

## HUNGER, THIRST, COLD: AN EPICUREAN INTEGRATION TO SENECA, EPIST. 24.26\*

**Abstract:** The present paper aims to argue in favour of the integration of *sitiam* at Sen. epist. 24.26. In the early manuscript tradition, this paragraph presents a five-verb sequence: *expergiscar dormiam esuriam algebo aestuabo*. However, almost every editor since the earliest printed editions has felt the need to integrate this sequence with one more verb. Nowadays the most commonly accepted emendation is *expergiscar dormiam edam esuriam algebo aestuabo*, consecrated by Reynolds' edition of Seneca's *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (1965). In this paper, I argue for a different integration (*expergiscar dormiam esuriam sitiam algebo aestuabo*), already proposed by Brakman (1909): I will offer new evidence as well as contextual arguments in favour of this emendation.

**Keywords:** Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, textual criticism, Epicurus

Pride costs us more than hunger, thirst and cold.  
(Thomas Jefferson,  
Letter to Thomas Jefferson Smith,  
Monticello, February 21, 1825)

### 1. Introduction: Seneca's Letter 24

The aim of the present paper is modest: that is, to discuss a one-word integration to Seneca's Letter 24,<sup>1</sup> and to argue in favour of a proposal which had already been advanced by Cornelius Brakman in 1909. It is indeed limited in scope, but the arguments I will offer are of different kinds. In fact, I will consider the textual problem not just from a strictly philological perspective (i. e. based

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1) Commentaries on Seneca's Letter 24: Costa 1988, 162–165; Laudizi 2003, 96–153; Edwards 2019, 131–154. See also Tandoi 1965, 331–335; Russell 1974, 85–88; Mayer 1991, 153–155; Hutchinson 1993, 273–9; Hachmann 1995, 182–90.

on manuscript and printed tradition and past critical editions), but I will rely also on rhetorical, stylistic, literary, and philosophical arguments.

The passage I am interested in is the letter's very last paragraph (§ 26), which I will quote in its entirety (the text is the one established by L. D. Reynolds)<sup>2</sup>:

*Quosdam subit eadem faciendi videndique satietas et vitae non odium sed fastidium, in quod prolabimur ipsa impellente philosophia, dum dicimus 'quousque eadem? nempe expergiscar dormiam, <edam> esuriam, algebo aestuabo. Nullius rei finis est, sed in orbem nexa sunt omnia, fugiunt ac sequuntur; diem nox premit, dies noctem, aestas in autumnum desinit, autumnus hiemps instat, quae vere conspescitur; omnia sic transeunt ut revertantur. Nihil novi facio, nihil novi video: fit aliquando et huius rei nausea.' Multi sunt qui non acerbum iudicent vivere sed supervacuum. Vale.*

Others find that they have become satiated with seeing and doing the same things, and do not hate life so much as they are disgusted by it. We slip into it even at the instigation of philosophy, when we say, "How much more of the same things? I mean, how long will I wake and sleep, eat and grow hungry, grow cold and grow hot? Nothing has an ending: everything is connected in a circle. Things chase each other in succession: night comes on the heels of day, day on the heels of night; summer yields to autumn, autumn is followed hard by winter, which then gives way to spring. Everything passes only to return. I do nothing that is new, see nothing that is new. Sometimes this too produces nausea." There are many who feel, not that life is hard, but that it is pointless. Farewell.<sup>3</sup>

After criticizing those who kill themselves in impulsive ways, Seneca turns to those who take their own lives not because they hate living, but out of disgust for life (*non odium sed fastidium*). This feeling of *nausia*, Seneca says, often derives from a misinterpretation of philosophy: understanding the cyclic and monotonous nature of life often leads one to loathe it. Men have to meet always the same basic needs, all days and all years are the same: for those men, living is not harsh (*acerbum*) but useless (*supervacuum*). This is the immediate context of the object of my interest, that is, the verb sequence *expergiscar dormiam, <edam> esuriam, algebo aestuabo,*

2) Reynolds 1965a, 72.

3) All translations of Seneca's *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* are by Graver / Long 2015, with some minor adjustments.

which describes the repetitiveness of human life. As I will argue, this piece of text requires a different kind of integration than the commonly accepted one.

2. *Expergiscar dormiam esuriam algebo aestuabo:*  
*need to integrate?*

The manuscript tradition of the *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* has received wide scholarly attention.<sup>4</sup> For my purposes, however, the earliest phases of the text transmission are of little use: the entirety of the most ancient testimonia agree on the piece of text I am discussing. They all contain the same five-verb sequence, which they surely derived from their archetype:

*expergiscar dormiam esuriam algebo aestuabo.*

From a strictly philological and codicological point of view, there does not seem to be any need to modify the transmitted text. However, almost every editor since the sixteenth century up until now felt the need to integrate the passage with one more verb. This attitude can be traced back to the very first printed editions: not only in Erasmus' edition (which is considered the first critical edition, dated 1515), but already in the Roman *incunabulum* (dated 1475) this sequence appears:

*expergiscar dormiam satiabor esuriam algebo aestuabo.*

It must be noted, however, that the very earliest evidence for such an integration of this piece of text is provided by a fourteenth century manuscript, the *codex Rehdigeranus* 123, sigled as R in C. R. Fickert's edition of the *Epistulae morales* (1842). The codex was written in Italy and belonged to the Venetian politician and humanist Leonardo Giustinian;<sup>5</sup> it is now property of the Wrocław University

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4) The most extensive account of the manuscript tradition is Reynolds 1965b. Among the later studies, the most relevant are those by Jeannine Fohlen (1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2003) and Maddalena Spallone (1995), who relied on a much wider basis of manuscripts and highlighted the limits of Reynolds' stemmatic approach.

5) Fickert 1842, XXI.

Library.<sup>6</sup> Given that all the other extant manuscripts contain the five-verb sequence, it is most probable that this addition was made out of *ingenium* rather than following a *collatio*; it cannot be ruled out that the first printed edition derived the integration of *satiabor* from this manuscript (or, at least, from the tradition it represents).

Starting from the sixteenth century onwards, all editors (including Muret, Lipius, and Gruter) seem to take for granted the presence of *satiabor* either after or before *esuriam*. Later, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, some editors felt the need of different yet careful emendations. Here is a list:

*edam esuriam* (Gertz,<sup>7</sup> followed by Reynolds 1965; Graver / Long 2015; Edwards 2019)  
*esuriam fastidiam* (Hense 1898)  
*esuriam hauriam* vel *explebor* (Roszbach 1899, 651)  
*esuriam sitiam* (Brakman 1909)  
*esuriam farciar* (Beltrami 1931, followed by Préchac 1945)  
*esuriam nauseabo* (Alexander 1940)

Each editor, however, manifests a certain degree of caution with their emendations: Hense leaves three dots in the text, declaring “*esuriam fastidiam ego proposui*” in the apparatus; Roszbach gives two alternatives *exempli gratia*; Beltrami uses angled brackets. Brakman is the only scholar who argues in favour of his emendation at some length with no apparent hesitation and relying on textual parallels, as will be seen. However, all of them seem quite sure about the necessity of an integration: Hense clearly states that “opus est membris inter se oppositis”. Nowadays, the most commonly used text is that established by Reynolds, who chose *edam esuriam*, conscious that this is an *exempli gratia* integration. Nevertheless, he too is sure that in this passage there is a missing word.

