluous’ (*praeceptis vitam satis explicari, supervacua esse decreta sapientiae*). By using the grammatical form of accusative and infinitive, they speak in *decreta*, or, in other words, they voice basic theoretical rules. Similarly, if Seneca were to issue a series of commands in the gerundive, he would be confirming the existence of *praecepta*:

If I would now remark that one must dispense with precepts on the ground that they are superfluous, that one must make use of doctrines, and that our studies should be directed solely towards this end; thus, by my very statement that precepts should not be taken seriously, I would be uttering a precept.

Si nunc ego dicerem recedendum a praeceptis velut supervacuis, utendum esse decretis, in haec sola studium conferendum: hoc ipso, quo negarem curanda esse praecepta, praeciperem.

What Cancik refers to by the term ‘präskriptive Sprache’ is something more complex than a series of sentences containing commands. This appears from the fact that this form of speech is also composed of *exempla* and comparisons (1967, 23-26). ‘Das wertsetzende Argumentieren’ (1967, 31) is another element of the prescriptive speech Cancik analyses; by recommending certain things, or conversely, devaluing them, the author also gives prescriptions.

– oder eine präskriptive Bedeutung der Art haben, daß sie ohne Veränderung ihrer Funktion in einen Imperativ umgeformt werden können, also die Ausdrücke der Verpflichtung, besonders Gerundivformen, bisweilen Futurformen, Formeln moralischer Billigung, die die Unmöglichkeit gegenteiliger Entscheidung implizieren’. Cancik also mentions the ‘Futur der Prophezeiung’ (p.31, 33), which implies a command (of the sort ‘you will do this or that...’). She discusses the ‘präskriptive Sprache’ p.22ff.

⁶⁹ Mentioned by Cancik, p.45.

One major problematic point of Cancik's theory is its verification in practice. She regards prescriptive speech as something that may occur in certain parts of a letter, and thus may be quite exactly localized. Letters 74 and 78 are discussed as examples of prescriptive speech. Concerning letter 74, Cancik claims that some paragraphs (§1-9, 16-19, 20-21 and 30-34, roughly) are prescriptive, whereas the others are descriptive (1967, 27ff.). Such neat delineations between prescriptive and descriptive parts cannot be found, in my opinion.⁷⁰ Letter 78 is wholly prescriptive, Cancik further argues, since it begins and ends with an adhortation (in §5 and §25) (1967, 31ff.). However, though imperatives, subjunctives and other prescriptive forms certainly occur in this letter, it also contains passages that can be called descriptive.⁷¹ In as far as the entire reasoning of the letter is aimed at the elimination of the fear of death and pain, the letter can be considered prescriptive. However, this gives a different idea of what 'prescriptive speech' implies.

Risselada's linguistic study of Latin 'directives' also constitutes an inquiry into prescriptive language. She starts from the notion of 'speech acts': a speech act is 'the verbal action which a speaker performs by means of an utterance', e.g., asking a question, giving a compliment or an order (1993, 1, 23ff.). Risselada more specifically studies 'directives', 'speech acts by means of which a speaker attempts to get the addressee to do something'. The range of directives is, of course, very wide. Two means of forming a directive are distinguished, grammatical (such as an imperative), and lexical (such as a verb of command).⁷² The grammatical means Risselada studies are, among others, the imperative, the subjunctive, the indicative future and the gerundive with a form of *esse*.⁷³

⁷⁰ For instance, no clear change in tone (or in the form of sentences) is visible between the first part of the letter (§1-9) and the following 'descriptive' paragraphs.

⁷¹ For instance, §8ff. give a description of pain.

⁷² See pp.4-5. In her conclusion, she points out that the lexical aspect has been underestimated (p.330). There are also cases where it is more difficult to determine where the directive aspect of an utterance is located (p.5). Compare the discussion in Chapter 4, section 5.3.

⁷³ About the gerundive construction, which we saw mentioned in *EM*95.60 as the means to render prescriptions, Risselada says: 'by their very nature gerundival constructions focus the

Risselada further distinguishes between different levels of the speech act. She equates the speech act with the term ‘illocutionary act’. The illocution is defined as ‘what we do in saying something’. The illocution ‘must be distinguished from the instrumental locutionary act; this subact involves the production of the ‘meaningful utterance’’.⁷⁴ The distinction between locution and illocution may be helpful in further defining Cancik’s approach. Her ‘imperativische Satz’ is situated at the level of the locution, while the more general ‘prescriptive speech’ (comprising exempla, comparisons etc.) rather seems to be at the level of the illocution.

A specimen of prescriptive text will be discussed together with the preface of *NQ* 3. In some other prefaces and epilogues directives are clearly visible, for instance in the imperative forms contained in the preface to *NQ* 4a. In the consolatory passages at the end of *NQ* 6 and 2, directives expressed by grammatical means also occur.⁷⁵ Such passages could be said to have a general prescriptive intent, which is especially visible at some points (by grammatical and lexical means). Often, however, the epilogues form negative descriptions or complaints about man’s

attention on the necessity, inevitability etc. of the realization of a state of affairs rather than to the one who should realize it’ (p.182). Such a construction corresponds to the nature of Seneca’s prescriptions. In the material on which Risselada bases her research (comedies and letters), the ‘periphrastic gerundive construction’ does not occur often. It would be interesting to see whether it appears more frequently in Seneca’s work (cf. also the gerundives in *De tranquillitate animi* 2.5 and *De ira* 3.5.3, mentioned above). Seneca’s work is of the specific type of interaction mentioned by Risselada as ‘instruction texts’ (p.17). The characteristic these texts share is that ‘they do not constitute interactions between a speaker and a specific addressee, but are addressed to any reader that is interested in the subject matter’. A note refers to the existence of a conventional internal addressee in some of these texts.

⁷⁴ 1993, 25. An example of these different levels is also given: the sentence ‘I could give you a ride back home later’ involves an offer (the illocutionary act), which is made by means of the utterance (the locutionary act).

⁷⁵ See for instance, in the epilogue of *NQ* 6: *ingenti animo mors provocanda est* (32.3), *videbit* (32.4), a gerundive and subjunctive in 32.5, an imperative in 32.6, etc. Such exhortations do not occur in the preface of the book (an indication of the difference between the two texts).

misbehaviour, rather than (positive) adhortations. The prescriptive character of these passages is different (apotreptic). What Cancik calls ‘das wertsetzende Argumentieren’ plays an important role in these texts. Through positive or negative qualifications and descriptions Seneca indicates what should be done or avoided. A study of the language of the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* (and of Seneca’s hortatory style in general) from a linguistic point of view would certainly yield interesting results, but lies outside the scope of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BEGINNING OF THE WORK: THE PREFACE OF *NQ* 3

1. *Introduction*

As mentioned in the Introduction of this study, the original book order of the *Naturales Quaestiones* has been, and still is, a much disputed matter. According to the order recently argued for by Codoñer and Hine, the *Naturales Quaestiones* begins with Book 3. Therefore, in the study of the preface of this book the question whether it might be the *praefatio totius operis*, that is, whether it has the character of a preface introducing the entire work, is important.¹ Consequently, this question will be discussed in this chapter (although the discussion will also cover a larger area).

In his edition of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Hine says that this is the preface of an author who begins a new work:

Nam libri 3 praefatio auctorem opus novum ingredientem redolere viro docto Diels aliisque visa est, quia Seneca se *magnarum rerum fundamenta* ponere dicit (3 pr.1).. haec verba auctori novum opus inchoanti convenire credo.

Had these words been written in the preface to the seventh book (which is the position of Book 3 according to the order of the archetype), Seneca would surely have said that six books had already been written, Hine adds.² The opinion that the preface of *NQ* 3 is the preface that introduces the entire work, since it speaks of the beginning of an undertaking, has also been expressed before Codoñer and Hine.³

¹ Cf. Gross 1989, 317.

² 1996, xxv. Compare Hine 1981, 15-16.

³ This also appears from Hine's words *viro docto Diels aliisque visa est*. Cf. Hine 1981, 15: the reference is to Diels 1885, 28 n.1 (1969, 404).

In 1896, Gercke had already said: ‘Seneca sagt ja so deutlich wie möglich, dass er jetzt das schwierige Werk in Angriff nehmen und sich dabei möglichst beeilen will’.⁴

Protests against the idea that this is the *praefatio totius operis* are also heard. An example of such a protest is found in a review of Gercke’s edition of the *Naturales Quaestiones* by Summers.⁵ Summers does not consider Seneca’s statement that he is beginning an important undertaking sufficient proof for putting the preface at the beginning of the entire work. As he says: ‘these prologues are independent pieces of writing, and the sentiment ‘it is a bold thing to begin writing on Natural Philosophy late in life’ might stand in the prologue of any of the books of the *N.Q.*’.⁶ Indeed, the independent character of the books of the *Naturales Quaestiones* is an important obstacle to discovering whether a specific preface was meant to introduce the entire work.

In more recent times, the idea that the preface to Book 3 introduced the entire work has also met with some protest. Certain details in the text are interpreted in different ways. Stahl points to the instances of the perfect tense, which, according to her, indicate that Seneca has already begun his work (1960, 2-3). Gross devalues Hine’s argumentation by saying that it is only based on the ‘Tenor’ of the preface.⁷ According to Gross, in §4 of the preface Seneca expresses a sentiment of optimism because he has already achieved part of the work. In their edition of the *Naturales*

⁴ 1896, 123. See also Parroni 1992, 169; 1997, 116; edition, p.xlviii-xlix, Gauly 2004, 58. Others also remark upon the introductory character of the preface, but do not draw the conclusion that the book should be placed at the beginning of the work. See for instance Wunsch 1894, 14, 17 (an example of an early discussion of the book order of the *NQ*). In their edition of the *NQ*, O. and E. Schönberger, who consider the 1-7 sequel the original order of the books, twice mention the preface of Book 3 in the chapter devoted to the ‘Absicht des Werkes’ (1998, 521-522).

⁵ W.C. Summers, ‘Gercke’s *Senecae Naturales Quaestiones*’, *CR* 23 (1910), 233-235.

⁶ On p.234, n.2. See also P. Lejay’s review of Gercke, *Revue critique d’histoire et de littérature* 64 (1907), 442-444.

⁷ Gross 1989, 317-318. In 1981, 15-16, Hine indeed uses the words ‘tone’ and ‘tenor’ in his argumentation.

Quaestiones, O. and E. Schönberger contest Hine's interpretation of *fundamenta ponam* as referring to the beginning of the work.⁸

The preface has also been thought to indicate the beginning not of the *Naturales Quaestiones* as we have it, but of a more extensive undertaking. After having written some books on different subjects, Seneca decided to turn his work into a complete survey of the universe.⁹ This argument recognizes that the preface refers to the beginning of an undertaking.

The idea that the preface to Book 3 is the beginning of the entire work has clearly not been accepted by all researchers.¹⁰ In the following in-depth analysis of the preface, I will argue along the lines of those who regard it as the preface to the entire work.

2. Preface §1-4

The first four paragraphs of the preface of Book 3 announce the author's intentions. The subject of the work, its importance, and the difficulties that accompany the project are mentioned. These paragraphs contain a high density of elements that regularly occur in prefaces, prefatory commonplaces.¹¹

⁸ 1998, 532 'von keiner Bedeutung für die Reihenfolge der Bücher ist 3 pr. 1 (*fundamenta ponam*) woraus Hine (s.15) schloß, damit beginne das Gesamtwerk..., doch ist der Ausdruck viel zu allgemein und bedeutet nur, daß Seneca dabei ist, grundlegende Ausführungen zu schreiben'.

⁹ This idea has been expressed by Rehm 1907, 390-391, and is mentioned by Gross 1989, 318, Hine 1981, 16 (with a refutation). Compare the Introduction, section 4, for this question.

¹⁰ Even after Hine and Codoñer's work on the book order: Gross and O. and E. Schönberger, for instance, disagree with Hine.

¹¹ For works in which prefatory commonplaces have been assembled see Chapter 1, section 1.1, n.3. Compare Gauly's remark (2004, 58) about the relevance of the 'Exordialtopik' for the question of the position of the preface at the beginning of the work.

2.1 The first sentence of the preface: the subject of the work

The first sentence of the preface mentions the task Seneca is about to undertake: he has decided to ‘go around the world’ and uncover its causes and secrets.

I realize, Lucilius, my dear friend, how vast is the project for which I am starting the groundwork, I, an old man, who has decided to survey the universe, to uncover its causes and secrets, and to pass them on to the knowledge of others.

Non praeterit me, Lucili virorum optime, quam magnarum rerum fundamenta ponam senex, qui mundum circumire constitui et causas secretaque eius eruere atque aliis noscenda prodere.

In this sentence, Seneca gives the impression of continuing a dialogue with Lucilius: we readers are led to think that Lucilius pointed out the magnitude of the project, and Seneca answered him.¹²

Announcing the subject of the work that follows is one of the basic functions of a preface.¹³ Such a general indication of the subject of the *Naturales Quaestiones* is not found in the other prefaces. The phrase *mundum circumire* also appears in the preface to *NQ* Book 1, where Seneca says: ‘the mind cannot despise colonnades and panelled ceilings...until it goes around the entire universe’ (*[animus] non potest ante contemnere porticus et lacunaria...quam totum circuit mundum*, §8). In this

¹² Cf. Stahl 1960, 29. The epistolary character of the preface is strongest in the preface to Book 4a (discussed in Chapter 6). With this sentence one may compare Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 4.16.2: *rem enim, quod te non fugit, magnam complexus sum et gravem et plurimi otii* (speaking about his work *De republica*).

¹³ See Herkommer 1968, 64 ff., Engel 1910, 7 (who speaks of the commonplace *indicatio*). Cf. Janson 1964, 149, Mansfeld 1994 and 1998, index s.v. ‘theme’. See also Conte 1992, 147: ‘the empirical function...to inform the public of the song’s object – its *quid* – by serving as a periphrastic substitute for the title itself, or a plot-summary of the contents. Among its various possible functions, and aside from many others which could be added, this is the most characteristic function of the proem, the only necessary and constant one’.

case, however, the phrase occurs in a less ‘programmatically’ sense: it does not indicate Seneca’s programme, as in the preface of Book 3.¹⁴

The representation of one’s study of the world (or the heavens) in terms of a voyage through the universe was a traditional image.¹⁵ Lucretius, describing Epicurus’ achievements, says ‘he traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination’ (*omne immensum peragravit mente animoque*, *De rerum natura* 1.74). Manilius also speaks of going around the heavens: ‘it is my delight to traverse the very air and spend my life touring the boundless skies, learning of the constellations and the contrary motions of the planets’ (*Astronomica* 1.13-15).¹⁶

Seneca’s own (prosaic) formulation speaks of *mundum circumire*. The verb *circumire* refers to a general survey (or tour) of the world.¹⁷ Some researchers have considered the phrase an indication of the idea that the scope of the *Naturales Quaestiones* was meant to be that of a cosmology, even if the subjects that are

¹⁴ The preface of *NQ* 1 is the other most probable candidate for the position of the original beginning of the work, since the book order 1-7 has been widely accepted. Codoñer 1989, 1811 speaks of the programmatic character of both the preface of Book 3 and that of Book 1.

¹⁵ See also Schrijvers 1986, 46ff.: p.60 he mentions that the image of a ‘spiritual voyage’ was widespread in antiquity.

¹⁶ *Iuvat ire per ipsum / aera et immenso spatiantem vivere caelo signaque et adversos stellarum noscere cursus*. See also *Astronomica* 2.58-59, 5.1. In Book 15 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Pythagoras says, at the beginning of a longer speech: *iuvat ire per alta / astra, iuvat...nube vehi* (147-149). For the formula *iuvat* see below, section 2.4.

¹⁷ Vottero *ad loc.* mentions that the verb *circumire* is often used by Seneca in the sense of ‘to survey’, ‘to examine attentively’, but adds that here the literal meaning ‘to go around’ will also have played a role. The exact extent of the term *mundus* is difficult to determine. At the end of *NQ* 3, the *mundus* is destroyed through the inundation (*NQ* 3.28.5, 3.29.2). In 7.2.3, though, the term rather refers to the universe around the world, there named *terra*. *Circumire mundum* in the *NQ* also involves the comets and heavenly fires of Books 7 and 1. For the general meaning of term *mundus* see also Pease’s commentary on Cicero, *DND* 1.18. Gauy 2004, 137-139 also discusses the phrase *mundum circumire*.

discussed in the work rather belong to the area of meteorology.¹⁸ I prefer to think that Seneca speaks about his undertaking in a grand manner as ‘a voyage around the world’.¹⁹

The phrase *fundamenta ponere* clearly refers to the beginning of an undertaking.²⁰ The expression is also used with this meaning in *EM* 13.16:

Foolishness, with all its other faults, has also this: it is always getting ready to live (*semper incipit vivere*). Reflect... what this saying means, and you will see how revolting is the fickleness of men who every day lay down new foundations of life (*cotidie nova vitae fundamenta ponentium*), and begin to build up fresh hopes even at the brink of the grave (*novas spes etiam in exitu inchoantium*).

The notion of beginning an undertaking is also found in §3-4 of the preface: ‘now I have started a work that is serious, difficult and immense in the second half of my life’, Seneca says (*nunc vero ad rem seriam, gravem, immensam postmeridianis horis accessimus*). The comparison he makes between his position and that of travellers, who begin their voyage belatedly, also refers to a beginning: they compensate for their delayed departure by their haste (*qui tardius exierunt, velocitate pensant moram*).

¹⁸ For the question cf. the Introduction, section 4. See Waiblinger 1977, 19-20, 111, Gross 1989, 114, Abel 1985, 740-741 and Gauly 2004, 71 for the thought that *mundum circumire* refers to a more general inquiry than the field of meteorology. The phrase has also been regarded as an argument for the idea that the *NQ* is not complete, since the subjects that compose the work as we have it can hardly be said to form a (complete) ‘survey of the world’. In my opinion this reasoning is hazardous, because the sentence does not seem to give so precise an indication.

¹⁹ Besides a voyage around the world, the first sentence also speaks about an inquiry into the causes of natural phenomena. This aspect of the work has been mentioned in Chapter 2 (section 2).

²⁰ Cf. ThLL on *fundamentum* (II B): *spectat ad artes et litteras, librorum compositionem 1. generatim: i. q. initium, principium*.

Gercke points to the occurrence of verb forms in the future and the subjunctive, which indicate that the work must be undertaken (1896, 123). Stahl, on the other hand, emphasizes the few cases of the perfect tense (*constitui* and possibly *praeterit* in the first sentence, *accessimus* in §3), which, according to her, indicate that the work has already been started, while the instances of the future tense suggest that there still is much to do (1960, 2-3). Gercke explained these forms with reference to the usage of the past tense in the epistolary style.²¹ For Stahl, however, this does not provide sufficient explanation.

Herkommer discusses the appearance of the perfect tense in the prefaces of historical works (1968, 84-6). He states that future and perfect tenses do not necessarily indicate that the preface has been written before or after the book, respectively (another possibility to be taken into account concerning prefaces). The origin of the difference in tenses lies rather in the view the author takes on his work:

..im einen Fall nimmt der Verfasser den Standpunkt vor Beginn des Unternehmens ein, in dem das werk noch vor ihm liegt und er dabei ist, es in Angriff zu nehmen. Im anderen Fall wird das Werk als geschrieben betrachtet; der Autor nimmt den Standpunkt des Lesers ein, und somit können wir bei dieser From der Aussage von Briefstil reden (1968, 85-6).

Herkommer adds that future and perfect tenses also occur together in prefaces. These ideas confirm Gercke's explanation.

A good parallel for the perfect tense in Seneca's first sentence is found at the beginning of Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia*: 'I have determined...to enumerate the deeds and sayings worthy to be remembered of the Roman city and external nations' (*digerere constitui*...).²²

²¹ 1896, 123: 'das Perfektum...das dem Praeteritum des Briefstiles ähnelnd den gefassten Entschluss und einige bereits erledigte Vorarbeiten voraussetzt'.

²² Cf. also Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 4.2: *statui res gestas populi Romani carptim...perscribere*, and *Historiae* Fr. 1: *res populi Romani...composui*.

2.2 Indications of the preoccupation with natural and moral philosophy

At the end of §2, a second reference to the activity Seneca wants to undertake occurs: ‘the mind should be entirely free to concentrate on itself; towards the very end of its life, at least, it should look backward in contemplation of itself’ (*sibi totus animus vacet et ad contemplationem sui saltim in ipso fine respiciat*). In this sentence, Seneca describes what he will do in the moral terms of self-contemplation. The *animus* should free itself from other occupations and finally indulge in *contemplatio sui*.²³

It may seem strange to find this moral activity replacing the ‘voyage around the world’. Donini asks why Seneca recommends that the *animus* should devote itself to self-contemplation, although this is not the subject of the book, nor of the entire work (1979, 238, n.44). He proposes to interpret *contemplatio sui* as ‘contemplation of what is its own, what belongs to it’ (with reference to *NQ* 1 praef. §12), instead of the more normal meaning ‘contemplation of itself’. This interpretation seems less probable, however, since *contemplatio sui* as ‘contemplation of itself’ is perfectly understandable in Senecan language. Moreover, the idea of ‘contemplation of itself’ remains present in the words *sibi totus animus vacet*, and in the next paragraphs of the preface.²⁴ In my opinion, we should not try to adapt the meaning of the passage so as to avoid the statement of a moral pursuit. It is preferable to accept the announcement as an indication of the ethical aspect of the *Naturales Quaestiones*: for Seneca, the study of nature is accompanied by an introspection of the *animus*.

²³ See also *fidelissimus est ad honesta ex paenitentia transitus* in §3; the term *honesta* has moral connotations (see SVF, index *s. v.* καλόν).

²⁴ For the use of reflexive pronouns in Seneca see Traina 1978, 14ff.: ‘l’uso del riflessivo, sia diretto che indiretto, è forse il più frequente mezzo sintattico senecano con cui si esprime questo continuo ripiegarsi del soggetto su se stesso’. On p.60 Traina mentions our passage. Gauly (2004, 137 n.8) also disagrees with Donini’s interpretation.

2.3 The importance and difficulty of the undertaking

In the first four paragraphs of the preface, Seneca repeatedly emphasizes the vastness, importance and difficulty of his undertaking. The theme appears in the announcement of the subject in the first sentence of the preface ('I realize...how vast is the project for which I am starting the groundwork...'). Seneca goes on with: 'when will I cover so much material, gather together such scattered information, gain insight into such hidden facts?' (*quando tam multa consequar, tam sparsa colligam, tam occulta perspiciam?*) The importance and difficulty of the undertaking is further illustrated by the lines Seneca quotes and comments upon in the third paragraph; they are discussed below (under 'Vagellius' verse', 2.4). He announces: 'I have started a work that is serious, difficult, immense' (*ad rem seriam, gravem, immensam...accessimus*). In the fourth paragraph he speaks of 'a subject that is perhaps surmountable, but certainly grand' (*opus nescio an superabile, magnum certe*). The paragraph (and the first section of the preface) ends with the statement: 'when I consider the magnitude of the undertaking my spirits rise and I contemplate how much remains to be done, not how much remains to live' (*crescit animus quotiens coepti magnitudinem aspexit, et cogitat quantum proposito, non quantum sibi supersit*).

Indicating the importance, vastness and difficulty of the work undertaken (the difficulty often resulting from the magnitude of the undertaking) was a standard element of prefaces.²⁵ Lucretius announces that his teachings concern great subjects (*doceo magnis de rebus, De rerum natura* 4.6). Manilius also mentions the magnitude of what he has undertaken.²⁶ In the preface to his *De re rustica*, Columella announces that when he discerns the scale of his undertaking, as a whole or in its distinct parts, he fears he will not master the subject before the end of his life (§21). In the paragraphs following this statement he sums up everything one should know in order to be a good farmer (§22-28).²⁷ Pointing to the importance of

²⁵ See Herkommer 1968, 164ff., Janson 1964, 99, Dahlmann 1977, 80 and Genette 1997, 199-200 (concerning modern prefaces).

²⁶ *Astronomica* 1.10, 114-116, 3.1, 34.

²⁷ Columella concludes that this survey risks deterring students. The formula he uses to announce the difficulty involved in the magnitude of the subject, *post hanc tam multarum*

the work was one of the functions ancient rhetorical theory assigned to the preface, with the intention of catching the reader's attention.²⁸

Gross argues that the concluding sentence of §4, 'when I consider the magnitude of the undertaking my spirits rise...', forms an argument for not regarding this preface as the introduction to the entire work.²⁹ According to him, Seneca's high spirits can best be understood if he has already achieved a certain amount of work. Gross interprets the second part of the sentence, *..et cogitat quantum proposito, non quantum sibi supersit*, in this light. Seneca's courage grows when he considers how much work still must be done (a positive element, since some work has already been done), not how much time is left to him (a negative fact: there is little time left).

This interpretation does not seem correct to me. To say that Seneca's spirits rise because of the work he has already achieved is an unnecessary addition. The parallels given by Vottero *ad loc.* show that the meaning of the first part of the sentence is that Seneca feels exalted because of the difficulty or magnitude of the undertaking itself, just as he says.³⁰ In the second part of the sentence, the contrast is between Seneca's grandiose plans for the work, which make him enthusiastic (*quantum proposito*) and the little time that is available to achieve them (*quantum supersit*).

2.4 'Vagellius' verse'

In the third paragraph, Seneca says: 'I want to recite these well-known lines of the famous poet' (*libet igitur mihi exclamare illum poetae incluti versum*). *Libet (mihi)*

tamque multiplicum rerum praedicationem non me praeterit.., is the same as that used by Seneca in the first sentence of *NQ* 3.

²⁸ Cf. Chapter 1, section 1.1.

²⁹ 1989, 317. He is not the first to say so: see Hine 1981, 15-16, with further references and a refutation.

³⁰ See *EM* 22.7: *nisi crescit illi animus ipsa rerum difficultate*, Tacitus *Dialogus de oratoribus* 37.5: *crescit enim cum amplitudine rerum vis ingenii*.

is a recurrent element of prefaces, used (together with variants like *iuvat*) to indicate the wish to undertake a work.³¹ The famous lines follow: ‘we arouse our minds to greatness and strive for grand accomplishments in a short time’ (*tollimus ingentes animos et maxima parvo / tempore molimur*). The quotation is thought most likely to come from the oeuvre of the poet Vagellius.³²

The exclamation suits Seneca’s situation: he is undertaking a great effort while only little time remains, because of his old age. However, in a commentary on these lines, Seneca indicates (as an afterthought) that they do not apply to him: they would have been relevant if he had started writing the *Naturales Quaestiones* as a young man. He explains the reference in the quotation to ‘a short time’, which would seem strange in connection with a young man, by saying that for so great a project no time is long enough. With this commentary, Seneca emphasizes the immensity of his task and the difficulty of completing it even more strongly.

According to Dahlmann, three themes are contained in the poet’s verse as well as in Seneca’s preface: the author’s poetical enthusiasm (*tollimus ingentes animos*), the magnitude of the undertaking (*maxima molimur*) and the short time available for it (*parvo tempore*). Dahlmann states that these three themes are prefatory commonplaces: his conclusion is that ‘Vagellius’ verse’ belonged to the proem of a

³¹ See Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.13-14 and 16-17, Lucretius *DRN* 4.2-3, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15.147-148; cf. also 1.1-2, Livy, *Ab urbe condita* preface §3 *iuvabit me*, Horace *Odes* 3.25.14 *libet*, Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 26.5.

³² Most editions of fragments of Latin poets place the verse under Vagellius’ name, with the remark that this attribution is probable, but not certain (see Büchner 1982 and Blänsdorf 1995). *NQ* 6.2.9 has been used as an argument (although it is not a very strong argument) for attributing the verse to Vagellius, since Seneca, quoting a verse from Vagellius by name, announces that it comes from *illo incluto carmine*, with the same qualification (*inclutus*) as is used in the preface to *NQ* 3 to refer to the poet. Cf. Dahlmann 1977, 76-77, Vottero *ad loc.*, Mazzoli, ‘Due note anneane, II, L’*inclutum carmen* di Vagellio’, *Athenaeum* 46 (1968), 363-368, Mazzoli 1970, 257-258. In 1968, 365ff., Mazzoli goes so far as to reconstruct the content of Vagellius’ work from these fragments and their context in Seneca’s work.

specific work.³³ He further argues that the author's poetical ardour (or 'Begeisterung') appears in the preface to *NQ* 3 in the sentences 'the mind should be entirely free to concentrate on itself...it should look back in contemplation of itself' (§2) and 'whatever has been lost the mind will recover by the diligent use of its present life' (§3). In my opinion, these sentences rather testify to an enthusiastic willingness of the author to engage with the work; a 'poetical ardour' is especially visible in Seneca's wish to cite Vagellius' lines.

2.5 Seneca *senex*

Another element that is prominent in these first four paragraphs is the characterisation Seneca gives of himself as a *senex*.³⁴ In the first sentence, he speaks of realizing what an enormous task he undertakes in his old age. The fact that he starts writing at the end of his life forms an obstacle for the accomplishment of the work, together with the greatness of the undertaking itself. This also appears from Seneca's commentary on the lines of poetry just quoted; 'now I have started a work that is serious, difficult and immense in the second half of my life'.

In the second and third paragraph, Seneca states that his old age urges him on and reproaches him for the time he has lost. The time that has been misspent is an incentive to work diligently: the new zeal will make up for his past mistakes.³⁵ In §4, concluding these thoughts about the difficulty of the work and his old age, Seneca says that he will hasten to get on with his writing *sine aetatis excusatione*.

Thus, two evaluations of Seneca's old age are involved in this passage: besides seeing it as an impediment for the (achievement of the) work that must be done, he

³³ 1977, 79-81. The quotation as a whole reminds Dahlmann of a line from the *Aetna*, which speaks of a great effort undertaken for an untried theme (*fortius ignotas molimur pectore curas*, v.24). This statement occurs at the beginning of the poem, together with an announcement of its subject. Cf. also Virgil, *Georgics* 3.207, *ingentes tollent animos*, quoted by Vottero *ad loc*.

³⁴ We know that the work was written in the last years of Seneca's life, at about the same time as the *Epistulae Morales*. For the date of the *NQ*, cf. Gauly 2004, 19-28.

³⁵ Lana 1955, 3 therefore calls the beginning of the preface Seneca's 'palinodia'.

also mentions it as an incentive to labour assiduously (§2), and thereby as a positive factor.³⁶

The reference to the author's old age belongs to the prefatory category or commonplace of 'the author speaking about himself'.³⁷ What an author says about himself tends to be of a humble nature.³⁸ Seneca does not think he will be able to complete the enormous task he is beginning, because of his old age. Such statements contribute to one of the functions of the preface: besides capturing the listener or reader's attention, ancient rhetorical theory also prescribed that he should be made well-disposed towards the author. This could be done *ab nostra persona*, by presenting the author or speaker in a positive light, as described in a passage from Cicero's rhetorical work:

We shall win goodwill on the basis of our own person if we refer to our own acts and services without arrogance...if we display the misfortunes which have befallen us or the difficulties which still beset us; if we use prayers and entreaties with a humble and submissive spirit (*De inventione* 1.22).³⁹

Presenting one's problems humbly achieves a good effect. Genette also mentions this prefatory 'stratagem': he speaks of a 'rhetoric of modesty', which often accompanies the emphasis placed on the magnitude of the subject. As he

³⁶ In *EM* 68.13 Seneca more clearly states that old age is best suited to study. Stahl 1960, 27ff., also points out both aspects of the theme of old age. However, she believes the negative aspect to be mentioned in the first two paragraphs, while the positive aspect is found in the next two paragraphs, in a contrast with the first section (p.28). I cannot discern such a neat distinction in the preface.

³⁷ See Herkommer 1968, 46ff. Cf. in Engel (1910, 7) the category *scriptor de se ipso loquens*. Gercke 1896, 125 mentions that private thoughts occur in this preface.

³⁸ Cf. Herkommer 1968, 51ff. about 'Selbstverkleinerung' and 'Außerungen der Bescheidenheit'. This idea is also present in Janson 1964: see for example his conclusion pp.159-160.

³⁹ *Ab nostra, si de nostris factis et officiis sine arrogantia dicemus...si quae incommoda acciderint aut quae instent difficultates proferemus; si prece et obsecratione humili ac supplici utemur.*

formulates it: ‘offsetting the importance of his theme, which he sometimes inordinately exaggerated, the author pleaded his incapacity to handle it with all the necessary talent’ (1997, 208). This is the combination we find at the beginning of the preface: the emphasis on the magnitude and difficulty of the work is combined with the obstacle formed by the author’s old age.

In other prefaces, the combination of a huge subject and a hesitant author also occurs. Manilius hopes he will live long enough to complete his great undertaking (*Astronomica* 1.114-116). The fact that this statement is found at the beginning of the first book of the *Astronomica*, and not in one of the introductory passages to the subsequent books, is significant. A famous example of the mention of the magnitude of the proposed task, together with the author’s uncertainty about it, is the beginning of Livy’s *Ab urbe condita*. As in the preface to *NQ* 3, the subject of the work is mentioned in the first sentence: Livy claims not to be sure whether he will do something worth the effort if he writes down the history of Rome from its beginnings. In the next paragraphs, one of the factors that contribute to his doubts appears to be the magnitude of the task.

The theme of the author’s old age for instance also appears in the preface of Book 1 of Seneca the Elder’s *Controversiae*. Seneca the Elder says that he is willing to take upon himself the task his sons have asked him to fulfil, namely to tell about the orators he has heard speaking during his life; his memory, though, is not as good as it used to be, but has diminished because of his illness and old age (§2-3). However, he will do what his sons demand of him. He declares: ‘be it as you wish, then: let an old man be sent to school’ (§4). As in the preface to *NQ* 3, the mention of the impediment caused by the author’s old age is followed by an exhortation to begin the task that lies ahead.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ At the beginning of the prefaces to Books 9 and 10, brief references to the author’s old age also occur. For the combination of the ideas of old age, a retirement from public life and a movement away from vice to virtue see also Horace, *Epistles* 1.1. The theme of old age in a preface is for example also discussed by C. Cignolo, ‘La struttura della *praefatio* al *De litteris, syllabis et metris* di Terenziano Mauro (GLK VI 325-327)’, in S. Sconocchia and L. Toneatto (eds.), *Lingue tecniche del greco e del latino III*, Bologna 2000, 235-245.

2.6 The haste

Because Seneca starts writing the *Naturales Quaestiones* as a *senex*, he has to make up for the years he has lost. Therefore, he will be constantly occupied with his work, day and night: ‘add night to day and cut other activities short, abandon concern for property that lies far from its owner. The mind should be entirely free to concentrate on itself’ (*nox ad diem accedat, occupationes recidantur, patrimonii longe a domino iacentis cura solvatur, sibi totus animus vacet.*., §2).⁴¹ The idea is pursued in the third paragraph. In §4 Seneca compares his haste after a late start with that of a traveller: ‘let me do what is often done on a journey: those who start late make up for their delay by their speed. Let me hurry...’⁴²

In the *Epistulae Morales*, which were written by Seneca at about the same time as the *Naturales Quaestiones*, there are some passages that contain the same elements of old age and constant work to make up for lost time. At the beginning of letter 8, Seneca describes the seclusion he has sought for the purpose of his work (§1-3). He works day and night and has abandoned all other occupations to this end. He adds that he has found the ‘right path’ late in life.⁴³

The thought of being occupied day and night with writing is another element that occurs more often in prefaces.⁴⁴ Janson mentions that diligence was one quality Latin authors did not mind boasting about. Spending your nights studying was a way to show diligence.⁴⁵ In the preface of Book 1 of *De rerum natura*, Lucretius speaks

⁴¹ As Vottero indicates in his n.8 *ad loc.*, what Seneca here says about leaving behind his affairs to concentrate on his studies corresponds with Tacitus’ account of Seneca’s demand of permission to retire to Nero (*Annales* 14.52ff.). In this text Seneca also says *..quod temporis hortorum aut villarum curae seponitur in animum revocabo*.

⁴² In the *Epistula ad Quintum fratrem* 2.14 (13), §2 (edition Shackleton Bailey), Cicero uses the same comparison. See also Seneca’s *EM* 68.13.

⁴³ See also *EM* 68.13, 61.1.

⁴⁴ See Janson 1964, 97-98, 147-148. The thought also occurs in *EM* 8.1, 61.1, and 122.3.

⁴⁵ See Janson, as mentioned in my previous note. Cf. Genette 1997, 206 on truthfulness.

about ‘spending tranquil nights in wakefulness’ (*noctes vigilare serenas*, v.142). Pliny the Elder also writes at night, as he says in the preface to the *Naturalis Historia* (§18).⁴⁶ Quintilian, too, speaks about writing day and night, in haste, in fear of death (preface to Book 6, §2).⁴⁷ The author’s haste belongs in the same prefatory category as the references to old age.⁴⁸

Varro starts his *De re rustica* with these same thoughts of old age and haste.⁴⁹

Had I possessed the leisure, Fundania, I would write in a more serviceable form what I must now set forth as I can, reflecting that I must hasten; for if man is a bubble, as the proverb has it, all the more so is an old man. For my eightieth year admonishes me to gather up my pack before I set forth from life.⁵⁰

Like Seneca, Varro says that because he starts writing at the end of his life he is compelled to make haste. His ‘intellectual luggage’ must be assembled before it is too late. This parallel is especially interesting because it is found in the preface of

⁴⁶ Pliny’s reason for writing at night is different, though: he dedicates his days to other activities. Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 18-19.

⁴⁷ Elsewhere, Quintilian says he does not entirely approve of writing at night (10.3.26 f.).

⁴⁸ Lausberg 1973, 157 mentions the theme ‘Trägheit ist zu meiden’ in relation to the achievement of benevolence *ab nostra persona*, with a reference to Horace, *Sermones* 2.3.15. Cf. Curtius 1967, 98 under ‘Exordialtopik’.

⁴⁹ *De re rustica* is also discussed by Janson 1964, 88 ff.

⁵⁰ *Otium si essem consecuturus, Fundania, commodius tibi haec scriberem quae nunc ut potero exponam, cogitans esse properandum, quod, ut dicitur, si est homo bulla, eo magis senex. Annus enim octogesimus admonet me ut sarcinas conligam antequam proficiscar e vita.* Cf. *EM* 19.1 for the similar expression *vasa colligere*, in the same context (*satis multum temporis sparsimus: incipiamus vasa in senectute colligere*). Compare also *quidquid amissum est, id diligenti usu praesentis vitae recolliget*, in §3 of the preface to *NQ* 3. Vottero (followed by Parroni) mentions *EM* 19.1 as parallel for *quando... tam sparsa colligam*, in the first sentence of the preface.

the first book of Varro's *De re rustica*. These clearly are suitable thoughts to open a work with.⁵¹

2.7 Seneca's haste in writing the *Naturales Quaestiones*

We have seen that Seneca says he had to hasten in writing the *Naturales Quaestiones*. This remark has sometimes been taken literally: it has been said that the *Naturales Quaestiones* is a 'hasty' work, in a negative sense. An example: 'Er vollendete das Werk in fliegender Hast – in den Jahren 62 und 63 – und hatte also für die Ausarbeitung der einzelnen an Lucilius gesandten Bücher der Quaestiones wenig Zeit übrig'.⁵² After having stated that Seneca is in fact a moralist, Schanz-Hosius also remark:

Die große Eilfertigkeit [with a reference to NQ 3, preface §4], mit der das Werk innerhalb der Jahre 62 und 63 hergestellt wurde, macht sich im einzelnen wie im ganzen fühlbar; wir vermissen nur zu oft eine streng systematische Durchführung der verschiedenen Lehren; auch in dem Aufbau des Ganzen will sich trotz aller Versuche ein leitender Faden nicht auffinden lassen...⁵³

Such statements are mostly found in earlier literature on the *Naturales Quaestiones*. More recent literature is more careful in the formulation of negative judgements, and is even inclined to defend Seneca.⁵⁴ These negative judgements especially concern the discussions of natural phenomena in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, which fall outside the scope of this thesis. However, a statement such as that of Schanz-

⁵¹ Parroni (1992, 169; 1997, 116; edition p.xlviii-xlix) has already pointed out this parallel with the preface of *De re rustica*, and considers it an argument to regard the preface of the third book as the *praefatio totius operis*.

⁵² Oder 1899, 286. This is said after a series of negative remarks on the *NQ*, which convey the idea that for scientific subjects Seneca lacks the interest he has for moral matters, and that this is apparent in the *NQ*.

⁵³ Schanz-Hosius 1935, 699-700. See also Gercke 1896, 125: 'man muss sich daran gewöhnen, dass Seneca schnell arbeitete und Moralist war, aber nicht Naturforscher'.

⁵⁴ Cf. Parroni's introduction to his edition of the *NQ*.

Hosius, 'in dem Aufbau des Ganzen will sich...ein leitender Faden nicht auffinden lassen', will, I believe, be qualified in this thesis.

3. Preface §5-6

The next two paragraphs of the preface argue that the achievement of moral improvement should be preferred to the writing of history: 'it is far better to eliminate one's own ills than to report to posterity the ills of others', Seneca exclaims (§5). The passage begins with the statement that some people have worn themselves down (*consumpsere se*) by writing about the deeds of foreign kings and the victories and defeats of nations. With this formulation, Seneca ridicules writers of history. It is better to celebrate the works of the gods than the bad deeds of conquerors such as Philippus and Alexander, who are no lesser disasters than an inundation or a conflagration. In the sixth paragraph, Hannibal's deeds are mentioned as an example of what historians describe.⁵⁵ 'It is far better to investigate what ought to be done rather than what has been done': Seneca concludes the passage by rephrasing his initial statement.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Among other details, Seneca mentions that, even as an old man, Hannibal continued to want to wage war. It is not impossible that this disapproving reference was caused by the attention Seneca pays to the theme of old age in this preface.

⁵⁶ *Quanto satius est quid faciendum sit quam quid factum quaerere*. Seneca also uses the formula *satius est...* in *EM* 118.2 (*sua satius est mala quam aliena tractare...*), *EM* 102.20 and *De beneficiis* 2.29.3; cf. *De brevitae vitae* 13.7.

3.1 *Comparatio artium*

In these paragraphs, Seneca is defending his work by arguing that it is far better to write about ethics than about history. It is interesting that, here again, he characterizes his undertaking as belonging to the area of ethics rather than physics.⁵⁷

The comparison of one's own subject to other subjects and the argument that one's own activity is better than that of others are found more often in ancient texts. These ideas, too, are prefatory commonplaces: this is understandable, since the preface is the place to defend and praise the work.⁵⁸ In the preface of his *De re rustica*, Columella presents the occupation he is writing about, agriculture, as better than other activities, such as for instance military activity (§7-10).⁵⁹ In the preface to Book 9 of his *De architectura*, Vitruvius compares writing about useful subjects to the practice of sport: since athletes win prizes, writers should be awarded even greater honours, he argues.⁶⁰ Pliny the Elder compares the lack of regard for those who have explained natural phenomena to the strange interest in putting men's misdeeds on record (i.e., writing history) (*Naturalis Historia* 2.43).⁶¹

In Chapter 2, we have already encountered the opposition between ethics and *artes* such as music and geometry, as formulated in *EM* 88. Seneca reproached the *artes* for lacking ethical relevance; historiography also belongs to this category ('the scholar (*grammaticus*) busies himself with investigations into language, and if it be

⁵⁷ Lana 1955, 5 says about these paragraphs: 'ora un confronto tra gli storici... e coloro, invece, che si sono dedicati e si dedicano allo studio della natura'. Without any comment, he changes Seneca's reference to an ethical theme into a reference to natural philosophy.

⁵⁸ This comparison is also called *sunkrisis artium*. See Citroni Marchetti 1991, 31 (who mentions our passage): 'il paragone tra la disciplina professata dall'autore e le altre attività è d'altronde comune nella letteratura tecnica e scientifica'; see also Schrijvers 1987, 378, André 1985, 383 (concerning Vitruvius' prefaces), Grilli 1971, 15 (about Cicero's *De republica*).

⁵⁹ Compare the beginning of Cato's *De agricultura*, §1-4.

⁶⁰ Citroni Marchetti 1991, 31 refers to the preface of *De architectura* Book 7 in this context, a text that seems to me to concern another subject, the useful writings of earlier generations, and the good use one should make of them.

⁶¹ Unlike the two other parallels, this one is a shorter remark made in the course of Pliny's work, not in a preface.

his desire to go further afield, he works on history..but which of these disciplines paves the way to virtue?', *EM* 88.3). Seneca's position in letter 88 is more fundamental than in the preface to *NQ* 3, where he is mainly concerned with validating his undertaking by means of the comparison with a less elevated activity.⁶²

Seneca also contrasts the narration of the bad deeds of conquerors to 'the celebration of the works of the gods' (*deorum opera celebrare*, §5). The general argumentation of the passage, as has been said, contrasts Seneca's own activity, formulated in terms of ethics, to historiography. This would in first instance lead one to regard the phrase *deorum opera celebrare* as another description of Seneca's superior undertaking, and therefore as a description of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁶³ However, this is somewhat questionable, since the idea of a 'celebration of the gods' work' is not strongly present in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Apart from a passage such as the epilogue of Book 5, the work could only be said to form such a celebration implicitly.⁶⁴ The wording 'the works of the gods' (with the plural 'gods') especially seems to have been chosen as a grand counterpart to the bad deeds of certain men, in the sense of *opera deorum* (good deeds of good persons) versus *latrocinia Alexandri* (bad deeds of bad persons), a connotation we should not seriously apply to the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁶⁵

⁶² In *De brevitae vitae* 13.9, Fabianus, one of Seneca's teachers, is shown to have been of the same opinion as Seneca regarding the (moral) uselessness of an occupation like history. Gross 1989 mentions this in his discussion of the preface to *NQ* 3 and adds: 'Seneca scheint dessen [i.e. Fabianus'] Werk für seine Praefatio benutzt zu haben' (p.116, cf. p.147, where he also mentions that Fabianus' name occurs in *NQ* 3.27.3). The facts do not give enough ground for this statement, however.

⁶³ Cf. Kühnen 1962, 18-19: '...gegenüber...dem grossen Werk, an dem Seneca gerade arbeitet: *deorum opera celebrare*'.

⁶⁴ Compare the remarks in Chapter 5, sections 8 and 10.

⁶⁵ Cf. again Kühnen 1962, 19: 'nur um des grösseren Zusammenhanges willen scheint der Satz eingefügt, dass es auch besser sei, die Werke Gottes zu feiern. In Wirklichkeit reisst der Eifer des Moralisten Seneca fort'. Concerning the plural 'the gods', see however also, e.g., *NQ* 6.3.1, where Seneca states that 'the gods' do not cause earthquakes.

3.2 Historiography

In his study ‘Seneca und die römische Geschichte’, Kühnen states that an incomplete and somewhat malevolent image of historiography is given in the paragraphs under discussion.⁶⁶ Indeed, Seneca describes historiography as preserving the evil deeds of humanity for posterity (*aliena mala posteris tradere*). Alexander, who is mentioned as the sort of criminal person historians choose to write about, is often mentioned by Seneca himself in his work.⁶⁷ In these references, the great conqueror serves as a negative *exemplum* that has a moral purpose. This aspect is not taken into consideration in §5-7.⁶⁸

In §10 of the preface, within a longer passage that defines how one should live, one finds a similar contrast: instead of the opposition between historiography and ethics, the historians’ subject, the conqueror, is contrasted to the (aspirant) *sapiens*. Seneca argues that the most important thing in life is not to have conquered the entire world, but ‘to have seen the universe in your mind and to have suppressed your vices – no victory is greater than this’.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ 1962, 19, cf. 27. Cf. Stahl 1960, 31-2, Vottero *ad loc.*, who speaks of ‘la svalutazione senecana della ricerca storica’. See also Codoñer 1997, 294-295 about the place of historiography in Seneca’s thought. Kühnen also discusses Seneca’s other references to history, demonstrating that he also speaks about this discipline in positive terms, and further places Seneca’s opinion in the context of Stoic thoughts about historiography (p.8ff.). In NQ 4b 3.1 and 7.16.1, historians are also mentioned in a negative manner.

⁶⁷ Vottero’s commentary *ad* §5 provides a list of passages, as well as a few references to the vast literature that has been written concerning the personage of Alexander.

⁶⁸ Cf. Kühnen 1962, 19.

⁶⁹ *Animo omne vidisse et, qua maior nulla victoria est, vitia domuisse*. In *De beneficiis* 7.2.5-7.3, Seneca also gives a description of the attitude of the wise man, and contrasts it with the attitude of the conqueror. The wise man is not satisfied with a little, but everything belongs to him; not, however, in the same sense as everything would belong to Alexander (and other conquerors), who always wanted to conquer more. The wise man surveys the entire world with his mind (a *lustratio animi*). This survey resembles the mind’s ascent to the skies described in the preface to NQ 1. This, too, is an aspect of the voyage of the mind

The negative actions described in §10, filling the sea with fleets, conquering the land around the Red Sea, and sailing the Ocean in search of the unknown (because all the land that was known had already been conquered), are not attributed to specific conquerors. However, they correspond to the characterisation of Alexander's deeds elsewhere in Seneca's work.⁷⁰ Seneca's next remark that many have reigned over populations and cities, but only few over themselves, is also applied to Alexander, who is said to have had power over everything rather than his emotions (*EM* 113.29). Such conquerors forget that 'self-command is the greatest command of all' (*imperare sibi maximum imperium est*, *EM* 113.30). In these passages, Seneca adapts military imagery to his moralistic goal.⁷¹

Historiography, we have seen, is contrasted to ethics as a morally useless discipline. However, historiographical works often proclaimed that they had a moral or practical utility.⁷² Most interesting is a passage in Polybius' *Histories* (1.35.1 ff.), in which the author is indicating the lesson that can be learnt from the episode he just described. It shows, he says, that one should not trust fortune, especially not when one happens to be experiencing success. Polybius' avowed purpose with such accounts is to make better persons of his readers. Indeed, as he says, there are two ways of improving oneself: by means of one's own misery and by that of others. Reading works of history, which provide experience about life without harm, is presented as the better option.

Polybius indicates that exactly the same lesson can be learnt from history – fortune should not be trusted, especially not when one thinks there is nothing to fear (compare the subsequent paragraphs of the preface, 7-9) – which, according to

around the world announced in the first sentence of the preface to *NQ* 3 (cf. Gauly 2004, 138).

⁷⁰ See *EM* 94.62, 119.7. Cf. the Budé's and Vottero's notes *ad loc.* (n.37) and Parroni's commentary. Cf. also Stahl 1960, 34.

⁷¹ Compare the same device in *EM* 51.5, applied to Hannibal: *armis vicit, vitiis victus est*. Seneca continues the metaphor by saying that 'we too' must fight a war, against the *voluptates*.

⁷² Often in their prefaces, of course: see Herkommer 1968, 128ff.

Seneca, only ethics can teach, not history. This, too, shows that Seneca's representation of historiography is all but objective.

In the fifth paragraph, bad conquerors like Alexander and Philippus are said to form no lesser disasters for mankind than an inundation or a conflagration. This comparison is of interest in connection with the ending of Book 3, where Seneca gives a vivid description of the inundation that will end this world (and also compares it to a conflagration). 'Catastrophal' human beings were more often compared to the natural catastrophes inundation and conflagration.⁷³ However, in our text the comparison might have been made for the specific reason that an inundation is described at the end of the book. This reference to the epilogue would imply a certain planning of the book, or at least indicate that Seneca had an overview of the book.⁷⁴

4. Preface §7-9

In §7-9 of the preface the central figure is that of *Fortuna*. Part of the task contained in teaching *quid faciendum sit* is to warn people against fortune. Seneca explains that none of fortune's gifts are stable. One therefore goes from success to misery (and vice versa): the human situation is an ever-changing one. Therefore, it is not sensible to be miserable about a bad situation, or happy about a good one. This instability also applies to powerful persons, cities and even reigns (§9).

⁷³ See Florus 4.2.3 *Caesaris furor atque Pompei urbem Italiam gentes nationes... quodam quasi diluvio et inflammatione corripuit*. Der Kleine Pauly, s.v. 'Sintflutsage' (vol.5, 1975, col.209-210), mentions that the term 'Sintflut' can also be used to refer to persons, enemies, etc. Cf. further Cicero, *De officiis* 2.16, for the idea that man is killed in greater number by his fellow-men than by natural disasters such as conflagrations and deluges.

⁷⁴ Gross 1989, 115 formulates it thus: 'dass die Präfatia wirklich zum Wasserbuch gehört, zeigt ein Satz in §5... damit weist Seneca schon auf den Epilog des Buches hin, der von der Sintflut handelt und in dem auch die Alternative 'Weltbrand oder Sintflut' als Ursachen des Weltuntergangs genannt wird'.

Fortuna, her instability and her gifts, forms one of the major themes of Seneca's work: many parallel texts exist.⁷⁵ In *De beneficiis* 6.33.1-2, for example, we find another clear indication of what should be taught on this subject:

Do you ask what you can bestow on a fortunate man? Teach him not to trust his felicity. . . Will you not have conferred enough upon him if you rob him of the foolish belief that his power will endure for ever, and teach him that the gifts of chance soon pass, and depart with greater speed than they come; that the descent from the summit of fortune is not made by the same stages by which it was reached, but that often it is only a step from the height of good fortune to ruin?⁷⁶

The lesson one must remember is that only virtue does not depend on fortune.

The idea that even powerful persons or instances suffer from *Fortuna* is also found elsewhere in Seneca's work. For instance, in *EM* 4.6 Seneca is advising Lucilius to remain strong in the face of adversity; it also befalls the most powerful persons. Some examples follow (§7). Seneca concludes that fortune does not elevate people without bringing them down as much as she had raised them. Power does not help men to escape from fortune: a powerful man is as likely to be killed (§8).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Cf. Vottero *ad loc.* (n.28). For the *NQ*, cf. 4a preface §22, 6.1.14. Cf. also Busch 1961, who has assembled many passages concerning the subject. She speaks of 'die in der Überschau fast ermüdend wirkende große Anzahl der Stellen, an denen Seneca zur Fortuna Stellung nimmt' (p.153). See also M. Rozelaar, *Seneca. Eine Gesamtdarstellung* Amsterdam 1976, 454-459 about the theme. To explain Seneca's great interest in this subject, Busch resorts to biographical reasons (pp.153-154). Cf. for example the biographical sketch of Regenbogen, 1936, 112-113. Rozelaar also pays attention to biographical motives.

⁷⁶ *Quaeris, quid felici praestare possis? Effice, ne felicitati suae credat. Parum in illum contuleris, si illi stultam fiduciam permansurae semper potentiae excusseris docuerisque mobilia esse, quae dedit casus, et maiore cursu fugere, quam veniunt, nec iis portionibus, quibus ad summa perventum est, retro iri, sed saepe inter maximam fortunam et ultimam nihil interesse?*

⁷⁷ See also *EM* 74.19 for the destruction of cities (another instance of items of greater magnitude struck by fortune) *in ipso flore* (the wording is similar to that of the preface).

The instability of fortune is a well-known commonplace, which appears in many authors.⁷⁸ Most significantly, it is found in the work of Seneca the Elder, in a passage where it is indeed called a commonplace (*locus*) (*Suasoriae* 1.9). The argument concerns the question whether Alexander – the prototype of the conqueror, as we saw – should sail the ocean. One of the speakers is arguing that even if the ocean could be navigated, it should not be: one ought to keep one's success within bounds. To this idea he adds the commonplace of the instability of fate:

He then spoke the commonplace on the variability of fortune. He described how nothing is stable, everything fluid, now raised, now depressed in unpredictable change, lands being swallowed, seas drained, and mountains subsiding. He gave examples of kings who have been tumbled from the height of their power.⁷⁹

In this short passage we find the same elements as in the *Naturales Quaestiones*: the instability of every situation and the fact that powerful persons, too, are thrown from their position by fortune.⁸⁰ This confirms the commonplace character of these elements. In his commentary on the passage from the *Suasoriae*, Edward gives this explanation of the term *locum*: 'i.e. *communem*; a passage of general application which might fit into any speech'.⁸¹ This is indeed the impression one retains from such a text: the passage from NQ 3 could easily be exchanged for any other discussion of the subject in Seneca's work.

Letter 74 offers a discussion of fortune and its gifts versus the only good. The mention of the instability of reigns and kings has been considered a reference (and warning) to Nero (cf. for this question Chapter 6, section 3.2).

⁷⁸ Cf. Vottero's notes *ad* §7-9. See also the commentary of Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) on Horace, *Odes* 1.34 and 1.35.

⁷⁹ *Dixit deinde locum de varietate fortunae, et cum descripsisset nihil esse stabile, omnia fluitare et incertibus motibus modo attolli, modo deprimi, absorberi terras et maria siccari, montes subsidere, deinde exempla regum ex fastigio suo devolutorum, adiecit...*

⁸⁰ The expression *ex fastigio suo* occurs in both texts. In his Loeb edition of Seneca the Elder (1974), Winterbottom refers *ad loc.* to NQ 3 preface §7.

⁸¹ W.A. Edward, *The suasoriae of Seneca the Elder*, Cambridge U.P. 1928, explanatory notes *ad loc.*, 94.

5. Preface §10-17

In §10 a series of answers starts to the seven times repeated question ‘what is most important in human existence?’ (*quid praecipuum in rebus humanis est?...quid est praecipuum?...?*).⁸² In the following discussion, I will present an analysis of the content and form of this passage.

5.1 The nature of the passage

A short summary of the passage reveals its nature: Seneca begins by saying that what is most important in life is not to have conquered the entire world with an army, but to have seen everything in one’s mind and to have conquered one’s own faults (§10). He then speaks about elevating oneself above fortune, above its threats and worthless gifts (§11). One should present a happy face to everything that happens, including misfortune, since everything occurs ‘in accordance with a decree of god’ (§12). The good mind is described: it is brave in adversity, knows how to react against luxury, is able to meet fortune in a fight and does not react to its splendour or tumult (§13). This resembles what has been said in §11 and 12 (although with a difference in the attitude towards fortune which is discussed below). Seneca then enjoins the reader to reject bad thoughts, remain pure and only wish for that which is received without causing harm to someone else, a good mind (§14). One should also regard human possessions as fleeting. This last point again resembles the statement of §11. The correct attitude towards chance occurrences (*fortuita*) described next (§15) again corresponds to the content of §11-12 (and that of §8). Finally, the readiness to die is mentioned as the attitude that truly frees a person (§16-17).⁸³ This freedom is further defined as freedom from the worst kind of

⁸² Lana 1955, 5-6: ‘questa interrogazione [*quid praecipuum...*] è ripetuta ben sette volte, in questa prefazione, per sottolineare l’importanza che alla risposta annette l’autore. La risposta, già la conosciamo [from the rest of the *NQ*]: bisogna conseguire la liberazione...’.

⁸³ For the correct meaning of *in primis labris animam habere*, referring to the willingness to die when necessary, see Vottero’s note *ad loc.* Cf. *EM* 30.14.

servitude: that inflicted upon oneself. This servitude can be removed by becoming aware of one's wrong attitude.

This summary shows that the density of information in the passage is not very high, and repetitions occur.⁸⁴ The main subject is the attitude one must have towards fortune: one should not suffer from its adversity, but react valiantly and not be tempted by its gifts. These ideas follow from the teachings of §7-9, and moreover are central teachings of Stoic philosophy (see also below under 5.2).⁸⁵

Such a passage seems to derive its interest or force from something else than a complex reasoning or novelty of thought. The effect is one of accumulation: it is one of the passages destined to 'hammer in' certain views.⁸⁶ Its accumulative aspect is achieved through a combination of form and content. The repeated infinitives contribute to it, as well as the repetition of basic Stoic teachings.

⁸⁴ The short description Schanz-Hosius (1935, 699) give of the preface of *NQ* 3 is interesting in this context; 'im dritten Buch beklagt er [Seneca] sich, daß er in so hohem Alter sich an einem so unermesslichen Stoff gewagt habe; er ist entschlossen, seine Zeit soviel als möglich auszunützen, um die Aufgabe zu lösen. Er beklagt die Schriftsteller, die sich mit der Geschichte Philipps, Alexanders, Hannibals abmühen, statt die Menschen über die Grundsätze des rechten Lebens zu unterrichten. Dann handelt er vom Wasser...'. Most is said about the first section of the preface; §5-7 are also mentioned, but the following part of the preface (the largest part, in fact) is not mentioned (unless implicitly in the mention of what one should teach people: how to live rightly).

⁸⁵ Some additional ideas also occur, such as the image of light and dark (§11), representing heavenly and human matters, the idea of purity in §14, that of death and freedom in §16 and servitude in §17. These ideas will not be further discussed here. I further refer to Vottero, who mentions many interesting details (although sometimes his search for parallels goes too far, and he mentions less relevant parallel occurrences of a word, for example).

⁸⁶ Compare Codoñer 1997, 304: '...de otra parte, los pasajes parenéticos que derivan su eficacia de la acumulación'. Stahl 1960, 34 has made a division within the passage between §11-13 and §14-16: she argues that the first part concerns the attitude one should have against fortune, the second part the action to take against the danger caused by man himself. This division seems artificial to me: although there is indeed a stronger accent on fortune in the first part of the passage, no such structure is visible.

Perhaps the best explanation of this passage is provided by a section from letter 64, where Seneca tells, full of enthusiasm, of a reading from a book by Quintus Sextius the elder (*EM* 64.2-6). He exclaims that much strength and spirit can be found in this philosopher. Not all philosophers have this essential quality: some of them argue, quibble, but do not give courage, since they do not have any (*non faciunt animum, quia non habent*). Whereas the reading of Sextius has this effect: ‘you will say: “He is alive; he is strong; he is free; he is more than a man; he sends me away full of confidence”’ (*dices: vivit, viget, liber est, supra hominem est, dimittit me plenum ingentis fiducia*). Seneca continues: ‘I shall acknowledge to you the state of mind I am in when I read his work: I want to challenge every hazard, I want to cry: “why keep me waiting, Fortune? Enter the lists! Behold, I am ready for you!”’ (*in qua positione mentis sim, cum hunc lego, fatebor tibi: libet omnis casus provocare, libet exclamare: “quid cessas, fortuna? Congredere; paratum vides”*). Sextius’ prose makes Seneca ready to attack fortune. He wishes to have something to spend his ardour on (*..libet aliquid habere quod vincam*). Not only does Sextius show the greatness of a good life, but he also does not make one despair of achieving it. Virtue will have the same effect on you, Seneca adds: to admire it and still have hope of attaining it.

The effect of the philosopher’s text described in letter 64 must have been what Seneca wanted to achieve with the passage from the *Naturales Quaestiones* under discussion. It must have been meant to bring the reader to a belligerent attitude towards fortune. While presenting what is most important in life – *magnitudo beatæ vitæ*, as is said in *EM* 64 (§5) – it also urges one on to achieve it. The disposition of mind this part of the preface aims at corresponds to what has been described in Chapter 3 as the effect a philosophical text should have on the reader.

5.2 The Stoic content of the passage

This passage teaches a basic Stoic lesson. As Vottero says: ‘Seneca delinea in questi paragrafi alcune delle caratteristiche fondamentali del *sapiens*’.⁸⁷ These

⁸⁷ In n.47 *ad loc.* It is not clear to me why Vottero put this remark at the end of §13, and not one or more paragraphs earlier or later. It is perhaps an indication of the difficulty in

paragraphs, answering the question *quid est praecipuum*⁸⁸, offer a definition of virtuous life. The idea that people should endure what happens to them and react to it as if they had actually wanted it to happen (§12) is a well-known Stoic lesson.⁸⁹ Those who are not willing to accept fate undergo it all the same; therefore it is best to agree to it.

The phrase ‘a mind that knows how to make its fortune, not merely wait for it’ (*animus... qui sciat fortunam non expectare sed facere*, §13) may surprise. It recommends an active attitude towards fortune, whereas in the preceding paragraph the more traditional idea of acceptance of fate’s unavoidability is used. This paradoxical combination is discussed by Busch, who argues that the attitude one ought to have against fortune involved a certain resistance:

Wir...glauben erkannt zu haben, daß jene ‘passive’ Haltung eine Tätigkeit vom Inneren her in sich schließt, indem sie alles, was im Menschen dem bitteren Schicksal widerstreben möchte, niederzwingt, um der Notwendigkeit freiwillig folgen zu können.⁹⁰

Two lines from the *Aeneid* best illustrate this attitude: ‘wherever fate draws us or takes us back, we follow; whatever befalls us, all fortune is to be overcome by bearing’ (...*quo fata trahunt retrahuntque sequamur / quidquid erit, superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est*, *Aeneid* 5.709f.). In the formula ‘to overcome by bearing’ (*superare ferendo*) the passive and active attitudes towards fortune are united.

commenting on this text: the same comment can be put at several places, and Seneca’s repetitions make one run out of comment. Cf. also Stahl 1960, 33, 35, who speaks of a ‘Stoische Tugendlehre’, Rosenmeyer 1989, 5.

⁸⁸ The term *praecipuum* is used in the normal, non-technical sense. It also has a more specific meaning: to indicate the *indifferentia cum aestimatione mediocri* (see Cicero *De finibus* 3.53 and *TD* 5.47).

⁸⁹ See SVF 1.527, about Cleanthes’ teachings (rendered by Seneca, in *EM* 107.11, as *ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt*), and SVF 2.975 (Zeno and Chrysippus’ teachings). We also find this thought elsewhere in Seneca, especially in the longer passages of *De vita beata* 15.5 ff., *De providentia* 5.4 ff., and in *EM* 96 (cf. Vottero *ad loc.*). Cf. also Busch 1961, 133 and 143 with parallels.

⁹⁰ 1961, 149. See also Stahl 1960, 180-183, 194.

At the end of her survey of Seneca's teachings about fortune, Busch remarks that they do not contain much Stoic theory. She quotes Regenbogen's statement that for his philosophical teaching Seneca had retained only what was of direct moral relevance, and had thereby simplified (and limited) philosophy.⁹¹ This certainly applies to the preface of *NQ* 3.

There are other passages in Seneca's work where such a general moral lesson is given. The manner in which Seneca defines the *primum bonum* in *EM* 66.6 shows some resemblance to *NQ* 3 preface §10ff.:

Let us return to the first good, and consider what its nature is: a mind that gazes upon truth, that is skilled in what should be sought and what should be avoided, establishing standards of value not according to opinion, but according to nature, a mind that penetrates the whole world and directs its contemplating gaze upon all its phenomena, paying as much attention to thoughts as to actions, great and forceful, superior alike to hardships and blandishments, yielding itself to neither extreme of fortune, rising above all blessings and tribulations, absolutely beautiful, perfectly equipped with grace as well as with strength, healthy and sinewy, unruffled, undismayed, one which no violence can shatter, one which acts of chance can neither exalt nor depress: a mind like this is virtue itself.⁹²

Here the same attitude towards fortune is prescribed as in the preface to *NQ* 3.⁹³ It is remarkable that the phrase 'the mind that penetrates the whole world and directs its contemplating gaze upon all its phenomena' does not occur in the preface of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, although it applies to the undertaking of this work.

⁹¹ Busch 1961, 154, Regenbogen 1936, 114.

⁹² See also *De beneficiis* 7.2; the ideas of a battle against fortune, the resulting freedom and the right attitude in front of death are also found in *EM* 51.8-9.

⁹³ Cf. Busch 1961, 148. The passage has the same form as §13 of the preface.

5.3 The form of the passage

As we have seen, §10-17 constitute a hortatory passage, which is meant to impress a basic lesson upon the audience. A short analysis of the form of the passage here follows, beginning with §7-9.

§7-9 start with the sentence: ‘it is far better to investigate what ought to be done rather than what has been done, and to teach those who have entrusted their affairs to fortune that none of its gifts is stable’ (*quanto satius est quid faciendum sit quam quid factum quaerere ac docere eos qui sua permisere fortunae nihil stabile esse ab illa datum*). The gerundive embedded in the phrase indicates that the passage is meant to provide instructions about ‘what should be done’, and more specifically about how to react to fortune. This adhortation is further expressed by a few other grammatical means (the subjunctive forms *confidat* and *deficiat* in §7 and the gerundive in §9). The adhortation is placed within a description of *Fortuna* and her workings; the injunctions follow from the situation Seneca describes in §7-9. Thus, the paragraphs form a mixture of prescriptive and more descriptive sentences.

In §10 the series of questions and answers starts: ‘what is most important in human existence?’ (*quid praecipuum in rebus humanis est?*), Seneca asks repeatedly. The question is answered by a series of infinitives (in §11 e.g. *erigere animum...nil dignum putare*, in §12 *posse...tolerare...ferre*, in §14 *non admittere...*, and so on). This is the main form in which the answers of the entire passage are phrased. In §13 a variant occurs: a substantive specified with adjectives (‘a mind bold and confident against calamity, not only averse to luxury but even an enemy of it, neither eager for danger nor fleeing from it’).

While the intention of the passage is hortatory, it consists of sentences that are in themselves descriptive.⁹⁴ For instance, the statement ‘innumerable are those who have had peoples and cities under their control, but very few have had themselves under control’ (*innumerabiles sunt qui populos, qui urbes habuerunt in potestate, paucissimi qui se*, §10) is clearly descriptive. Thus, the adhortation appears mostly not to have been formed by primary (or direct) grammatical and lexical means such

⁹⁴ Here the distinction between the instrumental locution and the intended illocution, as mentioned in Chapter 3, section 10, is useful.

as the subjunctive.⁹⁵ Because the descriptive sentences answer the question *quid est praecipuum*, they take on a hortatory character. In the term *praecipuum* lies a positive value that implicitly recommends imitation. The descriptions also contain other negative and positive value-terms that contribute to form the adhortation; these paragraphs not only form a description, but also an injunction to virtue.

6. Preface §18

In the last paragraph of the preface, Seneca returns to the idea of the study of nature – which, in fact, has only been mentioned in the first sentence of the preface – and links it to the ethical theme of the preface. He says: ‘to this purpose it will serve to inquire into the nature of things’ (*ad hoc proderit nobis inspicere rerum naturam*). First one will take distance from all sordid things; then the mind itself, which must be elevated and great, will be separated from the body. Finally, the skills acquired by investigating the secrets of the world (*occulta*) will also be of use for *aperta* (*deinde in occultis exercitata subtilitas non erit in aperta deterior*). The lessons with which we fight (in vain) against our wickedness certainly are *aperta* (*nihil est autem apertius his salutaribus quae contra nequitiam nostram furoremque discuntur*).

⁹⁵ As they are described in Cancik 1967 and Risselada 1993: compare Chapter 3, section 10. A few other formulations also occur: the verb *debere* used in §12 is a standard lexical means to render an injunction (see Risselada 1993, 313ff). In her discussion Cancik also mentions the pattern of question and answer (1967, 30). She argues that this form of speech can be found in a theoretical as well as a prescriptive context. It has a distinctive form in either context: ‘die Unterscheidung zwischen präskriptiver und theoretischer Sprache findet auch im Frage-Antwort-Schema ihren Ausdruck: auf theoretische Fragen folgt eine Antwort im Indikativ, während die praktische Frage eine Anweisung für das Handeln, also einen Imperativ als Antwort fordert’. Although in our passage the answers to the question *quid est praecipuum* certainly are ‘hortatory answers’ (or practical answers to a practical question, to use Cancik’s term), the form used in these answers, the infinitive, is not an imperative form.

In my opinion, with the first sentence of the paragraph, ‘to this purpose it will serve to inquire into the nature of things’, Seneca relates the preceding passage on ‘what is important in life’ to the theme of the study of nature. *Ad hoc* refers to the previous paragraphs: the study of nature will contribute to a correct attitude in life.⁹⁶ The sentence is also related to the rest of §18: whereas the previous paragraphs announce what must be one’s aim in life (and explain the aim of the study of nature), the following sentences describe the result of the study of nature: the mind frees itself from material things. The study of nature helps to achieve a state of mind that is more receptive to moral truths. Therefore, the process of freeing oneself from material things in the end also leads to a virtuous life.

As we have seen in Chapter 2 (section 1.4), the moral relevance of knowledge of physics was a matter of dispute in antiquity. Seneca was of the opinion that the study of nature had a moral relevance. Recently, Gauly has argued that the moral element only has a secondary importance in this paragraph. I have reacted to his opinion in my review of his book: the elevation of the mind contains a moral aspect.⁹⁷

Seneca gives us a glimpse of what he thinks the study of nature achieves. In the first place, it serves to elevate the mind and separate it from material things (a theme discussed in the chapter concerning the preface of *NQ* 1). Seneca further states that the sharpness of mind derived from the study of *occulta* is relevant for *aperta*. The term *occulta* is connected to *inspicere rerum naturam*: the *occulta* are of a physical nature, while *aperta* are further specified as moral lessons. The terms *aperta* and

⁹⁶ See also Gauly 2004, 91-92 about the question, with reference in.16 and 18 to those researchers who think that *hoc* refers to the previous passage (for instance Stahl 1960, 111; 1987, 268; also Baldacci 1981, 588). Gauly himself argues that it refers to the following passage (mentioning in n.17 those who agree with him): he considers §18 separately from the previous paragraphs of the preface.

⁹⁷ See Limburg 2005a; cf. also my discussion of *NQ* 1 for this argument (Chapter 10, section 3). Gauly (2004, 93-96) argues that the elevation of the mind and the separation from the body are indicated in this passage as the main aim of the inquiry into nature, and moral improvement is only a possible ‘Nebenprodukt’. He bases his interpretations of the subsequent moralizing passages on this understanding of *NQ* 3 preface §18, preferring to interpret these passages in a non-moralistic sense.

obscura are further discussed in Chapter 3 (sections 5-6) and Chapter 9 (section 3.1.8) of this study.

In §18, another prefatory theme is added to the preface. Indeed, Seneca points to the ethical goal of the work: one will become a better person by studying nature, he asserts (and thus by reading the *Naturales Quaestiones*, we may add). Such statements are a more widespread feature of classical prefaces. As Janson formulates it: 'Latin specialist writers often "campaign" for these subjects in their prefaces, concentrating naturally enough on the usefulness of the knowledge in question'.⁹⁸ As I mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 1.1), this was one of the standard arguments with which the attention of the audience could be caught. The fact that the *Naturales Quaestiones* is said to have a moral dimension will lead one to read the work in a different manner than if it had been announced as a work solely concerned with natural philosophy. In no other preface of the work is the moral aim of the study of nature stated in the general terms found in this passage.

7. Conclusion

Although Seneca does speak about the relationship between physics and ethics, the content of the preface of *NQ* 3 is not directly connected to the subject of the book, the inquiry into the origin of terrestrial water. Only the brief comparison of persons like Alexander and Hannibal with disasters such as inundations and conflagrations might refer to the subject of the book (and more precisely to the epilogue). The preface is rather concerned with moral advice of a general nature. To regard this text as the preface that introduces the entire work could, in my opinion, explain its general character.

We have seen that the first sentence of the preface announces the subject of the work, and the first paragraphs contain a combination of prefatory arguments that aim at making the reader attentive and well-disposed towards the author. Seneca

⁹⁸ 1964, 98. See also Herkommer 1968, 128 ff., Mansfeld 1998, 4, Genette 1997, 199-200.

Herkommer divides the 'Nutzen' of a work in a practical and moral utility; Seneca is interested in the latter.

also shows the ethical framework in which the work should be understood. In my opinion, these are not only prefatory themes, but basic matters that must be addressed at the beginning of an undertaking. The appearance of prefatory commonplaces in itself is not enough to consider this preface the introduction to the entire work, since such commonplaces can (and do) also appear in ‘middle prefaces’.⁹⁹ However, the high concentration of prefatory arguments in this text is decisive, in my view. There is an important resemblance between the themes occurring in §1-4 and themes found at the beginning of other works. This is the only preface of the *Naturales Quaestiones* written with such an awareness of the prefatory tradition.

8. *The transition to the scientific discussion*

After the preface, Seneca proceeds to the scientific discussion, announced by the words ‘let us, then, study the waters of the earth and investigate the causes that produce them’ (*quaeramus ergo de terrestribus aquis et investigemus qua ratione fiant*, 1.1). This transition has led to some discussion.

Gigon speaks of ‘der absurde und doch gewollte Sprung aus der Weite philosophischer und existenzieller Probleme in eine mehr als nüchterne Frage: Wie entstehen die Gewässer auf der Erde?’¹⁰⁰ Such a negative valuation of the transition implies a negative view on the structure of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, in which prefaces and epilogues on ‘grand’ moral themes are combined with discussions on concrete themes such as the origin of terrestrial water.

Gross gives what seems to me a correct interpretation of the transition:

Die Erläuterung des ethischen Wertes der Naturbetrachtung führt Seneca von der Ethik zum Gebiet der Naturforschung, nämlich der Hydrologie...eine gewisse thematische

⁹⁹ For instance, in his discussion of the preface to Book 6 De Vivo 1992 also points out some prefatory themes: the question of the utility and beauty of the undertaking appears in NQ 6.4.2. For the distinction between middle prefaces and the first preface of a work see also Chapter 1, section 1.1.1.

¹⁰⁰ 1991, 333. Cf. Zeller’s reaction to the transition of Book 1 (1909, 727 n.2).

überleitung zwischen Präfatio und Hauptteil ist also feststellbar. Allerdings ist *ergo* im ersten Satz von I 1 nicht streng logisch aufzufassen: denn aus der allgemeinen Betrachtung der ethischen Nützlichkeit der Naturforschung ergibt sich nicht notwendigerweise das Thema Hydrologie.¹⁰¹

Because the study of nature leads us to moral improvement, we should start our enquiry.

This interpretation gives much value to *ergo*: it provides a causal relation between §18 and the physical discussion; *since* the study of nature leads to moral improvement, let us then study the nature of terrestrial water. However, it is not certain whether *ergo* establishes such a causal relation or whether it only serves to effectuate a transition. Recent linguistic study has shown that *ergo* should in the first place be understood pragmatically, not semantically.¹⁰² *Ergo* could therefore be thought to effectuate a simple transition, without the addition of a causal relation, in the sense of ‘let us *now* search for the origin of water’ (and not ‘let us *therefore*...’). It is difficult to determine whether *ergo* here also has the semantic meaning of a causal connector.

A factor to be taken into account is that *ergo* occurs in a very specific situation, as a transition formula in a scientific work. Such formulas were usual in technical

¹⁰¹ 1989, 116. The transition seems to have been misunderstood by Rosenmeyer 2000, 109: ‘the *ergo* is a puzzling transition: *because* we have pushed beyond nature and asked questions about the gods and about our own vices, we may now more securely look at the behavior of water? It might seem that Seneca is almost desperately looking for ways to integrate scientific study with moral instruction’.

¹⁰² See C. Kroon, *Discourse particles in Latin: a study of nam, enim, autem, vero*, Amsterdam 1995, 369-370, and ‘Causal connectors in Latin: the discourse function of *nam*, *enim*, *igitur* and *ergo*’, in *Cahiers de l’institut de linguistique de Louvain* 15.1-4 (1989), 231-243 (Proceedings of the Vth Colloquium on Latin Linguistics, eds. M. Lavency and D. Longrée). In her 1989 study, Kroon argues that the primary function of certain particles, among which *ergo*, is pragmatic, not semantic, although such particles have traditionally primarily been regarded as ‘causal connectors’. The specific pragmatic function Kroon demonstrates for *ergo* (see especially pp.238-240) does not seem to apply, however, to the situation of the word in a transition formula in the *NQ*.

works and had stereotyped formulations.¹⁰³ This formal aspect may imply that a transition formula did not necessarily have a causal meaning. Vitruvius' use of *cum ergo*, towards the end of the prefaces in *De architectura*, is an example of such a fixed transition formula. He uses it in the preface to the seventh book, for instance, at the end of a survey of architects, when he concludes: 'since it appears, then, that our architects in the old days, and a good many even in our own times, have been as great as those of the Greeks...' (*cum ergo et antiquae nostri inveniantur non minus quam Graeci fuisse magni architecti et nostra memoria satis multi...*, §18). In this case, the formula also carries a semantic meaning.¹⁰⁴

Seneca uses the particle *ergo* once more in a similar situation in the *Naturales Quaestiones*; in NQ 6.4.1 he also introduces the questions of natural philosophy discussed in the book with the formula *quaeramus ergo...* As in Book 3, this formula follows upon a statement about the importance of obtaining knowledge of the causes of natural phenomena. In NQ 4a 1.1, Seneca uses the particle *itaque* in his transition from the preface to the announcement of the subject of the book. So as to take away Lucilius' mind from the fame of his province (which risks rendering him too proud), he will discuss an entirely different subject, the Nile (*itaque, ut totum inde te abducam... in diversum cogitationes tuas abstraham*). In NQ 5.18.1, the particle *itaque* also occurs in the transition to the epilogue. In this passage, it is difficult to attribute a causal meaning to it. Finally, in the transition to the epilogue of Book 6, Seneca uses the word *nunc* (6.32.1).

In some cases, the context in which the connective particle occurs makes a causal meaning possible, and attractive (*itaque* in the preface to Book 4a, *ergo* in NQ 6 and 3). In other instances, it is more difficult to judge the value of the

¹⁰³ See Fuhrmann 1960, index s.v. 'Überleitungsformeln'. The transition is often made with the particle *nunc* (pp.57, 69, 77). Cf. also Herkommer 1968, 122ff. about transitions in historiographical works, with on p.123 the reference to the didactic genre, in which transitions frequently occur and have stereotyped formulations.

¹⁰⁴ Does the semantic value lie in *cum*, in *ergo*, or in *cum ergo*? Such a question cannot be answered here. See also *De architectura* 1, preface §3, 5, preface §5, 8, preface §4; Book 2, preface §5 forms a variant with *autem*. The Budé edition comments on the passage from Book 8: 'phrase de type formulaire' (with reference to the introduction by Soubiran in the Budé edition of *De architectura* Book 9; 1969, xiv).

particle. In *NQ* 3.4.1, for instance, Seneca also uses *quaeramus ergo* to introduce the more specific question he is going to investigate ('first then let us investigate how the earth supplies the continuous flow of rivers'). In this sentence, although some translators do render *ergo* as 'therefore', it is more difficult to discern a direct causal connection, and the function of transition particle fits well.¹⁰⁵ On the whole, however, I am inclined to believe that *ergo* in *NQ* 3.1.1 (and in 6.4.1) also has a causal value, since the context allows for such a connection between the ethical goal and the discussion of physics.

¹⁰⁵ *Ergo* is often used in the scientific discussions of the work. Its function there seems to differ from case to case; this matter would require a separate investigation.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CAUSES OF THE FLOOD: THE END OF *NQ* 3 (*NQ* 3.27-30)

1. *Introduction*

The end of *NQ* 3 consists of an inquiry into the causes of the flood that will destroy the world at a set time, as appears from the announcement at the beginning of chapter 27: 'the occasion invites me to find out how a great part of the earth will be covered over by water when the fated day of the flood comes' (3.27.1). Therefore, this passage rather seems to belong to the scientific inquiry of the book than that it forms an 'epilogue'; one might ask whether it actually ought to be discussed among the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. However, in modern publications the nature of the passage appears to have been considered somewhat different from that of the main scientific discussions within the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

In a short discussion, Codoñer establishes that, like the main part of the book, the last chapters form a discussion of a natural phenomenon (1989, 1817-1818). At the same time, she points to certain aspects in which the treatment of the flood differs from a purely scientific discussion, the main element being the role given to nature as the final cause of the flood (compare especially the discussion in section 8 below). The place of the discussion at the end of the book, and its introductory formula, also give it a special status. Other researchers also point out that the description forms a grand ending to the book.¹

Reinhardt states that Seneca concludes *NQ* Book 3 with a 'pomphafte Gemälde' of the flood, to which the 'Quellenuntersuchung' does not apply: the passage should rather be valued as a form of art.² Although I do not agree with this

¹ See Gross 1989, 142, Levy 1928, 459.