The only one who has profusely and reasonably argued against any necessity for a supplementary verb is Giorgio Bernardi Perini.<sup>8</sup> His argument has some strong points. Firstly, all the *potiores* are

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6) I wish to express my gratefulness to the Manuscripts Department of the Wrocław University Library for sending me a digitalized scan of f. 30 recto of the manuscript.

7) Quoted by Hense (1898 ad loc.).

8) Bernardi Perini 2001, 267–269; his argument is shared by Laudizi 2003, 151–152. Indeed, already Haase, in the first Teubner edition of the *Epistulae* (1886), did not integrate the passage.

unanimous about the passage. Secondly, Bernardi Perini believes that the first verb couple (*expergiscar dormiam*) and the last one (*algebo aestuabo*) do not have quite the same value: the first one is characterized by time successions, while only in the second one the two verbs are opposite in meaning. Furthermore, he invokes the “legge dei membri crescenti”: only the first two verbs form a temporal binomial, while the remaining three (*esuriam algebo aestuabo*) constitute a three-cola crescendo related to physical necessities.

Nevertheless, Giorgio Bernardi Perini admits that, if any emendation should really be needed, the one proposed by Brakman (*sitiam*) would be the most reasonable one. Bernardi Perini refers to one of the Senecan passages mentioned by Brakman as textual parallels for epist. 24.26 (i. e. epist. 4.10: *non esurire, non sitire, non algere*), which he calls a “trittico epicureo”.<sup>9</sup> However, he argues that, in both of these two passages (Letter 4 and Letter 24), Seneca omits one element from an original double couple of elements (hunger and thirst, cold and heat), namely heat from Letter 4 and thirst from Letter 24. So, according to him, the (alleged) omission in Letter 24 is paralleled by another (alleged) omission in Letter 4: therefore no integration is needed.

I believe that the strongest argument put forward by Bernardi Perini against the necessity of an integration is the manuscript argument. But, on the other hand, I believe that the four-element argument is weak, because, as I shall argue, the original is not fourfold, but threefold (indeed, one of Epicurus’ maxims), and that Seneca – and Cicero too before him, as we will see – adds new elements to it. Furthermore, even though the first binomial (*expergiscar dormiam*) and the last one (*algebo aestuabo*) are different in nature, nevertheless they are two couples; I find it difficult not to think that also the middle verb (*esuriam*) was not part of a pair. I hold that in this passage, which is highly sophisticated from a stylistic point of view (direct speech, rhetorical question, enumeration), rhetorical arguments are stronger than those based on meaning nuances. So, I think that symmetry has some weight as an argument in favour of adding a verb to be coupled with *esuriam*; furthermore, the following sentence too has a sort of dyadic rhythm (*fugiunt–sequuntur, diem–nox, dies–noctem, aestas–autumnum, autumno–hiemps,*

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9) Bernardi Perini 2001, 269.

*transeunt–revertantur, facio–video*); I agree with Hense that “opus est membris inter se oppositis”. In addition, as Alfonso Traina has shown, the “legge dei membri crescenti” is very rare in Seneca, whose last *cola* in a sequence tend to be shorter than the previous ones.<sup>10</sup> Finally, to my knowledge, a five-verb sequence is not found anywhere else in Seneca’s prose, while series of couples are more frequent, especially in passages where the author talks about the cyclic nature of events.<sup>11</sup>

To sum up, I strongly believe that the passage requires an integration, despite Giorgio Bernardi Perini’s arguments, and that a word had been missing at least since the archetype of the manuscript tradition (ninth century), if not even before. This absence did not pass unnoticed to the humanists, who started adding the word *satiabor* already (probably) in the fourteenth century; Erasmus too, who collated many manuscripts (which most probably had the five-verb sequence), would not have written *satiabor* were he not persuaded of the necessity to integrate it. I infer that a one-verb integration is needed; yet, I believe that the missing word is neither *satiabor* nor *edam* (as most scholars accept nowadays), but *sitiam*, the one proposed by Cornelius Brakman in 1909.

### 3. Comparative arguments in favour of *esuriam sitiam*

As I anticipated, Cornelius Brakman is the only scholar who justified his integration with cogent textual parallels; despite this, his proposal has been given hardly any attention by other scholars.<sup>12</sup> Hense quotes him last in his apparatus, commenting “minus bene” (without any explanation); Beltrami does not mention him at all, while Préchac mentions him last. Only Giorgio Bernardi Perini

10) Traina 1974, 34–35.

11) E. g. epist. 12.6 (*et hic ab initio ad exitum venit, ab ortu ad occasum*); epist. 30.10 (*nam quemadmodum senectus adulescentiam sequitur, ita mors senectutem*); epist. 30.11 (*quidquid composuit resolvit, et quidquid resolvit componit iterum*). Another similar passage is epist. 49.10 (*dic mihi dormituro ‘potes non expergisci’; dic experrecto ‘potes non dormire amplius’*). *Dic exeunti ‘potes non reverti’; dic redeunti ‘potes non exire’*).

12) Stangl 1910, 1069 expresses his approval of Brakman’s integration; Russell 1974, 88 prints (*sitiam*) as well, but before *esuriam*.

discusses *sitiam* at some length, as I said before.<sup>13</sup> I think it is worthy to quote Brakman's paragraph in its entirety:

Supplemento meo favent Ep. 4,10 lex autem illa naturae scis quos nobis terminos statuatur? non *esurire*, non *sitire*, non *algere*; Ep. 113,21 omne animal terrestre alget, *esurit*, *sitit*: ergo iustitia *alget*, fortitudo *esurit*, clementia *sitit*; Ep. 119,7 at parum habet, qui tantum non *alget*, non *esurit*, non *sitit*; Dial. V (de ira lib. 3) 9,5 vetus dictum est a lasso rixam quaeri; aequae autem et ab *esuriente* et a *sitiente* et ab omni homine, quem aliqua res urit.<sup>14</sup>

The first three passages quoted by Brakman come the closest to Letter 24, because in all three of them the couple *esurire*–*sitire* is found in conjunction with the verb *algere*, which is present in Letter 24 too. For this reason, the passage from the *De ira* does not seem to reinforce Brakman's argument. But, on the contrary, it could be an *a fortiori* justification: the verbs *esurire* and *sitire* are so often coupled in Latin literature<sup>15</sup> that it is difficult to believe that they were not coupled in a passage where a couple of verbs is required by the context, such as Letter 24.

A passage that was not taken into consideration by any scholar (at least to my knowledge), which provides one more argument in favour of *sitiam*, is a piece of Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes* (2.34):

*Cretum quidem leges, quas sive Iuppiter sive Minos sanxit de Iovis quidem sententia, ut poetae ferunt, itemque Lycurgi laboribus erudiunt iuventutem, venando currendo, esuriendo sitiendo, algendo aestuando.*

The laws of Crete for instance – whether ratified by Jupiter or by Minos according to Jupiter's decision as the poets relate – and also the laws of Lycurgus educate youth by hardships, hunting and running, hunger and thirst, exposure to heat and cold.<sup>16</sup>

This passage is particularly meaningful for two main reasons. The first one is that it does include, alongside the three main verbs

13) See above, notes 8 and 9.

14) Brakman 1909, 23.

15) Some examples: Plaut. Cas. 724–725; Catull. 21.10–11; Cic. fin. 2.64; Tusc. 2.34; Varro, frg. Non. 88M; Sen. epist. 78.11; 78.22; 91.18; 113.21; 119.7; Apul. Socr. 22; Mart. 2.40.2; last, but not least, the evangelical *beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt iustitiam* (Mat. 5.6), translated by Jerome from the Greek μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην (compare also e.g. Aug. conf. 10.38).

16) Translation by King 1950.

which I am discussing (*esurire*, *sitire* and *algere*), also *aestuarie*, in final position, exactly as Seneca's Letter 24. The second one is that we have here a series of six verbs, made up of three couples: it is precisely the same pattern followed by Seneca – and the one Bernardi Perini argued against. In fact, I believe that Seneca had this specific passage in mind while writing Letter 24; it is widely recognized that Seneca is in constant dialectical relationship with his philosophical predecessor Cicero.<sup>17</sup> It would not be hazardous to affirm that Seneca is precisely alluding to Cicero here.

However, this game has a third player too, that is Epicurus. The verb sequence in common between the Senecan passages mentioned by Brakman and the Ciceronian one I mentioned can be traced back to an Epicurean maxim. This aphorism is included in the *Gnomologium Vaticanum* (33), but it was known even before the discovery of the *Gnomologium*, as it is quoted by Porphyrius (entirely) and Clement of Alexandria (partially) and classified as fragment 200 by Usener:<sup>18</sup>

Σαρκὸς φωνὴ τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγοῦν. Ταῦτα γὰρ ἔχων  
τις καὶ ἐλπίζων ἕξειν κἄν (Διὶ) ὑπὲρ εὐδαιμονίας μαχέσαιο.

The flesh cries out to be saved from hunger, thirst and cold. For if a man possess this safety and hope to possess it, he might rival even Zeus in happiness.<sup>19</sup>

Giorgio Bernardi Perini calls the Latin sequence *esurire–sitire–algere* a “trittico epicureo”, surely having this maxim in mind, while Laudizi explicitly draws attention to it as a precedent for epist. 4.10, 113.21, and 119.7.<sup>20</sup> Not only the word sequence in the Epicurean

17) I will limit myself to quoting just a few works on this vast topic: Gambet 1970; Moreschini 1977; Grimal 1984; Setaioli 2003; Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2003; Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2012; Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2018; Griffin 2018, 420–431.

18) Usener's edition (1887) does not contain the *Gnomologium Vaticanum*, which was published in 1888 (!).

19) All quotations from and translations of Epicurus' works are from Bailey 1926.

20) Laudizi 2003, 152, 213. It is likely (Meinel 1972, 133–134; Traina 1987, 158) that this Epicurean verb sequence lies also behind Sen. dial. 12 (= cons. Helv.)10.2: *corporis exigua desideria sunt: frigus summoveri vult, alimentis famem ac sitim extinguere*, “the needs of the body are slight: it wants the cold to be kept off, and to allay hunger and thirst with basic provisions”, translation by Gareth D. Williams (Fantham et al. 2014).

aphorism is the same as in Letter 24, but I also believe that the general contexts in which this sequence appears support the idea that when Seneca wrote Letter 24 he had Epicurus in mind as well.

#### 4. Non esurire, non sitire, non algere: *Epicurean natural desires*

In this paragraph I argue that Seneca deliberately refers to Epicurus when he uses the verb sequence *esurire*–*sitire*–*algere*. I hope I have demonstrated (parr. 2–3) that epist. 24.26 requires an integration; now I am going to highlight the strongly Epicurean character of this verbal sequence; finally, in the following paragraphs (5–6), I will emphasize how pervasive Epicurus is in Letter 24 in order to show that *sitiam* is the correct integration. I believe that the philosophical and the contextual (Epicurean) arguments corroborate each other and point towards *sitiam* as the best solution for the problem.

Let's start with Letter 4, which has been already mentioned. I think it is worthy to read the whole tenth paragraph of the epistle:

*Sed ut finem epistulae imponam, accipe quod mihi hodierno die placuit – et hoc quoque ex alienis hortulis sumptum est: ‘magnae divitiae sunt lege naturae composita paupertas’. Lex autem illa naturae scis quos nobis terminos statuatur? Non esurire, non sitire, non algere. Ut famem sitimque depellas non est necesse superbis adsidere liminibus nec supercilium grave et contumeliosam etiam humanitatem pati, non est necesse maria temptare nec sequi castra: parabile est quod natura desiderat et adpositum.*

To bring this letter to an end, here is what I liked from today's reading. This too is lifted from another's Garden:

Poverty is great wealth when it adjusts to nature's law. Do you know what boundaries nature's law imposes? Not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold. To keep back hunger and thirst, you need not hang about the thresholds of the proud, nor endure the scorn of those whose very kindness is insulting; you need not brave the seas nor follow the camps of the army. What nature requires is close by and easy to obtain.

As usual in first three books of the *Letters*, Seneca ends the epistle with a quotation from Epicurus.<sup>21</sup> The maxim he quotes here is

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21) On Epicurus' quotations in the first three books of Seneca's epistolary, Setaioli 1988, 170–248 (especially 182–223); Borgo 2013.