² *Poseidonios* (München 1921), 174. In this work Reinhardt discusses the meteorology of Posidonius on the basis of Seneca's *NQ* (p.136ff.). He believes that, unlike the other scientific passages, *NQ* 3.27ff. is not based on Posidonius. Cf. Levy 1928, 465 n.4, although his statement is restricted to chapter 27 (cf. section 5.1 below for the difference between

denial of a 'Quellenuntersuchung' to *NQ* 3.27ff. (see especially section 7 below), certain parts do indeed form a dramatised description. Seneca moreover reacts to Ovid's representation of the flood (*Metamorphoses* 1.253ff.; see for this aspect section 5 below).

Finally, Stahl, Waiblinger and Gauly have made the most of the moral element in the description of the flood, and have thus integrated the end of *NQ* 3 in their ideas on the structure of the book (see the discussion in section 6 below).³

2. *The transition*

Seneca introduces the discussion of the flood by saying 'the occasion invites me to find out...' (*admonet me locus ut quaeram...*, 27.1). Gross regards the transition as 'rein formal (associativ), nicht logisch': 'der Zusammenhang zwingt aber keineswegs zu einer Darstellung der Sintflut'.⁴ Waiblinger had noted earlier that chapter 26 contains an element that connects it to the discussion of the flood.⁵ Indeed, in 26.5-8 Seneca speaks about the periodical *purgatio* of rivers and sea, which from time to time depose their filth (§5); the flood, too, is a periodical purge of the world.⁶

Thus, this transition has met with dissatisfaction, as well as attempts to explain the connection it establishes. As mentioned in Chapter 1, section 1.5, Hutchinson cites this transition as an example of 'a tradition in prose often to signal openly movements away from the main exposition' (or towards it) (1993, 149). I agree with the view that Seneca uses this formula to indicate a conscious transition to a specific

chapter 27 and the other chapters discussing the flood). Gauly 2004, 237-238 and n.213 quotes Reinhardt's ideas and agrees with him.

³ It will not be possible to enclose in my discussion many particularities relating to the theories mentioned in the explanation of the flood. Vottero's edition provides some interesting notes *ad loc.* for these technicalities. Various details are also mentioned in Mader 1983.

⁴ 1989, 140, cf. 145 n.1 where the same remark is made about the transitions in *NQ* 3 in general.

⁵ 1977, 44. Cf. Gross 1989, 140.

⁶ The term *katharsis* is sometimes applied to the flood or to the conflagration: cf. Mader 1983, 62. See also the idea of *renovatio* mentioned in Cicero, *DND* 2.118.

argument, which is attached to the previous discussion by means of a (slight) thematic link.

3. *Conflagration and flood*

The idea of a flood occurs in the works of various authors, most conspicuously with Plato and in Aristotle, where it causes the destruction of smaller parts of the world.⁷ The idea of alternating floods and conflagrations is mentioned in *NQ* 3.29.1 as stemming from Bero(s)sus, who said that these phenomena happen in conjunction with certain positions of the stars.⁸ Certain texts closer to Seneca's time and environment also mention the occurrence of conflagrations and floods: Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (5.380ff.),⁹ Manilius' *Astronomica* (4.829ff.), and Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (23).¹⁰

There has been some discussion in modern literature about the fact that Seneca describes the end of the world in a flood, rather than in the well-known Stoic conflagration. This has been considered 'unorthodox'.¹¹ Indeed, the early Stoa only knew a conflagration as a cyclical ending (and renewal) of the world. Later, it is

⁷ Plato: *Laws* 3.677-680, *Timaeus* 22c-e (where the flood alternates with a conflagration).

Aristotle: *Meteorologica* 1.14, 352a28ff.

⁸ About Bero(s)sus see Mansfeld 1979, n.52 p.146, Theiler 1982 (II), 170, 198. Vitruvius, *De architectura* 9.2.1, also quotes Bero(s)sus (and gives some biographical details).

⁹ Speaking of the flood, he twice adds *ut fama est* (5.395, 412).

¹⁰ Cicero speaks about *eluviones exustionesque terrarum, quas accidere tempore certo necesse est*. For a survey of representations of the flood in antiquity see also Caduff 1986: under 'Flutssysteme in der Philosophie' (p.142ff.), he discusses the passages from Plato and Aristotle (but does not mention Seneca).

¹¹ See Mader 1983, who on p.64 n.9 mentions other researchers who made the same remark. Cf. Gross 1989, 142, 144, 146 n.10, Gauly 2004, 237ff. The representation of the flood in itself is not considered unorthodox by Donini 1979, 256 ('nessuna importanza ha poi il fatto che si tratti del diluvio piuttosto che della conflagrazione: Seneca dice chiaramente di considerare i due fenomeni... in tutto equivalenti'), but the manner in which Seneca represents it leads him to speak of an accusation against Stoicism; Gauly's interpretation, which I discuss next, follows through this idea.

thought, the Stoic *ekpurosis* became combined with the tradition of alternating conflagrations and floods.¹² Within Stoic theory, the alternating floods and conflagrations have also been understood as lesser catastrophes, taking place within a world-period.¹³

Such a view has been recognized in *Ad Marciam* 26.6, where Seneca speaks of the ending of the world through fire.¹⁴ He first mentions different catastrophes that will happen to the earth; among these are inundations and fires. They are said to destroy ‘everything that lives’. Seneca continues: ‘and when the time will come for the world to be blotted out in order that it may begin anew, these things will destroy themselves by their own power, and stars will clash with stars, and all the fiery matter of the world that now shines in orderly array will blaze up in a common conflagration’ (26.6-7). This description clearly refers to a total renewal of the world, caused by a conflagration. The other catastrophes must be regarded as lesser destructions.¹⁵

In the representation of the flood in *NQ* 3, there are indications that lead us to regard the flood as a lesser devastation. Seneca begins the description in chapter 27 by saying that the flood will cover ‘a great part of the earth’ (27.1). It is restricted to

¹² Cf. Pohlenz 1972, 47. See Gauly, 2004, 238-241 for a rendering of the Stoic theory of the *ekpurosis*, and the ensuing ‘contamination’ with theories of alternating floods and conflagrations. See also Mansfeld 1979 and Long 1985 about the Stoic *ekpurosis*, and about the infiltration of flood-theories in Stoic thought Mansfeld, n.52 p.146-147. Cf. Theiler 1982 (II), 198-200.

¹³ See Long 1985, 18, Mansfeld 1979, n.52 (p.146-147), Pohlenz 1972, 47, Theiler 1982 (II), 198-199. The catastrophes depicted in Plato and Aristotle (floods and conflagrations) do not destroy the whole world.

¹⁴ See Vottero’s edition, p.453 n.13, for a complete list of passages where Seneca speaks of the end of the world.

¹⁵ This passage is also mentioned by Mader 1983, 63, Gross 1989, 143 n.1, Gauly 2004, 242. Gross interprets this passage as representing the end of the world through an inundation, followed by a conflagration. On p.142 (with n.4) he seems to say that this was the view certain Stoics held on the end of the world. *NQ* 3.13.2 indicates that, on the contrary, the *ekpurosis* was thought to dissolve into a watery state of the world.

the area of *terrena* as an ‘intermediary’ disaster, of less importance than the conflagration.¹⁶

However, in his description of the flood Seneca also gives the impression of a total destruction. At some points, this is probably an effect of the dramatizing description, or of the wish to give a grand picture of the flood. However, there are also several passages in which the inundation is given the same status as the Stoic conflagration, as in *NQ* 3.28.7, which is discussed next.¹⁷ Therefore, the status of the flood in *NQ* 3 remains somewhat unclear.¹⁸

In *NQ* 3.28.7 the flood is compared to the conflagration, and both phenomena are indeed equated. Seneca indicates why the flood happens: for the same reason as the conflagration. Both occur when god has decided to end the world and start it anew. Both water and fire may serve this goal: they cause beginning as well as destruction.¹⁹ This passage has been shown to contradict *NQ* 3.13, where fire is said to cause the end of the world, and water is its beginning (§2).²⁰ Here, Seneca is speaking of the importance of the element of fire in Stoic thought, referring to the Stoic school by a first person plural.²¹

As said, Seneca’s representation of the flood with the ‘status’ of a conflagration has been considered unorthodox. From 3.29.2 it appears that Seneca is applying Stoic

¹⁶ See also Favez’ edition of the *Ad Marciam* (1928), introduction pp.xlvi n.3, xlvii-xlviii, Mader 1983, 65, Long 1985, 18 n.35. Gauly 2004, 244 n.244 mentions a few other passages that seem to indicate that the destruction brought about by the flood is not total, like 3.30.5. Compare the description of both inundation and conflagration in the preface of *NQ* 3, §5: *inundatio, qua planum omne perfusum est...conflagratio, qua magna pars animantium exarsit*.

¹⁷ See 3.28.7, 29.1, 29.2, 30.6. So also Mader 1983, 64, Gauly 2004, 245.

¹⁸ The uncertain status of the flood also seems a more general problem; so Theiler 1982 (II), 199: ‘bei den Berichtstattern ist öfters unklar, ob die partielle oder totale Zerstörung gemeint ist’.

¹⁹ Vottero 1987-1988, 30 compares this passage to a fragment from a work on physics by Theophrastus (Diels 1879, 490, 30-33).

²⁰ See Gross 1989, 142, Mader 1983, 63, quoting Waiblinger 1977, 44.

²¹ Gross 1989, 142 argues that the difference between *NQ* 3.13 and the last chapters of the book is caused by a difference of sources, the source of *NQ* 3.13 being Stoic.

ideas about the conflagration to the flood; 'I think the view that appeals to us Stoics in regard to the conflagration must also be applied here' (*et illam [sc. causam] quae in conflagratione nostris placet hoc quoque transferendam puto*). This passage, together with *NQ* 3.13.1-2, demonstrates (if this was still necessary) that for the Stoics the world ended in a conflagration.

One may ask whether it is useful to speak about Seneca's description of a flood in terms of unorthodoxy and deviation from Stoicism. First of all, it is important to state the obvious: after the inquiry in the origin of terrestrial water, the depiction of the destruction of the world by a flood must have seemed to Seneca a fitting ending for the book.²² I further prefer to note that Seneca in fact seems to want to integrate his representation of the flood in the Stoic system. The last chapters of *NQ* 3 may be regarded as a moment in the integration of the tradition concerning the flood within the Stoic theories about the end of the world.

Another element to be taken into consideration is that the subject of the flood was already present in Seneca's sources. Fabianus, who is mentioned in 27.3, had apparently also spoken about the causes of this phenomenon.²³ The flood (and the conflagration) may well have been part of the range of subjects discussed in works on meteorology. Minor floods and conflagrations are also mentioned in Aristotle's *Meteorologica*. Thus, we must not only take into account what we know about the Stoic theory of the *ekpurosis*, but also the doxographical material that was available to Seneca.²⁴ The fact that the flood is represented both as a total catastrophe, equivalent to the conflagration, and a minor disaster, is perhaps a result of the

²² However, Favez's opinion (1928, xlviii n.2) that the passages where Seneca gives the flood the importance of the *ekpurosis* are only of a rhetorical nature, is another extreme to be avoided. Chaumartin 1996, 186 expresses the possibility that Seneca described a flood instead of a conflagration because of literary reasons: the emulation of Ovid.

²³ For Fabianus, see also below n.69. Compare the material assembled by Caduff 1986, 142ff.; some of the philosophers who had theories about the flood are among the authors mentioned by Seneca as his sources (e.g. Anaximander, Diogenes of Apollonia, Xenophanes). Compare also the parallel mentioned in n.19 for *NQ* 3.28.7: Theophrastus, too, spoke about alternating floods and conflagrations.

²⁴ For the fact that the tradition of natural philosophy was rather Peripatetic than Stoic cf. Chapter 2, section 1.2, n.7.

combination of two traditions. It remains uncertain in how far the equation of the flood with the Stoic conflagration was Seneca's own contribution.

4. *Seneca's representation of the flood: a deviation from Stoic philosophy?*

Gauly (2004) pursues the possibility of a non-Stoic interpretation of Seneca's representation of the end of the world. According to him, Seneca depicts the flood as a disturbance of the world, while Stoic philosophy represented the process as a renewal. In this sense, Seneca would strongly distance himself from the Stoic position. Gauly further emphasizes the fact that in Seneca's version the flood is a punishment: this idea is incompatible with the cyclical occurrence of the conflagration, since in a cyclical context a punishment makes no sense.

The discussion of Gauly's interpretation will enable me to further clarify my opinion on the nature of Seneca's passage. Let us first look at the problems involved in the representation of the flood as a destruction.²⁵ Early Stoics depicted the conflagration positively, as a renewal rather than a destruction of the world.²⁶

²⁵ Gauly p.245ff. See also the similar ideas in Donini 1979, 256ff., who forms the point of departure for Gauly's theories. Gauly also accepts Waiblinger's theory of a darker second half of Book 3 (p.246). This theory has in my opinion been sufficiently refuted by Gross 1989, 110-111. In his review of Th.G. Rosenmeyer, *Senecan drama and Stoic cosmology* (CR 40 (1990), 277-279), R. Mayer argues against Rosenmeyer's interpretation of the occurrence of the Stoic ending of the world in Seneca's tragedies: Rosenmeyer considers this ending to be described as a destruction that causes despair (pp.278-279) (cf. Gauly p.237, n.211 and p.247 with n.255). Innocenti Pierini 1999a also points out that the description of the end of the world in *Ad Polybium* 1 has the character of a destruction, rather than a renewal of the world (p.17). She explains the divergences between the description in *Ad Polybium* and Stoic theory by saying that Seneca adapts his version to the addressee of the work.

²⁶ Gauly 2004, 239. See also Mansfeld 1979 and Long 1985, who both discuss the question of god's problematic involvement in the flood, a destruction caused by a providential being. Compare on this question also Algra 2003, 172-173.

Seneca only briefly mentions the following renewal of the world, at the end of chapter 30 (§7-8); he indeed emphasizes the destructive character of the flood.

In the evaluation of this fact, certain elements must be taken into account which Gauly does not consider. First of all, the nature of Seneca's text differs from that of the extant Stoic material on which Gauly bases his opinion. Seneca gives a vivid and dramatizing representation of the flood. In my opinion the 'dark' character of the passage is primarily the result of such literary motives.²⁷ The extant Stoic fragments do not have the same nature.

Apart from the dramatizing passages, Seneca's description of the various causes that contribute to the flood is rather neutral, as is clear from his statement about 'the flood, which occurs by a universal law just as winter and summer do' (*NQ* 3.29.3). The flood is something that happens regularly to the world, just like winter and summer.²⁸ This statement does not depict the flood as destroying the order of the world, as Gauly states, but rather as part of that order (as is made explicit by the words *lege mundi*, 'by a universal law').²⁹

Gauly also argues that the function of the flood as a punishment is a non-Stoic element (p.247ff.). According to him, this notion is present in Seneca's text via a reference to Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 1.253ff.). Since the readers are made aware of Ovid's description of the flood through Seneca's text, they will add the idea of a punishment of the human race, clearly present in Ovid's passage, to Seneca's description, where it cannot easily be discerned.³⁰

Such an argument inevitably leaves room for doubt about the presence of the idea of a punishment in Seneca's text (for the presence of Ovid in Seneca, see

²⁷ See section 5.2 below for a discussion of the dramatizing aspect of the passage. Certain elements that Gauly points to as evidence of the destructive character of the flood (p.246-247) will also be mentioned below in the discussion of the literary aspects of the passage.

²⁸ In Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 1.14, 352a28-31 the periodical floods are also compared to the occurrence of the winter.

²⁹ See also 3.29.4 *omnia adiuvabunt naturam ut naturae constituta peragantur*.

³⁰ On pp.248-251. In Ovid's version, the idea of a punishment is present in the passage preceding (and leading up to) the flood (1.163-261). Innocenti Pierini, who compares Ovid to Seneca's description, also mentions the idea of punishment (1990, 194-195).

section 5.1 below). In my opinion, this idea should not be added to Seneca's version of the flood. However, a moral element is certainly present, since the flood takes place when god has decided to begin a better world, Seneca says.³¹ The early Stoic material shows practically no indication that the conflagration had a moral aspect.³² The presence of this element in Seneca's description might therefore derive from his personal concerns. But it could also have been caused by an evolution in Stoic thought. A moral interpretation of the flood could indeed easily have developed from the designation of the conflagration as *katharsis* or *renovatio* (as for instance in Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.118). Moreover, I believe that, if one were to assign a significance to the moral aspect of the flood as a non-Stoic aspect in Seneca's representation, one would introduce a strict distinction between Stoic and non-Stoic elements that is irrelevant to the nature of Seneca's text.

Gauly argues that the indirect presence of the idea of punishment he reads in Seneca's text is intended to reveal the problematic character of this idea (p.251-253). Indeed, the concept of punishment is only understandable in the context of a 'Sintflut' happening once. In a cyclical world view, it makes no sense: since the cycle must begin all over again, punishment is ineffective. It also strikes a human generation arbitrarily.³³ Gauly's conclusion is that Seneca purposefully represents this aspect as a denunciation of the Stoic world view.

³¹ See 3.28.7 (*ordiri meliora*), 29.5 (*...ut de integro totae rudes innoxiaeque generentur nec supersit in deteriora praeceptor*) and 30.7-8. The moral element is further discussed in section 6 below; I only mention it here in connection with the question of the (non) Stoic aspect of the description.

³² See Long 1985, 25. The only relatively early passage testifying to a moral aspect of the conflagration is Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis* 17, 1067a (SVF 2.606). Mader 1983, 65f. is of the opinion that Seneca deviates from earlier Stoicism in emphasizing the moral element in his representation of the flood.

³³ Gauly adds that it is strange that Seneca presents this situation to his readers, since the failure of such a view had already been demonstrated in his time. In support of this idea, he quotes a passage from Philo (*De aeternitate mundi* 39ff.) in which an argumentation is presented against the idea that god would destroy the world in order to reconstruct it afterwards (all possibilities are refuted: the creation of a better world, a worse world, the same world).

I find it difficult to agree with this reasoning. We should understand that, within the cyclical world view in which floods or conflagrations are considered to carry a moral aspect, the human generation that is destroyed is vicious – again and again. When Gauly questions this situation, he seems to rationalize Seneca's representation of the flood too much, and especially to turn a problematic aspect that is generally inherent in the representation of a conflagration or flood into an element that is denounced by Seneca.³⁴ In my opinion, such an awareness is not present in Seneca's text: his denunciation is only directed at the human depravity.

On two more points, concerning the time at which the flood occurs, Seneca's representation also differs from the Stoic version, Gauly argues (pp.253ff). The first point is the fact that in *NQ* 3.27-30 the flood happens suddenly, while the Stoic conflagration is a longer process.³⁵ Seneca further represents the flood as something that will happen soon, while Stoic evidence presents it as a distant occurrence.³⁶ Both facts should, in my opinion, again be explained as the result of the literary and dramatizing character of the representation. When Seneca states that the flood will happen suddenly (27.2, 29.9), he uses an idea that is found more often in connection with dramatic descriptions of catastrophes. For instance, the fire that destroyed Lyons is said to have occurred with the same suddenness (see *EM* 91.2, 6).³⁷

³⁴ Caduff 1986, 205ff. indeed mentions these problems in the context of a general discussion of the flood.

³⁵ As Gauly also indicates (p.254), the situation in the *NQ* is not as simple as that. We find indications that the flood happens suddenly (mainly 27.2, 29.9, 30.5) as well as indications to the contrary (mainly 30.1: *non subito sed ex denuntiatio venit*). On p.239 Gauly states that the Stoic conflagration is a long process, with n.220 a reference to SVF 2.593 (Cicero *DND* 2.118), where the conflagration is represented as a gradual process.

³⁶ Gauly 2004, 254 with a reference to Long 1985, 24. Cf. Dodds 1973, 22 about the fact that the flood is represented by Seneca as taking place soon.

³⁷ See also Lucretius, *DRN* 5.93ff., 5.106.

Gauly gives a metaphorical and political interpretation of Seneca's representation of the flood.³⁸ The comparison of tyrants to floods and conflagrations, in the preface of the book (§5), is the starting point for his reading of the passage: the flood is a metaphor for a political system in collapse, i.e., Nero's reign. Such a metaphorical reading in my opinion must remain hypothetical.³⁹ The description of the flood has an explicit goal, related to the scientific discussion in the book. Indeed, although in this section I have argued that the literary and dramatizing aspects of the flood should be taken into consideration more strongly than Gauly does, I will also show that the scientific character of the passage is more important than has been thought. As Gross says, three main elements compose the epilogue: its literary aspect, the moral element and – the most important component – the inquiry into the causes of the flood (1989, 144, 145).

5. *The literary element: the polemic with Ovid and the dramatizing description of the flood*

5.1 Seneca and Ovid

At the beginning of chapter 28, the statement 'now let us return to the discussion' (*nunc ad propositum revertamur*) shows that Seneca comes back to his main subject after a digression. At the end of chapter 27 (§13-15), he has criticized Ovid's

³⁸ On pp.256ff. This interpretation directly follows the discussion of the two temporal elements I just mentioned; Gauly seems to connect his historical interpretation of the passage with Seneca's statement that the flood will take place soon.

³⁹ In an earlier chapter, Gauly had already argued that Seneca's references to Alexander contain allusions to Nero (pp.203ff.). Gauly finds confirmation for a metaphorical reading of the flood in a few representations of the end of the world with a metaphorical character, written after Seneca's version (in Lucan, the *Octavia* and Dio Chrysostomus, pp.258ff.). A discussion of this part of Gauly's interpretation would take us too far. Gauly also mentions the fire of Rome in July 64, which was thought to have been instigated by Nero (p.262ff.). The fact that contemporaries could think of this fire as Nero's 'conflagration' is considered by Gauly as another argument for a 'contemporary' reading of the flood (while the fire is a 'correction' of Seneca's flood, 'Korrektur der Version Senecas', p.263).

description of the flood in the *Metamorphoses* (1.253ff.). Although he applauds Ovid for certain descriptions, he criticizes other verses: Ovid is guilty of ‘childish silliness’ and has a tendency to be ‘frivolous’. This does not befit the discussion of such a grand subject as the flood.

Seneca’s criticism of Ovid has been well discussed by Innocenti Pierini.⁴⁰ Based on an analysis of certain terms used by Seneca, she argues that he reproaches Ovid for not describing an epic subject in epic terms; he does not keep to the rules of the genre. Seneca for instance disapproves of Ovid’s description of several lambs and a wolf swimming together (*Metamorphoses* 1.304). Innocenti Pierini demonstrates that although such images were used more often in similar contexts, this was in other genres than the epic, where such frivolity did not belong.⁴¹

Seneca had begun his description of the flood in the paragraphs preceding his criticism of Ovid. At the beginning of the chapter, he had stated that there are many causes contributing to this enormous catastrophe. The following paragraphs (from about 27.4 on) turn into a rather picturesque and dramatised description of the flood (so also 29.7-9). This has been considered an emulation of Ovid’s version.⁴² As appears from his quotations of the *Metamorphoses*, Seneca cannot but have been aware of his predecessor while he himself wrote a description of the flood.

⁴⁰ 1990, 177-192. See also Mazzoli 1970, 245-247, De Vivo 1995, 41ff. Most of Seneca’s quotations from Ovid come from the *Metamorphoses*: a large part of these are found in the *NQ*. The quotations in *NQ* 3 mostly come from Pythagoras’ speech in *Metamorphoses* Book 15. In this text we encounter the mutual interchanging of the elements (15.237ff.), which also plays an important role in *NQ* 3, and a catalogue of *mirabilia* related to water (circa 15.270ff.; cf. *NQ* 3.20ff.). On this question, see Mazzoli 1970, 238ff. and De Vivo 1995, 48ff. (who argues that in the sentences introducing such quotations allusions to Ovid are also found: see pp.46-47 about *NQ* 3.28.2).

⁴¹ On pp.186-187: she quotes Horace, *Odes* 1.2.9ff., where a similarly light-hearted description is found, and the ancient commentator Porphyrio’s remark that such a description was allowed in the genre in which Horace writes. Levy 1928, 466 (with reference to Virgil *Eclogues* 5.60) had said that Seneca’s criticism was unjust, since such images as that of a wolf and lambs side by side were a traditional characteristic of *aurea aetas* descriptions.

⁴² See Levy 1928, Innocenti Pierini 1990.

The influence of Ovid on Seneca's description has been analysed by Innocenti Pierini. She shows that she is aware of the fact that the discussion of one subject can lead to certain similarities in two texts that need not be explained by the reference of one author to the other. Her conclusion is that Seneca takes elements from Ovid and sometimes adapts them to his more serious description of the flood, or to his need for dramatization. Verbal echoes of Ovid are also found to occur beyond chapter 27 and its dramatizing description, scattered over chapters 28-30.⁴³

Chapter 27 stands out in the description of the flood. Indeed, the elements that are here said to cause the flood differ from those mentioned later on.⁴⁴ Seneca mainly describes the effect of rainfall and the action of the sea. The overall description is

⁴³ 1990, 193-210. Innocenti Pierini's analysis is accepted by Gauly 2004 (especially p.250, with notes), De Vivo 1995, 46 with n.27. Concerning some details of her analysis, however, one may retain doubts. For instance, she refers to Ovid for Seneca's military metaphors (pp.196 ff., especially 198-199; *Metamorphoses* 1.274-282 is more specifically compared to *NQ* 3.27.1-2). This is not convincing, since Seneca himself makes great use of this metaphor in his work (as Innocenti Pierini herself mentions); also, the military metaphor in Seneca's text is not very pronounced, or so similar to that occurring in Ovid's text as to lead one to believe that Seneca took over this element from him. Another interesting case is the phrase *nec ea semper licentia undis erit* (*NQ* 3.30.7), mentioned by Innocenti Pierini as an echo of *Metamorphoses* 1.309: *obruerat tumulos immensa licentia ponti* (p.206). Seneca also uses the expression in the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, to characterize the ocean: *oceanus... ingenti licentia exaestuans* (18.6). This formula was therefore used more widely (see also Statius *Silvae* 3.2.108). One may conclude from this that the mention of the *licentia* of water in *NQ* 3 was not borrowed from Ovid's description of the flood, or that Ovid's use of the term in this context was so influential that further usages, including the *Ad Marciam* passage, referred to it. Other points Innocenti Pierini mentions are more convincing. For instance, influence from Manilius is recognizable in Seneca's injunction to Ovid (*NQ* 3.27.15) to write about the flood with the image in mind that the world itself is swimming (*scies quid deceat, si cogitaveris orbem terrarum natare*). Manilius says: *natat orbis in ipso* (*Astronomica* 4.829). This image is so uncommon that influence from Manilius seems guaranteed (Innocenti Pierini pp.190-191). Innocenti Pierini also argues for the textual variant *amota mole* in 3.28.3 on the basis of *Metamorphoses* 1.279, *mole remota* (pp.208-210, taken over in the editions of Hine and Parroni).

⁴⁴ As Gross 1989, 144 has already remarked; cf. Oder 1899, 292-3.

similar to Ovid's version, who, like Seneca, mentions rain, the absence of wind, the action of the sea and the ruin of crops. Ovid also refers to earthquakes (*Metamorphoses* 1.283), which are among the causes mentioned in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, too (both in 3.27.3 and later, in 3.29.1). At the end of their descriptions, both authors speak about what is left of the human race. Seneca may well have decided to form his own, more serious description of the flood with these elements. It is certain that in the main part of chapter 27 he is not so much interested in aetiology as in the dramatic description of the onset of the flood.⁴⁵

Gross is of the opinion that the whole of chapter 27 from §4 on, not just the explicit criticism of Ovid, forms the digression that is brought to an end in 28.1.⁴⁶ The description in chapter 27 should, however, not be labelled as a digression only. In 27.3, the words 'according to some, among whom Fabianus' rather seems to place the passage within the scientific exposition.⁴⁷ The description subsequently becomes more dramatic. At the beginning of chapter 28 (§1-3), reference is made to a first stage of the flood, rainfall, which does not suffice to destroy the world.

⁴⁵ Cf. Gross 1989, 144: 'es ist meines Erachtens in erster Linie eine dichterische Beschreibung einer Naturkatastrophe. Seneca mag dazu durch die betreffende Ovidverse inspiriert worden sein. In diesem Abschnitt geht es ihm um effektvolle Naturbeschreibung'.

⁴⁶ See his schematic rendering of chapters 27-30 in 1989, 141; also p.143. Vottero (note *ad* 28.1) considers *nunc ad propositum revertamur* to refer to §12 of the preceding chapter, and the excursus to consist of §13-15.

⁴⁷ Since Axelson (1933, 56) the words *ut quidam putant, inter quos Fabianus est* have been placed at the beginning of §4, where the account of the flood begins (*ut quidam putant...primo immodici cadunt imbres*), and not at the end of the previous passage, which mentions earthquakes as a factor in the flood (*neque enim sine concussione mundi tanta mutatio est, ut quidam putant...*). Axelson's reasoning was that for the contribution of earthquakes to the flood Seneca did not need to refer to *quidam*, whereas in connection with the beginning of the flood opinions could differ, and 'some' (among whom Fabianus) have said that it started with rainfall. Axelson's alteration has been generally accepted (in the editions of Vottero, Hine, Parroni). However, one may also argue that the mention of earthquakes, a specific factor, would need the support of *quidam*, rather than the evident element of rainfall. In 29.1 earthquakes are also introduced with the words *quidam existimant*. Hutchinson 1993, 128, n.34 disagrees with Axelson because of the dramatic character of the description that follows.

Thus, chapter 27 also describes the first stage of Seneca's representation of the flood, and is more than an excursus.

5.2 Seneca's dramatizing description of the flood

As said, the description of the flood in chapter 27 has a dramatic character.⁴⁸ Levy (1928) has pointed to some elements that create this dramatization. An effect of amplification ('Steigerung') is especially discernible in the temporal sequence expressed through adverbs of time in the text. The advance of the inundation is described in steps, each representing a worsening of the situation.⁴⁹ Among other instances of amplification, Levy also mentions that Seneca specifies one general thought in a few formulations containing details or examples. This is a more general feature of his rhetorical style (the *partitio*).⁵⁰ About Seneca's description of different rivers (27.8-9), Levy for instance says 'Seneca spezialisiert...es ist wieder derselbe Drang...die eine Angabe immer durch eine andere zu übersteigern' (1928, 464).

⁴⁸ A dramatized description is also found in 29.7-9; traces of dramatization further occur in the rest of the passage, for instance in ch.30. Hutchinson 1993, 128-131 also points to the dramatic character of the description of the flood. Trillitzsch 1962, 124-125 discusses ch.27 as an example of rhetorical 'Schilderung'.

⁴⁹ Levy 1928, 463: 'in der Darstellung der Tragödie des Weltunterganges arbeitet er eine gewisse zeitliche Stufenfolge heraus, dergestalt daß, um es einmal so auszudrücken, der folgende Akt jedesmal eine Steigerung des vorhergehenden bedeutet'. The adverbs are: *primo...tunc...mox...postquam magis et magis...tandem...deinde...novissime*, etc. Cf. Waiblinger 1977, 45, Hutchinson 1993, 128ff. About the use of adverbs of time by Roman historians, see J.-P. Chausserie-Laprée, *L'expression narrative chez les historiens latins*, Paris 1969, 28-29.

⁵⁰ Cf. Trillitzsch 1962, 42-43 about Seneca's use of the *partitio* ('...indem man die betreffende Sache nicht als Gesamtheit, sondern in ihren einzelnen Teilen zeigt'), with reference to Quintilian 9.2.40 and 8.3.69; see also pp.124ff in connection with the description of NQ 3.27. Rabbow 1954, 80ff. calls this 'Amplifikation durch die Zerlegung' (*per partitionem*) in the context of his study of meditative texts.

In order to demonstrate the rhetorical character of this passage, I will, by way of example, briefly go through the description of the results of the flood for large rivers (27.8-9). The flooding of these rivers is described with great rhetorical flourish. Seneca mentions that their course is already violent under normal circumstances. This emphasizes that when the flood occurs these streams become exceptionally violent. §8 gives a detailed description of the fact that the rivers leave their normal bed, phrased as a rhetorical question: 'what do you think these rivers are like', Seneca asks, 'when they have overflowed and made new banks for themselves and, cutting through the ground, have all left their usual beds' (*cum superfusi novas sibi fecere ripas ac scissa humo simul excessere alveo*). The question is followed by an exclamation: 'how great is the force with which the rivers roll forth!' Seneca says of the Rhine that even while this river flows through an open field its force is not diminished, but it still moves forwards as it would in a small riverbed. This description in an indirect way emphasizes the force of the river more than if Seneca had simply said that it roamed with force. The Danube is said to flow not at the bottom or halfway up the mountains, but at the top. The addition 'not at the bottom or halfway up the mountains' (but at the *top*) emphasizes the disastrous character of this fact. The river carries with it enormous rocks and parts of land: these large items are carefully described, each substantive accompanied by an adjective. This, too, indirectly shows the force of the attack of water. Finally, Seneca describes the river as looking for a way out, but not finding any, since it has closed every exit for itself (by being everywhere): it is forced to turn back on itself in a circle. This complex and poetical description, the climax of the passage, is used to express the idea that the water covers all the land.

Thus, every sentence is aimed at presenting the fact it describes as emphatically as possible. Various means are used to this end. Every description is complex and unlike any simple, straightforward statement of fact.

Seneca's use of dramatizing effects in chapter 27 is especially interesting because it links this passage to the other prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, in which similar effects are found. Temporal sequences also occur in the descriptions of decadence (in the epilogues of *NQ* 4b and 1). Rhetorical strategies such as that of the *partitio* occur in different passages. The phenomenon of

amplification receives more attention in the discussion of *NQ* 1.16 (Chapter 7, section 3.1.2), where it is most conspicuous.

6. *The moral element*

The flood also has a moral aspect: a few remarks in the course of the description, and especially in the last paragraphs of the book, indicate that the catastrophe occurs because of mankind's misbehaviour. The flood will end this and enable humanity to begin anew – though gradually it will again subside into vice.⁵¹ It is understandable that Seneca, who gives such prominence to the theme of moral decadence in his work, mentions this aspect of the flood. Its moral character links it to the images of decadence and golden age found in the other epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Seneca's representation of his time as the summit of decadence, gradually emerged from a primeval golden age, agrees with the idea of a new beginning after the flood, a period without vice that will gradually fall back into this depravity. The end of Book 3 represents this as a repeated, cyclical process.

Some studies have emphasized the presence of the moral element in the description of the flood. Stahl most conspicuously speaks of the text as an 'ethische Paränese', a definition that gives far too much emphasis to the moral aspect (and the hortatory character) of the passage.⁵² It is clear that the moral element of the catastrophe is only present in the background of the description. In this sense, the ending of *NQ* 3 differs from the other epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

A reaction to the emphasis put by Stahl on the moral aspect in the description of the flood is found in Gross, who asserts the preponderance of the scientific aspect of the epilogue. Gross also reacts to the theories that have been formulated by Stahl and Waiblinger concerning Book 3 as a whole, and in which the moral

⁵¹ See 3.28.7, 29.5 and 30.7-8, as mentioned in n.31 above.

⁵² Stahl 1960, 118 (cf. p.155), repeated in 1987, 270. See also Innocenti Pierini's short remark, in 1990, 193 n.35.

element of the epilogue is involved.⁵³ Stahl relates the description of the flood to the digression in chapters 17-18. The mention of underground lakes with their strange, unnatural species of fish leads Seneca to speak of even more unnatural habits in the consumption of these fish, especially the habit of letting them die on the dinner table because of the beauty of the colours changing at that moment. According to Stahl, this passage gives an impression of the moral evil that is punished in the flood.⁵⁴

Waiblinger has continued this line of thought, also involving the preface of the book. According to him, the preface describes the moral depravity of earlier life and indicates how one should live correctly, the digression reveals the actual degeneration of the *mores*, and the epilogue the end and punishment of that situation. Preface and epilogue are especially opposed to each other, the positive character of the beginning of the book contrasting with the negative character of its ending.⁵⁵

Gross has, in my opinion correctly, rejected these ideas: there is no evidence that Seneca opposed preface and epilogue as different moments in the moral history of mankind. The digression does give a demonstration of vice, and in the flood viciousness does make a short appearance, but there is no indication that these passages are more specifically related. The description of the flood is mainly concerned with aetiology. The nature of the 'dark character' of the epilogue, which

⁵³ For Gross' criticism, see pp.109ff., especially 112-113 (also pp.143-144, 145): he gives a clear summary of Stahl and Waiblinger's ideas. Strohm 1977, 315-316, 317-318 has also refuted Stahl's theory.

⁵⁴ 1960, 118, 1987, 270. Stahl 1960, 92 also believes that the digression in ch.17-18 forms the centre of the book. Gross 1989, 112 has convincingly rejected this idea by pointing to the formulas that frame the passage, and its digressive character (in 3.18.1 and 19.1). According to Gross, the centre of the book is formed by ch.15, where Seneca voices his own opinion regarding the origin of terrestrial water. In my opinion, one should not search for a centre of the book at all. I will leave aside Stahl's theory about the structure of the scientific discussion of Book 3 (1960, 92-96, rejected by Gross 1989, 112, cf. Strohm 1977, 316-317).

⁵⁵ On pp.45ff., especially 49. Waiblinger also argues that the dark representation in the epilogue is prepared by the sombre and irrational tone of the second part of the book.

Waiblinger contrasts to the preface, I have discussed together with Gauly's analysis of the flood (in section 4 above).

In his discussion of the digression of *NQ* 3, Gauly also argues in favour of a connection between this passage and the epilogue (2004, 96ff.). His undertaking differs from that of Stahl and Waiblinger, he argues, since he gives a metaphorical interpretation of the digression.⁵⁶ He points out that the interest in dying fish mentioned in this scene should also be seen as a society's morbid interest in death (see especially pp.102-104). Therefore, the passage forms a reference to impending doom: this creates a connection between the digression and the ending of the book.⁵⁷

Although I do agree that the scene described in the digression represents the moral degeneration of a society, the reference to an interest in death Gauly sees in it remains unproven to me. Moreover, the idea of a society with an interest in death does not provide a reliable link with the representation of the flood. Rejecting the theories of Stahl, Waiblinger and Gauly implies that no such skilful construction, involving the moralizing passages of the book (preface, digression and epilogue), exists in *NQ* 3. Similar theories have been formulated concerning the structure of *NQ* 1; this discussion is therefore continued in Chapter 7, section 3.

7. *The causes of the flood*

The theories of Stahl, Waiblinger and Gauly disregard the fact that the primary aim of chapters 27-30 is the inquiry into the causes of the flood. The end of *NQ* 3 is

⁵⁶ He does this on the basis of Citroni Marchetti's (1991) symbolical interpretation of Seneca's moralistic discourse. Gauly finds a direct connection between the digression and the end of the book difficult to accept, because of the contrast between the 'banality' of the moralistic digression and the total destruction presented by the scene of the flood (p.98).

⁵⁷ Gauly bases this idea on Waiblinger's remark that the description of the fish under the earth (just before the digression sets in) evokes an underworld. 'Das Motiv der verkehrten Welt', the tendency of luxury to reverse nature (discussed in Citroni Marchetti 1991 and Torre 1997), also contributes to his interpretation.

especially related to the preceding scientific discussion: just as he does in the main part of the book, Seneca determines the causes of this massive attack of water. To understand his argument, we must proceed from what he has said in his discussion of the origin of 'terrestrial water' (the water of rivers and sea, in contrast to rainfall), in chapters 4-15 of the book.⁵⁸

In *NQ* 3.4.1, the question that will be answered in the first part of the book is formulated: what is the origin of terrestrial water? Seneca begins the discussion by mentioning what earlier specialists had said on the subject. He then discards these explanations for his own theory. In chapter 8 of the book a theory is mentioned that explains the origin of water as a result of the existence of large reservoirs of water under the earth. This explanation is followed by the mention of enormous subterranean spaces containing air, air that changes into water (9.1-2). In 9.3, Seneca then states that earth, too, is transformed into water: 'we believe the earth is susceptible to change' (*placet nobis terram esse mutabilem*).⁵⁹ This is the primary cause of the water that originates under the ground (*habes primam aquarum sub terra nascentium causam*).

In chapter 10, Seneca adds that the four elements, water, air, fire and earth, all merge into each other. Earth in particular will become water, since earth and water are related and resemble each other. Thus, the water of rivers comes from a great force: the ever-existing element 'water'. The elements not only change into each other, but they also contain each other. This line of thought is continued in chapter 12. When one knows what the true origin of water is, no questions remain, Seneca asserts. To inquire into the origin of terrestrial water is in fact to ask how 'water' in

⁵⁸ Strohm 1977, 318 and Gross 1989, 143 also state that the search for the causes of the flood corresponds to the main inquiry of the book, but they do not develop this idea. Inwood 1999, 29-32 and 2002, 130-133 gives a somewhat different interpretation of the end of *NQ* 3.

⁵⁹ It seems plausible that Seneca uses the formula *placet nobis* to indicate a Stoic theory with which he agrees. Compare the occurrence in *NQ* 6.21.1, and contrast *NQ* 7.21.1, where a Stoic theory with which Seneca does not agree is introduced with the formulation *placet nostris*.

general originates. Water is a part of nature and as such can not be lacking from the world:

If there are four elements in nature, you cannot ask where water comes from, for it exists as nature's fourth part. Why, then, are you surprised that so large a portion of nature has the power to pour forth a perpetual supply from itself?...I gave it enough power, and more than enough, when I said "it is an element". You realize that whatever is derived from an element cannot become deficient (12.2-3).⁶⁰

Thus, Seneca explains the origin of terrestrial water by referring to the status of water as an element and to the interchanging of the elements. Here we see how the natural philosopher solves a physical *quaestio* with a basic philosophical tenet.⁶¹ Moreover, the theory explained in chapters 9-10 and 12 of the book is of use for the understanding of the epilogue.

In the epilogue, Seneca repeatedly asserts that a great catastrophe such as the flood has several causes (see already 27.1). In chapter 27 rainfall is presented as a factor in the flood. Chapters 28-30 describe its other causes: the sea (28.3-6), earthquakes (29.1), the action of the stars (29.1). To these is added a more basic explanation, by which the Stoics explain the conflagration: whatever happens to the world is

⁶⁰ Gross discusses chs.9-10 and 12 on pp.125-126 and 128. According to Steinmetz (1964, 242-243) Seneca used different sources in these passages; chs.9-10 and 15 come from one source (which Steinmetz identifies as Posidonius), and the chapters in between from another source (11-14, identified by Steinmetz as Asclepiodotus). This interpretation, unlike mine, separates chapter 12 from 9-10. In my opinion, chapter 12 continues the idea, first mentioned in chapter 10, of the status of water as an element (as appears from the phrase *satis et multum illi virium dedi, cum dixi "elementum est"*).

⁶¹ Oder 1899, 288 goes so far as to say about ch.12: '...wo jeder Versuch, sich die Entstehung des Grundwassers auf natürlichem Wege zu erklären, aus metafysischen Gründen verboten wird'. Stahl has made similar remarks: cf. Chapter 2, section 2.4.

included in it from the beginning, also its ending (29.2-3; the idea is also mentioned in 30.1).⁶²

In 29.4 a new factor emerges. Seneca begins by repeating that all causes will contribute to the flood, but continues with the statement that the greatest cause will be provided by the earth itself, which, as he had said earlier, changes into water; the reference is to chapters 9-10. During the flood, the equilibrium of the elements must be destroyed (29.5), Seneca adds.⁶³ Earlier in the book, the normal situation of the elements had already been described as one of equilibrium (3.10.3).⁶⁴ When the flood destroys this situation, the element of water is present in a much larger quantity. To this end, the presence of the element of earth must also diminish (29.6).

In 30.4, Seneca repeats that the transformation of earth into water will cause the flood. While the other causes will come to a halt, the earth will find enough material in itself to be engulfed (*...ita tellus liquefiet et, aliis causis quiescentibus, intra se quo mergatur inveniet*). The philosopher adds that he would rather believe that a combination of all these causes brings about the flood (*sed magis omnia coitura crediderim*). He has in fact been emphasizing this plurality of causes in his description. However, in spite of his preference for this explanation, Seneca feels obliged to state that the transformation of earth into water will be the decisive factor. The interchanging of the elements, as it was stated in the main discussion, is the primary cause of the flood. Thus, the main connection between the passage about the flood and the central discussion of the book is clarified.⁶⁵

⁶² This theory is attributed to Cleanthes (SVF 1.497, Diels 1879, 470; cf. Vottero 1987-1988, 31). Vottero *ad loc.* (*ad* 29.2) refers to SVF 1.98, 1.497, 2.596, 2.618 and 2.619 for the idea.

⁶³ In *De beneficiis* 6.22, Seneca describes the destruction of the order of the heavenly bodies in a conflagration. Here, too, a situation of equilibrium is destroyed.

⁶⁴ Compare Pliny, *NH* 2.11.

⁶⁵ The doctrine of the four elements also lies at the basis of other books in the *NQ* (see especially *NQ* 6). Thus, they form a philosophical tenet on which Seneca bases his inquiry in a more general sense. This subject falls beyond the scope of this study, but would certainly benefit from further research.

The interchanging of the elements is a Stoic theory, which can be traced to Zeno and Chrysippus.⁶⁶ In *De natura deorum* 2.84, Cicero mentions that the interchanging of the elements forms the basis of the world ('the continuum of the world's nature is constituted by the cyclic transmutations of the four kinds of matter. For earth turns into water, water into air, air into aether...').⁶⁷ Seneca's description may well provide us with interesting information about Stoic ideas on the physical process of the end of the world.⁶⁸

It also seems probable that Seneca used doxographical sources for the inquiry into the flood, as for the discussion in the main part of the book. Since he quotes Papirius Fabianus in the course of the description, it has been suggested that Fabianus was Seneca's source.⁶⁹ In his catalogue of miraculous characteristics of water, in *De architectura* Book 8, Vitruvius mentions a few of his sources, among

⁶⁶ This is mentioned by Gross 1989, 126, Vottero 1987-1988, 30, Oder 1899, 288 with n.73. See for Zeno SVF 1.102 (Diels 1879, 469, 26 - 470, 4) and for Chrysippus SVF 2.413 (Diels 1879, 458, 21-26). A passage from Dio Chrysostomus (*Oratio* 36, 51-54) also mentions the interchanging of the elements in the context of the end of the world (although in the form of a myth). One element becomes stronger than the others. This passage has been thought to show Stoic influence (Mansfeld 1979, 146 n.52, followed by Gauly 2004, 241, 261-262).

⁶⁷ *Et cum quattuor genera sint corporum, vicissitudine eorum mundi continuata natura est. Nam ex terra aqua, ex aqua oritur aer, ex aere aether...* Compare Philo, *De providentia* 2.62, where the elements are also mentioned as the basis of the ordered world (and contribute to the explanation of physical phenomena).

⁶⁸ Cf. Setaioli 1988, 440: 'in essi [i.e. the chapters forming the description of the flood] attraverso la pur forte coloritura retorica, rimane chiaramente visibile l'impronta delle dottrine stoiche'. Caution is only needed in so far as the four elements were generally considered the basis of the world, not only according to the Stoics. Concerning the elements see also E. Schöner, *Das Viererschema in der antiken Humoralpathologie*, Wiesbaden: Steiner 1964 (Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin und Naturwissenschaften, Beiheft 4).

⁶⁹ Papirius Fabianus is mentioned by Gross 1989, 144, Axelson 1933, 56 n.10, Vottero 1987-8, 29 n.53, with reference to earlier literature, such as Oder 1899, 293-294. Oder suggests that depicting the flood was a fashion of the time: 'F[abianus] hatte also, der damaligen Mode folgend, eine Schilderung der am Ende aller Tage eintretenden grossen Flut gegeben'.

whom Theophrastus and Posidonius (*De architectura* 8.3.27); these authors may also have been among Seneca's sources.⁷⁰

7.1 The comparison with the human body

In chapter 15, Seneca gives another explanation for the origin of terrestrial water.⁷¹ At the beginning of the chapter he states that he agrees with some of the ideas he has just mentioned, but that he moreover believes that nature rules the earth following the example of the human body. The analogy with the human body serves to explain the origin of water: just as in our bodies, there are 'veins' in the earth, corridors through which water and other liquids or air pass. Likewise, something may happen to the liquid in those veins: it can receive shocks, or a vein can be opened or closed.

⁷⁰ See also the list of authors mentioned by Pliny, *NH* 31. In earlier scholarship, Posidonius has often been regarded as the source of the *NQ* (possibly reaching Seneca through summaries of his work); more recently scholars have begun to refute this idea (see especially Gross 1989; for *NQ* 3 see his summary p.147). Steinmetz 1964, 242ff., however, considers Posidonius to be the main source of the passage about the origin of water in *NQ* 3, even detecting Posidonius' criticism towards the theories of Theophrastus in it. In its search for alternative sources, modern literature has often regarded a form of the doxographical *placita* as the source of the *NQ*; see e.g. Vottero 1987-1988 (for *NQ* 3 see pp.29-31). About the sources of the *NQ*, see also Setaioli 1988, 375ff.; Book 3 is discussed pp.432ff. According to Caduff 1986, 202-203, the description of the flood should be traced back to oriental sources ('eine derartige Vorstellung ist eindeutig orientalischen Ursprungs; wohl nicht zufällig bringt Seneca gerade in diesem Zusammenhang ein Zitat aus Berossos' *Babyloniaka*', cf. Dodds 1973, 21-22). Caduff compares Seneca's description to a passage from Lucian (*The goddess of Syria* 12) in which the transformation of earth into water also appears (however, Lucian is recounting a Greek tale, not a Syriac one: this passage cannot be an indication for oriental influence).

⁷¹ Oder 1899, 289 and Gross 1989, 112 regard chapter 15 as the centre of the book, and as Seneca's own opinion on the matter discussed. Gross' discussion of the chapter (pp.129-134) concentrates on the question of the sources for the analogy with the human body.

The additional explanation provided in ch.15 is compatible with the other theories. Indeed, this chapter describes the transformation of earth into water in the context of an organic process. Just as in a human body certain changes occur, so they do in the world. In 15.6-7 the transformation of earth in water is mentioned, in 15.7 that of air in water (see also 15.3).⁷² The analogy with the human body occurs frequently in *NQ* 3. It is also found in the description of the flood, at 29.7 and 30.4, passages in which Seneca explains the decisive cause of the flood: the transformation of earth into water.⁷³

In his discussion of miraculous occurrences (*mirabilia*) of water, Vitruvius likewise uses the analogy with the human body to explain the variety in existing forms of water. Since there are so many different kinds of liquids in the human body, it is not surprising that such variety is also found in the world (*De architectura* 8.3.26).⁷⁴

⁷² Compare Steinmetz 1964, 242-243: 'in dem großartigen Vergleich der Erde mit einem Lebewesen... wird dem Leser klargemacht, daß diese drei Arten der Entstehung des Grundwassers [in chs.9-10 Steinmetz distinguishes three explanations for the origin of water] als organische Prozesse verstanden werden müssen. Der Zusammenhang mit cp. 10 ist offensichtlich'. See also Althoff 1997, 100.

⁷³ See also *NQ* 3.29.3. The analogy with the human body also occurs as explanation of other phenomena in the *NQ*. See further Althoff 1997, who discusses the possible sources of this analogy (rejecting Posidonius) and Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 305-307.

⁷⁴ Seneca mentions such *mirabilia* in the second part of Book 3 (ch.20ff.). The Budé edition of *De architectura* 8 also notes the parallel (introduction p.xxiv, with a further reference to *Aetna* 97f.). Vitruvius' discussion of water in this book differs from that of Seneca in its purpose and in the composition of the book. Vitruvius is an architect who has a practical purpose. As he says in the introduction, he is interested in such matters as the ways to find water, the properties it has, and the determination of its quality. Thus, the long catalogue of *mirabilia* given in 8.3 should help discern which source must be led to one's house, and which one should be carefully avoided (although this does not account for the presence of the entire catalogue). Vitruvius mentions the four elements, which form the basis of Seneca's inquiry, in his introduction. Philosophers and physicians (*physici et philosophi*), he says, have considered the four elements (and water in particular) the basis of everything. Unlike Seneca, Vitruvius does not make further use of this theory in his discussion.

8. *The manifestation of flex naturae in the world*

In her discussion of the unifying ideas in the different parts of each book of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Stahl mentions a thought linking the end of this book to the main discussion in a more general way than I have done. She argues that the central philosophical idea of Book 3 is the *ordo rerum*, or *fatum*. Nature's rule over the world is visible in the order maintained among things, and in the periodical occurrence of certain phenomena ('im periodenhaften Geschehen mikrokosmischer oder makrokosmischer Tragweite'). This last point includes the flood in the larger theme of *ordo rerum*.⁷⁵

Codoñer argues that the epilogue shows that nature is the final cause of the flood:

Sénèque... imprègne la discussion scientifique de contenus transcendants, jusqu'à attribuer à *natura* l'origine finale... le propos demeure donc sur le terrain du scientifique, mais en lui donnant le sens qu'il a pour Sénèque en sa qualité de philosophe stoïcien.⁷⁶

During the discussion of the origin of terrestrial water, 'nature' is a few times referred to as the ultimate origin of the world order. The current situation is 'as nature planned it'.⁷⁷ In the description of the flood, nature is mentioned more often as the ultimate cause (see 27.2, 27.3, 28.2, 28.4, 28.7, 29.4, 30.1, 30.3). Thus, the flood forms the 'ordered' unravelling of the world: the end of the world is part of the planning (see especially 29.2-3 and 30.1).⁷⁸

⁷⁵ 1960, 117-118. Thus, Stahl does not see the flood as something negative, unlike Gaully.

⁷⁶ 1989, 1817-8; cf. Waiblinger 1977, 42.

⁷⁷ See especially 10.3, 15.1 (*placet natura regi terram*), 15.3 (*haec est causa aquarum secundum legem naturae voluntatemque nascentium*), 16.3-4.

⁷⁸ Donini (1979, 256-261) interprets Seneca's representation of the flood as an accusation against the Stoa, a subtle criticism designed to show the absurdity of the concept. According to him, the fact that Seneca does not mention providence or god as the final cause of the flood, but only uses the term 'nature', is caused by a wish not to impute a bad deed to a good god. This interpretation does not seem correct to me, since Seneca not only uses the

Nature's more prominent presence as final cause in the description of the flood may simply be caused by the fact that the flood is a major occurrence in which the work of a higher entity is more easily discernible. However, the parallel with other books is interesting: the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* more often discuss the greater matters that are related to the physical discussion, and thus come to mention god/nature (compare especially the preface of *NQ* 1, *NQ* 6.3, 1.17, and the epilogues of *NQ* 5 and 7).

Since the concept of nature is mentioned a few times in the main discussion of *NQ* 3 and more often in the passage at the end of the book, one could agree with Stahl that Book 3 forms a demonstration of the more general philosophical idea of a world order regulated by a central entity. However, a restriction should be appended to this conclusion: indeed, one would expect such an idea to emerge from the work, but it is not emphasized in this book or in the *Naturales Quaestiones* as a whole. Seneca's main attention is concentrated on more concrete questions such as the origin of the water of rivers. According to Stahl, the same central philosophical idea is also found in other books of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. In some cases, however, the basic idea of a divine order in the world cannot be said to underlie the whole book; in Book 5, for instance, it only appears in the epilogue, not in the main discussion.⁷⁹

9. Levels of causation

In *NQ* 3.28.4, Seneca states that the sea is set in motion by fate, not by the tide, since this is only an instrument of fate (*haec fati mota, non aestu, nam aestus fati*

term nature in the description of the flood, but also in the rest of *NQ* 3. The central discussion of the book cannot be called an 'accusation of Stoicism', since Seneca there demonstrates the *lex naturae*. In *NQ* 2.45, 'nature' appears as one of the many names of god. Seneca may be speaking of nature mainly, instead of god, because to a large extent he keeps the discussion in the realm of the strictly physical, non-metaphysical.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 7, section 2.1. Cf. Rosenmeyer 2000, 109-110 for the opinion that the all-dominating *ratio* or nature is hardly present in the *NQ*, except in certain prefaces, or barely related to the discussion of natural phenomena, apart from such short formulations as are found in *NQ* 3.

ministerium est). Here a distinction is made between levels of causation: the direct cause of the motion of the sea is the tide, but the ultimate cause is fate itself.

In 3.26.8 Seneca makes an explicit distinction between a specific and a more general cause. He says that it is difficult to ascertain the direct cause (*proxima et vicina causa*) of certain phenomena, especially when they have not been observed. Their cause may, however, be determined on a more general level. Although it is difficult to explain a particular case of purgation of the sea, it is known that all water of a certain kind purifies itself. Seneca calls this the *publica causa*.⁸⁰

Thus, each phenomenon has a specific cause, similar phenomena having the same cause, and we must understand nature (or god/fate) to be the ultimate cause of everything. In the description of the flood, the different levels of explanation are combined. Nature (also called god, or fate) brings about the flood ‘when a change in humanity is wanted’; on a more direct level it is the transformation of earth into water that primarily causes the flood.⁸¹

10. *The relevance of levels of causation for the theodicy*

Concerning the flood, interesting evidence is added to the question of the distinction in levels of causation by Mansfeld: certain Stoics, it appears, did not agree with the orthodox Stoic view that god causes the end of the world.⁸² A passage

⁸⁰ In *NQ* 3.16.1-3 Seneca is also content to mention only a more general cause for certain phenomena. He does not deem it necessary to enumerate all the rivers that lie dry at certain periods and flow at other moments, or to give an explanation for each river, since the periodical character of certain phenomena provides an explanation for all these rivers. This passage and that of *NQ* 3.26.8 are discussed by Inwood in the context of the idea of epistemic limitations for man (1999, 28-29, 2002, 128-130).

⁸¹ Codoñer 1989, 1817 with n.67 also makes a distinction between ‘cause initiale’ and ‘cause proche’ in her discussion of the end of *NQ* 3. In n.67, she distinguishes between different levels of the ‘cause initiale’: it may refer to a physical cause, such as the power of water as an element, or to the initial cause of everything (god).

⁸² 1979, 157-159. For the orthodox view Mansfeld quotes Diogenes Laertius 7.137 (SVF 2.526). Mansfeld argues that, whereas early Stoics claimed that god/providence was responsible for the conflagration, some later Stoics did not.

in Philo's *De aeternitate mundi*, 8-9 (SVF 2.620), mentions that 'the Stoics' said that god is the cause of the beginning of the world, but not of its ending, caused by 'the indefatigable force of fire'. In his discussion, Seneca does not separate the final cause from the direct, physical causes of the flood in such a way. In my opinion, this confirms that he does not represent the flood as a negative phenomenon. Of course, since it destroys humanity, the flood is described as a disaster. However, in *NQ* 3 this aspect does not lead to questions concerning god's responsibility.

In other books of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the differentiation in levels of causation is of importance in connection with the question of providence. In the epilogue of *NQ* 5, the useful winds are emphatically said to be the work of a benevolent deity or providence. In *NQ* 6, however, Seneca says that the gods have nothing to do with such phenomena as the deadly earthquakes: these do not arise from their wrath, but 'they have their own causes'. Like our bodies, they are sometimes troubled by *vitia* and suffer themselves when they seem to inflict pain (6.3.1).⁸³ Here, in order to preserve the idea of providence, the relation between the direct and the ultimate cause is broken.⁸⁴

The sentence in *NQ* 6.3.1 could lead one to believe that Seneca adheres to the Epicurean idea that the gods are not involved in human affairs.⁸⁵ However, the

⁸³ *Illud quoque proderit praesumere animo, nihil horum deos facere, nec ira numinum aut caelum concuti aut terram: suas ista causas habent, nec ex imperio saeviunt, sed quibusdam vitiis ut corpora nostra turbantur, et tunc cum facere videntur iniuriam, accipiunt.* Again a comparison with the human body.

⁸⁴ As Mansfeld 1979, 158 puts it: Seneca 'is not very consistent'. His implication of providence differs from subject to subject.

⁸⁵ So De Vivo 1992, 82: 'il razionalismo senecano assume aspetti di chiara marca epicurea, prendendo le distanze da quella visione provvidenzialistica che in qualche misura affiora nel pensiero stoico a proposito dei terremoti'. The idea that the gods have nothing to do with natural phenomena also appears apropos of volcanoes in the *Aetna* (v.29ff.), as mentioned by Vottero (in his note *ad NQ* 6.3.1) and De Vivo 1992, 83 n.12. There has been some debate about the question whether the *Aetna* is Epicurean or Stoic (see for instance Ph. De Lacy, 'The philosophy of the *Aetna*', *TAPhA* 74 (1943), 168-178). Pliny speaks of *scelera naturae* while mentioning earthquakes (*NH* 2.206). I do not think the

statement should rather be related to Stoic thought on providence, as appears from some passages in Seneca's work where similar formulations occur.⁸⁶

At the beginning of *De providentia*, Seneca establishes that the world is ruled by providence. He mentions that not only ordered phenomena (such as the stars and planets) happen under the guide of providence, but also irregular ones such as lightning and earthquakes. Just as the wonderful phenomena, they are part of the overall *ratio*: they, too, have their own explanations (*De providentia* 1.3).⁸⁷

A similar idea occurs in *De ira* 2.27.2, where Seneca is saying that the gods cannot do any harm. Harmful natural phenomena, such as rain without end and strong winters, are therefore not sent by the gods against man: only fools think so. None of the phenomena that harm or benefit humans come about with the purpose of harming or benefiting them. They are not the cause of everything that happens on earth: these phenomena have their own laws (*suas ista leges habent quibus divina exercentur*).⁸⁸

Both passages account for the presence of harmful phenomena in a world governed by providence. These phenomena have their own, specific rationale. Although everything may be said to happen within the rule of providence (*De providentia* 1.3), the specific laws of natural phenomena also dissociate them (or their harmful aspect) from divine action (*De ira* 2.27.2). In the context of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the specific *causae* or *leges* of such phenomena as

plural *deos* in *NQ* 6.3.1 ('the gods have no role in earthquakes') has a significance in this context (in the sense that it still leaves open the possibility that *providence* has a role in earthquakes: one would then prefer a different combination, with providence having no part in the phenomena). Seneca seems to use the plural 'gods' without difference in meaning more often.

⁸⁶ See also Van Dijk 1968, 132, who adds *De beneficiis* 6.20.1-2.

⁸⁷ *Ne illa quidem quae videntur confusa et incerta, pluvias dico nubesque et elisorum fulminum iactus et incendia ruptis montium verticibus effusa, tremores labantis soli aliaque quae tumultuosa pars rerum circa terras movet, sine ratione, quamvis subita sint, accidunt, sed suas et illa causas habent, non minus quam quae alienis locis conspecta miraculo sunt...*

⁸⁸ In the next sentence, Seneca adds that, although none of the grand natural phenomena occur with the specific intention of harming man, there is nothing that is not done for his good. The idea of providence is still valid (cf. the note of the Budé edition *ad loc.*)

earthquakes are specified further: an earthquake is caused by a subterranean stream of air, for instance.

Additional information concerning the preservation of the idea of divine providence in connection with harmful natural phenomena is given in *NQ* Book 2. Two passages mention that, although god does not actively cause the occurrence of every single phenomenon, he is responsible for the general arrangement (2.32.3-4, 2.46). Although he does not personally direct every bird from which man derives good or bad omens, 'such things are nonetheless carried out by divine agency' (*ista nihilominus divina ope geruntur*, 2.32.4). Jupiter does not himself hurl the lightning bolts, but 'all things are so arranged that even those things which are not done by him none the less do not happen without a plan, and the plan is his..he is not present at every event but he has given force and cause to everything' (2.46).⁸⁹

God takes care of the larger plan, not of its details: this explains how a distinction between specific natural causes and the general action of providence can be made. In the end, earthquakes also come under the rule of providence. This idea could have been added in *NQ* 6.3.1, but Seneca chooses not to mention it.⁹⁰

The idea that the gods take care of the larger plan, but not of the details, was a well-known thought.⁹¹ It occurs for instance in Book 2 of Cicero's *De natura deorum*

⁸⁹ This statement is made in the context of the question why innocent people, too, are struck by lightning bolts, while guilty persons escape from them. Seneca says he will discuss this question on another occasion (*in maiorem me quaestionem vocas, cui suus dies, suus locus dandus est*, 2.46). Mansfeld 1992, 330 n.44 believes that this refers to the end of *NQ* 2 (as well as to a later study); I doubt this. See also Hine's commentary on the passage (1981, 399-400). Cf. for the announcement that such a subject will be treated elsewhere *EM* 110.2: *postea videbimus an tantum dis vacet ut privatorum negotia procurent*.

⁹⁰ In the epilogue of *NQ* 5, concerning the beneficent winds, Seneca leaves open the question whether god has only taken care of the general arrangement of the winds, or of the details (the disposition of the specific winds) as well (18.1; see also 18.5).

⁹¹ As Mansfeld 1992, 328-329 puts it: 'he does so [i.e. Seneca saves the idea of providence] by appealing to the well-worn argument of Stoic theodicy that fate, or the divine plan, is only concerned with the course of events in general and that God does not care about minor details on the one hand, and that such natural disasters (cosmic evils) as befall

(*magna di curant, parva neglegunt* 2.167). Here, too, destructions caused by phenomena such as fire and hail (comparable to earthquake and lightning) lead to questioning providence.⁹²

Thus, Seneca's distinction in levels of causation, which 'saves providence', may be understood within Stoic thought on providence. The Stoics used such a distinction in reaction to the problem of the presence of physical evil in a world that was supposed to be governed by providence. Physical evil was explained as an involuntary side-effect in the order of the world; it could be caused indirectly or accidentally. Chrysippus also stated that 'necessity' was to some extent involved in the existence of this form of evil.⁹³

The distinction in levels of causation also occurs in other explanations of the world. The idea that god is responsible only for the orderly phenomena of the world, not for the disastrous ones, comes up in a passage from Theophrastus' work.⁹⁴ In this text, thunderbolts (and similar phenomena) are said not to be caused by god's anger, since god is the cause only of the order in the world, not of its disorder. The

humans, which moreover may be for the good of the whole, are irrelevant from the point of view of morality and felicity on the other'.

⁹² In the refutation of Stoic providence, in *DND* Book 3, the theme also appears (3.86, 90, 93). Pease's commentary *ad DND* 2.167 provides a list of parallels for the thought, which was widely used, not only in philosophical contexts.

⁹³ Mentioned by Mansfeld 1979, 158-159 with n.90. Cf. Steiner 1914, 68-69. SVF fragments they refer to are 2.1169, 2.1170, 2.1176, 2.1178. For the problem of cosmic evil in relation to providence see also Algra 2003, 172-173. Van Dijk 1968 gives a longer discussion of the question of physical evil and divine providence in Stoic philosophy and Seneca's thought (see especially pp.97ff., 122-126, 128-133).

⁹⁴ The passage is part of Theophrastus' *Meteorology*, preserved only in an Arabic version. An English translation by Daiber is available (in W.W. Fortenbaugh and D. Gutas (eds.), *Theophrastus: his psychological, doxographical and scientific writings*, New Brunswick 1992, 166-293). See especially the discussion of the passage in Mansfeld 1992; cf. Taub 2003, 125-127, who also reacts to the doubts about Theophrastus' authorship of this passage expressed by M. van Raalte, 'God and the nature of the world: the "theological excursus" in Theophrastus' *Meteorology*', *Mnemosyne* 56 (2003), 306-342.

disorder of the world is attributed to 'the nature of the world'. Theophrastus offers rationalistic explanations of the phenomena he discusses.

The situation described in Theophrastus' passage is comparable to that of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Seneca also attributes good phenomena to god, but not bad ones. The idea that the disorder of the world should be attributed to 'the nature of the world' provides a 'natural explanation' as occurs in *NQ* 6.3.1. As Mansfeld points out, the difference between both authors is that Seneca must, in the end, preserve the thought of providence.⁹⁵

Philo's *De providentia* provides another interesting parallel.⁹⁶ In this work Philo comes to speak of the part played by providence in the occurrence of natural phenomena. He asserts that god has nothing to do with evil phenomena such as earthquakes or lightning, since he is never the cause of any harm (*De providentia* 2.82, 102).⁹⁷ These phenomena occur because of the transformation of the elements (2.102). Thus, in this text, too, a direct, physical cause at the basis of the physical phenomena is mentioned, which liberates god from his responsibility. The parallel shows that the question of god's contribution to disastrous phenomena, and its solution through 'levels of causation', was more widespread.

It is typical of the *Naturales Quaestiones* that such an important matter as the role of god in the causation of natural phenomena is discussed briefly, *en passant*. The knowledge that the earthquakes are not caused by god but have natural causes finally leads to liberation from fear of the divine, and more in general to a correct

⁹⁵ Mansfeld 1992 also traces the 'aftermath' of the subject in the Epicureans, who, as is known, denied any involvement of the gods in human affairs, not just in the disorderly phenomena. So did Strato of Lampsacus (cf. Mansfeld 1992, 331-333, 334 n.62). Strato's is one of those works that could have served as model for the *NQ*. He is mentioned once in the *NQ* (6.13.2).

⁹⁶ Cf. Mansfeld 1979, 157.

⁹⁷ The idea that disastrous phenomena are in some way useful is also mentioned (*De providentia* 2.99-100).

representation of god. Therefore, the idea is strictly speaking of great importance in Seneca's philosophy.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ For the idea that the gods must not be feared, see *EM* 29.12, 75.17 and 123.16.

CHAPTER SIX

A LETTER ON THE TOPIC OF FLATTERY: THE PREFACE OF *NQ* 4a

1. *The connection between preface and main text*

The preface of Book 4a is a somewhat surprising text: it consists mostly of a warning about the dangers of flattery addressed to Lucilius, with no apparent connection to the subject of the book, the Nile and its annual flood.¹ Moreover, the preface has the character of a letter (see for the discussion of this aspect section 2 below, where a short overview of the content of the preface is also given).

For this preface, too, the question of the connection with the rest of the work has been raised. One possible answer lies in the similarity of the preface to the other prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Like these, it is a moralizing passage. It can be explained as a specific instance of the general moralistic lesson found in the preface to Book 3, which indicates the behaviour one must adopt in order to attain virtue; the preface to the next book, 4a, shows what one's attitude towards one particular vice, *adulatio*, should be.²

However, the relation of the preface to the main argument of *NQ* 4a is less clear than for other books. Waiblinger argues that the discussion of the Nile is given an ethical aspect at the end of the preface (1977, 54). Indeed, Seneca says that the discussion of the Nile will take Lucilius' thoughts away from the importance of his province (preface §21-22 - 1.1). However, this only connects the inquiry into the Nile's nature to the end of the preface, not to the discussion of flattery that forms its

¹ Cf. Gross 1989, 150, 182, Rosenmeyer 2000, 106: 'the extended harangue to Lucilius, longer than other prefaces, has nothing to do with the subject that follows...why he inserts it at this point is unclear; the avowed explanation...a contemplation of the great river will turn Lucilius away from his self-absorption...is too flimsy to persuade'.

² Cf. Stahl 1960, 36, 202.

main part.³ One might add that through the discussion of the river the status of his province will become less important to Lucilius 'so as not to make him succumb to flatterers'. This thought would connect the physical discussion to the entire preface; however, Seneca does not explicitly formulate it.

There appears to be a connection between the Nile and flattery, unnoticed by earlier literature. A passage in John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria* 4, reveals that a benefactor could be compared to the Nile and the Ocean in order to flatter him. The passage runs as follows:

Then, as the benefactor who has brought them together enters in the sight of all... all with one voice call him protector and ruler of the city... next, they liken him to the greatest of rivers, comparing his grand and lavish munificence to the copious waters of the Nile; and they call him the Nile of gifts. Others, flattering him still more and thinking the simile of the Nile too mean, reject rivers and seas; and they cite the Ocean as an example and say that he in his lavish gifts is what the Ocean is among the waters, and they leave not a word of praise unsaid...⁴

From this description it is clear that the comparison to the Nile was used to praise the generosity of a benefactor.⁵ Of course, this text only attests to such a practice for the Roman East, and for a later period than the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Apart from

³ Cf. Gross 1989, 150 n.1. Gross calls the transition at the end of this preface to the discussion of the Nile 'formal' (p.150). Cf. the discussion of the transitions in *NQ* 3 (Chapter 4, section 8, Chapter 5, section 2). Berno 2003, 135 also points to the connection between the end of the preface and the discussion of the Nile; she moreover argues that the ideas at the end of the preface are connected with the ideas expressed in its main part (pp.132-134).

⁴ Translation by M.L.W. Laistner, *Christianity and pagan culture in the later Roman Empire*, Ithaca, New York 1951, 87-88 (with slight alterations).

⁵ The comparison with the Ocean also occurs in a few papyri: see G. Meautis, 'Oceane', *RPh* 40 (1916), 51-54, E. Peterson, 'Die Bedeutung der Oceane Akklamation', *RhM* 78 (1929), 221-223. See also the short mention of the 'Nile-acclamations' by M.J. Versluys, *Aegyptiaca Romana. Nilotic scenes and the Roman views of Egypt*, Leiden 2002, 295 and n.347, with the remark 'this interesting subject needs further research'.

this restriction, we do have a connection between the Nile and flattery here. The fact that Seneca wanted to write a book about this river may have made him think of the association with flattery in the moral sphere.

It is interesting that – even if we assume the connection between the Nile and flattery to have been known to Seneca as well as to his readers – Seneca does not develop or even mention this connection. Thus, although it remains possible that the subjects of the preface and the main text were related, the book does not function on the basis of this relation; the preface is rather a separate piece attached to the scientific discussion. In Chapter 1 I have argued that such a composition – first developing a subject in a preface and then linking it to the main text – was a relatively common practice in classical literature.

2. *The epistolary character of the preface*

In the preface of Book 4a Lucilius is strongly present, more than in the other prefaces and epilogues. Not only is he addressed in the first sentence with the words *Lucili virorum optime*, as in the prefaces to Books 1, 3 and 6, but the pretence of direct communication with him is continued further in this preface.

In the first sentence, Seneca refers to a correspondence between Lucilius and himself, in which Lucilius has told him about his personal situation: he is pleased with the place where he resides, Sicily, and his work as procurator, which leaves him time for *otium*, as he has written to Seneca (*delectat te, quemadmodum scribis, Lucili virorum optime, Sicilia et officium procurationis otiosae*). Seneca immediately adds some advice: Lucilius' situation will continue to please him if he keeps it within certain bounds, and does not make his procuratorship an exercise of supreme power (*delectabitque si continere id intra fines suos volueris, nec efficere imperium quod est procuratio*). Seneca does not doubt that Lucilius will do as he advises him. He contrasts Lucilius with the mass of less worthy people, giving a description of incorrect human behaviour in this respect.⁶ The lesson from this

⁶ The description culminates in the sentence *quod est miserrimum, numquam sumus singuli*. Its compactness makes the sentence somewhat difficult to understand. Different

situation is then drawn: Lucilius must separate himself from the crowds, so as not to expose himself to flatterers (§3). With the *adulatores* the main subject of the preface, flattery, is introduced.

In the next part of the preface, which focuses on the dangers of flattery, Seneca continues to address his advice concerning the avoidance of these dangers to Lucilius. Second person singular verb forms occur regularly, and in §9 Lucilius is again mentioned by name. In §10-12, Seneca refers to his own brother Gallio, whom he had described to Lucilius as an ardent opponent of flattery. Then follows a scene in which Lucilius is represented as trying (in vain) to win the unconquerable Gallio by flattery ('you tried him on every side. You proceeded to look up to his intelligence...'; *ab omni illum parte temptasti: ingenium suspicere coepisti...*). At the end of this passage, Seneca says to Lucilius that he should not be disappointed by the thought that he did not perform well, or that Gallio suspected something: Gallio did not catch Lucilius at his game but rejected a flatterer. In §13, by way of conclusion, Lucilius is told to take this paragon of virtue as his model (*ad hoc exemplar componere*).

In §14 ff. advice follows about what one should do instead of listening to a flatterer: 'if you want to be praised, praise yourself'. Seneca describes the good deeds Lucilius could mention to himself. At the end of this long fictitious self-address, Seneca's slightly ironic conclusion is that if Lucilius tells himself the truth, he will be praised by a great witness (himself), and if he lies, he will be ridiculed without witnesses (§18). Seneca's further comment that he himself could be trying to flatter Lucilius at that moment (through the representation of Lucilius' laudatory self-address), leads to the concluding thought that caution is needed towards everyone.

translations exist: the Loeb edition speaks of never being 'alone with ourselves' (cf. the Budé edition), Vottero and Parroni speak of never being one person or having one personality only, the edition of O. and E. Schönberger of never being 'selbständige Charaktere'. Perhaps, in connection with the idea of avoidance of the crowds that is present in the passage, the simpler interpretation of the Budé and Loeb editions is preferable.

After that, the text reverts to the more specific mode of an epistolary communication, as sketched at the beginning of the preface (§20). Seneca will try to provide guidance to Lucilius from the other side of the sea, he says. They will converse together, and be together in their minds, the part of them where they are best, giving each other advice from a distance (*..hinc tecum miscebo sermones: erimus una qua parte optimi sumus; dabimus invicem consilia non ex vultu audientis pendentia*). The advice Seneca will give to Lucilius is specified: he will lead his student's thoughts away from Sicily, to prevent him from thinking about the importance of the province in his charge (§21-22). In 1.1 Seneca concludes that in order to do so he will discuss a subject entirely different from the marvels of Sicily, that is, the Nile and its annual flood.

2.1 Resemblance to the *Epistulae Morales*

It is clear from this summary that Lucilius is addressed in this preface as he would be in the course of a correspondence. The epistolary character is especially evident at the beginning and the end of the preface. On the whole, Lucilius is clearly more present throughout this text than in the other moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Some scholars have remarked upon the specific character of this preface. Codoñer expresses her surprise as follows: 'ce prologue nous surprend immédiatement par sa ressemblance avec n'importe laquelle des lettres de Sénèque'.⁷ As we have seen, the unusual form of the preface is combined with a remarkable content, unrelated to the subject of the book. The preface resembles the *Epistulae Morales* in form as well as content.

⁷ 1989, 1812. Codoñer voices the possibility that the preface is one of the letters from the corpus of the *EM*, adapted to form a preface. Her note p.1812 indicates that no attention had been paid to the specific character of this preface so far. See also Gross 1989, 150, Gauly 2004, 210 with n.84.

The idea that Seneca and Lucilius will be together by means of writing letters (§20 of the preface) also appears in the *Epistulae Morales*.⁸ ‘A conversation with an absent friend’ is the definition of a letter.⁹ In the *Epistulae Morales*, the epistolary character of a letter is also emphasized at the beginning and end.¹⁰ These elements clearly indicate that Seneca characterizes the preface as an epistle.

The method Seneca employs in the preface of Book 4a is similar to the process used in the *Epistulae Morales*: he begins with a particular, concrete situation, in this case Lucilius’ position in Sicily. From this he proceeds to the discussion of a specific philosophical matter, in this case flattery.¹¹ It has been remarked in studies of the letters that Lucilius’ function is to facilitate the introduction and discussion of a certain topic. Mazzoli, for example, states: ‘appare in conclusione plausibile, per tutto il corso dell’epistolario, un ‘trattamento’ del destinatario finalizzato, al di là del fondo reale, alle peculiari e variabili esigenze dell’organizzazione filosofica’.¹² The fact that the addressee fulfils such a function also implies that he is (to a certain extent at least) fictional.¹³

⁸ See *EM* 40.1, 55.11, 67.2, cf. 55.9. These instances place the thought at the beginning and end of a letter.

⁹ See Cancik 1967, 51-53; cf. Wilson 1987, 110.

¹⁰ See Cancik 1967, 71, Wilson 2001, 178-179.

¹¹ Cf. Codoñer 1989, 1812: ‘à partir de là, le prologue, comme n’importe quelle des lettres, développe un thème qui a la finalité de faire avancer Lucilius sur le chemin de la sagesse’. See also Cancik 1967, 69, 89-90. Cf. for the analysis of this method in the *EM* (an initial situation leading to a lesson) also Henderson 2004.

¹² 1989, 1855. In the later letters, Lucilius also serves to introduce discussions about logic, a subject that strictly speaking Seneca does not consider worth discussing (see *EM* 85, 89, 102, 106, 108, 109, 111, 113, 120).

¹³ There has been some debate about the fictitious character and the genre of the *EM*. The most probable solution seems that they were a fictitious rather than an actual correspondence, a series of moral lessons addressed to a larger public. For the fictitious character of the letters see Griffin 1976, 416-419, 350ff., who argues that there are ‘traces of faulty simulation’ in the letters: Lucilius’ progress takes place in an incredibly short time, he is not addressed in a consistent way, and the exchange of (real) letters could never have taken place so quickly. See also K. Abel, ‘Das Problem der Faktizität der Senecanischen Korrespondenz’, *Hermes* 109 (1981), 472-499, who demonstrates that the correspondence

The preface of *NQ* 4a has more specifically been compared to *EM* 7.¹⁴ This letter deals with the necessity to avoid the masses, the same advice Seneca gives to Lucilius at the beginning of the preface.¹⁵ *EM* 7 resembles the preface at certain points, especially in the recommendation to keep the crowds at a distance and to retreat into oneself as much as possible (*EM* 7.1, 7.8 *recede in te ipse, quantum potes*). At the end of the letter the idea appears that one's own judgment is more important than the praise of others (*EM* 7.12). This resembles the notion of praising oneself that is developed in the preface. However, the resemblance between the preface and the letter remains limited, since the preface is concerned with the topic of flattery rather than avoidance of the crowds.

The idea that both the person who teaches and the person who is taught learn together is also found in *EM* 7 (7.8). This is one of the elements of Seneca's self-representation as a teacher in the letters: while he teaches he himself still learns.¹⁶ In §20 of the preface of *NQ* 4a, besides the idea that Seneca will provide guidance for Lucilius, the thought also appears that they will give each other advice (*dabimus invicem consilia*).

Letters 19-22 present Lucilius' situation in terms similar to those of the preface. In letter 19, Lucilius is advised to avoid *occupationes* (*si potes, subduc te istis occupationibus*, 19.1). He is in the same position of *procurator* of a province as in the preface (*provincia et procuratio*, 19.5). Seneca recommends *otium* to him (see e.g. 19.8): at the beginning of the preface of *NQ* 4a, Lucilius mentions his *officium*

was not only addressed to Lucilius, but to a wider public; see further Mazzoli 1989, 1854ff., Wilson 1987 and 2001. Cancik 1967, 53 states that the literary character of the *EM* is more important than the question whether these are genuine letters or not. On pp.72-3 she emphasizes that we should not consider Lucilius' situation historical (although it has certain realistic traits, which suggest that there was a real Lucilius at the basis of the personage, cf. Griffin 1976, 349).

¹⁴ Berno 2003, 133-134, P. Grimal, *REL* 58 (1980), 517. Grimal also compares the preface to *NQ* 3 with *EM* 1; with these comparisons he tries to specify the date of the *NQ*.

¹⁵ Compare also Vottero's notes on §1 and §3 of the preface, in which he mention parallels for the idea of avoidance of the masses in Seneca's work.

¹⁶ See Cancik 1967, 76-77: 'Erziehung' is also 'Selbsterziehung'.

procurationis otiosae. In the two following letters (20-21), Lucilius still appears to be hesitating. In *EM* 21.1, Seneca says to him that he does not know what he wants: he approves of good advice but does not follow it (cf. *EM* 20.1). In letter 22 Lucilius seems to have agreed with Seneca's advice (§1), whereupon Seneca can proceed to the next stage of guidance: to provide indications about how to withdraw from one's occupations.¹⁷

It has been remarked that there is a difference between the representation of Lucilius in these letters and that in the preface.¹⁸ In the preface to *NQ* 4a Seneca is more sure of Lucilius, who seems to have achieved a balance between his duties and his *otium* – although Seneca still uses the occasion to instruct him to avoid bad behaviour. It would certainly be difficult to find a complete correspondence between both representations. Since the exact chronology of the works, written at approximately the same time, is uncertain, the preface could have been written after the letters.¹⁹ However, it is a much more attractive solution to regard these small inconsistencies as demonstrating that in each case Lucilius is used to support the point Seneca wants to make. The opening passages of letters 20 and 21, in which Lucilius is portrayed as not responding immediately to his advice, provide the perfect introduction to one of the philosopher's lessons. The sequel of *EM* 19-22 – Seneca's advice and Lucilius' subsequent fluctuations, followed by his agreement with the advice – also gives the impression of a somewhat unrealistic process of improvement.