*magnae divitiae sunt lege naturae composita paupertas*, which is quoted in Letter 27 as well:<sup>22</sup> it was classified by Usener as fragment 477 and found its original version in Sent. Vat. 25. Epicurus' authorship of this aphorism is expressed by Seneca with a witty metonymy (*ex alienis hortulis*). So, it is beyond question that here, in Letter 4, the sentence *non esurire, non sitire, non algere* is another direct reference to Epicurus, namely to the maxim known to us as Sentence 33 from the *Gnomologium Vaticanum*.<sup>23</sup>

Both Seneca's paragraph and Epicurus' quotation are related to the Epicurean theory of desires (ἐπιθυμῖαι), which we know better from the *Letter to Menoecus* (§ 127<sup>24</sup>), two of the *Principal Sayings* (26<sup>25</sup>, 29<sup>26</sup>) and one of the *Vatican Sayings* (21<sup>27</sup>). Human desires

22) Sen. epist. 27.9: *sed accipe iam quod debeo et vale. 'Divitiae sunt ad legem naturae composita paupertas'. Hoc saepe dicit Epicurus aliter atque aliter: sed numquam nimis dicitur, quod numquam satis dicitur*, "but take what I owe you, and then farewell: 'Poverty that adjusts to nature's restrictions is wealth'. Epicurus says this repeatedly in one passage and another, but a thing is never said too much when it has not been well enough learned".

23) Scarpat 1975, 89–90; Borgo 2013, 32.

24) Ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί, καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον· τῶν δ' ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν, "we must consider that of desires some are natural, others vain, and of the natural some are necessary and others merely natural; and of the necessary some are necessary for happiness, others for the repose of the body, and others for very life".

25) Τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ὅσαι μὴ ἐπ' ἀλγοῦν ἐπανάγουσιν, ἐὰν μὴ συμπληρωθῶσιν, οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι ἀλλ' εὐδιάχυτον τὴν ὄρεξιν ἔχουσιν, ὅταν δυσπόριστον ἢ (ἢ) βλάβης ἀπεργαστικαὶ δόξωσιν εἶναι, "of desires, all that do not lead to a sense of pain, if they are not satisfied, are not necessary, but involve a craving which is easily dispelled, when the object is hard to procure or they seem likely to produce harm".

26) Τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαὶ καὶ ἀναγκαῖαι· αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μὲν, οὐκ ἀναγκαῖαι (δέ)· αἱ δὲ οὔτε φυσικαὶ οὔτε ἀναγκαῖαι ἀλλὰ παρὰ κενὴν δόξαν γινόμεναι, "among desires some are natural (and necessary, some natural) but not necessary, and others neither natural nor necessary, but due to idle imagination". Compare also [Phld.] De elect. VI.1–7 Indelli / Tsouna-McKirahan, and Cic. fin. 1.45; 2.26.

27) Οὐ βιαστέον τὴν φύσιν ἀλλὰ πειστέον· πεισόμεθα δὲ τὰς (τ') ἀναγκαῖας ἐπιθυμίας ἐκπληροῦντες τὰς τε φυσικὰς ἂν μὴ βλάπτωσι, τὰς δὲ βλαβερὰς πικρῶς ἐλέγχοντες, "we must not violate nature, but obey her; and we shall obey her if we fulfil the necessary desires and also the physical, if they bring no harm to us, but sternly reject the harmful".

are of three species: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, unnatural and unnecessary. Vatican Sayings 33 (τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγοῦν) refers to the first category: these desires are in fact basic needs, the only ones our body requires to survive and to compete with Jupiter in happiness.<sup>28</sup> A sage is one who satisfies only these elemental desires, as they are the only one springing directly from nature (*quod natura desiderat*, Seneca says). Seneca is quoting Epicurus in order to corroborate a typically Stoic tenet: the sage lives according to nature's law. In his direct quotation, Seneca is somewhat adapting Epicurus' saying to Stoic philosophy: where in Sent. Vat. 25 we find τῷ τῆς φύσεως τέλει, Seneca translates *lege naturae*, relying on a more Stoic vocabulary. But, in this ethical tenet, Epicureanism and Stoicism are not so different from each other: even though the Epicurean sage satisfies desires (ἐπιθυμῖαι) in order to gain pleasure (ἡδονή), while the Stoic sage fulfills his duties (καθήκοντα) to attain virtue (ἀρετή), they both reach the happy life (εὐδαιμονία) living in accordance with Nature's laws and neglecting all the rest.

Letter 119<sup>29</sup> too has many Epicurean traits and contents; according to Brad Inwood, "for most of the present letter the atmosphere is more Epicurean (sc. than Stoic)".<sup>30</sup> The scholar closely links the contents of this letter (mainly, that nature's needs are few and easily satisfied) to Letter to Menoecus 127–32, RS 29 and Lucretius 2.14–58, as well as to Sent. Vat. 33, which is the model for our verb sequence. Once again, a strongly Epicurean context encompasses the three verbs *algere*, *esurire* and *sitire* (§ 7): Seneca is decidedly aware of the Epicurean origin of this verb sequence (and so were his readers).

28) "Protection from hunger, thirst, and cold are the necessary physical desires, and a man who satisfies these may have perfect happiness equal to that of the gods" (Bailey 1926, 380).

29) As regards epist. 113, 21, no evident Epicurean reference can be found in this passage, although Seneca's *reductio ad absurdum* of the letter's main argument implies that abstract concepts have the same natural desires as animals.

30) Inwood 2007, 316.

## 5. Seneca's Letter 24 and Epicurus

Once I have established that Letter 24.26 requires an integration, and that the integration I propose is a reference to Epicurus, I will move on highlighting how deeply Seneca's Letter 24 is engaged with Epicureanism. The continuous allusions to Epicurus in this epistle corroborate, I hold, the need to integrate *sitiam* after *esuriam* at § 26.

The passages of the letter where Epicurus (or Epicureanism) is referred to are listed in the following diagram:

Paragraphs of Letter 24	Epicurus	Topic
§ 1: <i>est sine dubio stultum, quia quandoque sis futurus miser, esse iam miserum</i>	Cic. Tusc. 3.32 = frg. 444 Us. Cic. Tusc. 3.33	Uselessness of anticipating future pain ( <i>avocatio</i> )
§ 2: <i>... aut non magnum aut non longum esse quod metuis</i>	Epicurus, Ep. Men. 133 Epicurus, Sent. Vat. 4 Epicurus, RS 4 [Phld.] De elect. IV.1–2 Indelli / Tsouna-McKirahan Cic. fin. 2.94 Plut. de aud. poet. 36b = frg. 447 Us.	If pain is severe, it is brief; if long, it is light
§ 13: <i>quod vides accidere pueris ... quoque maiusculis pueris evenit</i>	Lucr. 2.55–61, 3.87–93, 6.35–42	The fears of the foolish are like children's fears
§ 14: <i>levis es si ferre possum; brevis es si ferre non possum</i>	See § 2	See § 2
§ 18: <i>Epicuream cantilenam</i>	Epicurus, RS 20 Lucr. 3.978–1023	Myths about the afterlife are mere inventions; fears about the afterlife are unjustified
§ 18: <i>mors nos aut consumit aut exiit ... consumptis nihil restat</i>	Epicurus, Ep. Men. 124–125 Lucr. 3.380 Cic. Tusc. 1.91	Death is nothing to us
§§ 22–25: comments on three sentences by Epicurus	Frags. 496–498 Us. Epicurus, Ep. Men. 125–126 Epicurus, Sent. Vat. 38	Suicide and <i>taedium vitae</i>

Paragraphs of Letter 24	Epicurus	Topic
§26: <i>vitae ... odium</i>	Lucr. 3.79–80	Same expression: <i>vitae odium</i>
§26: <i>quousque eadem?</i>	Lucr. 3.944–945	<i>Taedium vitae</i>

As you can see from the diagram, Epicurus' presence can be perceived from the very first paragraph of Letter 24. Lucilius has to stand a trial and is afraid the outcome will be conviction. Seneca encourages him not to anticipate evils (*mala accersere*), as they will be hurtful enough when they come, so there is no need to suffer in advance:

*Quid enim necesse est mala accersere, satis cito patienda cum venerint praesumere, ac praesens tempus futuri metu perdere? Est sine dubio stultum, quia quandoque sis futurus miser, esse iam miserum.*

After all, what need is there to take an advance on future troubles, ruining the present with fear of the future? When troubles come is time enough to bear them. Surely it is foolish to be miserable now just because you are going to be miserable later on!

Giovanni Laudizi<sup>31</sup> links this passages to Cic. Tusc. 3.32, who directly quotes Epicurus at some length in relation to this same topic: the analogies between Seneca's and Cicero's passages are manifest and need not to be underlined.<sup>32</sup>

31) Laudizi 2003, 111.

32) *Sed est isdem de rebus quod dici possit subtilius, si prius Epicuri sententiam viderimus, qui censet necesse esse omnes in aegritudine esse, qui se in malis esse arbitrentur, sive illa ante provisa et expectata sint sive inveteraverint. Nam neque vetustate minui mala nec fieri praemeditata leviora, stultamque etiam esse meditationem futuri mali aut fortasse ne futuri quidem; satis esse odiosum malum omne, cum venisset: qui autem semper cogitavisset accidere posse aliquid adversi, ei fieri illud sempiternum malum; si vero ne futurum quidem sit, frustra suscipi miseriam voluntariam: ita semper angere aut accipiendo aut cogitando malo,* "but a more accurate statement upon this same subject is possible, if we first consider the opinion of Epicurus, who supposes that all men must necessarily feel distressed, if they think themselves encompassed by evils, whether previously foreseen and anticipated, or long established. For according to him evils are not lessened by duration nor lightened by previous consideration, and besides, he thinks it folly to dwell upon an evil which is still to come or maybe will not come at all; all evil, he says, is hateful enough when it has come; but the man, who is always thinking a mishap may come, is making that evil perpetual: but if it is not destined to come at all, he is needlessly the victim of

Epicurus unmistakably makes his entrance in the second paragraph of Letter 24. Seneca does not mention him openly, but he quotes him almost literally:

*... quodcumque est illud malum, tecum ipse metire ac timorem tuum taxa: intelleges profecto aut non magnum aut non longum esse quod metuis.*

Whatever bad event that might be, take the measure of it mentally and so assess your fear. You will soon realize that what you fear is either no great matter or not long lasting.

This is clearly a quotation of Epicurus' famous maxim about pain: if it is severe, it is brief; if it is long, it is light. This very same thought is quoted again at § 14:

*nempe dolor es ... levis es si ferre possum; brevis es si ferre non possum.*

You are only pain ... if I can bear you, you are slight; if I cannot, you are short.

Here, Epicurus' presence gets even clearer than in the previous sections. Seneca is in fact quoting one of Epicurus' most famous tenets, which was expressed by the philosophers in many different ways. Sent. Vat. 4 probably comes the closest to epist. 24.14 from a rhetorical point of view:

Πᾶσα ἀλγοδὼν εὐκαταφρόνητος· ἡ γὰρ σύντονον ἔχουσα τὸ πονοῦν σύντομον ἔχει τὸν χρόνον, ἡ δὲ χρονίζουσα περὶ τὴν σάρκα ἀβληχρὸν ἔχει τὸν πόνον.

All bodily suffering is negligible: for that which causes acute pain has short duration, and that which endures long in the flesh causes but mild pain.

Both Seneca and Epicurus are very epigrammatic: even though Seneca's formulation is briefer than Epicurus', both are constructed with

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a wretchedness he has brought upon himself: thus he is always tortured either by undergoing or by reflecting on the evil" (translation by King 1950). In the following paragraph, Cicero explains Epicurus' methods of relieving afflictions: moving away from harassing thoughts (*avocatio*) and turning to pleasures (*revocatio*) either past or future. At a closer look, Seneca seems to be referring precisely to these practices at § 1: Lucilius expects Seneca to relieve his fear with pleasing hopes (*adquiescas spei blandae*), but instead, Seneca rejects this mild remedy in favour of the Stoic *prae- meditatio futurorum malorum*. Similarly, Seneca adopts the consolatory method of *avocatio* / *revocatio*, only to reject it, in Letter 13 as well.

parallelism and antithesis, and both are characterized by paronomasia (σύντονον–σύντομον in Epicurus, *levis–brevis* in Seneca).<sup>33</sup> The same antithesis (brief and tolerable vs. long and intolerable) is expressed by Epicurus in RS 4,<sup>34</sup> Ep. Men. 133<sup>35</sup> and a passage of PHerc. 1251.<sup>36</sup> It is also quoted by Cicero in his *De finibus* with a mocking attitude towards Epicurus (2.94–95),<sup>37</sup> as well as by Plutarch in his *Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat* (36b), who states that a verse from Aeschylus has the same content as Epicurus' saying.<sup>38</sup>

33) When Seneca quotes Epicurus and translates him into Latin, he tries to keep, if not emphasize, the rhetorical traits of the Greek original (Setaioli 1988, 182). However, Setaioli states that none of the Epicurean passages which express the absence of relation between duration and intensity is clearly recognizable in any of Seneca's renditions of it (1988, 245).

34) Οὐ χρονίζει τὸ ἀλγὸν συνεχῶς ἐν τῇ σαρκί, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἄκρον τὸν ἐλάχιστον χρόνον πάρεστι, τὸ δὲ μόνον ὑπερτεῖνον τὸ ἡδόμενον κατὰ σάρκα οὐ πολλὰς ἡμέρας συμβαίνει. Αἱ δὲ πολυχρόνιοι τῶν ἀρρωστίων πλεονάζον ἔχουσι τὸ ἡδόμενον ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ ἢ περὶ τὸ ἀλγὸν, “pain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses permit a predominance of pleasure over pain in the flesh”.