In the *Epistulae Morales*, Lucilius functions as the figure of the student, the person to be taught. The remarkable speed with which he progresses under the guidance of Seneca is one of the factors that have led scholars to regard the correspondence as fictional.²⁰ Lucilius demonstrates the moral progress one can achieve, providing an

¹⁷ However, the question of Lucilius' retirement from occupations is not solved yet in letter 22; only in letter 82 is Lucilius said to have abandoned his occupations and devoted himself to 'otium'; cf. Wilson 1987, 111-112 with n.22.

¹⁸ Gercke 1896, 326-7, followed by Griffin 1976, 350.

¹⁹ Cf. Griffin 1976, 350 n.3.

²⁰ Griffin 1976, 350-353 (cf. my n.13 above).

example for the reader to follow. His function resembles that of the addressee in didactic works, used to mediate between author and public.²¹

Through Lucilius Seneca also addresses a larger public. This is apparent in passages where Lucilius is not 'in view', but Seneca is still at certain moments addressing an unspecified 'you'. It is less evident at such moments that he is referring to Lucilius. As Costa says:

This I/you relationship is characteristic of much of Seneca's work...not just in the *Letters*, where a close relationship with an addressee is to be expected, but throughout the treatises, where the rapport is sustained by second-persons even when the notional addressee has faded from view. In this way...Seneca maintains the teacher/taught roles, the more advanced *proficiens* talking to the relative novice and through him to a wider readership (1995, 109).

This situation is also discernible in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. In the preface of Book 4a, as we have seen, Lucilius remains fairly visible, and it is possible to identify him as the 'you' addressed in the lesson about flattery.²² Lucilius' role varies in the different parts of the preface. While at the beginning and end of the text he is present as a (constructed) individual, in keeping with the epistolary fiction, in the

²¹ Compare Servius' commentary to the preface of Virgil's *Georgics*: *et hi libri didascali sunt, unde necesse est ut ad aliquem scribantur; nam praeceptum et doctoris et discipuli personam requirit*. Wilson 1987, 104 compares the role of Lucilius to that of Memmius, the addressee in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Ph. Mitsis, 'Committing philosophy on the reader: didactic coercion and reader autonomy in *De rerum natura*', in A. Schiesaro, Ph. Mitsis and J. Strauss Clay (eds.), *Mega nepios. Il destinatario nell'epos didascalico*, Pisa 1994, 111-128, shows how a didactic addressee of a different kind, a rather recalcitrant student, functions in this work: the process is comparable to the procedure in Plato's dialogues, where the reader prefers not to identify himself with the character who is giving the wrong answers in the dialogue.

²² Only the 'you' addressed in §8 of the preface in the quotation of Demetrius Cynicus does not refer to Lucilius, but rather to a general 'you', representing the person who is flattered.

course of the lesson on flattery he loses some of his individuality and becomes ‘the student’.²³

The preface of *NQ* 3 presents another situation. Although Seneca begins the preface with the formula *Lucili virorum optime*, he does not address Lucilius in the following paragraphs. A second person singular only reappears in §8, where Seneca rather seems to address his teachings about fortune very generally to any reader (or listener). Seneca urges the addressee not to attach too much importance to a lucky or unlucky situation (‘why are you happy? You do not know what will happen to you; why are you sad? You are at the bottom of fortune’s wheel: soon you will be rising again’). This situation is continued in the next paragraphs, in which Seneca describes what is most important in life.²⁴

Besides fulfilling the role of ‘the student’, the undefined person that appears in the *Naturales Quaestiones* may also serve other purposes, for instance as the so-called ‘anonymous objector’.²⁵ This character for example makes an appearance at the beginning of the epilogue of *NQ* 4b, where he criticizes the preceding discussion on the nature of snow. He asks why Seneca busies himself with such unimportant matters. The reproach is introduced by an anonymous *inquis*, the interlocutor is not identified as Lucilius. One could argue that he does not need an identity, since he merely serves to introduce a point Seneca wants to make.²⁶ The independent *inquis* indeed often serves to put forward a point of criticism on a theory that has

²³ I am asserting this in spite of §14ff., which contain Lucilius’ self-address. See for §10-12 below under *Adulatio*. Compare Wilson 1987, 112 about Lucilius in letter 82: ‘As the epistle proceeds it takes on a life of its own. Lucilius is kept more in the background. Though he is still addressed, he ceases to be an actor and becomes part of the audience’.

²⁴ Gauly 2004, 79 also contrasts the preface to *NQ* 3 with that to *NQ* 4a, saying that the addressee does not become an individual person in the first preface, but only in that to *NQ* 4a.

²⁵ This figure is also considered a feature of diatribe: see Chapter 3, section 1, with n.3.

²⁶ About the question whether the *inquis* mentioned in *NQ* 4b.13.1 represents Seneca’s opinion see the discussion in Chapter 7, section 1.1.1.

been presented, so that Seneca may refute it. Sometimes the *anonymus* also introduces a new point in the discussion.²⁷

Besides speaking to a 'you' we cannot easily identify as Lucilius, Seneca also sometimes addresses Lucilius by name when he is not present as a person(age) in the text at all. The vocative *Lucili virorum optime* (at the beginning of *NQ* Books 3, 6 and 1, and at the beginning of the epilogue to Book 6), is a mere formality, since Seneca does not continue to address Lucilius in these texts. At the beginning of a preface, the mention of Lucilius may be regarded as a dedication of the book to him. According to Herkommer, a dedication can indeed take such a simple form.²⁸ It seems in any case to have been a relatively common habit to address someone at the beginning of a preface without continuing the address.

However, the mention of Lucilius' name has a wider function than the dedication of a book: this appears from the fact that he is also, for instance, mentioned at the beginning of an epilogue (in *NQ* 6.32.1). His name sometimes appears in the moralizing passages without his having been addressed beforehand, and is forgotten immediately.²⁹ This happens when a conclusion is drawn, as in the epilogue to Book 6 (6.32.9 and 6.32.12, compare the preface to 4a, §9). It seems that Lucilius' name is also used when Seneca wants to make a particularly strong assertion; this might explain the single occurrence in 2.59.6 ('let us consider that we are lost, as far as death is concerned. And we are. This is so, Lucilius: we are all

²⁷ Compare the preface to *NQ* 1, §17; see also e.g. *NQ* 2.1.3, 3.28.7. Gauly 2004, 80ff. studies the question of the unspecified interlocutor in the *NQ* more extensively, including the scientific discussions in his research. He distinguishes between the appearance of the *inquis* and the *inquit* (following C. Codoñer, 'El adversario ficticio en Séneca', *Helmantica* 34 (1983), 131-148) and argues that the *inquis* shows different attitudes in the different parts of the *NQ*.

²⁸ 1968, 27: He speaks of 'eine bloße Anrede als Zeichen der Widmung'. Janson 1964 also regards the addressing of the person who has requested the book to be written as an indication of a dedication (see the use of the word 'dedicatee' in p.27ff.) Cf. also Gauly 2004, 78-79, 211.

²⁹ Cf. also, for example, the address *apud te, Iunior carissime, invenio...* in 3.1.1, where Seneca quotes a verse of Lucilius. Lucilius' name does not appear in the scientific discussions; cf. Gauly 2004, 80.

reserved for death'). Both elements (drawing a conclusion and emphasizing a statement) may also explain the occurrence of Lucilius' name at the end of the epilogue to Book 5, where Seneca summarizes the lesson of this passage (5.18.16). My conclusion from this short survey is that the occurrence of Lucilius in the *Naturales Quaestiones* clearly shows him to be a device rather than a person.

2.2 The epistolary preface

As stated earlier, the resemblance of this preface to a letter has caused surprise. However, ancient prefaces that contain an epistolary element do occur more often. The epistolary preface is discussed in studies on prefaces and on letters.³⁰ It originated out of the habit of sending a letter as accompaniment of a book to someone. Just as we saw in the preface to *NQ* 4a, the epistolary element appears at the beginning and end of these prefaces.³¹ Besides these characteristics, their content is often not different from that of other prefaces. The letter-prefaces of Apollonius' *Conica* may function as an example.³² Each book has a prefatory letter. It begins with a short epistolary introduction (of the kind 'if you are well, all is well, as for me, I am fine'). After this introduction, a transition is made to the subject of the work (or the specific book) the letter accompanies; Apollonius mentions its theme, particularities of publication and other practical aspects (in this sense his

³⁰ See P. Cugusi, *Evoluzione e forme dell'epistolografia latina nella tarda repubblica e nei primi due secoli dell'impero con cenni sull'epistolografia preciceroniana*, Roma 1983, 131-133, who says that letter-prefaces occur especially in technical or learned works, Janson 1964, 19ff., 106-112, Mansfeld 1998, 36ff., 44. Herkommer 1968, 28-29 discusses the 'Widmungsbrief', the dedication in the form of a letter. For Martial's epistolary prefaces (as an example of the phenomenon), see M. Citroni's commentary on Book 1 of the *Epigrammata* (Firenze 1975), 3-4. It is interesting that as a possible reason for the appeal of the epistolary prefaces Janson (1964, 112) mentions the fact that they clearly demarcate the introduction from the subsequent main text.

³¹ Cf. Janson 1964, 106 n.2 on the characteristics of a letter-preface: 'by "epistolary preface" is meant here introductions with the formal characteristics of a letter, namely a salutatory phrase at the beginning and/or the word *vale* or corresponding at the end'.

³² Written around 200 BC. See also Mansfeld 1998, 36-40; cf. Janson 1964, 23.

prefaces differ from the sort of preface one finds in the *Naturales Quaestiones*). A farewell ends the text: a return to the epistolary mode.

The prefaces in Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae* also have an epistolary component.³³ Seneca the Elder addresses these prefaces to his three sons; the beginning of each book is invariably the formulary *Seneca Novato, Senecae, Melae filiis salutem*. Often the epistolary character is restricted to this first sentence and Seneca proceeds immediately to the subject he wishes to discuss. In some prefaces he continues to address his sons, as in the first *Controversia*, where he says that he is writing his work in reaction to their request. In the course of a preface he may address a remark to a second person plural, which we should understand to refer to his sons. The preface to the second book of the *Controversiae* contains the most elaborate filial address; at a certain point, Seneca addresses his son Mela and links his situation to the subject of the preface (§3-4). In the preface to NQ 4a, the subject is likewise related to the situation of the addressee.

In writing a preface in the form of a letter, Seneca clearly follows a prefatory tradition. His version extends beyond the simple epistolary characteristic of a formulary greeting. We may safely say that the form of his letter-preface was influenced by the *Epistulae Morales*. It is noticeable that only one of the prefaces of the *Naturales Quaestiones* has such an elaborated epistolary form, or such a strong presence of the addressee. This fact, it seems to me, may be explained by a desire for variation in the composition of the prefaces.

3. Adulatio

The main part of the preface is dedicated to the subject of flattery. In Seneca's description of the phenomenon in §4-9, the accent lies on its paradoxical

³³ Cf. Janson 1964, 49-50; about these letter-prefaces see also J. Fairweather, *Seneca the Elder*, Cambridge 1981, 27-28, L.A. Sussman, *The elder Seneca*, Leiden 1978, 46-58.

character.³⁴ Whereas flattery should be, and strictly speaking is rejected, it is also accepted in some way. Whereas one would think that flattery should be concealed, it is more successful when it is evident. These paradoxical aspects appear in the following descriptions: when flattery is rejected, it is even more effective (§4-5). It is best to flatter in an obvious manner. The flatterer profits from being discovered (*plurimum adulator cum deprensus est proficit*, §5-6). Instead of ‘closing the door’ to flattery, one invites it in, and it is the more welcome when its intrusion is more violent (§6).³⁵

In the conclusion of this passage, Seneca repeats that the more open and terrible the flattery, the better it works (*quo apertior est adulatio, quo improbior...*, §9). He adds ‘we have come so far that he who flatters too little is considered mean’ (*eo enim iam dementiae venimus ut qui parce adulatur pro maligno sit*). The formulation ‘we have come so far’ (*eo...venimus*) is used more often to designate the decadent state of affairs that has been reached.³⁶ The idea that it is not the act of flattering that is considered subject to reproach anymore, but on the contrary, not to flatter enough (reversing the ‘normal’ situation), again points to the paradoxical character of flattery.

The description is enlivened by quotations from famous flatterers or opponents of flattery.³⁷ In §7-8 the scandalous character of the flatterer’s occupation, who makes money without effort, in an immoral way, is denounced by the ironical words of Demetrius Cynicus.³⁸ Demetrius pretends that he is willing to explain the advantages of the flatterer’s trade, in contrast to other more dangerous and less

³⁴ Stahl 1960, 38 shows clearly how Seneca’s ‘pointierte Diktion’ underlines the paradoxical character of flattery. However, I cannot agree with her idea that the preface is divided into four parts related through antithesis (1960, 36ff.).

³⁵ On this last passage see Innocenti Pierini 1999b, 156.

³⁶ Cf. Chapter 7, section 1.3, n.48.

³⁷ Vottero provides useful information concerning the different personalities appearing in this preface. See also Gauly 2004, 211-212, 213, Berno 2003, 113 with notes.

³⁸ Demetrius is quoted a few more times in Seneca’s work (most notably in *De beneficiis* 7.1ff.). Cf. Berno 2003, as mentioned in my previous note, and the reference in Gauly 2004, 213 n.97. The first part of Demetrius’ statement (§7), concerning the idea that the flatterer makes money in an easier way than is possible in other occupations, is comparable to Athenaeus 258 d-e (a passage from Antiphanes’ *Lemnian Women*).

attractive or lucrative activities. He shows that the flatterer is ready to say anything about anyone.

In §10-12 an example is given of a virtuous rejection, by Seneca's brother Gallio, of a flatterer's efforts. These efforts are characterised by long, complex sentences, whereas Gallio's reaction is formulated in short sentences.³⁹ This probably represents the flatterer's intricate way of formulating compliments.

The fact that in these paragraphs it is Lucilius who is represented as mounting an offensive of flattery against Gallio is remarkable. Berno considers Lucilius' bout of flattery to be serious.⁴⁰ She argues that Seneca uses different rhetorical strategies so as not to present Lucilius' vice in too harsh a light. For example, the term *adulatio* does not occur in this passage, but only its softer variant *blanditiae*. Although I agree that Seneca's presentation of Lucilius' flattery is subtle, I take a different view on this question. The wording at the conclusion of the passage seems to indicate that Lucilius was only pretending to act as a flatterer; Gallio could have suspected some joke or ruse, Seneca states. He did not discover Lucilius' pretence, but rejected a flatterer (§12). Lucilius may have tried to tempt the irreproachable Gallio, and to this end taken on the role of a flatterer. In view of what was said earlier about Lucilius' role in Seneca's work, we should also ask whether the scene really took place. While this is of course possible, Seneca may merely have wanted to picture a flatterer's attack and Gallio's resistance to it. Lucilius (the second person singular addressed in the text) provides an example of the flatterer's *modus operandi* and a person's virtuous resistance to it. At the end of the passage, Lucilius is told to take Gallio as his example.

Seneca gives his own selective representation of the topic of flattery in the preface to NQ 4a. To try to discern something of the specific character of his approach, I will take a brief look at the theme of flattery in antiquity. Flattery was something that had to be dealt with in classical society, as is said by modern researchers in order to

³⁹ Cf. Stahl 1960, 40.

⁴⁰ 2003, 125-127: 'si tratta di un vizio che riguarda direttamente anche Lucilio' (p.125).

explain the importance of the subject.⁴¹ It is a recurrent topic in classical literature. Flatterers were present in comedy; they were also discussed by philosophers. Not much of what philosophers have written on the subject survives, however. In Theophrastus' *Characters* a sketch of 'the flatterer' is found (sketch 2), but his work *On flattery* has been lost.⁴² Fragments of Philodemus' work on flattery survive. The main text still extant is a work by Plutarch known as *De adulatore et amico* (*On how to distinguish a flatterer from a friend*). In the second century AD, Maximus of Tyre wrote an oration with the same title. In a longer passage of Book 6 of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, anecdotes about flatterers are presented.⁴³ Flatterers also appear in Roman satire, in the works of Horace and Juvenal.⁴⁴

Plutarch's discussion on 'how to distinguish a flatterer from a friend' shows a major point of interest in the theme of flattery: the distinction between friend and

⁴¹ For literature on flattery see the introduction to the edition of Plutarch's *De adulatore et amico* by Gallo and Pettine, 1988, 7-16; the introduction of this work in the Budé edition, pp.71-73; the collection of essays on *Friendship, flattery, and frankness of speech. Studies on friendship in the New Testament world*, ed. J.H. Fitzgerald, Leiden 1996, with a contribution on flattery and friendship in classical antiquity (Konstan), a contribution on Philodemus (Glad), and one on Plutarch (Engberg-Pedersen). For Philodemus' views on flattery see also F. Longo Auricchio, 'Sulla concezione filodemea dell'adulazione', *Cronache Ercolanesi* 16 (1986), 79-91, and further references there. The archetypal study on flattery is O. Ribbeck, *Kolax: eine ethologische Studie*, Leipzig 1883, devoting much attention to flattery in comedy.

⁴² Or, in the more cautious wording of the Budé edition (p.72 n.3), Theophrastus perhaps wrote such a work on flattery (testimonia: Athenaeus, Book 6, 254d, Diogenes Laertius 5.47).

⁴³ See 248c-260. Sayings about the nature of flatterers / flattery can be found at 254 c-d, 255 b, 255 d, 258 a-b.

⁴⁴ For Horace see *Satire* 2.5 and *Ars Poetica* 419ff., for Juvenal *Satire* 3.86-108. In Juvenal's fourth satire, an example of extreme flattery is called 'open', a characteristic also mentioned by Seneca. A large fish has been captured for the emperor, and is presented to him with the words 'the fish wanted to be caught' (*ipse capi voluit*, v.69). The writer's comment is: 'what flattery could be more explicit?' (*quid apertius?* The flattery, however, is successful: the emperor is pleased).

flatterer.⁴⁵ This question was also treated in the schools of rhetoric in order to exemplify a specific sort of debate (*quaestio*), i.e., that which compares two items.⁴⁶ Seneca himself mentions it in *EM* 45.7. In this passage, he is distinguishing between questions worth knowing and those not worth knowing, a theme that comes up more often in his work. Unnecessary distinctions are made between words, Seneca argues, while it is more important to be able to distinguish between such things as good and evil and friendship and flattery. This last item is described as follows:

How closely flattery resembles friendship! It not only imitates friendship, but outdoes and exceeds it: with wide-open and indulgent ears it is welcomed and sinks to the depths of the heart, and it is pleasing precisely wherein it does harm. Show me how I may be able to see through this resemblance! An enemy comes to me full of compliments, in the guise of a friend. Vices creep into our hearts under the name of virtues.⁴⁷

In this short formulation we recognize certain characteristics of Seneca's presentation of flattery in the preface to *NQ* 4a, in the strong and paradoxical formulas 'it not only imitates friendship, but outdoes and exceeds it' and 'it is pleasing precisely wherein it does harm'.

This passage shows that Seneca was aware of the debate concerning the distinction between friend and flatterer. He even thought it one of the questions that should be investigated. However, such a theoretical discussion did not have its place in the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Seneca rather gives an exemplification of *adulatio*, its characteristics and its dangers. Correspondingly, a large place is given to such elements as *exempla*, vivid quotations, and some *sententiae*. The strongly rhetorical aspect of the passage, with its emphasis on the

⁴⁵ Cf. also Cicero's *De amicitia*, 88ff., Horace *Ars poetica* 419ff. Cf. Gallo and Pettine 1988, 12 and the Budé edition of Plutarch's work, p.73. Fitzgerald 1996 (as mentioned above in n.41) focuses on this subject (in combination with the element of frank speech).

⁴⁶ This appears from Cicero's *De oratore* 3.117; cf. Gallo and Pettine 1988, 16.

⁴⁷ *Adulatio quam similis est amicitiae. Non imitatur tantum, sed vincit et praeterit; apertis ac propitiis auribus recipitur et in praecordia ima descendit, eo ipso gratiosa, quo laedit: doce quemadmodum hanc similitudinem possim dinoscere. Venit ad me pro amico blandus inimicus: vitia nobis sub virtutum nomine obrepunt.*

paradoxical character of flattery, may be explained in the context I have sketched in Chapter 3.

A comparison of Seneca's passage on flattery in *NQ* 4a with Plutarch's work shows that the different aims of the texts produce different discussions.⁴⁸ Plutarch focuses on a flatterer who does his best to disguise himself as a friend, and on the question how to distinguish such a flatterer from a friend. For instance, Plutarch says that a flatterer who conceals his actions is more dangerous than one who does not (§4). Seneca, on the other hand, describes obvious flattery as the worst (or most successful) form of flattery.⁴⁹ It is also interesting to note that Plutarch's text does not present flattery in a paradoxical light.⁵⁰ This element could be Seneca's own addition (although, of course, there is not enough comparative material to say so with certainty). Paradox is also clearly present in the preface to *NQ* 6. There are evidently also comparable elements in the two descriptions of flattery. Both authors point to the fact that the flatterer presents things in a different light from how they truly are, for instance when he calls a small person large.⁵¹

3.1 Preface §14ff.

The idea that one should praise oneself (§14ff.) is somewhat intriguing. It may be related to another teaching of Seneca's: *ipse te lauda* often seems a more strongly formulated variant of the formula *intus te considera*. Seneca invites his student to

⁴⁸ My comparison with Plutarch's work is solely based on its availability as a text about flattery. It is not intended to imply anything as to the sources of the works.

⁴⁹ In Maximus of Tyre's description of the flatterer we find a focus similar to Plutarch's interest; it is dangerous for the flatterer when his deeds are discovered (§6). Berno 2003, 116ff. draws the same conclusion from the comparison of the *NQ* with Cicero *De amicitia* 88ff.; Seneca presents open flattery as the worst (and most successful) form, unlike Cicero (see for instance *De amicitia* 99).

⁵⁰ Something resembling the paradoxical aspect of flattery is found in Athenaeus 255 a-b, where we are told about the perverse use of the term 'flattery' as 'willingness to oblige' (in the terms of the Loeb edition).

⁵¹ §12, see also §19, in Plutarch's *De adulate et amico*, cf. §8 of the preface.

withdraw into himself, to let himself be the only judge of his actions. At the end of *EM* 80, for example, the reader is told ‘look into your own soul. At present, you are taking the words of others for what you are’ (*intus te ipse considera: nunc qualis sis aliis credis*, §10).⁵² In the context of a discussion about flattery, the injunction *intus te ipse considera* comes to be phrased as *lauda te ipse*.⁵³

The idea is contrary to the thought that we are all too liable to think too highly of ourselves, and thus ‘flatter ourselves’ excessively. In *De tranquillitate animi* 1.17, Seneca says that men do not tell themselves the truth, and thus flatter themselves more than they are flattered.⁵⁴ The positive view on addressing ‘flattery’ to oneself is put forward as a contrast to the negative opinion or flattery of others; it is in this context that the idea appears in both letter 7 (§12) and the preface to *NQ* 4a. This context ‘supersedes’ the negative idea that one is all too liable to think too highly of oneself.

The idea that in some circumstances it is a good thing to flatter oneself appears to have been more widespread in antiquity. Rhetoricians and statesmen used self-praise; the subject also had a philosophical relevance. The subject is discussed in Plutarch’s *On praising oneself inoffensively*.⁵⁵ Plutarch begins by saying that to praise oneself is mostly considered offensive. However, there are circumstances in which it is justified or acceptable. These circumstances are summed up in the work: among them is the idea that self-praise can be beneficial, for instance in arousing a desire for emulation in the listeners. Lucilius’ self-praise may also be understood in this context.

⁵² Cf. also *EM* 8.1, 119.11, *De providentia* 6.5 (referred to by the Budé edition, note on *EM* 7.12). Compare the idea that Seneca is also addressing himself in his teachings: in *EM* 27 Lucilius is invited to listen in on Seneca’s internal dialogue (§1).

⁵³ In *EM* 78.21 the occurrence of *ipse te lauda* is not related to the idea of introspection. For Seneca’s frequent use of the reflexive pronoun, see Traina 1978, 14ff. (cf. Chapter 4, section 2.2, n.24).

⁵⁴ Cf. Berno 2003, 128-129. The idea also occurs in Plutarch’s *De adulate et amico* (at the beginning of the work, and in §25).

⁵⁵ See also the short introduction to the work in the Loeb edition, p.110ff. The Greek technical term for self-praise is περιαιτολογία.

I have already pointed to the specific nature of Seneca's description of flattery in *NQ* 4a. §14ff. are also interesting in this context.⁵⁶ Indeed, it is tempting to regard this passage in the light of the existence of spiritual exercises as mentioned in Chapter 3 (section 7). Instead of listening to the flattery of others, it is better to judge the true nature of your deeds yourself: this resembles the habit of asking oneself at the end of a day in what sense one has improved oneself during that day.⁵⁷ The nature of the passage is not such, however, as to make it evident that it is a form of 'spiritual exercise'.⁵⁸

In first instance this passage refers to Lucilius' (ideal) life. Although Lucilius functions as Seneca's largely fictitious addressee, it is generally assumed that there was also a historical person behind the character (see my n.13 above). However, several scholars have thought that Seneca might be speaking about his own life.⁵⁹ Berno points out that the passage gives a representation of the wise man; at the same time, the facts are adapted to Lucilius' historical situation (2003, 129).

Lucilius says to himself that he has nobly devoted himself to the profitless *studia liberalia*, and, in particular, to the study of philosophy. In spite of his modest origin, he has become a great philosopher, demonstrating that the seeds of virtue are found in everybody (§14-15).⁶⁰ The next paragraphs describe Lucilius' behaviour during his life: he remained a good friend, even when this was dangerous under the current regime, his attitude was courageous, he firmly accepted adversity as a test, and did not give in to the solution of suicide (which could be considered the easier

⁵⁶ For the rhetorical/stylistic aspects of the passage, see Stahl 1960, 40-42.

⁵⁷ Cf. *De ira* 3.36.

⁵⁸ For the difficulty in recognizing spiritual exercises in Seneca's work cf. the discussion in Chapter 8, section 3.7.

⁵⁹ See Stahl 1960, 41, Codoñer, in her edition of the *NQ*, n.2 *ad NQ* 4a, preface §17 and Motto 2001, 113. Stahl also thinks that the passage could be Seneca's defence against accusations concerning his life. Cf. for this aspect my discussion of 'Seneca and flattery' below (section 3.2). Griffin 1976, 372 believes the paragraphs to refer to events of Lucilius' life, but arranged in accordance with Seneca's aims. Gauly 2004, 211-214 points out the contemporaneous and political aspect of the passage (and of the preface more in general).

⁶⁰ For Lucilius' modest origin see Berno 2003, 129, with reference to Vottero's notes *ad loc.*

choice). Finally, Lucilius did not yield to various vices but showed good behaviour (§15-18).

Lucilius is not praising himself most for having written poetry, or for having written a good exposé of Stoic philosophy, but for having acted correctly.⁶¹ Whether the facts mentioned belong to Seneca's or Lucilius' life, whether they are true or fictitious, they certainly give us an indication of what Seneca thought important in a philosopher's life.

3.2 Seneca and flattery

The inclusion of a discussion on *adulatio* in this preface has also been explained by establishing a connection between this subject and Seneca's life. As Vottero says of the *adulator*: 'è una categoria di persone che qui Seneca descrive non solo in base ad una cataloghizzazione scolastica... ma soprattutto perché ne ha fatto esperienza diretta'.⁶² It is clear that Seneca had to deal with *adulatio* in his life, and that it was a subject that preoccupied him. Since the relationship between Seneca's life and his writings does not fall within my line of inquiry, my discussion of the subject will be brief.

In Tacitus' account of the events leading to Seneca's death, Seneca is portrayed as saying that he is no flatterer: 'his temperament was not one that was quick to flattery; no one was better aware of that than Nero, who had more often experienced the frankness of Seneca than his servility' (*Annales* 15.61). In *De clementia* 2.2.2 Seneca says to Nero, to whom the work is addressed, that it is not his habit to flatter: 'permit me to linger longer on this point, but not merely to

⁶¹ Compare Stahl's remark, 1960, 41: '[Seneca shows the facts of Lucilius' life]... sicherlich zum Beweise dessen, daß sich die Theorie der sittlichen Forderungen durchaus in die Praxis umsetzen läßt'.

⁶² In n.13 *ad* §3 of the preface. One need of course not agree with the statement that Seneca's description is based on his own experiences. See also Stahl 1960, 41; for the connection between §7-8 and Seneca's time see W.L. Friedrich, 'Zu Senecas nat. quaest. IV praef. 7 und 8', *BPhW* 34 (1914), 1213-1216.

please your ears – for that is not my habit: I would rather offend with the truth than please by flattery’.

However, in a list of charges revealing him as a false philosopher, Cassius Dio accuses Seneca of not acting according to his words. Thus, Seneca is said to be disapproving of flatterers while at the same time he had behaved as a flatterer towards Messalina and Claudius’ freedmen. He even sent them a book full of praises from his exile, about which he later felt ashamed (61.10.2).⁶³ This refers to Seneca’s *Consolatio ad Polybium*, in which Polybius and the emperor are indeed addressed in flattering terms (12ff.). Similarly, *De clementia* certainly contains flattery directed at Nero.

In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, some very flattering references to Nero occur. The work was written in the last years of Seneca’s life, when the relationship between Nero and Seneca had become tense.⁶⁴ It is therefore interesting that Seneca speaks in a very positive manner about the emperor in a few passages. For example, in Book 7 he refers to ‘Nero’s most blissful principate’ (*Neronis principatu laetissimo*, 7.21.3, see also 1.5.6, 6.8.3, 7.17.2). On the other hand, some of the moralising passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones* have also been thought to contain warnings directed at Nero, for instance in the reference to fortune’s unexpected reversals, including the instability of reigns, in the preface of *NQ* 3 (§9).⁶⁵

⁶³ For Cassius Dio as a source for Seneca see Griffin 1976, 427ff.

⁶⁴ See Tacitus, *Annales* 14.52ff., which narrates how Seneca asked Nero permission to retreat from public life. Nero refused, but Seneca nonetheless retreated from public affairs. This took place around 62 AD, the period in which both *EM* and *NQ* were written. See also the short discussion entitled ‘Seneca gives thanks to Nero’, in Motto 2001, 111-117.

⁶⁵ See Vottero *ad loc.*, the Budé edition *ad loc.*, Gercke 1896, 131, Lana 1955, 15, 18. As we saw in the discussion of the preface to Book 3, the instability of reigns was part of the commonplace on fortune. Gauly 2004 pays ample attention to the contemporaneous aspect of the *NQ* (see specifically his index *s.v.* Nero). Berno 2003 also mentions the connection with Nero (see her appendix ‘perversioni principesche’, p.327ff.). The question of evident flattery and possible warnings addressed to the emperor extends beyond Seneca’s work; for instance, it also plays a role in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*.

The topic ‘Seneca and flattery’ is part of the more general question about the relationship between the philosopher’s life and his teachings.⁶⁶ In *De vita beata* (ch.17ff.), Seneca reacts to the accusation that his actions do not correspond to his teachings.⁶⁷ His attitude towards superiors is also briefly mentioned.⁶⁸ Seneca shows himself to be in good company: philosophers were frequently reproached with such inconsistency. He admits to not being a *sapiens* yet, freed from all passions. He further argues that to possess wealth (the most important reproach philosophers face) is not condemnable in itself; what is important is one’s handling of these possessions.

One possible answer to the question of Seneca’s behaviour concerning flattery might be deduced from his justification of his richness in *De vita beata*. It was probably not possible for him to avoid flattery entirely in his position; he aimed at using it for good purposes. In the *Consolatio ad Polybium* his purpose was to be allowed to return from exile, and in *De clementia* he wanted to influence Nero. At the beginning of *De clementia*, Seneca accompanies his flattering remarks with the further observation (besides the statement that it is not his habit to flatter) that in some circumstances flattery is necessary (2.2.2-3).

⁶⁶ This question is especially discussed in Griffin’s study *Seneca. A philosopher in politics* (1976); see also Rist 1989, 1993ff. When giving a paper on totally different aspects of Seneca’s work, I have a few times been asked during the ensuing discussion ‘but wasn’t he very rich himself?’; it is an aspect that is foremost in people’s minds (both modern and ancient).

⁶⁷ On *De vita beata* 17ff. cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 124ff; Griffin 1976, 19.

⁶⁸ *Quare et superiori verba summittis...?* Griffin 1976, 19 n.2 refers to this as flattery.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MORALIZING EPILOGUES: *NQ* 4B, 5 AND 1

1. *The epilogue of NQ 4b*

1.1 Hoc quid ad mores?: *the justification of the Naturales Quaestiones. First part of epilogue (4.13.1-3)*

At the end of the scientific discussion in Book 4b, Seneca introduces some criticism on his undertaking by means of the anonymous objector frequently occurring in his work. The relevance of an inquiry into the nature of snow, the subject that has just been discussed, is questioned. The discussion is labelled as *ineptiae* by the objector, nonsense that adds only to someone's knowledge, not to moral progress. It would be more relevant, he says, to explain why one should not buy snow, rather than how it is formed.

Seneca reacts by saying that the *lis cum luxuria* demanded of him is a battle he fights daily without effect. Nonetheless, he agrees to fight this battle that is bound to be lost. He also defends the usefulness of the scientific discussion: the study of nature does add to one's moral progress. Concerning the discussion of snow, Seneca asks in a rhetorical question, will showing the nature of snow not be a greater reproach to those who buy it, since they will know that they are not even buying water, but something that consists for a large part of air?

The next sentence, 'let us investigate how snow is formed rather than how it is preserved', implies that an 'inquiry into the conservation of snow' is not a subject worth discussing. Seneca's rhetorical move reduces the battle against the decadent use of snow to a description of how it is conserved. At the same time, this disparaging reference introduces the moral sermon: the description of man's habit of conserving snow during the summer forms the point of departure for a longer tirade against the misuse of snow. This aspect of Seneca's moralizing passages has attracted some criticism: they often form descriptions of vice upon which Seneca

could be thought to dwell with some complacency.¹ A few passages mentioned in the following discussion show his awareness of this fact.

1.1.1 The prevalence of morals

The request for ethical learning instead of physical investigations is formulated in several moralizing passages (see also *NQ* 1 preface §17, 2.59.1, 6.32.1). This passage is of interest since it questions and defends the undertaking of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. *NQ* 4b 13.1-3 has not remained unnoticed in modern scholarship. Some researchers have considered the passage an example of bad connections between the different parts of a book.² Recently, Gaulty has again pointed to this problematical aspect.³ He argues that the link Seneca establishes at the beginning of ch.13 between the scientific and moral passages does not last long. We already saw that as the specific relevance of the discussion about snow Seneca mentions that those who buy it will be even more ashamed when they realize that what they are buying consists mainly of air. However, in the following paragraphs Seneca focuses on the scandal inherent in putting a price on water; the concept of snow as air is left out of the discussion. The moralizing passage is attached to the physical discussion, but after that follows its own development.⁴ This literary procedure has been discussed in other chapters (Chapter 1, section 1.2, Chapter 6, section 1).

¹ See for instance Gourévitch 1974, 311: 'l'immoralité du monde dans lequel il vit est en effet le thème central de toute son oeuvre; il la décrit, non parfois sans une certaine complaisance'.

² According to Holl (1935, 9), the transition to the epilogue (*quid istas, inquis, ineptias...*) testifies to an awkward connection between the different parts of the book. Transitions have been discussed notably in Chapter 1, section 1.5, Chapter 4, section 8 and Chapter 5, section 2.

³ 2004, 105-106. He also refers to Strohm 1977, 313-314.

⁴ As Gaulty 2004, 106 says: 'die Brücke, die das philosophische Ich zu Beginn des Epilogs zwischen diesem und der aitiologischen Untersuchung herzustellen versucht, trägt nicht weit...der Gedanke wird, wenig überraschend, nicht weiter verfolgt, und die Predigt wider das Laster verselbständigt sich'.

There has been some disagreement about the question whether or not the objection of the anonymous interlocutor could be attributed to Seneca.⁵ Gross, for instance, does not believe that the objector represents Seneca's own opinion. This interpretation corresponds to the importance Gross attaches to the discussions of natural phenomena in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁶ In my opinion, the anonymous objection may be attributed to Seneca himself: as appears from certain passages in the *Epistulae Morales*, he requires from every subject that it has a moral utility, and considers the discussion of subjects without ethical relevance a waste of time. Because of the overall value of the moral element for Seneca, one should not downplay the importance of the moralizing epilogue. However, *NQ* 4b.13.1-3 also shows that Seneca clears the *Naturales Quaestiones* from the accusation that it has no moral utility.

In *EM* 89, for instance, after a discussion of the three parts into which philosophy is divided, Seneca adds that Lucilius may occupy himself with this kind of knowledge provided that he directly relates it to moral instruction (*haec, Lucili virorum optime, quo minus legas non deterreo dummodo quicquid legeris, ad mores statim referas*, 89.18). Such a passage shows that the question about the utility of the preceding discussion in *NQ* 4b.13.1 may indeed be put into Seneca's mouth.⁷

In this letter the idea also comes up that the repetitiveness of Seneca's moral teaching is annoying (§18-19). To those who ask 'how long will you go on repeating

⁵ Cf. Gauly 2004, 105, who mentions a few representatives of the different opinions.

⁶ 1989, 199, cf. p.200: 'Seneca gibt im Epilog deutlich zu verstehen, daß er seine Sittenschelte... letztlich für wirkungslos hält. Keineswegs ist sie ihm wichtiger als die naturwissenschaftliche Erörterung'. While Seneca indeed describes the *līs cum luxuria* as ineffective, he also mentions that it is a daily battle. One should be careful in regarding the statement that the battle against luxury has no effect as an indication that Seneca considers this activity unimportant. Rather, Seneca profits from the occasion to complain about the depraved character of his age. Gauly also gives the mention of the ineffectiveness of the battle with vice much importance. According to him, Seneca does not consider the moralizing passages that interesting (2004, 111-114).

⁷ At the end of the letter, the need to refer everything to moral instruction and the sedation of the passions is repeated (§23). See also *EM* 124.1, where Seneca approves of the fact that Lucilius always reduces things to some moral use.

yourself?’ (*quo usque eadem?*), Seneca answers that one should rather say ‘how long will these sins of yours repeat themselves?’ (*quo usque eadem peccabitis?*). People seem to want the remedies to stop before the vices have been remedied. Seneca will continue his warnings all the more insistently: medicine works when it hurts. This passage shows an awareness of the fact that the moral teachings can be annoying. They are, however, also necessary, Seneca asserts.

In *EM* 121, the question of the ethical relevance of certain subjects is addressed at greater length, in a form similar to that of *NQ* 4b 13. At the beginning of the letter, Seneca says that Lucilius will argue with him about the ‘little problem’ to be discussed: Lucilius will exclaim again (this point has apparently been discussed more often): ‘what has this to do with morals?’ (*hoc quid ad mores?*).

In his reaction, Seneca begins by stating that the reproach might also be addressed to other philosophers (such as Posidonius and Archidemus). They, too, have written on subjects not directly related to moral questions. Seneca adds another argument: not everything that is part of the *moralis philosophia* contributes to the improvement of man (*non quicquid morale est, mores bonos facit*, §1). This can be verified in *EM* 109, where Seneca discusses a specific question of which he says that it rather belongs in his (lost) *Libri moralis philosophiae*, adding that it does not provide useful knowledge (109.17ff.). Improvement of *mores* can be obtained in various ways, Seneca continues in *EM* 121.2: some arguments correct the *mores*, others investigate their nature and origin. Therefore, questions about man’s nature are also related to his moral improvement: it is only after having discovered their nature that one can set rules for men.⁸

Seneca has Lucilius reply to these ideas with a statement about the importance of moral counsel, which resembles the formulations that occur at the beginning and endings of certain moralizing passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. ‘“I desire”, you say, “to learn how I may crave less, and fear less. Rid me of my unreasoning beliefs. Prove to me that so-called felicity is fickle and empty”’ (“*ego*” *inquis* “*volo discere quomodo minus cupiam, minus timeam. Superstitionem mihi excute: doce leve esse vanumque hoc quod felicitas dicitur*”, §4). Freeing someone from fear and

⁸ This idea corresponds to the notion of physical *decreta* at the basis of morals discussed at the beginning of *EM* 95: compare Chapter 3, sections 5-6.

desire are really important matters. Seneca replies that he will satisfy Lucilius' desire. Even if he is deemed too immoderate in this field, he will persevere in his fight against vice (*licet aliquis nimium immoderatumque in hac parte me iudicet, non desistam persequi nequitiam et adfectus efferatissimos inhibere et...et...*). Here Seneca shows an awareness of his lack of restraint in fighting vice.

In §5, the actual subject of the letter, the question 'whether all animals have any feelings about their constitution', is introduced by the words 'meanwhile, allow me to discuss thoroughly some points which may seem rather remote from the present inquiry' (*interim permitte mihi ea quae paulo remotiora videntur, excutere*). In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, this kind of formulation is used to introduce an excursus of a moral kind: the discussion of natural phenomena forms the main subject of that work, which is interrupted by the moralizing passages.⁹ In *EM* 122, on the other hand, the formulation introduces the subject of the letter, for which the primarily moral subjects of the *Epistulae Morales* have to be put aside.

The relation between Seneca's promise to aid Lucilius in his combat against his vices (*EM* 121.4) and the actual subject of *EM* 121 is not made explicit. Does Seneca mean that he will satisfy Lucilius' desire in this letter, or does the promise refer to the philosopher's moral teachings in a more general way? The introductory formulation 'meanwhile, allow me to discuss...' seems to indicate that the second possibility is the right one. The sentence shows that some reserve towards non-moralistic subjects remains present. However, at the beginning of letter 121 Seneca had answered the reproach *hoc quid ad mores* by stating that his inquiries into the nature of mankind were also relevant to the *mores* (in §1-3). This reasoning may be applied to *EM* 121 as well as to the *Naturales Quaestiones*: the study of the nature of the world and man is relevant for moral improvement; it is the basis of moral instruction.

⁹ See *NQ* 3.18.1: *permitte mihi paulum quaestione seposita castigare luxuriam* and 5.15.1: *nunc mihi permitte narrare fabulam*.

1.1.2 Logic and the reproach of uselessness

In the *Epistulae Morales*, the reproach of the uselessness of a subject is directed more often at questions pertaining to the field of logic, so often as to become a recurrent theme in the letters (especially the later ones).¹⁰ Discussions about logical problems are followed by negative remarks about this part of philosophy: it does not make anyone a better person, but is just useless knowledge. Sometimes, the reproach of the uselessness of certain knowledge is not linked to logical questions, but to discussions of ethics, as in *EM* 109. Useless knowledge appears in any field, but it is most often stigmatized in the area of logic.¹¹

In these passages formulations occur that are similar to the anonymous objector's reproach in *NQ* 4b.13.1. For instance, in *EM* 106.11 Seneca says: 'we dull our fine edge by such superfluous pursuits: these things make men clever, but not good' (*in supervacuis subtilitas teritur: non faciunt bonos ista, sed doctos*). Again, in *EM* 109.17-18 he says: 'for I return again and again to the thought: what good does this do me? Make me more brave instead, more just, more restrained...why do you require useless knowledge of me?'

Thus, the reproach that can be countered for physical inquiries must often be applied to logical questions. Seneca places physical inquiries far above logical ones: at least, they do not detract from the majesty of philosophy. This line of thought is clarified in *EM* 117.18-19, where the discussion of an intricate problem of logic is followed by the words:

All such matters are on the outskirts of wisdom, not in wisdom itself. But our abiding-place should be in wisdom itself. Even though one takes a fancy to roam, wisdom has large and spacious retreats: we may investigate the nature of the gods, the fuel feeding the constellations, or all the varied courses of the stars...such topics are somewhat removed from moral instruction, but they uplift the mind and raise it to the dimensions of the subject it discusses; the matters, however, of which I was speaking a while ago [i.e. logical

¹⁰ See *EM* 82.8, 83, 85.1, 87.41, 102, 106, 109, 111, 113, 117.

¹¹ For a more elaborate discussion of Seneca's views on logic, see Barnes 1997, 12ff.

subtleties], wear away and wear down the mind, not (as you maintain) whetting, but weakening it.¹²

The reproach *hoc quid ad mores* does not touch the *Naturales Quaestiones*: as we saw, Seneca believes that the inquiry into nature may have such a moral function as should be added to everything, always, even if this seems repetitive. However, this moral aspect is not so clear as to make a justification unnecessary: of the study of physics it can still be said that it is ‘somewhat removed from moral instruction’. The passage of *NQ* 4b.13 just discussed has its importance for the understanding of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, and more specifically for the understanding of the relationship between the moralistic passages and the scientific discussions. We have here stated the need to add *aliquid ad mores* to the discussions; this might (simply) be the task of the prefaces and epilogues, to add some moral point or commentary to the subject discussed.

1.2 Decadence and (table) luxury

In the main part of the epilogue a picture of decadent table luxury is presented: the introduction and use of snow during dinners. This is the sort of passage Goethe called a ‘Kapuzinerpredigt’.¹³ The theme of moral decadence is prominently present in the moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, especially in the epilogues

¹² *Omnia ista circa sapientiam, non in ipsa sunt: at nobis in ipsa commorandum est. Etiam si quid evagari libet, amplos habet illa spatiososque secessus: de deorum natura quaeramus, de siderum alimento, de his tam variis stellarum discursibus.. ista iam a formatione morum recesserunt, sed levant animum et ad ipsarum quas tractat, rerum magnitudinem adtollunt; haec vero de quibus paulo ante dicebam minuunt et deprimunt nec, ut putatis, exacuunt sed extenuant.* The sentence *ista iam a formatione morum recesserunt* has been translated in the Loeb edition as ‘such topics have nowadays been withdrawn from instruction in morals’. I prefer the interpretation I give above in my translation (and for which cf. the Budé edition).

¹³ Goethe 1949, 337 (The *NQ* is discussed in the *Schriften zur Farbenlehre*, under ‘Materialen zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre’, Zweite Abteilung, Römer, Nachtrag). On Goethe and Seneca see further Waiblinger 1975.

of Books 4b, 5, 7 and 1. The discussion of the theme and depiction of increasing luxury and accompanying moral decadence will therefore be continued with the other passages. In the first part of this chapter, I will give a more general discussion of the subject (with references to the specific subject of table luxury). After this a more specific discussion of *NQ* 4b 13.3ff. will follow.

The tendency to regard the present as 'decadent', as worse than earlier times, is found in all ages.¹⁴ Classical antiquity had elaborated an entire system of reference to the idea of a decadent present and a perfect past. Texts describe a primeval *aurea aetas*, followed by different stages of decadence (see for instance Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 1.89ff.). The process of moral decadence goes hand in hand with an increase in luxury.

Interesting material about the idea of decadence is found in Hämpl (1966). He demonstrates that the Romans of the early imperial period regarded their own time as decadent, and the period of the early republic as the perfect past. At the same time, there is evidence that the Romans of this previous period also considered their own time the decadent time following upon a 'golden' period.¹⁵ This leads Hämpl to say that the thought of decadence was nothing but a sentiment without any substance. It is worth quoting him at some length:

Wir gewinnen also ein Bild, das uns mit großer Eindringlichkeit zu Bewußtsein bringt, daß die ganze herausgestellte Unterscheidung zwischen einer guten alten und einer schlechten neuen Zeit nicht auf einer gleichsam auf wissenschaftlichem Wege gewonnenen rationalen Erkenntnis eines entsprechenden realen Sachverhaltes beruht, sondern

¹⁴ Concerning classical antiquity see for instance Kleywegt 1978, 3, Bracher 1987, 83 ('es ist leicht zu zeigen, denn man erlebt es selbst, daß wohl zu allen Zeiten die dem Verfall geweihte Nichtswürdigkeit der Gegenwart beklagt wurde und der Blick in eine glücklichere Vergangenheit sich richtete, da alles so viel besser, gesünder, wertvoller gewesen'). For modern times see also J. Barzun, *From dawn to decadence. 500 years of western cultural life, 1500 to the present*, New York 2000.

¹⁵ See part I of Hämpl's article, after which he gives more specific instances of this idealization. Cf. Döpp 1989, 80, Gowers 1993, 16, giving data from Livy and Tacitus, and adding 'but the moral contrast between antique simplicity and present decadence was timeless'.

vielmehr aus einer bestimmten gefühlsmäßigen Einstellung resultiert, die sich..über alle Einsichten hinwegsetzte, zu denen eine nüchterne Beschäftigung mit den Verhältnissen von einst und jetzt gelangen mußte...(1966, 148).

This helps to understand why it is so difficult to explain thoughts about decadence: an explanation would have to be phrased in terms of psychology.¹⁶

In this context it is also relevant to point out that the complaints of the moralists about the decadence of their time, and the praise for earlier generations, should not be taken so seriously as to think that they wanted the ancient way of living to be restored. For instance, although navigation for reasons of commerce and luxury was disapproved of, the Romans did not *really* want to return to a society in which such an institution did not exist. *EM*90 is a good example of a longing for a golden age society that should probably not be taken *à la lettre*. It is also worth remarking upon the fact that the idea of luxury could be used not only in the context of the discourse about decadence, but also with positive associations: we also encounter the argument that a certain amount of luxury befitted a Roman gentleman.¹⁷

1.2.1 Modern historians' views on Roman luxury of the table

It is interesting to see how modern historians treat the material assembled by Roman moralists about the advance of luxury. The following examples are taken from the field of table luxury. In his outdated but still interesting study of Roman life, Friedländer also discusses Roman table luxury. He argues that this form of luxury was not as widespread in Roman society as one might think.¹⁸ Friedländer also discusses the exaggerated representation of luxury found in the works of the Roman moralists (especially Seneca and Pliny).

¹⁶ My research does not extend to this area. See the attempt by Bracher 1987, 86-7.

¹⁷ See Cicero *In Pisonem* 67; cf. *Pro Murena* 76. See also Sancisi-Weerdenburg 2000, 160, Hudson 1989, 82, Gowers 1993, 10-11.

¹⁸ L. Friedländer 1919-1921, vol. 2, section xi, pp.268ff. and 285ff. His method consists mostly of a comparison with data from his own time.

In his study of food and cuisine in Rome, André speaks about table luxury as a normal situation, an evolution arisen out of the gradual increase of welfare in Rome. The cases of excessive luxury are emphasized to be exceptions. André seems to want to minimize, and normalize, table luxury.¹⁹ In Sancisi-Weerdenburg, the same acknowledgment of the actual existence of table luxury at Rome can be found as in André, together with an objective attitude towards these facts.²⁰

In an article on the theme of alimentation and digestion in Seneca's prose work, Gourévitch (1974) also discusses table luxury. She studies Seneca's references to the process of digestion as a historian of medicine. However, she has to conclude that the discussion of digestion in Seneca's work rather belongs to the area of ethics than to that of medicine. As she says:

Ainsi les rapports des Romains avec leur nourriture ne sont qu'un des aspects des rapports complexes...qui existent entre eux et leurs ancêtres plus ou moins mythiques, ou du moins progressivement transformés en personnages de mythe (1974, 329).

The way modern historians approach the subject of table luxury clearly differs from that of the Roman moralists themselves. The researchers dissociate the facts concerning table luxury in Rome from the attitude of an author like Seneca towards these facts. The Roman moralists do not consider the situation of their time and the historical evolution towards it objectively, but impose on it the fixed idea of the idealisation of the past and the decadence of present times.

Sometimes, when a modern researcher does not accept an ancient author's biased view on food and the rhetorical character of his text, the researcher's approach risks being incorrect. Thus, in her otherwise excellent study of Seneca's ideas about digestion, Gourévitch for instance says that Seneca considers thirst from the wrong point of view: she has deduced from his work that he presents it as less

¹⁹ J. André, *L'alimentation et la cuisine à Rome*, Paris 1961, 226ff. A few adverbs show the line of thought of the author: André says '*d'ailleurs*, le luxe de la table est lui aussi soumis à la mode et dépend du contexte historique' (speaking about Tacitus, *Annales* 3.55), and '*de toute façon* c'était le genre de vie d'une minorité dans l'empire' (p.229).

²⁰ 2000; Sancisi-Weerdenburg investigates the underlying, socio-political reasons for table luxury, and the laws that were issued against it.

important than hunger, which is not correct. Gourévitch also remarks that there is no reason for Seneca's strong dislike of food such as *ostrea* and shrimps.²¹ Of course, Seneca's ideas on alimentation are not 'right' or sensible, but it does not further the understanding of his work to state this.

Thus, one must distinguish the study of the historical reality and context of the phenomenon of increasing luxury from the study of an ancient author's ideas on the subject. Of course, these questions are also intertwined. For instance, to study the historical reality of the reports of increasing luxury may help one to determine the extent of an author's forging and exaggerating of facts. The question whether or not, or to what extent the decadence portrayed by ancient authors represents an actual situation is an interesting aspect of the study of the theme of decadence. As we have seen, modern historians tend to accept the existence of a certain amount of luxury. On the other hand, although there was certainly a basis in reality for the moralizing comments of the ancient authors, they also exaggerated the situation. In the second part of this chapter, we will get an impression of how they did this. The most sensible response therefore seems to be that both reality and exaggeration played a role in the moralists' complaints.²²

It is not easy to comment on such a text as the 'Kapuzinerpredigt' of *NQ* 4b, or on the more general phenomenon of 'decadence'. This difficulty sometimes appears in discussions of this subject. Quite interesting in this sense is Heldmann (1982), who, while giving a survey of the different explanations of the idea of decadence in antiquity (pp.60ff.), attempts to rationalise ancient explanations in such a way that he is compelled to mention failures in the authors' reasoning. For instance, in order to explain a passage in the preface to the first *Controversia* of Seneca maior, Heldmann has to resort to the notions of *topos* and emotion, instead of the notions of reasoning and theory he prefers. Thus, he says: '...dann wird man das mit dem

²¹ 1974, 315ff. ('les problèmes de la soif étant ainsi mal posés...', p.318). Compare also p.324 the remark: 'il est étrange que Sénèque n'ait pas fait appel à l'expérience pour corriger cette affirmation...?.'

²² Cf. Bracher 1987, 109, 113, 116, Citroni Marchetti 1991, 82. Of course, this is an incomplete response to such a complex question.

besten Willen nicht als eine Theorie vom Verfall der Beredsamkeit bezeichnen können', 'es bleibt bei stereotypen Klagen über einen moralischen Niedergang' (1982, 90-91).

In these statements we see two extreme forms of interpreting thoughts on decadence: on the one hand the attempt to distil coherent theories from them, and on the other hand the complaint about a 'mere *topos*'. The negative reference to the notion of commonplace is indeed a reaction to the subject of decadence that occurs more often.²³ While we must realize that, indeed, the discourse on decadence consists largely of commonplaces, we must deal with this fact cautiously.

1.2.2 Citroni Marchetti's study of Roman moralism

In her study *Plinio il Vecchio e la tradizione del moralismo romano* (1991), besides discussing the moralising character of Pliny's work, Citroni Marchetti also gives an overview of the moralistic discourse before Pliny, with much attention for Seneca.²⁴ She argues that the moralistic descriptions used by different authors gradually became more rigid.²⁵ In its early stages, for instance in Cicero's work, Roman society was not yet described in an entirely negative manner: luxury could also be described positively. The moralistic remarks commented upon actual facts. This changed gradually. In the work of Sallust, Citroni Marchetti recognizes what she calls 'schemi moralistici', fixed thought patterns, with a 'carattere totalizzante': the whole of Roman society is described in the same negative terms. In Seneca's work the process has been completed. The persons described do not have any natural characteristics, but are pictured in an entirely negative manner. The moralistic discourse has now achieved a reality of its own.

²³ See for instance the judgement on the last chapter of Longinus' *De sublimitate* quoted by Donini (1969, 193): it is 'a declamation on a commonplace topic', 'in any case, it has no connexion with the rest of the treatise, [and] it says nothing new'.

²⁴ A few Italian studies, such as Berno 2003 and Torre 1997, follow Citroni Marchetti in her discussion of Roman moralism.

²⁵ 1991, 81-173. See especially pp.81-84 and the introduction, pp.11-14, for a general overview. The work has a useful index.

In Seneca's work, Citroni Marchetti further argues, a specific use of the 'schemi moralistici' is found, which she calls 'moralismo simbolico'. She distinguishes this form of moralism from a 'moralismo sistematico': the first term refers to a conscious, interpretative use of moralistic patterns, the second to a usage in which the fixed moralistic patterns are thought to represent and describe an actual situation. According to Citroni Marchetti, Pliny sometimes uses the moralistic patterns in the traditional way, which by then has become mechanical, of the 'moralismo sistematico', but he also sometimes shows an awareness of their use (1991, 180-182). Seneca does not use the moralistic discourse to describe an actual situation.

The moralistic discourse uses certain standard subjects, 'motivi moralistici' as Citroni Marchetti calls them, such as, for instance, the idea of digging under the ground in search of gold. I make a distinction between standard moralistic subjects, such as table luxury and the act of digging under the earth, and standard moralistic motifs applicable to these subjects, such as the tendency of vice to go against nature. Citroni Marchetti also points to the concept of objects ('oggetti') that are perverted by luxury and deviate from the natural use nature had in mind for them.

In my view, the main merit of Citroni Marchetti's work is to have assembled a great amount of material relating to the area of Roman moralism. Moreover, she has attempted a more complex analysis of the subject, not reserving for it a qualification such as 'a mere commonplace', but instead presenting it as a 'modo di vedere', with its evolution and characteristics.²⁶

However, I also have some reservations towards Citroni Marchetti's theories: the factual basis for her interpretations is sometimes small.²⁷ It is very difficult to discern the difference between a descriptive and interpretative use of moralism in

²⁶ Cf. E. Romano's review (*RFIC* 123 (1995), 221-226), which points out the merits of Citroni Marchetti's work. Two other reviewers, K. Sallmann (*Gnomon* 73 (2001), 214-220) and G.O. Hutchinson (*CR* 43 (1993), 61-63) also criticize it.

²⁷ Compare the criticism expressed by Hutchinson (in his review mentioned in my previous note), p.62. I am not in a position to evaluate Citroni Marchetti's theory on the evolution of the moralistic discourse, which would require knowledge of a larger part of Roman literature.

various moralizing passages, for instance in comparing the works of Pliny and Seneca. It is also difficult to see why Seneca's moralism should be called 'symbolic', but not that of others. Citroni Marchetti moreover argues that an evolution takes place in Seneca's work: the 'symbolic', conscious use of moralism is only developed in the later letters and the *Naturales Quaestiones*.²⁸ I myself have not been able to make such a distinction in the use of moralistic material: the moralistic descriptions in Seneca's earlier and later works are comparable.²⁹ Is it not rather that every bit of moralism consists partly of description and partly of symbolism?³⁰ It is certain that the moralizing descriptions had an exaggerated aspect, which was not a representation of reality. I can also agree to the idea that moralistic representations became more elaborate. But we cannot attribute a specific use of the moralistic discourse in this sense to Seneca only: the similar use of the moralistic discourse in the genre of satire, for instance, is an important counter-argument.³¹

²⁸ See especially p.119, 133.

²⁹ As appears, for instance, from the comparison of the epilogue of *NQ* 4b to a passage about food luxury in the early consolation *Ad Helviam* (ch.10).

³⁰ As Citroni Marchetti admits when she speaks of a 'simbolizzazione...che è in parte implicita in tutto il moralismo' (p.133). An example: the term *venter* is sometimes used in the context of table luxury, as in the idea 'many men work for one stomach' (*EM* 95.24). The term is also used more generally to indicate a life guided by the quest for pleasure (see Cicero *DND* 1.113, where someone is reproached for measuring everything by the belly, and Cicero, *Ad familiares* 15.18.1). Various occurrences of *venter* have been discussed by Citroni Marchetti 1991, 99-101, 135ff., 204f. (cf. her index s.v. 'ventre'). On pp.135ff. she presents it as one of the elements of Seneca's later, symbolical moralism. However, the fact that this representation of (table) luxury is found in Roman literature since Sallust shows that a symbolic representation of luxury had already been present since then.

³¹ Citroni Marchetti also gives interpretations of different moralizing passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Cf. Hutchinson's review of Citroni Marchetti (mentioned in n.26 above), p.62, about *NQ* 3.18. Gauly 2004 follows up on some of Citroni Marchetti's ideas.

1.2.3 Reflection on the idea of decadence in ancient authors

In antiquity, some thought had already been given to the idea of decadence. Besides the moralistic interpretation, a few other explanations are found in ancient texts.³² Thus, we also encounter a socio-political theory, according to which a change in society is responsible for the regression of the *mores*.³³ Another recurrent explanation is that of the cyclical nature of history: periods of golden ages and decadence follow upon each other.³⁴

There are a few texts in which several explanations are mentioned together, as alternatives.³⁵ A passage in Tacitus' *Annales* (3.55) does this for the table luxury that is the subject of *NQ* 4b.13. Tacitus inquires after the causes of the decrease of the *luxus mensae* that was prominent in the time after the battle of Actium, until the beginning of the reign of Servius Galba. The first explanation he mentions is socio-political: Rome's noble families competed with each other in this and other ways, until it became dangerous for them to do so. The arrival of a class of more frugal

³² Some of the relevant passages have been put together by Caplan 1970, 160ff. and Williams 1978, 6ff.

³³ The political explanation is especially found in Longinus (ch.44) and Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus* (cf. the passage of *Annales* 3.55 discussed below). See Caplan 1970, 185, 194, Williams 1978, 49-51. They tend to emphasize this interpretation over the alternatives proposed in the texts of Longinus and Tacitus.

³⁴ Heldmann 1982, 71ff. discusses this interpretation.

³⁵ See Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 1 preface §6ff., Dionysius of Halicarnassus *De oratoribus veteribus*, preface §1. In *De sublimitate* (44), Longinus has a philosopher present the opinion that the decadence is due to the loss of liberty under the emperors (the political explanation). He introduces this explanation by saying 'should we believe that well-known opinion...': like the other explanations, the political interpretation has a topical character. The author of the treatise himself is in favour of the moralistic explanation. The presentation of alternative explanations for the phenomenon of decadence could take the form of a *disputatio in utramque partem*, as appears from Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus*: in this work devoted to the question of the decadence of eloquence, it is said that Aper, who speaks in favour of his own time, is doing so not because this is his opinion, but because this is usual in such discussions (ch.24, see also ch.15). Cf. Williams 1978, 42.

citizens, and especially the emperor Vespasian, completed the process of a decrease in luxury.

Two other possible explanations are added, formulated more succinctly. The first is that of the recurring cycle of all things: just like the seasons, the *mores* change, too. Moreover, not everything was better in earlier times: the present has also produced something of worth for posterity to imitate (*nec omnia apud priores meliora, sed nostra quoque aetas multa laudis et artium imitanda posteris tulit*).³⁶

After the attention paid to the socio-political explanation, the other ideas seem merely added as conventional afterthoughts. In a concluding remark, Tacitus adds: 'but let the competition with the ancients in matters of virtue remain' (*verum haec nobis maiores certamina ex honesto manean*t). Even if one were to accept the idea that the ancients also had their faults, the positive moral incentive contained in the idea of the virtue of one's forefathers remains valuable.

Besides the idea of a gradual decadence of society other ideas were also found. For instance, a concept of gradual progress also existed. Sometimes, ancient authors denied the idea of decadence, as in the short formulation of *Annales* 3.55. The negation of the idea of a gradual decadence also occurs in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*. On different occasions, Pliny mentions the dissolute behaviour of earlier generations, for instance apropos of the import of the luxurious material of marble (*NH* 36.4ff.). He also concludes that one may rejoice about the *mores* of his own time.³⁷

³⁶ This passage is not unproblematic: the commentary on *Annales* 3 by A.J. Woodman and R.H. Martin (Cambridge 1996) *ad loc.* argues that the idea that not everything was better in earlier times does not refer to the subject of the decadence of the 'culinary *mores*' anymore, but that Tacitus is speaking of the literary worth of his age (pp.408ff.). It is certain that the thoughts were added without much relation to the rest of the passage.

³⁷ Pliny even calls his generation the *maiores* (*NH* 36.117), indicating that this term has a positive moral connotation. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 176-179 discusses the occurrence of the idea in Pliny. She explains Pliny's positive attitude towards his own age by saying that he lived in times (and under an emperor) favouring rather simpler *mores*, in contrast to the Augustan period. Therefore, such passages possibly had a propagandistic character. Another formulation that questions the reality of decadence is found in Velleius Paterculus 2.92, who says that we are naturally inclined to prefer the past to the present. In Tacitus,

On a few occasions Seneca himself also brings up these ideas.³⁸ In his representation the idea that earlier ages were as depraved as the present age is predominant; vice is a general characteristic of mankind, not of specific ages. Man will always have to come to the same judgement about himself: that he was, is, and, alas, will always be evil (*De beneficiis* 1.10.3). The idea that earlier generations were not free of vice is also formulated in such a manner as to form a moralistic lesson. Seneca also states that the only thing that changes is the emphasis on a specific vice: in some ages one specific form of vice is prevalent, in other ages other forms dominate.³⁹ Once, Seneca formulates the optimistic statement that occurs more often in Pliny, i.e., the idea that the youth of the present time is better than that of the past (*EM* 97.9).

In the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the vice of earlier generations is mentioned in the digression of Book 5, in which Seneca narrates how Philippus of Macedonia asked his men to descend into an ancient mine, to see what riches had been left there by prior generations (15.1). Seneca comments that he read this story with much pleasure.⁴⁰ It made him understand that his age was not suffering from new vices, but from the same vices as the *maiores* whose weight and virtue his contemporaries bear, in their effort to equal them. In this passage one finds the same ‘uncovering’ of the vices of earlier generations as in Pliny’s work.

Thus, the idea that all times were equally dissolute, which contradicts the pattern of decadence, is found in several authors, including an author like Seneca, in whose work the idea of decadence is strongly present. It has been suggested that the negation of the idea of decadence was also a commonplace. Citroni Marchetti speaks of ‘una specie di modulo contrario all’interno del moralismo’: the opposite

Dialogus de oratoribus 18 the preference of humankind for the past over the present is said to be immoral.

³⁸ See *EM* 97 and *De beneficiis* 1.10.1-3; cf. the two shorter passages in *Ad Marciam* 16.8 and *De beneficiis* 6.32.4. See also Citroni Marchetti 1991, 176.

³⁹ Cf. the beginning of *EM* 114. This idea of a succession of different forms of vice presents a cyclical element.

⁴⁰ Compare the similar formulation in *EM* 86.5, where it comments, however, on the delight in seeing Scipio’s past austerity, in contrast to the decadence of the present.

of the basic pattern of mankind's decadence is an equally fixed thought pattern.⁴¹ However, Citroni Marchetti adds that the formulaic character of the thought does not render it void of meaning.⁴² This remark shows the difficulty inherent in considering a thought to have a formulaic, commonplace character: it automatically renders the thought less charged with meaning. Since, in the end, a text containing such ideas does not seem meaningful, the commentator takes pain to assert that the commonplace thought does retain significance.

The fact that statements about the equal depravity of all ages are also found in Seneca's work demonstrates, if need be, that Seneca does not 'believe' in the gradual decadence of humankind. Still, he also states, very seriously – or rather, with rhetoric demonstrating strong indignation – the degeneration of humankind.

Bellincioni (1979) also remarks upon these facts. She argues that Seneca uses the idea of decadence 'as a myth, to point to a deeper reality'. Through the idea of a decadence from a golden age man knows that once he was good, and that he has in himself the possibility to be good again.⁴³ The 'myth of decadence' is used by Seneca in his battle against vice, to make man aware of his faults and his duty to improve himself. One may compare to this the statement we encountered in Tacitus, *Annales* 3.55: the wish to see man's competition in virtue with the ancients continue, even if it is based on a faulty assumption.

⁴¹ 1991, 178, cf. 176. Citroni Marchetti believes that the fact that this idea can be found in Seneca as well as Pliny is an argument for considering the idea a commonplace, as well as the fact that in the passage of the *NQ* just quoted it appears in connection with the well-known moralistic element of the search for riches under the earth.

⁴² 1991, 177: 'il carattere formulare non toglie però valore alla critica che vien fatta agli antichi'. As an argument for this idea she points out that very concrete facts, for example information about import of marble in earlier times, lead to criticism of the ancients.

⁴³ 1979, 49-50, with reference to Bellincioni 1978, 28-29 ('al mito di un passato migliore, e quindi al progressive peggiorare dell'umanità nella sua storia, Seneca non crede. Se ne serve tuttavia... appunto come di un mito, per alludere ad una realtà più profonda'). Compare Gowers' observation (1993, 18): 'the standard extremes of Roman eating, simple and luxurious food, were used, then, to mark out two different stages in the mythology of Roman civilization'.

In the discussion of the epilogue of *NQ* 1, a comparison will be made between one of Seneca's description of primeval virtue and ensuing gradual decadence, and one of Musonius Rufus' moral lessons; this comparison will help to understand that Seneca's moralizing passages may indeed be regarded as moral lessons.⁴⁴ Both the idea of gradual decadence and its negation are used as separate lessons.

1.3 *NQ* 4b 13.5-11: *Luxus mensae*

After this general introduction to the phenomenon of decadence, I will now continue by discussing the epilogue of *NQ* 4b. The moralist achieves his biased representation by certain rhetorical means. 'Exaggeration' and 'generalisation' of fact are two mechanisms of moralistic descriptions mentioned by modern research, to which we should also add 'accumulation' of fact. Concerning the generalisation of facts, an interesting remark is made by Gourévitch: apropos of mushrooms, one of the standard ingredients of table luxury, she says that, when they *possibly* have a negative effect, Seneca says that they *do* have such an effect.⁴⁵ Such an example shows how he achieves a negative effect in his descriptions. In the study of Roman satire, similar techniques have been pointed out. Satire uses selection and compression of fact: for instance, it may select all possible elements that give a negative representation of something (omitting the positive elements) and compress them within one description.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See section 3.3.3 of this Chapter; see also in section 3.3.2 the discussion of Gaul's idea that the ideas formulated in *NQ* 5.15 influence the thought of *NQ* 1.17.

⁴⁵ 1974, 317. Gourévitch also complains: 'Sénèque généralise sans s'en expliquer' (p.317). She speaks about 'des diatribes hors de propos, ou en tout cas d'une vivacité tout à fait disproportionnée avec la gravité des faits'; cf. her commentary on the adjective *omnia*: 'le mot *omnia* du texte de Sénèque paraît suspect: il est plutôt dicté par l'emportement oratoire que par la précision scientifique' (p.325). See further Bracher 1987, 116, and Citroni Marchetti 1991, 118 about accumulation.

⁴⁶ See Braund 1989, and Hudson 1989, about 'Food in Roman Satire', who points to the technique of generalisation (especially p.69 and 79).

Certain moralizing passages, instead of focusing on one moment of the process of decadence, present a gradual pattern of decadence that accompanies a gradual evolution in the luxurious use of a certain object, for instance. This pattern is indicated by such means as temporal adverbs

(*primus...deinde...postquam...paulatim*).⁴⁷ We also noticed the representation of a gradual worsening in the account of the flood at the end of *NQ* 3. In other epilogues, it occurs in a moral context: in the epilogue of 4b, too, a pattern of gradual worsening can be distinguished. The gradual process of decadence is clearest in *NQ* 1.17 (see also *NQ* 7.31).

Seneca begins by pointing out that man has put a price on snow (§3-4); this motif will be discussed later. I will first go through the passage narrating 'how snow came to be used at dinners' (§5-11), and give some indication of how the picture of decadence is constructed. The account begins with the announcement 'I will explain how we have come to such a situation that no water which is flowing seems cold enough to us' (*unde hoc perventum sit ut nulla nobis aqua satis frigida videretur quae flueret, dicam*). The phrase *unde hoc perventum sit* implies a process of deterioration.⁴⁸ Seneca first describes the natural state of the stomach: when it is not overfilled, it does not need any extra lenitive. The sentence contains clear word play (*sanus...salubris cibi capax stomachus...impleturque, non premitur*). This situation is contrasted with that of the overloaded stomach (introduced by a double sentence beginning with *ubi*). Because of the overloading the stomach is consumed by a heat of its own: a continual 'drunkenness' (*ebrietas*) of the entrails

⁴⁷ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 116-117: 'l'uso di determinate formule, o semplicemente di determinati avverbi temporali, fa capire che il lusso segue uno sviluppo progressivo...a cui corrisponde, dal punto di vista della moralità, una progressiva decadenza'. This representation begins with Sallust, Citroni Marchetti argues, as historical processes come to be identified with the gradual decadence of the *mores* (pp.93-95).

⁴⁸ This formulation is used more often in moralizing passages: compare *NQ* 3.18.3, also in a description of table luxury (*quo pervenere deliciae?...ad hunc fastum pervenit venter delicatorem, ut...*). Luxury has been long to attain this stage (the death of the fish *mullus* on the table), Seneca says ironically (18.1). See also *EM* 86.7 (*eo deliciarum pervenimus, ut nisi gemmas calcare nolimus*), *Ad Helviam* 12.4. Cf. the passages mentioned by Citroni Marchetti 1991, 117 n.64.

burns up the inner organs with bile. As a result, it becomes necessary to use something to cool down the stomach. Water is not sufficient. The formulation of the process of bad digestion in terms of excessive heat naturally leads to the idea that snow will be necessary to remedy it.

The result of the remedy is that the stomach feels better and is therefore able to go on eating. Therefore, paradoxically, the remedy excites the vice (*remediis incitant vitium*). The additional statement that snow is used in this manner not only during the summer (when cooling is normal to a certain extent), but also in the winter (already cold of itself), further emphasizes the perverse character of the situation.

In §6, the origin of this vice is described in moral terms. Seneca suggests that the need for snow is caused by an ‘inner pain and organs corrupted by luxury’ (*quae huius rei causa est nisi intestinum malum et luxu corrupta praecordia?*, a rhetorical question).⁴⁹

Another description of eating resulting in a bad digestion follows. The ongoing character of revelry is emphasized: there is no rest between meals, lunches are added to dinners going on all night.⁵⁰ The abundance and variety of dishes aggravates the situation of the already satiated diners. The result of these uninterrupted excesses (*numquam intermissa intemperantia*) again is an overheating, a ‘consuming’ of the person, which leads to insanity (*quicquid animi decoxerat efferauit*). The description again ends with the statement that a cold lenient is needed.

In §7 Seneca emphasizes the absurdity of the consumption of snow in the winter by pointing at the care taken to ensure that the dinner room is heated. Still, the stomachs need to be revived by ingesting something cold: because of their abuse they do not feel anything anymore. A sensation of strong cold is needed to ‘bring them to their senses’. Thus, the snow eaters (even) use ice instead of snow, because

⁴⁹ I prefer ‘inner pain’ (cf. Vottero, Budé) to ‘bad intestine’ (Parroni), but probably both meanings play a role. The second half of Seneca’s explanation leads one to regard the first half in moral terms, too.

⁵⁰ Berno 2003, 331 speaks of a ‘motivo topico’: it was a common argument to emphasize the length of dinners. See also Vottero’s n.21 *ad loc.*, about negative and positive valuations of ongoing dinners.

they think it is colder than snow. Ice must (even) be taken from the bottom of the stack, so as to be even colder. In their search for a cold lenient, the depraved snow eaters have put not one, but (even) different prices on ice.

Seneca further emphasizes the decadence of the use of snow by a comparison with the attitude of the Spartans towards perfume (§9). The Spartans, known for their simplicity, are said to have banned perfume from their city.⁵¹ What would they have thought of the conservation and use of snow?⁵² The comparison indirectly amplifies the scandal of the matter.⁵³

An exclamation about the ease of fulfilling one's thirst follows in §10, a single remark about the correct attitude towards thirst and hunger. Seneca immediately goes on to the next negative description: it is not only an extreme cold the spoiled eaters crave for, but also its opposite, an extremely hot sensation.⁵⁴ They eat steaming shrimps and drink ice-cold snow, some of them in thick clothing, and look whitish and ill. Again, the absurdity of the situation is demonstrated.⁵⁵ The perverse character of the situation is emphasized by adding yet another degree: snow is not only sucked in, but also eaten. Every possible care is taken not to let it lose its coldness.

⁵¹ Vottero (n.26 *ad loc.*) refers to Athenaeus 15.686f., where the same fact is mentioned in the context of Chrysippus' disapproval of perfume.

⁵² With some malice, Seneca adds details about the transportation of ice: the straw that is supposed to protect it during the voyage spoils its colour and taste. Compare for the protection of ice with straw M. Turcan-Deleani, 'Frigus amabile', in M. Renard and R. Schilling (eds.), *Hommages à Jean Bayet*, Bruxelles - Berchem 1964, 693.

⁵³ The procedure of indirect amplification is further discussed in section 3.1.2 of this Chapter.

⁵⁴ Cf. Gourévitch 1974, 323: 'un abus entraîne l'autre'.

⁵⁵ Berno 2003, 170-171 and 331 points to the Graecisms in this passage: these perhaps imply a reference to the Greek character of vice. According to Berno, the whitish personages represent ridiculous *graeculi* of comedy. The articles of dress *palliolum* and *focalis* were associated with malady and effeminacy (Berno 2003, 170 with nn.118-119, Vottero, n.29 *ad loc.*). Migliorini 1997, 38 mentions whiteness as one of the symptoms of persons who are suffering from an illness of the stomach (with reference to Celsus, *De medicina* 1.8.2).

The thirst of the dinner participants is called a fever, an internal one, which does not affect the skin but the heart (§11). Again, *luxuria* is denounced as the origin of the abuse of snow. The description is concluded with the statement that things lose their strength because one becomes used to them; so it will be with snow, too. Snow, in which people even swim nowadays (a final degree in decadence!), has come, 'by constant use and daily slavery of the stomach', to take the place of water (*itaque nix ista, in qua iam etiam natatis, eo pervenit usu et cotidiana stomachi servitute ut aquae locum obtineat*). Some colder lenient must be found. *Nix ista...eo pervenit ut...*, the pendant of *unde hoc perventum sit*, at the beginning of the account (§5), concludes the story.

Everything in this passage is aimed at emphasizing the horror of the misuse of snow. The description of the process of decadence is phrased in the form of continuous gradations in depravity (the dinner participants are continually said even to be going so far as to...), rather than in temporal terms. Negative descriptions of the perverse snow eaters are accumulated; the immorality of the situation is emphasized through different means such as repetition, paradox and indirect amplification. The addition of many details and the revelation of the absurdity of the situation also contribute to it. These rhetorical means also occur in the descriptions of *NQ* 5.18 and 1.16-17.

1.3.1 Table luxury and digestion

1.3.1.1 The correct attitude towards drinking

Longer or shorter descriptions of table luxury also occur in a few other passages in Seneca's prose work.⁵⁶ Certain resemblances and differences can be pointed out between these passages and the epilogue. For instance, the idea that food from far-away places is assembled for a luxurious meal (see especially *Ad Helviam* 10) is not used in *NQ* 4.13.

⁵⁶ Many of these passages will be mentioned in the following discussion. Cf. the list in Torre 1997, 380 n.13 and in A.J. Woodman and R.H. Martin's commentary on Tacitus' *Annales* 3 (Cambridge 1996), 377.

In other passages, Seneca also speaks about the right attitude towards food and drinking (though always briefly), a subject that is quasi absent from the moralizing tirade in *NQ* 4b.13.⁵⁷ In the course of a discussion on true richness in *EM* 119, Seneca explains what would be the correct use of water. When one is thirsty, it does not matter what kind of water one drinks, water from some nearby reservoir or water that has been put away, surrounded by snow, to cool it down. Nature only commands to quench your thirst: whether you use a golden cup or your cupped hand does not make any difference (*EM* 119.3, compare §13-14). In *Ad Helviam* 10, one of the passages elaborating on table luxury, Seneca similarly says that the body's desires are simple: absence of cold, hunger and thirst. Anything else is not a need, but a vice (*Ad Helviam* 10.2, cf. 10.11). In these passages nature and luxury are put in opposition to each other: the habit vice has of going against nature will be discussed below.

1.3.1.2 Reasons for and results of wrong eating

Luxury dinners such as represented in *NQ* 4b.13 do not serve the purpose of satisfying hunger or thirst.⁵⁸ Such dinners only serve to satisfy a vice, not a need. This is explained in *Ad Helviam* 10: the debauched eaters vomit so as to be able to go on eating, and they eat to vomit. They do not deign to digest the meals for which the whole world has been searched (*vomunt ut edant, edunt ut vomant, et epulas quas toto orbe conquirunt nec concoquere dignantur*, 10.3). As Seneca also says, the stomach is irritated or excited rather than calmed by these meals (*Ad Helviam* 10.5, *EM* 95.15). In *Ad Helviam* 11.4, this characteristic of vice is mentioned in more general terms. Every desire that arises not out of a need, but out of vice, has the same nature: everything you add to it will be not the end of the desire, but a higher level of it. This describes what happens during the dinners mentioned in *NQ* 4b.13.

⁵⁷ Compare Gourévitch 1974, 327-328.

⁵⁸ Compare Torre 1997, 383 n.28.

1.3.1.3 Gastronomic vice and illness

The culinary excesses also point to a (more general) decadent state of the mind (§6, 11), which is formulated in terms of illness.⁵⁹ The connection between vice and illness is made more often in the moralistic discourse.⁶⁰ In *NQ* 4b 13.11, the vicious thirst is called a fever affecting the heart (*sitim istam esse putas? Febris est*). The mention of this specific form of illness is related to the situation of overheating that the diners find themselves in.

In *Ad Helviam* 11.3, Seneca had used a formulation similar to that of *NQ* 4b13.11, when he said that no amount of drinking would be sufficient to satisfy the thirst of someone who did not drink out of a need, but because of the heat in his inner organs: this was not thirst, but a disease (*..non magis quam ullus sufficiet umor ad satiandum eum cuius desiderium non ex inopia, sed ex aestu ardentium viscerum oritur: non enim sitis illa, sed morbus est*).⁶¹ The mention of a 'heat of the inner organs' in this passage can be explained in the context provided by *NQ* 4b13.⁶²

1.3.1.4 The process of (bad) digestion

The process of (bad) digestion is referred to with a certain precision in the epilogue.⁶³ We have seen that in §5 Seneca speaks of a 'consuming' of the stomach: it is burned by its own heat and the bile that results from bad digestion. In the

⁵⁹ Cf. Gourévitch 1974, especially pp.311, 325, 328.

⁶⁰ Cf. for the idea of disease also *Ad Helviam* 10.5, *EM* 122.18, 114.11, where luxury is said to be the sign of a diseased society. Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 95 and the index *s.v.* 'malattia', Migliorini 1997, 23, 36, Berno 2003, 155: 'il motivo della malattia come metafora e conseguenza del vizio...è topico della tradizione moralistica'.

⁶¹ As Gourévitch 1974, 318 n.2 remarks, 'à vingt ans de distance [i.e. between the *Ad Helviam* and the *NQ*], Sénèque retrouvait la même formule': one of the fascinating features of the moralistic discourse.

⁶² Cf. Migliorini 1997, 42, 45.