35) ... τὸ δὲ (sc. τέλος) τῶν κακῶν ὡς ἡ χρόνους ἢ πόνους ἔχει βραχεῖς, “the course of ills is either short in time or slight in pain”.

36) [Phld.] De elect. IV.1–2 Indelli / Tsouna-McKirahan: [τὸ κ]ακὸν οὐ μόνον [ἔ]χον ὄ[ρ]ους [κατὰ] τὸ μέγεθος καὶ κατὰ [τὸν] χρόνον. ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐεκα[ρ]τήρητον, “the bad not only has limits in magnitude and time, but also is easy to bear” (translation by Indelli / Tsouna-McKirahan 1995).

37) *Huic Epicurus praecentet, si potest, cui “E viperino morsu venae viscerum / Veneno inbutae taetros cruciatus cient”, sic [Epicurus]: ‘Philocteta, si gravis dolor, brevis.’ At iam decimum annum in spelunca tacet. ‘Si longus, levis; dat enim intervalla et relaxat’.* [95] *Primum non saepe, deinde quae est ista relaxatio, cum et praeteriti doloris memoria recens est et futuri atque impediens torquet timorē*, “let Epicurus work his magic on one who: ‘Poisoned by the viper’s bite / Is racked in his guts by foul distress’. Epicurus will say, ‘Philoctetes, if your pain is severe it will be short.’ But Philoctetes has been laid out in his cave for ten years now. ‘If it is long-lasting it will be light; there will be periods of remission.’ [95] Firstly, this is often not the case. Secondly, what is this talk of remission when the memory of pain endured is still fresh and the thought of its imminent return torments one?”, translation by Raphael Woolf (Annas / Woolf 2001). Philoctetes’ pain is both long and unbearable: Epicurus’ saying is not effective at all in his case, as in many other cases. Cicero repeats this saying some lines later in an even more epigrammatic style: *si gravis brevis, si longus levis*.

38) Ἐπιρρητέον δὲ καὶ τῷ τοῦ Αἰσχύλου “θάρσει· πόνου γὰρ ἄκρον οὐκ ἔχει χρόνον” ὅτι τοῦτ’ ἐστὶ τὸ παρ’ Ἐπικούρου θρυλούμενον αἰεὶ καὶ θαυμαζόμενον, ὡς

At §§ 12–13 Seneca criticizes those who are afraid of those things (like death) which have nothing scary but their façade. Such fears are not appropriate for an adult man, but still we are frightened like children. The childishness of such fears is reprehended by Seneca also in epist. 4.2.<sup>39</sup>

*Illud autem ante omnia memento, demere rebus tumultum ac videre quid in quaque re sit: scies nihil esse in istis terribile nisi ipsum timorem. [13] Quod vides accidere pueris, hoc nobis quoque maiusculis pueris evenit: illi quos amant, quibus adsueverunt, cum quibus ludunt, si personatos vident, expavescunt: non hominibus tantum sed rebus persona demenda est et reddenda facies sua.*

Remember above all to get rid of the commotion. Observe what each thing has inside, and you will learn: there is nothing to fear in your affairs but fear itself. [13] You see with children how people they love and know, people they play with, frighten them terribly if they see them wearing masks: well, the same things happens with us, who are just slightly bigger children. In our case, though, the mask needs to be removed not only from people but from events as well, and their true face revealed.

This passage closely echoes Lucretius' criticism towards men who are frightened not just in darkness, like children, but also in light, which appears in a famous set of verses recurring three times in the *De rerum natura* (2.55–61, 3.87–93, 6.35–42).<sup>40</sup> The metaphors

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“οἱ μεγάλοι πόνοι συντόμως ἐξάγουσιν, οἱ δὲ χρόνιοι μέγεθος οὐκ ἔχουσιν.” Ἴν τὸ μὲν εἶρηκεν ὁ Αἰσχύλος ἐναργῶς, τὸ δὲ τῷ εἰρημένῳ παρακειμένον ἐστίν· εἰ γὰρ ὁ μέγας καὶ σύντονος οὐ παραμένει πόνος, οὐκ ἔστι μέγας ὁ παραμένον οὐδὲ δυσκαρτέρητος, “and on the words of Aeschylus, ‘Fear not; great stress of pain is not for long,’ we ought to remark that this is the oft repeated and much admired statement originating with Epicurus, namely ‘that great pains shortly spend their force, and long continued pains have no magnitude.’ Of these two ideas Aeschylus has perspicuously stated the one and the other is a corollary thereto; for if great and intense pain is not lasting, then that which does not last is not great or hard to endure” (translation by Babbitt 1949).

39) *Adhuc enim non pueritia sed, quod est gravius, puerilitas remanet; et hoc quidem peior est, quod auctoritatem habemus senum, vitia puerorum, nec puerorum tantum sed infantum: illi levia, hi falsa formidant, nos utraque,* “for childhood – or rather, childishness, which is worse – has not yet left us. Worse yet, we have the authority of grown men but the faults of children, of infants even. Children are terrified of trivial things, infants of imagined things, and we of both”.

40) *Nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis / in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus / interdum, nilo quae sunt metuenda magis quam / quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura. / Hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessesit / non radiis solis neque lucida tela diei / discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque,* “for, just as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we

used by Lucretius and Seneca to describe the contrast between ignorance and knowledge are different, as Lucretius depicts it in terms of darkness and light, while Seneca relies upon the image of the mask; nevertheless, both authors equate ignorance and fear with childhood (or better, childishness), and knowledge and absence of fear with adulthood. The association between fool and child is a commonplace in the so-called diatribic literature,<sup>41</sup> which in turn has an antecedent in Plato's *Phaedo*;<sup>42</sup> nevertheless, we know for certain that Seneca knew well these lines from Lucretius because they are quoted literally in Letter 110 (§§ 6–7); furthermore, Seneca links childishness and fear again at § 18, where he is criticizing the Epicurean tenets against the fear of the Underworld (*nemo tam puer est ...*, quoted below).

Seneca's attitude towards Epicureanism seems to change course starting from § 16, where it gets more unfavourable.<sup>43</sup> The one thing Seneca admittedly dislikes about the Epicureans is their commitment to pleasure, which they justify on philosophical ground. It must be noted that Seneca never blames Epicurus, but only his devotees.<sup>44</sup> So, Seneca's reprimand against *voluptates* and *libidines*

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even in daylight sometimes dread things that are no more terrible than the imaginary dangers that cause children to quake in the dark. This terrifying darkness that enshrouds the mind must be dispelled not by the sun's rays and the dazzling darts of day, but by study of the superficial aspect and underlying principle of nature". All translations of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* are by Ferguson Smith 2001. On these lines, Bailey 1947, 808; Ernout / Robin 1962a, 218; Kenney 1971, 87–88.