⁶³ In another passage describing table luxury, *EM* 95.15-29, another aspect is described in detail: the diseases that result from this sort of luxury. The emphasis on this aspect is related to the discussion in the letter, which involves medicine.

preface to *De medicina*, Celsus mentions different medical opinions about digestion (§20, cf. also §38).⁶⁴ According to some specialists, food is ground up in the stomach (*teri cibum in ventre*), others say it putrefies (*putrescere*), others (the followers of Hippocrates) believe that it is cooked by heat (*per calorem cibos concoqui*). Still others disagree with all these theories and say that there is no concoction: the food goes through the body crude, as it was eaten (*nihil enim concoqui, sed crudam materiam, sicut adsumpta est, in corpus omne diduci*).

Seneca speaks about digestion in the same terms as the school of Hippocrates, which saw digestion as a ‘concoction’.⁶⁵ *NQ* 4b.13 is especially concerned with digestion gone wrong, ‘putrefaction’. In this case the food is not digested (‘concocted’), but goes through in undigested, crude state (*cruditas*).⁶⁶ The bad digestion is described as resulting in excessive heat, which naturally leads to the use of snow as a lenient. The idea of an overheating of the body seems to have been related more often to a disequilibrium of the brain or body.⁶⁷ The excessive heat is understandable in the context of bad digestion, since Seneca speaks about continuous eating, which involves continuous (attempt at) digestion.

Migliorini, who discusses *NQ* 4b.13 in the context of a study of medical science and terminology in the literature of the Neronian era, argues that Seneca uses several technical terms in this passage – although some terms, like *concoquere*, were also more generally used. The technical terminology, placed in a strongly rhetorical context and modified by it, contributes to the effect of the passage.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Gourévitch 1974, especially pp.311-314, also mentions Celsus in the context of a discussion of digestion in Seneca.

⁶⁵ About *concoquere* and *concoctio* cf. Gourévitch 1974, 314 n.1, Migliorini 1997, 25, and D.R. Langslow, *Medical Latin in the Roman Empire*, Oxford 2000, 200, who defines *concoctio* as ‘the process of digestion of food in the stomach’, from the verb *concoquere* used figuratively from its basic sense ‘to heat thoroughly, to cook down’.

⁶⁶ Cf. Migliorini 1997, 38 about *cruditas*, Gourévitch 1974, 313-4. Cf. *EM* 95.25 *in ventre scias putrescere sumpta, non concoqui*.

⁶⁷ So Migliorini 1997, 41, who refers to Celsus *De medicina* 4.12.1.

⁶⁸ 1997, 41-43, cf. 36-37, 39. See also Berno 2003, 155-157. C. de Meo, *Lingue tecniche del Latino*, Bologna 1983, 233-236, briefly discusses Seneca’s use of medical terminology, mentioning the term *fomentum* (cf. Gourévitch 1974, 313 n.2), but without referring to *NQ* 4b.13.

Seneca also phrases the process of digestion in moral terms.⁶⁹ In §6, he speaks of ‘internal organs corrupted by debauchery’ (*luxu corrupta praecordia*) and uninterrupted excesses ‘boiling down’ a person and leading him to insanity (*quicquid animi decoxerat efferavit*).⁷⁰ Here, the part of the body affected is the *animus*. Likewise, in §11 mention is made of an internal fever, affecting the heart (*cor ipsum excoquit*). Thus, the passage is a mixture of medical and ‘moral’ terms: Seneca has taken great care of the terminology.⁷¹

The comparison of *NQ* 4b.13 to a passage about digestion and eating in Celsus’ *De medicina* (1.1.2, 1.2.2, 1.2.8-10) immediately shows the difference between this medical text and Seneca’s version. Celsus gives objective medical advice about what to do in case of indigestion, as well as advice about what may best be eaten. He also touches on the subject of banquets, saying that one should sometimes attend them, and sometimes stay away. Again, one may also eat more than sufficient on some occasions.⁷² One should always eat as much as needed, if one can digest the food. When one’s stomach is well-filled, Celsus recommends having a drink of cold water to improve digestion (and going to sleep after a while) (*ubi expletus est aliquis, facilius concoquit, si, quicquid adsumpsit, potionem aquae frigidae includit*, 1.2.10, cf. 1.2.2). This healthy advice is what decadent people exaggerate and deform when they eat snow.⁷³

⁶⁹ Cf. Berno 2003, 156-157.

⁷⁰ About *decoquere* compare Migliorini 1997, 171, Berno 2003, 156, with nn.57-59. For the expression *efferavit animum* cf. *EM* 83.26 (cf. Berno 2003, 158, with n.69).

⁷¹ The formulation is quite ‘recherché’ at some points (not only concerning the medical terminology). Cf. Gourévitch 1974, 313 n.2 : ‘le texte est extrêmement recherché, précieux, sophistiqué’ (about 4b.13.5). Berno 2003, 170 n.117 points to the seldom used terms *ferculum* and *comessatio*.

⁷² About an excess of food, he also says: ‘coming to food, a surfeit is never of service, excessive abstinence is often unserviceable; if any intemperance is committed, it is safer in drinking than in eating’ (1.2.8).

⁷³ It is further interesting to remark, as Gourévitch has done (1974, 321-2), that Seneca does not, following his discussion about the nature of snow, refer to the more precise idea that drinking water obtained from molten snow or ice was bad for one’s health. Several authors refer to this idea, arguing that the best part of water disappears in snow and ice. See Pliny,

1.3.1.5 The standard ingredients of table luxury

Snow seems to have been one of the standard elements of which the *luxus mensae* consisted. Other standard ingredients of this form of luxury were mushrooms and oysters.⁷⁴ Boiling mushrooms are briefly mentioned in the epilogue of Book 4b (13.10). In *EM* 108.15, oysters and shrimps are described as ‘amuse-gueules’ serving to force satiated people to eat more, food that is agreeable to those who enjoy eating more than is sensible, stuffing themselves with what goes down the throat as easily as it is thrown up again (*nec enim cibi, sed oblectamenta sunt ad edendum saturos cogentia, quod gratissimum est edacibus et se ultra quam capiunt farcientibus, facile descensura, facile reditura*).⁷⁵ Thus, oysters and mushrooms form the same kind of ‘food’ as snow: they have nothing to do with the appeasing of hunger, but only with the process of vicious eating and ensuing bad digestion.

1.3.1.6 Table luxury and luxury or vice in general

In many of the passages in which table luxury is mentioned, it is only one form of luxury among other instances.⁷⁶ As Seneca says in *Ad Helviam* 11.4, after a long discussion of table luxury, and a shorter reference to a few other forms of luxury: ‘nor is this true only in respect to money or food...’ The mechanism of the vice described does not only apply to avarice or table luxury, but to all vices. The

NH 31.33 (and *NH* 31.40 the mention of *vitia nivis*), Aulus Gellius 19.5, with reference to Aristotle [fr.214 Rose], Hippocrates *On airs, waters, places* 8. Theophrastus, on the other hand, is positive about drinking molten snow (according to Athenaeus 42d).

⁷⁴ They are mentioned together in *EM* 78.23, 95.25, 108.15. As Citroni Marchetti says about mushrooms: ‘I boleti sono condannati dal moralismo filosofico come cibo caratteristico del lusso malato di Roma’ (1991, 70). See also Gourévitch 1974, 315ff., with the addition of *garum*. Cooks also serve as an indicator of table luxury: when Livy tells how luxury was brought to Rome by the army on its way back from Asia, he mentions cooks among other luxury ‘objects’ (39.6). See also Sancisi-Weerdenburg 2000, 159, Gourévitch 1974, 331.

⁷⁵ Pliny calls mushrooms *gulae novissima irritamenta* (*NH* 16.31).

⁷⁶ See *Ad Helviam* 10-12, *De brevitate vitae* 12, *De providentia* 3.6, *EM* 89.22, 114.9.

different forms of luxury are interchangeable: when Seneca gives a description of table luxury, he might just as well have described another form.⁷⁷ The form he chooses often depends on the context, as it clearly does in the epilogue of *NQ* 4b. Sometimes, too, Seneca mentions a few forms of luxury together, as examples. Thus, the specific forms of luxury may be regarded as to a certain extent symbolic, since they are exemplary and interchangeable.

1.3.1.7 Snow as a fashionable vice

The habit to drink snow, or iced water, appears to have been the subject of moralizing texts.⁷⁸ In one of his epigrams (14.117), Martial states that the latest luxurious invention is to drink not snow, but water obtained from snow (*aqua recente de nive*). The various appearances of snow or boiled and iced water in Martial's work indicate that these drinks had become fashionable.⁷⁹ The habit to boil water and conserve it refrigerated with snow is also called an invention of Nero's, the *decocta Neronis* (Pliny *Naturalis Historia* 31.40, Suetonius *Nero* 48.3). It is possible that the description in *NQ* 4b.13 alludes to Nero. Nero was also said to have had snow-cooled swimming-pools in the summer (Suetonius, *Nero* 27.2). This reminds one of Seneca's final remark concerning the latest evolution in the use of snow: swimming in it.⁸⁰ Boiling water and refrigerating it by means of snow

⁷⁷ Cf. Heldmann 1982, 91, who calls *eloquentia* 'ein beliebig austauschbares Exemplum' of the complaint of decadence.

⁷⁸ See the passages assembled by Gaulty 2004, 106ff. See also Berno 2003, 148 with nn.15-16. The use of snow-cooled drinks is also mentioned as a diatribic theme in Oltramare 1926, 50, 271. Pliny the Younger, on the other hand, mentions snow in a positive context (*Letters* 1.15.2).

⁷⁹ Occurrences in Martial are found in Berno 2003, 148 n.16: see the epigrams 2.85, 5.64, 6.86, 9.2.5-6, 12.17, 14.103 and 116-118. In these passages, referring to snow or to (boiled and) refrigerated water, no mention is made either of the 'scientific' idea that snow, or water from snow, was bad for one's health. Gaulty 2004, 108-109 argues that the habit to drink snow was new in Rome in Seneca's time.

⁸⁰ Both Gaulty 2004, 109-110 and Berno 2003, 330-331 mention the importance of the connection with, or allusion to, the emperor Nero. Commentaries (Loeb and Budé editions, Vottero, Parroni) also refer to Nero.

might have become popular because Nero invented it. The connection with Nero gives a contemporary dimension to Seneca's 'Sittenschelte', and possibly a political dimension, too.

1.3.1.8 Epicurean descriptions of table luxury

In *De finibus* 2.23, Cicero provides evidence that descriptions of table luxury were also found in the works of the Epicureans.⁸¹ The context of this passage is an argumentation against Epicurus' acceptance of pleasure. The speaker gives a few examples of the kind of vices the Epicureans are supposed to accept, according to their ideas about pleasure. He says that he does not want to picture debauchees, as the Epicureans have the habit of doing (*ut soletis*), people who vomit on the table and have to be carried away, but begin anew the next day, and never see the setting or rising sun. This sentence indicates that there was a certain habit of representing such banquet-scenes (unfortunately, no examples have been preserved). We must assume these descriptions to have represented the kind of excesses (instead of moderate pleasure) the Epicureans did not approve of, although their opponent in *De finibus* turns the argument against them.

1.3.1.9 Food in satire

In the study of Roman satire, some attention has been given to the function of the representation of food. In her commentary on Book 2 of Horace's *Satires*, Muecke says: '...food is not simply described for its own sake, but shown to represent, and set in critical light, a way of life, or a character'.⁸²

Hudson (1989) gives an ample discussion of the function of food in this genre. Food is one of the elements of the theme of decadence, the pattern of virtuous past and vicious present: the past is represented as having an ideal attitude towards food. Satiric descriptions mainly cover the dinners of the present time. The satiric characters are 'extreme versions created to embody all the satiric possibilities of a

⁸¹ The passage is also mentioned in Citroni Marchetti 1991, 87-88.

⁸² 1993, 227, cf. the introductory passage 'Focus on food' (p.9-11). Food is especially mentioned in *Satires* 2, 4 and 8.

subject' (p.70). Satire does not give a realistic picture of the dinners that were an important part of Roman society.⁸³ Instead, the satirist inverts the picture of bad eating to arrive at an idealized, unreal picture of the correct attitude towards food. The food featuring in satires has an established literary and moral significance: it is recognizable as 'good' or 'bad' food for the reader.

The treatment of food in satire clearly resembles Seneca's use of the theme on some points. Food has a place in the theme of decadence, its representation is not realistic but influenced by this pattern: it has a recognizable value as good or bad food. Seneca's moralizing descriptions also clearly differ from satire on other points. For instance, he does not really use food to describe social relations, as satire does. Seneca moreover does not develop the characterization of his vicious personages enough to make them into 'real' persons.⁸⁴ The genre of satire also has a less serious and more playful character: its open aim is 'the entertaining exploration of moral subjects' (Hudson 1989, 70). Seneca, on the other hand, gives the impression of a serious indignation.⁸⁵

1.3.2 The *contra naturam* motif (*NQ* 4b.13.3-4)

1.3.2.1 Putting a price on an element of nature

The idea that man makes a wrong use of something provided by nature is a fundamental part of Roman moralism. It is also present in the epilogues of *NQ* 5 and 1, where Seneca also gives an indication of what would have been the right use

⁸³ See for instance p.82: 'dinner parties were a fact of Roman social life and an important one at that...the satirists never give us a description of a properly conducted dinner other than the idealised rural type'.

⁸⁴ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 118.

⁸⁵ The same comparison can be made between Seneca's moralizing texts and modern 'satire'. For instance, the performances of the Dutch cabaret performer Youp van 't Hek (see e.g. 'Het zelfmoordcommando', 2005), are composed of a series of extravagant accounts detailing the vice of modern society, and formulated with much rhetoric. These accounts often have a factual basis, but the imagination of the performer has certainly added to these facts.

of the gift of nature in question. In *NQ* 4b.13.3-4, we are told that a price has been put on water. In §8 ice is even said to have different prices, according to its quality. Man thought it a pity that some things, such as sunlight, air and water, were available to everyone, rich and corrupt persons alike, without having to pay for it. Therefore, *luxuria* put a price on water. Nature, on the other hand, had wanted water, one of the essentials of life, to be the one thing that did not make a distinction between rich and poor. Seneca uses much pathos to formulate the idea that nature had originally put water to everyone's disposition (§4).

These ideas also occur elsewhere in Seneca's work. The depraved eaters described in *Ad Helviam* 10.5 are only content with food that is expensive. This goes against the design of nature, which had placed aliments at their disposal; they disregard these and, instead, traverse the entire world in search for food. In *EM* 90 this aspect of vice is presented in the terms of a temporal evolution. In a description of the primeval golden age that was free from luxury, Seneca states that nature had made everything freely available to man. Man himself has chosen to complicate his life, out of disdain for what is easy, by searching for what is difficult to obtain and putting a price on it. Luxury has deviated from nature (§18-19, 36).⁸⁶ The idea of a development from a simple, natural use of things to a complicated, luxurious situation is similar to the process described in *NQ* 4b.13.

The idea that man has put a price on an element of nature occurs more often in Latin literature.⁸⁷ Horace, too, speaks of the sale of water, the most common thing on earth (*Satires* 1.5.88-89: *...venit vilissima rerum / hic aqua*). In his description of the gradual decadence of the world, Ovid also mentions that the earth, air and sunlight were 'common possessions' of mankind at the world's first stage, until man changed this (*Metamorphoses* 1.135-136). These parallels demonstrate that the idea

⁸⁶ Cf. *EM* 94.56-57.

⁸⁷ The idea that the world is dominated by money is one of the features of Roman moralism (see on the subject *EM* 115.10ff.). Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991 s.v. 'denaro'.

that man had changed the free availability of certain elements of nature was a common thought, an element of the moralistic discourse.⁸⁸

The thought that nature had put an essential element such as water freely at man's disposal is also mentioned in the preface to Book 8 of Vitruvius' *De architectura* (§2-3). Vitruvius states that the four elements are necessary for our life on earth. He adds that, because of this, god has not made these elements difficult to obtain and expensive, like those things (gold for instance) which our body and nature do not desire. Those elements that are necessary for a safe life were put at our disposition by nature, all over the world. Therefore, there is air to breathe, sunshine and fire for warmth and security, fruits for eating, and water for drinking and other necessary and gratuitous uses (*aqua...gratas, quod est gratuita, praestat utilitates*). The idea that what is necessary is easy to obtain, and what is unnecessary is hard to get, was also an Epicurean teaching.⁸⁹ Thus, these ideas functioned in a more philosophical as well as a more literary context.

In Book 19 of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* a remark is made about the use of snow that corresponds quite well to the ideas of *NQ* 4b.13.⁹⁰ While discussing the care of gardens, Pliny comes to speak about table luxury. Summing up culinary

⁸⁸ In *NQ* 4b 13.4 the *luxuria* that has reduced water to something with a price tag is called *contra se ingeniosa*: with its need to put a price on water, luxury also complicates the availability of water for its vicious ends. A similar paradoxical formulation is found in Ovid, *Amores* 3.8. In a description of the golden age and ensuing decadence man's nature is called *contra te sollers...et nimium damnis ingeniosa tuis* in its inventions that signify the end of the golden age (vv.45-46). Martial 14.117 speaks of an *ingeniosa sitis* in the context of drinking water coming from snow. Berno 2003, 164-165 points out that once one has given in to luxury, it always wants more (as mentioned earlier): in this sense, too, it can be considered *contra se ingeniosa*. Compare also *EM* 86.8, where Seneca is speaking about bathing establishments that are popular only until the next, even more advanced baths are built. He comments that *luxuria* invents new things by which it surpasses itself (*cum aliquid novi luxuria commenta est quo ipsa se obrueret*). The *ingeniositas* of vice is also discussed in the context of the *inventio* of luxury, below.

⁸⁹ See the references in H. Usener, *Glossarium Epicureum*, Rome 1977, s.v. εὐπόριστος: see for instance the *Letter to Menoiceus* 130 and 133.

⁹⁰ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 168. See also *NH* 36.1.2.

extravagances, he also mentions the misuse of water. Distinctions have been made, he complains, between different kinds of water: nature's elements have been distinguished by their price. Some people drink water, some ice, as *voluptas gulae*. Ways have been found to conserve snow during the summer. Some people first boil water, and then refrigerate it. Nothing pleases man as nature has decided it (*NH* 19.55). This short passage contains the same idea as *NQ* 4b.13, but without the long description Seneca adds. The parallel is of interest, since in the *Naturalis Historia*, too, it is the discussion of certain natural phenomena that leads to the mention of (table) luxury/misuse of snow. The parallel with Pliny is continued in the discussion of the epilogues to *NQ* 5 and 1 (in sections 2.5 and 3.3.4 of this chapter).

1.3.2.2 *Contra naturam: Epistulae Morales* 122

Vice clearly goes against nature. This motive also appears in the other moralizing passage of the *Naturales Quaestiones* that discusses table luxury, the digression in *NQ* 3 (ch.17-18). Here Seneca protests against the luxurious ways in which fish are eaten. These are more incredible, he argues, than the fact that fish also exist under the earth. A description is given of the habit people have of watching the red mullet die on the dinner table, for the beauty of its colours at that moment. As in *NQ* 4b.13, vice is shown to rival nature: 'you are surprised at this fact [the existence of fish under the earth]? The achievements of luxury are much more incredible, as often as they mimic or surpass nature', Seneca says in 3.17.2.

Letter 122 provides a longer discussion of the inversion of the natural order of things by vice; 'all vices rebel against nature, they all abandon the appointed order' (§5).⁹¹ Several instances of vice *contra naturam* are mentioned, such as, for instance, the habit of men to dress in women's clothes (§7). The instance described at greatest length is the perverse habit of those people who reverse the natural order of

⁹¹ For a study of the composition of this letter see Hijmans 1976, 160-166. See also Thomsen 1979-1980, 152-172 (with pp.164ff. a reaction to Hijmans).

day and night, sleeping during the day and living or feasting during the night (§2ff., §3 speaking of ongoing banquets at night).⁹²

Seneca also expands on the possible reasons for this behaviour. Explanations of a social nature are found together with explanations that fit the context of the moral discourse. It is a characteristic of vice to go against nature and relinquish the normal order, Seneca first states. Luxury enjoys such perversion (§5). Other motivations for the behaviour of those who invert day and night are added. Some wish to differ from what common people do: it is believed a sordid thing to live a normal life (§9). In §18, the ‘annoyance with a normal existence’ is even called the principal reason for the vicious habit described. Related to this idea is the wish of the *luxuriosi* to be the talk of the town: to achieve this, they have to invent some abnormal vice (§14, 18). Living at night and sleeping during the day also became a fashionable vice: at a certain moment many were doing it (§10, 13).

In §14 Seneca sums up a few possible reasons for the reversal of night and day; those who live at night do not do so because they consider the night more agreeable. Seneca suggests that the bad conscience of the vicious cannot stand the clarity of daylight. The same reason that plays a role in the misuse of water in *NQ* 4b.13 is also mentioned: the fact that daylight is available to everyone without distinction makes it unattractive to those used to valuing things according to their price (*et omnia concupiscenti aut contemnenti prout magno aut parvo empta sunt, fastidio est lumen gratuitum*).⁹³ Seneca concludes the letter by saying that one should follow nature, not deviate from it. The former option makes things easy, whereas the latter complicates life.⁹⁴

⁹² Seneca illustrates their behaviour by a quotation from Cato, *nec orientem umquam solem viderunt nec occidentem* (§2, cf. §11). This idea appears to have been proverbial; in other texts it is not attributed to Cato (Cicero *De finibus* 2.23, Pliny *NH* 14.141 and Columella *De re rustica* 1, preface §16 among others). Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 88 n.12.

⁹³ The sentence *sed quia nihil iuvat oblatum/solitum* offers different possibilities of interpretation, according to the textual variant chosen. It may refer to the disdain for what is common or what is offered to everybody. Both explanations are further developed in the rest of the paragraph.

⁹⁴ The idea of the reversal of the natural order by vice has been developed, in connection with the theme of the luxurious banquet, by Torre 1997. For instance, Torre contrasts the *perscrutatio gulae* of table luxury (dishes from all over the world are assembled) to the

1.3.3 A moralistic motif: vice's inventions

The idea of 'inventions', often occurring in the context of the beginning of the *artes* and other basic utilities of society, was 'perverted' by moral decadence and the search for luxury (see especially *EM* 90). In the moralistic discourse, the terminology of invention is used to indicate vicious novelties. Researchers have contrasted this search for new 'inventions' to the natural philosopher's search for the causes of phenomena.⁹⁵

In the epilogue of *NQ* 4b, the word *invenimus* appears ('we have found out how we may compress snow', 13.3), to indicate that a way has been found to preserve snow.⁹⁶ In the epilogue of *NQ* 1, vicious inventions face the positive inventions of nature. The evil Hostius Quadra, who speaks of finding a way of satisfying his sexual desires through the use of mirrors, says: 'I will discover (*inveniam*) a way to deceive my sick wants and satisfy them. To what purpose my depravity if I sin only to the limit set by nature?' (16.8). In the next chapter, nature's original intentions for the use of mirrors are described: 'mirrors were invented in order that man may know himself' (17.4). Nature's positive inventions (not yet

perlustratio animi of the wise man, who oversees the world (*De beneficiis* 7.3.3; pp.380-1). Such a contrast resembles the 'mirroring contrasts' between vice and virtue pointed out in Berno's monograph on the *NQ* (2003). Torre's reading of the banquet scenes follows the symbolic line of interpretation set up by Citroni Marchetti. Some of the ideas she presents are somewhat dubious, for instance when, following Citroni Marchetti, she speaks of the presence at the banquet of the figure of the tyrant.

⁹⁵ The discussion of this moralistic motif has been started by Citroni Marchetti 1991 (see her index *s.v.* 'invenzione negativa', and see especially pp.201ff.). See also Berno 2003, 161-163, 165 in connection with *NQ* 4b.13. Berno considers this motif an example of the use by vice of 'virtuous' means for contrary goals; she contrasts and compares the search undertaken by vicious people to scientific research. According to Berno, this is a connection between the scientific discussions and moralizing passages that is more generally present in the *NQ*.

⁹⁶ Cf. Pliny *NH* 31.40 about Nero's invention of boiled and refrigerated water.

perverted by vice) are also mentioned in the epilogue of *NQ* 5: 'providence devised winds...for several reasons' (18.1).

There are also passages where *luxuria* itself (and similar agents such as *furor*) is said to have 'invented' something, as in *EM* 86.8: '...as soon as luxury has worked out some new device' (*cum aliquid novi luxuria commenta est*).⁹⁷ The qualification of *luxuria* as *ingeniosa* (*NQ* 4b 13.4, cf. *NQ* 1.16.1) also fits in this category, since it implies that luxury is 'thinking up' something. By means of the verb *excogitare* the negative connotation of *invenire* is made explicit. The term is used in *NQ* 4b 13.4: 'someone burdened by riches has thought out (*excogitatum est*) how even water might become a luxury'. In the digression of *NQ* 3.17-18 the term also occurs, in Seneca's exclamation 'how much more delicately and elegantly does our madness invent something (*aliquid excogitat furor*) while despising anything ordinary!' (18.3).⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Cf. *EM* 78.23. In Pliny such formulations also occur (*NH* 8.31; 19.53; cf. 13.1, 33.22).

⁹⁸ Cf. also *NQ* 5.18.4. Instances in Pliny's *NH*: 14.138, 16.232 and 19.55.

2. *The epilogue of NQ 5*

The epilogue of *NQ* 5 develops one central thought. Gross gives an adequate summary of the passage:

Überblickt man das achtzehnte und letzte Kapitel des Windbuches, das moralphilosophische Finale, so fällt auf, daß Seneca hier ein und dieselbe Aussage, mit gewissen Variationen immer wieder von neuem zum Ausdruck bringt: die Winde seien von der providentia, der Vorsehung, dem Menschen als segensreiche Gaben gestiftet worden; dieser aber mißbrauche sie zu seinem eigenen Unheil, indem er sie zur Kriegsschiffart benutze.⁹⁹

2.1 *The connection between epilogue and main text*

The final chapter follows an enumeration of the specific winds found in the different regions of the earth (ch.16-17). It opens with the thought that the winds are among the works of providence, worthy of admiration (*inter cetera itaque providentiae opera hoc quoque aliquis ut dignum admiratione suspexerit*). In the next sentence, ‘providence devised the winds or scattered them about for several reasons’ (*non enim ex una causa ventos aut invenit aut per diversa disposuit*, 18.1), the idea occurs that the winds have been positioned in different regions. The addition ‘or scattered them about’ possibly refers to chapters 16-17. Seneca also speaks about the distribution of rain over the world by the different winds (18.2). Thus, there may be a slight link between the last chapters of the physical discussion and the epilogue.¹⁰⁰ However, Seneca does not develop the idea of ‘the usefulness of the winds in the different regions’ in the epilogue. The connection does not further

⁹⁹ 1989, 324. Cf. Vottero’s n.11 *ad* 18.6.

¹⁰⁰ Compare perhaps Stahl 1960, 98: ‘nach einer Diskussion der Winde hinsichtlich ihres spezifischen Auftretens aus bestimmten Himmelsrichtungen (c.16) und in festgelegten Erdzonen (c.17) lenkt der Autor zu der Vorstellung von Schaden und Nutzen über, die die Winden gewissen Provinzen bieten: vom Wind als dem Vorteil bringenden opus providentiae handelt aber die ethische Paränese’. See also Gross 1989, 328.

affect the content of the final chapter: the link is rather formal. This corresponds to the method of ‘attaching’ prefaces and epilogues to the main text, as has been discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.2).¹⁰¹

Some scholars have expressed ideas about the relation of the epilogue to the central part of the book. About the ‘philosophical unity’ of the book Stahl states:

Daß Seneca in der naturwissenschaftlichen Forschung des fünften Buches den *aer* als Selbstbeweger begreift...so daß der so konzipierte *aer* eher einem Lebewesen entspricht als einem physikalischen Element, geht natürlich auf die stoisch-philosophische Vorstellung zurück, daß *aer* bzw. *ventus providentiae opera* (18.1) seien. Dieses also schon deutlich in der naturwissenschaftlichen Ursachenforschung erscheinende philosophisch-weltanschauliche Kernmotiv der *providentia* (sc. *dei*) wird mit der *dementia* des Menschen...konfrontiert...¹⁰²

Stahl links the concept of *aer* in the scientific discussion of the book to the idea of *providentia* appearing in the epilogue. According to her, the theme of providence is also clearly present in the previous discussion. In my opinion there is no evidence for this.¹⁰³ In the epilogue, divine providence and human folly are indeed contrasted, but the notion of providence does not appear in the rest of the book.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ It is also interesting to remark that just before the epilogue, in 17.5, Seneca mentions the *salubritas caeli* that was believed to be caused by one of the winds discussed (the *circius* of Gallia: the emperor August even dedicated a temple to this wind). The cleanness of the air is a positive effect of the winds mentioned in the epilogue (and apart from the remark in 17.5 not present in the scientific discussion).

¹⁰² 1964, 270-1. Compare her statement in 1960, 120, cf. p.119.

¹⁰³ It is interesting to see that Stahl says that the idea of *aer* in the main part of the book ‘naturally’ goes back to the concept of providence, and that this concept is ‘clearly’ present in the central discussion.

¹⁰⁴ The only place in the book where providence may be discerned is in 5.2, where Seneca speaks about the strength to move given to man; we might add that this strength was given to man by providence. No other or more explicit references occur. Gross 1989, 235 (following Strohm 1977, 321) also rejects Stahl’s idea that the notion of providence can be found throughout the book. Gross agrees, though, that a demonstration of the *ordo rerum*,

By combining the notions of *aer* and *providentia dei*, Stahl has tried to find a covering theme for the book.¹⁰⁵ This is an example of a situation in which, in order to achieve a certain degree of unity, more general ideas not present in the text are believed to underlie this text. This question has been discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1).

What could then be said about the composition of *NQ* 5? Seneca discusses the winds on a physical level in the main part of the book; in the epilogue, such matters as god's intention with the winds, and man's (mis)use of them, are also discussed. Remembering what Seneca said in *NQ* 4b.13.1-2, this epilogue can be regarded as answering the question: *hoc quid ad mores?* The epilogue attaches some observations of a moral kind to the discussion of natural phenomena.¹⁰⁶

2.2 *The folly of navigation*

The epilogue begins by mentioning the usages of the winds that were originally intended by nature. Nature's gift of the winds to mankind was made for several reasons (see §1-5, 13-14). The winds cause the air to remain in motion, and thus make it useful and breathable. The winds further distribute the rain over the world. They are also essential for the growth of plants.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, they keep the different

the law inherent in all things, is visible in *NQ* 5, as in other parts of the work. So general an idea can be read in the text more easily (cf. the discussion in Chapter 5, section 8). In his discussion of the winds, Pliny points out that they occur according to a *lex naturae* (*NH* 2.116, 121).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Waiblinger 1977, 77, who says, without advancing proof for his statement: 'dennoch ergeben die physikalischen Untersuchung und der philosophische Inhalt ein einheitliches Ganzes'.

¹⁰⁶ Williams' recent interesting article on *NQ* 5 (2005) compares Seneca's description of the wildness of certain winds to the portrayal of man in the epilogue; I find this comparison highly hypothetical.

¹⁰⁷ In *EM* 86.18 Seneca briefly mentions the negative effect of the wind on trees; in *De providentia* 4.15-16 he says that, just as hardships are necessary to make man strong, the wind makes trees strong. This shows that Seneca uses the idea of 'the action of the winds

parts of the world clean. Seneca also speaks of ‘maintaining the right temperature for earth and sky’ (§13). Finally, the winds have made navigation possible, which has provided an interchange between far-away nations: people mingle and the goods of their respective countries are exchanged. Thus, navigation has also made it possible to increase human knowledge.

In spite of god’s good intentions regarding the usage of the winds, man misuses navigation to go to war in foreign countries across the sea. The main part of the epilogue is devoted to a description of this foolish activity; it is a good example of a repetitive, hammering lesson meant to have an effect on the audience, as I described in Chapter 3. I will undertake a short analysis of the construction of this passage (§5-12), and point to a few rhetorical devices used to emphasize the idea of man’s folly.¹⁰⁸

After stating that people wrongly use navigation to go to war at sea or in other countries, Seneca asks what *dementia* leads man to do this, and cause general death (§6). Navigation for reasons of war is immediately defined by its most obvious negative feature: death for everyone partaking in it. Another description of navigation in the context of war follows, with a clear use of alliteration (*vela ventis damus bellum petitori et periclitamur periculi causa*). By the description ‘we are in danger for the sake of danger’ Seneca presents the undertaking as absurd. Several of its dangerous aspects are then listed.

At the beginning of §7 the reasoning is taken back a step: even if man went through the dangers of navigation for peaceful purposes it would not be worth it. This idea differs from the view adopted in the enumeration of the positive aspects of navigation elsewhere in the epilogue. By mentioning (and disapproving of) good reasons to cross the sea, Seneca introduces an additional level into the argumentation (it is even less worth taking such risks for the purpose of war) and thereby emphasizes the folly of navigation in the context of war. The dangers of the sea are described in four detailed *cum* sentences. With a double rhetorical question Seneca asks what the result of braving these dangers will be. The ironical answer is:

on plants and trees’ in the sense that is most convenient within the argumentation of a specific passage.

¹⁰⁸ See also the similar discussions of the epilogues of *NQ* 4b and 1.

one gets into other dangers, the dangers of war (*bellum scilicet.*). These, too, are described in detail: a case of the rhetorical device *enumeratio*.¹⁰⁹

In §8 a series of rhetorical questions follows, enquiring why man would commit this folly. Seneca replies ironically that this must be because there are not enough dangers on the mainland; he then describes mankind's precarious situation. The description is concluded with an ironical adhortation to set sail and thus provoke one's fate. The next rhetorical question asks why man goes in search of death, since death is everywhere (§9). This idea is again illustrated by a few examples. The argument that it is foolish to search death at sea, since death is everywhere and many other dangers are present, resembles the argumentation in the preface of *NQ* 6, where, in order to remove fear of earthquakes, Seneca says that there are many more likely dangers in life than earthquakes (*NQ* 6.2). In both cases other forms of death than that under discussion are adduced to influence man's view on the specific form of death discussed.

In §9 follows yet another alliterating description of the folly of navigation for reasons of war. Seneca adds a comparison with animals: man shows a beastly behaviour in killing persons he does not hate. Men are said to be even worse than animals, since animals attack others out of revenge or hunger; not so men. The comparison of human behaviour to animal behaviour occurs more often in the moralizing discourse, just as the idea that men are worse than animals.¹¹⁰

In §10 a few historical exempla follow (introduced by the repeated anaphora *sic*) of men who have extended their fury outside their country by means of navigation. In §11 the idea that navigation should not have been made possible for man, already expressed at the beginning of the epilogue, reappears. Here it is the conclusion of the preceding line of thought (*ergo...*).

¹⁰⁹ See Lausberg 1973, 337ff.

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., Horace, *Epodes* 7.11-12, Seneca, *Phaedra* 913-4, Pliny, *NH* 18.2. Compare Oltramare 1926, index s.v. 'animaux comme exemples'; see especially p.270 with n.1 for the occurrence in Seneca. In *EM* 103.2 Seneca also states that, in contrast to man, animals only kill out of necessity (i.e. hunger or fear). In *EM* 95.31, speaking about war, he says that animals are non-aggressive. In other contexts man may be represented as being in a more advantageous position than animals; see the Stoic (positive) representation of man in Cicero, *DND* 2.145. On this subject, see also section 3.1.4 of this Chapter.

After this conclusion, Seneca adds a few more thoughts to his vituperation against navigation: it adds ‘external’ dangers to man’s allotment of dangers (§11-12). One never knows whether a war will be started against you by a distant country. In this reasoning the perspective is changed: the danger comes not from the martial folly of one’s own country, but from other war-waging countries.

The passage as a whole clearly shows the characteristics of a strongly rhetorical text. Biased argumentation (content) as well as word play (form) contribute to stating – or rather, impressing on the reader – the folly of navigation. Irony, rhetorical questions and historical examples are means that contribute to this end.¹¹¹ The comparison of man with animals is one of the instances of indirect amplification used in the passage: the comparison indirectly emphasizes man’s wickedness. This form of *amplificatio* also occurs in *NQ* 1.16, where it is discussed at greater length (see section 3.1.2 of this chapter).

2.2.1 Concluding *sententiae*

The epilogue is concluded with a few *sententiae* (§16). While the main part of chapter 18 describes navigation for reasons of war, in the last paragraph Seneca states in more general terms that the diverse reasons for navigating are vicious. A few short sentences indicate this thought (for instance: ‘surely each man sets sail to do some harm’; *utique alicui vitio navigatur*). These are followed by a quotation from Plato: ‘the smallest things are bought by men for the price of their life’ (*minima esse quae homines emant vita*).¹¹² From the words with which Plato’s

¹¹¹ Cf. Williams’ discussion of the passage, 2005, 441ff. According to Gross, the text has the characteristics of a declamation (1989, 235; he also mentions ‘die Häufung von Stilmitteln’ in the passage). In the work of Seneca maior, part of a *Suasoria* on the subject ‘whether Alexander should sail the Ocean’ remains (*Suasoria* 1), in which a passage from a poem describing Germanicus’ voyage at sea is reproduced (1.15); this resembles *NQ* 5.18 in its elaborate description of the dangers of a maritime journey.

¹¹² For this quotation compare Setaioli 1988, 123 and 450-451. See for instance also Parroni *ad loc.*: *haec sententia in Platonis operibus non invenitur*, and Williams 2005, 447 n.98, with reference to Hall 1977, 423.

quotation is introduced ('he must be produced in the role of witness now that I am about to close'), it is clear that Seneca is consciously working towards a conclusion of his discourse. He adds a last phrase, which brings forward the absurdity of man's action even more strongly ('you will laugh all the more when you consider...', as he says to Lucilius): 'things are acquired for living that are the very things for which life is destroyed' (*vitae parari in quae vita consumitur*).

The sayings gradually become more pointed, and their meaning more general. In the quotation from Plato, and Seneca's ensuing remark, the idea of navigation has entirely disappeared; only that of a death caused by the quest for certain matters remains. With these *sententiae* Seneca summarizes the lesson of the passage in such a manner that it can be easily remembered and 'made part of oneself'.¹¹³

2.3 Attitudes towards navigation

The representation of navigation in classical literature has been studied extensively by Heydenreich (1970).¹¹⁴ From the many passages he discusses, Heydenreich deduces an ambivalent attitude towards navigation: it was regarded positively as well as negatively in classical antiquity (and in later centuries). The epilogue of *NQ* 5 is discussed among the positive passages, since Seneca regards the winds and the resulting possibility of navigation as in themselves positive, while only man's misuse of it is negative (1970, 53-54). However, Seneca's text may evidently also be compared to passages that place navigation in a negative light, because of the emphasis he puts on man's wrong use of it.¹¹⁵ A selection of a few passages will provide a background for *NQ* 5.18, and point to the specific nature of this text.

¹¹³ Cf. the discussion of *sententiae* in Chapter 3, section 8.

¹¹⁴ The first chapter (pp.13-62) is dedicated to navigation in classical antiquity.

¹¹⁵ Hine 2000, 147 mentions *NQ* 5.18 among those texts where navigation is presented negatively.

In the passages in which navigation appears in a negative sense it is often related to the idea of a 'golden age' followed by a gradual degeneration.¹¹⁶ For instance, in Ovid's description of this process in *Metamorphoses* Book 1, the motif of the ship also makes its apparition. The primeval golden age is described as a time without navigation: no ship had yet touched the water and man only knew his own shore (1.94ff., cf. Seneca's *Medea* 331ff.). The beginning of navigation coincided with the entry of vices in society (1.128-134). Navigation was considered one of the elements that marked the end of the golden period and the beginning of contemporary times. It was associated with (the beginning of) vice, especially with *avaritia*: it was for the purpose of gain that man sailed the seas.¹¹⁷

A passage from Seneca's *Medea* also places navigation in the context of the end of a primeval golden age; it provides an interesting contrast with *NQ* 5.18.¹¹⁸ The second chorus of the tragedy (lines 301-379) brings up the subject of the ship *Argo*, which had brought back *Medea*. The *Argo* is identified with the first ship ever to have set sail.¹¹⁹ This first act of navigation is described in negative phrases (301ff.): the expedition was risky, since it took place during a time when there was not yet any knowledge of the stars or other elements necessary for navigation.¹²⁰ The world's

¹¹⁶ For a survey of passages on navigation see besides Heydenreich also Nisbet-Hubbard (1970) on Horace *Odes* 1.3, K.F. Smith (1913) on Tibullus 1.3.37-40, Hine on Seneca *Medea* 301-379.

¹¹⁷ Cf. for the combination of navigation with *avaritia* (as its cause or consequence) Heydenreich 1970, 32-34. As Heydenreich mentions, this connection is also referred to by Servius' commentary on Virgil, *Eclogae* 4.32: *per navigationem ostendit fore avaritiam, quae homines navigare compellit*. Servius gives a symbolical interpretation of the mention of navigation, as an indication of avarice. He is commenting on Virgil's fourth Eclogue, a famous text depicting a return of the golden age that includes a gradual disappearance of navigation.

¹¹⁸ Cf. about this passage Heydenreich 1970, 26-27, 47-48 and 54-55; cf. Hine's commentary *ad loc.* (pp.146ff).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Hine 2000, 147, Heydenreich 1970, 23ff.

¹²⁰ The condemnation of the inventor of navigation is one of the characteristics of the negative passages on navigation; cf. Heydenreich 1970, 41ff. See for instance Propertius

primeval golden age was disturbed by the advent of the Argo (329ff., 335ff.). This description gives navigation a sacrilegious character.¹²¹ At the end of the ode, the chorus describes the situation ‘nowadays’: ‘the sea has given in, and submits to all our laws’.¹²² The description becomes more positive when the chorus says that one day the entire world will be known (374ff.).

One of Propertius’ *Elegies* (3.7) is an example of the treatment of navigation in the genre of love-elegy (and similar genres). The fact that a beloved person undertakes a voyage at sea leads the author to embark on a *vituperatio* of navigation, which often contains a picture of the golden age and ensuing decadence.¹²³ This poem contains some arguments similar to those used in *NQ* 5.18. Like Seneca, Propertius laments that the land apparently did not provide enough opportunities for man to die, so he added the sea (*terra parum fuerat, fatis adiecimus undas / fortunae miseras auximus arte vias*, lines 31-32: cf. *NQ* 5.18.8). Propertius also says that man achieves his own death (*ista per humanas mors venit acta manus*, 30); Seneca likewise emphasizes that man brings about his own death.¹²⁴

These few points of comparison with Propertius’ elegy demonstrate that *NQ* 5.18 may show some resemblance to negative representations of navigation. However, the description in the epilogue of *NQ* 5 is clearly different from the representation of navigation as the end of the *aurea aetas* and as a sacrilegious affair, which is how

1.17.13-14, Horace *Odes* 1.3.9ff. For the motif of inventions in Roman moralism see the discussion in section 1.3.3 of this chapter.

¹²¹ See, e.g., Hine *ad* line 320. The sacrilegious character of navigation is confirmed by the third chorus, especially vv.595-8, 603-5, 614-6.

¹²² Lines 364f. (translation Hine 2000). Because it states that ‘now’ there are many ships, strictly speaking the chorus of this act cannot be contemporary with the action of the play, but is placed in an extemporal situation.

¹²³ Cf. Heydenreich 1970, 36ff.

¹²⁴ For example in §8, *itaque eamus in pelagus et vocemus in nos fata cessantia*, and the ensuing elaboration; see for more parallels Smith’s commentary on Tibullus 1.3.37-40. In Tibullus 1.10.33-34 we also find the thought that man is crazy to go meet his death in war, since death is imminent and approaching surreptitiously anyway. Williams 2005, 444 n.87 also refers to Propertius.

it is characterized in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Medea* (and many other texts). The contrast between the *Medea* and the *Naturales Quaestiones* is most obvious. In the play, navigation is said to desecrate the sea, whereas in the *Naturales Quaestiones* Seneca presents navigation as a gift from nature: he cannot launch on the traditional description of the fall from a golden age in which navigation plays a role. It is not the beginning of navigation itself that is connected to decadence, but what man made of it. The epilogue of *NQ* 5 must be placed in a different context, which I will try to identify in the rest of this chapter.

It is noticeable that Seneca focuses on navigation in the context of war.¹²⁵ The more common connection with avarice is only mentioned in §10, when Seneca says that Crassus crossed the seas out of avarice. The *sententiae* at the end of the epilogue more generally speak of various immoral reasons to navigate, as we saw earlier (section 2.1).¹²⁶ A connection between navigation and war is also established in one of Tibullus' *Elegies* (2.3).¹²⁷ Tibullus says that in the Iron Age cupidity reigns (v.35ff.). It has led man to war and doubled the dangers of the sea, since it made ships into battleships (v.39-40). Thus, here cupidity is presented as the origin of naval warfare. This connection is not made in Seneca's epilogue.

As we have seen in some passages mentioned above, navigation is part of a certain world view, in which a primeval golden age is disturbed by the advent of certain technologies, accompanying or causing the advent of vices. Navigation may also represent man's all too bold undertakings, as in a well-known ode of Horace (*Odes* 1.3). The condemnation of navigation is brought about by the fact that a friend

¹²⁵ Other passages in Seneca's work concerning war are *EM* 94.61ff. and 95.30-32. In 95.30 war is described as a public fury, as in this epilogue. Compare Griffin 1976, 222 about Seneca's ideas on the subject.

¹²⁶ Cf. n.117 above for the common connection of navigation with avarice. In his short mention of navigation in *De brevitate vitae* 2.1, Seneca also relates it to avarice. Berno 2003, 198-203 emphasizes the connection between the epilogue and the digression in the same book (*NQ* 5.15), in which avarice plays a role. Smith's commentary *ad* Tibullus 1.3.37-40 mentions the epilogue among the passages in which the absence of seafaring in the golden age and the motif of avarice are found, although neither element is clearly present in the epilogue.

¹²⁷ Cf. Oltramare 1926, 210.

leaves the narrator on a ship, which as we saw is usual in this form of literature. Navigation is said to be an impious activity: the ships are crossing depths that the gods intended to remain untouched (21ff.). In the following strophes, other forms of human daring are mentioned, beginning with Prometheus' theft of fire from the gods. The conclusion and climax of the poem is that nothing is left undone by man: 'nothing is too steep for mortals. In our folly we aspire to the sky itself, and by our crimes we do not allow Jove to lay aside his bolts of wrath' (37ff.). In this ode, navigation becomes part of a larger picture, as it is associated with other forms of human impiety.¹²⁸ It is part of a specific view of man's position in the universe. This also appears in the following positive representations of navigation.¹²⁹

A few elements of the representation of navigation occur in a negative as well as a positive context. This is the case with the idea of foreign pursuits and knowledge of other countries. When Seneca says in *NQ* 5.18.14 that the winds have been given to man in order 'to get to know distant lands', he presents the search for new lands as positive. In passages containing a(n entirely) negative representation of navigation, the search for the unknown has a negative meaning.¹³⁰

In Lucretius' *De rerum natura* navigation is spoken of in negative terms in one passage, as one of the things that were absent from the blessed golden age, but in

¹²⁸ Compare a passage from the *Corpus Hermeticum* (fr.23.45-6), in which man's audacity is blamed: the fact that he navigates is mentioned (among other deeds) together with his wish to ascend to the skies. The ascent to the sky is a symbol of the wish to acquire knowledge of the world. Cf. the commentary of Nisbet-Hubbard on this passage (1970, *ad Odes* 1.3): 'Momus [the personage in the text] begins, as in our poem, with the audacity of seafaring; he then proceeds to an attack on scientific curiosity'. Nisbet-Hubbard add that such formulations (involving battles against heaven) were probably used more often.

¹²⁹ Heydenreich has assembled such passages 1970, 51ff. (under 'Aufklärung').

¹³⁰ See Tibullus 1.3.39; compare Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.94-96. See also Seneca the Elder's *Suasoria* 1, about 'Alexander sailing the ocean', for this theme (§1-3). The idea that the (first) navigators are naming and counting the stars also occurs both in a negative and a positive context; see Seneca, *Medea* 309ff. (negative), Virgil *Georgics* 1.137-8 (positive); cf. Seneca the Elder, *Suasoriae* 1.4, for sailing the ocean without knowledge of stars, and Manilius 1.30ff. and 1.109 (not in the context of navigation).

other passages it is presented as one of the achievements of human progress.¹³¹ In his *Astronomica* (1.66ff.), Manilius argues that in earlier times there was no knowledge of nature, and the *artes* had not yet been invented. His description of the skills that were gradually acquired (among which navigation) forms a list of standard elements also found in descriptions of the degeneration of the world from a paradisiacal past to the present. However, Manilius presents this process as a positive evolution.¹³²

In Book 2 of Cicero's *De natura deorum*, navigation is mentioned among other crafts in a longer passage dedicated to all man is able to achieve thanks to the care of providence. Out of wood man builds ships, by which he is able to get everything that is necessary for life. He alone is able to control the sea and the winds, those most violent elements, by means of the science of navigation, and to use many products of the sea (*DND* 2.152).¹³³

Elsewhere in *De natura deorum* 2, in the grand Stoic picture of the disposition of the world for the benefit of man, the Etesian winds are also mentioned, among other phenomena, as part of the 'benevolence of nature' (*DND* 2.131). They are not only salutary for man, but also for animals and plants: they provide refreshment from heat, as well as swift and safe courses for navigation. This passage provides a context for the positive representation of the winds in *NQ* 5.18; Seneca may well have developed his version from such a text.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Book 5, 999ff. versus 332-334 and 1448ff. In the first passage navigation is also related to war. For Heydenreich, the idea of progress is Lucretius' own view of the world, and the mention of the golden age a traditional formulation (1970, 52). Both ideas occur in Lucretius as well as other authors 'without forming a contradiction' (n.123 of the same page). See concerning Lucretius also Lovejoy and Boas 1973, 222ff.

¹³² Virgil, *Georgics* 1.129ff. also represents the acquisition of the *artes* as progress, though involving hard labour.

¹³³ In *De officiis* 2.12-13 navigation is also said to play a part in the exportation of superfluous and importation of necessary goods.

¹³⁴ Another interesting passage is *De officiis* 2.16f. Cicero has just elaborated on the positive things that can be achieved by man through cooperation, *artes* like navigation, agriculture, building, etc. To this well-known idea, he adds that, just as men have achieved much together, they have also caused each other much pain. In a book about 'the death of man',

The different views on navigation lead to different views on what man is able or permitted to do and know. In one representation, man should not surpass the limits of his domain, cross the sea or, let alone, ascend the skies. According to other texts, man was meant to navigate and obtain knowledge of the world. We will again encounter the question of the human capacities in the discussion of the end to *NQ* 7 (Chapter 9).

2.4 *Man's misuse of nature's gifts*

We have seen that Seneca does not base his moralizing discussion about the winds and navigation on the idea of an *aurea aetas* disturbed by the advent of navigation. The main theme of the epilogue is the misuse man makes of this gift of nature (see especially §4-5, 11, 13, 15). In the discussion of *NQ* 4b.13 the perversion of nature by vice has already been mentioned (section 1.3.2 above). Man's use of things in an unnatural way, for purposes of luxury, is a central idea of the moralistic discourse. Various objects, or gifts of nature, which man may use correctly or not, appear in the moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*: ice in *NQ* 4b, the winds and ships (or navigation) in Book 5, mirrors in Book 1.¹³⁵ The idea of man's misuse of these objects is formulated most clearly in *NQ* 5.18.15; 'you will find nothing, even of obvious usefulness, such that it does not change over to its opposite through

the Peripatetic Dicaearchus had assembled natural causes of death and compared them to instances of death caused by man himself; the latter outnumber the former (compare for the thought *EM* 103.1). Cicero concludes by saying that there is no doubt that it is man who most helps and harms his fellow man. Like the epilogue of *NQ* 5, this passage speaks about death caused by man in the context of *artes* such as navigation.

¹³⁵ Cf. Heinonen 2000, 73: 'that humans are guilty of abusing nature's gifts is a typical theme in *Naturales Quaestiones* in particular', Citroni Marchetti 1991, 113: 'l'uso perverso delle cose è anch'esso un modulo comune'. Citroni Marchetti speaks about man's attitude towards 'oggetti'; cf. her index *s.v.* Compare, e.g., also the idea of a misuse of the invention of the sword, meant to be used against animals but then used against man, in Tibullus 1.10.5-6.

man's fault. So, nature had also created the winds for a good purpose; we ourselves have made them otherwise'.

2.4.1 *De brevitae vitae*

In Seneca's *De brevitae vitae* the theme of 'man's misuse of nature's gifts' plays an important role. The dialogue begins with the widespread complaint that nature has made life too short. Seneca replies that we should not complain about nature: life is long enough if one knows how to use it. It only seems short when one makes bad use of it. As Seneca pointedly summarizes his thought in 1.4: 'the life we receive is not short, but we make it so'. Among the forms of waste of one's life time summed up in the passage also appears navigation for the sake of profit (2.1). Here Seneca determines the wrong usage of navigation in the standard way, as caused by avarice.¹³⁶

2.4.2 *De beneficiis*

In Seneca's *De beneficiis* the theme of god's gifts to humankind comes up from time to time. Lists of divine benefits that man does not sufficiently recognize are given. Among these benefits the winds are mentioned a few times, along with navigation: in the context of this work Seneca speaks about navigation in a positive manner. The moralizing account of man's misuse of things is left out of the

¹³⁶ Cf. Williams' edition of *De brevitae vitae* (2003), ad ch.2 and 2.1-2. Dionigi 1995 points out that a different view on the time allotted to man is also found in Seneca (pp.21-22). Indeed, in *De otio* 5.7 and *NQ* 7.25.4 Seneca himself complains about the lack of time man has in relation to the amount of work to be done (the famous *vita brevis, ars longa*). This is exactly the thought Seneca rejects at the beginning of *De brevitae vitae*. Dionigi sensibly does not reproach Seneca with the inconsistency, but speaks about 'Seneca situazionale', a Seneca who according to the point of view from which he discusses a subject may make different statements about it. This important characteristic of Seneca's texts plays a role especially in the discussion of *NQ* 7 and the preface to *NQ* 1.

discussion.¹³⁷ Only a few remarks indicate that there is also a problematic aspect to the matter. In *De beneficiis* 4.25.2-3, Seneca says that the gods need no reward for their gifts. Man should therefore be ashamed to put a price on them. In *NQ* 4b.13, the idea that a price is put on something that is essentially free, such as water (in its form of ice), leads to much indignation (see section 1.3.2.1 above). In another passage (*De beneficiis* 4.28.3) we find the remark that certain gifts have been given to all men. For instance, the use of navigation for commercial purposes is generally speaking a good thing; god could not make it possible for good, but impossible for bad people.

2.4.3 *De natura deorum* 3.65b-78

In the course of the refutation of the Stoic view on providence in Book 3 of Cicero's *De natura deorum*, the idea appears of a divine gift that turned out different from what it was meant to be, the gift of *ratio*. The opponent of Stoicism gives examples of human beings who are doing evil consciously, with the help of their reason (ch.65b-69 and 71-74).¹³⁸ His conclusion is that 'reason' was a bad gift, since it may be used for wrong purposes. This contradicts the Stoic idea that

¹³⁷ For such lists of benefits see *De beneficiis* 2.29, 4.4-6, where mines and metals are also mentioned positively, as divine gifts: these are subjects Seneca more often mentions in a negative way in the context of man's search for luxury (as in *NQ* 5.15). See further especially 4.5.3 (rivers and navigation), 4.25.2 (winds and navigation), 4.28.1-3 (winds and navigation).

¹³⁸ The passage is divided into two parts of a similar structure (65bff. and 71ff.); it contains the same argument twice. One possible explanation for this situation could be that Cicero used two sources, one after the other; or he may have added his own version of the argument after presenting the one given in his source. Kleywegt 1961, who discusses these possibilities (pp.207ff.), prefers this option. A passage found in Galen (*In Hipp. librum primum Epid. comm. III* 17a.80K., cf. *In Hipp. de offic. med.* 18b.864 K.) provides an additional explanation for such a situation. Galen mentions that sometimes an author writes two versions of a discussion of the same matter; the one is found in the body of the text, the other in the margins. The author still has to decide which variant he will choose. However, a copyist may inadvertently insert both versions in the text.

providence has arranged everything in the world for the good of man.¹³⁹ The opponent of Stoicism argues that it would have been better if god had not given this particular gift to mankind (69-70 and 75, for instance: ‘..it would have been better if the immortal gods had not bestowed upon us any reasoning faculty at all than that they should have bestowed it with such mischievous results’, 69).

The Stoics had heard this argument more often. Their standard answer, as Cicero says, was that the fault lay not in the divine gift, which was good in itself, but in man’s bad use of it (‘this line of argument is usually met by your school thus: it does not follow, you say, that the gods have not made the best provision for us because many men employ their benefits wrongly’, 70). The Stoics made a comparison with inheritances: it is not because someone used his inheritance badly that it was not a good gift from his father.¹⁴⁰ This reasoning was part of the theodicy: one of the arguments put forward by the Stoics for retaining god’s goodness in spite of the moral evil in the world was that this evil should be imputed to man alone. It was up to man to make a correct use of things and to live correctly.¹⁴¹

The opponent of Stoic philosophy in *De natura deorum* 3 disagrees with the reasoning (70-71, 76).¹⁴² God should have taken care to give mankind a good *ratio*

¹³⁹ The *ratio* is mentioned and praised in the course of the Stoic argument in *DND* Book 2 as proof of divine care (2.147). However, Kleywegt (1961, 195) does not think that the attack in Book 3 refers to this specific passage; rather, it is an independent argumentation against providence.

¹⁴⁰ Further on in the attack on providence (ch.86-87) the idea also appears that virtue is something you achieve by yourself; you only thank the gods for prosperity. This confirms the idea that the *ratio* in itself is a neutral gift, which man could and should use correctly.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *De providentia* 2.4: *non quid, sed quemadmodum feras interest*. For other Stoic explanations of (moral and cosmic) evil on earth see for example Long and Sedley 1987, vol.1, pp.329-331 (texts 54 Q-U) and pp.332-3. The passage in *DND* 3.70 forms SVF fragment 2.1186. The idea that the responsibility for correctly using something lies with the user is also found outside the context of Stoic theodicy. Pease’s commentary *ad DND* 3 refers to Plato *Gorgias* 456d-457a (the responsibility for a good or bad use of a ‘technē’ lies with the user), and Cicero *De divinatione* 1.24-5, where Cicero gives a similar defence of divination.

¹⁴² This passage in 70-71 is complicated, as Kleywegt 1961, 196ff. has noted. He gives an elaborate discussion of the text.

(which would have been comparable to an inheritance); he could not have been deceived in the purpose it would serve, since in the Stoic view providence is all-knowing. The conclusion is a restatement of the idea that it would have been better if the *ratio* had not been given to man, because of the bad use made of this gift.

The relevance of this passage to the epilogue of *NQ* 5 is obvious. Just as the opponent of Stoicism complains about the misuse of the divine gift of the *ratio*, so Seneca complains about man's misuse of navigation. In §4 he speaks about 'a great benefit of nature, if the madness of man did not turn it to his own destruction'. He adds that the same observation can be made about the winds as has been made about C. Marius, i.e., that it is uncertain whether it would have been better for the state if he had existed or not.¹⁴³ Indeed, the usefulness of the winds does not outweigh the damage caused by their misuse, Seneca argues. In §11 he further states that one could say that nature would have done better by man if it had not allowed the winds to make navigation possible. This idea resembles the criticism of Stoicism voiced in *De natura deorum*.

However, Seneca is a Stoic: he makes it clear that the divine gift of navigation is in itself good, and that it is only man's misuse that makes it harmful. Twice, he lets the reproach about man's misuse of navigation be followed by this remark: 'even if they do cause harm by the wrongdoing of men who use them evilly, it is not on this account that the winds are evil by nature' (*sed non ideo non sunt ista natura bona, si vitio male utentium nocent*, §5, compare §13). Thus, Seneca uses the same idea that forms the Stoic counterargument in *De natura deorum*.

The tone in which Seneca concludes the whole argument (§15), however, is negative. He generalizes the complaint about man's misuse of nature's gifts, wondering whether it is a good thing that we are able to speak and see, since we misuse these faculties, too:

If we evaluate the benefits of nature by the depravity of those who misuse them, there is nothing we have received that has not hurt us. Who has been helped by being able to see? Or by being able to speak? In fact, who has not found life a torment? You will find

¹⁴³ For information on C. Marius, see Parroni's and Vottero's notes *ad loc.*, with further references.

nothing, even of obvious usefulness, that does not change into its opposite through man's fault.¹⁴⁴

Thus, the idea that god should not have given man navigation (and other things) because of his bad use of these gifts' is strongly present in the epilogue. Although Seneca was of the (Stoic) opinion that navigation was a benevolent gift (only) misused by man, the impression given by the strongly rhetorical text is somewhat different. It must be emphasized that the similarity between Seneca's complaints and the criticism of Stoic philosophy in *De natura deorum* is caused by the nature of Seneca's moralizing text, not by the philosopher's most profound convictions. It is in the nature of the moralizing *vituperatio* to lead to such strongly negative statements.

2.4.4 Technology in *Epistulae Morales* 90

In *NQ* 5.18, Seneca does not condemn navigation in itself, but only the misuse man makes of it. In letter 90 he takes a somewhat different position. He conducts a polemic with Posidonius about the question whether the *artes*, that is, techniques such as building, were invented by philosophers or not.¹⁴⁵ Seneca disagrees with this idea, arguing that philosophy did not participate in technological inventions that also came to be used for the purpose of luxury; this is the basic thought of the letter. For instance, philosophers did not contribute to the invention of the art of building, since it led to all sorts of decadent constructions (90.7ff.). Among the artefacts of technology mentioned the ship also appears (§24).¹⁴⁶ Thus, man's misuse of

¹⁴⁴ In *DND* 2 the eyes and the faculty of speech are also part of those abilities of man praised as proof of providence's care (*DND* 2.140, 142-143, 148-149).

¹⁴⁵ In relation to *EM* 88 we are speaking about the *artes vulgares* (and possibly the *artes ludicrae*) (*EM* 88.21).

¹⁴⁶ The short description points out that the navigation system follows the example of the manoeuvring of fish; Posidonius argued that the *artes* were invented in accordance with natural processes (cf. *EM* 90.22). Seneca's interpretation of 'living according to nature' is different, a reverting to a primitivism without *artes*.

technology here leads Seneca to condemn technology itself. He argues that man lived an ideal life in a purely natural environment, before he built houses or ships.

Posidonius and Seneca may be said to represent two different aspects of (Stoic) thought in their different views. Posidonius regards the emergence of the *artes* as a positive process, which is part of the development of society. This corresponds to the view found in the exposition of Stoic philosophy in *De natura deorum* 2.¹⁴⁷ Seneca represents the negative stance towards technology that is brought about by the precedence of the moralistic point of view.¹⁴⁸

2.5 *Parallels in Pliny's Naturalis Historia*

2.5.1 The theme of man's misuse of nature's gifts

There are a few points at which the discussion of a 'gift of nature' leads Pliny to speak of man's misuse of it, just as Seneca does in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. At

¹⁴⁷ See *DND* 2.150-152. Posidonius has also been regarded as the source of *DND* Book 2 (see Frede 2002, 96 with n.29). In any case, Cicero is willing to let this view represent a more general Stoicism. It may be assumed that the idea of the rule of providence over the world will have led Stoicism to accept this positive worldview.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Lovejoy-Boas (1973) versus Edelstein (1967): the first study investigates the idea of primitivism in Stoic thought (and illustrates it with Seneca's work), while the second discusses the idea of progress, which also appears in Stoicism (and in Seneca's work: see *NQ* 7.25). On the topics of technology and luxury, see also André, J.-M., 'La réflexion sur la technique à l'époque néronienne', in C. Lévy, B. Besnier and A. Gigandet (eds.), *Ars et ratio. Sciences, art et métiers dans la philosophie hellénistique et romaine*, Bruxelles 2003, 143-156. Seneca's attitude towards technology has been discussed with a special intention by Heinonen (2000): she studies Seneca's ideas for their utility for today's society. As she says, 'this study is based on a literature survey of the texts of Seneca in the field of classical philology and consists of analyses and interpretation of the texts from the perspective of futures research' (p.34). The main idea to which she points is that technology should not be used carelessly, without thinking of the moral implications. A passage like *NQ* 5.18 (discussed on pp.73-74; for *EM* 90 see also p.74) serves as the basis for this line of thought. It is meant as an advice for the modern use of technology.

the beginning of *Naturalis Historia* Book 18, since the subject he is going to speak about touches on the idea that nature produces harmful things, Pliny must specify, he says, that it is man who brings harm on himself (§2-5).¹⁴⁹ People impute their own crimes to nature: although nature has created poison, man has found out its noxious use.

Men are described as worse in this than animals, who avoid poison. In the discussion of the ‘declamatory’ passage of *NQ* 5.18 (section 2.2 above), we have seen that the comparison (and contrast) with animals could be used to emphasize man’s depravity. The misuse of poison also leads Pliny to the more general statement that man perverts the elements of nature; he infects rivers and turns mankind’s means of life (air) into a cause of death.¹⁵⁰ We encountered the idea of a misuse of an element of nature, an element of the moralistic discourse, in the epilogue of *NQ* 4b.13. Another moralistic motif in this passage is the idea that man is not content with what is provided by nature, but must add to it products of his own invention (§4).

In *NH* 2.154ff. a similar passage occurs.¹⁵¹ Pliny is speaking about the earth, which should be revered for its beneficence. Among the benefits of the earth he mentions poison (2.156): in this passage poison is even said to have been invented for man’s good, to allow him a painless exit from life. But, while nature had only good intentions with poison, man has made a bad use of it (2.157). Moreover, even if nature had intended poison to be a means to do harm, man could not have complained about it: such a bad use does he make of the earth. For the purpose of

¹⁴⁹ On this passage, see also Beagon 1995. She points out that the subject matter of the book does not demand a defence of nature regarding poison, since no poisons are mentioned (p.125). Therefore, Pliny rather uses a conspicuous place in the book (halfway through it) to discuss a theme that matters to him.

¹⁵⁰ *Nos et flumina inficimus et rerum naturae elementa, ipsum quoque quo vivitur in perniciem vertimus* (§3). It is not entirely clear to me to what this passage refers. Translations speak of the poisoning or dyeing of rivers; the Budé edition further understands the poisoning of the air (to which the description ‘that through which we live’ is usually thought to refer) as a reference to bad breath (note *ad loc.*), a strange explanation.

¹⁵¹ Beagon 1995 (especially p.120-121) also points to the similarity between both passages, the one at the beginning of the *NH*, the other halfway through it.

luxury it suffers all kinds of ill-treatment, the most notable being the habit to dig under the earth in search of gold and other riches (2.158).¹⁵² ‘And we wonder, if earth has also generated some creatures for our harm!’ Here Pliny admits that the earth has produced some harmful things, after all. Like Seneca, Pliny presents nature’s institutions as positive, and regards man, because he misuses these benefits, as guilty.

2.5.2 Moralizing remarks about navigation in the *Naturalis Historia*

Like Seneca, Pliny’s discussion of certain subjects also leads him to make some moralizing remarks on the subject of navigation. He interrupts his discussion of the winds (*NH* 2.117-118) to remark upon the fact that, while in earlier times such natural phenomena as the winds were studied even though life was less easy than nowadays, in his own prosperous time such studies stagnate. The idea of a decadence of science, which appears here, is discussed in Chapter 9 (section 3.2). Pliny adds a remark about navigation: now that it is possible to travel freely on the sea (without the fear of pirates earlier generations had), people only sail out to achieve profit, not knowledge. They do not even reflect upon the fact that a better knowledge of the sea and winds could also serve their avarice. To make up for the neglect of his time, Pliny concludes, and because so many persons navigate, he will give the subject of the winds even more attention than could be expected in his work.

The common link between navigation and avarice is here made.¹⁵³ As Citroni Marchetti argues, in this passage Pliny’s own handling of a theme, in contrast to Seneca’s, is visible. Pliny’s discussion has a practical aim: he claims to discuss the winds with the great number of seafarers in view. This practical usefulness is not

¹⁵² Among man’s crimes towards the earth Pliny also mentions ignoring its nature; this forms the transition to the scientific discussion of earth, in *NH* 2.160ff.

¹⁵³ Compare *NH* 2.125. The sentence *mortis periculo in mortem ruere* used there shows a similarity to certain phrases in Seneca’s epilogue.

found in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, where it is rather a ‘moral usefulness’ that prevails.¹⁵⁴

In another passage concerning the plant flax (*linum*), used for making sails, Pliny is also led to speak of navigation in negative terms (*NH* 19.2ff., the moralizing comments §4-6). In one long sentence he describes man’s audacity in growing a plant that enables him to sail across the world. The sentence accumulates the elements describing man’s audacity. The exaggeration is clear: Pliny says that man does not consider it enough to be borne by the winds alone, but he needs sails, too; sails larger than the ship are not deemed sufficient either; other sails are added to these oversized sails, at different places on the ship; death is provoked in so many ways. From such a small seed, such a tiny plant, comes forth something that carries the entire world everywhere; this is ‘the summit of audacity’.

Thus, an author was liable to make a connection between the discussion of the winds (and related subjects) and a moralistic treatment of navigation. Unfortunately, because of the lack of material, it is often not possible to say in how far Seneca and Pliny followed the conventions of a specific genre.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Citroni Marchetti 1991, 28-30, cf. 171; cf. Williams 2005, 446. Citroni Marchetti also argues that Pliny refrains from elaborating in a moralizing way on subjects that had already been treated at length in the *NQ* (pp.215-216; see for her opinion on the attitude of Pliny towards Seneca pp.37ff.). She mentions the *mullus* (*NQ* 3.17-18; *NH* 9.66), the use of ice (*NQ* 4b 13; *NH* 19.55, 31.40) and the mirror (*NQ* 1.16-17; *NH* 34.160). I am not certain I agree with this theory; perhaps these differences rather point to a more general distinction between the two works: while Seneca’s moralizing comments are found in longer, neatly delineated passages, Pliny makes looser moralistic comments on a subject, some longer, some shorter (although it is clear that the beginning of a book is often reserved for moralizing commentary; cf. Beagon 1995, 118: ‘rhetorical passages...are positioned at structurally significant points, frequently the beginnings and endings of individual books’).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 29 n.24, 171.

3. *The epilogue of NQ 1*

3.1 *The fabella: Hostius Quadra's misuse of mirrors (NQ 1.16)*

At the beginning of chapter 16, Seneca announces to his readers that he wishes to tell them a *fabella*, so that they may understand that lust 'scorns no instrument for rousing passion' and is ingenious in exciting its own madness.¹⁵⁶ Then follows the account of Hostius Quadra's perverse use of mirrors for the purpose of his sexual satisfaction.¹⁵⁷ Recent studies of the *Naturales Quaestiones* have investigated the meaning of the term *fabella*. As Gauly summarizes: '*fabella* bezeichne bei ihm [Seneca] eine Erzählung, die in mehr oder weniger witziger Weise auf Unterweisung des Lesers zielt'.¹⁵⁸ The purpose of this *fabella*, too, is didactic, as Seneca announces: it serves to reveal how lust functions. In view of the scabrous

¹⁵⁶ *Hoc loco volo tibi narrare fabellam, ut intellegas quam nullum instrumentum inritandae voluptatis libido contemnat et ingeniosa sit ad incitandum furorem suum.* The reference to stimulating and inciting the *voluptas* may well be understood in the context sketched in the discussion of NQ 4b.13: the opulent meals were not intended to appease hunger but to stimulate it (section 1.3.1.2 above). Mantovanelli 2001, 69ff. mentions the Hostius Quadra episode while discussing the vice of *libido*.

¹⁵⁷ For the lack of further information about the historical Hostius Quadra and for information about others who (mis)used mirrors (Horace, according to Suetonius *De poetis* p.47, 12-15 Reiff [*vita Horatii* 56-58]), see the references in Vottero *ad loc.* (nn.3 and 5 *ad* 16.1) and Gauly 2004, 121-122, 127.

¹⁵⁸ 2004, 121. About the term Gauly also says 'es ist nicht leicht zu sagen, was dieses recht seltene Wort hier meint' (p.120). Cf. Berno 2002, 224 n.61 about *fabella* and *fabula*. The terms *fabula* and *fabella* (cf. NQ 3.26.7, 4b 7.2, 5.15.1), generally referring to an account of a fictitious character (cf. *Auctor ad Herennium* 1.8.13), may, however, have a wider range, as appears from EM 77.10, where the term *fabella* is used to characterize the account of a suicide. This is also said to have a useful or didactic character: it provides an *exemplum*. According to Lausberg 1973, 229, the *fabella* is an even less refined, simpler account than a *fabula*. Thomsen 1979-1980, 187-190 points out a few characteristics of the *fabella*, such as its style and the appearance of introductory and concluding passages.

content of the passage, it is understandable that Seneca wishes to make his didactic intention explicit.

In the other prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* lengthy descriptions of vice also occur, but the tale of Hostius Quadra's misdemeanour has an extreme character. The detail in which Hostius' vices are presented has made commentators uneasy. Most recently, the problem has been taken up again by Gauly, who wishes to clarify a problem, which, as he says, has occupied commentators for a long time: 'die Frage nämlich, ob nicht die breit entfaltete, detailreiche und anschauliche Darstellung den vorgeblichen Zweck der *fabella*, die Bekämpfung des Lasters, desavouiert'.¹⁵⁹

As a solution to this problem, Gauly gives a metaphorical interpretation of the account (2004, 129). If Hostius' misbehaviour is symbolic of something else, the lengthy description might serve a purpose. Sexual misbehaviour could also be seen in terms of the upsetting of a social order, Gauly argues. A Roman male who took on a passive sexual role went against social norms: with his behaviour, Hostius abolishes social ranks (2004, 122-124). Gauly adds that the terms *monstrum* and *portentum*, with which Hostius is described, show that he is 'ein Phänomen mit Zeichencharakter' (2004, 129). Hostius represents the same kind of portent as natural phenomena do (for instance earthquakes). Thus, Hostius' extreme perversion is the sign of social chaos and of the end of humanity.¹⁶⁰

A metaphorical interpretation of the account is also given by Thomsen.¹⁶¹ According to him, certain terms in *NQ* 1.16 refer to the idea of religious impurity. Thomsen believes that in the context of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the function of

¹⁵⁹ 2004, 127. Gauly quotes a few opinions in support of his discomfort: G.E. Lessing (Sämtliche Schriften, ed. K. Lachmann, third edition by care of F. Muncker, vol. 5, Stuttgart 1890, 279-282) and A. Richlin, *The garden of Priapus. Sexuality and aggression in Roman humor*, New Haven – London 1983, 221. On the question see also Leitao 1998, 127-128.

¹⁶⁰ Gauly adds to this theory elements from Citroni Marchetti's interpretation of Hostius Quadra (1991, 129-130).

¹⁶¹ 1979-1980, 183ff. (especially p.192, 194).

the story is that of a theodicy: the irreverent Hostius is struck by the gods (he is killed by his slaves, Seneca states).

In my opinion, these metaphorical interpretations have one major weakness: they still do not explain why Seneca gives such an elaborate description of Hostius' vice. Moreover, in this specific description of sexual perversion I myself do not see any indication that it should be read as a representation of the end of a social order, as Gauly argues. I prefer to understand the elaborate description of Hostius' vice in the context that has been sketched in Chapter 3 (section 7) of this study: on a few occasions, Seneca mentions a method of presenting vice with its full force or detail, so as to deter people from it. This is related to a technique such as that of the *praemeditatio futurorum malorum* (as described in Chapter 8, section 2.6), and the function of negative *exempla* (Chapter 3, section 8). In the preface of *NQ* 6, Seneca uses similar techniques of amplification in the description of earthquakes. In this context, the lengthy description of *NQ* 1.16 may be regarded as functional. As we will see, Seneca makes Hostius' vice very clear, just as the totality of vice, or possible disasters, should be placed before one's eyes. As Lessing said: '[Seneca] giebt sich alle Mühe die Augen seiner Leser auf diesen Gegenstand recht zu heften. Man sollte schwören, er rede von dem freywilligen Tode des Cato, so feurig wird er dabey!'¹⁶² Indeed, Hostius' evil deed is repeatedly described, with different details. Several rhetorical means emphasize his depravity. We must understand that the purpose of the description is to make one refrain from this vice. This interpretation has the advantage of corresponding to Seneca's announcement in *NQ* 1.16, and of having a clear context in Seneca's moral philosophy.

Although it thus seems possible to speak of a moralizing intent for the passage, its effect is less certain. Readers may well have been enticed rather than deterred by the vice described, or scandalized by Seneca's graphic description. Thus, this passage and form of teaching remains somewhat problematic. On this point, too, a comparison with the *praemeditatio*-like passage of the preface to *NQ* 6 can be made. Indeed, as I mention in Chapter 8 (section 2.6), complaints were voiced, already in antiquity, about the ineffective and unworthy manner of offering solace that characterized a certain form of *consolatio*.

¹⁶² G.E. Lessing (title as mentioned in n.159 above), p.280. Quoted by Gauly 2004, 128.

3.1.1 The rhetorical character of chapter 16

The whole passage of *NQ* 1.16 is designed to emphasize the wickedness of Hostius Quadra. Seneca makes much use of stylistic means such as repetition, anaphora and irony. The representation of gradations in vice, which occurs in the next chapter (1.17) and in *NQ* 4b.13, is not the main characteristic of this text. Hostius' vice is only presented in gradations in §4: as if it were not enough to undergo incredible acts, Hostius also watched them; because he was not content with what he could see, he also placed mirrors all around him in which he could see every aspect of what he was doing. However, Seneca adds with some irony, because Hostius could not always see well (in spite of eyes and mirrors) when his head was immersed in someone else's body, he imagined what there was to see.

Seneca's main procedure in chapter 16 is to mention the same fact, i.e., that Hostius sees his sexual prowess in the mirrors around him, repeatedly, in different words: the horrendous deed is the main focus of the entire passage (§ 2, 3, 4, 5, 7). A few rhetorical techniques further emphasize it.¹⁶³ The vivid and detailed representation Seneca gives corresponds to the rhetorical device of *evidentia*, which describes something in such a manner that it becomes alive for the reader.¹⁶⁴ When one describes something in detail, instead of summarizing it in one statement, one achieves a greater effect, Quintilian mentions in his discussion of *evidentia* (8.3.67-69). Thus, in describing Hostius' vice in such detail, Seneca achieves more than by a neat summary of his activities.

¹⁶³ According to Berno 2003, 36-41 ch.16 consists of a triple description.

¹⁶⁴ See Lausberg 1973, 399ff. ('Die *evidentia*... ist die lebhaft-detaillierte Schilderung eines rahmenmäßigen Gesamtgegenstandes... durch Aufzählung (wirklicher oder in der Phantasie erfundener) sinnenfälliger Einzelheiten'); Lausberg's main source on the subject is Quintilian 8.3.61ff., also 9.2.40, 4.2.123-124. One of the areas in which *evidentia* was applied was the characterisation of a person, in terms of vice or virtue (the *χαρακτηρισμός* or *descriptio*, Lausberg p.406).

3.1.2 Amplification

Several means of amplifying Hostius Quadra's scandalous deeds are found in the passage. To begin with, Hostius' depravity is amplified indirectly by the mention of the Emperor Augustus' reaction to the murder of Hostius by his slaves (§1). The emperor judged this crime unworthy of reprisal and almost declared that Hostius had been justly murdered.¹⁶⁵

Another instance of indirect amplification is the representation of Hostius as even worse than those best known for their lack of *pudor*. In §16.4 Seneca states that even in corrupt persons exposed to every kind of disgrace there is a modesty of the eyes; Hostius lacks such modesty. In §16.6 Seneca compares him with prostitutes: the comparison is to their advantage. Even prostitutes still have some sense of shame left, in contrast to Hostius. They conceal what they do, while he makes a spectacle of it (see also the discussion of the role of sight below). This comparison of shameless persons to prostitutes occurs more often in Latin literature.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Seneca emphasizes Hostius' shamelessness by a recognized rhetorical means.

Amplificatio is a well-known rhetorical device. Indirect amplification could be achieved through *comparatio* or *ratio cinatio*. Both forms are described in Quintilian's discussion of the procedure (*Institutio oratoria* 8.4).¹⁶⁷ In the first form,

¹⁶⁵ There has been some discussion in scholarship about which virtue of the emperor Augustus is shown in this account, *clementia* (towards the slaves: P. Jal, *REL* 35 (1957), 245) or *severitas* (towards Hostius Quadra: Vottero *ad loc.*): see for the discussion Vottero's note *ad loc.* In my opinion, Seneca's intention is not to present a quality of Augustus, but to emphasize the monstrosity of Hostius Quadra. I agree with Vottero when he says that the text does not show Augustus' clemency towards slaves, but his dissatisfaction with Hostius Quadra. However, when Vottero goes on to assert that we have here a case of *severitas* of the emperor, he places a focus on Augustus that is not present in the text.

¹⁶⁶ See Martial 1.34.5-8, Ovid *Amores* 3.14.7ff., Juvenal 11.171ff.

¹⁶⁷ Quintilian mentions four main forms of amplification (and many subdivisions). Cf. Lausberg 1973 (index *s.v. amplificatio*), whose main source is Quintilian. A passage from Juvenal also shows an awareness of such procedures. Juvenal is recounting the tale of a fish

amplification through comparison, one emphasizes a fact by adding a comparison with another, less serious fact (8.4.9-14). This occurs, for instance, when one says: if this had happened when he was in the intimacy of his home, it would have been bad enough, but it happened during the meeting of the Roman people.

When one uses amplification through reasoning (*rationatio*, 8.4.15-26), something is magnified to amplify something else. For example, by praising the military virtues of Hannibal, Scipio, who defeated him, is praised, too. Another example Quintilian gives to explain this form of amplification refers to the idea of luxury. It comes from Cicero, who in order to describe the luxury of M. Antonius says that the beds of his slaves are strewn with the purple coverlets of Pompeius (*Philippica* 2.67). As Quintilian comments: ‘no more, surely, can be said than this, and yet it leaves us to infer how infinitely greater was the luxury of their master’ (8.4.25).

Seneca uses both forms of indirect amplification: a clear example occurs in the epilogue of *NQ* 5, when Seneca says that it is not worthwhile to cross the seas for peaceful reasons (*NQ* 5.18.7; cf. section 2.2 above). We must infer that it is even less worthwhile to cross the sea in the context of war described in the epilogue; a case of amplification through reasoning. It is not always possible to distinguish the specific form of amplification Seneca uses in relation to Quintilian’s categories, but it is clear that Seneca’s moralizing passages are built according to such rhetorical techniques. He also makes great use of the *congeries*, amplification through an accumulation of words or sentences with a similar meaning (Quintilian 8.4.26-28).

bought for a very high price (*Satire* 4.15-17). He emphasizes the fact that the fish is bought at a high price, six thousand sesterces, by the addition of the words, ‘one thousand sesterces for every pound of fish’. This is the way of speaking, Juvenal says, of those *qui de magnis maiora loquuntur*, i.e., who amplify the facts. In the following verses, Juvenal uses the same method, when he emphasizes the price paid for the fish by comparing it to the more important things that could have been bought for the same amount (4.25-27).

3.1.3 The faculty of sight

In the description of Hostius' perverse use of mirrors, sight understandably plays a large role. As has been remarked in earlier scholarship, there is an accumulation of vocabulary pertaining to the faculty of sight in chapter 16.¹⁶⁸ Emphasis is put on the idea that Hostius' vice forms a spectacle he enjoys: 'mirrors faced him on all sides in order that he might be a spectator of his own shame' (§3, see also §5 the repetition of *spectabat*, §6 'that monster had made a spectacle of his own obscenity'). Enjoying one's vice through the eyes is represented as one further degree in viciousness (cf. §3 '...he not only presented to his mouth but to his eyes as well').