41) According to André Oltramare (1926, 48), this motif (marked as Th. 24b in Oltramare's work) seems to go back to Teles. See also Renner 1910, 337; Villa 1997, 123–38 (especially 126–7 on Letter 24); Laudizi 2003, 128.

42) Plat. Phd. 77e: Cebes says to Socrates that inside of each of us there is a πᾶσις, and it's him who fears death: the disciple invites the philosopher to free this child from fear. Commentators of Lucretius also indicate Aristotle (*De insomniis* 3). The association between fear of death and childishness is also asserted by Socrates in the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* (365b–c).

43) If the Epicurean consolatory method of *avocatio / revocatio* is to be recognized at § 1, this more dissenting attitude towards Epicureanism can be traced back to the opening of the letter.

44) Seneca's charge against those who exploit Epicurus' teaching in order to justify their vitious and lecherous lives is expressed at length in chapters 7–15 of the treatise *De vita beata*. The author blames those degenerate Epicureans while defending Epicurus' philosophy: his *voluptas* Seneca describes as *sicca ac sobria* (12.4) and his teachings as *sancta et recta* (13.1).

at § 16 can be seen as a reprimand against the Epicurean fashion, not against Epicurus' actual teachings. Nevertheless, Epicurus is still in the background of this letter. Allusions to his philosophy persist throughout § 18:

*Non sum tam ineptus ut Epicuream cantilenam hoc loco persequar et dicam vanos esse inferorum metus, nec Ixionem rota volvi nec saxum umeris Sisyphi trudi in adversum nec ullius viscera et renasci posse cotidie et carpi: nemo tam puer est ut Cerberum timeat et tenebras et larvalem habitum nudis ossibus cohaerentium. Mors nos aut consumit aut exiit; emissis meliora restant onere detracto, consumptis nihil restat, bona pariter malaque summota sunt.*

I am not so silly as to sing to you here the Epicurean song, about how fears of hell are empty, how Ixion is not spinning on his wheel nor Sisyphus shouldering his rock uphill, how no one's entrails can be devoured and regenerated daily. No one is such a child as to be afraid of Cerberus and the dark and the skeleton figures of ghouls. Death either consumes us or sets us free. If we are released, then better things await us once our burden is removed; if we are consumed, then nothing is waiting for us at all: both goods and evils are gone.

Seneca explicitly describes as an *Epicurea cantilena* Epicurus' tenet that the myths about the afterlife are just illusions created by poets, which must not induce fear, because death is annihilation of both body and soul. Seneca's attitude is dismissive, because in fact no one believes in such a fate after death. This very same attitude is shared by Cicero (*Tusc.* 1.10–12,48): only fools and grannies are frightened by these myths, so the philosophers who boast of wiping out the fear of death with such arguments are ridiculous. Both Seneca and Cicero probably have in mind some passages from Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (e. g. 1.112–126, 3.965–1023): this reference can be inferred from the lists of myths present in all three authors (Tantalus, Tityus, Sisyphus, Cerberus and the Furiae in Lucretius; Cerberus, Tantalus, Sisyphus, Minos et Radamanthus in Cicero; Ixion, Sisyphus and Cerberus in Seneca).<sup>45</sup>

After this dismissive parenthesis, Seneca becomes again tolerant towards Epicurus. The maxim *mors nos aut consumit aut exiit* expresses what is called by modern scholars "Socratic alternative".<sup>46</sup>

45) A similar list can also be found in the *Axiochus* (371e–372a).

46) This definition was first given by René Hoven (1971, 86), especially in relation to Sen. epist. 65.24, where Seneca defines death *aut finis aut transitus*; this

It is a commonplace in philosophic literature, which is first attested in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* (40c). The "Socratic alternative" is basically an agnostic perspective on death: the speaker considers both possibilities, i. e. death as annihilation and death as a passage. It is generally used as a rhetorical and argumentative means of persuasion: whether you believe that the soul is mortal or immortal, in any case death is not an evil. In the former case, death is deliverance from life's evils; in the latter, the soul will migrate to a better place. Although the origin of this commonplace predates Epicurus, its reception (especially in Roman philosophy) is seen as an opposition between the Platonic theory of the immortality of the soul and the Epicurean theory of its mortality. The "negative horn" of the Socratic alternative, as expressed here by Seneca, is linked to Epicureanism; in this regard, Giorgio Laudizi<sup>47</sup> mentions Epicurus, Ep. Men. 124<sup>48</sup> and Lucr. 3.830<sup>49</sup> (the most famous formulations of the concept are RS 2<sup>50</sup> and Ep. Men. 125<sup>51</sup>); the verb *consumo* is repeated by Seneca some words later (*consumptis nihil restat*).

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definition closely resembles the sentence *mors nos aut consumit aut exiit* from Letter 24. Hoven uses this expression because this concept, i. e. the idea that whether death is an ending or a passage, it is no evil, is found for the first time in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* (40c). On this motif: Setaioli 1997, 328–331; Setaioli 1999, 151, 156–161; Setaioli 2001, 38–41.

47) Laudizi 2003, 137.

48) Συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον· ἐπεὶ πάντων ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει· στήρησις δὲ ἐστὶν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος, "become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation".

49) *Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet bilum*, "death, then, is nothing to us and does not affect us in the least".

50) Ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ· τὸ δ' ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, "death is nothing to us: for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us".

51) Τὸ φορικώδεςτατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἐπειδήπερ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὄμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν· ὅταν δ' ὁ θάνατος παρῆ, τότε ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμέν, "So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist".

6. §§ 22–26: *Epicurus, natural desires and taedium vitae*

However, the passage that comes closer to my point (the integration of *sitiām* at § 26) is obviously the conclusion of Letter 24 (§§ 22–26). As usual for the first three books of the *Epistulae morales*, Seneca ends this letter commenting quotations from Epicurus: his presence is more than self-evident. The subject chosen for the closing of Letter 24 is desire for death, which is condemned by the Greek philosopher (§§ 22–23):

*Obiurgat Epicurus non minus eos qui mortem concupiscunt quam eos qui timent, et ait: 'ridiculum est currere ad mortem taedio vitae, cum genere vitae ut currendum ad mortem esset effeceris'. [23] Item alio loco dicit: 'quid tam ridiculum quam appetere mortem, cum vitam inquietam tibi feceris metu mortis?' His adicias et illud eiusdem notae licet, tantam hominum imprudentiam esse, immo dementiae, ut quidam timore mortis cogantur ad mortem.*

Epicurus reproaches those who desire death as much as those who fear it, saying,

It is absurd to run after death out of disgust with life, when it is you, with your manner of living, who have made death something to run after.