The scandalous character of Hostius' deeds is related to the idea that shameful acts are usually done in the dark, and in secret (§3, 4, 5, 6). One should be ashamed of one's vices, and deny having committed them, but Hostius acts openly, showing what he does to himself and approving it. Exceptionally depraved persons are more often described as disregarding the 'norm' of executing immoral deeds in secret. For instance, in Cicero's *Pro Caelio*, Clodia is thus described:

They proclaim that the lust of that one woman is so headlong that she not only does not seek solitude, and darkness, and the usual concealments of wickedness, but even while behaving in the most shameless manner, exults in the presence of the most numerous crowd, and in the broadest daylight (§47).¹⁶⁹

The parallel with Hostius is clear.

In another moralizing passage, the digression in *NQ* 3, where Seneca speaks of the role played by the red mullet at a banquet (3.17-18), sight also plays a role. The delight taken in this fish consists not only in eating it but in seeing it die on the

¹⁶⁸ See Berno 2002, 217-218, with reference to Solimano 1991, 78, Citroni Marchetti 1991, 157ff. (cf. her index s.v. 'sguardo').

¹⁶⁹ See also Martial 1.34 (cf. Ovid *Amores* 3.14). For further parallels, see Vottero's nn.18-19 *ad loc.*

dinner table, since its colour changes during this process.¹⁷⁰ People not only want to eat fish that is as fresh as possible, but they also wish to see it die, after it has provided a long satisfaction for the eyes, and fed their eyes before it fed the mouth (17.3, cf. 18.3). Seneca concludes the episode by saying: 'they are not content to employ their teeth and belly and mouth at the eating place: they are also gluttonous with their eyes' (*oculis quoque gulosi sunt*, 18.7). The moralist consciously applies to the eyes a term that is usually reserved for the sense-organ of taste. Here, as in the Hostius Quadra episode, the eyes form one further means in the fulfilment of vice.¹⁷¹

3.1.4 Hostius speaks

The description is concluded by Hostius' own words (§7-9), which provide the occasion for another description of his debaucheries. A speech made by the protagonist was one of the characteristics of rhetorical *evidentia*.¹⁷² Hostius affirms his complete awareness of his behaviour (cf. §5 *sibi ipse approbavit*), as well as the intention to let everyone participate in this knowledge (*...ne quis me putet nescire quid faciam*, §7). The idea that vice goes against nature's set-up also makes an appearance (§8). Hostius exclaims that nature has achieved nothing in providing so poorly for man's libido, while animals are well provided for their couplings: he will find a way to satisfy his desires. Through the magnifying mirrors he will see more than nature had made possible, by artificial means (*arte*, §7). He adds that there is no use for his viciousness, if he only sins 'within the limits accorded by nature' (*ad*

¹⁷⁰ See A.C. Andrews, 'The Roman craze for surmulletts', *CW* 42 (1949), 186-188, W.H. Alexander, 'Change of colour in moribund fishes (Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* 3.17-18)', *CW* 48 (1955), 192-193.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 165. Citroni Marchetti also believes the motif of sight to have a more general importance in Seneca's work and in the moralistic discourse in general (see p.143). For instance, she refers to Seneca's descriptions of the spectacle of the death of gladiators. In other contexts eyesight may also have a different function: in *EM* 114.25 it is the only way in which those who have exhausted their other means of pleasure by their excesses are able to feel pleasure (so Citroni Marchetti 1991, 138).

¹⁷² See Lausberg 1973, 402, 406, 407ff.

naturae modum). It is interesting that Hostius uses the term *morbus meus* to refer to his vice: the term has a negative connotation that usually appears in descriptions of vice from a moralizing point of view.¹⁷³

A comparison with animals such as Hostius makes occurs more often in moralizing passages, as mentioned in section 2.2 above). Hostius complains that animals have been better provided for what he is interested in. Ungrateful men were more often represented as complaining that animals were better than men in some respects (see e.g. *De beneficiis* 2.29.1). In Cicero's *De natura deorum* 2.145, on the other hand, in the course of the description of man's position in the universe, his senses are said to be far superior to those of the animals.¹⁷⁴ The view was also taken that animals were better provided for in certain respects, but only man possessed reason (*EM* 76.8-9). In Cicero's *De officiis* 1.105, man is also put above animals. These only feel sensual pleasure, while the human mind is capable of much more. When man happens to be too much inclined to sensual pleasure, he conceals these feelings out of shame – that is, if he is not beastly in his desires. Hostius' words and behaviour clearly form a perversion of what man's attitude should be: he is one of those beastly men, who even find the situation of animals more desirable than that of mankind.

3.1.5 Hostius Quadra as *anti-sapiens*

From Hostius' speech it appears that he goes against nature's set-up. His attitude clearly is the contrary of what it ought to be. Hostius may therefore be considered a negative example, or an *anti-sapiens*. This characteristic is pointed out by Berno,

¹⁷³ Compare Citroni Marchetti 1991, 157. For the comparison of vice to illness cf. section 1.3.1.3 above. Hostius also speaks of his *nequitia*, his *obscenitas* and the *stuprum* he commits.

¹⁷⁴ The commentary of Pease *ad loc.* provides more parallels for both the idea that men are better than animals, and the reverse. For an extensive discussion of the comparison of men and animals on these points see U. Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch im Denken der Antike*, Amsterdam 1977.

who moreover argues that certain specific terms in the account are contrasting echoes of Stoic terminology.¹⁷⁵ Although I also consider Hostius to demonstrate the opposite of virtuous behaviour, the terms Berno mentions do not all convince me. For instance, she contrasts Hostius' sexual *patientia* (mentioned §5, 7, 9) to the virtuous *patientia* of the Stoic sage (as it appears in other Senecan texts). I am not sure whether this echo of the Stoic sage is evoked in *NQ* 1.16: *patientia* is a normal term in a sexual context.¹⁷⁶ There is therefore no indication that it should be contrasted to the Stoic sage's attitude. Likewise, Berno points to the notion of *exercere* (in §7 for instance). This is a fairly normal term, which can be used in different contexts. It is therefore doubtful whether, reading this text, one is directed to compare Hostius' 'exercising' with that of the Stoic sage.

3.1.6 The *fabella* as a moralizing digression

In an early edition of the *Naturales Quaestiones* (Ruhkopf, 1794), chapter 16 was left out of the text, on the grounds that it was not necessary to the argumentation of the book.¹⁷⁷ Although the reason for this deletion was probably the scabrous content of the passage, the presence of what is regarded as an unnecessary, foreign passage inserted in the *Naturales Quaestiones* still causes some difficulties. Again, this is certainly partly due to the specific content of the passage, but the question is also part of the more general question concerning the place of the moralizing passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones*; the description of Hostius' extreme vice seems to exacerbate the problem. Berno's recent discussion of the epilogue (2002, 2003) is especially interesting in this context: she undertakes to demonstrate the importance of a cognitive element over the moralistic element in the passage. In her view, the presence of a cognitive theme relates chapter 16 to the rest of *NQ* 1. Thus, she

¹⁷⁵ 2002, 221-224; 2003, 45-50.

¹⁷⁶ See J.N. Adams, *The Latin sexual vocabulary*, London 1982, 189-90.

¹⁷⁷ Mentioned by Waiblinger 1977, 4 n.28: 'F.E. Ruhkopf, L.A. Senecas physikalische Untersuchungen aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen, Erster Teil, Leipzig 1794, VII: (*Nat. Quaest.* I 16 ist ausgelassen) "Übrigens kann es in Absicht auf den Zusammenhang vollkommen entbehrt werden"'.

points to the motif of sight in the chapter; sight also plays a role in the scientific discussion of *NQ* 1 (cf. the discussion in section 3.4.2.3 below).¹⁷⁸

Berno's conclusion is that the Hostius Quadra episode is well integrated in the book; she also states that it has proven not to be a digression.¹⁷⁹ We may ask ourselves, besides the question whether a cognitive theme is as strongly present in the passage as Berno argues, whether it is necessary to unite the passage with the rest of the book in such a way. Should we really do our best to reduce the moralizing and digressive character of this passage? Could such moralizing digressions with a didactic intent not have their place in a work on physics? I would rather think that as a moralistic piece (only) the *fabella* fits the work well, since Seneca is also determined to show the moral lesson to be learnt from the study of phenomena related to mirroring.

The discussion about the position of the Hostius Quadra episode in *NQ* 1 will be taken up once more below, under 'The relation of the epilogue to the rest of the book' (section 4). In the first part of chapter 17, which will now be discussed, themes of natural and moral philosophy occur together, unlike the situation in chapter 16.

¹⁷⁸ Berno also argues that the first sentence of ch.16, which introduces the account by mentioning its intention (i.e., to demonstrate the ingenious ways of lust), contains a cognitive aspect (2002, 219-220; 2003, 41-42). Her reasoning concerns the use of the term *ingeniosa* for *libido*, which is related to vice's habit of inventing new things (cf. section 1.3.3). However, the *ingeniositas* of vice is part of the moralistic language and therefore does not introduce a non-moralistic, cognitive element in the sentence, in my opinion.

¹⁷⁹ 2002, 224; 2003, 53 (a clear conclusion: 'so far I have demonstrated the connection between the Hostius Quadra episode and the rest of the work, to show that it is not a digression'). Berno wishes to avoid marking the passage as a 'digression', and believes this can be achieved by finding other than moralizing themes in the text (especially clear in her 2002 study, e.g. on pp.216, 219, 224, 228). This implies that she attaches a negative connotation to the term digression, a view with which I do not agree. For a discussion of digression see also Chapter 1, section 1.4. Especially interesting in Berno's discussion of *NQ* 1.16 is the comparison of Hostius with characters in Seneca's tragedies (2002, 225ff.), as well as the discussion of Hostius' death (2002, 227-228), mentioned at the beginning and end of the chapter.

3.2 *On the correct usage of mirrors (NQ 1.17.1-4)*

Because mirrors are used for perverted and decadent ends, the inquiries of philosophers into the nature of the mirror are being ridiculed. Philosophers investigate the way in which this object functions, and why it functions as it does (17.1-2). Mirrors are certainly not intended for purposes of luxury, Seneca states. Two correct uses of mirrors are given, related to natural and to moral philosophy (17.2-4). Mirrors enable one to see the sun in all its force, and its eclipse, without being blinded. Mirrors moreover serve the acquisition of self-knowledge, and give good advice: beautiful and ugly, young and old people should act in accordance with their condition. 'This is why nature has given us the opportunity of seeing ourselves', is the conclusion (17.4).

The right use of the 'object' under discussion is expressed more clearly in this epilogue than in the other moralizing passages, where it is mostly man's misuse of an object that is described.¹⁸⁰ Interestingly, Seneca mentions both a 'physical' and an ethical usage of the object.¹⁸¹ These usages perhaps seem somewhat artificial: the misuse of the object for the purpose of luxury and vice is contrasted to its 'philosophically correct usage'.

The two ideas Seneca uses to describe nature's original intention with the mirror are well-known. As appears from parallel passages, the practice to look at an eclipse via a basin filled with a liquid was generally known in antiquity.¹⁸² It is also described in the course of the main discussion of *NQ* 1 (12.1), where it is not given a particular relief as 'nature's intention'. Seneca describes how, when one wants to see an eclipse of the sun, one puts recipients filled with oil or pitch on the ground: these liquids are less easily blurred and therefore show the images they 'receive'.

The 'moral usage of the mirror' Seneca mentions was also more widely known in antiquity. Indeed, the mirror more often appears as the means to gain self-

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Stahl 1960, 81.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Waiblinger 1977, 66.

¹⁸² See Vottero *ad loc.* for parallels: for instance Lucretius 4.210-215, Diogenes Laertius 7.146.

knowledge. The advice to look into a mirror is especially attributed to Socrates.¹⁸³ What one sees in the mirror should not provide advice about one's external appearance, but about one's behaviour: the mirror serves as means of introspection. In this context, it becomes less relevant that it should be a real mirror: it is also possible for someone to realize his age (and act according to it) without literally looking in a mirror.¹⁸⁴

3.2.1 The ambivalence of the mirror

The mirror appears to be an ambivalent object, destined for good purposes but used for wicked ends. This characteristic has been discussed in a wider context than that of the *Naturales Quaestiones* by some studies, such as McCarty (1989), who also mentions the 'moral use' of the mirror as its correct usage, and speaks of 'catoptro-erotic entrapment' (the category in which Hostius Quadra belongs) among its negative usages.¹⁸⁵ Whereas such studies consider the ambivalence of the mirror

¹⁸³ See for example Diogenes Laertius 2.33. For Apuleius *Apologia* 13ff. see below. A more complete overview of parallels is given by Vottero's commentary *ad loc.* See also Jónsson 1995, 47, Gauly 2004, 120 with n.140. Gauly remarks that the mention of the aged person who is enjoined by the mirror to think about death may well be Seneca's own addition.

¹⁸⁴ In *De ira* 2.36.1-3, Seneca speaks about the effect of a mirror on angry people, who see something of their enraged feelings in it. (Cf. Jónsson 1995, 47-48, who refers to the wider distribution of this thought: see for instance Plutarch *De cohibenda ira* 6). In this passage Seneca also shows doubts about the effect of the mirror: those who come to this means of introspection to be changed are already changed, whereas (still) angry persons find an angry face agreeable to see. At the beginning of *De clementia*, Seneca states that he will form a mirror for the emperor Nero with this work: by writing about clemency he aims to bring Nero to this virtue. Here, the image of the mirror, applied to the work *De clementia*, is used in a metaphorical sense. Cf. Jónsson 1995, 84. In the *NQ*, the reference to the mirror remains closer to the actual object. Leitao 1998, 154ff. gives a dubious interpretation of the *De clementia* passage: the fact that Seneca says that he will function as a mirror for Nero leads Leitao, among other things, to speak of a sexual connotation.

¹⁸⁵ See also F. Frontisi-Ducroux, J.-P. Vernant, *Dans l'oeil du miroir*, Paris 1997, especially chapters 7 and 8. The argumentation in this book is sometimes of a dubious quality: for

itself (and its story through the ages), in the *Naturales Quaestiones* the mirror appears in the context of misused ‘gifts of nature’.

The epilogue of *NQ* 1, and especially the double function of the mirror mentioned there, is the starting point of Jónsson’s discussion of this object.¹⁸⁶ He speaks of it as an ‘instrument de vision indirecte’ and an ‘instrument de la connaissance de soi’ (1995, 35). Both these functions, he argues, are likely to be twisted: the mirror as ‘instrument de vision indirecte’ is misused by Hostius for his immoral ends. The mirror’s function as ‘instrument de la connaissance de soi’ is misused for the purposes of luxury.¹⁸⁷

Jónsson inquires whether there is a corresponding ideological background in Seneca’s time for his opinions about the mirror. We have already seen that the usages of the mirror Seneca mentions as nature’s intention with this object were more generally known in antiquity.¹⁸⁸ From an archaeological survey it further appears that the mirror was indeed an instrument of luxury. Moreover, the engravings found on mirrors often have erotic connotations. Thus, the mirror is a suitable object for Seneca’s moralistic remarks. Because of the combined presence

example, on p.181 the question why the mirror is reserved for women is discussed. The suggested answer is: they cannot see their genitals, unlike men, but the mirror helps them here, as is shown in the tale of Hostius Quadra.

¹⁸⁶ 1995, 21ff. Jónsson also gives a general interpretation of the *NQ*.

¹⁸⁷ This categorization is perhaps too strict: the misuse of the mirror for purposes of luxury need not be related to its function as promoting self-knowledge. However, the fact that the mirror was used when adorning one’s face may have led to the idea that it should rather be used for less superficial purposes (cf. Jónsson 1995, 47: the idea of the mirror as ‘instrument de la connaissance de soi’ is a positive tradition ‘concernant le miroir en tant qu’objet de toilette’).

¹⁸⁸ Jónsson also points out other examples of (correctly used) ‘vision indirecte’ through the mirror (pp.56-60). These concern less literal cases: for instance, in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.779-783 Perseus is said not to have been transformed into a rock because he only saw the face of Medusa via a bronze shield; the mirror functions as an indirect way to see something (without being harmed by it, just as in the case of an eclipse). This part of Jónsson’s study is less relevant for the *NQ*.

of these different aspects, Jónsson considers the epilogue of *NQ* 1 ‘a synthesis of the different conceptions of the mirror’.¹⁸⁹

3.2.2 Apuleius’ passage on mirroring

A justification for the usage of the mirror that is related to natural and ethical philosophy is also found in Apuleius’ *Apologia* (ch.13ff.). The comparison of this passage to *NQ* 17.1-4 yields interesting results. Apuleius is defending himself against the charge that he possesses a mirror: the charge implies that a philosopher ought not to be associated with such an object and its connotations of luxury and vanity.¹⁹⁰ In his defence, Apuleius uses several arguments. Besides arguing that the possession of a mirror does not necessarily imply its use for vain purposes, he states that it is no crime to know one’s image (13-14). With reference to the legitimate existence of statues and other means of reproducing a person, he claims that mirrors give a far better image, one that is provided by nature (*natura oblatum*), whereas statues are made by craftsmanship (*artificium*).

The argumentation continues by mentioning the acceptable usages of the mirror also found in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. It is legitimate to study one’s face in a mirror: indeed, this is what Socrates recommended to his pupils. Both beautiful and ugly people derive good advice from it for their behaviour (15). From the moral use of the mirror, Apuleius proceeds to its scientific interest. The philosopher should also ask why a mirror reproduces images (15). Different theories about this process are enumerated. Additional questions are also listed, such as the question why different sorts of mirrors create different reflections (16).

¹⁸⁹ 1995, 48. The functions of the mirror mentioned in the *NQ* are also found in later times; Jónsson follows their traces in subsequent chapters. He states that the different functions led to different forms of symbolism (p.63ff.). An example: a person’s acts may be said to show his soul ‘as in a mirror’. Jónsson distinguishes the symbolic use of the image of the mirror from the functions of the mirror mentioned in the *NQ*.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Lucian, *Piscator* 44-45, where a cynical philosopher is found to have a mirror (and other dubious possessions such as riches) in his bag, instead of more appropriate objects such as books.

The enquiry after the origin of the rainbow and the two suns, both phenomena discussed in *NQ* 1, is also mentioned.

Apuleius' passage resembles *NQ* 1.17.1-4 on a general level: both authors react to the reproach that philosophers should not occupy themselves with mirrors. In both reactions the idea appears that one obtains moral knowledge from the mirror, and that this instrument is part of the knowledge of the world to be achieved. Like Apuleius, Seneca mentions that philosophers inquire how mirrors work, adding a few specific questions that preoccupy them (*NQ* 17.1). However, his version is less elaborate than that of Apuleius: Seneca does not mention any specific theories or questions concerning the mirror (the place for this would have been the physical discussion). His attention turns towards the question of nature's intention with this object (not destined for luxury, but...). The idea that philosophers investigate the working of the mirror does not serve as a justification for their interest in it, as it does in Apuleius' passage: for Seneca the justification of the mirror related to natural philosophy lies in the fact that it permits to see the heavenly phenomena indirectly.

In view of the general similarity between both passages, one might conclude that Apuleius knew *NQ* 1.¹⁹¹ However, his version also contains much that differs from Seneca's text. Even if he depended on the *Naturales Quaestiones*, he must have had other sources, too, notably for the theories concerning mirroring he mentions. Book 4 of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* contains a discussion of mirroring that probably was the starting point of later traditions on the subject, and a source for some of the facts mentioned by Apuleius.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Cf. Berno 2002, 220, n.34 'Apuleio, che si difese rielaborando Seneca', cf. 2003, 43 n.36.

¹⁹² See the extensive discussion of Lucretius 4.269ff. by Koenen 1995. Koenen refers to Apuleius' passages several times, and compares it with Lucretius, notably on pp.54-56: Lucretius formed one of Apuleius' sources. Apuleius himself concludes the passage by mentioning the learned Archimedes of Syracuse, who is most famous for the attention he gave to the mirror. It is a tantalizing thought that the idea of both a physical and an ethical 'philosophically correct usage' of the mirror, as mentioned in Seneca and Apuleius, would have occurred in other (unpreserved) texts, too.

3.3 *The tale of the gradual increase in the (mis)use of mirrors (NQ 1.17.5-10)*

3.3.1 Rhetorical aspects

In the last part of the epilogue, Seneca describes how mirrors became luxurious objects. This passage, like the Hostius Quadra episode, especially lends itself to a rhetorical analysis, within the context of the Roman moralistic discourse.

Seneca clearly states that man's use of the mirror for purposes of luxury is a distortion of this product of nature. In an early age, man 'had not yet twisted benefits into vice or seized upon inventions of nature for the purpose of lust and extravagance' (17.5). The description of the gradual introduction and use of mirrors coincides with a pattern of gradual decadence. Adverbs of time and other temporal indicators shape the description of this process:

At first...then...after a worse people went into the very earth...iron was first in use...then came the other evils of the earth...and next...later, when luxury had already become supremely powerful...luxury, encouraged by sheer opulence, has gradually developed for the worst... (§6, 8, 10).

At first, people only saw themselves by accident, in natural mirrors such as the water of a river. When they began appreciating this view, they went to such mirrors more often. The next generation, a more decadent age, started digging under the earth and found the precious metals hidden there. The discovery of iron was followed by the discovery of a metal that made it possible to see oneself. People first saw themselves in it by accident, but soon an object was made for this specific purpose. It was not yet of silver, but of a cheaper and fragile material. After this first stage of the account, leading up to the invention of mirrors, the second stage describes how mirrors became more refined, expensive and more widely used. Mirrors as large as the human body were made, decorated with silver, gold and gems. Their price was very high: the daughters of *libertini*, who were now buying such mirrors, needed more money to do so than the amount of a woman's dowry in earlier times. Finally, mirrors had become part of a man's and a soldier's luggage, too.

In 17.10, concluding the entire episode, Seneca replies to the question ‘is a mirror by now used for the sake of grooming only?’, by saying that, on the contrary, ‘there is no vice for which it has not become indispensable’ (*iam speculus ornatus tantum causa adhibetur? Nulli non vitio necessarium factum est*). Thus, at the end of the description the idea that the mirror might be used for grooming – that is, for decadent purposes – is presented as the less depraved usage: it is for every vice that mirrors are now used. This conclusion takes us back to the idea underlying the Hostius Quadra episode.¹⁹³ As in other epilogues, the final statement is concise, general, and has a striking effect.

In §17.6, Seneca says that when a more decadent age dug under the earth to uncover what should have been left there, iron was discovered first. He comments that if man had only dug up iron, he would have done so without danger. Afterwards, other materials in which one could see oneself were discovered, for instance bronze. Commentaries remark at this point that Lucretius (5.1285ff.) gives the correct order when he says that bronze was dug up first, followed by iron.¹⁹⁴ It is quite understandable why the reverse order is found in Seneca’s text: Seneca presents the development in the use of mirrors as a gradual process, corresponding to a pattern of gradual decadence. When man started digging under the earth for what nature had put away there, he first dug up iron, which could not be used as mirroring metal. The discovery of iron was already a bad thing, but the arrival of a material of which mirrors were made is considered even worse in this passage.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Cf. Gauly 2004, 125.

¹⁹⁴ See the Budé and Loeb editions, and Vottero and Parroni’s remarks *ad loc*. It is not entirely certain what the historical truth in this matter is (Vottero refers to H. Blümner, *Technologie und Terminologie der Gewerbe und Künste bei Griechen und Römern*, Leipzig 1887-1912, reprinted Hildesheim 1969, 39-56), but the idea that bronze was found first, and iron followed, was certainly more widespread in classical texts.

¹⁹⁵ The Loeb edition makes the interesting remark that Seneca’s comment on the discovery of iron, *et id impune homines eruerant si solum eruissent*, can be understood in two ways. Besides the obvious meaning in this context that man would not have come to evil by digging up only the metal iron since he would not have been able to make mirrors of it, Seneca may also have meant that iron would not have caused evil if it had only be dug up

Digging under the earth in search of metals and other riches is one of the standard themes of the Roman moralistic discourse.¹⁹⁶ The extraction of metals from under the earth was also part of the representation of the process of gradual decadence, as appears from, e.g., Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.137ff. Like Seneca, Ovid presents one metal (gold) as worse than the other (iron). In Lucretius' account of the discovery of metals (*De rerum natura* 5.1241ff.), iron is described as a better material for weapons (1281ff.). In this sense, the discovery of iron could also be presented as a calamity. Seneca has adapted the pattern of gradual decadence to the specific object he discusses.

In §17.8, Seneca remarks that the mirrors of his time cost more than the amount of the dowry given by the state to poor women in earlier times. He illustrates this by referring to the daughters of Scipio, who could certainly not have bought one of the mirrors of Seneca's age, since they were so poor that they had to receive a dowry from the Roman state. Seneca considers this an honour.

In Seneca's *Consolatio ad Helviam*, the daughters of Scipio are also mentioned as an example of honourable poverty (12.6-7). Seneca is consoling his mother for the fact that he has been exiled, and arguing, among other things, that the poverty that accompanies exile, and thence poverty in general, is not dishonourable.

Scipio's daughters received their dowry from the public treasury because their father had left them nothing...happy the maidens' husbands in having the Roman people as their father-in-law! Do you think that those whose daughters dance upon the stage and receive dowries of a million sesterces at their weddings are happier than Scipio, whose children

and not used. Both interpretations seem possible, but I prefer the first one because it fits the context best.

¹⁹⁶ Other passages in Seneca's work where this theme appears are *NQ* 5.15 and *EM* 94.56-59. In Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* similar ideas are found (*NH* 2.157-8 and 33.1-3); cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, index s.v. 'estrazione dei metalli'. See also H. Zehnacker, 'Pline l'Ancien, lecteur d'Ovide et de Sénèque (N.H. 33.1-3)', in H. Zehnacker and G. Hentz (eds.), *Hommages R. Schilling*, Paris 1983, 437-446 (with Citroni Marchetti's reaction p.256 n.77: one should see the similarity of thoughts in these authors as the spread of common thoughts rather than as a dependence of Pliny on the others).

had the senate as their guardian and received from it a weight of copper for their dowry?
Can any one scorn poverty when she has a pedigree so illustrious?¹⁹⁷

In both cases, the daughters of Scipio serve as a positive example, to illustrate the idea of honourable poverty. In the epilogue of *NQ* 1, this *exemplum* is moreover related to the idea of the purchase of expensive mirrors. This shows how Seneca used the available ‘moralistic material’ to illustrate a specific case.

3.3.2 Gauly’s interpretation of *NQ* 1.17

In his discussion of the end of *NQ* 1, Gauly argues that Seneca does not depict the primeval age as entirely virtuous: several elements indicate a ‘Relativierung des Topos von der reinen Frühzeit’ (2004, 125). The discussion of Gauly’s ideas will help me to clarify my views on the passage.

According to Gauly, in the description of the primeval age as *aetas illa simplicior* (§5), the use of the comparative marks the purity of the early age as relative. This is possible, but not necessarily true.¹⁹⁸ Gauly further claims that ‘die Unverdorbenheit der ersten Menschen’ is questioned by Seneca’s use of a ‘false quotation’ from Virgil. Seneca illustrates the idea that in the early ages men only used mirrors they came across by chance with two lines from the *Eclogae* (2.25-27) about an accidental mirroring in the sea. In fact, Gauly points out, it appears from the context of the quotation that the person who is looking into this mirror is doing so out of vanity; this does not fit in with Seneca’s representation of the early age as virtuous. This is certainly true, but it is not certain that Seneca purposefully uses the quotation to give some ambivalence to his description of the good early men. It is

¹⁹⁷ *Scipionis filiae ex aerario dotem acceperunt, quia nihil illis reliquerat pater... o felices viros puellarum, quibus populus Romanus loco soceri fuit! Beatioresne istos putas, quorum pantomimae decies sestertio nubunt, quam Scipionem, cuius liberi a senatu, tutore suo, in dotem aes grave acceperunt? Dedignatur aliquis paupertatem, cuius tam clarae imagines sunt?*

¹⁹⁸ It is well-known that when comparing two instances the comparative may have the meaning of the superlative. Seneca could be comparing his time to a more virtuous time.

possible that he simply dismissed the context of the lines. Research about Seneca's quotations from Virgil has shown that Seneca is interested in the moral aspect of Virgil's work, and that he occasionally draws his own moral lessons from Virgil.¹⁹⁹ Seneca could have disregarded the fact that in Virgil's account of mirroring in the sea vanity plays a role.

The ambivalence of the representation of gradual decadence is more clearly visible in the passage about retrieving metal from under the ground, Gauly argues. Indeed, he considers this to refer to *NQ* 5.15, where the same subject is related to the idea that man was always depraved. This is an interesting reasoning: the idea that all ages were equally decadent could influence the representation of the gradual decline into vice. The occurrence of both thoughts with one author indeed poses problems of interpretation. I myself prefer to argue that the statement that all ages were equally virtuous does not necessarily undermine the representations of gradual decadence in Seneca's work; both views serve as separate moral lessons.

Gauly signals one last point in the text where he believes some ambivalence to be present, and thus to undermine the lesson provided by the virtue of the ancients. This concerns the passage where Seneca states that the first generations of men paid attention to grooming, but without need of a barber: they took care of their hair themselves, 'they shook it like the mane of a noble animal' (§7). Gauly remarks: 'der Vergleich mit den stolzen Gesten edler Tiere unterminiert die Vorstellung schlichter Strenge' (2004, 126). I do not understand how the mention of the gestures of noble animals could undermine the simple severity of the representation. Below, I will mention a passage of Musonius Rufus' work from which it appears that the comparison with the mane of noble animals is a recurring element in the context of instructions about hairdressing.

It will be clear that I do not agree with the idea that in these passages the virtue of primeval generations is presented as lesser. I consider Seneca's description to be more straightforward. Of course, a gradual decadence of mankind is paired with the gradual discovery and increasing use of mirrors, but Seneca also describes the primeval virtue before that time in *NQ* 1.17.

¹⁹⁹ Mazzoli 1970, 218ff., especially 225, 227.

3.3.3 Cleanliness: the 'normal' usage of mirrors in between vice and virtue

In *NQ* 1.17, Seneca contrasts the extreme abuse of the mirror with the philosophically correct usage of it. It seems that what we would consider the normal, neutral use of the mirror, serving personal grooming, is lost between these extremes, or is considered a luxury usage. The only instance of this use of the mirror is the following remark in the Hostius Quadra episode: 'go on now and say that the mirror was invented to keep ourselves clean; the things that monster said and did with it are disgusting to mention' (*I nunc et dic speculum munditiarum causa repertum! Foeda dictu sunt quae portentum illud...dixerit feceritque...*, 16.3). Here the fact that the mirror serves to clean oneself only seems mentioned as a contrast to Hostius' 'dirty' abuse of it.

The use of the mirror for toiletry purposes is further mentioned in terms of decadent or luxurious behaviour. In 17.2, Seneca states: 'surely nature did not provide us with mirrors in order that we men may pluck out our whiskers (*barbam velleremus*) in front of a mirror or make our faces smooth' (*faciem viri poliremus*). Thus, to shave one's beard is regarded as decadent behaviour.²⁰⁰

At the beginning of the account of the gradually spreading misuse of mirrors, the cleanliness of earlier, virtuous generations is dissociated from the later use of the mirror (see especially §7). Seneca is at some pains to state that in spite of the fact that they did not have a mirror, these people were clean: they washed off their dirt in the river. This dirt is further described as 'grime collected in working': if early men were dirty, it was from 'noble' dirt, caused by hard work. The positive picture of early virtue is constructed carefully. These men also took care to comb their hair ('that hair, which it was the custom of men formerly to let stream down') and their long beard (*prominentem barbam*), without further artifices. They did all this by themselves, without help from barber or wife. The long beard is in contrast with the

²⁰⁰ Compare the *RAC* s.v. *effeminatus* (vol.4 [1959], p.632-633). To shave one's beard, as well as to have long hair, was regarded as a sign of effeminacy. The *RAC* mentions some authors who spoke in negative terms about these habits (cf. my remarks below). Long hair that was carefully tended was also regarded negatively; this may explain why Seneca gives such attention to the description of the 'good' long hair of early people.

habit of shaving one's beard mentioned in 17.2: the beard is associated with primitive virtue, and a shaved face with decadent *mores*.

In letter 86 Seneca discusses a similar subject: he compares the modest bathrooms of earlier generations with the luxurious buildings of his own time.²⁰¹ The early Romans did not bathe every day, he states. They only washed those parts of the body that were filthy from the work they had done each day, and took a bath every week (*EM* 86.12).²⁰² Having mentioned these facts, Seneca reacts to the interjection that the ancients must then have been filthy persons; he replies 'they smelled of the army, work and virility'.²⁰³ Here, too, the filth of earlier generations is characterized as a 'virtuous filth'. Seneca adds that since the invention of spotless baths people have become dirtier. We see how the idea that earlier generations spent less time cleaning or adorning themselves is given a positive turn. The fact that his own generation has turned cleaning oneself into a luxury operation leads Seneca to profess a preference for the situation of earlier times.

The description of the care early generations paid to their hair (17.7) may seem strange. However, this theme appears to have been the subject of philosophical instruction. One of Musonius Rufus' short diatribes, *Diatribes* 21, is devoted to the subject of hairdressing. Musonius Rufus argues that man must only cut away from his hair what is useless. Hair and beard are useful: the beard is man's distinctive sign, like the comb for the cock and the mane for the lion. From the beard nothing

²⁰¹ Henderson 2004, 93ff. discusses this letter at length. He analyzes Seneca's rhetorical strategies (see e.g. p.108ff. about the passage on baths), speaking of his amplification, generalizations (p.113, cf. p.1), cumulation (p.112) and figures of speech (p.113). Henderson demonstrates how Seneca creates a lesson, using the place mentioned in the letter as his starting point.

²⁰² The Loeb edition *ad loc.* compares this with a statement of modesty from Varro's *Catus vel de liberis educandis* (§19): *mihi puero modica una fuit tunica et toga. .balneum non cotidianum* (Nonius Marcellus, *De honestis et nove veterum dictis* 108.26).

²⁰³ Different punctuations of this passage exist. The anonymous interlocutor says: *liquet mihi immundissimos fuisse. Quid putas illos oluisse?* To which Seneca answers: *militiam, laborem, virum*. It is also possible to link the sentence *quid putas illos oluisse* to Seneca's answer to the anonymous interlocutor.

must be removed, from the hair only what disturbs. In cutting one's hair, one must conform to nature: this statement is quoted from the Stoic philosopher Zeno. Hair must certainly not be cut out of vanity, as do those who shave their beard. A description of various effeminate, unnatural *coiffures* is given.

This passage demonstrates that hairdressing was a subject on which serious philosophical instruction was given. The comparison with animals occurred in this context, as appears from Epictetus' work, too.²⁰⁴ In his description, instead of giving prescriptions to his contemporaries regarding their hairdressing, like Musonius Rufus, Seneca transposes the behaviour one should show regarding hairdressing to the primeval, virtuous age: he describes the ideal attitude concerning hair as that of the ideal past. From the fact that he emphasizes that early men took care of their hair themselves, one may presume that, besides shaving, the habit of 'having your hair done' was also prominent in Seneca's time.

3.3.4 The comparison with Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*

Like other moralistic passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, this part of the epilogue can be compared with material from Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*. Pliny briefly discusses mirrors in Book 33, while speaking about the metal *argentum* (*NH* 33.128-130). He does not attach moralistic remarks about the use of mirrors, but he does add such remarks to the discussion of other metals. Thus, his work provides observations about the misuse of metals for the purpose of luxury similar to those in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

In *NH* 33.152-3, for example, Pliny mentions among other instances that even soldiers have decorated their swords and other equipment with silver, despising ivory. Seneca, too, mentions soldiers' use of luxury as the apex of decadence: at the end of his description, he says that women's toiletries have become part of all men's

²⁰⁴ See 1.16.9-14 and 3.1.31ff. for the comparison with the cock's comb and the lion's mane, and for the idea that the beard is useful as a male characteristic, and that it is effeminate behaviour to shave oneself. Athenaeus 13, 565 a-d reveals that Chrysippus also spoke on the subject, in his work *On the good and pleasure*, recommending not to shave one's beard.

luggage, including that of soldiers (17.10).²⁰⁵ Soldiers represented one of the categories of people who were supposed to be more austere and less given to luxury or vice.²⁰⁶

In *NH* 33.146, a short description of gradual decadence is given, concerning silver tableware: dinner tables, too, gradually became overloaded with various ornaments, just as mirrors did. In 33.152, Pliny remarks about the metal *argentum* that it serves the purposes of eating as well as those of vice (*eademque materia et cibis et probris serviat*). Like the mirror, it is ambivalent, although Pliny, unlike Seneca, contrasts the perverse use of this material with its utilitarian character (rather than its 'philosophical' usage).

Finally, in Book 34 Pliny mentions *en passant* the possession of luxury mirrors by slaves. The metal *stagnum* (an alloy of silver and lead) was used to make very fine mirrors, until even maids began using silver mirrors, he deplores (34.160). Seneca speaks about the fact that the daughters of freedmen are buying mirrors at enormous prices (*NQ* 1.17.9). In *EM* 86.7 he also mentions that freedmen make a display of the worst possible luxury (when building their bathrooms). The fact that certain groups of society (*parvenus*) indulged in luxury was also a moralistic theme.²⁰⁷

3.4 *The relation of the epilogue to the rest of the book*

3.4.1 The explicit connection

In the course of the scientific discussion in *NQ* 1, Seneca is led a few times to speak about distorting mirrors, in connection with the explanation of the rainbow by

²⁰⁵ Cf. Juvenalis 2.99ff., who speaks of *speculum civilis sarcina belli* (v.103). He mentions the mirror among other signs of decadence.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 154. Compare on soldiers and vice also Vottero's n.28 *ad loc.*

²⁰⁷ Cf. Vottero's n.24 *ad NQ* 1.17.9. Gauly 2004 gives the social aspect of luxury and vice a more important role; cf. his interpretation of Hostius Quadra (2004, 122ff., mentioned in section 3.1 above).

means of theories that involve mirroring. Thus, in 1.5.13-14 the idea that the rainbow is a non-resembling image of the sun is explained by reference to the fact that not all mirrors reflect accurate images. Some mirrors show frightening images: they distort the face. Others produce a pleasant reflection, since they exaggerate the strength (the muscles) and magnitude of the body; again, other mirrors have other peculiar effects. Therefore, it is no wonder that in the mirror formed by a cloud a distorted image (*species vitiosa*) of the sun is formed. In 1.6.2, the same facts are used to explain that the rainbow appears far larger than the sun itself: certain mirrors have the property of reflecting much larger images, blowing up forms to 'monstrous proportions' (*in portentuosam magnitudinem augeat formas*).

In 1.15.6-8, just before the Hostius Quadra episode, Seneca divides the phenomena discussed in Book 1 into two categories, those that are real fires, with a substance of their own, and those caused by mirroring.²⁰⁸ He emphasizes the unreal character of these *simulacra* (15.7-8). Moreover, the reflected images may be deformed: here, Seneca refers to the various distorting mirrors he has already mentioned, those that deform the face and those that magnify images beyond human proportions (*ut dixi...sunt quae in infinitum augeant ita ut humanum habitum modumque nostrorum corporum excedant*).

As appears from these passages, deforming mirrors play a role in the explanation of some of the natural phenomena in Book 1. Distorting mirrors also feature in the *fabella* about Hostius Quadra's deeds: it is such mirrors as mentioned in *NQ* 1.5.14, 1.6.2 and 1.15.8 that occur there, mirrors that emphasize the strength of the body. Indeed, reference is made at the beginning of chapter 16 to 'mirrors of the kind I have just mentioned, rendering images much greater than the objects' (16.2, *specula huius notae cuius modo rettuli, imagines longe maiores reddentia*). The backward references (1.16.2 to 1.15., 1.15 to 1.5) show that the theme of mirroring remains present in Seneca's mind.

Thus, there is an explicit connection, as well as a transition, to the subject of the epilogue.²⁰⁹ It seems probable that Seneca describes the general distinction between the two kinds of phenomena he has discussed at the end of the scientific discussion

²⁰⁸ For this distinction, see also Gross 1989, 16.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Gauly 2004, 115, 117.

with the purpose of providing a transition to the *fabella*; the mention of the distorting mirrors themselves in 1.15 certainly has this purpose. Thus, we must prefer the idea that the transition to the epilogue has been prepared to the idea that it is sudden.²¹⁰

It is further interesting to remark that the distorting mirrors that form the link between the discussion of physics and the epilogue are not Seneca's main interest in chapter 16. They are certainly part of the décor (appearing in 16.2, 16.8), but Seneca focuses on Hostius Quadra's absolute immorality (exemplified by mirrors).²¹¹

It is particularly mirrors enlarging the body that are relevant to the Hostius Quadra episode. One may ask whether in *NQ* 1.5 and 1.15 this specific detail is mentioned because of the account that will conclude the book. Several terms used in the description of the distorting mirrors are interesting in this context, since they refer to ideas found in chapter 16. Thus, in 6.2 the term *portuentuosam magnitudinem* ('monstrous proportions') is used: Hostius is called a *portentum* ('monster') in 16.3, and two paragraphs later Seneca speaks of *illos concubitos portentuosos* ('monstrous coitions'). Also, the phrase *species vitiosa* (1.5.14) is used to indicate

²¹⁰ Stahl 1960, 76-77 and Gross 1989, 20 have already stated that ch.15 forms a purposeful transition to the epilogue. In his note *ad* 16.1 Vottero remarks that the transition to the epilogue is brusque: 'come, in questo libro primo, dalla prefazione di carattere morale si passa alla trattazione scientifica con un procedimento esteriore e sforzato, così anche l'epilogo (capp. 16 e 17), in chiave moralistica, si stacca dall'argomento del libro in modo piuttosto brusco'. Gauly 2004, 115 has remarked that in this book the beginning of the epilogue is 'besonders scharf vom Vorhergehenden abgesetzt', with reference to the formula *hoc loco volo tibi narrare fabellam*. Again we notice that such transition formulas are considered brusque or gauche in modern research; however, the use of these formulas was standard practice (cf. Chapter 1, section 1.5).

²¹¹ Cf. Gauly 2004, 115: 'der Gebrauch von Zerrspiegeln ist dann aber in der Erzählung von Hostius nur eines der Momente, die die Obszönität seiner sexuellen Verirrungen ausmachen'. However, as Thomsen 1979-1980, 187 n.90 says: 'it must be observed that the distinctive mark of the story in Seneca is that the mirrors are *imagines longe maiores reddentia*'. See also Koenen 1995, 105, who mentions Hostius Quadra in the context of the usage of several mirrors together in antiquity.

the deformed image of the sun the rainbow forms.²¹² Of course, the rainbow is a ‘defective image’ of the sun, but the term *vitiosa* may also refer to Hostius.²¹³ However, we should be careful in our conclusions: in his *Naturalis Historia* Pliny also mentions deforming mirrors in such terms: *excogitantur et monstifica* (‘monstrous mirrors are also invented’, *NH* 33.129).²¹⁴ Thus, the use of such a term as *vitiosus* may be connected to the account of Hostius Quadra’s vice at the end of the book, but it need not be.

In 15.7-8 the unreal character of the heavenly phenomena caused by mirroring is also mentioned. This aspect of mirrored images is not strongly present in *NQ* 1, but we do find a few references to the mendacious character of mirroring in the description of Hostius’ activities, especially at the beginning of chapter 16 (16.2, 16.3 ‘his insatiable depravity also took delight in misrepresentations’ (*mendaciis*), cf. 16.9).²¹⁵

3.4.2 Implicit connections between the epilogue and the main text and/or preface

Seneca has established an explicit link between the epilogue and the discussion of physics by mentioning magnifying or distorting mirrors. The presence of other, implicit connections is more open to discussion. I will now mention several interpretations of *NQ* 1 in which such connections between the different parts of the book are suggested.

²¹² In *NQ* 1.4.1 Seneca also speaks of the rainbow as a badly rendered image of the sun (*ob vitium figuramque speculi*).

²¹³ Leitaø 1998, 132 argues that moral and physical terminology are combined in this description.

²¹⁴ The terms *monstrum* and *portenta* also had a non-moral significance, referring to the existence of abnormal things. See Schrijvers 1999, 17-19, with reference to the Greek equivalent τέρας (on which see P. Stein, *Teras*, Marburg 1909).

²¹⁵ Jónsson 1995, 52ff. shows that the distortion of the image and its unreal character was one of the connotations of mirroring in antiquity.

3.4.2.1 Waiblinger's theory

Waiblinger argues that there are closer connections between the different parts of *NQ* 1.²¹⁶ He points out that the order in which the physical phenomena are discussed in the book goes from smaller to greater resemblance to the sun. This order also has a deeper meaning: it represents a gradual acquisition of knowledge (corresponding to the image of the mind's search for knowledge in the preface of the book). At the same time, a *Gegenbewegung* is visible in the explanation of the natural phenomena: there are indications that what is seen through a mirror is unreal, and hence, that the acquisition of knowledge does not lead to real knowledge. The gradient of knowledge starts at the preface of the book, representing the achievement of knowledge, its counterpart (the gradient of distorted knowledge) ends in the epilogue (or at least in ch.16), which represents the opposite of knowledge in the depraved character of Hostius Quadra.

Waiblinger constructs the ideal, unified book, in which the scientific discussion is more than just a discussion of natural phenomena, and has a deeper meaning when viewed in relation to the preface and epilogue of the book. Indeed, according to Waiblinger, 'Proömium und Finale geben den Schlüssel für das Verständnis der philosophischen Bedeutung des physikalischen Teils' (1977, 66). Unfortunately, Waiblinger's ideas have been proven unacceptable by Gross, with whose criticism I agree.²¹⁷ Gross argues that Seneca did not purposefully arrange to discuss the phenomena in *NQ* 1 in accordance with their degree of resemblance to the sun. Indeed, the positions of certain phenomena run counter to this idea. Between the rainbow and the *parhelia*, which most resembles the sun, the *virgae* are discussed (1.9): these show less resemblance to the sun and so break up the order devised by Waiblinger. Gross adds that the epilogue is of a moralizing nature, and not concerned with the idea of negative knowledge, as Waiblinger thinks.²¹⁸ There is simply no evidence for the idea of a gradual acquisition of knowledge that is

²¹⁶ 1977, 63-71, elaborating on ideas first mentioned by Stahl 1960, 46-8.

²¹⁷ 1989, 17-20; I refer to his more elaborate discussion, of which I only give a short resume.

²¹⁸ Gross adds that the preface, concerned with the sphere of the *aether* as it is, and therefore not fitting Book 1, cannot be included in the discussion about the composition of this book. This reasoning seems too strict to me.

transformed in a distorted knowledge. Moreover, although chapter 16 of the epilogue gives a negative view on the use of the mirror, in the first part of chapter 17 a rather positive view on knowledge through the mirror is found.²¹⁹

3.4.2.2 Leitao's theory

The discussion about the unity and meaning of *NQ* 1 was not closed by Gross' rejection of Waiblinger's ideas. We find ourselves faced with a renewal of the discussion in some recent publications, among which that by Leitao (1998). Leitao presents a highly speculative interpretation of *NQ* 1 along the same lines as Waiblinger.²²⁰ According to him, the discussion of natural phenomena in the book also has a moral aspect. Whereas in the preface the perfect, celestial light is presented, in the central part of the book distorted 'lights' are discussed (1998, 128-9). The distortion of these phenomena increases as the book proceeds, and culminates in the description of Hostius Quadra's vice. In my opinion, Seneca nowhere gives an indication that the natural phenomena he discusses should be regarded as imperfect in a moral sense.

Leitao adds another layer of construction to Book 1: the preface speaks of the divine, the epilogue of the bestial, and the scientific discussion is about man (1998, 138). Here again nothing seems to point to the presence of this superimposed layer of meaning. Leitao further argues that these different areas (god, man, beast) are distinguished from each other by different oppositions, such as light versus darkness and body versus soul. I agree that the opposition body/soul is one of the means to differentiate between man and god, but I doubt its relevance to *NQ* 1 (it is only

²¹⁹ The composition of the scientific discussion of *NQ* 1 remains an interesting question (on which I cannot focus here); cf. Gross 1989, 20. The book first speaks about meteors, continues with a longer discussion of the rainbow, and concludes with the meteors already discussed. Gross has proposed some explanations for this structure. From the different statements in the two passages about meteors (in ch.1 and 14-15), he concludes that Seneca used different sources for these passages and was not able to combine these. He wanted to add something to the subject of the meteors, and did this at the end of the book. As another possibility, Gross adds the idea already mentioned that Seneca may have wanted to return to the subject of the meteors in order to make a transition to the epilogue.

²²⁰ Berno distances herself from Leitao (2002, 216; 2003, 34-35); cf. Gauly 2004, 130-131.

found in the preface). Leitao's theory becomes really hazardous when, while discussing the opposition bounded/unbounded, he discovers that, whereas man is bound by limits (see for instance §9 of the preface), both god and Hostius are unbounded (heaven does not have any boundaries and Hostius refuses to be bound by human limits). A series of correlations between preface and epilogue follows: they demonstrate the similarity between the philosopher or god and the beast (1998, 145). For instance: just as the philosopher is in search of what nature has put beyond our eyesight, so Hostius is in search of what he cannot see. Leitao concludes this section by remarking that these 'echoes' between god's and Hostius' behaviour cannot have been intended by the author, but are 'evidence of deconstructive tendencies in the text'. Leitao further explains the equation of Hostius the beast with god or the philosopher by means of the model of cyclical destruction and renewal of the world, as it is described at the end of *NQ* 3 (1998, 146ff.). At the end of each period of decadence the beast turns into the philosopher, the inhabitant of the first period of the world: at that moment they are equated.²²¹

3.4.2.3 The motif of sight

Some researchers, especially Berno, connect the epilogue to the rest of the book by the motif of eyesight.²²² We have seen that sight is given an important role in chapter 16. It also comes up in the preface and the main part of *NQ* 1.²²³ In the preface, the statement most easily related to the *fabella* of ch.16 concerns the idea that natural philosophy was not content with things visible, but suspected that there was

²²¹ See for instance the statement: 'man may need to become beast before becoming god' (p.152). In the last part of his article (p.153ff.), Leitao argues that god and beast can converge at other moments than that of the cyclical destruction and renewal of the world, for instance through mirroring.

²²² 2002, 218; 2003, 50-52. With this point, she wishes to demonstrate the presence of a cognitive theme in the *fabella*, as we saw in section 3.1.6 above.

²²³ However, the theme is certainly not central to the entire preface, as Berno says (2002, 218 and 2003, 50). The statements related to eyesight in the preface are part of the description of the ascent of the mind to the heavens and its contemplation of the world from there.

something greater beyond what the eye could see (*[naturalis philosophia] non fuit oculis contenta: maius esse quiddam suspicata est ac pulchrius quod extra conspectum natura posuisset*, §1). This idea is compared to Hostius Quadra's attempts to see what is beyond the limits of his sight.²²⁴

In the course of the scientific argumentation, it is more exactly the idea of the weakness of the human eyesight that is used.²²⁵ It serves to explain the fact that something is different from how we see it: for instance, in chapter 3.9-10 Seneca argues that mirroring takes place in each drop of rain, although we do not see this as many cases of mirroring. One could also speak of a 'deficiency of sight' concerning the Hostius Quadra episode: Hostius is not content with what he is able to see and uses mirrors to make up for this deficiency.

Should the theme of eyesight in chapter 16 be related to the statements in the course of the natural inquiry or the preface? In my opinion, there is no indication that we are meant to do so: the mention of sight can each time be adequately understood in the specific context in which it occurs.

3.4.2.4 Gauly's theory

Like Berno, Gauly points out that both the knowledge achieved through mirroring and the weakness of the senses occur in the physical and moral parts of the book.²²⁶ As for other books, Gauly also points to the 'Dialogizität' between the Roman, moralistic part of the book and the scientific discussion (2004, 121). However, he especially develops the connection between the preface and epilogue of the book (2004, 119, 131-133). Hostius is an example of the vice that must be resisted, according to the preface. But there is more. Seneca also states that it is not enough

²²⁴ Cf. Leitao 1998, 145.

²²⁵ In 1.2.3, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9-10 and 14.3-4. In 1.17.2 there is another mention of the weakness of human sight, when Seneca speaks of *imbecilli oculi ad sustinendum comminus solem*.

²²⁶ 2004, 117. On p.116 Gauly states: 'es ist offensichtlich, dass sich hier die Frage nach dem Verhältnis des moralisierenden Epilogs zum naturphilosophischen Traktat mit besonderer Schärfe stellt'. On p.117 he distinguishes the epilogue of *NQ* 1 from the moralizing texts of *NQ* 3 and 4b because it has more than a superficial connection with the central discussion of the book.

to have vanquished *portenta*; one should do more than overcome vices: one should ascend the skies (preface §5). Gauly uses this passage to argue that the purpose of the epilogue cannot only be to persuade the reader not to give in to such vice. In this context, he points to the metaphorical interpretation of the Hostius Quadra episode discussed in section 3.1 of this chapter. He also mentions the idea of ‘filth’: Hostius is characterized as filthy, while the preface mentions that only those who have got rid of their filth can ascend the skies (§11). This passage is related to *NQ* 3 preface §18, which (according to Gauly) states that the elevation from *sordida* is more important than moral matters are. Man must leave such filth as Hostius’ vice behind him and ascend to higher questions. Gauly concludes that it remains possible for the reader to see a moral lesson in the epilogue to *NQ* 1, but that the other reading he proposes is more plausible.

The different interpretations of *NQ* 1 provide interesting material. There are those, such as Waiblinger and Leitao, who include the scientific discussion in an interpretation of the book that is based on its moralizing passages. They believe the discussion of natural phenomena to have another, metaphorical meaning. A more restricted and specific attempt to link the physical and ethical parts of the book has been made by pointing to a theme that occurs in both parts, i.e., the theme of sight. Several researchers remark on this connection. It has further been argued that the epilogue shows an interest in the theme of knowledge that links it to the central part of the book.

Several scholars also mention another category of connections, i.e., between the moralizing passages in the book, the preface and the epilogue (Leitao, Berno, Gauly). An interesting possibility is provided by the occurrence of the word *portentum*. In the preface, Seneca asks what one has achieved when one has fought one’s vices: *portenta* have been vanquished, he answers (§5). The term is also applied to Hostius Quadra. It is difficult to ascertain whether such an echo was actually intended by Seneca (or recognized as such by the readers of his time).

It is further interesting to consider in what kind of argumentation scholars use these connections. Leitao mentions the connections between preface and epilogue in the context of an equation of Hostius with god or the philosopher (represented in the preface), imposing a metaphorical layer on *NQ* 1. Gauly uses the connection

to argue in favour of a certain interpretation of the epilogue. Since Seneca says that it is not enough to have vanquished *portenta*, the epilogue should not be regarded as the representation of a vice readers should avoid. It seems to me that Gaully's argumentation is based on the assumption of too strict a coherence between the moralizing passage at the end of the book and one of the statements Seneca makes in the preface. The preface is centered on a specific theme: the elevation of the mind above the world, while the epilogue contains a description of the depravity that is often represented and fought in Seneca's work.

The fact that so many different interpretations have been put forward for a text such as *NQ* 1 should warn us of being too rash in our interpretations, as I argued in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1). However, because many scholars believe it worthwhile to interpret the *Naturales Quaestiones* in such ways, one hesitates in rejecting these possibilities. Nonetheless, it seems important to question the issue, at the very least. It is certain that rejecting such theories reduces the possibilities of interpretation. However, I believe that in this study I also offer a possible way of understanding the *Naturales Quaestiones*; the prefaces and epilogues may be regarded and studied as separate pieces treating moral themes related to the study of nature.

It is important to admit the possibility that the *Naturales Quaestiones* is a complete work without such connections and metaphorical meanings. It does not seem unacceptable to me to restrict what one says about *NQ* 1 to this: a discussion about natural phenomena involving mirroring is followed by an epilogue that discusses the mirror from a moral point of view, developing the idea of the misuse by man (and the intended correct use) of one of nature's gifts.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONSOLATION FOR DEATH BY NATURAL PHENOMENA:
NQ 6 AND 2

1. *Introduction*

The preface and epilogue of *NQ* 6 and the epilogue of *NQ* 2 contain consolations for death by earthquake and by thunder and lightning. The *consolatio* is a genre in which the practice of philosophy is clearly recognizable.¹ In *EM* 94 and 95, the *consolatio* is mentioned as one of the genres that belong to the *pars praeceptiva* of philosophy.² The aim of this part of philosophy was to ensure that a lesson took effect, rather than to present new information. It will be important to keep in mind that ‘the consolations had as their goal to recall well-known things, to reactivate them in the soul’.³

Certain characteristics of the consolation are related to the fact that this genre belongs to the practice of philosophy. It is known for combining arguments from different philosophical schools: in order to offer the best consolation, all arguments are allowed.⁴ The *consolatio* is also known for a strong presence of *topoi*, which is

¹ ‘An ideal genre in which to observe the ancient practice of philosophy’: Davidson 1995, 22. Cf. Wilson 1997, 48, Newman 1989, 1479 n.13: the *consolatio* (and other literary genres employed by the Stoics) ‘can be used to illustrate both the theory and practice of the *meditatio*’.

² *EM* 94.21, 39, 49; 95.34, 65: cf. Chapter 3, section 5. In her discussion of the consolation, Garbarino 1982 also points to the context provided by *EM* 94-95 (p.6ff.).

³ I. Hadot 1992, 17; the English version I quote is found in Davidson 1995, 22. I. Hadot 1992 gives a good introduction to the consolation in the context of the practice of philosophy. See also Kassel 1958, 17 (‘im stoischen System ist die Consolatio nach ihrer Funktion ein Stück der praktischen Ethik’), Kenney 1971, 32, Trillitzsch 1962, 22-23, who mentions it in connection with the diatribe. In *EM* 30.7 Seneca speaks about the repetition of well-known consolatory thoughts (cf. *EM* 64.8).

⁴ See Cicero, *TD* 3.76. Cf. I. Hadot 1992, 28-29, Stork 1970, 13, 18. In his edition of the *Ad Helviam* (Paris 1918), Favez mentions that the consolation did not belong to a specific

compatible with the fact that it recalls well-known arguments.⁵ Finally, since it aimed at achieving a certain effect, at working on the emotions of a person, it had a strong rhetorical character. The consolation has therefore been considered an intermediary genre, between philosophy and rhetoric.⁶

We will encounter these characteristics in the consolatory passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Thus, we will expect Seneca to speak fiercely against the fear of death. The aim of the text will influence its form. The philosopher will also want to bring about an *adsidua meditatio* of the idea of death.⁷ The constant exercise of important thoughts was an important part of the process of making philosophical advice effective (for the subject of meditation see further especially section 3.7 of this chapter).

Seneca's work contains different specimens of the *consolatio*. Besides his three *consolationes*, consolatory themes also occur in the *Epistulae Morales*.⁸ EM 63, 93

philosophical school, but was a general philosophical form (introduction, p.xl). See also C.E. Manning, 'The consolatory tradition and Seneca's attitude to the emotions', *G&R* 21 (1974), 71-81, who demonstrates that, in keeping with this idea, both Stoic and Epicurean consolatory arguments are found in Seneca's work.

⁵ Cf. I. Hadot 1992, 17-18, Stork 1970, 10, Garbarino 1982, e.g. 23. Curtius 1967, 90-92 mentions the 'Topik der Trostrede' as one of the examples of topical literature.

⁶ Cf. I. Hadot 1992, 16, Kassel 1958, 48, Stork 1970, 10, 18: the *consolatio* has a 'Zwischenstellung' between rhetoric and philosophy. Garbarino 1982 demonstrates this intermediary position of the consolation in her first chapter (p.5ff.). A. Setaioli, 'La vicenda dell'anima nella *Consolatio* di Cicerone', *Paideia* 54 (1999), 148, 150 says that rhetoric and philosophy are difficult to distinguish in a consolation.

⁷ Cf. EM 82.8-9. See also Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.1.38.

⁸ Two of Seneca's three *consolationes*, the *Consolatio ad Marciam* and the *Consolatio ad Polybium*, offer consolation for the death of a person. The consolation addressed to Polybius, which offers solace to the powerful ex-slave for the death of his brother, contains an important non-consolatory aspect, since Seneca is asking to be allowed to come back to Rome from exile. In the *Ad Helviam*, Seneca offers consolation to his mother for the fact that he has been exiled. Although death was the main cause of sorrow covered by consolation, other afflictions were consoled, too: see Cicero *TD* 3.81. Cf. Summers' short

and 99 are the most extensive consolations; in several other letters, consolatory passages and themes occur. The frequent appearance of the theme of death shows its importance.⁹

De remediis fortuitorum liber, probably written by Seneca, provides interesting evidence for the topical nature of the consolation.¹⁰ This work, of which only an epitome has been preserved, discussed consolation, ‘remedy’ for several misfortunes, among which death was the most important. The epitome provides us with the skeleton of the work: it shows that each paragraph contained a different consolatory argument or commonplace, in answer to the repeated assertion ‘you will die’. For instance: ‘you will die; this is man’s nature, not his punishment. You will die; one of the conditions of life is the death appended to it’ (*“morieris”. Ista hominis natura est, non poena. “morieris”. Hac conditione intravi, ut exirem* (etc.)). The work has been considered a collection of consolatory commonplaces that could be used in a consolation.¹¹

In her study of the epilogue of Book 3 of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, Stork makes a distinction between a *consolatio* in the stricter sense, offering consolation for the death of a person, and works she calls *de morte*, which offer consolation for the fear of (one’s own) death.¹² The texts of the *Naturales Quaestiones* belong to this second category. As Stork says, these texts do not follow the *consolatio* genre completely, which makes the appearance of consolatory commonplaces less evident.¹³

introduction to the genre in his commentary to Seneca’s *EM* 63 (1921, 243-5). Studnik 1958 and Wilson 1997 have studied the theme of *consolatio* in the letters.

⁹ Cf. *EM* 30.3: *hoc philosophia praestat, in conspectu mortis hilarem*; cf. Scarpata 1965, 259ff., Leeman 1971, 324-5. See SVF 3.768 for the importance of the theme to the Stoics.

¹⁰ Cf. Lausberg 1989, 1925-6. Newman 1989, 1495 argues that even if the work was not written by Seneca, it may be used to give an example of Stoic consolation/meditation in the imperial period.

¹¹ See Stork 1970, 13, Newman 1989, 1495-6.

¹² 1970, 18-20, 22 (‘Schriften “de morte”... ihr Ausgangspunkt ist nicht die Trauer, sondern das Problem des Todes, genau betrachtet, die Angst vor dem Tod’), 160.

¹³ A testimony to the existence of specific rules for the genre of *consolatio* is found in Seneca’s *Ad Marciam* 2.1, where Seneca states that it is usual to begin with *praecepta* and

In Books 6 and 2 of the *Naturales Quaestiones* Seneca offers consolation for death caused by the occurrence of certain natural phenomena (earthquakes and lightning); this leads to a particular form of consolation. The first two chapters of the preface of Book 6 contain an ingenious argumentation, as will be revealed in the following discussion.

end with *exempla*. In spite of the correspondence on a general level between the *NQ* and *De rerum natura* (both contain discussions of natural philosophy accompanied by consolatory texts), a comparison between the consolatory passages of the *NQ* and that of *DRN* Book 3 does not produce strong resemblances. Stork notes the few minor correspondences that exist between Lucretius' text and Seneca's work (see her index *s. v.* Seneca, and see for instance p.161). Berno 2003, 277-279 draws a short comparison between *NQ* 6 and Seneca's *consolationes*.

2. *A reading of NQ 6.1-2*

2.1 *Place and time of earthquakes*

Book 6 begins with a description of the earthquake that had just occurred in Pompeii (1.1-3). This earthquake gives Seneca a double motivation for writing this book: besides the general aim of his work, the recent disaster itself leads to the inquiry into the causes of this natural phenomenon and the attempt to give solace (6.1.4). In his description of the recent earthquake, Seneca mentions where and when it took place, and what damage it caused: it occurred during the winter, a period that was considered to be free from such dangers. This element adds to the fearfulness of the catastrophe: one should have been safe from such a peril at the moment when it occurred.¹⁴

The idea that earthquakes usually did not take place during the winter is not further developed in the preface. In the following paragraphs, Seneca will emphasize that earthquakes can occur at every moment and in every place (see especially 1.10-15, although he also mentions at one point that some areas are hit more often than others, 1.13). The omnipresence of the danger is part of the lesson of the preface, as we will see.¹⁵ In the course of the physical discussion, earthquakes are said to occur more often in certain places than in others. Regions near the sea are hit more often; this has resulted in the association of Poseidon with earthquakes (23.4). Chapter 26 discusses the influence of location on the occurrence of earthquakes; Seneca rejects the idea that Egypt never suffered from earthquakes and that certain islands are safe from them.

¹⁴ Compare Waldherr 1997, 74. Parroni's note *ad loc.* refers to Aristotle *Meteorologica* 2.8, 366b, 2ff. and Pliny, *NH* 2.195, which state that earthquakes (and lightning) occur *more often* during the autumn and spring. Seneca's formulation somewhat simplifies the situation.

¹⁵ Rosenmeyer 2000, 112 comments on Seneca's statement that earthquakes can occur everywhere: 'a surprising remark, documenting a questionable historical and geographical awareness'.

Thus, whereas in the preface Seneca strongly focuses on the omnipresence of earthquakes, in the course of the inquiry into the causes of the phenomenon he agrees with the fact that certain areas are hit more often than others, and participates in a discussion on the influence of place on the occurrence of earthquakes. The reasoning of the preface leads to a specific representation of the earthquake, which is not found in the discussion of the causes of the phenomenon, as we here begin to see.

2.2 *The amplification of the disaster (6.1.4-7)*

In the following paragraphs of the preface, the horror of the earthquake is described – and emphasized (6.1.4-7).¹⁶ Two main arguments contribute to the representation of the earthquake as the worst possible catastrophe. The first argument (6.1.4-6) is the idea that, since the earth itself is shaking, death is omnipresent: there is nowhere to go. Part of the terror inherent in this idea results from the emphasis on the fact that the earth is (normally speaking) the most stable element in the world, and that it is this element that is shaking. The following sentence may serve as an example:

Can anything seem adequately safe to anyone if the world itself is shaken and its most solid parts collapse? Where will our fears finally be at rest if the one thing which is immovable in the universe and fixed, so as to support everything that leans on it, starts to waver, if the earth loses the characteristic it has, stability?¹⁷

The second argument that contributes to the emphasis laid on the danger posed by earthquakes is a comparison with other catastrophes (6.1.6-7). These are all described as less disastrous and inescapable than an earthquake, since a refuge can

¹⁶ Waldherr 1997, 74 points out that in this passage the discussion evolves from the concrete description to the abstract, general notion of the danger of earthquakes.

¹⁷ *Quid enim cuiquam satis tutum videri potest, si mundus ipse concutitur et partes eius solidissimae labant, si quod unum immobile est in illo fixumque, ut cuncta in se intenta sustineat, fluctuatur, si quod proprium habet terra perdidit, stare? Ubi tandem resident metus nostri?*

be found for them. For example, flight is a solution in case of fire, a harbour protects from storm. Lightning, the subject of *NQ* 2, is also mentioned: one escapes from it in subterranean places and caves, and lightning never strikes whole populations (6-7). For earthquakes, on the other hand, there are no such solutions.¹⁸

In the conclusion of this passage, the total destruction that is brought about by an earthquake is once more described:

The disaster of an earthquake extends far and wide, is inevitable, insatiable, deadly for the entire state. It gulps down not only homes or families or individual cities; it inters entire nations and regions. Sometimes it covers them with ruins, sometimes buries them in a deep abyss, and does not even leave anything to indicate that what does not exist, at least once was. Soil extends over the noblest cities, without any trace of the way they used to look (6.1.7).¹⁹

In this sentence it is easy to recognize the (rhetorical) elements that amplify the catastrophe, such as the sequel of adjectives describing the earthquake (*inevitabile*, *avidum*, and others), the listing of victims of the earthquake with *non solum... aut... aut... [sed etiam, left implicit]... gentes totas...*, another subdivision of the effect of the catastrophe (*modo... modo*), a further gradation in horror with *ne... quidem*. Such features have been described in the discussion of the moralizing epilogues in Chapter 7 (and therefore receive less attention here). It is clear that the importance of the earthquake is amplified in this passage. It is made to look like the worst possible kind of death.²⁰

¹⁸ Earthquakes and lightning are mentioned together in different passages; see Berno 2003, 149ff.

¹⁹ *Hoc malum latissime patet, inevitabile, avidum, publice noxium. Non enim domos solum aut familias aut urbes singulas haurit: gentes totas regionesque submergit, et modo ruinis operit, modo in altam voraginem condit, ac ne id quidem relinquit ex quo appareat quod non est saltem fuisse, sed supra nobilissimas urbes sine ullo vestigio prioris habitus solum extenditur.*

²⁰ Berno 2003, 243, 244 argues that the manner in which the earthquake is represented at the beginning of the preface corresponds to the point of view of 'l'uomo comune'. On p.243ff. she points to the presence of one main argumentation in the preface, but not in the same sense as I do; according to her, the preface represents the didactic trajectory of the

2.2.1 *Epistulae Morales* 91

Epistulae Morales 91 provides a relevant parallel for the discussion of the preface to *NQ* 6. This letter comments upon the destruction of the city of Lyons by fire and offers consolation for it. At the beginning of the letter, just as in *NQ* 6.1-2, the disaster is amplified. Seneca states that he is not surprised that the fire, this unexpected and unheard-of catastrophe, was not feared, since it was without example: fire had often hurt cities, but never completely destroyed one. Even when a fire was set alight by enemies, it stopped at some point: it rarely took away everything. Earthquakes had also hardly ever been the cause of such complete destruction. Never, in the end, was a fire so bad as to leave nothing standing for another fire.²¹

Seneca emphasizes the unique character of the catastrophe. The fire at Lyons is compared to other instances of the same phenomenon, which are characterized as less destructive. A comparison with another form of catastrophe, as in *NQ* 6.1, is also made: here, the earthquake is mentioned as example of a lesser disaster.²² This shows (if need be) that the arguments are brought about by the circumstances; in a text aiming at describing the horror of an earthquake fire may be said to be less

student from a wrong to a correct representation of the phenomenon (p.244-245, 266).

Berno further points out many stylistic features in the preface.

²¹ *Hoc vero tam inopinatum malum et paene inauditum non miror si sine metu fuit, cum esset sine exemplo: multas enim civitates incendium vexavit, nullam abstulit. Nam etiam ubi hostili manu in tecta ignis inmissus est, multis locis deficit et quamvis subinde excitetur, raro tamen sic cuncta depascitur, ut nihil ferro relinquat. Terrarum quoque vix umquam tam gravis et perniciosus fuit motus ut tota oppida everteret. Numquam denique tam infestum ulli exarsit incendium ut nihil alteri superesset incendio* (§1). The description is continued in §2.

²² Though some caution is expressed in the words *vix umquam*: earthquakes had ‘barely ever’ caused such destruction. According to Waldherr 1997, 74 n. 195, the same valuation of the earthquake as more dangerous than other disasters is also found in *EM* 17.10. This reference must be erroneous.

disastrous (cf. *NQ* 6.1.6), whereas in a description of fire's destructive force the opposite argument will be found.

Recent studies of letter 91 have paid attention to the element of amplification in the description. Viti (1997) argues that Seneca expanded the report of the fire of Lyons for his moralistic purposes. He adduces earlier research, partly based on archaeological material, which had shown that the fire had not been as important as Seneca suggests. In support of this thesis, Viti adds material drawn from the letter itself, i.e., stylistic evidence. He points to Seneca's frequent use of

Rafforzativi (*tam, sic, tot, tantus*) e superlativi, l'insistita contrapposizione tra immagini di grandezza e di nullità, tra la verticalità della città al culmine del suo splendore e l'orizzontalità delle sue rovine... la domanda retorica... la scelta dei verbi (1997, 404-405).

Thus, as Viti says, Seneca has made an *exemplum* of the fire of Lyons: he has 'prepared the terrain' for the reflections on fate and death that follow, forming the *consolatio* of the letter. Similarly, in the passage of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, consolation follows the amplification of earthquakes.

2.2.2 A mechanism

The procedure of augmenting a disaster before offering consolation for it is comparable to a consolatory mechanism described in a passage from the *Consolatio ad Helviam* (2.1-2). Seneca is saying to Helvia that he will be stronger than her *dolor*: he will not begin the battle against it immediately, but first intensify it and stimulate the pain (*nec statim cum eo concurram. Adero prius illi et quibus excitetur ingeram*). In what follows the difference between the *Ad Helviam* passage and the texts we discussed appears: Seneca will, he says, arouse the pain by reminding the person to be consoled of all the other causes of pain in the past. This person will be ashamed to have borne so many miseries, but not to be able to bear

this one.²³ The procedure we have seen, on the other hand, stimulated the pain by emphasizing the cause of pain itself.

Although the mechanism described in the *Ad Helviam* is not identical to that of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, in each case we see how one could first excite pain or fear before offering consolation for it.²⁴ This procedure also appears in the *De remediis fortuitorum*. At the beginning of the epitome, it is stated that ‘death’ will be first treated, since this is man’s greatest fear. Several arguments for this idea are summed up: other disasters do not constitute a total ending, whereas death does; every fear leads up to fear of death; even those who fear nothing fear death (1.2-3).²⁵

In his discussion of *EM*91, Viti seems to explain the use of this procedure as a ‘preparation’ for the consolation that follows. We may indeed wonder about the

²³ Seneca presents fictitious criticism of this method of consolation (‘what kind of consolation is this, which adds other pains to the one already present’): this leads him to explain it. The idea that multiple hardships make any one of them seem less important is a consolatory principle; it also occurs in Cicero’s *Ad familiares* (4.5), in a letter sent by Sulpicius to Cicero at the death of his daughter. Sulpicius begins the consolation by adducing other miseries Cicero has suffered, to conclude that the death of Tullia is not so awful after all (cf. Kassel 1958, 99, who compares to *TD* 3.67). This mechanism is similar to that of the ‘generality of death’, discussed in section 2.6 below, in so far as it adduces other miseries, one’s own or those of others, as consolation.

²⁴ Contrast the reverse consolatory argument as found (for instance) in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, v.11.

²⁵ In *EM*30, one of the letters concerned with the theme of death, similar arguments are found. Seneca describes the courageous attitude of an old man in the face of his approaching death. At the beginning of the letter, this form of death is presented as inescapable (§4): Seneca contrasts it with other forms, among which the *ruina*, for which an escape does exist. This is comparable to what occurs in *NQ* 6.1 and *EM*91. However, the description of death by old age is not entirely negative, since it is also called a soft kind of death in §4. In the rest of the letter follow consolatory ideas aiming at diminishing the fear of this kind of death (e.g., death is equal for all). In §12 Seneca states that ‘death by old age’ is a good form of death, for which man should thank god. This positive valuation of the form of death under discussion is also found in *NQ* 6.2.

purpose of such a procedure. The amplification of the earthquake resembles the elaborate descriptions of vice we have encountered in the moralizing epilogues, where similar rhetorical means were used. It might be helpful to magnify the fear of earthquakes before reducing it, just as the representation of Hostius Quadra's vicious behaviour in all its force, for instance, is a way to deter from it. The existence of such a procedure has been demonstrated in Chapter 3 (section 7). A dictum Seneca mentions later provides further explanation: the realization of the absence of salvation provides salvation (6.2.1). The idea of the omnipresence of danger functions as some sort of a consolation; it is useful to know that earthquakes can always occur. This notion is discussed further in the rest of this chapter.²⁶ Finally, the consolation will be more evident after the disaster has been emphasized: we will see how the general argumentation of the preface achieves a consolatory effect that is the opposite of the initial feelings about death by earthquake.

Seneca himself admits his rhetorical amplification of the earthquake at the beginning of the second chapter of the preface: 'what am I doing? I had promised solace against dangers that are rare. Instead I am now reporting dangers to be feared on all sides' (2.1). The paradoxical aspect of the consolatory procedure is revealed: the earthquake is no more than a rare occurrence, but Seneca presents it as occurring everywhere.²⁷ We have already remarked that the preface focuses strongly on the idea that earthquakes can happen everywhere and anytime, an idea not found in the rest of the book. The contrast is most clear in chapter 25 of the scientific explanation. Seneca there states that only 'small parts' of the earth are hit during an earthquake, and he consequently presents the Campanian earthquake as not so important; it did not go beyond the borders of Campania (25.3, pursued in 25.4 with other examples). This idea stands in contrast to the lament of the preface that the 'entire world' is unstable.²⁸

²⁶ However, this idea does not really explain the amplification of the phenomenon itself, without generalisation.

²⁷ About the occurrence of paradox in the preface cf. De Vivo 1992, 29ff.; see also section 2.5.1 below.

²⁸ This contrast is also remarked upon by Gaulty 2004, 232; see section 2.7 below for his interpretation. Seneca also has a specific reason for arguing in ch.25 that earthquakes only cover small areas: this supports his theory that earthquakes are caused by the movement of

2.3 *The counter-movement: consolation (6.1.8-9)*

In 6.1.8-9 follows the first reaction to the amplification of the earthquake, the first ‘counter-movement’ in the reasoning.²⁹ Seneca states that although some people fear death by earthquake most (he has done his best to ensure this in the preceding passage), everyone meets the same end, in whatever way one dies.³⁰ This is the main idea of §8-9: it does not make any difference how one dies, hit by one stone or by a whole mountain, alone or in a general earthquake, because one house collapses or the entire world. In the argumentation of the preface, we have moved from the idea that death by earthquake is disastrous and more inescapable than other forms of death to the idea that (the effect of) death by earthquake is equal to any other form of death. It therefore makes no sense to have a greater fear of it.

The idea that the manner in which one dies is unimportant also occurs in one of Seneca’s letters, *EM* 57.6. Man should not fear some mortal accidents more than others, since their results are the same. It makes no difference whether a big mountain or a small guard post falls on a person. It is the cause of death that terrifies, rather than its effect, Seneca concludes (*adeo non effectus, sed efficientia timor spectat*).

air in a subterranean ‘open space’. The earthquakes ‘only’ extend as far as the subterranean spaces. We could here speak of an intentional reduction of the importance of the phenomenon (instead of a magnification). In ch.30, again, the mention of a statue broken into parts by the earthquake leads Seneca to say that an earthquake can do far more stupendous things than break a statue (cf. 30.4 *quantas res hi terrarum tremores quamque mira spectacula ediderint, satis dictum est*). De Vivo 1992 points to the ‘drammatizzazione dei fatti stessi /dei fenomeni fisici’ in ch.27ff. of the book, and especially ch.30 (p.92 ff., especially p.98-100).

²⁹ Compare Wilson’s use of the word ‘movement’ in his discussion of *EM*99 (1997, 52-53).

³⁰ *Nec desunt qui hoc mortis genus magis timeant quo in abruptum cum sedibus suis eunt et e vivorum numero vivi auferuntur; tamquam non omne fatum ad eundem terminum veniat*. In this description, death by earthquake is still presented as an impressive end.

In this section the actual consolation begins, and consolatory commonplaces occur. The idea that everyone comes to die is one of the basic principles of the *consolatio* (compare some of the formulations in *De remediis fortuitarum*, 2.1-2). Seneca adds that the fact that everyone dies without exception is proof of the equanimity of nature (§8). This subdivision of the idea of general death also appears in *EM* 30 (§11) and *EM* 91 (§16), where it serves as consolation for the fire of Lyons: ‘their ashes level all men: we are unequal at birth, but equal in death’.³¹

2.4 *Earthquakes occur everywhere (6.1.10-15)*

In the next section of the preface (§10-15), the amplification of the earthquake is taken up again. Seneca had concluded the previous passage with the thought that one should be courageous in the face of the inescapability of death. Just as for death, there is no escape from earthquakes: they are everywhere. In this passage the basic consolatory idea of the generality of death is developed in the form of the omnipresence of earthquakes. The lesson of the passage is: ‘all places are under the same conditions and if they have not yet suffered from an earthquake, they none the less are liable to have quakes’ (§11).

This lesson is in the first place directed at those who want to leave Campania, where the recent earthquake had taken place: Seneca asks them how they can be sure that they will be safer elsewhere, since the earth is subject to earthquakes everywhere (§10-11: he even suggests they might be more safe where an earthquake has just occurred). The argumentation goes back and forth between the general idea of the inescapability of death and the earthquake in Campania.³² In §12 the idea that every part of the earth may be destroyed is repeated; ‘all regions lie under the same laws: nature has not created anything in such a way that it is immobile’. Now one part of the world is hit, now another. Examples of other places that have been struck by earthquakes are given: Tyrus, cities in Asia, Achaia and Macedonia. Fate travels around, is the conclusion (§13). Not only we ourselves are frail creatures

³¹ Rutherford 1989, 163, e.g., mentions that this is a well-known consolatory idea.

³² Cf. Wilson 1997, 51, who, apropos of letter 99, speaks of a ‘technique whereby the discussion oscillates between examining grief on an abstract and on a personal level’.

subject to fate, but also larger entities such as cities. Still, we believe we can attain certainty and happiness. We do not reflect upon the fact that even the more stable earth is not stable. Here, the ideas of the first section of the preface reappear.

In *EM*91, the ruin of other cities is also one of the arguments adduced as consolation for the fire that destroyed Lyons (91.9-12). So many more (and greater) cities than Lyons have already been devastated. Not only man's constructions, but also nature's works suffer this fate: it is a law of nature. The same examples as in *NQ* 6 are mentioned (cities in Asia, Achaia, Macedonia).³³

In one of Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares*, letter 4.5, in which Sulpicius offers consolation to Cicero for the death of his daughter, the argument of the 'mortality' of greater entities also appears (§4).³⁴ On a voyage at sea Sulpicius comes to realize, while passing a certain area, how many cities that were once flourishing have fallen into ruins (the examples are the same as those of *NQ* 6 and *EM*91). He concludes that men, these tiny creatures, should not complain about dying, since bigger constructions such as cities also perish. This thought, with which he admonished himself, has strengthened him, Sulpicius adds. He then proposes another idea for Cicero to keep in mind (or to 'hold before his eyes'): the death of other persons and recent disasters. Recently many brave men have died; the Roman imperium has suffered great misfortunes. In the face of such disasters, Sulpicius concludes, how can Cicero be so strongly moved by the death of one single woman?

In this passage the death of men and that of larger entities like cities are complementary arguments; both are cases of the 'generality of death'. The one could serve as an extension of the other.³⁵ Both were widespread consolatory ideas.³⁶

³³ The passage is concluded in §12 with a *sententia*. Cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1986, 189 n.20.

³⁴ This letter is discussed in Kassel 1958, 98-103.

³⁵ Cf. *Ad Marciam* 26.6: *nec hominibus solum (quota enim ista fortuitae potentiae portio est?) sed locis, sed regionibus, sed mundi partibus ludet [sc. vetustas]. Totos supprimet montes...*

³⁶ Many references may be quoted here; see for instance Innocenti Pierini 1999a, 20 n.44 and Kassel 1958, 100-101, who adduce Menander rhetor, *On epideictic speeches* 414.2ff., a precept saying that one may (in a consolation) speak of the fact that man is mortal, and add to this thought the examples of cities and entire nations.

In the context of his consolation for fear of death by earthquake, it is understandable that Seneca focuses on the ‘deaths’ of cities and of the earth, not on that of men (see only *NQ* 6.1.14).

2.5 *The second counter-movement*

2.5.1 Solace for *imperiti* (6.2.1-3)

The second chapter opens with a second ‘counter-movement’. Seneca reacts to his own argumentation that earthquakes can occur everywhere with the exclamation that he is not providing the solace for a rare danger that he had promised. However, the awareness of this danger should provide consolation, he adds. This idea is introduced in a complex sentence:

But I place this fact in the category of solace, actually a very powerful solace, since fear without remedy is for fools only. Reason frees wise men from terror; for the uneducated a great sense of security comes from despair.

Ego verum hoc ipsum solacii loco pono, et quidem valentissimi, quoniam quidem sine remedio timor stultis est: ratio terrorem prudentibus excutit, imperitis magna fit ex desperatione securitas (2.1).³⁷

For the wise (for those who are able to receive ‘rational’ information), *ratio* drives away fear. This form of consolation is related to the purpose of the inquiry into the

³⁷ Hine’s edition has *sine remedio timor stultis <salutaris> est*. Other editions, most recently Parroni, do not add *salutaris*. With this addition, the meaning becomes: fear without remedy is salutary for fools; while for intelligent people *ratio* drives away fear, for those without knowledge it is ‘despair’, this ‘fear without remedy’, that gives a sentiment of security. In this case, the sentence *sine remedio timor stultis* becomes the equivalent of the later formulation *imperitis magna fit ex desperatione securitas*. If *salutaris* is left out, Seneca first says that there is always a remedy for fear: a different remedy for different categories of persons. I agree with Parroni that the text is understandable without *salutaris*, and I, too, prefer to leave out what is not a necessary addition. See the editions *ad loc.* for further information. For my remarks on the passage it does not matter which variant one chooses.

causes of natural phenomena: the search for the causes is meant to drive away fear (cf. *NQ* 6.3). For the less intelligent, however, it is out of a great sense of despair that arises a sentiment of security. The amplification presented in the preface appears to be functional: in causing a great sense of despair, Seneca aims at creating a sense of *securitas* for the less educated. He even calls this a ‘most strong form of consolation’.

This sentence leads to interesting questions, which have already been pointed out in Chapter 3, section 6. Preface and physical exposition can be recognized as two different (or complementary) ways to achieve liberation from fear. Liberation from fear by means of the scientific discussion (for the wise ones) is sought in the main part of the book, and liberation from fear by means of an ethical lesson (for the less intelligent ones) is found in preface and epilogue. Like the other books of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, *NQ* 6 therefore discusses one subject from both a moral and a physical point of view.³⁸

In 6.2.2-3 Seneca develops the idea that total despair can provide consolation or a sense of security. He illustrates it with a quotation from Virgil (*Aeneid* 2.354), giving it a more general meaning: one should apply to all mankind what Aeneas said at the fall of Troy to the Trojans when they suddenly found themselves caught between fire and enemy. *Una salus victis nullam sperare salutem*: the only salvation for the vanquished is not to hope for any salvation. An elaborate commentary on this verse is given by De Vivo, who argues that the entire chapter is built around the

³⁸ The difficulty in understanding the sentence is reflected in the diverging opinions of scholars. De Vivo 1992, 27-8 also mentions that the preface is destined to the *imperiti*. On the other hand, Gross 1989, 247 relates the sentence *ratio terrorem prudentibus excutit* to the idea that those who recognize that there is no salvation from the earthquake lose their fear of it. Gauly 2004, 234-235 rejects the sentence as giving an impossible division of the work: ‘diese Differenzierung vermag aber nicht zu überzeugen, weil sich, wollte man sie wörtlich nehmen, eine absurde Teilung des Traktats ergäbe; die Aitiologie des Erdbebensbuches wäre für kluge Leser konzipiert, der Rahmen für die *imperiti*’. However, Gauly does not indicate how we should then interpret the sentence.

paradoxical structure found in the quotation.³⁹ He especially shows that the other *sententiae* in the passage, such as the statement ‘for the uneducated great confidence comes from despair’, also have a paradoxical aspect. As De Vivo mentions, in Seneca’s text the verse has an even stronger character of a *sententia* with a moral function than it had in its original context. In Chapter 3 (section 8), we have seen that the *sententia* was recognized as an effective means to convey a message in such a manner that it would penetrate the minds.⁴⁰

2.5.2 Everything can cause death (6.2.3-6)

In the following passage (6.2.3-6), Seneca continues his demonstration of the idea that everything must be feared – the thought that leads to liberation from fear. Everything can cause our death, he argues. This idea is again related to death by earthquake: besides earthquakes many other kinds of deaths exist that are more likely to happen to us. The most insignificant things are mentioned, such as bad food or a cold. The same argument is repeated over and over: man is stupid to fear death by earthquake, while so many more obvious forms of death may occur. Irony is much employed: ‘without doubt the only thing man has to fear is an earthquake’. ‘Man is stupid to fear the sea, while a drop of water is sufficient to kill him’. Lightning again appears in the discussion: the man who only fears lightning and earthquakes thinks greatly of himself (6.2.4, cf. 6.2.6). These two phenomena are here equated (whereas in 6.1.7 earthquakes were said to be worse than lightning). The message of the passage is summarized in the form of a *sententia*: ‘there is no

³⁹ De Vivo (1992) discusses the passage pp.21-33, with p.32 this summarizing statement. Seneca’s use of quotations has been studied more extensively by Mazzoli 1970. See also Berno 2003, 266 about the function of the poetical citations in this passage.

⁴⁰ De Vivo further argues that the *sententiae* in the moral passages have a different function from the quotations in the scientific discussions of the *NQ*.

greater solace for death than mortality itself' (*nullus maius solacium est mortis quam ipsa mortalitas*, 2.6).⁴¹

At the beginning of the argumentation Seneca had emphasized the terrifying character of earthquakes, but this specific fear is now lessened. The general idea that 'everything / everyone dies' is given another form in this part of the argumentation; we are told that many forms of death are more dangerous than earthquakes. We now understand how the idea that everything should be feared may serve as consolation for the specific fear of earthquakes.

The central idea of this passage also occurs in other consolatory texts, such as the *Consolatio ad Marciam* (11.3-4).⁴² Seneca there argues that man is fragile and dies easily. Several among the examples of man's fragility are similar to those mentioned in *NQ* 6: a lack or excess of food can be fatal to man, a hiccup suffices to kill him. These 'catalogues of causes of death', reflecting the idea that death can occur in many forms, are part of the consolatory commonplaces.⁴³ They can also be used, as we see in *NQ* 6, to make a specific point: many forms of death are closer to us than an earthquake.

2.5.3 Death by earthquake is preferable (6.2.7-9)

A last step in the consolatory argumentation of the preface is found in 6.2.7-9. Not only is death by earthquake less dangerous than other forms of death, but it also forms a better kind of death. Since death is inevitable, to die in an earthquake is a

⁴¹ The *sententia* is followed by the longer sentence *nullum autem omnium istorum quae extrinsecus terrent quam quod innumerabilia pericula in ipso sinu sunt*. See also De Vivo 1992, 31.

⁴² See also *EM* 24.16, 30.16 (death by the hand of an enemy versus death through indigestion).

⁴³ Cf. H.-J. van Dam's commentary on Statius, *Silvae Book 2*, Leiden 1984, 176 (*ad* 2.1.213-218), Esteve-Forriol 1962, 151. This idea is related to that of man's weakness, and the concept of *natura noverca*: see for instance the preface of Book 7 of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, discussed and related to the *consolatio* by Citroni Marchetti 1991, 49-53.

more grand way of dying. In 6.2.9, Seneca uses a quotation from the poet Vagellius to illustrate this idea.⁴⁴ Instead of saying, as Vagellius did, ‘if I have to fall, I would like to fall from heaven’, it is also possible to say ‘if I have to fall, I wish to do so in an earthquake, not that it is legitimate to wish for a public disaster, but because it is an immense consolation to see that the earth, too, is mortal’.

Having started with the horrendous idea of the inescapability of earthquakes, we have then been told that all manners of death are equal, after that that more immediate forms of death than earthquakes must be feared, and we now understand that dying in an earthquake is even preferable. Seneca has given us a grandiose example of a consolatory argumentation.⁴⁵

2.6. Grande solacium est cum universo rapi (*De providentia* 5.8)

The main consolatory idea of the preface to Book 6 is the generality of death: ‘it is a great consolation for death to see that the earth, too, is mortal’ (*ingens mortis solacium est terram quoque videre mortalem*), Seneca concludes. This basic consolatory thought occurs in many texts, in Seneca’s work and in other authors.⁴⁶ Cicero (*Epistulae ad familiares* 5.16.2) calls it ‘that extremely commonplace form of consolation’ (*consolatio pervulgata quidem illa maxime*), ‘which we must always

⁴⁴ For Vagellius cf. Chapter 4, section 2.4.

⁴⁵ Gross 1989, 247 speaks of a contradiction between the thought that all deaths are equal and that an earthquake provides a grander way of dying. He solves this ‘problem’ by appealing to the idea that the consolation may use different kinds of arguments together (including contradictory ones) to achieve its effect; Gross does not seem to recognize the grand argumentation of the preface.

⁴⁶ For Seneca see e.g. *EM* 30.11, 71.12-15, *Ad Polybium* 1.4, the end of the *Ad Marciam* (ch.26) (cf. also Vottero’s note *ad NQ* 6.2.9). See also one of the epigrams attributed to Seneca, AL 232 R² (= 1 Prato = 224 Sh. B.), discussed by Innocenti Pierini 1999b, 118ff. The idea also appears in Seneca’s tragedies, in slightly different formulations, for example the wish to see one’s enemies die, too. See, e.g., *Medea* vv.426-428, *Thyestes* vv.882-4 (cf. the commentaries to these passages). Cf. also Innocenti Pierini 1999a, 11 n.1, with further references to modern studies.

have at hand'. The interaction between personal and general death is explicitly considered a consolatory mechanism in some passages of Seneca's work, such as *EM* 24.16, where Seneca says (in the context of *consolatio*): 'remove the mind from this case of yours to the case of men in general. Say to yourself that our bodies are mortal and frail...' (*abduc illum [sc. animum] a privata causa ad publicam...*).⁴⁷

Book 3 of Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes* contains references to the *consolatio* and therefore offers some background information, in particular for the idea of the generality of death.⁴⁸ Some criticism was directed at the genre: its effect was questioned. The *consolatio* stated that one must be prepared for everything: in what sense, however, could the realization of one's precarious condition help to bear the pain (§55, cf. §73)?⁴⁹ Cicero's reaction to this reproach is that he nonetheless thinks this form of consolation to be very effective. In *Tusculanae Disputationes* 3.59-60, more criticism is directed at the argument of the generality of death: the realization of man's poor condition is argued to add to one's grief, instead of diminishing it. This form of consolation, which consists in reminding sufferers of the misery of others, is moreover said to be for evil people. Cicero again replies to these reproaches by indicating the positive aspect of the argument. Later on, he specifies that the idea of the generality of death should be used with some caution (§79). Although this form of consolation is much used and is often beneficial, it is not effective in every case (*ne illa quidem firmissima consolatio est, quamquam et usitata est et saepe prodest "non tibi hoc soli"*). Much depends on how it is used: it should be well adapted to the circumstances. Just as in a court case one adapts one's arguments to the case and the circumstances, a consolation, too, should be adapted to the situation.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See also *EM* 77.13, *Ad Polybium* 1.4, *Ad Marciam* 12.4, 26.6.

⁴⁸ This form of consolation, adducing other people's afflictions, is said to resemble the use of *exempla* (3.56-57).

⁴⁹ Modern literature has also taken up this criticism: see Kenney 1971, 32-33 ('how effective can formal consolatory writing ever be for those who stand most in need of it?'), C. Martha, 'Les consolations dans l'antiquité', in *Études morales sur l'antiquité*, Paris 1883, 162.

⁵⁰ This indication in first instance applies to the consolation in a strict sense: Cicero explains that one should not adduce *exempla* to show man's misery, but to show his courage in misfortune (cf. *Ad Marciam* 12.5, quoted next). However, I believe that the adaptation of

Criticism of the argument of the generality of death also occurs in other texts.⁵¹ For instance, in the *Consolatio ad Marciam* (12.5), when he has exposed the consolation ‘through general death’ to Marcia, Seneca adds that he does not think so badly of her as to believe that she will be consoled by the mention of an enormous amount of sufferers; this is a spiteful kind of consolation. Seneca will present Marcia with some examples, not in order to show her that death always happens to mortals, but to demonstrate that some people have reduced their misery through their courage. Thus we see how, with some caution, the idea of general death was still used.⁵²

In the preface to *NQ* 6, Seneca uses some ideas that are mentioned and criticized in the *Tusculanae Disputationes*. The idea that one must be prepared for disasters is part of the lesson of the preface: earthquakes can happen at any given place and time, Seneca argues. To be continually conscious of the possibility of an earthquake should reduce one’s fear when that earthquake will finally happen. This is known as the *praemeditatio futurorum malorum*.

The *praemeditatio*, the exercise of familiarising oneself through one’s imagination with future evils, especially death, was used by the Stoics to improve their attitude to the disasters they encountered. It also occurs in Seneca’s work.⁵³ In

the consolation to the specific situation is a more general rule, which may also be applied to the *NQ*.

⁵¹ See Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 6.2.2 (speaking of a miserable but necessary form of consolation), Lucan *Bellum civile* 7.654-5, Pliny the Younger *Epistulae* 6.20.17, Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 9.6.2.

⁵² Compare in the final formula in 6.2.9 the words *non quia fas est optare publicam cladem, sed...*

⁵³ On the subject see Rabbow 1954, 160ff., Van Dijk 1968, 155-157, Armisen-Marchetti 1986, from whom this definition of the *praemeditatio* comes, and C.E. Manning, ‘Seneca’s 98th letter and the *praemeditatio futuri mali*’, *Mnemosyne* 29 (1976), 301-304. Both Armisen-Marchetti and Manning discuss the problem of the occurrence in Seneca, besides the idea of *praemeditatio*, of thoughts that rather belong to the Epicurean sphere and seem to deny the *praemeditatio*. They also offer a short history of this exercise, which was primarily used by the Cyrenaics, but also by the Stoics: see Cicero, *TD* 3.28-29 and 3.52. Compare further Newman 1989, 1477-178. Armisen-Marchetti (p.188-190) and Manning

her discussion of the occurrence of *praemeditatio* in Seneca, Armisen-Marchetti mentions (among other passages) *EM*91, which has already been referred to earlier in this chapter.⁵⁴ The parallel with *EM*91 helps to place the preface to *NQ* 6 in the context of the *praemeditatio*. At the beginning of this letter, Seneca states that the unexpected is more fearsome: one should therefore foresee everything and not only think about what usually happens, but also about what may happen (91.3-4, *in omnia praemittendus animus*). Armisen-Marchetti argues that in the rest of the letter Seneca gives an example of the exercise of *praemeditatio*. This example, she remarks, has a rhetorical rather than a philosophical character. Instead of a mention of *indifferentia*, Seneca ‘describes, and only describes’ the disasters that may occur. This remark is interesting, since it corresponds to the preference for descriptions of vice we have encountered in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Among the rhetorical elements in the letter, Armisen-Marchetti also notes amplification.

The general description of whatever disasters may befall concludes with an injunction to meditate upon all of them (§8, *meditare*). One must place before one’s eyes the condition of humankind, the different forms of accidents that possibly happen, so as not to be surprised by them (*tota ante oculos sortis humanae condicio ponatur...praesumamus animo...in plenum cogitanda fortuna est*). This procedure resembles the function of the detailed description of vice we have argued for in other chapters.

In the argumentation used in the preface to *NQ* 6, Seneca has selected the consolatory ideas to fit his subject. The fact that he primarily offers consolation for death by earthquake leads him to concentrate on the idea of the generality of death and its subdivisions, such as the idea that the earth also dies, and the various ways in which one may die. Other consolatory arguments (which do occur in the epilogues of Books 6 and 2), are omitted. In each passage, one argument is developed, with

(p.301 n.3) also mention passages in Seneca’s work where the *praemeditatio* occurs (e.g. *EM* 107.3-4). Cf. Newman 1989, 1484-1485, Rabbow 1954, 164ff.

⁵⁴ 1986, 188-189. On p.189 she also refers to *NQ* 6.32.12. Compare also Viti 1997, 406 n.35.

much help of rhetoric: the basic thought is repeated in different formulations and examples. This form is meant to ensure that the message is effective.⁵⁵

Seneca's arguments are much-used consolatory commonplaces, as should by now have become clear. Compare for example, in the categorization of consolatory commonplaces made by Esteve-Forriol, under the heading 'die Allgemeinheit des Todes' ('die Gedanke ist allgemeines Gut der Literatur', as he also says), subdivision 'B' 'Das Weltall wird auch untergehen' and 'D' 'Verschiedene Todesarten'.⁵⁶ In using these well-known ideas for a specific aim, Seneca has successfully adapted them to the situation and thereby demonstrated how commonplace thoughts may form an impressive exhortation.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Cf. Kassel 1958, 98-99 about *Ad familiares* 4.5: '...treten mit Beginn des eigentlich konsolatorischen Teils in ungewöhnlicher Dichte die wohlbekannten thetisch-diatribischen Kunstmittel auf, mit denen die literarische consolatio die drängende und zwingende Einwirkung auf den Affekt intensiviert'.

⁵⁶ 1962, 150-151. Esteve-Forriol studies the *consolatio* in Roman poetical texts and mentions many consolatory motives occurring in these texts. As instances of B the following texts are mentioned, among others: Seneca *Ad Marciam* 6.26.6, *Ad Polybium* 1.2f., *Epigrammata* 7.5 (p.15 Haase), Statius *Silvae* 2.1.209ff. As instances of D are mentioned: *Ad Marciam* 6.10.6, Petronius 115.16ff., Horace *Odes* 1.28.17f. See also the commentary by Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) on this last passage.

⁵⁷ As Berno 2003, 242 mentions, the consolatory passages of Books 6 and 2 have been considered 'una rassegna di topoi'. My discussion has aimed at explaining the commonplace nature of these texts in the context of the *consolatio*. Speaking in negative terms about such gatherings of commonplaces without trying to understand their function should clearly be avoided. Cf. Studnik's conclusion (1958, 89) about the presence of the *consolatio* in the *EM*. Wilson 1997 investigates the literary dimension of the *consolatio* in Seneca's letter 99 (presenting a convincing analysis of the form of the letter, explained in connection with Seneca's ideas about consolation).

2.7 *Different views on NQ 6*

Several scholars have regarded Book 6 as well-composed compared to other books of the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁵⁸ In this book, preface and epilogue correspond to each other, and thus form an ethical ‘cornice’, as De Vivo calls it, around the scientific discussion.⁵⁹ The scientific discussion provides the release from the fear of earthquakes requested by the preface and epilogue; the explanation of the causes has a clear moral aim.

More in particular, De Vivo also argues that the preface and the epilogue have the same length: indeed, he considers ch.27-31 to be part of the epilogue. This correspondence between preface and epilogue would provide more evidence for a careful composition of the book.⁶⁰ However, I do not agree with De Vivo’s view on the length of the epilogue, since *NQ* 6.32.1 clearly rounds off the discussion of the causes of earthquakes: ‘this is what I wanted to say, my dear Lucilius, concerning the causes of earthquakes’, Seneca concludes. De Vivo points to another concluding formula, in 6.26.4, as the end of the exposition of the causes of earthquakes (‘such are the reasons generally given for why the earth trembles’). At this moment, he believes, Seneca returns to the thoughts of the preface (1992, 92). However, the formula at the beginning of the epilogue (6.32.1) shows that, although Seneca has concluded the inquiry into the causes of the earthquake in its strictest sense in 6.26.4, in 6.32.1 he regards everything that precedes as belonging to the scientific discussion. The last formulation therefore forms a clearer demarcation between the ethical and physical passages, in my opinion.

⁵⁸ See for instance Gross 1989, 246, 248, 272, who speaks of an ‘unmittelbare Zusammenhang’ between the preface and the main part of the book. Cf. Berno 2003, 273, who also remarks that scholars have pointed to the unity in this book. She adds a statement by Grimal 1991, 244, who says there is no digression in the preface to *NQ* 6. Berno further mentions that Book 6 has received more attention than other books of the *NQ* (p.241).

⁵⁹ De Vivo 1992, 77 and 108-9, followed by Waldherr 1997, 81, who discusses the *NQ* in the context of an overview of opinions about earthquakes (p.69ff.).

⁶⁰ At 1992, 77 (cf. 92) De Vivo clearly states that he believes the epilogue to consist of 6.27-32. On p.101 he considers chapters 27-31 to form a ‘trait d’union’ between the scientific and the moralistic parts of the book, a less strong and in my view more accurate position.

In several books of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Seneca adds a discussion of some specific questions to the examination of the causes of a natural phenomenon. Chapters 27-31 belong in this category.⁶¹ They discuss certain phenomena that accompanied the earthquake in Campania, and which had already been mentioned at the beginning of the book (6.1.3). In chapter 29, a few important elements discussed in the preface reappear: fear and *religio*. Amplification of the earthquake is also found in these chapters (especially in ch.30); De Vivo considers this a case of correspondence between preface and ‘epilogue’. It is clear that in chapters 27-31 some elements occur that are also mentioned in the moralizing parts of the book. De Vivo’s statement that these chapters form a ‘trait d’union’ between the scientific and moralizing parts is perhaps most accurate (cf. my n.60). The recent earthquake in Campania serves to connect the idea of fear and consolation more strongly to the inquiry about earthquakes.

Thus, the demarcation between the ethical and physical parts in *NQ* 6 is perhaps less clear than the closing formula of 6.32.1 suggests. On the other hand, in the discussion of *NQ* 6.1-2 we have also noted some differences between the approaches to earthquakes in the various parts of the book.

In contrast to De Vivo *e.a.*, Gauly expresses doubts about the level of coherence between the different parts of this book: according to him, the passages follow upon each other, without following from each other.⁶² In this context, he also remarks upon the differences we noted earlier: the fact that, while speaking of the consolation to be provided by the inquiry into the causes of the earthquake, the preface itself provides consolation in a different manner, and the difference in representation of the earthquake between the moral and the physical discourses.⁶³ According to Gauly, the amplified presentation of the earthquake in the preface denies the rational explanation of the book: ‘nach einer solchen Einleitung erscheinen die rationalistischen Erklärungen über die Ursachen von Beben... von vornherein desavouiert’ (2004, 232-233).

⁶¹ Cf. e.g. *NQ* 3.16ff. (the exposition of the causes is complete in 15).

⁶² 2004, 73.

⁶³ P.225. He also sees a difference between representations of a natural phenomenon in the different parts of a book in *NQ* 2, concerning lightning (p.230).

Gauly interprets this situation in a specific manner.⁶⁴ In his view, Seneca only combats the widely held view on the earthquake as a *prodigium* in the physical discussion, but not in the preface and epilogue of the book. These passages show the earthquake in its metaphorical sense of *prodigium*: for the contemporary reader earthquakes represented the fear of the destruction of an established order. Although political connotations are not explicitly present in *NQ* 6, for contemporaries they probably existed, Gauly argues. In other texts, these connotations are made explicit. The amplification of the fear in the preface may be a response to the actual needs of the senatorial public. The situation of the contemporary reader, rather used to great catastrophes, could explain the paradoxical emphasis on despair and the disastrous character of earthquakes that are part of the consolation.

This interpretation clearly differs from the one I have proposed. Gauly argues that the difference between the various parts of the work is more than a difference between ethics and physics (p.230). I think that it is nonetheless in this direction that we should see the differences within the book. The genre of the *consolatio* provides a clear context for the preface, a context that explains the characteristics of this text. The form of the main discussion of the book is obviously not influenced by this genre. Gauly's interpretation of the earthquake as a *prodigium* with a political meaning must remain hypothetical; as he admits, there are no political connotations in the moralizing passages of *NQ* 6 themselves.

⁶⁴ 2004, 224-235, especially 231-235.

3. *The epilogue of Book 6 (NQ 6.32)*

Like the preface, the epilogue of Book 6 forms a consolation for death by earthquake. This text, which does not contain such a grand argumentation as the preface, will be discussed more briefly. The last paragraph of the epilogue will provide an opportunity for a further discussion of the meditative aspect of the text.

3.1 *From death by earthquake to death in general*

As in other epilogues, the transition from the physical discussion to the moralizing passage is made by a remark about the necessity for ethical teaching (32.1). Having stated that the contemplation of nature provides moral strength, Seneca asks who has not been strengthened against all other catastrophes by the occurrence of an earthquake (32.1-2).⁶⁵ Faced with enormous disasters such as lightning and earthquakes, one need not fear dangers caused by man or wild animals. Thus, the beginning of the epilogue takes up the comparison made in the preface between death by earthquake (and other instances of a grand death such as lightning) and other forms of death. However, the purpose of the comparison is different: while in the preface other forms of death were adduced in order to diminish the fear of death by earthquake, here, on the other hand, the possibility of a death by earthquake should fortify against other, more common, forms of peril and death. Seneca does not further explain how this is supposed to work; the idea seems to be that earthquakes form a much more important and perilous catastrophe than other catastrophes.

⁶⁵ In his translation and commentary *ad loc.*, Parroni indicates that *hic ipse casus* refers to the recent earthquake in Campania, a plausible interpretation. We may wonder whether the statement that earthquakes render other dangers less fearful is a consequence of the previous statement about the moral strength that comes from the contemplation of nature. In that case, the contemplation of nature would here not be understood as an inquiry into natural causes, but rather as the experience of the frightening disaster of an earthquake.

Seneca continues by saying that we should be very courageous towards death, in whatever form it comes – a ‘savage and huge attack’ or an everyday occurrence (32.3). The appearance death takes does not make any difference, since it is itself near to nothing to us. Here, we proceed from the thought that one form of death should diminish the fear of other forms, to the idea that every death is equal and indifferent. We also encountered this argument in the preface (6.1.9). The ‘very little death asks from us’, Seneca adds, is taken from us by insignificant causes: old age, a pain in the ear, food that does not suit the stomach, and so on. Again the catalogue of (insignificant) causes of death, also used in the preface, supports the argumentation.

We seem to have moved on, in this passage, to the thought expressed in the epitome of *De remediis fortuitorum* by the possibility that ‘you will die at sea’ (*in freto morieris*), and the reaction ‘it does not matter where you die, but how’ (*non ubi, sed qualiter moriaris, ad rem pertinet*, 2.9). Not the manner in which one dies, but one’s attitude towards death is important. This more general question replaces the theme of fear of death by earthquake. This emphasis will be pursued in the rest of the epilogue.

3.2 *Contempt of death and ensuing securitas or felicity*

In 32.4, Seneca contrasts the small difference death makes with the enormous value of one’s contempt of death (*pusilla res est hominis anima, sed ingens res contemptus animae*). The idea that death should be despised is central in Seneca’s reflections on the subject.⁶⁶ A description follows of what the person who despises death will achieve: he will be free from fear (*securus*) in the face of great disasters. A few terrifying natural disasters that contempt of death allows one to witness bravely are described, such as a great overflowing of the sea (resembling the *diluvium*

⁶⁶ Cf. for parallels the notes in the editions by Hine (1981) and Marino (cf. my n.98) *ad NQ* 2.59.3 *contemne mortem*; see also Leeman 1971, 327, 328. The formulation of a ‘contempt of life’ (*contemptus animae*) instead of ‘contempt of death’ in this passage is certainly used to create a contrast with the first part of the sentence (*pusilla res est hominis anima*).

described at the end of *NQ* 3) and an opening of the earth.⁶⁷ The description is formulated by means of the repetition of the adjective *securus* (*securus videbit... securus aspiciet... securus aspiciet*). Seneca adds that the person who is *securus* will even, if necessary, make the decision to jump off a precipice. This positive attitude towards suicide (a well-known feature of Stoicism) forms a clear contrast with the negative attitude towards death: instead of fearing it, one should even be prepared to go towards death voluntarily.⁶⁸

As I. Hadot argues, the concept of *securitas* has an important place in Seneca's thought.⁶⁹ In *EM* 92.3, the philosopher says: 'what is the happy life? It is peace of mind, and lasting tranquillity' (*quid est beata vita? Securitas et perpetua tranquillitas*). *Securitas* is the opposite of *sollicitudo*, and implies being free from negative emotions, especially fear. This is achieved by means of knowledge, as we see in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, and by means of meditation, which ensures that the knowledge is internalized.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ According to De Vivo 1992, 104, Seneca's description of the *securitas* of the wise man looking at the tempest at sea could refer to a description in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* of a safe viewing of a wild sea: *suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem* (*DRN* 2.1-2). De Vivo admits that the situation is different in the two authors: for Lucretius the distance from the wild sea (*e terra*) provides the sentiment of *securitas*, whereas for Seneca it is the contempt of death. In my opinion, this kind of image was used more generally to express a sense of security from danger. Cf. for instance the occurrence in *De Beneficiis* 7.1.7: *subductus ille tempestatibus in solido ac sereno stetit*. De Vivo also compares the description of natural disasters in this passage to Horace (*Odes* 3.3.7-8) and Virgil (*Aeneid* 8.243-245). For these two references see also Parroni's commentary *ad loc.*; p. xxxiii-xxxiv of his edition give a more general discussion of references to poetry in the *NQ*. I myself am somewhat cautious about such references, but I admit a more extensive study of the subject should be made.

⁶⁸ Cf. De Vivo 1992, 104.

⁶⁹ 1969, 126ff.

⁷⁰ See also Newman 1989, 1486-8 about *securitas* and meditation. Lana 2001, who discusses the political concept of *securitas* in *De clementia*, mentions the result of earlier study on the concept of *securitas* in Seneca's late work: 'securitas appare come termine polivalente atto a coprire ambiti anche completamente discordanti; è un termine

After a repetition of the idea that it does not matter by what (striking) means one dies, since death in itself is nothing, Seneca goes on to say that one should be ready to die if one wishes to lead a happy life. The happy life is described by three qualifications (in a four-part sentence introduced by repeated *sí.*); it involves (1) not being afraid of men, god and things, (2) despising fortune with her offerings of inane goods and her feeble threats, (3) living a tranquil life, alike in felicity to that of the gods. This general advice resembles the teachings of the preface to *NQ* 3 (cf. Chapter 4, sections 5.1-2). Whatever disaster demands your life must take it – thus Seneca continues the idea of readiness to die. In the listing of disasters (with repeated *sive...sive...*) the earthquake again occurs.

Seneca has now stated what should be one's correct attitude towards death (contempt, whatever its form may be), and what one achieves by this attitude (*securitas*, felicity). The rest of the epilogue contains three major consolatory arguments: life after death, the death of the earth, and reflections on time.

3.3 *After death*

To the basic consolatory thought that man cannot escape his fate and must die anyway, sooner or later, Seneca adds in §6-7 that the place to which one returns after death is a better place (*locus melior ac tutior*). Seneca can only urge on the person bound to die, he says: he will be returned (*redderis*). This term implies that after death man returns to where he came from.⁷¹ The idea is continued in the next sentence: nature, which had brought man into existence, is waiting for him after death (*rerum natura te quae genuit expectat*). The place to which one returns is described as free from earthly catastrophes, among which earthquakes.

concettualmente ricchissimo' (p.36). The term *securitas* does not seem to have been strictly circumscribed.

⁷¹ See also Parroni's note *ad loc.* on the term. Compare for the idea of man's heavenly origin the chapter on the preface of *NQ* 1 and its discussion of the flight of the mind to heaven.

In Seneca's *Ad Marciam*, the idea that there are no disasters after death is also accompanied by a list of examples ('here are no rival armies clashing in their rage, no fleets to shatter one another, no parricides...', 26.4).⁷² These examples are of a general nature; in *NQ* 6.32.7 the description of the 'life after death' has been somewhat adapted to the context of the book, since it is said to be free of such great disasters as earthquakes (although besides natural disasters, disasters caused by man, for instance war, are also mentioned).

What occurs 'after death' was an important consolatory item. The passage under discussion presents one version: it pictures a better place. Another, more cautious formulation suggested different possibilities: if there is nothing after death, there will be no pain either; if there is something, it will be a better place (cf. *Ad Polybium* 9.2ff.).⁷³ From other passages in his work it appears that Seneca did not believe in the consolatory thought of a life after death. He considered it a beautiful idea, but probably not true.⁷⁴ The appearance of this idea in *NQ* 6.32.6-7 can be explained in the context sketched in the introduction of this chapter: the consolatory genre used arguments from different schools to provide all possible consolation.

⁷² Compare also the listings of the many catastrophes occurring in life, which the dead person is now spared: *Ad Marciam* 19.6, 22.3, *Ad Polybium* 9.

⁷³ Thus, the idea that nothing follows after death is also a consolatory thought; cf. *Ad Marciam* 19.4-5.

⁷⁴ See for instance *EM* 102.1-2. Further on in the letter, the idea that life continues after death nonetheless appears, in a protreptic context (§22ff.). As in *NQ* 6, Seneca admonishes the fearful person not to hesitate, and speaks of the motherly womb from which he came (§26). Much has been written on Seneca's ideas concerning the soul's fate after death. His opinion is difficult to discern, but he seems to have believed, as Stoics did more generally, that the soul survived for a limited amount of time. For an overview of scholarship on the matter, see for instance Setaioli 1997; for Stoicism in general, see R. Hoven, *Stoïcisme et Stoïciens face au problème de l'au-delà*, Paris 1971.

3.4 *The death of the earth*

After a shorter remark – if death is nothing, what are we afraid of; if it is serious, best to get it over with – we find the next consolatory argument in §8: the idea of the ‘death of the earth’, the basic consolatory argument in the preface. Since the whole earth ‘dies’, one should not moan about one’s own insignificant death. A few examples of bygone cities are mentioned (*Helicen Burinque totas mare accepit...*). Seneca adds that many more cities have been destroyed than we know about.

In §9 follows an intermediate conclusion, formulated as a recommendation to Lucilius: ‘and so, Lucilius, brace yourself, as much as you can, against the fear of death’ (*quantum potes itaque ipse te cohortare, Lucili, contra metum mortis*). The reappearance of Seneca’s addressee interrupts the series of consolatory arguments.⁷⁵ Seneca adds a thought that is by now familiar to us: it is fear of death that makes one vulnerable (not death itself). The thought is formulated in a threefold sentence introduced by the word *hic* (‘this makes us vulnerable, this...’). The second sentence states that fear of death even causes those who stay alive to lose their life (in fear). In *EM* 24.23, Seneca also uses such a strong, paradoxical formulation: it is fear of death that drives us to death. The third sentence introduced by *hic* adds that fear magnifies catastrophes such as earthquakes and lightning.

3.5 *Time and death*

One more consolatory argument is added, concerning the element of time: a correct understanding of time also helps against our fear of death (§9-11). There is no difference between a short and a long life: time flees, one is bound to lose it. The past time does not belong to us anymore, the future not yet: ‘I am suspended on a point of fleeting time’ (*in puncto fugientis temporis pendeo*), is the conclusion. The idea that past time is not ours is clarified by the anecdote about the wise Laelius, who corrected someone’s statement ‘I have an age of sixty years’ with the

⁷⁵ For the function of Seneca’s addressee see the discussion in Chapter 6, section 2.1.

words ‘you mean the sixty years you do not have anymore’.⁷⁶ The fact that time is so transient should make the idea of a nearby death less fearful: the time allotted to us is minimal anyway.

The argument concerning time is used more often in a consolatory context. For instance, in *EM* 77 (§11-12) similar ideas to that of the epilogue occur.⁷⁷ Seneca is reacting to the stupidity of those who complain when the moment of death approaches, in spite of the fact that they know they must die. He remarks that the past and the future (here in the sense of the time before and after one’s life) do not belong to a person. Man finds himself in a point of time (*in hoc punctum coniectus es*): the formulation of *NQ* 6.32.10. Even if man is able to extend this situation, it is still for a minimal amount of time.⁷⁸ Seneca further states that a life of 99 years is still short, and not something to be proud of (*EM* 77.20). Dying at the right moment does not depend on the duration of your life, but on its quality.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Literally “*sexaginta annos habeo*”, “*hos*” inquit “*dicis sexaginta quos non habes*”.

⁷⁷ About the theme of time and death, see also *Ad Marciam* 21, *EM* 61.4, 99.6ff., 99.31, 101.4ff. The argument of time was particularly important in the context of a premature death.

⁷⁸ Cf. also *Ad Marciam* 21.2. The idea that the present is only a point in time also appears in Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditationes* 6.36 (see also 10.17, 12.32). A.L. Motto – J.R. Clark, ‘Time in Seneca: past, present, future’, *Emerita* 55 (1987), 37-38 rightly demonstrate that Dodd’s remark that this idea did not occur before Marcus Aurelius (in *Pagan and Christian in an age of anxiety: some aspects of religious experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*, Cambridge 1965, 7-10, 21-23, 27-29) is incorrect. See also, in *Meditationes* 4.50, the thought that there is no difference between a long and short lapse of time. It is connected to the representation of foolish persons who tried to hold on to life as long as possible (a thought that also appears in the epilogue to *NQ* 2, and in *EM* 4.5, in the context of meditation). Marcus Aurelius presents this as a ‘common’ thought (not specifically philosophical), but still a great help in despising death.

⁷⁹ Cf. the argument of *De brevitae vitae*: life is not short, but man’s waste of time makes it short. For more information see the abundant literature on the subject of time in Seneca, for instance V. Viparelli, *Il senso e il non senso del tempo in Seneca*, Napoli 2000, and the further references in its bibliography. Viparelli also discusses the role of time in connection with the theme of death.

3.6 *The epilogue*

Unlike the preface, the epilogue of *NQ* 6 does not aim at liberation from the fear of dying in an earthquake, but from fear of death in general. The accent lies on prescribing a courageous attitude towards death. The first paragraphs of the epilogue seem to form a transition: thoughts that had also occurred in the preface are used with a different purpose. Seneca then establishes the sentiment of *securitas* following from one's contempt of death. The rest of the epilogue offers several arguments that contribute to a correct attitude towards death.

However, earthquakes (and lightning) remain present in the epilogue. The emphasis on the idea that death is the same, in whatever form it meets us, is generated by the specific (fear of) death by earthquake. In §2 of the epilogue, the earthquake is argued to remove fear of other forms of death. In 32.4, different natural catastrophes are mentioned, by which the person with the right mental attitude will not be disturbed; among them are earthquakes. In 32.5 different forms of death are listed that will be accepted by the wise man, among which earthquakes. In 32.7, the description of the better place after death involves an absence of earthquakes. In 32.8 the consolation provided by the 'death of the earth' is mentioned. In 32.9, earthquake and lightning are said to be magnified by fear of death.

In this book, in which preface and epilogue cover approximately the same subject, a difference emerges between the two texts. In the preface, the attention is directed towards the subject discussed in the book, and the fear it causes. In the epilogue, the attention is rather led away from the subject itself towards the general moral lesson people should draw from it.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Compare for the difference between the epilogue and the preface also my n.75 in Chapter 3, section 10. Of course, I do not mean to imply that this is a general characteristic of the prefaces and epilogues; this is not the case. Berno 2003, 267 phrases the difference between the preface and epilogue in lexical terms: while in the preface *metus* prevails, in the epilogue *fortitudo* and *securitas* are prevalent.

3.7 NQ 6.32 *and* meditatio

The last paragraph of the epilogue refers to a ‘meditation’ on the idea of death. Seneca says that we should ‘affix in our mind’ and repeat to ourselves that we must die (*hoc adfigamus animo, hoc nobis subinde dicamus: moriendum est*). When and how one dies does not matter: death is a law of nature, death is a characteristic of the human condition, a remedy for all miseries (repetition of *mors...mors...*). Seneca exhorts Lucilius to forget everything else and meditate on this subject, so as to do away with fear of death (*omnibus omissis hoc unum, Lucili, meditare, ne mortis nomen reformides*). He must make death familiar to himself by thinking often about it (*effice illam tibi cogitatione multa familiarem, ut si ita tulerit possis illi et obviam exire*).

This passage provides a clear reference to the meditation on important thoughts.⁸¹ Several other passages in Seneca’s work also bring up the idea of meditation.⁸² For instance, at the end of *EM* 26 Seneca cites Epicurus’ injunction to meditate on death (*meditare mortem*, §8). Seneca explains that, since one cannot test whether one knows how to die, one should constantly learn to know death.⁸³ In *EM* 30, the fact that consolatory thoughts are and should be often repeated is mentioned (30.7).⁸⁴ As in *NQ* 6.32.12, at the conclusion of the letter an injunction is addressed

⁸¹ The concept of meditation has already been mentioned earlier (see section 1 of this Chapter, as well as Chapter 3, section 7); moreover, the preface of *NQ* 6 has been related to the idea of *praemeditatio* (in section 2.6 above).

⁸² See e.g. *De beneficiis* 7.2.1 *cotidiana meditatione*, *EM* 4.5 *hoc cotidie meditare* (cf. 4.9), *EM* 16.1 *hoc, quod liquet, firmandum et altius cotidiana meditatione figendum est*, *EM* 82.8.

⁸³ In §10 he adds that to meditate on death also involves meditating on one’s liberty. The connection between death and liberty is also made in *NQ* 3, preface §16.

⁸⁴ Seneca further says that these thoughts have less effect on him when he reads them, or when they are professed by persons who are far from having to fear death, than when he hears them from a courageously dying old man (cf. *EM* 30.15). This shows that the consolatory ideas were also found in written texts, besides being spoken to oneself or others.

to Lucilius to always think about death, so as never to fear it (30.18). The thought has a paradoxical character.

In *EM* 54 we see Seneca put meditation in practice, during an attack of asthma, which was generally called a *meditatio mortis* (54.2). While he was suffocating, Seneca did not stop addressing happy and courageous thoughts to himself, to calm down (54.4): death had put him on trial often already. Before he was born, he was already ‘dead’: death would consist in the same absence of life. Seneca concludes the passage by repeating that he did not stop admonishing himself (silently) with these and similar exhortations (*his et eiusmodi exhortationibus... alloqui me non desii*, 54.6). Slowly the asthma attack receded. Seneca is now prepared for death, as he says.⁸⁵

The phenomenon of *meditatio* in imperial Stoicism has been studied by Newman (1989).⁸⁶ He describes this means to achieve a moral goal as a structured contemplation, which used particular phrases and images. Meditation was an exercise that had to take place daily, or regularly.⁸⁷ Its effect should be permanent: the important thoughts ought to be fixed in one’s mind. The idea of ‘fixing’ thoughts in the mind also occurs in *NQ* 6.32.12.⁸⁸ Meditation further has a rhetorical character, which helps to achieve its goal. Newman considers the repetition of striking, short phrases or images to be the centre of meditation. ‘Rhetorical units’ are formed, which each stress a point.⁸⁹ Thus, *sententiae* have an

⁸⁵ Scarpat 1965, 266 calls this passage Seneca’s ‘consolation to himself’. Newman 1989, 1480 n.16 considers it evidence that the *meditatio* was spoken aloud. For examples of Senecan meditative texts see further Newman 1989, 1491ff., especially p.1494, and Rabbow 1954, 28-29, 326-327 (discussion of *EM* 4).

⁸⁶ See especially p.1474ff., also p.1483ff. Meditation is also discussed in Rabbow 1954 (see e.g. p.33 about Seneca), I. Hadot 1969; see also Scarpat 1965, 109ff.

⁸⁷ With reference to Seneca’s *EM* 16.1, *De ira* 2.10.7; cf. the texts mentioned in my n.82.

⁸⁸ See also *EM* 11.8, 16.1, 113.32.

⁸⁹ On p.1489 Newman speaks of a ‘rhetorically unified group’, on p.1490 of ‘simple phrases...[that] generally occur in rhetorical groups unified by topic’ (this is illustrated with *EM* 91.9); cf. p.1480 n.17. Describing such a rhetorical unit (*EM* 47.1), Newman comments ‘each sentence means fundamentally the same thing’ (p.1489). He distinguishes

important function. The description of their effect (*EM* 94.46-47: cf. Chapter 3, section 8) corresponds to the process of meditation: the repetition of important phrases makes certain thoughts become part of yourself. Newman also counts paradox among the rhetorical devices used in meditation.⁹⁰

There is a clear resemblance between the characterisation of meditation as sketched here, and the description I have given in Chapter 3 of Seneca's hortatory text. Newman's description of the *meditatio* adds some interesting elements. For instance, we have seen that paradoxical thoughts occurred in the consolatory passages of *NQ* 6; paradox is also considered an element of meditative texts. The idea of rhetorical 'thought units' may be applied to the argumentation of the preface of *NQ* 6, which consists of a few main arguments, each developed in a 'rhetorical unit' of a few paragraphs.

Should we then regard such texts as the preface and epilogue of *NQ* 6 as meditations? Rabbow argues that the second half of the epilogue of Book 6 (6.32.6-12) belongs to 'der technischen Sphäre der Meditation', with reference to the meditative terminology of §12.⁹¹ He states that the structure of the meditation is recognizable in the first two of the three consolatory arguments in the passage (life after death and the death of the earth). The third argument (concerning time) has been made unrecognisable through stylisation.⁹² The difference between these

two contexts in which these rhetorical units occur: internal dialogues (exemplified by *EM* 47.1) and 'simple phrases meant for repetition' (p.1489-1490).

⁹⁰ See pp.1478, 1479; cf. p.1505 about Epictetus.

⁹¹ 1954, 327-328. Rabbow adds the exhortation *te cohortare* in §9.

⁹² 'Im ersten und zweiten wird man die technische Struktur der Meditation noch erkennen [Absetzen der Punkte]; der dritte ist völlig stilisiert'. According to Rabbow, the literary character of Seneca's text deforms the meditation (p.27 e.g., 'wie Seneca die Meditation literarisch stilisiert und deformiert', cf. p.326). Rabbow also states that in the final paragraph the three arguments are summarized ('quando quid tua [=9-11]; mors tributum officiumque mortaliū [=8]; malorum omnium remedium [=6-7]'). This does not seem to me to be the case.

arguments is specified as a distinction between 'Meditation' and 'Beherrzigung', a less strict form of meditation.⁹³

When one reads through the passage, it is impossible to agree with Rabbow's idea that meditation is discernible in the first two consolatory arguments, but not in the third one. All three arguments have a certain amount of 'stylisation' or rhetorical effect. Also, they all present consolatory thoughts in short sentences.⁹⁴

Newman offers some reflections on the question of the presence of meditation in written texts. He states that it is difficult to establish whether a text can be considered a 'meditation':

Finding actual examples of *meditatio* presents a problem, since the examples given in our sources are bound up together with the written text. How can we distinguish between an actual *meditatio* which would have been used by the Stoic philosopher or his students, and what is simply a rhetorical flourish communicating a certain thought? (1989, 1478).

Newman answers the question by saying that meditation is rhetorical by nature. The rhetorical character of a text need not be an impediment to consider it meditative: 'we can safely assume that the imperial Stoics looked on their literary productions, whether Seneca's letters or dialogues from Epictetus' diatribes, as in some way part of the act of *meditatio*' (p.1479). The meditation 'blended in' with the genre of the text. Some passages, Newman further argues, are designated as meditations by a term that refers to meditating or is connected to it. Other passages do not contain such clear indications, but the subject matter, combined with the style, seems to indicate that the text was intended to be memorized as a meditation.

The epilogue of *NQ* 6 contains certain rhetorical characteristics that could be interpreted in the light of meditation. The text has for a large part been formed by

⁹³ See p.112ff., p.116.

⁹⁴ I presume that this is what Rabbow calls 'Absetzen der Punkte' (see n.92 above). The deficiencies in Rabbow's discussion are pointed out by Newman 1989, 1476 n.6; p.1481 n.19 he mentions Rabbow's distinction between 'really meditative thoughts' and 'literary representations of thoughts'. Newman retains only the idea that meditation has a strong rhetorical character in general, which makes it difficult to discern a meditative core in it.

repetition. One intriguing and strongly visible characteristic (also present in the preface of the book and the epilogue of *NQ* 2) is Seneca's habit to divide one thought into a few subsections introduced by anaphora. In the previous discussion of the epilogue I have pointed out these stylistic features.⁹⁵ Such repetitions may be regarded as an aid in the repetition of thoughts to oneself. One could say for instance, to forestall the fear of death: 'after death, there will be no earthquakes, there will be no war, there will be no misery...' (cf. §7). Or: 'it is fear of death which makes us miserable, this frightens us, this makes every danger seem terrible...' (cf. §9).

An interesting feature of the epilogue is the alternation in the person speaking and addressed. Indeed, Seneca speaks in the first person plural (as in for instance *horae sunt quae perdimus*, §10), in the first person singular (for instance *in punctum fugientis temporis pendeo*, §10) and in the second person singular (as in *vade fortiter, vade feliciter. Nihil dubitaveris: redderis*, §6).⁹⁶ The first person plural may be interpreted as 'us human beings'; the second person singular primarily addresses Lucilius, but also, more in general, the person who must learn to despise death by means of the arguments offered. The first person singular is not so much the person of the teacher as the voice of the person speaking the meditative thoughts to himself (see especially §8).

It is tempting to accept Newman's ideas and to regard the epilogue of *NQ* 6 as a meditative text, whose rhetorical features must be understood in this context. The epilogue unites a theme fit for meditation, explicit references to meditating, and a style adapted to it. However, the rhetorical component that is clearly part of texts with a meditative character makes it difficult to isolate what would have been the core of meditation. Again, Newman argues: 'instead of trying to divide examples of

⁹⁵ This is the rhetorical technique of *partitio*, or 'Amplifikation durch die Zerlegung' (cf. Rabbow 1954, 84). In spite of the fact that he considers stylistic embellishment to deform the meditation, Rabbow also mentions rhetorical characteristics of meditation. P.80ff. he discusses its technique and stylistic features.

⁹⁶ For the first person plural see also §5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12; for the first person singular see also §6, 8; for the second person singular see also §9, 10, 12.

meditation from simple literary arrangement of thoughts, we should see imperial Stoic writings as meditative in general' (1989, 1479-1480). A passage such as the epilogue to *NQ* 6 might perhaps be seen as providing an example, or starting point, for meditation.⁹⁷ It is probable that the meditation proceeded in the manner indicated above, through repeated sentences such as 'it is fear of death which makes us miserable, this frightens us, this makes every danger seem terrible'. It would certainly have involved commonplace consolatory thoughts.

⁹⁷ Cf. for the idea of starting points for meditation Newman 1989, 1494.

4. *The epilogue of Book 2 (NQ 2.59)*

Like Book 6, Book 2, which discusses the nature of thunder and lightning, ends with a consolatory epilogue. Earthquake and lightning were mentioned together as frightening causes of death a few times in *NQ* 6. The situation concerning lightning is analogous to that of earthquakes, and the consolatory text in Book 2 is a variation of those in Book 6. Since the consolatory ideas we encounter are by now well-known, the following discussion will be kept short.

Hine provides a summary of the epilogue:

Ch.59 is in three parts: ss.1-2 introduce the epilogue, stressing that an understanding of how lightning is produced is worth nothing unless it is accompanied by some moral improvement; ss.3-8 are about death in general, encouraging us to despise rather than fear it; ss.9-13 are about death by lightning in particular, showing that it is no worse than any other form of death. Several of the themes are commonplaces of exhortations not to fear death, and some of them also occur in consolation literature.⁹⁸

4.1 *'Death in general'*

The epilogue is again introduced by a request for moral strengthening instead of the discussion of natural phenomena. Seneca agrees that a moral aspect is required in every occupation, with the aim of fortifying the soul so as to enable it to withstand whatever disaster strikes it. Although it is not possible not to undergo misery, it is possible to endure it courageously (59.1-3).⁹⁹

To be able to endure such misery, people must despise death (59.3). Thus, they lose fear of all possible ways to die; a few of these are listed (*sive...sive*). In this passage, unlike the consolatory texts of Book 6, the general idea of contempt of death is presented as the starting point of the argumentation. It is noticeable that

⁹⁸ 1981, 439. Two commentaries on *NQ* 2 are available: besides Hine 1981 see also R. Marino's edition (Pisa-Roma 1996).

⁹⁹ This passage is discussed in Newman 1989, 1487. Seneca uses martial imagery; compare Berno 2003, 213, with reference to other passages in the *NQ* where this imagery occurs.

lightning (or earthquake) is not mentioned among the deadly disasters that are listed. In this part of the epilogue, the consolation remains general.

The idea that death should be despised also appeared in the epilogue of *NQ* 6. A few consolatory thoughts are mentioned in support of it in this text (59.4). Death is said to be no more than the separation of soul and body; this separation is inevitable; death reaches everyone without exception. We had already encountered the idea of death's equanimity in the preface to *NQ* 6.

In the following paragraph (59.5), the notion that courage may come from total despair is developed. It is phrased as an exhortation: 'take courage from this very lack of hope' (*animus ex ipsa desperatione sumatur*). The same thought is repeated in a few sentences, among which a comparison with animals: even the least courageous animals risk a fight in a desperate situation.¹⁰⁰ The idea that courage arises out of despair seems to have been more widespread.¹⁰¹ In the preface to Book 6, we encountered the similar idea that a sentiment of despair provides consolation (6.2.1-2). Seneca emphasizes that mankind indeed finds itself in a desperate situation, since everyone and everything has to die at some time (59.6). The argument of the generality of death here comes up.

In the following paragraph (59.7), Seneca speaks about those who want to delay the moment of their death. Their conduct is despicable, since they seek delay for something that is inevitable. A comparison is made with people who are to be executed, and among whom one would be trying to be the last in the row. The description of persons who are acting incorrectly (negative examples) is part of hortatory texts, as we have already ascertained. In §8, the idea that men all die equally, 'the greatest of consolations', is repeated (with a continuation of the image of execution).

Thus, this passage is formed of well-known consolatory thoughts, which support the injunction to despise death. The central ideas of the inevitability and general character of death are combined with the argument that one's courage rises in a

¹⁰⁰ The comparison with animals was also pointed out in the moralizing epilogues of Chapter 7 (sections 2.2 and 3.1.4).

¹⁰¹ The commentaries *ad loc.* refer to Seneca, *De clementia* 1.12.5 and Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 4.28.5.

situation of despair, and that those who seek to delay their death are not achieving anything. This argument is enlivened by the comparison with executions.¹⁰²

4.2 *Death by thunder and lightning*

After these general thoughts follows the discussion of ‘death by lightning’ in particular (59.9-13). Seneca argues that there are many other, more obvious ways to die, and that to be struck by lightning is a magnificent way to go. In the preface of *NQ* 6 (2.3ff.), these ideas formed two separate steps in the grand argumentation against fear of earthquakes, but here they occur together in one passage.

The text has a strong rhetorical character. As in the similar passage of *NQ* 6, much irony is employed. Seneca again contrasts everyday or insignificant ways of dying with death by lightning. He also pretends that the man who fears death by lightning believes that the stroke of lightning is set in motion for his own death. If this person believes that such a great heavenly disturbance occurs for him, he should be consoled by the trouble taken to ensure his death, Seneca mocks him. The emphasis on the magnificent character of death by lightning is partly due to the divinatory character of lightning (see 6.32.10), which has been discussed in the course of the book (ch.32ff.); dying through lightning means that you are a sign of something greater.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Compare Newman 1989, 1490-1491 on the role of metaphors in consolation.

¹⁰³ Thus, the mention of the divinatory character of lightning in the epilogue provides a connection with the main part of the book. Further connections between epilogue and main part are in my opinion not found in this book. However, as I said in my Introduction, I am not discussing the epilogue of *NQ* 2 (and the book more in general) in detail. In my review (2005) of Berno, I have argued against one connection she establishes between the main part and the epilogue of this book. Berno finds ‘una sorte di analogia’ between man’s position as described in the main part of the book and in the epilogue, from the point of view of the opposition nature/against nature (2003, 234). Just as man gives in to fear and falls into vice – but this happens in accordance with nature when it concerns death (Berno argues that fear of death is not a vice that goes against nature, as do other vices) – likewise lightning is sent downwards against its nature (fire usually goes upwards, Seneca says) by a greater power, which, however, is part of the order of things, of nature.

There is much repetition in this passage (*petet...petet...petet*, §9, the *si* series, §10, 12, *male scilicet actum erit tecum...male scilicet tecum agitur*, §10), and use of rhetorical questions. The second person singular to whom the lesson is addressed is strongly present (more than in the previous part of this epilogue).

After this rhetorical development, the last paragraph of the epilogue follows with a final striking effect (59.13). Seneca concludes that one will not have time for such a consolatory idea as he has just exposed, since the speed with which lightning strikes excludes even its anticipation (cf. §10.) The epilogue ends with a *sententia*: ‘no one has ever feared any lightning except that which he has escaped’ (*nemo umquam timuit fulmen nisi quod effugit*).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Seneca says more often that one should not fear pain beforehand: for instance, the formulation ‘pain follows only from what one feels’ (*non est autem nisi ex eo, quod sentias, dolor*), which concludes *EM* 74 (§33), reminds us of the last sentence of *NQ* 2. Compare also the idea that one should not fear pain after death, since it is foolish to fear what one will not experience, or what one will not feel (*EM* 30.6). There are two close parallels for the thought that one does not fear the lightning by which one is struck; Pliny, *NH* 2.142 (in the course of the discussion of thunder and lightning), and Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 3.2.9-10. They show the idea to have been more widespread.

CHAPTER NINE

KNOWLEDGE OF *OBSCURA*: *NQ* 7 AND ITS END

1. *The beginning of the book*

Book 7 does not have a clearly delineated preface as do Books 1, 3, 4a and 6. However, unlike Book 5, it cannot be said to have no introduction at all. It rather resembles the beginning of Book 2, since it also starts with some introductory thoughts related to the scientific inquiry.¹

In the first sentence of the book, Seneca says that no one is so slow-witted, inert and focused on the earth that he does not look up into the sky at the appearance of *divina*, especially when something unusual has been seen. This is a reference to the well-known idea that man has been placed in an upright position so that he may be able to contemplate heaven; he is destined for philosophical study.² With the term *divina* the theme of the divinity of heavenly phenomena, which pervades the entire book, is introduced.

In the following paragraphs the idea is developed that man tends to pay more attention to unusual phenomena than to everyday appearances (7.1.1-7.1.5; cf. 7.14.4, 7.20.2). The daily occurrence of a phenomenon makes it seem more ordinary. In fact, the phenomena we see every day, such as the sun, are more extraordinary than the fires that only rarely appear in the sky. In *NQ* 6.3.2, Seneca had mentioned that one is more easily frightened by the occurrence of unusual

¹ It is therefore difficult (and perhaps even unnecessary) to determine where the introduction ends and the discussion about the nature of the comets begins. Seneca first mentions doxographical material (opinions concerning the comets) in 7.3. Gross 1989, 281 regards the first two chapters as prefatory, Vottero only the first chapter (see the introduction of his 1989 edition of the *NQ*, p.39, n.2).

² This commonplace recurs in ancient literature from Plato onwards. Vottero *ad loc.* and Pease's commentary *ad Cicero DND* 2.140 provide a list of parallels. It also occurs elsewhere in Seneca's work (see *NQ* 5.15.3, *EM* 92.30, 94.56 and *De otio* 5.4). See e.g. Bernert 1961, 113ff. on the commonplace (in a Stoic context).

phenomena, an idea that also comes up in this book in connection with the comets (7.1.5). The unusual character of a phenomenon alters the human reaction to it in more than one respect.³

In 7.1.5, the comets are introduced in the discussion: as unusual phenomena they receive much attention and also cause fear. People want to know whether the comet is a *prodigium* or a *sidus*. Seneca does not answer the question directly, but goes on to praise the inquiry into the nature of stars and planets (*de stellarum siderumque natura*), which is most magnificent as well as most useful. In order to determine the nature of these phenomena, he continues, it will be helpful to investigate whether the comets have a similar nature; they do have some characteristics in common with the stars and planets (2.1). In §2.3 a greater question is said to be involved in the discussion of the comets, the question whether the *mundus* revolves around the earth or vice versa. The issue is not mentioned further in the book, however.

Although Seneca does not immediately answer the question about the nature of the comets, the attention given to the option *sidus* over that of *prodigium* is indicative of the solution that will be proposed in the following discussion.⁴ The doxographical survey begins in chapter 3 with the statement that the gathering of knowledge about these rare phenomena has only recently begun.

³ The idea that the unusual is more interesting than the usual was also a commonplace thought; see Vottero *ad loc.* and Pease *ad Cicero DND* 2.96 for parallels. See also Schrijvers 1999, 177-179. In *DND* 2.96 and in Lucretius, *DRN* 2.1026-1039, as in the *NQ*, the idea is related to the beauty of heavenly phenomena that go unnoticed. The idea of the interest in the unusual is applied to different areas: in *NQ* 7.16.1-2, for instance, Seneca says that historiographers make their stories more attractive by adding unusual feats. It was a rhetorical prescription to retain the attention of the audience by mentioning unusual facts; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.22.35-36 exemplifies this rule with examples from the area of physics: no one pays attention to the rising sun, but everyone to its eclipse. *Novitas* excites people: this must therefore be aimed at in rhetoric, too. The idea that we react differently to known than to unknown things also forms one of the sceptical modes; see Sextus Empiricus *PH* 1.141-144, again with natural phenomena as examples.

⁴ The solution to the question whether the earth turns while the *mundus* is immobile or the reverse is likewise discernible: one possibility is formulated in positive terms, and the other in negative terms (7.2.3).

2. *The divine character of the comets*

In the main part of the book, Seneca asserts the divine character of the comets, which plays an important role in the epilogue (cf. 7.30.1 ‘when we discuss the planets, the stars, the nature of the gods’). The comets, unlike the stars and planets, were not considered divine phenomena by all authors in antiquity. Aristotle, Posidonius and the Stoics, most notably, thought they were meteorological phenomena.⁵ However, some of Seneca’s predecessors regarded the comets as phenomena of the same nature as the planets and the stars, and therefore belonging to the divine area of the *aether*.⁶

Seneca asserts his opinion in 22.1: ‘I do not agree with our Stoics: I do not think that a comet is just a sudden fire, but it is among the eternal works of nature’.⁷ The comets share the characteristics of the divine sphere, as opposed to that of the *aer*; they are eternal and their movement is tranquil and stable.⁸ To the attentive

⁵ See Gross 1989, 278-281 for an overview of ancient opinions about the comets, including the views of Aristotle and Posidonius. For an overview dating from antiquity see Aetius’ *Placita* 3.2.1-11. For the Stoics cf. also *NQ* 7.19-21 (and *NQ* 1.15.4).

⁶ Most notably some Pythagoreans, probably Theophrastus (as argued by Steinmetz 1964, 215-217), and Apollonius of Myndos, mentioned by Seneca in *NQ* 7.17.

⁷ This opinion has later proved to be the correct one. This has led to a greater appreciation of Book 7 than of the other books of the *NQ*, especially in combination with the much praised idea of the progress of science found in ch.25 and 30. See for example D.K. Yeomans, *Comets. A chronological history of observation, science, myth and folklore*, New York 1991, 9: ‘in general, Seneca’s views on meteorology were based on speculation and analogy. However, his views about comets were quite rational, original, and modern’ (cf. p.10, 16). Cf. Holl 1935, 10 n.12, 33 on Seneca’s greater independence from his sources in this book.

⁸ Gauly 2004, 155-157 argues that Seneca’s argumentation on the nature of the comets has a metaphorical character; Seneca’s division of the world into two areas, the *aether* and the *aer*, carries with it a metaphorical distinction. The comets’ area is called ‘superior’ and has characteristics such as ‘divine’, in contrast to the lower area of the sky. Gauly’s concept of

reader of Book 7, Seneca's declaration comes as no surprise, but transpires from his reactions to the opinions of other philosophers mentioned in the first part of the book.⁹

In his discussion, Seneca pays hardly any attention to the common opinion that the comets were *prodigia*, the alternative to the *sidus* option mentioned in 1.5. Only in chapter 28 is this idea mentioned.¹⁰ The comets are not *prodigia* in the normal sense of portents of evil, Seneca argues: as part of the universe, they form 'signs' in a different, less direct sense, signs that are enclosed in the *leges mundi* ('...from this it is clear that the comet has not drawn from its close neighbourhood the signs it gives for the immediate future but that it has them stored up and linked to the laws of the universe', 28.2).

The comets are no *fortuita*, as stated in 27.6 and 30.2. In the last passage, Seneca points to the erroneous opinion certain philosophers have on the nature of the comets, an opinion that leads them to ask many unnecessary questions about these phenomena; 'all these investigations are dismissed when I say that the comets are not accidental fires but are interwoven in a universe that produces them infrequently and moves them about in secret'.¹¹ These short remarks point to the larger cosmic plan of which the comets are part. In the discussion of the end of *NQ* 3 we have already seen that the general philosophical theme of 'the order of the world' (as established by god) is present in the background of the *Naturales*

metaphor is based on Blumenberg's 'Metaphorologie' (Gauly 2004, 139-143: see e.g. *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, 1998).

⁹ See 7.1, 8.4, 9.2-4, 10.2, 12.7. This is interesting material for an analysis of Seneca's way of arguing in the *NQ*. Rehm 1987, 236 and Maurach 1987, 316-317, who think that Seneca shows objectivity in his discussion of other theories by not refuting them from his own point of view, are thereby proved wrong.

¹⁰ Cf. Gauly 2004, 144, 151-155. Gauly also explains further what the qualification *prodigium* implies.

¹¹ The statement that the comets are not *fortuita* is also interesting in connection with *NQ* 1 preface §14, where Seneca mentions the erroneous opinion of those who think that the world is devoid of divine ordering (*fortuitum*; certain 'unordered' natural phenomena that illustrate this view of the world, such as storm and lightning, are mentioned). Cf. Gauly 2004, 157.

Quaestiones (Chapter 5, sections 8 and 10). The scientific discussion in Book 7 could also be said to form a demonstration of this theme.

3. *The end of Book 7* (NQ 7.29.3-7.32)

The end of *NQ* 7 consists of two main parts. The first part contains reflections about the knowledge of the divine comets and god (30). The second part (31-32) forms a moralizing passage.

3.1 *Chapter 30: Knowledge of the divine*

The conclusion of the discussion about the comets in 29.3 is not the request for moral enlightenment we find in many books of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Seneca says:

These are the matters related to comets that have impressed me and others. Whether or not they are true only the gods know, who have knowledge of the truth. We can only investigate these things and grope in the dark with hypotheses, without the assurance of discovering the truth, but not without hope.¹²

This conclusion is indicative of the mood of chapter 30.

The chapter opens with a quotation from Aristotle about the reverence that is necessary when one deals with the divine. Such reverence is especially needed in the discussion of divine natural phenomena: it is important not to say anything wrong or thoughtless about them. Those who have a mistaken opinion about the comets have had to ask unnecessary questions, Seneca continues. All these questions disappear when one realizes that these phenomena are part of the world and that they mostly move about in secret. This leads Seneca to exclaim that much

¹² *Haec sunt quae aut alios movere ad cometas pertinentia aut me: quae an vera sint, di sciunt, quibus veri scientia est: nobis rimari illa et coniectura ire in occulta tantum licet, nec cum fiducia inveniendi nec sine spe.*

is invisible to man: not everything has been made for him by god. As for god, he is hidden from sight and must be 'seen' through rational means. Divine powers akin to god can only be seen with great difficulty: no wonder that god himself cannot be known! At this point follows the mention of the gradual progress in man's achievement of knowledge; many things that are not known now will be in the future. As in a mystery cult, nature only gradually reveals her secrets to her initiates.

Perhaps the most remarkable statement in this chapter concerns the idea that god cannot be known.

What is that without which nothing exists, we are not able to know. And yet we are surprised if we imperfectly understand some tiny fires, even though the greatest part of the universe, god, remains hidden.

Quid sit hoc sine quo nihil est, scire non possumus: et miramur si quos igniculos parum novimus, cum maxima pars mundi, deus, lateat (30.4).

In the preface to *NQ* 1, as well as in other passages, Seneca is positive about the possibility to gain knowledge of god's nature, but here the opposite idea is expressed.¹³ The following analysis of *NQ* 7.30 aims at clarifying the nature of Seneca's statements.

3.1.1 *Non omnia homini deus fecit*

In 7.30.3, the fact that the comets cannot be seen leads to the idea that many things are not visible for human eyes. Then follows the statement: 'god has not made everything for man. How small a part of so great a work has been entrusted to us!' (*neque enim omnia homini deus fecit. Quota pars operis tanti nobis committitur!*).

¹³ *NQ* 7.30 is the only passage in Seneca's work containing such a thought. In *EM* 31.10, Seneca argues that a good reputation will not make one equal to god. Indeed, *nemo novit deum*: 'no one knows god', or rather: 'god does not have a good reputation'. Seneca does not wish to say that god cannot be known, but he presents god as the example one must follow in not being interested in a good reputation (cf. Hijmans 1973, 49). This passage is a good example of the importance of the context for understanding certain of Seneca's bold statements.

To explain this sentence, Vottero quotes a passage from *De ira*:

It is not because of us that the universe brings back winter and summer; these have their own laws, by which the divine plan operates. We have too high a regard for ourselves, if we deem ourselves worthy to be the cause of such mighty movements (2.27.2).¹⁴

Likewise, the comets are part of the universe, as Seneca has explained, not *prodigia* sent for man's benefit. It has been remarked that the assertion that 'god did not make everything for man' stands in contrast with the Stoic thought that the world has been arranged for man's sake.¹⁵ However, in Chapter 5 we have seen that the idea that certain things have specific causes and do not function with regard to man (and his happiness or unhappiness) was used to explain the existence of phenomena such as earthquakes within the Stoic system (section 10). The statement that 'god has not made everything for man' may also be explained in this context.

The context in which the sentence appears adds another aspect to it. Additions in the critical apparatus indicate how the sentence has been understood; Gercke has proposed the addition *<pate>fecit*, while a manuscript variant has *<nota> fecit*. God has not made known or opened up everything to man. It is the fact that the comets (and other things) move secretly and are not visible that leads Seneca to say that 'god has not made everything for man'. In my opinion, the sentence is first and foremost a dramatization of the idea that human beings cannot perceive everything.

3.1.2 God cannot be seen or known

Seneca then focuses on god: he cannot be seen either, but must be 'viewed' by the mind. The fact that Seneca's next thought concerns god's invisibility is an additional argument for considering his remark that not everything has been made for man to refer to the thought that mankind cannot see everything.

¹⁴ Vottero, 'nota critica' *ad loc.* (p.202-203). Cf. Steiner 1914, 21 n.1.

¹⁵ Gauly 2004, 163 and Dihle 1990, 91 point to the non-Stoic character of the sentence. See for instance in Cicero, *DND* 2.133 the conclusion *ita fit credibile deorum et hominum causa factum esse mundum quaeque in eo sint omnia*.

The very one who handles this universe, who established it, who laid the foundations of all this and placed it around himself, and who is the greater and better part of his work, escapes our sight: he must be seen in thought.

Ipse qui ista tractat, qui condidit, qui totum hoc fundavit deditque circa se maiorque est pars sui operis ac melior, effugit oculos: cogitatione visendus est (30.3).

Although Seneca here represents it in somewhat negative terms, it was the normal Stoic procedure to achieve knowledge of god through the *ratio*.¹⁶

After the mention of divine powers (discussed below), Seneca states in strong terms that god's nature cannot be known.¹⁷

What is that without which nothing exists, we are not able to know. And yet we are surprised if we imperfectly understand some tiny fires, even though the greatest part of the universe, god, remains hidden! (30.4).

¹⁶ See Diogenes Laertius 7.52, Cicero *TD* 1.36: *deos esse natura opinamur, qualesque sint ratione cognoscimus*. The same applies to the soul (cf. also *TD* 1.70). This was not an easy process: the passage introducing the discussion of god's nature in Cicero's *De natura deorum* states that it is difficult to turn away from the habit of sight in achieving knowledge through the mind (2.45). See also Inwood 2002, 151: 'the existence of things graspable only by reason is compatible with Stoic monism, just as much as the distinction in value between earthly and celestial realms'. This fact has not always been taken into consideration in the discussion of Seneca's statements about god (cf. Donini, 1979, 210-211). Stoicism shared this cognitive method with Platonic thought. The deity that appears in *Peri kosmou* can also only be known through the mind. However, its invisibility does not mean that we should doubt its existence, as is said: the soul, too, is invisible (*Peri kosmou* 399a31, 399b11ff., cf. Apuleius *De mundo* 30-31). The deity of *Peri kosmou* is also seated in the upper area of the world (397b24ff., 398b6ff., *De mundo* 25, 27, 33), as in *NQ* 7 and 1: see for this aspect the discussion of the preface of *NQ* 1 (Chapter 10, section 5.2.1).

¹⁷ For the distinction between knowledge of the existence and the essence of god see Runia 2002, who shows that it occurs in doxographical material (p.281), before demonstrating that it is also found in Philo (p.285, 299-302).

One must ask what the significance of this statement is: again, it seems probable to me that the idea that god cannot be seen led Seneca to the dramatic statement that he cannot be known. The passage immediately preceding the statement describes the (in)visibility of the divine powers, demonstrating that this is still Seneca's concern.

A statement made in Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, during a discussion with the Epicureans on the nature of the *animus*, shows that the invisibility of certain things could lead to the idea that it was not possible to know them: 'for unless we are unable to realize the nature of what we have never seen, beyond doubt we can form a conception of god himself and the divine soul set free from the body' (1.51).¹⁸ It seems that Seneca has followed through the negative side of this thought. This idea will be further developed in the rest of this chapter.

3.1.3 The powers similar to god

In 7.30.4 Seneca speaks about mysterious divine powers. Many divine powers are *obscura*: they cannot be seen, or perhaps, more subtly, 'they both fill and elude our vision'. Two possible reasons are given: perhaps the human eye cannot see their *subtilitas* (the material of which they consist is too subtle to be seen), or their sacred character is hidden away in a reign only accessible to the mind (they can only be grasped by the mind).

These divine phenomena are said to be 'related to the highest divinity and allotted a related power'. They may be equated with the lesser gods of the pantheon.¹⁹ It is also possible to identify them with the divine comets.²⁰ The remark

¹⁸ *Nisi enim, quod numquam vidimus, id quale sit intellegere non possumus, certe et deum ipsum et divinum animum corpore liberatum cogitatione complecti possumus.* Schofield 1980, 283ff. (289-290, 306-307 especially) also speaks about the problematic character of the knowledge of god via the *ratio* in the Stoic system.

¹⁹ So Bonhöffer 1894, 248 and De Bovis 1948, 156.

²⁰ See Waiblinger 1977, 85, Gross 1989, 303 and the note *ad loc.* (p.499) in the *NQ* edition by O. and E. Schönberger. It is interesting to see that those who discuss this passage in the context of the *NQ* think of the powers as comets, while those who discuss it in the context

that the powers fill our eyes and at the same time escape our sight corresponds well to the nature of the comets, which are barely visible. In *NQ* 7.11.3, Seneca says that even when the comets appear there is no agreement as to their form, due to the imperfection of the human sight.

If we accept the equation of the divine powers with the comets, Seneca's statement that god cannot be known becomes more understandable. Indeed, the comets combine a divine nature with the fact that they are not (yet) entirely known. God himself must then also be unknown.

The sentence 'And yet we are surprised if we imperfectly understand some tiny fires, even though the greatest part of the universe, god, remains hidden!' forms a remarkable sequel to the idea of divine heavenly phenomena: the comets become *aliqui igniculi*, insignificant fires. In contrast to the magnitude of god their smallness is now emphasized. The perspective has changed: starting from the idea that 'the greatest part of the universe' is unknown, it is not surprising that other, less important things are not well known either. In both cases, the comets (whether divine powers or tiny fires) put the remarks about god in perspective.

In chapter 30, two elements from the previous discussion on the nature of the comets are combined.²¹ The comets, it has been said, are difficult to see and know. Only recently some knowledge about them has begun to be assembled (see 7.3.1, 7.11.3, and 7.25, which is discussed in section 3.1.10 below). The discussion concludes with the cautious remark in 7.29.3 that the truth about the matter remains uncertain. The other element that is developed in the epilogue is the divine character of these phenomena. The combination of the two ideas leads to

of Seneca's remarks on god (see the previous note) regard the powers as the other gods of the pantheon.

²¹ Earlier scholarship already (succinctly) pointed to the connection between the epilogue and the scientific discussion in this book; see Stahl 1960, 123, 125; 1987, 271, Waiblinger 1977, 85, Gross 1989, 303-304 (who points out that, after the conclusion of the discussion about the comets, the scientific discussion is continued especially in 30.2), Codoñer 1989, 1819. Berno 2003, 292-293 mentions that for *NQ* 7, in contrast to other books, scholars have noticed a connection between the different parts of the book (with reference to Waiblinger and Gross). Cf. Gauly 2004, 158.

statements about the impossibility to see and know the divine being *par excellence*, god; the discussion of the comets is taken from a physical to a theological level. The fact that the grand statements about knowledge of the divine follow from this specific context puts them in perspective.

In an article entitled 'The beginnings of the end: Philo of Alexandria and Hellenistic theology', Runia shows that although at certain moments Philo demonstrates the conviction that it is possible to obtain knowledge of god's nature, an idea that is characteristic of the Hellenistic period, at other moments he states that god's essence cannot be known. This, Runia argues, is indicative of the Platonic tendencies arising after the Hellenistic period. In Philo's *De specialibus legibus* 1.36ff., for instance, one finds a longer passage concerning the impossibility of knowing god's nature. Man is not able to receive everything god can give him: comprehension of the divine is something that lies beyond his capacities.²² Runia adduces Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* as a parallel for Philo: whereas in the preface to NQ 1 Seneca is positive about the possibility to gain knowledge of god's nature, at the end of Book 7 he states that god cannot be known.²³ This is remarkable, since for a Stoic god's nature is supposed to be known (or knowable).²⁴

Philo provides some interesting parallels for Seneca. For instance, divine powers are also mentioned in *De specialibus legibus* (1.45ff.). When Moses has understood that god himself cannot be known, he asks whether it is possible to have knowledge of the divine powers. However, as with god, the essence of these powers cannot be known. Only their existence can be grasped through the mind. The intermediary position of the divine powers between the world and god is similar in NQ 7.30. However, the nature of the powers mentioned by Philo is different, since

²² Runia 2002, 300-301. Cf. e.g. Philo *De praemiis et poeniis* 40.

²³ Runia 2002, 306-307. Another parallel Runia refers to is the Middle Platonic handbook of Alcinous, the *Didaskalikos*, where god is said to be 'ineffable' and understandable only by the intellect (10.4); at the same time indications of god's nature are given (e.g. in 10.3). Compare also, for a later period, J. Mansfeld, 'Compatible alternatives: Middle Platonist theology and the Xenophanes reception', *Knowledge of god in the Graeco-Roman world*, Leiden 1988, 92.

²⁴ Cf. Cicero *DND* 2.45 *restat ut qualis eorum [sc. deorum] natura sit consideremus*.

he equates them with the Platonic Ideas. As we have seen, the specific nature of the minor divinities mentioned by Seneca is less clear.²⁵ There is a risk involved in comparing Seneca's highly rhetorical statements about the impossibility to obtain knowledge of god to Philo's ideas. In the following, we will see that the ideas of *NQ* 7.30 can be placed in a more general context than that offered by the comparison with Philo.

3.1.4 The study of natural phenomena and the limits of knowledge

I will continue my analysis of the theme of knowledge in *NQ* 7.30 by presenting a context for Seneca's pessimistic thoughts. In other passages, too, the study of natural phenomena appears to be accompanied by the idea that such knowledge is difficult to obtain. A few short examples of this line of thought will be followed by a discussion of more extensive passages from Cicero and Manilius.²⁶

In Aristotle's work, some remarks may be found that indicate that caution accompanies the search for knowledge about certain subjects. Thus, Aristotle says that we must restrict ourselves to τὸ φαινόμενον, as long as we do not have a firmer knowledge of a specific thing. Concerning subjects that cause ἀπορία, we should modestly be content with trying to achieve small certainties (*De caelo* 288a1-3, 291b24-28). In *Metaphysica* 982b29-33, Aristotle mentions that achieving knowledge about divine matters could be thought to fall outside the scope of man's knowledge. He himself reacts to this idea by saying that it is possible for man to achieve such knowledge.

²⁵ In the discussion of god in *Peri kosmou*, divine powers also appear (*Peri kosmou* 397b27-30; cf. Apuleius' Latin version *De mundo* 25-27). They function as mediators between god and the world, and are also related to the heavenly phenomena.

²⁶ Besides the following statements on the difficulty to achieve knowledge about certain natural phenomena, Seneca's pessimism could also be placed in the context of the reserved attitude of the Stoic school towards aetiology: see especially Strabo 2.3.8 (T 85 in the Edelstein-Kidd collection of Posidonius' fragments: Kidd's commentary refers to other Stoic *testimonia*), and Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantibus* 1047c, quoting Chrysippus (SVF 2.763).

Remarks about the limits of human knowledge of the heavens also occur in Pliny's discussion of heavenly phenomena in *Naturalis Historia* Book 2. Like Seneca, Pliny states that certain phenomena are unknown because of their rarity.²⁷

On the basis of this material, one begins to discern a line of thought that declared knowledge of celestial phenomena to be somewhat uncertain. Another example of the restrictions to man's knowledge on this subject concerns the proverbial idea that the number of the stars was unknown.²⁸ Such material is mostly found in the works of the Sceptics: the expression of uncertainty of knowledge by 'dogmatists' of course seemed especially interesting to this philosophical school. It is in their writings that we find some good comparative material for Seneca's text.

In Cicero's *Academica* (2.14), the sceptical philosophers are accused of using philosophers such as Empedocles and Anaxagoras, and even Plato and Socrates, for their cause. The person who functions as opponent of the sceptical school says that these philosophers cannot be compared to the sceptics; the trickery of an Arcesilas is not comparable to the modesty (*verecundia*) of a Democritus. Still, natural philosophers (*physici*) sometimes seem to express something akin to sceptical thoughts:

Nevertheless your natural philosophers do rather rarely, when brought to a standstill at some topic, cry out in an excited sort of manner – Empedocles indeed in a way that sometimes makes me think he is raving – saying that all things are hidden and that we perceive nothing, discern nothing, are utterly unable to discover the real nature of anything.²⁹

²⁷ *NH* 2.97: *raritate autem occultam eorum esse rationem ideoque non, sicut exortus supra dictos defectusque et multa alia, nosci*. See also *NH* 2.101.

²⁸ See Cicero, *Academica* 2.32, 110, Sextus Empiricus *PH* 2.97, *M* 8.317. In *De specialibus legibus* 39, Philo says that we cannot know the nature of all the stars. The number of grains of sand in the universe was also traditionally unknown: cf. Horace *Odes* 1.28.1, with the commentary of Nisbet-Hubbard (1970).

²⁹ *Et tamen isti physici raro admodum, cum haerent aliquo loco, exclamant quasi mente incitati – Empedocles quidem ut interdum mihi furere videatur – abstrusa esse omnia, nihil nos sentire, nihil cernere, nihil omnino quale sit posse reperire*. See also, in chapter 15, the similar formulation *Arcesilas qui constitutam philosophiam everteret, et in eorum*

The speaker adds that in spite of these exclamations, the philosophers usually make stronger assumptions than they should.³⁰

Natural philosophers have a tendency, when they are not making progress in their research, to exclaim that they do not see or know anything, it appears. This resembles Seneca's attitude: the fact that he encounters some difficulty in his inquiry concerning the comets leads him to exclaim that there are many things man cannot see (and know), including god. In the passage from the *Academica*, as in *NQ* 7.30, the deficiencies of sight and knowledge are combined. It is also interesting that in Cicero's text such exclamations are not taken too seriously; for the rest these philosophers are very capable of making dogmatic assertions. This passage places Seneca's epilogue in the context of a recurring attitude among natural philosophers – and in a somewhat ironic light.

3.1.5 Manilius, *Astronomica* Book 4

...A man's reach should exceed his grasp
Or what's a heaven for?

Robert Browning, *Andrea del Sarto*, 97-98

The epilogue of Book 4 of Manilius' *Astronomica* (v.866ff.) provides another important parallel for *NQ* 7.30.³¹ This passage grapples with the problematic aspect of man's inquiry into heavenly subjects. It opens with the idea that such an inquiry is not possible: man's own fearful protest is that nature is hidden in deep

auctoritate delitesceret qui negavissent quidquam sciri aut percipi posse. Compare also Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 3.28.10ff. (and 3.30.6) about philosophers who proclaim not to know anything. Lactantius' passage resembles Cicero's: it may have been inspired by it (and certainly stands in the same tradition), although Lactantius directs his attack to philosophers in general, rather than natural philosophers.

³⁰ *Maiores autem partem mihi quidem omnes isti videntur nimis etiam quaedam adfirmare, plusque profiteri se scire quam sciant.*

³¹ Compare also *Astronomica* 2.115-135.

concealment and escapes the sight and knowledge of mortals (*conditur en... vasto natura recessu / mortalisque fugit visus et pectora nostra*).³² Manilius reacts by saying that, on the contrary, man can attain knowledge of heaven. He argues that god himself has put this knowledge within man's reach (4.874). God expressly reveals himself so as to be known (4.916ff.): he does not begrudge man the sight of heaven (*atque ideo faciem caeli non invidet orbi / ipse deus*, 4.915-916). Manilius further asserts that since we see the celestial area, we also know it.³³

The mind ascends to the heavens in its quest for knowledge, penetrating its secrets (4.877ff.). The image of 'the flight of the mind' also occurs in the preface to *NQ* 1 (and is therefore discussed at greater length in Chapter 10); both texts contain many similarities. Manilius describes how the mind makes the entire world its own: nothing remains secret for it ('now nature holds no mysteries for us; we have surveyed it in its entirety', 4.883). Man is not content with the 'outer face' of heaven, but penetrates its inner part.³⁴ The divine element in man returns to where it came from. It is natural that men are able to have knowledge of this area to which they are related.³⁵ Man is said to have great powers, in spite of his insignificance. The power of *ratio* is all-important (4.923ff.).

This passage shows that it was possible to react in a negative as well as a positive way to the attempt to attain knowledge about the heavens. In the discussion of the theme of navigation in Chapter 7 (section 2.3), we also noticed that different reactions to man's achievements were possible. In the passage of the *Astronomica* the negative reaction is immediately replaced by a positive view. Some elements occurring in a negative sense in *NQ* 7.30 are mentioned positively by Manilius; whereas he deduces the possibility to know heaven from the fact that one can

³² This idea is put forward by an anonymous objector, a procedure Seneca often uses. Cf. Reeh 1973, 142.

³³ 4.876 *perspicimus caelum, cur non et munera caeli*, 4.922 *quis putet esse nefas nosci, quod cernere fas est*, also 4.918 *doceatque videntis*.

³⁴ 4.908-909; cf. *NQ* 1, preface §3.

³⁵ 4.884-887; 893ff., 910 *cognatumque sequens corpus se quaerit in astris*. This thought is common to representations of the mind taking possession of the world in its flight. Cf. the preface to *NQ* 1, §12.

contemplate it, it is the fact that the comets cannot be seen that leads Seneca to the thought of the impossibility of knowledge. For Manilius, nature has presented the skies to man's sight so that they may be known. The idea that god does not begrudge man knowledge of him is also in contrast to *NQ* 7.30, and in particular to the sentence *non omnia homini deus fecit*. In the *Astronomica*, man's powers, such as the power of the *ratio*, are valued positively. This is not as clear in *NQ* 7, where knowledge obtained through other means than the eyes is said to be uncertain.

Earlier on in Book 4 of the *Astronomica* occurs another relevant passage (v.387-407), a reflection on the difficulty of the inquiry into celestial matters, which forces one to 'merge the mind in great darkness' (4.388). The reaction to this complaint is that an inquiry into so great a subject understandably takes its toll.

The object of your quest is god: you are seeking to scale the skies and, though born under the rule of fate, to gain knowledge of that fate; you are seeking to pass beyond your understanding and make yourself master of the universe (4.390-392).³⁶

The inquiry into divine matters leads man to go beyond his mortal nature. The hard labour required is in proportion to the aim of the inquiry: 'the toil involved matches the reward to be won, nor are such high attainments secured without a price' (4.393). Man has been given the possibility to undertake such inquiries: the rest (the difficulty of the undertaking) is his concern (4.395).

The passage continues with a list of laborious activities undertaken by mankind for wrong purposes such as the acquisition of wealth. Among them is a reference to navigation (4.402). These activities are contrasted with the inquiry into the heavens. Manilius asks what will be the prize to pay in exchange for the conquest of 'the whole' (4.406). The answer is: 'man must expend his very self before god can dwell in him' (*impendendus homo est, deus esse ut possit in ipso*, 4.407). This concluding remark, which presents man's inquiry as an integration of god into the self, adds a moral aspect familiar from Seneca.

³⁶ *Quod quaeris, deus est: conaris scandere caelum / fataque fatali genitus cognoscere lege / et transire tuum pectus mundoque potiri.*

This passage, too, is of interest for the discussion of *NQ* 7.30. Again we see how the inquiry into the skies, which is in fact an inquiry into the nature of god, is considered an undertaking of great difficulty, exceeding man's scope. But here, too, Manilius speaks in positive terms about it (a fact that is not surprising in the context of the *Astronomica*). Although the inquiry is very difficult, man can undertake it. In *NQ* 7.30, Seneca, on the other hand, (very briefly) takes the point of view that man cannot know god. The parallel provided by the *Astronomica* (and Cicero's *Academica*) places his statements in another context than that of Philo's Platonic ideas. The theme of the ambivalent character of man's inquiry into divine phenomena had been long linked to the study of nature.³⁷

3.1.6 Other Senecan passages on heavenly inquiries

Besides the preface to *NQ* 1, there are other passages in which Seneca presents the inquiry into the heavens in positive terms. In *De otio* 5.4, in the course of an argumentation in favour of contemplation, he mentions the idea that nature has put man in an upright position and directed him towards heaven. Moreover, 'she has revealed every part of herself, so that by what she had presented to man's eyes she might also arouse his curiosity in the rest' (*nullam non partem sui explicuit, ut per haec quae obtulerat oculis eius cupiditatem faceret etiam ceterorum*). Here, the knowledge of what cannot be seen is presented as part of nature's intentions; this corresponds to the thought of the *Astronomica*. The passage continues by explaining how man achieves knowledge about what he cannot see on the basis of what he can see.

³⁷ In her discussion of 'Pious and impious approaches to cosmology in Manilius' (2002), Volk concludes the question of the simultaneous occurrence of positive and negative images of the ascent to the skies in Manilius with this statement; 'Manilius... finds himself the heir to a vast store of literary images, and I would suggest that in drawing on this repertory, the poet is more interested in using each image to its utmost effect than in presenting an absolutely consistent picture' (p.113). In my opinion, this remark also applies to Seneca.

Chapter 5 of *De otio* also contains other interesting thoughts. In 5.7 Seneca says: ‘man is too mortal to comprehend things immortal’ (*homo ad immortalium cognitionem nimis mortalis est*). This statement expresses a pessimistic view of man’s capacities for knowledge. However, the context somewhat modifies this statement. As we have just seen, the entire passage argues in favour of contemplation of the visible as well as the invisible world. Questions on which man achieves knowledge are listed. After such a long list (in 5.5-6), Seneca adds that man has been given little time for such grand questions. Even if he guards this time jealously, spending all of it in study and none of it in vicious occupations, ‘yet man is too mortal to comprehend things immortal’. Seneca continues ‘consequently I live according to nature if I surrender myself entirely to her, if I become her admirer and worshipper’. Thus, the passage also speaks in positive terms about the knowledge man searches and achieves. Perhaps the statement concerning man’s mortal nature should rather be regarded as an encouragement to study harder. In my opinion, the case of *De otio* is also indicative of the manner in which we should understand the statements of *NQ* 7.30.

In *De beneficiis* 6.23.6, Seneca discusses the divine benevolence towards man:

See how great a privilege nature has bestowed upon us, how the terms of man’s empire do not restrict him to mankind; see how widely she allows our bodies to roam, she has not confined them within the limits of the land, but has dispatched them into every part of her domain; see how great is the audacity of our minds, how they alone either know, or seek, the gods, and, by directing their thought on high, commune with powers divine.³⁸

God has granted much to man: his mind reaches far, in pursuit of the divine, and attains the divine heavenly phenomena. In *NQ* 7.30 Seneca states that there is much that god has not entrusted to man, but when he is speaking about (divine) benefits, he will also be led to say that god has given much to man. Interestingly, in

³⁸ *Vide, quantum nobis permiserit, quam non intra homines humani imperii condicio sit; vide in quantum corporibus vagari liceat, quae ne coeruit quidem fine terrarum, sed in omnem partem sui misit; vide, animi quantum audeant, quemadmodum soli aut noverint deos aut quaerant et mente in altum data divina comitentur.*

this passage, too, Seneca is still speaking with some reserve about the knowledge of god (in the sentence ‘they either know, or seek, the gods’).

3.1.7 *Ratio* versus sight as a means of attaining knowledge

We have encountered sight and *ratio* as two different means to obtain knowledge. In *NQ* 7.30.3, god is said to escape the eyes, and only to be ‘visible’ through the mind.³⁹ What cannot be seen is *obscurum* (the qualification applied to the divine powers). The fact that something cannot be seen is understood in a negative sense, since it leads to thoughts about the impossibility of knowledge. However, in the same passage of *NQ* 7.30.4 Seneca also offers us proof that he values the *ratio* highly, in his description of the divine powers. He speaks of a *subtilitas* that cannot be followed by the human eye, and a sacred recess that can only be reached by the mind.

Other passages indicate that the eyes are considered limited instruments for obtaining knowledge. In *NQ* 6, Seneca speaks negatively about those who only base their explanations on what they see with their eyes: ‘we comprehend nature with our eyes, not our reason, and do not reflect upon what nature can do but only on what she has done’ (*naturam oculis, non ratione, comprehendimus...*, 6.3.2, cf. 6.7.5).⁴⁰ Thus, although in *NQ* 7.30 Seneca seems to attach a great importance to the faculty of sight as a means of knowledge, elsewhere he devalues knowledge obtained in this manner, and speaks of the mind as the instrument that offers a correct understanding of nature.⁴¹

³⁹ Cf. *NQ* 2.2.3 *quae sensum quidem effugiunt, ceterum ratione prehenduntur*.

⁴⁰ See also *NQ* 1 preface §1, *EM* 90.28, 102.28. In the course of the scientific discussion of *NQ* 1, the idea that the eyes are not reliable occurs more often (see also Chapter 7, section 3.4.2.3). Compare about the occurrence of this theme in Seneca Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 175-176. Certain passages in Cicero also mention the difficulty of passing from knowledge achieved through the eyes to that acquired via the mind (see *TD* 1.37-38).

⁴¹ Solimano 1991, 93-94 also signals this contradiction. She explains it by referring to the Stoic cognitive system, in which the *ratio* decides to accept or refute what the eyes see: both the eyes and the mind have a role in the cognitive process. In its role of instrument of

3.1.8 *Aperta* versus *obscura*

In *De otio* 5.5, Seneca explains how one proceeds from knowledge of visible things to an understanding of invisible things:

We do not behold everything, nor the full extent of things, but our vision opens up a path for its investigation, and lays the foundations of truth so that our research may pass from revealed (*aperta*) to hidden things (*obscura*) and discover something more ancient than the world itself - whence the stars came forth, what was the state of the universe before the several elements separated to form its parts...⁴²

The eyes provide the basis of the inquiry into questions that go beyond the sight; from *aperta* one proceeds to *obscura*.⁴³ The term *obscurum* was used in a technical sense in antiquity, to indicate those things that are known through the *ratio*. Sextus Empiricus explains that the dogmatist philosophers divided objects in πρόδηλα (or ἐναργῆ) and ἄδηλα (*PH* 2.97-98, *Adv. Math.* 8.316-317). Knowledge of ἄδηλα could be obtained by analogy or through a deductive reasoning (*PH* 2.135, 2.143).⁴⁴ Knowledge of invisible things was therefore accounted for.

knowledge the *ratio* is proverbially spoken of as 'the eyes of the mind': see Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 174-175 (with n.256), and Schrijvers 1999, 205-206, who mentions that knowledge was strongly connected to vision in classical thought (with reference to H. Blum, *Die antike Mnemotechnik*, Hildesheim 1969, 164ff. ['Antike Meinungen über die optische Anschauung']).

⁴² *Nec omnia nec tanta visimus quanta sunt, sed acies nostra aperit sibi investigandi viam et fundamenta vero iacit, ut inquisitio transeat ex apertis in obscura et aliquid ipso mundo inveniat antiquius; unde ista sidera exierint, quis fuerit universi status antequam singula in partes discederent...*

⁴³ Cf. Solimano 1991, 97 about *aperta* and *obscura*.

⁴⁴ Compare the Latin version in Cicero *Academica* 2.26 (SVF 2.111). Compare also what is said about knowledge of ἄδηλα in the Epicurean system: see in particular Diogenes Laertius 10.78-80, 85-87, 94, 98. About the reasoning through analogy see Schrijvers 1999

Although achieving knowledge of ἀδελφα through reasoning was an acknowledged procedure, it was also felt to include an uncertain factor.⁴⁵ This aspect appears in the conclusion of the discussion of the comets in *NQ* 7.29.3; ‘we can only...grope in the dark with hypotheses (*in coniectura ire in occulta*), without the assurance of discovering the truth, but not without hope’. Knowledge obtained through hypothesis (*coniectura*) had the appearance of truth (was *verisimile*).⁴⁶

Cicero *Academica* 2.127-128 shows that such an attitude towards knowledge of the invisible corresponds to sceptical caution. The passage formulates the reaction of the sceptical philosopher to the study of nature:

There is delight in the mere investigation of matters at once of supreme magnitude and also of extreme obscurity; while if a notion comes to us that appears to bear a likeness to the truth, the mind is filled with the most human kind of pleasure. These researches will therefore be pursued both by your wise man and by this sage of ours, but by yours with the intention of assenting, believing and affirming, by ours with the resolve to be afraid of forming rash opinions and to deem that it goes well with him if in matters of this kind he has discovered that which bears a likeness to truth.⁴⁷

183-184, with further references, and Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 283ff., who discusses the appearance of analogy in the *NQ*.

⁴⁵ Cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 302ff. about the uncertain factor in the reasoning through analogy.

⁴⁶ Cf. *NQ* 1.3.14: *in aliis rebus vaga inquisitio est, ubi non habemus, quod manu tenere possimus, et late coniectura mittenda est*. See also *NQ* 6.20.5, *De beneficiis* 4.33.1-2. Cf. Cicero, *De republica* 1.15, *Academica* 2.116, and *TD* 1.23 (following a list of opinions about the nature of the soul): *harum sententiarum quae vera sit, deus aliqui viderit: quae veri simillima, magna quaestio est*.

⁴⁷ *Indagatio ipsa rerum cum maximarum tum etiam occultissimarum habet oblectationem; si vero aliquid occurrit quod veri simile videatur, humanissima completur animus voluptate. Quaeret igitur haec et vester sapiens et hic noster, sed vester ut adsentiatur credat adfirmet, noster ut vereatur temere opinari praeclareque agi secum putet si in eius modi rebus veri simile quod sit invenerit*. See also *Academica* 2.116, 122: the subject of natural philosophy is hidden (*latent ista omnia...crassis occultata et circumfusa tenebris*), the human mind (‘the sight of the mind’) cannot penetrate that far.

As appears from *De otio* 5.5, *obscura* comprise important questions about the universe. In *EM* 95, Seneca provides more information about *aperta* and *obscura*:

There are certain matters in philosophy that need admonition; others need proof, and a great deal of proof, too, because they are complicated and can scarcely be made clear even with the greatest care and the greatest subtlety of mind...some matters are evident, others obscure: the senses and the memory embrace evident matters, what is outside their scope is obscure. Reason is not satisfied by obvious facts; its higher and nobler function is to deal with hidden things. Hidden things need proof (*EM* 95.61).⁴⁸

This passage again mentions the difficulty of obtaining knowledge about *obscura*: they can only barely be revealed, with much effort. However, Seneca also states that the mind is not content with *manifesta*. The best of its territory lies in the *obscura*. Both categories thus have positive and negative aspects: while the knowledge of the former is more certain, that of the latter provides a worthy challenge for the mind. In letter 95, Seneca is arguing for the importance of *decreta* in philosophy; *decreta* are part of the reasoning that leads to knowledge about *obscura*, as appears from *EM* 95.61. It is therefore not surprising that a more positive view on the *obscura* is given. In *NQ* 7.30 Seneca values the ‘obscure’ character of ἄδηλα negatively. He reflects about the knowledge of ‘obscure matters’ obtained by the *ratio* and finds it uncertain.

In *NQ* 3 preface §18 Seneca also mentions *aperta* and *obscura*. Speaking of what may be gained by the study of nature, he states that the mind will exercise itself in studying *occulta*. This exercise of the mind will not be lost for the *aperta*, which are here specified as moral lessons. Thus, in this passage *obscura* and *aperta* are primarily distinguished as questions of natural philosophy and ethical lessons. In *NQ* 2.59.2, the inquiry into natural phenomena is described in the same terms (*cum imus per occulta naturae, cum divina tractamus...*). Physics was more generally

⁴⁸ *Quaedam admonitionem in philosophia desiderant, quaedam probationem, et quidem multam, quia involuta sunt vixque summa diligentia ac summa subtilitate aperiuntur... quaedam aperta sunt, quaedam obscura: aperta quae sensu comprehenduntur, quae memoria; obscura quae extra haec sunt. Ratio autem non impletur manifestis: maior eius pars pulchriorque in occultis est. Occulta probationem exigunt.*

associated with, or described as, *obscura*. The idea of ‘nature’s secrets’ had also become proverbial: the expression *occulta naturae* (and similar formulations) also occurs without a very pregnant meaning. It is often used in the sense of ‘bringing to light’ nature’s secrets.⁴⁹

Thus we may conclude that the term *obscura* could be used in a neutral sense, in an epistemological context, as referring to those things known through analogy or a deductive reasoning (1); as referring to physics, a main area of research into *obscura* (2); finally, the word could also be used in a non-technical sense, to indicate that something was ‘obscure’ (3).⁵⁰

3.1.9 The idea of progress

In 30.5, following the exclamation that god cannot be known, Seneca presents a thought that softens the pessimistic view on knowledge discernible in the epilogue: the gradual progress of human knowledge. Much of our knowledge is recent, he says: what we do not know will be uncovered by later generations.⁵¹ The concept of a gradual progress of knowledge follows from the discussion of the comets. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, Seneca says that knowledge about these natural phenomena had only just begun to take shape in his time (7.3.1, 7.11.3 and 7.25). Thus, both

⁴⁹ As Fowler 1997, 121 says: “‘natural philosophy’ was known in Latin as *res occultae* or *res abditae*’. He refers to *Academica* 1.19, where physics is described as *de natura et rebus occultis*. This idea begins with Heraclitus’ statement ‘nature loves to be hidden’ (DK 22 B 123). Occurrences in Seneca: *NQ* 1 praef. §3, 3 praef. §1, 6.5.2, 7.25.4, *EM* 102.28. See further Pliny, *NH* 2.77, 2.101, Lucretius, *DRN* 1.143-145, cf. 1.70-71, 2.59-61. The latest study of P. Hadot (2004) discusses the different aspects of the idea of nature’s secrets in classical thought (with reference to Seneca).

⁵⁰ In her discussion of *NQ* 7, Berno also mentions *aperta* and *obscura* (2003, 313-316), as one of the pairs of contrasting ideas she believes to be present in the entire book. Among the passages referring to *aperta* and *obscura* she also points to *EM* 68.4 (p.316 n.76). In my opinion, however, the *aperta* and *obscura* mentioned in that passage are unrelated to the philosophical concept of *aperta* and *obscura* under discussion here.

⁵¹ Compare also *NQ* 6.5.3, where Seneca says that all subjects, not only the most difficult questions, leave something to discover for future generations.

the negative thoughts concerning the knowledge of the divine and the positive concept of a gradual progress of knowledge arise from the same discussion.

It has been a matter of dispute to what extent the idea of progress is present in Seneca's thought. Indeed, he also often portrays the decadence of mankind. In this matter, one must distinguish between scientific progress and moral decadence. In earlier research this distinction has been used to solve the contradiction caused by the presence of the ideas of progress as well as decadence in Seneca's work.⁵² The two ideas occur together in other authors as well.⁵³

NQ 7.30 shows that the idea of scientific progress may occur in the same text as the notion of a moral decadence. Indeed, the final chapters of the book (31-32) give a description of moral decadence, which centres on the notions of progress and decadence in philosophical studies and in morals. Scientific progress and moral decadence are not entirely distinct processes, however. The latter also has an effect on the former, slowing it down (see besides *NQ* 7.31-32 *De otio* 5.7). In *NQ* 5.18, Seneca distinguishes between a correct usage of technology and man's misuse of it. In *EM* 90, he condemns technical progress in itself because of the misuse moral decadence makes of it.⁵⁴

⁵² See Motto 1984, particularly p.235, Gauly, 2004, 161. Cf. Vottero n.22 *ad* 30.6. Edelstein 1967, 169ff. and Dodds 1973, 21-23 also mention the presence of the ideas of moral decadence and scientific progress in Seneca. Dodds moreover reacts to Edelstein's very positive view on the presence of the idea of progress in antiquity (cf. Gauly 2004, 160-161). *NQ* 7.25 and 7.30 have a prominent place in such discussions. It is in the writing of scientists that the thought of progress is most often found (Dodds 1973, 18, 22, 24; cf. Edelstein 1967, 155). See also Berno's bibliographical note (2003, 293, n.4) about Seneca and progress.

⁵³ See Dodds 1973, 24, Novara 1982-1983 (p.343 about Lucretius, p.675-712 about Virgil). According to Gauly (2004, 159), Seneca's representation of progress distinguishes itself from that of Manilius and Lucretius because he projects the progress in the future, while the other two authors only speak of a progress in the representation of the gradual development of civilization until their time.

⁵⁴ According to Gauly, Seneca's representation of progress has a 'transcendent character' (2004, 162-163). From Gauly's own short discussion it is not clear to me what we should understand by this. The idea of progress only occurs in a context that has been thought to

3.1.10 *NQ* 7.25

The notion of progress in knowledge is also expressed in chapter 25 of Book 7. This chapter is part of a series of refutations of arguments put forward against Seneca's theory about the nature of the comets. Seneca is asked why the courses of the comets have not been established, like those of the planets. He begins by answering that there are many things that we concede exist, although we do not know their nature. This is the case with our soul: everyone knows we have one, but uncertainty reigns as to its nature, about which many different opinions exist.⁵⁵

The pessimistic idea that the nature of some things is unknown is soon replaced by a more optimistic tone. Since we do not know what our soul is made of, it is no wonder that the nature of the comets, those rare phenomena, is also unknown, Seneca continues (25.3).⁵⁶ Much knowledge has been gained only recently (25.3, 5). For instance, the true nature of the planets has also only just been established (25.6-7). A time will come when what we do not know now will be revealed (25.4-5). Seneca adds that one generation will not suffice to discover the answers to such great questions. Moreover, man spends only little of his time in study, whereas

picture a transcendent god (see for this theme the discussion in Chapter 10). Gauly states that he follows Citroni Marchetti 1991, 144-153, Dihle 1990, 88-92 and Donini 1979, 243-251. Donini (who mentions a few interesting passages from the *EM* related to the idea of progress) had earlier placed Seneca's idea of progress in a Platonic context. According to him, the contradiction between the ideas of moral decadence and progress of scientific knowledge must be understood in the context of the rivalry between two world models in Seneca's thought, the theoretical-Platonic and the practical-Stoic model. I myself do not think it is possible to equate the idea of progress with Platonic tendencies and that of decadence with Stoic thought (cf. Donini 1979, 247). The Stoics are known to have believed in some notion of progress (see SVF 2.1172).

⁵⁵ The distinction between knowledge of the mere existence and of the nature of something was also present in the discussion of the divine; cf. n.17 above.

⁵⁶ As Seneca says, *adeo animo non potest liquere de ceteris rebus ut adhuc ipse se quaerat* (25.3). Cf. Cicero, *Academica* 2.122.

much attention is given to vice (25.4). Therefore, discoveries have to be made by a succession of generations. The truth about the comets will once be uncovered:

Some day there will be a man who will show in what regions comets have their orbit...what their size and nature is. Let us be satisfied with what we have found out, and let our descendants also contribute something to the truth (25.7).

The relative pessimism of this chapter ends in relative optimism. The specific context of the research into the nature of the comets prompts the idea that the lack of knowledge is only temporary. We here encounter ideas that are also found in the epilogue: besides the idea of the progress of science, Seneca also briefly mentions man's habit to dedicate more time to vice than to study. The fact that these thoughts are voiced in the course of the scientific argumentation shows that the thoughts of the epilogue and that of main text are to some extent interwoven in this book. However, the epilogue also takes the discussion further: it grapples with the divinity of the comets and develops the moralizing theme of which chapter 25 only gives a glimpse.

3.1.11 Reverence for the mysteries of the world

Attached to the idea of a progress of science is the image of an initiation in the mysteries of the world (30.6). A religious attitude already appears in 30.1, where Aristotle is quoted as saying that men must never be more respectful (*verecundiores*) than when the gods are concerned.⁵⁷ If they behave reverentially in a temple, how much more must they do so when they speak about the nature of divine heavenly phenomena, so as not to make incorrect or bold affirmations. This idea results in the affirmation that god cannot be known.

⁵⁷ In *Academica* 2.14 the word *verecundia* is also used to denote the respect of the natural philosopher for the world. Cf. Cicero *De legibus* 2.11, quoting Pythagoras. The parenetic element in Aristotle's statement (*debere*) has been thought to come from Seneca, not from Aristotle (see Untersteiner 1963, 187).

Aristotle's quotation has been taken to cover the entire paragraph (30.1).⁵⁸ The idea that caution is necessary in speaking about divine matters corresponds to the thought expressed in the short passages from Aristotle's work I mentioned earlier (section 3.1.4 above: especially *De caelo* 291b24-28). However, the formulation of Aristotle's statement resembles Seneca's usual manner: this is especially visible in the anaphora (*si...si...de...de...ne...ne...*), which structure the sentence as a series of parallel phrases. Researchers have also pointed to the Roman *togam adducimus*.⁵⁹

In 30.6 the theme of knowledge is also placed in a religious context. Nature is compared to Eleusis, a mystery cult that, like the world, only gradually initiates its adherents into its mysteries. Nature's secrets are not open to everyone, but enclosed in an inner sanctuary. Some are revealed in this age, others in later ages.⁶⁰

In two passages of the *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca uses a similar religious metaphor to describe the 'initiation' into philosophical knowledge. In *EM* 90.28 we learn that philosophy teaches everything:

She delivers to us the knowledge of the whole of nature and of her own nature. She discloses to us what the gods are and of what kind they are...such are wisdom's rites of initiation, by means of which is unlocked, not a village shrine, but the vast temple of all the gods - the universe itself, whose true apparitions and true aspects she offers to the gaze of our minds. For the vision of our eyes is too weak for these great spectacles.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See Hine *ad loc.*, Untersteiner 1963, 186. Others think that the quotation only consists of the first sentence (we should be respectful when the gods are concerned); see Untersteiner 1963, 186. The quotation is usually placed in Aristotle's lost work *On philosophy*; cf. n.14 of Ross' edition of the fragments of Aristotle (1955, with reference to earlier editions). Cf. also Vottero's note *ad loc.*

⁵⁹ See Festugière 1949, 236 n.2, Untersteiner 1963, 186-187.

⁶⁰ Of course, the comparison is not entirely correct, since the same persons are initiated further and further into the secrets of the mystery cult, whereas later generations will learn more about nature's secrets.

⁶¹ *Totius naturae notitiam ac suae tradit. Quid sint di qualesque declarat...haec eius initia sunt, per quae non municipale sacrum, sed ingens deorum omnium templum, mundus ipse reseratur, cuius vera simulacra verasque facies cernendas mentibus protulit:*

This passage speaks in positive terms about attaining knowledge of (among other things) the nature of god, through the ‘vision of the mind’: again, interesting comparative material for *NQ* 7.30. Thus, the image of initiation in the mysteries of the world is used in the context of achieving of knowledge.

In *EM* 95.64 Seneca says:

Just as only the initiated know the more sacred portion of the rites, so in philosophy the hidden truths are revealed only to those who have been admitted to the sacred rites. But precepts and other such matters are familiar even to the uninitiated.⁶²

The more intricate part of philosophy can also more specifically be described as its secret part, known to initiates only (cf. *NQ* 1 preface §3). The passage in *NQ* 7.30.6 adds that the initiation is gradual (an understandable addition, since Seneca is speaking of a gradual progress of knowledge).

The idea of an initiation in a mystery cult was more commonly used as a comparison with the process of learning about the wonders of the well-ordered world, that is, philosophical activity.⁶³ The world is also represented as a temple.⁶⁴

nam ad spectacula tam magna hebes visus est. Cf. also *EM* 52.15. According to Boyancé (1962, 471), the phrase *vera simulacra verasque facies* refers to the divine stars. Boyancé mentions that a comparison of divine phenomena with statues occurs more often.

⁶² *Sicut sanctiora sacrorum tantum initiati sciunt, ita in philosophia arcana illa admissis receptisque in sacra ostenduntur. At praecepta et alia huiusmodi profanis quoque nota sunt.*

⁶³ See especially Dio Chrysostomus (*Olympikos logos* 12.33-34) and Plutarch (*De tranquillitate animi* 20). Aristotle himself has also been thought to have compared the achievement of knowledge of the world to the initiation into a mystery cult. See Festugière 1949, 233-238, who remains cautious on the question. Compare *DND* 2.95 for an Aristotelian passage on the awareness of the wonders of the world. The comparison of knowledge of the world with a mystery cult is also found in a Stoic context; Cleanthes compared the cosmos to a *mysterion*, the followers of the divine to initiates (SVF 1.538, Epiphanius *Adv. Haeres.* 3.2.9). Boyancé 1962, 468 also mentions fragment SVF 2.42, in which Chrysippus compares the highest part of physics, theology, to an initiation. See also

This idea is implicit in *NQ* 7.30.1: if we behave with respect in a temple, how much more must we do so in speaking about the world, the true temple of god. The comparison expresses a reverence for the divine that characterizes the epilogue.⁶⁵

‘A feeling of reverence for the divine’ is perhaps a better indication of the content of *NQ* 7.30 than ‘the impossibility to know god’. In this discussion, I have aimed at clarifying the tenor of Seneca’s statement about the impossibility to know god. The fact that the divine comets cannot be seen leads him to express the idea that god cannot be known. Knowledge of invisible things, which must be obtained through the *ratio*, is valued negatively in this passage. We have seen that the idea of the progress of human knowledge softens this negative representation.

Seneca’s epilogue must be placed in the more general context of the theme of man’s capacity to obtain knowledge about the heavens. Positive as well as negative reactions to this idea occur in antiquity – although an author writing on this area of study could be expected to think (fundamentally) positively about this inquiry. While Seneca is sometimes led to sweeping statements to the contrary effect, his views about the possibility to achieve knowledge of god are fundamentally positive. He exclaims that god cannot be known, in the same way as earlier natural philosophers had said that all was obscure when they were having difficulties in their

Fowler 1997, 122 and n.30 for the association of the idea of progress with the image of an initiation.

⁶⁴ For the Senecan image of the world as a temple, see also Armisen Marchetti 1989, 102. Cf. Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* 15. These ideas are considered commonplaces: cf. Untersteiner 1963, 187.

⁶⁵ Compare for a reverent sentiment towards the world also 7.24.2-3, and the sentence *pusilla res mundus est, nisi in illo quod quaerat omnis aetas hab[e]at* in 7.30.5. *EM* 64.6-10 also unites the discussion of progress and a feeling of reverence. According to Festugière 1949, 237 the atmosphere expressed by *NQ* 7.30 is that of a ‘mysticisme cosmique’ (p.237), characteristics of which are the flight of the mind to the divine, the invisibility of god, his ambivalent nature (he is at the same time invisible and ‘the greatest part of the world’), and the idea of the world as a temple. The beginning of Book 7, with its image of man’s position, directed towards the spectacle of *divina*, also shows signs of the ‘mysticisme cosmique’.

research. The final statement of the epilogue even has a proverbial character: even if men did their utmost best to study, 'we would scarcely reach to the bottom where truth is located, which we now seek on the surface of the earth and with slack effort' (32.4).⁶⁶

3.2 Chapters 31-32: The progress of decadence

Seneca also develops a moral theme in *NQ* 7, as is his habit. Chapters 31-32 continue one of the ideas mentioned in the previous discussion, the theme of progress: while the progress of science falters, vice makes good 'progress', Seneca states.⁶⁷ To vice man gives all the attention that is lacking for philosophical study: nonetheless, vice still has some 'progress' to make (31.1).⁶⁸ Whereas in 30.5-6 Seneca expressed faith in the idea of a gradual progress of knowledge, in the moralistic passage he emphasizes how little mankind achieves.

In both chapters the thought of the progress of vice and relative stagnation of philosophical studies, stated at the beginning of each chapter, is further developed. In ch.31 different forms of vicious 'progress' are described. They are spoken of as vice's 'inventions': we have already encountered this terminology earlier (see

⁶⁶ Cf. Motto 1984, 238 n.43; Seneca's text is mentioned in Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörterlichen Redensarten der Römer*, Leipzig 1890, s.v. *manus*. See Vottero *ad loc.* (n.15 and 16 with 32.4) for parallels, e.g. Seneca's *De beneficiis* 7.1.5. Lydus (*De mensibus* 4.107) explicitly calls 'the truth in the depth' a saying. Seneca's *NQ* was one of Lydus' sources (see Gross 1989, 174-178, Parroni, edition, introduction, p.xxxvii). Some researchers have argued that the idea also occurred in the lost part of *NQ* 4a (Waiblinger 1977, 94, Gross 1989, 181, with a reference to Gercke 1896, 98f.).

⁶⁷ Berno 2003, 294 mentions that Seneca provides a transition to the moralizing passage with this idea. In her discussion of *NQ* 7.31-32, she also points to the theme of the progress/decadence of science/vice (p.294ff.) In this passage, as in other moralizing pieces, she pays special attention to the 'specularità' between vice and virtue (p.307-310); vice's mirroring imitation and reversal of virtue is for instance visible in the fact that schools in vice appear (while schooling in virtue disappears).

⁶⁸ *Id quod unum toto agimus animo nondum perfecimus, ut pessimi essemus: adhuc in processu vitia sunt.* Cf. 31.2, 32.1.

Chapter 7, section 1.3.3). In an ascending tricolon, Seneca describes how some new folly is always being invented (*invenit luxuria aliquid novi in quod insaniat, invenit...invenit...*, 31.1; cf. *commiscimur* in 31.3). Effeminate clothing and behaviour are sought after (31.2-3). Men go to extremes in an attempt to destroy their virility.⁶⁹

In 32.1-2 Seneca describes the other aspect of decadence, the cessation of virtuous activities. No one spends his time studying, and the philosophical schools are empty. This is again said in an ascending tricolon (*ad sapientiam quis accedit? Quis dignam iudicat, nisi quam in transitu noverit?...*). Several schools of philosophy that are not doing well are listed. In 32.3 Seneca returns to the description of prospering vices: they form a contrast with the abandon of the study of philosophy. The teachers and students philosophy lacks abound for 'studies' such as pantomime (*harum artium multi discipuli sunt multique doctores*, 32.3). For these activities there is enthusiasm.⁷⁰ Seneca's conclusion is that the current state of decadence has not only led to a stagnation in new discoveries, but also to a loss of previously achieved knowledge. However, he adds, even if man dedicated all his effort to philosophy, he would barely achieve knowledge that is so difficult to obtain (32.4).

The construction of this moralizing passage, like other such passages, can be described in terms of selection, accumulation and exaggeration of fact. Seneca selects the negative facts he wishes to mention, exaggerates and accumulates them. In this context, the mention of the decline of certain philosophical schools (32.2) is especially interesting. According to Seneca, many of these schools lack successors

⁶⁹ Berno argues that the description of the vices in ch.31 goes from general to particular (2003, 294-5), and points to the climax in this chapter (2003, 297-8, 301). She believes that the description in chapter 31 is divided in three parts, just as other moralizing passages in the *NQ* (p.294). For further commentary on 31.3 cf. Berno 2003, 300-301 and Parroni *ad loc.* To take on the occupation of a gladiator (see 31.3 and 32.3) was a strong instance of vicious behaviour (Berno 2003, 304). Effeminate behaviour was a standard part of vice.

⁷⁰ Compare for the contrast between full theatres (or kitchens) and empty schools of philosophy *EM* 76.4, 80.2, 95.23. See also Cicero, *De oratore* 2.21, Tacitus *Dialogus de oratoribus* 29 and the preface to Columella's *De re rustica* (for which cf. Chapter 1, section 2.2).

and therefore become extinct: the Academics (*veteres et minores*), the Pyrrhonists, the Pythagoreans and the sect of the Sextii. Only schools that are doing badly are mentioned: if Seneca had added the philosophical schools that were prospering at that time, such as that of the Stoics, the picture would be different.⁷¹ This gives an indication of how he selects facts.

We should also ask what value may be assigned to Seneca's statements. It is often difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in moralizing passages. Some modern studies regard the decline of the philosophical schools as a historical fact, and believe that Seneca's passage supports this; a few other ancient testimonia also speak of a decline of certain schools of philosophy.⁷² However, the description in *NQ* 32.2 is not accepted on all points: some researchers find that Seneca's words stand in contrast with what is otherwise known of the historical situation of certain schools.⁷³

An example of the partiality of Seneca's representation is easily provided. Among the schools that cannot find a successor and are therefore doomed, Seneca lists the Pythagoreans. However, as Vottero mentions, although Seneca represents the Pythagorean school as extinct, neo-Pythagorean thought was still alive at that

⁷¹ Cf. Berno 2003, 309, with reference to Vottero, n.3 *ad* 32.2.

⁷² See Glucker 1978, 337ff. Diogenes Laertius 10.9 mentions (in a pro-Epicurean context) that whereas almost all other schools have become less prosperous, the Epicurean school conserves an everlasting vitality and continues to produce leaders for the school. The absence of scholars is the point under discussion in Seneca's passage. Cicero, *De oratore* 3.62 also speaks of the disappearance of certain schools, among them the Pyrrhonists. The context is different from that of Seneca's passage: Cicero offers a short overview of philosophy without moralizing (*fuerunt etiam alia genera philosophorum qui se omnes fere Socraticos esse dicerent, Eretriorum, Erilliorum, Megaricorum, Pyrrhoneorum, sed ea horum vi et disputationibus sunt iam diu fracta et extincta. Ex illis autem quae remanent...*).

⁷³ See, e.g., F. Decleva Caizzi, *Pirrone. Testimonianze*, Napoli 1981, 274-275. Decleva Caizzi considers that Seneca must have been using a polemic source. (She also discusses Cicero *De oratore* 3.62 (cf. my previous note), on p.268ff.).

period.⁷⁴ Rhetorical exaggeration can also clearly be discerned at some points. For Vottero, Seneca's description of the end of the Sextian school ('the new sect... was extinct at its very beginning') is exaggerated, since the school lasted at least half a century.⁷⁵ It is a common technique of the moralizing discourse to transform an indication concerning, for instance, a lessening of interest for a philosophical school (or simply a change in its situation) into a general statement about the decline of that school. Most important is the fact that Seneca interprets the situation of these philosophical schools in the context of a decadence of the *mores*. While we may perhaps assume that these schools were really less popular in this period, this may have been caused by entirely different reasons than a moral decadence.⁷⁶

The degeneration of knowledge and science was a standard element of the moralistic discourse, as appears from the existence of parallel texts for *NQ* 7.31-32.⁷⁷ In Petronius' *Satyricon* (88), the decadence of modern times is said to have led to the end of different *artes*, among them philosophy. Once the *artes* were flourishing; however, mankind has now even forgotten what earlier generations had accomplished, preoccupied with vice as it is ('but we are besotted with wine and women, and do not dare to understand even the arts that have been developed before our time; instead, we slander the past and learn and teach nothing but vices'). In *NQ* 7.32.4, Seneca likewise says that much of what has been invented is now forgotten.

⁷⁴ N.6 *ad* 32.2. Cf. Galinsky (www.utexas.edu/depts/classics/faculty/Galinsky/pythag.html), section 2, with further references. Vottero's notes on the passage are very informative, and contain references to which I am indebted. See also Berno 2003, 302 with n.32.

⁷⁵ N.8 *ad* 32.2 (with further references to literature about the Sextii).

⁷⁶ Vottero (n.2 *ad* 32.1) refers to a political explanation of the decline of certain philosophical schools. The explanation of a decadence, or change, of society, in terms of politics is an important alternative to the moralistic explanation. Compare also Glucker's investigation of the causes of the decline of certain schools (1978, 373ff.). We must also take into account the fact that certain schools could have merged with others, or that philosophical interests might have been going in a different direction.

⁷⁷ Cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 34-35. In n.70 above I point to parallels for the contrast between empty classes of philosophy and full kitchens or theatres.

Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* also contains several passages concerning the decadence of science. *NH* 14.1-7 develops the thought that the present-day generation has forgotten what earlier generations had achieved. In another passage, the mention of the knowledge that has been assembled by the ancients and forgotten by the contemporary generation is inserted in a description of the winds, about which, Pliny says, there is still much to learn (*NH* 2.117). This situation resembles that of *NQ* 7: the thought that progress in science is still needed leads to the assertion of the decline of science from a moral point of view.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ The parallel with Pliny is also mentioned by Berno 2003, 305, with n.43, who states that the cause of this deterioration given in Pliny (avarice, also mentioned in Petronius *Satyricon* 88) differs from Seneca's version. A declining interest in learning is also mentioned by Seneca maior (*Controversiae* 1 preface §8).

CHAPTER TEN

THE FLIGHT OF THE MIND: THE PREFACE OF *NQ* 1

‘Il proemio delle *Naturales Quaestiones* è un pezzo da antologia’
(Traina 1975, 325, speaking of the preface to *NQ* 1)

1. *The preface and Book 1*

With its reference to knowledge of the divine, the preface of *NQ* 1 seems to introduce a discussion of *caelestia*, phenomena pertaining to the divine area of the world (the *aether*). Although the comets of Book 7 belong to this area, the phenomena treated in Book 1 do not. Earlier research has pointed to this discrepancy, which has led some researchers to separate the preface from the actual Book 1.¹ Hypotheses about lost books of the *Naturales Quaestiones* that would have discussed *caelestia* have also been put forward. Indeed, this part of the universe is only dealt with in *NQ* 7.²

However, the specific character of the preface to Book 1 can be explained by taking it as a sequel to Book 7, and especially to its epilogue.³ In first instance, it

¹ Separation of the preface from Book 1: Chaumartin 1996, 179, Gross 1989, 14-15, following Rehm 1907, 387. On the discrepancy, see also Gercke 1896, 121-122, Weber 1995, 88-89, Gaulty 2004, 166. Zeller (1909, 727 n.2) says that one cannot escape a feeling of ‘fast komische Enttäuschung’ when one proceeds from the elevated preface to the discussion of natural phenomena.

² Some researchers think that the *caelestia* are not present in the *NQ* at all (and therefore that Book 7 does not deal with this area either). For this question, see also the Introduction, section 4. Flammini 1992, 643 remarks that the preface does not contain any reference to matters discussed in the *NQ*; it appears unconnected to the work, and rather resembles the *EM*. He does not address the question further.

³ For the order of the books in the *NQ*, including the sequel *NQ* 7 – *NQ* 1, see the Introduction, section 3. Gercke 1896, 122 already speaks of a ‘Nachwirkung’ (answering Zeller’s reproach mentioned in my n.1 above). Cf. Codoñer 1989, 1814: ‘cette préface se trouve être une mise en évidence, en termes abstraits, de ce qui est énoncé dans la

may seem strange that the epilogue of Book 7 would have directly preceded the preface of Book 1, since the epilogue gives the impression that god cannot be known, whereas in the preface knowledge of god is said to be achieved.⁴ However, as we have seen in the discussion of Book 7, Seneca's dramatic statement that god cannot be known must not be taken literally; it is softened by different factors.

Both texts speak of the same area of physics, the secret part of philosophy (compare the expression *cum secretiora eius intravi* of *NQ* 1 preface §3 with the language used in *NQ* 7.30). In the preface of *NQ* 1, Seneca says about physics:

It is loftier and more spirited, and has permitted itself a great deal: it has not been content with what can be seen, but has presumed that there is something greater and more beautiful, which nature had placed beyond our sight.

Altior est haec et animosior, multum permisit sibi: non fuit oculis contenta, maius esse quiddam suspicata est ac pulchrius quod extra conspectum natura posuisset (§1).

The idea that certain objects must be known through other means than the eyes, which led to a discussion concerning the possibility of knowledge at the end to Book 7, is here mentioned in a different light. This kind of knowledge is now viewed positively: the study of physics goes further than the eyes, Seneca states. In the passages from Manilius' *Astronomica* discussed as a parallel for *NQ* 7, we have seen that it was possible to react to the idea of human knowledge of heaven positively as well as negatively. The discussion of the comets led to great questions: it is understandable that Seneca reacts to it in the preface of *NQ* 1 with an

conclusio du livre antérieur (VII)', Inwood 2002, 148: 'the preface to book one comes naturally after the conclusion of book seven', Gauly 2004, 162, 164. P.170-172 Gauly explains the relation between the preface and main text as the complementary contrast between the achievement of knowledge as found in the preface, and the imperfect knowledge found in the rest of Book 1. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 145ff. also remarks upon the correspondence between the end of *NQ* 7 and the preface of *NQ* 1, but connects it with the 1-7 book order (p.145 n.114).

⁴ Cf. Waiblinger 1977, 96-97.

enthusiasm for the study of the heavens. This preface forms another argument against the absolute character of the negative statements in *NQ* 7.⁵

Although the preface is unrelated to the scientific discussion of Book 1, it is certainly related to the general enterprise of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. It is in connection with this text that Codoñer speaks about the prefaces as the ‘cadre conceptuel’ of the work.⁶ Seneca indeed discusses the value of the study of nature. The passage has long been considered the preface of the entire work. However, it does not have such an introductory character as the preface to Book 3.⁷

Weber argues that the preface contains thoughts about morals and physics that are central to the *Naturales Quaestiones*.⁸ In §14-15 she sees a reference to what she considers to be one aim of the work: to demonstrate that nothing happens accidentally, but only by divine purpose (1995, 90). In these paragraphs Seneca speaks about the error of certain men, among whom we recognize the Epicureans, who think that the world, this beautifully ordered whole, is an accident, moved and tossed about by chance, amidst lightning bolts, clouds, tempests and like phenomena (*existiment homines fortuitum et casu volubile, ideoque tumultuosum, inter fulmina, nubes, tempestates et cetera...*, §14). Seneca obviously disagrees with this view. Weber states that he undertakes to demonstrate that these natural phenomena, discussed in several of the books of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, are part of the order of the world. Although this more general thought does indeed emerge from the *Naturales Quaestiones* at some points, it is only touched upon.⁹ In

⁵ A ‘Nachwirkung’ of Book 7 is perhaps also discernible in the fact that, at the beginning of the scientific discussion of Book 1, a strong distinction is made between meteorological and supra-lunar phenomena, such as we find in Book 7, whereas this distinction disappears in the latter part of the book. Contrast the explanations in *NQ* 1.1.9-10 and 1.2.3-5 to 1.14.5 and 1.15.1-2 (concerning the same phenomena). Of course, these differences might also be the result of the use of different sources.

⁶ 1989, 1811, 1813, 1814-1815.

⁷ See Chapter 4 for the discussion of the preface of *NQ* 3, and section 3 of the Introduction for the question of the book order in the *NQ*.

⁸ 1995, 89ff. She accepts the 1-7 book order, so this argument must matter to her.

⁹ Cf. the discussion in Chapter 5, sections 8 and 10.

this passage, Seneca does not contest the idea that meteorological phenomena such as tempests and lightning bolts are signs of disorder, but only more generally refutes the idea of a world without a leading element.¹⁰

2. *Physics versus ethics*

It is in the preface to Book 1 that the clearest ‘Auseinandersetzung’ is found between the two main domains of philosophy, physics and ethics. It is also in this text that most value is attributed to physics, above ethics (§1-2). The difference between philosophy and the other *artes*,¹¹ Seneca says, is as great as that between physics and ethics, which differ from each other like god and man. Ethics is concerned with man and his errors, physics with the light of the heavenly region and the gods: it is more elevated and spirited.

In this contrast, it is theology, the most elevated part of physics, which is preferred over ethics. When Seneca praises the study of physics elsewhere in his work, it is also this aspect of physics that is mentioned. Worthwhile questions that are said to be answered when one studies physics concern the nature of the universe and other important matters (see *EM* 65.19, 90.28-29, 93.9, 117.19). This area of physics is covered in *NQ* 7 and in this preface (and perhaps in the discussion of divination in *NQ* 2), but it does not correspond to the general content of the *Naturales Quaestiones* (cf. Chapter 2, section 1.5).

In the course of the preface, Seneca gives different priorities to the search for virtue and knowledge of nature.¹² In §4-6 he argues that it is not enough to conquer your vices. Virtue is said not to be achieved for itself, but because it prepares the mind for the knowledge of celestial phenomena:

¹⁰ The interpretation Gross (1989, 14) gives of §14 seems incorrect.

¹¹ For the denomination *ars* for philosophy and its difference from the other *artes* cf. Chapter 2, section 2.1.

¹² Compare I. Hadot 1969, 114-115.

That virtue we seek is magnificent, not because to be free of evil is in itself so marvellous but because it unchains the mind, prepares it for the realization of heavenly things, and makes it worthy of becoming associated with god (§6).¹³

Here ethics seems subservient to physics. In §8, on the other hand, Seneca says that the mind cannot despise luxury before it has gone around the universe. Here, the goal of the ascent to heaven is phrased in moral terms. Virtue leads to the study of nature, which in turn has moral consequences: physics and ethics are intertwined.

Seneca concludes the preface with the question that occurs in many prefaces and epilogues, the anonymous objector's request for moral relevance (§17). What will be the use of achieving knowledge about intricate theological questions? The answer is: 'if nothing else, certainly this: having measured god I will know that all else is trivial' (*si nihil aliud, hoc certe: sciam omnia angusta esse mensus deum*).¹⁴ Knowledge of god will put the world in the right perspective. Thus, at the end of the preface, the relation between physics and ethics is brought back to the form in which we usually find it in the prefaces and epilogues: Seneca states knowledge of nature (or god, in this case) to have a moral aim.

In the other prefaces and epilogues statements are also made about the value of ethics and physics. Often, the moral aim is regarded as most important, a necessary part of every occupation, including the study of nature (cf. Chapter 7, section 1.1.1). In *NQ* 6.32.1, Seneca says that the study of nature and moral improvement go hand in hand. One's spirit cannot become strong without the contemplation of nature. Sometimes, his inquiry also leads Seneca to statements that accord greater importance to physics than ethics. As I said earlier, the value that is attributed to physics in the preface of *NQ* 1 seems a consequence of the physical inquiry of Book 7. In *NQ* 6, too, Seneca states that the inquiry of nature has a beauty and

¹³ *Virtus enim ista quam affectamus magna est non quia per se beatum est malo caruisse, sed quia animum laxat et praeparat ad cognitionem caelestium, dignumque efficit qui in consortium <cum> deo veniat.*

¹⁴ At the beginning of Book 2 of his *Naturalis Historia* Pliny expresses outrage at the madness of those who measure the cosmos. His reproach is directed towards philosophers, among whom the Epicureans are identifiable.

interest of its own. In reply to the question about the value of his undertaking, he states that the achievement of knowledge is itself the greatest reward for the study of nature. Although the study of nature is very useful, its greatest attraction is that it holds man's attention because of its beauty and is not pursued for a material reward, but because of this intrinsic appeal (6.4.2). Just as the idea of the moral aim of the study of nature, this reaction was also more widespread.¹⁵

In his study of the *Naturales Quaestiones* Donini argues that besides a Stoic view of the world, the work also reflects a Platonic model of thought.¹⁶ He speaks about the 'schema moralistico' (Stoic) and the 'schema teoretico' (Platonic): in the Stoic model of the world, nature is studied with a practical, moral aim, whereas in the Platonic world view the theoretical element prevails and the study of nature is pursued for itself. The fact that in the *Naturales Quaestiones* the scientific inquiry is often primarily said to be pursued for itself, Donini argues, is an important argument for the presence of a Platonic world view in the work (1979, 220ff.).¹⁷

The preface of *NQ* 1 could (at least partially) be understood within the 'modello teoretico'.¹⁸ Donini argues that in the prefaces of *NQ* 3, 4a and 6, too, the theoretical view of the study of physics prevails over the ethical aim.¹⁹ I find it

¹⁵ Cf. Cicero *De finibus* 4.12, *De republica* 1.19 (mentioned in Chapter 2, sections 1.2, 1.4). For a correct evaluation of the relation between physics and ethics in Seneca, see also Barnes 1997, 21-23, who mentions that the idea that physics was a nobler study than ethics was 'little more than a platitude'.

¹⁶ Setaioli 1988, 505ff. and Mazzoli 1989, 1870-1871 argue against Donini's views; cf. Chaumartin 1996, 189, and the review of G. Maurach in *Gnomon* 53 (1981), 77-79.

¹⁷ Donini 1979, 220, 224 does mention the fact that Stoic testimonies not only place ethics at the top of the order of the three parts of philosophy, but also physics. However, he believes that the high value placed on physics by Seneca has a different meaning. In my opinion, one must not forget that the nature of Seneca's text is different from that of the extant Stoic testimonies; this explains why Seneca gives the impression to speak about the beauty of physics in a more enthusiastic tone.

¹⁸ Discussed 1979, 221-224.

¹⁹ He even concludes: 'tutte le prefazioni dei libri delle *QN* seguono coerentemente lo stesso schema di orientamento teoretico' (1979, 228). This is certainly not true. Donini

difficult to agree with this theory, and will give a short example of the problematic character of Donini's interpretations.

The preface of Book 4a is concerned with the discussion of a moral question: the dangers of flattery. Donini focuses on one sentence and interprets it in such a manner that he can conclude to the presence of the 'modello teoretico' in the preface (1979, 226-227). In §20 Seneca says to Lucilius: 'it is necessary to flee the world and to return to oneself; better still, even to escape from one's self' (*fugiendum ergo et in se recedendum est, immo etiam a se recedendum*).

According to Donini, the first part of this sentence corresponds to the moralistic ('Stoic') line of thought. In the second part, however, Seneca speaks of leaving oneself behind. This refers to the ideas that are also found in the preface to Book 1 and its description of the flight of the mind, Donini argues: Seneca there says: 'you have escaped many ills, but you have not yet escaped yourself' (*multa effugisti, te nondum*, §6). One must do more than combat one's vices: one must flee oneself, escape from the body towards heaven. This testifies to the Platonic 'modello teoretico', which therefore, Donini concludes, is also found in the preface to NQ 4a.

However, the idea of fleeing from oneself must not be primarily, or only, placed in the context of a Platonic flight from the world. This image also occurs elsewhere in Seneca's work and in other authors. From these occurrences, it is clear that the idea of fleeing from oneself has a moralistic meaning: it implies that one should change, flee one's old self.²⁰ Donini's interpretation removes the possibility to interpret this sentence in a moralistic context, since Donini separates the moralistic element from the Platonic/theoretical view on the study of physics. This is one of the problematic aspects of his theory: it is too simplistic to combine the idea of a pre-eminence of physics and the pursuit of the study of nature for itself with Platonism, and to combine the prevalence of a moral aim of this study with Stoicism. The discussion of the Platonic character of Seneca's thought will return in

concedes that there are also passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones* where the moralistic model of thought is most important, as in NQ 2.59 (1979, 228-229).

²⁰ See Lucretius 3.1068-1070, Horace *Odes* 2.16.17-20, *Epistulae* 1.14.10-14, 1.11.25-30, Seneca *De tranquillitate animi* 2.14, *EM* 28.1-3, 104.7-8.

the rest of this chapter, in connection with the themes of the flight of the mind and the nature of god.

2.1 The battle against the vices is not sufficient

In §4-6, Seneca leads up to the image of the flight of the mind, the main subject of the preface, by stating that it is not enough to conquer one's vices: an elevation of the mind to the heavenly areas is also needed. But for the knowledge of heavenly matters, life would not be worth living.²¹

The main ideas of this passage (man is not only on earth to spend his time in such occupations as drinking and eating, and he has not done enough when he has painstakingly managed to abstain from such vices) are described at some length in these paragraphs, in Seneca's usual parenetic manner. This involves rhetorical questions, anaphora introducing parallel sentences, medical imagery, etc. Among the vices that are mentioned, there are subjects discussed in the other prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. The indulgence in culinary luxury and the fear of death, for instance, are major preoccupations in Seneca's battle against vice.²²

In *EM* 79.11-12 and *EM* 92.29ff., the same introduction to the image of the flight of the mind is found. In these letters, too, Seneca states that it is not enough to avoid vicious behaviour or to be better than other persons (who may not be so virtuous either). Man will only be truly virtuous when his mind elevates itself from the darkness of the earth.

Thus, besides his repeated appeal for a battle against the vices, Seneca also sometimes states that more is needed: the mind should elevate itself to the heavenly

²¹ Gauly 2004, 165 n.126 mentions a similar statement of the philosopher Anaxagoras: what makes life worth living is the contemplation of the cosmos (Aristotle, *Eth. Eud.* 1.5, 1216a10-14). This idea is indeed likely to have been formulated by philosophers.

²² See the epilogue of *NQ* 4b and the moralizing passages in *NQ* 6 and 2. Berno 2003, 196 compares the reference to *avaritia* with *NQ* 5.

spheres.²³ In spite of this apparent dissociation of the idea of a flight of the mind from the battle against the vices, one must be cautious in separating both ideas, since the flight clearly contains a moral component, as we have already seen in the short overview of the different representations of the relation between physics and ethics in this preface, and as will also appear from the following discussion.

3. *The flight of the mind*

The main theme of the preface is the ‘flight of the mind’ to the heavens Seneca describes, followed by the ‘view from above’ of the earth. In §3 Seneca already speaks of entering the secret part of nature, and learning about god. The description of the flight begins in §6 with the statement that virtue prepares for the knowledge of heavenly phenomena, and renders one worthy of communion with god. The mind ascends and reaches the inner realm of nature (*petit altum et in interiorem naturae sinum venit*), then wanders among the stars (*inter ipsa sidera vagantem*) (§7). From above it contemplates the smallness of the earth.

The main elements composing Seneca’s representation of the flight of the mind are: its moral aspect (linked to the realization of the smallness of the earth), the knowledge the mind achieves, and its divinity. The moral element is given most attention: from its new perspective, the mind scorns the riches of the earth, which become meaningless (§7-8). The world has become a mere point (*hoc est illud punctum...* §8, *punctum est istud* §11): Seneca describes the smallness of the earth as it appears from the magnitude of the heavenly areas (§9-11, 13). The mind reaches the heavens only when it is freed from the body and all earthly bonds (§11-12). In ascending the skies it returns to its own, divine element: it is able to obtain knowledge of this area to which it is related (§12). This knowledge especially pertains to the nature of god (§3, 13ff.).

²³ Prof. K.A. Algra suggests the interesting possibility that this idea could be related to the difference between *praecepta* and *decreta* (as explained in my Chapter 3): not only *praecepta* are needed, but also *decreta*.

The image of a 'flight of the mind' is often found in Graeco-Roman literature.²⁴ One form in which it occurs is the 'eschatological flight': the mind ascends to heaven after death.²⁵ It can also discern something of these regions during life: Cicero mentions that those who have done so will profit most from the celestial regions after death (*TD* 1.45).²⁶

Wlosok distinguishes between two main forms of the flight: a religious-mystical, and a philosophical-rationalizing flight.²⁷ Jones similarly speaks of a supernatural and a figurative ascent.²⁸ Thus, the flight is considered an actual ascent of the mind that transcends the earth (especially in texts of a mystical nature), or a metaphorical ascent, a metaphor for philosophical contemplation of the world. These two forms intermingle: it can be difficult to determine the status of the flight of the mind during life in a specific text.

Sometimes there are clear indications in a passage that the representation of the flight should not be taken literally. It can be represented as a dream, as in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. On some occasions the flight of the mind is explicitly spoken

²⁴ See especially Jones 1926 and P. Hadot 1995, 238ff. Festugière 1949, 441 speaks of 'un des thèmes les plus chers à l'époque hellénistique et gréco-romaine'.

²⁵ See Cicero *Somnium Scipionis* 13, 18, *TD* 1.19.43-45, Seneca *Consolatio ad Marciam* 25.2.

²⁶ *Praecipue vero fruuntur ea qui tum etiam, cum has terras incolentes circumfusi erant caligine, tamen acie mentis dispicere cupiebant*; cf. Cicero *Somnium Scipionis* 29, Seneca *EM* 79.12, 102.28. Wlosok 1960, 44 says, comparing the flight during life to that after death: 'jener Schau gegenüber ist die irdische contemplatio herabgemindert zu einer bloßen Vorbereitung'. Cf. also Festugière 1949, 442.

²⁷ 1960, 33, 33-37. In the case of a mystical ascent it is perhaps better to speak of a 'flight of the soul'. I have however chosen to use the phrase 'flight of the mind'. In *NQ* 1 preface §6, 11 and *NQ* 3 preface §18 Seneca uses the term *animus*. P. Hadot 1995, 238ff. uses the term 'soul'.

²⁸ For the distinction see 1926, 99, for instance. Jones also mentions the eschatological ascent. See also P. Hadot 1995, 240, Volk 2001, 89 (Volk 2002, 225ff. also discusses the flight of the mind or heavenly journey of the poet in Manilius' work).

of as an image for philosophical thought; for instance, in *Legum allegoriae* 1.62 Philo says that when the mind thinks of heaven it is there.²⁹

In the preface of *NQ* 1 Seneca speaks of a flight of the mind during life.³⁰ It is not described as a dream: nothing qualifies the 'real' character of this flight. It is difficult to determine whether this ascent therefore has a transcendent character or whether it nonetheless is metaphorical. This aspect has also been involved in the discussion on whether Seneca's representation of the flight is of a Stoic or a Platonic nature, and will be taken up below.

The same elements that compose Seneca's representation of the flight of the mind in *NQ* 1 are present in other representations; the realization of knowledge, the divinity of the mind and the moral aspect of the flight. Whereas the knowledge one

²⁹ This is mentioned among other examples of the displacement of the mind in thought. Cf. P. Hadot 1995, 240, 243-244; see also the RAC, vol.8 (Stuttgart 1972) s.v. 'Flügel (Flug) der Seele I', p.34 about an allegorical explanation of flight in Philo. See further *EM* 65.18 (mentioned below), *Peri kosmou* 391a8-18, Maximus of Tyros 10.2-3 (on which cf. Jones 1926, 106-107). In Cicero, *DND* 2.153, the contemplation of heaven is formulated in terms that almost seem to refer to the flight of the mind. In a passage of Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica* (15.62) the inquiry into physics is denied any value: only ethics is thought important. This is primarily said to be Socrates' opinion, but the Stoic Aristo of Chios is also mentioned (§7). Physics is of no use, it is said, not even if one ascends to heaven and contemplates the whole world from there (§8). Here the flight of the mind serves as illustration for (the elevation provided by) the study of nature.

³⁰ It has been remarked that the words *tunc contemnit domicilii prioris angustias* (§13) seem to refer to the flight of the mind after death, and do not fit well in this context: see Hutchinson 1993, 235 n.20 and Gauly 2004, 173 n.164, who explains the words as an echo of the *Somnium Scipionis*. However, in his note *ad loc.* (n.45), Vottero offers a better solution: *domicilium* refers to the human body, which the mind has left behind in its ascent. As parallels for this meaning of *domicilium* Vottero mentions *De ira* 2.28.4, *EM* 65.17, 21, Cicero *TD* 1.58. One may also think of the earth as the prior 'housing' of the mind, in contrast to heaven, where it now is, without any need to place the situation after death.

obtains during life is uncertain, the flight of the mind leads to certain knowledge.³¹ The image of darkness and light is sometimes used to represent the transition to this knowledge, or simply to a better world: the mind goes from darkness to light.³² The idea that the mind returns to its own element is found quite frequently.³³ So is the representation of a detachment from the vile body.³⁴

The moral aspect of the flight of the mind also appears in other texts. The image of the smallness of the earth viewed from above was used by a number of authors.³⁵ In his *Somnium Scipionis*, Cicero gives much weight to the moral aspect.³⁶ The preface of *NQ* 1 has been thought to depend on the *Somnium*. Indeed,

³¹ For Seneca see also *Ad Marciam* 25.2 (after death), *De otio* 5.5-6, *EM* 102.28, and cf. *EM* 93.9, 110.9. Manilius speaks about obtaining knowledge about the subject his *Astronomica* deal with (1.13ff.); in *Astronomica* 4.866ff. he also mentions achieving knowledge of god. These listings of parallels are of course selective, not exhaustive. Many occurrences of the 'flight' are mentioned in Jones 1926 and P. Hadot 1995, 238ff.

³² See for example *EM* 102.28, Philo *De opificio mundi* 69-71.

³³ See Seneca *EM* 79.12, 92.30ff., Cicero *TD* 1.43-45, Philo *Quod deterius* 86ff., *Peri kosmou* 391a14-15, Manilius 2.115-116, 4.866ff.

³⁴ Cf. for Seneca *NQ* 3 preface §18, *EM* 65.16ff., 79.12, 92.30ff., 120.13ff., *Ad Marciam* 23.1-2; Cicero *Somnium Scipionis* 14, 15, 29.

³⁵ A good example of the theme of the smallness of the earth viewed from above is found in Lucian's *Icaromenippus* (ch.18). As in *NQ* 1, the ridiculous division of such a small area in different countries and the comparison of men to ants are mentioned. Festugière 1949, 443ff. calls the theme a commonplace. He argues that the idea that the earth was very small compared to the universe was originally known as an astronomical fact, which passed from technical treatises (passages from Geminus and Cleomedes are mentioned) to works with a more literary character, to become a moral/literary commonplace (in Cicero, Seneca, *Peri kosmou* etc.: p.449-451; cf. Vottero's n.35 *ad* §8). P.451 these rather literary representations are said to refer to one Hellenistic source, possibly Posidonius. For the specific idea of the earth as a point see also Traina 1975, who demonstrates how the idea reached Dante. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 151-153 compares the description of the earth as a point in *NQ* 1 to Pliny, *NH* 2.173ff. (with reference to Plato *Theaet.* 174).

³⁶ Cf. Wlosok 1960, 29, who thinks the *Somnium Scipionis* distinguishes itself from other representations by this aspect. Wlosok speaks about the moral aspect of the flight p.28ff. P. Hadot 1995, 245-247 also mentions this aspect, especially in connection with Seneca and the Cynic tradition. Cf. for the moral aspect in Seneca's flight also *EM* 92.31.

certain elements correspond in the two texts: they both refer to the earth as a point and describe its smallness, and use the image of the body as a prison for the soul.³⁷

Due to its occurrence in many texts, the image of the flight has been thought of as a commonplace.³⁸ In my opinion, the commonplace aspect of the flight affects the question whether we can assign a specific philosophical character to it, as is done in the discussion about the Stoic or Platonic character of the flight.

3.1 Seneca's flight: Platonic or Stoic?

The flight of the mind is a concept found in different philosophical schools. It is originally known from Platonic texts (especially *Theaetetus* 173e-174a, *Phaedrus* 246a-247e), but had a wider expansion.³⁹ For instance, it also occurs in Epicurean passages.⁴⁰ Thus, we may perhaps regard the flight as a 'philosophical commonplace': this denomination would take into account the fact that the image occurs quite often, in different philosophical contexts, without stripping it of philosophical significance as the denomination 'commonplace' may be thought to do.

The main question that has been asked concerning Seneca's representation of the flight of the mind is whether it is of a Stoic or Platonic nature. Although P.

³⁷ For these correspondences see especially Weber 1995; also Gauly 2004, 173, Wlosok 1960, 37, Traina 1975, 324 n.1. For Festugière (1949, 457-458), Seneca perhaps depends on Cicero. Since these elements also occur in other texts, I agree that the dependence of Seneca on Cicero is not certain.

³⁸ For this aspect see Jones 1926, 98, Festugière 1949, 441ff. I do not think it is possible to distinguish between what is a 'commonplace' rendering of the flight and what is not, as Jones 1926 does, for example p.101.

³⁹ See P. Hadot 1995, 240ff., especially p.242: 'Plato developed these ideas and concepts in a specifically Platonic direction, but in and of themselves they are not specifically Platonic. Rather, they are to be found in all the ancient philosophical schools, be they Epicurean, Stoic, or Cynic'.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Lucretius 1.66ff. *omne immensum peragravit mente animoque* (with the commentary by Schrijvers 1970, 260-262). Other passages are mentioned in P. Hadot 1995, 243, Jones 1926, 112-113.

Hadot demonstrates that the flight is found in texts from all philosophical schools, he also leaves room for some differentiation: he regards Seneca's description as Stoic.⁴¹ Unlike Hadot, Gauly argues for the Platonic character of the preface to *NQ* 1 and its representation of the flight.⁴²

I will first discuss the metaphorical or transcendent character of Seneca's ascent of the mind in this context. Indeed, Gauly mentions that those who do not think that Seneca's flight has a Platonic character consider it no more than a Platonic image, which does not infringe on Seneca's Stoicism.⁴³

Gauly himself points out (2004, 173-175) that in contrast to Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, where the flight is embedded in a dream, and *EM* 65, where the flight is explicitly said to be an elevation of thought (§18), the description in *NQ* 1 has no such qualification, as I mentioned earlier. This, he argues, shows the problematic character of Seneca's description, which represents the flight as an actual separation from the body. Although he agrees that the representation in the preface has a metaphorical character, Gauly also argues that it contains a wish for transcendence that does not fit the Stoic world view.

⁴¹ 1995, 245: 'the theme takes on a Stoic coloration in Seneca's *Natural Questions*' (the statement is not further explained). See for the distinction between a Stoic and a Platonic representation of the flight of the mind also Wlosok 1960, 21.

⁴² Gauly 2004, 164ff., and for the flight of the mind especially p.170-176.

⁴³ 2004, 169: 'wer Doninis Bewertung nicht folgt, versucht in der Regel, die Platonismen dadurch in ihrer Bedeutung herunterzustufen, dass er auf ihren literarischen Charakter verweist und sie als Metaphern platonischer Herkunft deutet, die eine im Kern stoische Lehre illustrieren' (Gauly refers to Mazzoli 1970, 40). In his refutation of this idea, Gauly argues that the *NQ* was read by contemporaries of Seneca who were not able to distinguish between a (Platonic) metaphor and a (Stoic) basis. Therefore the whole must be Platonic, is his thought; my reaction would be that it might as well be Stoic. Gauly adds that the contemporary reader perhaps did not expect 'systematische Eindeutigkeit', i.e., he could well have expected a mixture of Platonic and Stoic elements. This argument, too, can be used to speak of a Stoicism integrating Platonic images. It also seems to contradict the previous argument. Finally, Gauly points to the fact that a metaphor is more than mere rhetoric. It has a function in the text: thus, the Platonic image must undermine Seneca's Stoicism.

According to Wlosok, although the flight of the preface to *NQ* 1 has a mystical character and seems a real ascent, it is in fact a philosophical ascent of the mind, a way to speak about the contemplation of the world.⁴⁴ I rather agree with this view. In *EM* 65.18 Seneca says that the wise man remains attached to his body, but he is absent 'so far as his better self is concerned and he concentrates his thoughts upon lofty things' (*adhaeret quidem in corpore suo, sed optima sui parte abest et cogitationes suas ad sublimia intendit*). The fact that in this passage the elevation of the mind is specified as the wise man's concentration on heavenly objects may in my opinion be used as an argument for applying the same interpretation to the flight represented in *NQ* 1.

Just as it is difficult to distinguish between a real and figurative ascent of the mind, it is not simple to distinguish between a Platonic and Stoic flight. There are no unequivocal Platonic elements in Seneca's representation. For instance, it does not contain allusions to such Platonic components as the contemplation of the 'Ideas'.⁴⁵ An element in Seneca's description of the flight that might be used to determine its Stoic character is the fact that knowledge of god's nature is obtained (§3, 13). Whereas the Stoics thought it possible to obtain knowledge of the nature of god (cf. Book 2 of Cicero's *De natura deorum*), in a Platonic context it tends to be described as one of the things about which man cannot gain knowledge.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ 1960, 37-39. Setaioli 1997, 353-355 also speaks of a rationalization of the theme of the flight of the mind in *NQ* 1. He adds that through the use of a metaphor the experience of the flight is rendered real: the contemplation of the mind is the equivalent in life of the flight after death.

⁴⁵ Cf. P. Hadot 1995, 240. The Ideas are for example mentioned in Philo's representation of the flight in *De mutatione nominum* 178-180 and *De opificio mundi* 69-71. For Seneca, see however *EM* 58.27: *ad illa mittamus animum, quae aeterna sunt. Miremur in sublime volitantes rerum omnium formas deumque inter illa versantem et hoc providentem...* Donini 1979, 182-183, who in general strongly argues for the presence of Platonic influence in Seneca's thought, says that this Platonic element is not seriously presented: the Ideas do not float in the skies. Perhaps Seneca here conflates the Ideas with the planets. See also the discussion of *EM* 58 below in section 3.2.

⁴⁶ For this distinction, cf. Runia 2002. See also the discussion of the theme of knowledge in Chapter 9, section 3.1.

Due to its origin in well-known Platonic texts, the ascent of the mind to its divine origin is primarily known in a Platonic context. However, the return to a divine origin can also be understood in a Stoic sense, since the mind is of a divine nature.⁴⁷ In my opinion, the return of the mind to its own, divine area is an element that was part of the representation of the flight, rather than a distinctly Platonic or Stoic element.

Speaking about the return of the mind to its own element, Seneca says that it leaves the ties of the body behind. When it reaches heaven 'it is nurtured, grows, and returns to its origin as though freed from its chains' (*alitur, crescit ac velut vinculis liberatus in originem redit*, §11-12). The origin of the image of the liberation of the mind from earthly bonds is Platonic.⁴⁸ However, just as the return of the mind to its divine origin, it may also be used in a Stoic context. It is indeed also possible to understand the lesser status of the body as compared to the mind within Stoicism; with its material desires, the body impedes the achievement of

⁴⁷ Cf. I. Hadot 1969, 116 n.88. W. Theiler, 'Gott und Seele im kaiserzeitlichen Denken', in *Recherches sur la tradition Platonicienne*, Vandoeuvres - Genève 1955 (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 3), 85 makes a further distinction between a Platonic and Stoic return to one's origin; the Platonist reaches god through action, rather than through a similar substance. The Stoic is a part of god, while the Platonist is an image of god (see Philo *De mutatione nominum* 223). However, such distinctions cannot easily be traced in the different representations of the flight.

⁴⁸ Some scholars have pointed to Seneca's use of the term *velut* in §12, which indicates the appearance of a (mere) image: see Wlosok 1960, 39, Weber 1995, 34 (and cf. in *Somnium Scipionis* 14 the image *tamquam e carcere*). However, Seneca also uses the image without *velut* (as does Cicero), for example in *EM* 65.16.

virtue.⁴⁹ So, although certain images are Platonic, they may be grafted on to a Stoic basis.⁵⁰

A specification of a more general nature must be added to the use of Platonic images in a Stoic context and in parenetic texts. Chrysippus is known to have said that for the cure of the passions one could use arguments from other schools than that to which one belonged, the parenetic aspect being more important than the dogmatic aspect (SVF 3.474).⁵¹ In *EM* 58.26 Seneca explicitly indicates what he wants to retain from the discussion of Platonic ideas: 'how can I be made a better man by the Platonic Ideas? What can I draw from them that will put a check on my appetites?' Seneca's interest in Platonic philosophy is in accordance with Chrysippus' statement: it serves a moral aim.

In view of Chrysippus' statement, the use of Platonic images or elements within Stoic philosophy ought not to be found problematic, and should be seen in a larger context than that of Seneca's work. The incorporation of Platonic images and elements was part of a more general evolution of thought. In Cicero's *Somnium*

⁴⁹ For this distinction between body and mind in Stoicism, see Long 1982, especially p.52-53. Cf. I. Hadot 1969, 128 n.12. According to Hijmans 1973, 59, Seneca is able to emphasize the body-soul contrast 'without immediately feeling the need to come to grips with the apparent metaphysical problems that may result'. Again, p.55 he says 'we must accept the situation, then, that there is in Seneca a value distinction between two forms of matter-corpus, and that the grosser form is treated with contempt'.

⁵⁰ Cf. Küppers 1996, 66-67: '[speaking about *EM* 65, where Seneca] die Platonische Vorstellung vom Aufstieg der Seele zur θεωρία der Ideen mit der stoischen Lehre von der Teilhabe des menschlichen *animus* an...dem Göttlichen verbindet'. Cf. Scarpit 1965, 243-244: 'l'accostamento di Seneca a queste visioni 'platoniche' del corpo e dell'anima è, quindi, più nei termini che nella sostanza e ha valore più etico che metafisico'. Seneca also sometimes refers to the idea that the mind remembers its divine origin in ascending (*EM* 92.30 *hic deos aequat, illo tendit originis suae memor*, 120.15 *scit enim quo exiturus sit qui unde venerit meminit*). Compare Cicero *De legibus* 1.25 (*quasi recordetur*). This, too, is known as a Platonic element.

⁵¹ The passage is found in Origines' *Contra Celsum* 1.64 and 8.51. See also Donini, 1979, 182, I. Hadot 1969, 21, 83. The *consolatio*, for instance, is an area where the combination of different dogmas clearly appears; cf. Chapter 8, section 1, with n.4.

Scipionis, for instance, the flight of the mind is also accompanied by ideas such as the liberation from the chains of the body.

We must also ask, finally, whether we should speak of Platonism or Stoicism at all in relation to such ideas as the denigration of the physical. Seneca's opinions resemble the non-Platonist denigrations of the senses mentioned in Plato, *Phaedo* 65 a-b: even the poets say that we do not see or hear well. These ideas belong to the area of 'Popularphilosophie'.⁵²

3.2 The flight of the mind in *Epistulae Morales* 58 and 65

Among the Senecan passages in which the flight of the mind is described, *EM* 58 and 65 are of interest, since in both letters Seneca discusses a question that is related to the Platonic philosophy.⁵³ Both discussions are concluded with a query about their utility. In the first letter, the idea of a flight of the mind makes a short appearance; in letter 65 it is given more importance.

In letter 58 Seneca answers the question about the usefulness of the preceding discussion by saying that sometimes the mind needs a rest from its work (§25). This characterizes the preceding discussion as such. However, this recreation also has a moral aspect: to everything, a moral lesson should be added. The lesson to learn from Plato's teachings is that nothing on earth is real, Seneca states. It is in this context that he speaks of the flight of the mind:

⁵² Citroni Marchetti 1991, 146 speaks of 'elementi di filosofia che sono anche stati divulgati come un patrimonio culturale comune'.

⁵³ Compare my reference to these letters in Chapter 2, section 1.5. Letter 58 discusses the notions of *genus*, *species* and the six Platonic forms of being; Plato also remains present in the second half of the letter (§22, 26, 30-31). Letter 65 gives a discussion of the Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic causes. The letters are usually mentioned in discussions of Seneca's Platonism; see Chaumartin 1996, 180-181, 187, Gersh 1986, 170 n.70, 180-194, Rist 1989, 2010 and Donini 1979, 179ff., 223-224, according to whom letter 58 is of a Stoic nature, while letter 65 is Platonic. His interpretation of the occurrence of the flight in letter 65 differs from mine. See further J.M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: a study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London 1977, 135-139 for a discussion of the Platonic theories in the letters, and Scarpit 1965 on letter 65.

Let us despatch our minds to what is eternal. Let us look up in wonder to the ideal outlines of all things that flit about on high, and to god who moves among them and plans...

Ad illa mittamus animum, quae aeterna sunt. Miremur in sublime volitantes rerum omnium formas deumque inter illa versantem et hoc providentem...(58.27).

The appearance of a semblance of Platonic Ideas here⁵⁴ may perhaps be explained by the fact that Seneca is still discussing what can be learned from Plato's theories. The mind should elevate itself to what is worthy of its attention, in contrast to material interests, and derive a moral profit from it.

In letter 65, the answer to the question about the value of the discussion in the first part of the letter immediately involves the image of the flight (§15ff.). Seneca occupies himself with important questions, he claims: after himself he examines the world. This inquiry is also useful: these philosophical thoughts – if they do not succumb to useless subtlety - free the mind, weighed down by the body, and elevate it to heavenly matters. The *contemplatio naturae* is a respite for the mind. Not to have knowledge of the questions concerning the world and man's place in it reduces a person to a mere slave of his body. Negative references to the body occur repeatedly in this letter (§16, 18, 21-22, 24).

Rather than with such distinctions as between Platonic and Stoic theories, letters 58 and 65 are concerned with the question how one should consider worthwhile non-moral occupations, of which the discussion of Platonic philosophy forms an example *par excellence*. Seneca's reaction to the question of the usefulness of such discussions is similar in both letters. Letter 58 more strongly emphasizes the moral aspect such a discussion should have, whereas letter 65 pays more attention to the fact that the study of nature elevates man and liberates him from the slavery of the body. In these letters, the flight of the mind is used to represent the effect of the worthwhile activity of the mind that is not concerned with the moral matters that are of primary importance, but with other questions that can also be of (moral) relevance and elevate a person.

⁵⁴ Cf. my n.45 above.

The study of nature is an occupation that is not primarily moralistic but elevates the mind: the image of the flight of the mind well describes its effect. This interpretation explains why the image occurs in passages such as the prefaces of *NQ* 1 and 3, and *EM* 58 and 65, and as contrast to a discussion of logic, a non-moral occupation that does not elevate the mind. In *EM* 117.19 Seneca contrasts logic with the study of physics: the latter studies ‘uplift the mind and raise it to the dimensions of the subject it discusses’ (*levant animum et ad ipsarum quas tractat, rerum magnitudinem adtollunt*). The study of nature leads the mind away from human misery (cf. *NQ* 3 preface §18).⁵⁵

In the second book of Cicero’s *Academica* (2.127), the sceptical speaker admits that he does not want the study of physics (*istae quaestiones physicorum*) to be totally abolished. It has some good, in its moral effect:

For the study and contemplation of nature provides a sort of natural pasturage for the human mind; we are uplifted, we seem to become more exalted, we look down on what is human, and while reflecting upon things above and in the heavens we despise this world of our own as small and even tiny. There is delight in the investigation of nature... *Erigimur, altiores fieri videmur, humana despiciamus, cogitantesque supera atque caelestia haec nostra ut exigua et minima contemnimus. Indagatio ipsa rerum..habet oblectationem.*

An elevation of the mind, contempt for the trivial things of the world, viewed ‘from above’: these are the elements we find in Seneca’s flight. They were widespread: even the Academic philosophers agreed that the study of nature provided an elevation for the human mind and thus had a moral effect. This passage clearly places Seneca’s flight of the mind in a Hellenistic context: it need not be explained by specific Platonic influences.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Cf. also *EM* 88.28: *...mentibus nostris, quae tractatu caelestium crescent trahuntque aliquid ex alto.*

⁵⁶ Wlosok 1960, 25-28 also discusses this passage. She also recognizes sceptical influence in Seneca’s *EM* 58 and 65 (p.41-42).

3.3 The protreptic character of the flight of the mind

The image of the flight belongs to the area of parenetic philosophy.⁵⁷ In *EM* 102, after a long discussion of a question concerning logic, Seneca rejects this theoretical activity and turns to the kind of philosophy that should rather be practised. He speaks of the ascent of the mind: 'tell me rather how natural it is to let one's mind reach out into the boundless universe...it permits of no limits except those that can be shared by the gods' (*dic potius, quam naturale sit in immensum mentem suam extendere...nullos sibi poni nisi communes et cum deo terminos patitur...*, §21).

P. Hadot considers the flight of the mind a 'physical exercise'.⁵⁸ In addition to their theoretical ideas on physics, all philosophical schools had a 'practical' way to approach physics, he states. This was an exercise in which the mind went through the vastness of the universe. The goal was moral: to obtain greatness of mind. One should repeatedly imagine such a flight around the world to oneself, in order to learn to despise all that is earthly.⁵⁹

The representation of the flight is composed of several fixed elements (such as its moral component and the divine character of the mind), as we saw. It is also composed of standard images, for instance the representation of the earth as a point and the comparison of men with ants.⁶⁰ Perhaps the commonplace character of these elements was functional and they served as building stones to imagine the flight to oneself.

⁵⁷ Cf. Wlosok 1960, 40-41, 42-43, 45-46.

⁵⁸ P. Hadot 1995, 240ff., especially 242-243. The image of the flight also occurs in Marcus Aurelius (*Meditationes* 9.30, 9.32.2, 9.47-48, 11.1-3, 12.24.3, 6.36.1); in the context of this work its character as an exercise is clearly visible.

⁵⁹ A passage in Plato's *Phaedo* (67c) gives an impression of how such an exercise in separating the mind from the body was thought to work: 'shall we not say that purification occurs...when man separates the soul as much as possible from the body, and accustoms it to gather itself together from every part of the body and concentrate itself until it is completely independent, and to have its dwelling, so far as it can, both now and in the future, alone and by itself, freed from the shackles of the body?' Quoted from P. Hadot 1995, 241.

⁶⁰ For this last element see Vottero, n.41 *ad* §10, with a reference to Traina 1978, 68.

3.4 The occurrence of the image of the flight in prefaces

Wlosok suggests that the flight of the mind was a prefatory commonplace in philosophical works.⁶¹ The fact that the flight is also mentioned at the beginning of Pythagoras' speech in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (15.147ff.) is an argument in favour of regarding it as an appendage to a discussion of physics. Indeed, this passage of the *Metamorphoses* was discussed in Chapter 1 as an imitation of the genre of didactic natural philosophy, containing elements common to this genre (section 2.1.1).

The beginning of the preface to *NQ* 1 shows some resemblance to the beginning of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Peri kosmou* (391a), and its Latin translation by Apuleius (*De mundo*). The work opens with a praise of philosophy, as being the only activity to have engaged in contemplation. Philosophy (and especially natural philosophy) had gone further than others, and considered it its task to investigate the most noble (invisible) objects. This idea resembles the beginning of the preface to *NQ* 1 (although Seneca emphasizes the specific contrast between moral and natural philosophy). *Peri kosmou* / *De mundo* continues with the image of the flight of the mind: the human body cannot leave the earth, but the mind can, in the imagination. Like the *Naturales Quaestiones*, the *Peri kosmou* is a survey of the universe. Prefacing a discussion of natural philosophy with a praise of philosophy and the image of the flight of the mind was possibly a more traditional pattern.

⁶¹ 1960, 34 n.101, 40. She refers among others to Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.1 and Manilius 1.13ff. Cf. also Lucretius 1.66f. In Manilius the image of the flight is found in a preface (Book 1) and an epilogue (Book 4).

4. *Knowledge of god*

Restat, quod caput est sermonis huius, ut super mundi rectore verba faciamus

De mundo 24 (cf. *Peri kosmou* 397b9ff.)

The knowledge the mind achieves in its flight concerns the nature of god, as is mentioned in the preface ('when I learn...what god is', §3; 'here, finally, the mind learns what it long sought: here it begins to know god', §13). Contemplation of nature finally leads to knowledge of god.⁶² Book 7 of the *Naturales Quaestiones* gives a demonstration of this idea.

Various questions to which the mind receives answers when it penetrates the inner part of nature are mentioned. Thus, Seneca will learn

What god is, whether he keeps entirely to himself or whether he sometimes considers us, whether he creates something each day or only once, whether he is a part of the cosmos or the cosmos itself, whether it is possible for him to make decisions today and to repeal in part any sort of universal law of fate, whether it is a diminution of his majesty and an admission of his error that he had done things that had to be changed (§3; see also the questions in §16).

As regards the first question, Seneca of course believes that god cares for the world, unlike the Epicureans.⁶³ Concerning the question whether god is a part of the cosmos or the cosmos itself (*pars mundi sit an mundus*), it would seem that the second possibility must be chosen, in accordance with Stoic philosophy. However, in the following discussion we will see that this aspect of the representation of god is more complex. The other questions, which concern the issue whether god has arranged everything once and for all, or still goes on altering things, are clarified with the following addition: 'it is necessary that the same decisions please him

⁶² Cf. Cicero, *DND* 2.153: *hominum ratio non in caelum usque penetravit?...quae* [sc. the heavenly phenomena] *contuens animus accedit ad cognitionem deorum*.

⁶³ Vottero *ad loc.* refers to *De beneficiis* 2.29.6.

whom only the best can please, nor is he less free or powerful because of this: indeed, he is his own necessity'.⁶⁴

Such lists of questions occur more often in passages that speak of obtaining knowledge.⁶⁵ In *De otio* 4-5, for instance, such questions as 'what god's abode is, whether he idly gazes upon his handiwork or directs it, whether he encompasses it from without, or pervades the whole of it' (*quae sit dei sedes, opus suum spectet an tractet, utrumne extrinsecus illi circumfusus sit an toti inditus*, 4.2) are also mentioned. Just as for the questions of the preface, one of the two possibilities is the correct one, which will be revealed to the mind. These lists show Seneca to have been aware of important points of philosophical discussion, such as the relation of god to *materia* (see §16 of the preface).⁶⁶ These questions are, in a tantalizing way, often not further discussed in Seneca's (extant) work, which is usually concerned with ethical matters of a more direct relevance.

At the end (and as a culmination) of the description of the flight of the mind, Seneca gives some answers to the questions about god's nature (§13ff.).

⁶⁴ This sentence has been considered an interpolation by Alexander 1948, 251, as the editions *ad loc.* mention. For the question whether god daily regulates things or has decided about them once and for all see also *De beneficiis* 6.23.1-2 (*non externa cogunt deos, sed sua illis in legem aeterna voluntas est. Statuerunt, quae non mutarent*), *NQ* 2.36, *De providentia* 5.8.

⁶⁵ Wlosok 1960, 24 also mentions such 'Kataloge von Fragen' concerning god's nature in the context of the flight of the mind (*De otio* 4.2, *De brevitae vitae* 19.1, *EM* 65.19f., 82.6, 90.28). Hijmans 1973, 46-48 discusses another form of list, where Seneca presents different possible answers to a question without choosing between them. The right answer to these 'lists of possibilities' is not so important, whereas the answers obtained for such questions as appear in the preface to *NQ* 1 are. In the 'lists of possibilities' (see, e.g., *Ad Helviam* 8.3, *NQ* 7.25.2), which also concern themes like god's nature, the different possibilities mentioned must not all be regarded as Seneca's own opinion. Cf. Scarpata 1965, 273-4. Mansfeld 1990, 3137-3140 demonstrates that in such passages Seneca appears to have knowledge of the doxographical *Placita*.

⁶⁶ Here the correct (Stoic) answers must include god's omnipotence.

What is god? The mind of the universe. What is god? All that you see, all that you do not see. Only if he alone is all things, if he maintains his own work both from within and without, is he given due credit for his magnitude; nothing of greater magnitude than that can be contemplated.⁶⁷

Seneca continues with a comparison between god and man: ‘what, then, is the difference between our nature and the nature of god? Our mind is our better part, in god there is no part other than the mind: he is entirely reason’ (*nostrī melior pars animus est, in illo nulla pars extra animum est: totus est ratio*). Those who believe that the beautifully ordered world does not have a governing mind such as they themselves have, are in great error.

5. *God’s nature: Platonic or Stoic?*

5.1 The texts and the question

Seneca’s representation of the nature of god has been involved in the question about the Stoic or Platonic character of his thought.⁶⁸ Some researchers have considered such qualifications of god as ‘the mind of the universe’ (*mens universi*) and ‘all reason’ (*totus est ratio*) indications of a Platonizing image of god, differing from the Stoics’ immanent representation of the divine. Indeed, if god is *mens universi*, he cannot be all immanent, but must transcend the world.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Quid est deus? Mens universi. Quid est deus? Quod vides totum et quod non vides totum. Sic demum magnitudo illi sua redditur, qua nihil maius cogitari potest, si solus est omnia, si opus suum et intra et extra tenet.*

⁶⁸ See especially Donini 1979, 210-211. Others who have spoken about Platonic ideas in connection with Seneca’s representation of god (though to a lesser extent than Donini) are Stahl 1987, 278ff. and Gersh 1986, 165ff. See H.F. Burton, ‘Seneca’s idea of god’, *American journal of theology* 13 (1909), 358 and Zeller 1909, 729 for evidence that this thought already existed earlier on.

⁶⁹ See Donini 1979, 211, further: Gersh 1986, 167, Stahl 1987, 282. Cf. Bonhöffer 1894, 248 (who does not speak of Platonic influence, but discerns a separation of god from the world). The term ‘transcendent’ is used in a restricted sense: Seneca’s god stays within the

There are a few other passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones* that also form part of this discussion. At the end of Book 7, god is said to escape the human sight: he has to be perceived in thought (*effugit oculos: cogitatione visendus est*, 30.3). This indicates that he is not equated with the visible world: the universe seems divided into a visible part and a non-visible, divine part. God is ‘the greater and better part of his work’ (*maiorque est pars sui operis ac melior*, 30.3), ‘the greatest part of the universe’ (*maxima pars mundi*, 30.4). In the preface to Book 1 we saw that the mind achieved knowledge about the question ‘whether god was a part of the universe or the universe itself’. We said that the correct Stoic answer would in the first instance be to call god *mundus*, not *pars mundi*. In NQ 2.45, he is indeed called *mundus*. The denominations of NQ 7.30 have therefore been considered Platonizing.⁷⁰

In NQ 2.45 a more detailed definition of god is given. God is called

The controller and guardian of the universe, the mind and spirit of the world, the lord and artificer of this creation. Any name for him is suitable. You wish to call him fate? You will not be wrong: it is he on whom all things depend, the cause of the causes (45.1-2).

God can also be called providence, nature, and ‘universe’ (*mundus*). This last appellation is specified by the words: ‘he himself is all that you see, pervading all his parts, sustaining both himself and his own’ (*ipse est enim hoc quod vides totum, partibus suis inditus et se sustinens et sua*, 45.3).

mundus (see EM90.35 for his criticism of the Epicureans who place god outside the *mundus*). God and man also remain part of one society, in accordance with Stoic thought (*De otio* 4.1, EM95.52). They share the element of *ratio*. For the meaning of the term ‘transcendent’ see also my n.94 below. The terms ‘dualistic’ and ‘monistic’ are also used by researchers in this discussion.

⁷⁰ See Donini 1979, 210-211, Stahl 1987, 282; cf. De Bovis 1948, 168, Bonhöffer 1894, 248.

This passage is regarded as ‘Stoic’ by Donini (who is most intent on discovering Platonic influences in Seneca’s thought).⁷¹ He contrasts the formula *ipse est hoc quod vides totum* with a sentence from the preface to *NQ* 1, where god is said to be *quod vides totum et quod non vides totum* (§13).⁷² According to Donini, the formula of *NQ* 2 has a Stoic character, but not that of *NQ* 1.⁷³ Stahl, on the other hand, considers the sentence of *NQ* 1 to be part of Seneca’s Stoic statements. This seems more correct: in Book 7 of the *Naturales Quaestiones* occurs the idea that god is totally invisible, which seems to deviate more from Stoic thought.⁷⁴

It appears not to be entirely clear what should be regarded as a Stoic thought and what should not. This uncertainty is also noticeable in the interpretations of the idea of a ‘reason pervading the whole’ (*ratio toti indita*, *EM* 90.29), an idea that occurs in the passage of *NQ* 2.45.3 just mentioned (*partibus suis inditus*) and in *De otio* 4.2.⁷⁵ Donini considers the passages in which this formula occurs to render Stoic thoughts, whereas other researchers see the idea of a *ratio toti indita* as an indication that god is not equal to the entire world, but only to the best part of it – an idea Donini considers un-Stoic.⁷⁶ Thus, it does not seem entirely clear what may

⁷¹ 1979, 210: ‘talune parti del trattato si prestano facilmente a essere lette come una mera illustrazione del cosmo stoico, per esempio quasi per intero il secondo libro’. About chapter 45 he says: ‘certo quando Seneca tratta (nel capitolo 45) il tema della divinità si ha l’impressione di trovarsi davanti a un’esemplare descrizione del dio stoico. La serie delle identificazioni (dio = fato = provvidenza = natura = mondo) è infatti quella classica della scuola’.

⁷² In *EM* 95.52 Seneca says: *omne hoc quod vides, quo divina atque humana conclusa sunt, unum est: membra sumus corporis magni*. Compare also Lucan *Bellum Civile* 9.580.

⁷³ 1979, 210. See also Gersh 1986, 167.

⁷⁴ Stahl 1987, 278. So far those who have wanted to consider the formula of *NQ* preface 1 Stoic have said that the two formulas have a similar meaning. See the Budé edition *ad loc.* (*NQ* 2.45): ‘les deux formules sont équivalentes’; Pohlenz 1972, 159 (remark on vol.I, 1948, 320 l.20): ‘ergänzt ohne daß eine Meinungsänderung vorliegt’; cf. Parroni’s remark *ad* §13 of the preface.

⁷⁵ Cf. also *De beneficiis* 4.7: *divina ratio, toti mundo et partibus eius inserta*.

⁷⁶ See Donini 1979, n.35 with p.222 for *EM* 90.28-29, versus Bonhöffer 1894, 247-248 and Gersh 1986, 167-168. Cf. *SVF* 1.155 (Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 2.4.10): *ecce enim Zeno*

be regarded as Stoic ideas or not, and it also seems possible to discern a separation between god and the world in what are considered Stoic formulations by some researchers.

Such differences between *pars mundi* and *mundus* and *hoc quod vides totum* and *quod vides totum et quod non vides totum* show that Seneca is somewhat contradictory in his statements about god. These sentences may also seem to form proof for the theory of 'l'ecllettismo impossibile' coined by Donini. He understands the contradictions in Seneca's work as conflicting Platonizing and Stoic elements in Seneca's thought; Seneca's work (and thought) reflects two different conceptions of the world, he argues. Sometimes one model dominates, sometimes the other. The introduction of a transcendent deity contributes to the presence of the Platonic model of thought.⁷⁷

5.2 The Stoic context

In reaction to this Platonizing interpretation, I will point to a few elements that make it possible to understand Seneca's descriptions of god in a Stoic context. Qualifications of god such as *rector universi*, *artifex operis huius* and *mundus* occur next to each other not only in Seneca, but in Stoic philosophy in general. Donini does not consider these formulations of *NQ* 2.45 to go beyond the Stoic concept of immanence (since indeed they are well-known Stoic names of god), but does not the appellation *rector universi*, just as that of *mens universi*, present us with a god who is not totally immanent and not equivalent to the entire world?

quoque materiam mundialem a deo separat et eum per illam tamquam mel per favos transisse dicit.

⁷⁷ 1979, 198, 220-1. From certain passages it appears that Donini even thinks that the Platonic model is more strongly present in the *NQ* than the Stoic model (see p.255, cf. p.229), as Setaioli, too, remarks, 1988, 506, 508, n.2335.

5.2.1 *Summus deus*

There is evidence that Stoicism (also) placed god high in the skies. Most of the Stoics placed him in the *aether*, but Cleanthes saw him in the sun. As Cicero puts it: ‘Zeno and almost all the other Stoics think the aether a supreme deity, endowed with a mind whereby the universe is ruled, Cleanthes... holds that the sun is lord and master of the world’ (*Academica* 2.126).⁷⁸ Thus, besides being immanently present in the world, the Stoic god is concentrated in the heavens as a *summus deus*: it is a part of god that pervades all.⁷⁹

This information specifies how we should regard the Stoic concept of immanence and explains such a formula as *ratio toti indita* (*EM* 90.29) in a Stoic context. In *NQ* 2.45 it is the denomination of god as *mundus* that is specified by *partibus suis inditus...*; this shows that even in the representation of god as *mundus*

⁷⁸ *Zenoni et reliquis fere Stoicis aether videtur summus deus, mente praeditus qua omnia regantur, Cleanthes... solem dominari et rerum potiri putat.* Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.139 and SVF 1.154. The expression *summus deus* also appears in the *Somnium Scipionis* (§17), where an overview of heaven is given to Scipio. Of the nine globes that are said to form the universe, the most external is called *summus deus*. The sun is further called *mens mundi*.

⁷⁹ See also Diogenes Laertius 7.138-139, 147-148 for a distinction of god from the world. The following researchers mention the Stoic *summus deus*: Zeller 1909, 139-141, Pohlnenz 1948, 95-96, Van Straaten 1969, 31, Moreau 1939, 183-184, 186, Rist 1969, 207-208 (‘to regard the *ouranos* as especially divine is the normal Stoic position... there might seem to be a contradiction in the views... that the active principle is present both at some particular place in the world... and also in every natural object’). According to Rist, the fact that the heavens were ‘especially divine’ was not important to the earlier Stoics, but it was to Posidonius, who, Rist argues, showed dualistic tendencies. See also Gersh 1986, 166: ‘god is both equivalent to the world and somehow distinct from it as its cause’. Long 1982 compares the idea of god pervading the world with that of the soul in the body. It seems useful to contrast the Stoic position on god and the world with another stream of thought, mentioned in Philo of Alexandria’s work, Chaldeanism (see Runia 2002, 290). This considered the cosmos itself a god, without providence or transcending entity to accompany it. It denied the existence of anything that transcended physical reality and was intelligible only. Runia 2002, 290: ‘it [i.e. Chaldeanism] is not the same as a Stoic immanentist theology, because there is not even a single *logos* pervading and ordering all things’.

there was room for a distinction between a higher concentration of god in the upper part of the universe and a part of god penetrating the entire universe.⁸⁰

Denominations of god such as *maxima pars mundi* and *mens universi* are also understandable in this context: they refer to the *summus deus*.

The use of 'transcendent' images to represent god is a natural one: these images often (merely) aim at representing god as an elevated and powerful being.⁸¹ Just as the representation of god as 'father' does not need to imply a transcendence, several others of his 'roles', like that of *mens universi*, or *rector universi*, do not necessarily intend to represent god as transcendent.⁸² One may encounter the statements that 'god is the all' and 'god directs the all' together in an immanentist system.

5.2.2 The different aspects of the Stoic god

The Stoic god unites concepts like *mundus* and *summus deus*: he has many names or aspects. As Seneca says in *De beneficiis* 4.8.3: 'all these are names of the same god, who uses his power in various ways'.⁸³ Each name represents a particular aspect of god. *NQ* 2.45 ('every name befits him', Seneca there says) gives a good example of god's many aspects.

Seneca does not always aim at representing such a complete image of god as we find in *NQ* 2.45. In various passages different aspects of god are mentioned. This explains differences in denominations such as *maxima pars mundi* and *mundus*.

⁸⁰ Cf. Ortega Muñoz 1983, 315-316: 'Séneca distingue en Dios dos aspectos o facetas: Dios en sí mismo, creador y artífice del mundo, y Dios derramado en el mundo mismo'.

⁸¹ Cf. Stahl 1987, 282, Festugière 1949, 417-418, De Bovis 1948, 172-175.

⁸² Cf. Van Straaten 1969, 23. Hijmans 1973, 48 says that from such statements as 'god is the creator of all' one cannot conclude to either monistic or dualistic tendencies.

⁸³ *Omnia eiusdem dei nomina sunt varie utentis sua potestate*. Cf. the whole passage of *De beneficiis* 4.7-8, with other statement such as: '*natura*' inquit '*haec mihi praestat*'. *Non intellegis te, cum hoc dicis, mutare nomen deo? Quid enim aliud est natura quam deus et divina ratio... nec natura sine deo est nec deus sine natura, sed idem est utrumque, distat officio*. See also Diogenes Laertius 7.135, 147; SVF 2.1070, also *Peri kosmou* 401a12ff. Cf. Pohlenz 1948, 320.

When Seneca says that god is all rationality, he points to one of the aspects of the Stoic god.⁸⁴ The fact that Seneca only calls god ‘all *ratio*’ and omits to mention that this *ratio* pervades the entire world may cause one to forget this. In *NQ* 2.45, *hoc quod vides totum* is only one of the many aspects of god that are described. God’s ‘invisible aspect’ appears in some of the other denominations used. In *NQ* 1 preface §13 the formula *quod vides totum et quod non vides totum* gives a more complete picture of god. Seneca is demonstrating the magnitude of god: he is both visible and invisible, he is everything.

In the philosophical polemics of antiquity, the Stoics were criticised for their god with its many aspects. This appears, for instance, from the criticism of Stoic philosophy in Book 1 of Cicero’s *De natura deorum*.⁸⁵ Chrysippus is said to have invented many unknown gods:

He declares that the world itself a god, and also the universal outpouring of its soul, and again the guiding principle of this same world, which operates in mind and reason, and the common and all-embracing nature of things; and also fate and the necessity that governs future events; besides this, fire and the *aether* I mentioned before...(1.39).⁸⁶

From this complex list, it appears that god is the *mundus* as well as its rational *principatus*: the main opposition between an immanent and a transcendent deity is here attributed to Chrysippus. Since these different aspects were present in Stoicism, they need not be attributed to a Platonic influence when they appear in

⁸⁴ The denomination of god as *ratio* of course is especially found in the formula of the *ratio toti indita*. See SVF 1.157, 160-161, 2.1024-1026. See also a formulation as *animans est mundus composque rationis* (Cicero *DND* 2.22). Cf. Vottero’s n.49 *ad* §13.

⁸⁵ Such criticism is also found in Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis* 48, and in the works of some Christians: Lactantius’ *Divinarum institutionum libri* 7.3 (SVF 2.1041) and Tertullian’s *Ad nationes* 2.4.10-11. Cf. Algra 2003, 169-170.

⁸⁶ *Ipsumque mundum deum dicit esse et eius animi fusionem universam, tum eius ipsius principatum qui in mente et ratione versetur, communemque rerum naturam [universam] atque omnia continentem, tum fatalem ¶umbram¶ et necessitatem rerum futurarum, ignem praeterea et eum quem ante dixi aethera...*

Seneca. Not Seneca testifies to an ‘eclettismo impossibile’, but the Stoic philosophy.⁸⁷

5.2.3 The Stoics’ dualism

Thus, if we wish to speak of transcendent or dualistic tendencies in Seneca’s representation of god, the basis for these tendencies may be said to lie within Stoicism itself. In letter 65 Seneca gives a description of the two Stoic causes, the active *ratio* and the passive *materia* (§2, 23-24).⁸⁸ One might wonder whether there is a dualistic element here, too. The description of the Stoic causes is comparable to the definition of (two of) the Platonic causes in the same letter: ‘the agent is god, that what is acted upon, matter’ (*faciens, hic deus est; ex quo fit, haec materia est*, §9).⁸⁹ Since Seneca is describing the two Stoic causes that form the world, any dualism should again be placed within Stoic philosophy.⁹⁰

It is to this representation of the world that Seneca compares the human composition of mind and body; ‘god’s place in the universe corresponds to the place of the mind in man: the matter of the world corresponds to our body (*quem in hoc mundo locum deus obtinet, hunc in homine animus: quod est illic materia,*

⁸⁷ The fact that Stoicism is constituted by different elements, among which (originally) Platonic ideas, is a question that cannot be further discussed here; see, e.g., Moreau 1939, cf. Gersh 1986. Algra (2003, 165ff.) gives a (more complete) discussion of the nature of the Stoics’ god that corresponds to the view I sketch.

⁸⁸ For the two Stoic principles see also Bonhöffer 1894, 244-245, Moreau 1939, 158-164, Rist 1969, 203-204, R.B. Todd, ‘Monism and immanence: the foundations of Stoic physics’, in J.M. Rist (ed.), *The Stoics*, University of California Press 1978, 139-143, Lapidge 1978, 163-166, Ortega Muñoz 1983, 306-308, Gersh 1986, 176-179.

⁸⁹ Cf. Donini 1979, 158, 211, Stahl 1987, 281-282.

⁹⁰ Cf. Bonhöffer 1894, 243ff. Hijmans 1973, 49-52 discusses the relation between god and *materia* in Seneca: he concludes with a monistic interpretation. Most interesting is the statement Seneca makes in the preface to *NQ* 1 (§ 3): *ipse est necessitas sua*. Such a factor as *necessitas*, the necessity that is attached to *materia*, is part of god himself in a monistic system. Cf. Moreau 1939, 178-180 about the Stoic necessity. In *De Stoicorum repugnantibus* 1051c-d, Plutarch criticizes the Stoic *necessitas*.

id in nobis corpus est, EM 65.24). Just as the mind is man's leading part, the world has a 'mind', as is also said in the preface to NQ 1 §14. This equates god with *ratio*.⁹¹

If one wished to argue that Seneca's dualism goes further than the perhaps necessarily dualistic representation of a monistic system,⁹² one would have to say that Seneca recognizes the dualistic tendencies within Stoicism as such, whereas earlier Stoics did not. Thus, Stahl sees Seneca as part of a 'Spiritualisierungsprozeß' of the Stoa.⁹³

Carefully discerning 'Platonic' tendencies in Seneca's work has its use; it helps to discern the different aspects comprised in Seneca's representation of god. If by the term 'transcendent' we refer to the representation of god as separated from the world in his function of guide or providence of the world (for instance), and by 'immanent' we refer to the representation of god as equated with the world or present in it, it is certainly possible to speak of transcendent and immanent aspects in Stoicism.⁹⁴ This finally leads to distinguishing different aspects in the

⁹¹ For the comparison of the mind of the world with that of men cf. Manilius, *Astronomica* 4.888ff. Chrysippus also expressed this idea: see Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis* 1077d (SVF 2.1064) and Diogenes of Babylon *ap.* Philodemus, *De pietate* 15 (SVF 3, Diog. Bab. 33). The notion of god as all *ratio* could have arisen out of the analogy with man. Cf. Moreau 1939, 167, Rist 1969, 208-9. This analogy was one of the ways to achieve knowledge about god (Cicero, *DND* 2.29-30). Long 1982, discussing 'soul and body in Stoicism', explains the relation of soul to body via the comparison to god's pervading of the world.

⁹² Cf. Lapidge 1978, 164: 'in theory, then, the two principles ought to have been inseparable aspects of the one substance. But when the Stoics came to describe the behaviour and properties of their two principles, they tended to forget the theoretical inseparability and resorted to biological terminology and metaphor to describe them'.

⁹³ Stahl 1987; so also Pohlenz 1948, 320-321, Van Straaten 1969, 23, 31.

⁹⁴ Cf. Gersh 1986, 168: 'the transcendent aspect signifying that the active cause of all things is to be distinguished from the passive material upon which it operates, the immanent aspect signifying that the active principle is united with the passive element which it pervades'. In his article 'Immanenz u. Transzendenz' (RAC vol.17, Stuttgart 1996, 1041ff.),

representation of god in classical thought; thus, Gersh (1986), for instance, places Seneca's representation of god in a larger context.

5.3 Some final remarks about context

We have seen that in different passages Seneca presents various aspects of god. As Hijmans formulates it: 'the fact should be emphasized that the selection of aspects of the divine mentioned depends entirely on the purpose of the context' (1973, 48). Seneca often makes remarks about god's nature *en passant*, while he is discussing a different subject. His extant work does not contain a systematic discussion of the divine.⁹⁵ A consequence of an unsystematic discussion, and of a selection of aspects of a subject according to context, is that it can lead to inconsistencies, for which Seneca is indeed quite well-known.⁹⁶

The statements about god that have led to this discussion concerning his Platonic character are mainly found in *NQ* 1 and 7. Thus, they occur in the context of the discussion of elevated heavenly phenomena. It is not surprising that the

A.P. Bos also applies this restricted meaning of the term transcendent to Stoicism (discussed p.1059-1060).

⁹⁵ Remarks about the unsystematic character of Seneca's work are found for instance in Setaioli 1988, 509 and Griffin 1976, 175, 375. On p.334ff. Griffin gives an example of the difficulty of discussing such an unsystematically presented subject. Seneca's only systematic exposition about ethics (the *Libri moralis philosophia*) does not survive (see Lausberg 1989, 1885-1888); *De superstitione*, which probably contained much interesting material, does not survive either.

⁹⁶ See Grimal 1989, 1964 : 'en face de ces variations, au moins apparentes, les interprètes qui s'en tiennent à la lettre de chaque formule, et les insolent les uns des autres, dénoncent ce qu'ils appellent les 'contradictions de Sénèque''. Donini has understood Seneca's contradictions in the context of his theory about the conflicting Platonic and Stoic models in Seneca's thought. However, Seneca's contradictions must be explained differently. The Platonic and Stoic positions moreover cannot always be opposed as radically as Donini wishes. Setaioli 1988, 506-507, 509 also criticizes Donini for having restricted the explanation of Seneca's contradictions to his theory.

discussion of divine phenomena in the *aether*, such as the divine comets, leads to the representation of a deity who is located in especially that area.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Compare Van Straaten's remark (1969, 31) that the position of heavenly phenomena in the *aether* led to transcendent tendencies in the Stoa.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have focused on the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, analyzing form and content of these mainly moralizing passages. In this conclusion, I will give an overview of the main results obtained in the different chapters, and add some general reflections.

In Chapter 1, I examined the ancient and modern literary theory concerning prefaces, epilogues, digressions and transitions. In general, the function of classical prefaces (and epilogues) was related to the main text, for instance explaining its importance, or, in more general terms, placing the work in a broader context. However, a few *testimonia* from antiquity show that in certain genres at least, a preface (or epilogue) could also be a separate piece of writing, more or less unrelated to the main text. After following a development of its own, this kind of preface was then finally linked to the main text. Digressions, too, could be more closely related to the content of the main text, or function as separate developments inserted for the pleasure of the reader, for instance. Regarding transitions, which ancient literary theory requested to be 'smooth', ancient authors seem, in certain genres, to have had the tendency to use clear, explicit formulations such as found in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

In this chapter, I also placed the *Naturales Quaestiones* in the context of ancient works belonging to the genres of didactic poetry and technical prose, and similarly composed of a technical main text together with non-technical passages. A passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (15.75ff.), in which Ovid imitates and parodies the combination of moralizing passages (to some extent) related to a scientific main text, has provided interesting evidence. Ovid's parody shows that Seneca was not the only one to attempt to combine ethics and physics in works of natural philosophy, and that the moralizing passages of such works contained stylistic characteristics and themes (such as the description of the gradual decadence of human *mores*) that also occur in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

In Chapter 2 the *Naturales Quaestiones* was placed in a philosophical context. I have shown that in antiquity the relationship between ethics and physics was a matter of discussion – a debate that is particularly visible in a passage from Cicero's *De republica* (1.15ff.), and finds an echo in the disagreement within modern scholarship about the role of physics in Stoic ethics. In antiquity, opinions differed as to the relevance of the study of physics, i.e., the question whether this area of study could claim to have a moral and/or practical goal. For instance, some people recognized that it sharpened the mind for greater questions – but no more than that. In Hellenistic philosophy, the belief that natural philosophy had a moral relevance was vivid, even though this idea does not seem to have been concretised.

Several of the ideas that come up in this discussion also occur in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. Seneca clearly believed in the moral relevance of some activities that fall outside the scope of ethics proper. At the same time, the scientific discussions in the *Naturales Quaestiones* also have a goal of their own. Indeed, as I have argued, the work must be placed in the context of natural philosophy. In this genre, distinct from the natural sciences, philosophers investigated the causes of natural phenomena in accordance with their convictions about the universe.

In Chapter 3, I have attempted to explain the nature of the prefaces and epilogues in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. From Seneca's work it is clear that he particularly valued a kind of philosophy that aimed at achieving a practical effect: for instance, philosophy should bring people in such a state of mind that even the avaricious would proclaim a hatred of money. This aim was supported by a hortatory, repetitive form of text, devoid of intricate argumentations. Although written philosophical work allows for a wider range of philosophical texts, this hortatory writing can certainly be discerned, too. Thus, in my opinion the prefaces and epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* belong to the parenetic part of philosophy. They contain *adhortationes*, *dissuasiones* and *consolationes*, which are mentioned in *Epistulae Morales* 94-95 as subdivisions of this part of philosophy: genres aiming at repeating familiar information in such a way that people become convinced of it. The scientific discussions of the *Naturales Quaestiones*, on the other hand, do not belong to this form of philosophy: this difference, in content as well as in style, between the various parts of the work is for instance also found in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.

Besides hortatory texts, exercises such as a daily introspection of the soul were also part of the practice of philosophy. Important thoughts had to be incorporated in a person's mind by repetition, for instance by the repetition of *sententiae*, which abound in Seneca's work. In some passages of Seneca's work the idea also appears that the description of a vice with its full force or detail helps to combat that vice. This is important information, since it provides an explanation for Seneca's descriptions of vice in the context of his philosophical teachings: they should be understood as apotreptic texts.

In Chapter 4 we saw that the first paragraphs of the preface of *NQ* 3 contain basic prefatory themes: the presentation of the work, its importance and difficulty, accompanied by a sense of humility on the author's part. For a large part, the discussion of this preface revolved around the question whether it could have functioned as the original preface of the entire work; I have argued that the presentation of the work contained in this text and the awareness of the prefatory tradition, two elements not found in the other prefaces, are arguments in favour of this hypothesis. In this preface, Seneca also presents his undertaking in terms of morals: he speaks about the attention the mind will have for itself, and the fact that it is preferable to concern oneself with ethics rather than with the worthless activity of historiographers. It is clear that the author presents his inquiry into the causes of natural phenomena under a moral aspect.

In the preface of *NQ* 3 we also find a moralizing passage of a general nature, concerned with major themes of Seneca's moral philosophy: the workings of fortune and the attitude one should have in life. My analysis of this text has shown its commonplace nature: it could be replaced by any such passage elsewhere in Seneca's work. The passage was written so as to impress a message on the reader or listener – the function of philosophy as described in Chapter 3. As Seneca indicates in *Epistulae Morales* 64, in an account of the reading of a philosopher he admires: a text like this is meant to put the audience in such a state that it feels ready to attack fortune.

The end of *NQ* 3, discussed in Chapter 5, differs from the other epilogues of the *Naturales Quaestiones* in that it is an inquiry into the causes of the flood that ends the world at specific times. The representation of the flood has been analysed in the

light of the Stoic theory on the conflagration: Seneca seems to combine this theory with the tradition of representing a flood that is found in other texts. I have shown that the passage is clearly linked to the central inquiry of the book concerning the origin of the water of rivers and the sea: in both cases, the four elements and their interrelations form the basic explanation of the question under discussion.

However, certain features of the passage also link it to the other epilogues: these are the moral element present in the background of the description, and the dramatizing representation of the flood, which is achieved by means of the same rhetorical techniques as we find in the descriptions of moral decadence in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

Although Seneca gives a dramatized description of the flood, I have argued that he also presents it as a neutral occurrence, a standard part of the fabric of the world. Unlike his stance in the discussion of earthquakes (*NQ* 6.3), Seneca does not dissociate the occurrence of the flood from divine action. Concerning earthquakes he argues that these phenomena have ‘causes of their own’, and are not the result of the gods’ wrath. Such a distinction, which ancient philosophers made more often in connection with (harmful) natural phenomena, also has its place in a world view such as that of the Stoics, where certain things happen out of necessity without infringing on the idea of providence.

The preface that is dealt with in Chapter 6, the preface of *NQ* 4a, has a remarkable form and content. It is an independent piece of writing, in which one subject, flattery, is developed at some length, after which a transition is made to the central discussion of the book. Seneca’s discussion of flattery has a non-theoretical, exemplary character, and strong rhetorical characteristics such as the use of paradox. The preface is written in the form of a letter, a fact I have related to the tradition of writing epistolary prefaces in antiquity. In its epistolary characteristics and its theme, the preface resembles the *Epistulae Morales*. Lucilius, Seneca’s addressee, is more visible in this passage than in the other moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. In the *Epistulae Morales*, Lucilius seems to play a part in helping to introduce a topic, and often gives way to an undetermined second person singular, the character of ‘the student’. I have argued that the manner in which Lucilius appears in the *Naturales Quaestiones* confirms the idea that he functions as a literary tool.

In Chapter 7, three moralizing epilogues are regrouped. The epilogue of *NQ* 4b, in which Seneca questions and defends his undertaking in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, led to a discussion of the position of physics in relation to ethics in Seneca's thought. While ascertaining the importance of the moral goal of every occupation, Seneca also defends the utility and grandeur of the study of physics. I have argued that the presence of moralizing passages in the *Naturales Quaestiones* may be explained from the idea that some moral lesson should be deduced from every occupation.

The idea of moral decadence, coupled with an increase in luxury, occupies an important place in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. In this chapter, I have characterized the idea of moral decadence and increasing luxury as a fixed thought pattern that was imposed on reality in antiquity, an idea that was based in factual information but also wilfully exaggerated the facts. Even though it was a well-known commonplace, the idea of decadence was still believed to function as a moral incentive.

The description of table luxury in *NQ* 4b 13, detailing the gradually developing abuse of snow at dinners, has been studied as an example of Seneca's development of a moralistic subject. I have analyzed the literary aspect of the description (its rhetorical characteristics, Seneca's use of semi-medical terminology), and the place of the subject within the Roman moralistic discourse. The fact that such descriptions occurred more often, for instance in the parallel treatment of table luxury in satire, is of importance for a correct understanding of Seneca's account.

The epilogue of *NQ* 5 forms a long *vituperatio* against man's foolish misuse of a gift of nature, navigation, for the purpose of going to war in foreign countries. This is another hortatory text with a high level of rhetoric and repetition, meant to convey a simple message. In this epilogue, it is particularly clear how concluding *sententiae* rephrase the lesson in such a manner that it can easily be memorized. I have analyzed this passage in the broader context of the different views on navigation (and, by extension, on the position of mankind in the world) that existed in antiquity: in some texts, man was not allowed such sacrilegious feats as the crossing of the ocean, whereas in other texts navigation was presented as one of the uses of technology destined for man. Seneca's version combines the positive idea of the achievements nature has made possible for man with the negative element of

man's misuse of this possibility. The strongly pessimistic character of this text is emphasized by a comparison with Book 3 of Cicero's *De natura deorum*, which shows that Seneca's complaint resembles that of the opponents of Stoic philosophy. These argued that god had not provided adequately for mankind, since his 'gifts' could be misused: it would have been better if these gifts had not been made. In the course of the epilogue, Seneca uses the Stoic answer to react to this reproach: the correct use of a 'gift of nature' was man's responsibility. It is because of the strongly rhetorical text, which has the character of a lament, that greater emphasis is put on the idea that man should never have been allowed to navigate.

Questions about the reason for and meaning of Seneca's descriptions of vicious behaviour arise especially from the epilogue of *NQ* 1, with its description of an extreme case of human depravity: the sexual perversity of Hostius Quadra. In my opinion, this passage may be best understood in the context of apotreptic teaching, as discussed in Chapter 3. A reading of the passage reveals that Seneca uses several recognized rhetorical means, such as the procedure of indirect amplification, in order to emphasize Hostius Quadra's badness. The detail and vividness of the description are characteristics of rhetorical *evidentia*.

In the final chapter of the book, Seneca describes how mirrors ought to be used, and how they gradually came to be wrongly used, for purposes of luxury. In his contrast of the primeval, virtuous generations that did not need mirrors with the generation of his contemporaries who indulge in the vicious usage of this object, elements of good and bad behaviour are clearly distinguishable: they constitute Seneca's moral lesson.

Several theories have been formulated by modern researchers as to the composition of *NQ* 1. Some researchers consider the scientific discussion of the book to have a metaphorical meaning related to the content of preface and epilogue. For instance, whereas the preface refers to a divine light and the epilogue to bestial immorality, the main text is thought to represent the area of distorted lights, and that of humanity, in between the divine and the bestial. Some interpretations also link the two moralizing passages in the book in the same terms. I myself have argued against such interpretations.

In Chapter 8, discussing the *consolationes* of the *Naturales Quaestiones* (the preface and epilogue of *NQ* 6 and the epilogue of *NQ* 2), special attention was paid

to the preface of *NQ* 6. My analysis has revealed the grand consolatory argumentation this preface contains: Seneca begins with a description of death by earthquake as the most fearful kind of death, then proceeds to argue that every manner of death is equal (and should not be feared). Next, he says that many forms of death should be feared more than death by earthquake, and concludes with the idea that it is preferable to die in an earthquake, since this is a grand way of dying. The initial amplification of the fear for which consolation will afterwards be offered appears to have been more usual in a consolatory context, as is especially clear from the comparison with the description of the fire of Lyons in *EM* 91. I have shown that the preface consists of consolatory commonplaces that have been effectively selected and arranged. The presence of commonplace ideas is understandable in the context of a genre that aims at convincing people of basic ideas (e.g., ‘death should not be feared’).

I have also related the exercise of *praemeditatio* to the preface: this exercise consisted in presenting to oneself all the evil that could possibly happen, so as to be able to react more appropriately to a disaster when it actually happened. Seneca’s emphasis on the idea that earthquakes occur anywhere and anytime should be understood in this context: the realization that earthquakes may happen at any place or time should fortify people in case an earthquake occurs.

In the epilogue of *NQ* 6, commonplace consolatory thoughts are used to argue against fear of death in a general sense rather than against the specific fear of death by earthquake. The question in how far such texts as the consolations of the *Naturales Quaestiones* may be explained in the context of the idea of meditation on death was raised. The strongly rhetorical and repetitive character of the consolations corresponds to the concept of meditation; it has been suggested that the texts could have functioned as starting points for meditation.

In the chapter discussing the end of *NQ* 7, Chapter 9, we have seen, as in the discussion of *NQ* 5, that Seneca’s highly rhetorical manner leads to biased representations of certain ideas in a text. Seneca’s most conspicuous statement in *NQ* 7.30 is that god cannot be known. Upon closer investigation, this statement appears to be a dramatization of the fact that he cannot be *seen*. Seneca considers knowledge of god in the context of his discussion of the comets, divine phenomena that were hardly known: god, the divine *per se*, must not be known at all. The belief

in the progress of science that is expressed in this book confirms the idea that the pessimism concerning man's possibility to achieve knowledge is not absolute.

I have further clarified the nature of Seneca's statements by some additional evidence. For ancient philosophers, invisible things, *obscura*, formed one category of objects of knowledge. In this epilogue, Seneca for a moment takes a pessimistic view on this form of knowledge. He appears to stand in a tradition of natural philosophers who when they encountered some particularly difficult subject in their research exclaimed that 'nothing could be revealed'. Different views were taken on the study of the heavens in antiquity: sometimes this knowledge was said to be within the reach of men, but sometimes the daring character of the inquiry into superhuman matters was emphasized.

The epilogue is concluded by a moralizing passage that moves from the idea of a progress in science to that of a stagnation in philosophy and science, and a 'progress' in vice. Seneca's rhetorical representation of moral decadence is, again, clearly visible in this passage.

In the chapter discussing the preface of *NQ* 1, Chapter 10, we have seen that, next to a belief in the moral effect of the study of physics, Seneca also sometimes expresses the idea that moral improvement is the necessary precondition for an elevation of the mind to the heavenly sphere. The main focus in the preface is on this image of a 'flight of the mind': the mind ascends to its divine origin and contemplates the world from there. In its contemplation the mind learns to despise earthly possessions: Seneca's representation has a clear moral aspect. The flight of the mind was a common philosophical image or concept, often found in classical texts. There has been some disagreement among researchers about the nature of Seneca's representation of the flight, and more precisely about the question whether it shows Platonic or Stoic characteristics. In my opinion, such characteristics are not discernible in Seneca's text. The image of the flight primarily served to represent the elevation of the mind in philosophical contemplation, and was especially appropriate to a description of the effects of the study of physics. In the preface to *NQ* 1, too, this is its function.

In the last part of this chapter, I have briefly discussed the nature of Seneca's representation of god. Some statements in *NQ* Books 7 and 1 give the impression of a Platonic representation of god, since the divine, described as entirely invisible

and all *ratio*, is found not to correspond to the cosmos as a whole but to its best part. However, a closer investigation of Stoic theology shows that the Stoic immanent god was also believed to be present, in a higher concentration, in the highest part of the world. The different ways in which Seneca represents god mirror the different aspects of the Stoic deity. It is noticeable that the ‘elevated’ representation of god occurs especially in the context of the discussion of heavenly phenomena in *NQ* 1 and 7.

Initially, I had expected that my research would reveal the *Naturales Quaestiones* as a unified and therefore well-composed work, in reaction to those scholars who had expressed doubts about this. My analysis happened to start with Book 7, so that my impression of the work was based on this book. However, the situation turned out to be more complex: it is clear that the several books that constitute the *Naturales Quaestiones* have not all been composed in the same manner. In Book 7, the idea of the divinity of the comets, which pervades the scientific discussion, is developed in the epilogue, and the moralizing passage that ends the book links the idea of a progress of science to that of scientific regression and ‘progress’ in vice. In other books, such as *NQ* 5, the epilogue is connected to the main discussion by the fact that it discusses the same natural phenomenon from a moral point of view. This is not the case for Book 4a, in which the development in the preface is not related to the subject of the main text (as far as we can ascertain for a book only partially preserved). The general character of the preface of *NQ* 3 may be explained by the fact that it introduces the entire work, whereas the phenomena discussed in *NQ* 7 lead to general reflections on the value of the study of physics in the preface of *NQ* 1.

The material discussed in Chapter 1 has shown how important it is to be aware of contemporary literary theory before imposing (whether consciously or not) one’s own ideas about (for instance) literary unity on a work without verifying sufficiently if these ideas also apply to the period under discussion. Thus, it is important to realize that a passage such as the preface of *NQ* 4a need not be thematically related to the ensuing discussion of the Nile. In antiquity it was good literary practice to first develop a subject separately and then attach that passage to the main discussion.

Likewise, a preface may also be related to the main text in a more general way (for instance indicating its moral dimension) and still follow a development of its own.

Transitions have not been discussed as extensively as prefaces in this study. However, we saw that scholars have sometimes considered the transitions of the *Naturales Quaestiones* to have a 'formal' character, a verdict that has been issued with a negative undertone without verifying sufficiently if such a judgement should actually be applied to this kind of transition.

The *Naturales Quaestiones* has proved an exciting field for the study of questions concerning the unity or composition of a work. The more complex unitary interpretations that have been put forward for the *Naturales Quaestiones* we have seen especially in the epilogue of *NQ* 1. It is difficult to ascertain whether and to what extent such interpretations are justified. For instance, in the context of Seneca's thought *NQ* 5 is perfectly understandable as a scientific discussion on the nature and position of the winds, followed by a moralizing *addendum* on man's misuse of the possibilities offered by the winds. Such ideas as those recently expressed by Williams (2005), for instance, who relates the wild character of certain winds to the violence caused by man, add an extra dimension to the book, and thus would certainly seem to enrich it. However, not everyone will agree with Williams' interpretation, and other scholars will no doubt come up with other theories of the kind proffered by him. I myself have retained a strong scepticism towards such interpretations. This is not to say that, generally speaking, such interpretations may not be used in certain cases. However, one should recognize that the possibilities are not the same in each genre, and that it is helpful to strengthen one's interpretation by giving it a theoretical basis and placing it in a context, for instance that of a specific genre or the author's thought, as I have done with my line of interpretation. On the basis of these facts, I regard the *Naturales Quaestiones* as a more straightforward work than it is presented by scholars such as Williams.

Although we should consequently be careful not to seek too strong a unity in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, we should also be wary of seeing too little unity in the work. The author's intention certainly was to add a moralistic dimension to the discussion of natural phenomena. His belief in the moral value of the study of physics was shared by his contemporaries; even sceptical philosophers argued that the study of nature had a moral value.

I have spoken of moralizing *addenda*: it is not easy to understand how Seneca's repetitive and highly rhetorical text, and especially the long descriptions of human depravity in the prefaces and epilogues, could convey an effective moral lesson. The problematic aspects of such a method are most obvious in the account of Hostius Quadra's misdemeanour (*NQ* 1.16). This situation has led some researchers to search for different ways to understand Seneca's moralizing passages, for instance by opting for metaphorical interpretations.

In my opinion, both Seneca's own stylistic preferences and the parenetic character of his teachings have determined the form of the prefaces and epilogues. The parenetic aspect of Seneca's philosophy, as discussed in Chapter 3, provides a context in which the prefaces and epilogues may be understood. It is perhaps in the *consolationes* of the *Naturales Quaestiones* that the function of this kind of text is clearest. An exercise such as that of the *praemeditatio*, focusing on the visualisation of future disasters, is relatively well-documented and researched, and should clearly be related to the preface of *NQ* 6. The method of presenting a vice in all its grisly detail with the purpose of deterring people from it or creating awareness of its danger is less well-known. However, the idea of putting a vice or danger "before the readers' eyes" corresponds well to the details in Seneca's descriptions.

Certain ideas Seneca uses occur in a literary as well as a more philosophical context within classical literature. This is the case with the idea of a gradual moral decadence of humanity from a golden age onwards. The value of such a well-known, commonplace representation can be difficult to grasp. However, in the discussion of the epilogue of *NQ* 1 (Chapter 7), for instance, we have caught a glimpse of the manner in which this account could be understood in a philosophical context. Indeed, I have shown that the ideas on hairdressing formulated by Seneca in his description of the gradual introduction and increasing abuse of mirrors correspond to teachings expressed by other philosophers regarding the subject of hairdressing. By means of his descriptions, Seneca conveyed a lesson about right and wrong behaviour.

The parenetic character of the moralizing passages of the *Naturales Quaestiones* explains how exactly they differ from the scientific discussions. In the discussion of *NQ* 6, for instance, the demands of the consolatory passage lead to a specific treatment of the phenomenon discussed in the book. It seems that one may

indeed, to a certain extent, speak of a 'melange of genres' in the *Naturales Quaestiones*.

To conclude: the answer to the question of the unity of the *Naturales Quaestiones* will not be the same for each book. Generally speaking, we may say that on the level of the intention of the work we see ethics and physics combined, and (from a literary point of view) prefaces and epilogues that place the work in a greater context. Seneca is adding *aliquid ad mores*, putting his natural philosophy in a mainly moral context. When we look at the realisation of this intent, the 'unity' is less clearly discernible. Indeed, the prefaces and epilogues often follow a development of their own, and the moralizing *addenda* take the form of very specific moral adhortations and dissuasions, genres with their own characteristics. Thus, I hope to have shed some light on the nature of the elements composing the *Naturales Quaestiones* in this study.

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SAMENVATTING

In deze studie heb ik vorm en inhoud van de prologen en epilogen van Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* geanalyseerd. Mijn uitgangspunt was de omstrede compositie van dit werk, dat bestaat uit verschillende boeken waarin besprekingen van natuurverschijnselen worden vergezeld door moraliserende prologen en epilogen. Wetenschappers zijn het er niet over eens hoe deze onderdelen zich tot elkaar verhouden. Volgens sommigen verbinden diverse onderliggende gedachten steeds de moraliserende en natuurfilosofische delen binnen een boek, terwijl anderen menen dat de verschillende onderdelen van het werk niet met elkaar verbonden zijn.

In de eerste drie hoofdstukken zijn een aantal inleidende onderwerpen besproken: ik heb getracht de literaire en filosofische context van de *Naturales Quaestiones* in beeld te brengen, en heb de aard van Seneca's moraliserende teksten verder verklaard. In de daaropvolgende hoofdstukken zijn de afzonderlijke prologen en epilogen besproken.

In Hoofdstuk 1 heb ik antieke en moderne literaire opvattingen rondom prologen, epilogen, digressies en overgangsformules besproken. Klassieke prologen (en epilogen) werden in eerste instantie geacht een functie te hebben ten opzichte van de hoofdtekst die zij begeleidden. Een proloog kon bijvoorbeeld het belang daarvan aanduiden of, in meer algemene zin, deze tekst in een groter kader plaatsen. Uit een aantal passages in klassieke werken blijkt echter dat het in bepaalde genres ook mogelijk was om een proloog te schrijven die los stond van de hoofdtekst. Dit soort losstaande proloog werd uiteindelijk vastgeknoopt aan de tekst die er op volgde. Ook digressies konden in meerdere of mindere mate met de tekst waar ze in voorkwamen verbonden zijn; in het laatste geval fungeerden ze bijvoorbeeld als stukken die voor het vermaak van de lezer waren ingevoegd. De antieke literaire theorie schreef voor dat de overgangen tussen verschillende stukken binnen een tekst vloeiend moesten verlopen. In de praktijk kan men constateren dat in bepaalde genres auteurs duidelijke en zakelijke overgangsformules gebruikten, zoals we ook in de *Naturales Quaestiones* aantreffen.

In dit hoofdstuk heb ik tevens op de verwantschap gewezen tussen de *Naturales Quaestiones* en werken uit de genres didactische poëzie en technisch proza die een

soortgelijke combinatie van besprekingen van de natuur en toegevoegde niet-technische, vooral moraliserende passages vertonen. Een passage uit Ovidius' *Metamorphoses* (15.75ff.), waarin Ovidius deze combinatie imiteert, biedt interessant vergelijkingsmateriaal. Ovidius' parodie toont dat men vaker probeerde ethica en fysica te combineren in natuurfilosofische werken, en dat de moraliserende passages van zulke werken dezelfde stilistische kenmerken hadden als in de *Naturales Quaestiones*. Ook bevatten zij dezelfde thema's, bijvoorbeeld de beschrijving van het geleidelijke morele verval van de mensheid.

In Hoofdstuk 2 heb ik erop gewezen dat het verband tussen ethiek en fysica in de oudheid een betwist onderwerp was, zoals voornamelijk blijkt uit Cicero's *De republica* (1.15ff.). Men verschilde van mening over de vraag of bestudering van de fysica een moreel of praktisch doel had of niet. Sommigen erkenden bijvoorbeeld dat de bestudering van dit gebied de geest scherpste voor andere vraagstukken, maar voegden toe dat zij niet meer waarde had dan dat. In de Hellenistische filosofische scholen was de gedachte dat de bestudering van de natuur relevant was voor ethische vraagstukken wijd verspreid, hoewel dit idee niet verder lijkt te zijn geconcretiseerd. Moderne wetenschappers hebben de discussie voortgezet, in die zin dat ook zij van mening verschillen over de rol die de fysica vervulde voor de antieke ethiek.

Verschillende argumenten uit deze discussie komen ook in de *Naturales Quaestiones* voor; Seneca geloofde duidelijk in de morele relevantie van de bestudering van de natuur. Tegelijkertijd hebben de besprekingen van natuurverschijnselen in de *Naturales Quaestiones* ook een eigen doel: als natuurfilosoof zoekt Seneca op basis van eigen opvattingen over de wereld naar de oorzaken van bepaalde natuurverschijnselen.

In Hoofdstuk 3 heb ik de aard van de moraliserende teksten in de *Naturales Quaestiones* verder verklaard. Uit bepaalde uitspraken van Seneca blijkt dat hij van mening was dat filosofisch onderwijs een moreel effect bij mensen teweeg moest brengen: gierige mensen moesten er bijvoorbeeld toe worden gebracht hun afkeer van geld uit te spreken. Dit doel werd bewerkstelligd door middel van aansporende, repetitieve teksten (of 'preken'), zonder ingewikkelde argumentaties. Hoewel het overgeleverde filosofische werk van Seneca meerdere soorten tekst bevat, vinden

we er ook deze prekende teksten, onder anderen, naar mijn mening, in de prologen en epilogen van de *Naturales Quaestiones*. Deze prologen en epilogen bevatten *adhortationes*, *dissuasiones* en *consolationes*, in *EM* 94-95 vermeld als onderverdelingen van het paraenetische deel van de filosofie: teksten die beogen bekende informatie op zo'n manier te herhalen en te benadrukken dat een mens er diep van overtuigd wordt. De natuurfilosofische besprekingen in de *Naturales Quaestiones*, aan de andere kant, behoren duidelijk niet tot dit deel van de filosofie. Een dergelijk inhoudelijk en stilistisch onderscheid tussen de verschillende delen van een werk vinden we bijvoorbeeld ook in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.

Naast paraenetische teksten waren ook filosofische oefeningen zoals een dagelijkse introspectie deel van deze op de praktijk gerichte vorm van filosofie. Belangrijke gedachten moesten deel gaan uitmaken van een persoon, bijvoorbeeld door de herhaling van *sententiae*. In bepaalde passages van Seneca's werk verschijnt verder de gedachte dat de krachtige beschrijving van immoreel gedrag bijdraagt aan het bestrijden van dat gedrag. Deze informatie biedt een verklaring voor Seneca's uitgebreide beschrijvingen van moreel wangedrag in het kader van zijn leer: de beschrijvingen zijn bedoeld om mensen van zulk wangedrag af te houden.

Hoofdstuk 4 heeft voor een groot deel betrekking op de vraag of de proloog van *NQ* 3 kan hebben gediend als de oorspronkelijke proloog van het hele werk. De eerste paragrafen van de proloog blijken basale prologenthematiek te bevatten: Seneca introduceert het werk en benadrukt het belang daarvan, maar stelt zich daarbij als auteur bescheiden op. Ik heb betoogd dat deze thematiek en Seneca's bewustzijn van de traditie in het schrijven van prologen, elementen die in andere prologen niet even duidelijk voorkomen, argumenten zijn om de proloog van *NQ* 3 als de inleiding van het hele werk te beschouwen. In deze proloog spreekt Seneca ook over zijn onderneming in termen van ethiek: hij kondigt aan dat zijn geest nu eindelijk aandacht aan zichzelf zal besteden, en betoogt dat het veel beter is om zich met ethiek bezig te houden dan met de waardeloze activiteit van historiografen. Het is duidelijk dat het natuuronderzoek hier in morele termen wordt gepresenteerd.

In de proloog van *NQ* 3 komt verder een passage voor die betrekking heeft op de belangrijkste thema's van Seneca's ethische leer: de rol van *fortuna* en de houding die de mens in het leven zou moeten hebben. Ik heb laten zien dat deze tekst bestaat uit gemeenplaatsen die ook elders in Seneca's werk hadden kunnen

staan. De passage is geschreven om de lezer of toehoorder te overtuigen van een bepaalde boodschap – de functie van filosofische teksten zoals beschreven in Hoofdstuk 3. Zoals Seneca in *EM* 64 zegt, wanneer hij de lectuur van een filosoof die hij bewondert beschrijft: de bedoeling van dit soort tekst is om iemand in zo'n stemming te brengen dat hij zich in staat voelt om *fortuna* aan te pakken.

De afsluiting van *NQ* 3, die in Hoofdstuk 5 wordt besproken, verschilt van de andere prologen en epilogen met zijn bespreking van de oorzaken van de vloed die op vaststaande momenten een einde maakt aan de wereld. Er zijn echter ook overeenkomsten met de andere epilogen, zoals het morele element dat ook in de beschrijving van de vloed op de achtergrond aanwezig is, en de dramatiserende beschrijving van het gebeuren, die bereikt wordt met behulp van dezelfde retorische technieken als in Seneca's beschrijvingen van morele decadentie. Daarnaast heb ik aangetoond dat er een duidelijk verband bestaat tussen dit stuk en het centrale deel van het boek, waarin de oorsprong van het water van rivieren en zee wordt onderzocht: in beide gevallen zijn het de vier elementen en hun overgang in elkaar die de voornaamste verklaring vormen voor de kwestie die besproken wordt.

Analyse van Seneca's voorstelling van de vloed aan de hand van de Stoïsche theorie van de 'wereldbrand' lijkt er op te wijzen dat Seneca deze Stoïsche theorie combineert met het idee van een vloed zoals dat in andere teksten voorkomt. Hoewel Seneca's beschrijving dramatisch is, heb ik betoogd dat hij de vloed een neutrale status geeft, als een standaard onderdeel van de organisatie van de wereld. In tegenstelling tot zijn standpunt in de bespreking van de aardbevingen (*NQ* 6.3), scheidt Seneca vloed en goddelijke interventie niet. Met betrekking tot aardbevingen zegt hij dat deze verschijnselen 'eigen oorzaken hebben', en niet voortkomen uit de woede van de goden. Een dergelijk onderscheid, dat antieke filosofen vaker maakten in verband met schadelijke natuurverschijnselen, paste ook binnen een visie op de wereld zoals die van de Stoa: bepaalde dingen gebeuren noodzakelijkerwijze zonder dat het begrip van voorzienigheid daardoor wordt verstoord.

De proloog die in Hoofdstuk 6 wordt besproken, de proloog van *NQ* 4a, heeft een aparte vorm en inhoud. Het is een uitgebreide behandeling van het onderwerp 'vleierij', die niet in verband staat met de centrale bespreking van de rivier de Nijl in

dit boek, maar er alleen aan is vastgeknoopt. Seneca's bespreking van het verschijnsel vleierij heeft een niet-theoretisch karakter en sterke retorische karakteristieken zoals het gebruik van paradox. De proloog is geschreven in de vorm van een brief, een vorm waarin prologen vaker werden gegoten in de oudheid. De proloog vertoont gelijkenis met Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* wat inhoud en epistolaire kenmerken betreft. Lucilius, Seneca's adressaat, is in deze proloog ook sterker aanwezig dan in de andere moraliserende passages van de *Naturales Quaestiones*. Wetenschappers hebben geconstateerd dat Lucilius in de *Epistulae Morales* de rol van literair hulpmiddel vervult en de bespreking van filosofische onderwerpen vergemakkelijkt; ik heb betoogd dat de manier waarop Lucilius in de *Naturales Quaestiones* voorkomt deze rol bevestigt.

In Hoofdstuk 7 worden drie moraliserende epilogen besproken. Naar aanleiding van een passage uit de epiloog van *NQ* 4b, waarin Seneca zijn werk ter discussie stelt en verdedigt, heb ik de plaats van natuurfilosofisch onderzoek in verhouding tot de allesoverheersende ethiek in Seneca's denken besproken. De filosoof benadrukt dat elke activiteit een moreel doel moet hebben, maar stelt tegelijkertijd ook dat de bestudering van de natuur nut en grandeur heeft. Naar mijn mening kan de aanwezigheid van de moraliserende passages in de *Naturales Quaestiones* worden verklaard vanuit de gedachte dat overal een morele les uit moet worden getrokken.

Het idee van moreel verval, verbonden met het verschijnsel van een toenemende luxe, neemt een belangrijke plaats in de *Naturales Quaestiones* in. In dit hoofdstuk heb ik dit idee gekarakteriseerd als een vast denkpatroon dat in de oudheid aan de werkelijkheid werd opgelegd, en dat een feitelijke basis had maar de feitelijke situatie ook overdreef en vervormde. Ook al was het een bekende gemeenplaats, men was desondanks van mening dat de gedachte van 's mens morele verval kon aansporen tot beter gedrag.

De beschrijving van het geleidelijk toenemende misbruik van sneeuw bij luxueuze diners in *NQ* 4b.13 heb ik besproken als een voorbeeld van Seneca's behandeling van een moraliserend onderwerp. Daarbij heb ik gewezen op de literaire uitwerking van het onderwerp (de retorische karakteristieken van de passage, het gebruik van semi-medische terminologie), en de plaats ervan in het Romeinse moraliserende discours. Het feit dat zulke beschrijvingen vaker

voorkwamen, bijvoorbeeld in het genre van de satire, is van belang voor een goed begrip van Seneca's voorstelling.

De epiloog van *NQ* 5 is een lange aanklacht tegen het misbruik dat de mens maakt van een geschenk van de natuur, de mogelijkheid om over water te varen, om in andere landen oorlog te gaan voeren. Ook dit is een paraenetische tekst die groot gebruik maakt van retorica en herhaling om een eenvoudige boodschap over te brengen. In deze epiloog is bijzonder duidelijk hoe concluderende *sententiae* de les op zo'n manier herformuleren dat men hem gemakkelijk kan onthouden. Ik heb de passage bestudeerd in het kader van de verschillende opvattingen die in de oudheid bestonden over de zeevaart (en daarmee ook over de plaats van de mens in de wereld): in sommige teksten werd gezegd dat zulke heiligschennis als het oversteken van de oceaan niet aan de mens was toegestaan, terwijl in andere teksten de zeevaart wordt gepresenteerd als een blijk van technologische vooruitgang waartoe de mensheid de mogelijkheid had gekregen. Seneca's versie combineert het positieve idee van de mogelijkheden die de natuur de mens heeft gegeven met het negatieve element van het misbruik van deze mogelijkheid. Het sterk pessimistische karakter van de epiloog van *NQ* 5 wordt vooral duidelijk als men de tekst vergelijkt met de klacht van de tegenstanders van de Stoïsche filosofie zoals verwoord in Boek 3 van Cicero's *De natura deorum*. Deze tegenstanders betoogden dat god geen goede voorzieningen voor de mensen had getroffen, aangezien zijn 'geschenken' konden worden misbruikt: het zou beter zijn geweest als deze geschenken niet waren uitgedeeld – een gedachte die in de epiloog van *NQ* 5 ook naar voren komt. Seneca reageert echter ook met wat het Stoïsche antwoord op dit verwijt was: het correcte gebruik van een 'geschenk van de natuur' is 's mens eigen verantwoordelijkheid. Het is vanwege het sterk retorische, klagende karakter van de tekst dat hij grotere nadruk legt op het idee dat men nooit de mogelijkheid had moeten krijgen om op zee te varen.

De verklaring van Seneca's uitgebreide beschrijvingen van wangedrag wordt vooral problematisch gevonden in het geval van de epiloog van *NQ* 1, met zijn beschrijving van de seksuele perversiteit van Hostius Quadra. Naar mijn mening kan ook deze passage het beste worden begrepen in het kader dat in Hoofdstuk 3 besproken is, d.w.z. als een beschrijving die is bedoeld om de mens af te houden van zulke perversiteit. Een analyse van de passage toont dat Seneca verschillende welbekende retorische middelen zoals indirecte amplificatie gebruikt om Hostius

Quadra's perversiteit te benadrukken. Het detail en de levendigheid van de beschrijving zijn kenmerkend voor de stijlfiguur *evidentia*.

In het laatste hoofdstuk van *NQ* 1 beschrijft Seneca hoe spiegels gebruikt zouden moeten worden, en hoe ze geleidelijk misbruikt werden voor luxueuze doeleinden. In het contrast dat hij schetst tussen de vroegste, deugdzame generaties mensen (die geen spiegels nodig hadden) en zijn eigen tijd, waarin het perverse gebruik van spiegels wijd verspreid is, zijn elementen van juist en onjuist gedrag duidelijk herkenbaar, en vormen Seneca's morele les.

Moderne geleerden hebben verschillende theorieën geformuleerd met betrekking tot de compositie van *NQ* 1. Sommigen zijn van mening dat de bespreking van de natuurverschijnselen in het boek een metaforische betekenis heeft die in verband staat met de proloog en epiloog. Zo wordt bijvoorbeeld betoogd dat terwijl de proloog verwijst naar het idee van een goddelijk licht, en de epiloog een beestige immoraliteit vertoont, de centrale tekst het gebied van imperfecte, menselijke lichtverschijnselen behelst, tussen het goddelijke en het beestige in. Andere interpretaties verbinden (en contrasteren) de proloog en epiloog zelf in deze termen. Zelf heb ik in deze studie gewezen op het riskante karakter van zulke interpretaties.

In Hoofdstuk 8, waarin de *consolationes* van de *Naturales Quaestiones* zijn besproken (de proloog en epiloog van *NQ* 6 en de epiloog van *NQ* 2), heb ik vooral aandacht besteed aan de proloog van *NQ* 6, en de grandioze argumentatie die deze proloog bevat blootgelegd. Aanvankelijk omschrijft Seneca aardbevingen als de oorzaak van sterfte die het meest gevreesd moet worden, vervolgens beargumenteert hij dat elke dood gelijk is (en niet gevreesd zou moeten worden). Daarop meldt hij dat er veel manieren om te sterven zijn die meer gevreesd zouden moeten worden dan een aardbeving, om te concluderen met het idee dat sterven in een aardbeving zelfs te verkiezen is, aangezien dit een grootse dood is. De oorspronkelijke amplificatie van de angst waarvoor vervolgens troost zal worden geboden lijkt vaker te zijn voorgekomen in de context van de *consolatio*. Mijn analyse heeft aangetoond dat de proloog van *NQ* 6 bestaat uit gemeenplaatsen uit de troostliteratuur die effectief zijn geselecteerd en geordend door Seneca. Het gebruik van zulke gemeenplaatsen is op zijn plaats in een genre dat de mens wil

overtuigen van bepaalde basale ideeën, zoals de gedachte dat ‘de dood niet moet worden gevreesd’.

Ook de filosofische oefening van de *praemeditatio mortis* heb ik met deze proloog in verband gebracht: deze oefening bestond er uit dat men zich al de ellende die maar kon gebeuren voorstelde, zodat men in staat was om beter op een ramp te reageren wanneer deze daadwerkelijk plaatsvond. De nadruk die Seneca legt op het idee dat aardbevingen overal en elk moment kunnen voorkomen moet in deze context worden begrepen.

In de epiloog van *NQ* 6 worden gemeenplaatsen uit de *consolatio* ingezet tegen de angst om te sterven in algemene zin, eerder dan de specifieke angst om te sterven in een aardbeving. Naar aanleiding van deze passage heb ik de vraag gesteld in hoeverre zulke teksten als de *consolationes* van de *Naturales Quaestiones* kunnen worden verklaard in het kader van het idee van meditatie. Het sterk retorische en repetitieve karakter van de *consolationes* correspondeert met het concept van meditatie: ik heb gesuggereerd dat deze teksten als uitgangspunt voor meditatie zouden kunnen hebben gediend.

Bij de bespreking van het einde van *NQ* 7, in Hoofdstuk 9, hebben we net als bij de bespreking van *NQ* 5 gezien dat Seneca’s sterk retorische stijl er soms toe leidt dat bepaalde gedachten versterkt of vervormd worden voorgesteld. De meest opvallende mededeling van Seneca in *NQ* 7.30 is dat het niet mogelijk is om kennis van god te verkrijgen. Bij nader inzien blijkt dit een dramatisering te zijn van het feit dat god niet kan worden gezien. Daarnaast beschouwt Seneca kennis van god in de context van zijn bespreking van de kometen, goddelijke verschijnsels die nauwelijks bekend waren: kennis van god zelf moet dus ook niet mogelijk zijn. Het vertrouwen in de vooruitgang van wetenschappelijk onderzoek dat in dit boek wordt geuit versterkt het idee dat Seneca’s pessimisme met betrekking tot het bereiken van bepaalde kennis niet absoluut is.

Verder bewijsmateriaal heeft de aard van Seneca’s uitspraken in dit stuk nog verduidelijkt. Voor antieke filosofen waren *obscura*, onzichtbare dingen, ook voorwerp van kennis. In deze epiloog neemt Seneca tijdelijk een negatief standpunt in ten opzichte van deze vorm van kennis. Zijn houding blijkt een traditionele reactie te zijn geweest van natuurfilosofen die, geplaagd voor een bijzonder moeilijk onderwerp in hun onderzoek, uitriepen dat ‘niets aan het licht kon worden

gebracht'. In de oudheid bestonden verschillende meningen over de bestudering van de hemelse gebieden: soms werd gezegd dat dit onderzoek binnen het bereik van de mens lag, maar soms werd het overmoedige karakter van het onderzoek naar bovenmenselijke onderwerpen benadrukt.

De epiloog wordt afgesloten met een moraliserende passage die overgaat van het idee van een wetenschappelijke vooruitgang naar dat van een stagnatie in filosofische en wetenschappelijke kennis, en een 'vooruitgang' in immoreel gedrag. Seneca's retorische formulering en subjectieve presentatie van het verschijnsel van moreel verval is ook in deze passage duidelijk zichtbaar.

In Hoofdstuk 10, waarin de proloog van *NQ* 1 is besproken, hebben we gezien dat, naast het morele effect van de bestudering van de natuur, Seneca soms ook stelt dat morele vooruitgang de noodzakelijke voorwaarde is voor een opstijgen van de geest naar de hemelse gebieden. Deze proloog beschrijft voornamelijk een dergelijke 'vlucht van de geest': de geest stijgt op naar zijn goddelijke oorsprong en aanschouwt daarvandaan de wereld, waarbij hem duidelijk wordt hoe verachtelijk menselijke bezittingen zijn. Het opstijgen van de geest naar de hemel was een filosofisch getint concept dat veel voorkwam in klassieke teksten, en vaak voorzien was van een moreel aspect. Wetenschappers zijn het oneens over de aard van Seneca's weergave, en meer in het bijzonder over de vraag of deze een Platoons of Stoïsch karakter heeft. Naar mijn mening kan men een dergelijk karakter niet toekennen aan de tekst van de *NQ* 1. Het beeld van het opstijgen van de geest deed vooral dienst om de verheffing van de geest in filosofische contemplatie weer te geven, en was in het bijzonder geschikt voor een beschrijving van de effecten van de bestudering van de natuur. In de proloog van *NQ* 1 heeft het beeld ook deze functie.

In het laatste deel van dit hoofdstuk heb ik kort de aard van Seneca's godsbeeld besproken. Sommige uitspraken in de Boeken 7 en 1 geven de indruk van een Platoonse voorstelling van god, aangezien het goddelijke wordt beschreven als geheel onzichtbaar en geheel *ratio*, en niet wordt geïdentificeerd met de hele kosmos maar alleen met het beste deel daarvan. Een meer diepgaande bestudering van de Stoïsche theologie wijst echter uit dat van de Stoïsche immanente godheid ook werd gedacht dat hij zich in hogere concentratie in het hoogste deel van de wereld bevond. De verschillende manieren waarop Seneca het goddelijke voorstelt

weerspiegelen de verschillende aspecten van de Stoïsche godheid. Het is opvallend dat de ‘verheven’ voorstelling van god vooral voorkomt in de context van de hemelse natuurverschijnselen die in *NQ* 7 en 1 worden besproken.

Aanvankelijk verwachtte ik dat, in reactie op die wetenschappers die hierover twijfels hadden geuit, mijn onderzoek zou aantonen dat de *Naturales Quaestiones* een werk was dat een sterke eenheid vertoonde en dus goed gecomponeerd was. Mijn onderzoek was begonnen met Boek 7, zodat mijn indruk van het werk als geheel was gebaseerd op dit boek. De situatie bleek echter meer complex te zijn: het is duidelijk dat de verschillende boeken waar de *Naturales Quaestiones* uit bestaat niet allemaal op dezelfde manier zijn samengesteld. In Boek 7 wordt het idee van de goddelijkheid van de kometen, dat als een rode draad door het natuurfilosofische deel loopt, uitgewerkt in de epiloog, en verbindt de moraliserende passage aan het einde van het boek het idee van wetenschappelijke vooruitgang met dat van wetenschappelijke achteruitgang en de ‘vooruitgang’ die wordt geboekt op het gebied van immoreel gedrag. In andere boeken, zoals *NQ* 5, is de epiloog verbonden met de centrale bespreking van het boek vanwege het feit dat Seneca er hetzelfde natuurverschijnsel bespreekt vanuit een moreel standpunt. Dit is niet het geval in *NQ* 4a, waar de uiteenzetting in de proloog niet gerelateerd is aan het onderwerp van de hoofdtypekst (voor zover we kunnen nagaan voor een boek dat alleen gedeeltelijk bewaard is). Het algemene karakter van de proloog van *NQ* 3 kan worden verklaard vanuit het feit dat deze proloog het gehele werk introduceert, terwijl de algemene gedachten met betrekking tot de waarde van de bestudering van de natuur die in de proloog van *NQ* 1 voorkomen worden veroorzaakt door de aard van de natuurverschijnselen die in *NQ* 7 zijn besproken.

Het materiaal dat ik in Hoofdstuk 1 heb besproken heeft bewezen hoe belangrijk het is om zich bewust te zijn van de literaire opvattingen in een bepaalde tijd en omgeving, voordat men (al dan niet bewust) eigen ideeën over (bijvoorbeeld) literaire eenheid oplegt aan een werk zonder dat men voldoende verifieert of deze ideeën daar ook daadwerkelijk op van toepassing zijn. Het is dan ook belangrijk om te beseffen dat een passage zoals de proloog van *NQ* 4a niet noodzakelijk in thematisch verband hoeft te staan met de daaropvolgende bespreking van de rivier

de Nijl. Het was in de oudheid in bepaalde genres gebruikelijk om eerst een apart onderwerp te bespreken, en die bespreking vervolgens vast te knopen aan het daaropvolgende centrale betoog. Een proloog kon ook in meer algemene zin met de hoofdtekst zijn verbonden (en daar bijvoorbeeld de morele dimensie van aangeven), en toch een eigen ontwikkeling volgen. Overgangsformules zijn in deze studie minder uitgebreid besproken. Wij hebben echter kunnen constateren dat moderne geleerden de overgangsformules die in de *Naturales Quaestiones* voorkomen soms hebben bestempeld als ‘formeel’, zonder te verifiëren of de negatieve ondertoon van deze karakterisering gerechtvaardigd was.

De *Naturales Quaestiones* blijkt een interessant terrein te zijn voor de bestudering van vraagstukken die betrekking hebben op de eenheid of compositie van een werk. Vooral bij de bespreking van de epiloog van *NQ* 1 hebben we gezien wat voor meer complexe interpretaties er voor een bepaald boek van de *Naturales Quaestiones* naar voren zijn gebracht. Het is moeilijk om vast te stellen of, en in hoeverre, dergelijke interpretaties gerechtvaardigd zijn. Zo kan *NQ* 5 bijvoorbeeld zeer goed in het kader van Seneca’s filosofie worden verklaard als een natuurfilosofische bespreking van de aard en plaats van de winden in de wereld, gevolgd door een moraliserend *addendum* over het misbruik dat de mens maakt van de mogelijkheid om te varen die de winden bieden. Zulke interpretaties als recent naar voren gebracht door Williams, bijvoorbeeld, die het wilde karakter van bepaalde winden in verband brengt met het geweld dat door de mens is veroorzaakt, geven een extra dimensie aan het boek, en lijken het dus te verrijken. Niet iedereen zal het echter met Williams’ interpretatie eens zijn, en andere wetenschappers zullen ongetwijfeld variaties op deze interpretatie formuleren. Zelf ben ik sterk terughoudend gebleven ten opzichte van dergelijke theorieën. Het is belangrijk om een interpretatie een theoretische basis te geven en in een bepaalde context te plaatsen, bijvoorbeeld die van een bepaald genre of het overige werk van een auteur; op basis van dergelijke gegevens beschouw ik de *Naturales Quaestiones* als een minder gecompliceerd werk dan naar voren komt uit publicaties zoals die van Williams.

Hoewel we dus naar mijn mening moeten oppassen om een al te sterke eenheid te willen zoeken in de verschillende boeken van de *Naturales Quaestiones*, moeten we ons er ook voor hoeden te weinig eenheid in het werk te zien. Het was duidelijk

de bedoeling van de auteur om een moraliserende dimensie toe te voegen aan zijn bespreking van verschillende natuurverschijnselen. Zijn overtuiging dat de bestudering van de natuur een morele waarde had werd gedeeld door zijn tijdgenoten; zelfs de Sceptici waren deze mening toegedaan.

Ik heb het gehad over moraliserende *addenda*: het is niet gemakkelijk om te begrijpen hoe Seneca's repetitieve en sterk retorische teksten, en vooral zijn uitgebreide beschrijvingen van menselijk wangedrag, effectieve morele lessen konden vormen. De problematische aspecten van deze methode zijn het duidelijkst in de weergave van Hostius Quadra's perversiteit (*NQ* 1.16). Deze situatie heeft sommige wetenschappers ertoe gebracht naar andere manieren te zoeken om Seneca's moraliserende passages te begrijpen, bijvoorbeeld via metaforische interpretaties.

Naar mijn mening hebben zowel Seneca's stilistische voorkeur als het paraenetische karakter van zijn filosofisch werk de vorm van de prologen en epilogen bepaald. Het paraenetische aspect van Seneca's filosofie, zoals besproken in Hoofdstuk 3, biedt een context waarin de prologen en epilogen kunnen worden begrepen. Het is wellicht in de *consolationes* van de *Naturales Quaestiones* dat de functie van dit soort tekst het duidelijkst is. Een oefening als de *praemeditatio mortis*, die zich richt op het visualiseren van mogelijke toekomstige rampen, is relatief goed bekend en onderzocht, en moet duidelijk met de proloog van *NQ* 6 in verband worden gebracht. Het concept van een uitgebreide beschrijving van een vorm van immoreel gedrag die als doel heeft om mensen daarvan af te houden is minder bekend. Seneca's gedetailleerde beschrijvingen corresponderen echter goed met het idee om een ondeugd of gevaar 'voor de ogen van de lezer te plaatsen'.

Bepaalde ideeën die Seneca gebruikt komen in de klassieke literatuur zowel in een meer filosofische als een meer literaire context voor. Dit geldt voor het idee van een geleidelijk moreel verval van de maatschappij vanaf een oorspronkelijke gouden eeuw. Het is niet altijd eenvoudig om te begrijpen wat de waarde van deze welbekende gemeenplaats was. In de bespreking van de epiloog van *NQ* 1 hebben we echter een indruk gekregen van de manier waarop dit beeld kon worden gebruikt in een filosofische context; ik heb inderdaad aangetoond dat de ideeën met betrekking tot haarverzorging die Seneca in zijn beschrijving van het geleidelijk opkomend gebruik en misbruik van spiegels verwerkt overeenkomen met het

onderricht van andere filosofen over hetzelfde onderwerp. Via zijn beschrijvingen van deugdzzaamheid en moreel verval gaf Seneca lessen in juist en onjuist gedrag.

Met hun paraenetische karakter verschillen de moraliserende passages van de *Naturales Quaestiones* van de natuurfilosofische besprekingen in het werk. In *NQ* 6, bijvoorbeeld, leiden de regels van de *consolatio* in de proloog en epiloog van het boek tot een specifieke benadering van het natuurverschijnsel dat wordt besproken. Het idee van een ‘mengsel van genres’ lijkt dus van toepassing te zijn op de *Naturales Quaestiones*.

Om te concluderen: het antwoord op de vraag naar de eenheid van de *Naturales Quaestiones* zal per boek verschillen. Over het algemeen kunnen we zeggen dat op het niveau van de intentie van het werk ethiek en fysica worden gecombineerd, en (vanuit een literair standpunt) prologen en epilogen het werk in een groter kader plaatsen. Seneca voegt *aliquid ad mores* toe, hij plaatst zijn natuurfilosofie in een vooral moraliserend groter kader. Als we kijken naar de manier waarop deze intentie is gerealiseerd, is de eenheid minder duidelijk waarneembaar. De prologen en epilogen verlopen namelijk volgens een eigen patroon, en de moraliserende *addenda* nemen de vorm aan van specifieke morele *adhortationes* en *dissuasiones*, genres met eigen kenmerken. Met deze overwegingen hoop ik in deze studie enig licht te hebben geworpen op de aard van de verschillende elementen waar de *Naturales Quaestiones* uit bestaat.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Florence Julia Gabriella Limburg werd op 9 januari 1977 te Leiden geboren met een Frans/Nederlandse nationaliteit. In 1994 behaalde zij haar diploma aan het Stedelijk Gymnasium te Leiden. Vervolgens studeerde zij klassieke talen aan de Universiteit Leiden, met als hoofdvakken Latijnse Taal- en Letterkunde en Antieke Wijsbegeerte; deze studie werd in 2000 (*cum laude*) afgesloten. Voor haar doctoraalscriptie Latijnse Taal- en Letterkunde ontving ze de *Romanitas* scriptieprijs. Van 2000 tot 2005 was zij assistent in opleiding bij de sectie Latijn van de opleiding Griekse en Latijnse taal en cultuur aan de Universiteit Leiden. In het kader van deze aanstelling is het grootste deel van het onderzoek verricht waarvan de resultaten in dit proefschrift worden gepresenteerd. Na afloop van deze aanstelling is zij in deeltijd werkzaam geweest als docent aan dezelfde opleiding Griekse en Latijnse taal en cultuur. Daarnaast werkt zij momenteel bij Colo (Vereniging kenniscentra middelbaar beroepsonderwijs).