[23] Similarly in another passage he says,

What could be more absurd than to seek death when it is fear of death that has made your life unquiet?

To this may be added another saying of his to the same effect:

So great is the foolishness, no, the madness of human beings, that some are driven toward their death by fear of death.

In these paragraphs, Epicurus is quoted twice directly and once indirectly. These three citations are included in Usener's collection as frgs. 496–498. We do not have the Greek originals of these sentences, but the same concept (the criticism of those who kill themselves) can be found in two passages from Epicurus. The first one is from the *Letter to Menoecus* (§§ 125–126):

Ἄλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν θάνατον ὅτε μὲν ὡς μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν φεύγουσιν, ὅτε δὲ ὡς ἀνάπαυσιν τῶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν (κακῶν ποθοῦσιν. Ὁ δὲ σοφὸς οὔτε παραιτεῖται τὸ ζῆν) [126] οὔτε φοβεῖται τὸ μὴ ζῆν· οὔτε γὰρ αὐτῷ προσίσταται τὸ ζῆν οὔτε δοξάζεται κακὸν εἶναι τι τὸ μὴ ζῆν.

But the many at one moment shun death as the greatest of evils, at another (yearn for it) as a respite from the (evils) in life. (But the wise man neither seeks to escape life) nor fears the cessation of life, for neither does life offend him nor does the absence of life seem to be any evil.

The second one is Sent. Vat. 38:

Μικρὸς παντάπασιν, ᾧ πολλὰι αἰτίαι εὐλογοὶ εἰς ἐξαγωγὴν βίου.

He is a little man in all respect who has many good reasons for quitting life.

The basic notion lying behind these passages is that man is nearly always responsible for the quality of his own life: it is ridiculous to ruin your life with your own hands, and then seek relief from evils in suicide. If someone incurs into *taedium vitae*, this is their own fault. Epicurus is critical towards those who take their own life, but he does not place any taboo on suicide.<sup>52</sup> This is the main difference between Epicureanism and Stoicism in relation to suicide: while for the latter taking one's life may be a καθήκον (that is, something appropriate to do) under precise circumstances,<sup>53</sup> for the former it is a gesture which may be foolish, but is always legit. This is why Epicurus appears to endorse suicide sometimes, either as the only reasonable way for the fool to escape his evils, or as a way for the sage to back out of necessities. It is in this latter sense that, for instance, Seneca quotes Epicurus in Letter 12, that is, precisely in order to justify suicide as a moral choice.<sup>54</sup>

Let's now focus on the condition that, according to Epicurus (and Seneca), leads many people to commit suicide: *taedium vitae*. The latin term *taedium* and its synonym *fastidium* (which share

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52) On suicide in Epicurean philosophy, Grisé 1982, 175–178; Englert 1994, 86–95; Cooper 1999, 536–537; Warren 2004, 199–212.

53) Ancient sources on Stoic suicide (εὐλογος ἐξαγωγή) are collected in SVF III 757–768. On suicide in Stoic philosophy, Rist 1969, 233–255; Grisé 1982, 180–184; Griffin 1986a; Griffin 1986b; Cooper 1999, 531–536.

54) Sen. epist. 12.10: *malum est in necessitate vivere, sed in necessitate vivere necessitas nulla est. quidni nulla sit? Patent undique ad libertatem viae multae, breves faciles. Agamus deo gratias quod nemo in vita teneri potest: calcare ipsas necessitates licet*, “It is bad to live under constraint, but nothing constrains us to live under constraint.’ How could it? The roads to freedom lie open on every side, many of them, and shorts and easy ones. Thanks be to God that no one can be made to remain alive. We can trample upon those very constraints”. The original of this maxim is Sent. Vat. 9 (κακὸν ἀνάγκη, ἀλλ’ οὐδεμία ἀνάγκη ζῆν μετὰ ἀνάγκης). On this passage, Scarpit 1975, 283; Setaioli 1988, 215–216; Costa 1988, 161; Edwards 2019, 106–107. That the Epicurean sage may leave his life is also attested by Cicero (fin. 1.62: *non dubitat, si ita melius sit, migrare de vita*).

the same root)<sup>55</sup> encapsulate the ideas of distaste, revulsion, and disgust, which arise from a sense of weariness and boredom;<sup>56</sup> they also entail an alimentary nuance, which characterizes them as an excessive *satietas*<sup>57</sup> and brings them close to *nausea* / *nausia*.<sup>58</sup> In the first of the three Epicurean sentences quoted by Seneca, this *iunctura* describes the mindset of the fool who ruined his own life because he did not follow philosophy's teaching. Only philosophy makes life meaningful and worth living; without it, everything will turn out unpleasant and lead you to loathe life.

These reflections are crucial for a correct interpretation of § 26, on which my study is focused. I have already quoted it extensively in the introduction. From Seneca's words, it emerges that not only the absence of philosophy may lead to *taedium vitae*, but also – surprisingly – philosophy itself may. This passage does not contain the word *taedium*, but we have instead three synonyms: *satietas*, *fastidium* and *nausia*. In this case, the sense of boredom and satiation derives from the repetitiveness and monotony of life. The philosopher, or better, who studies philosophy, realizes that life cyclically and constantly repeats itself: caught in this endless cycle, he cannot help but wonder: *quousque eadem*? It may sound like an odd and paradoxical idea that philosophy and ignorance may lead to the same result, that is, distaste for life: but, of course, Seneca is thinking about a misuse of philosophy.<sup>59</sup>

55) ThLL VI 1 313 s.v. *fastidium* ll. 59–60; OLD s.v. *fastidium*; Kaster 2001, 175 n. 72.

56) OLD s.vv. *fastidium*, *taedium*; Kaster 2001; Kaster 2005, 104–133.

57) ThLL VI 1 314 s.v. *fastidium* l. 12 (“*satietas nimia*”); Forcellini s.vv. *fastidium* (“*inappetenza*”, “*nausea*”, “*fere dicitur de offensione stomachi, cibum respondentis, aut non retinentis: quae et nausea appellatur*”), *taedium* (“*satietas*”), *satietas* (“*translate est fastidium, taedium, quod ex cibi, vel rei alius cuiuspian nimio usu nobis ingignitur*”); OLD s.v. *fastidium* (2 “*aversion engendered by satiety*”). That the term *taedium* entails an idea of excessive *satietas* emerges from passages such as Mela 3.37; Ps. Quint. decl. 17.14; Plin. epist. 3.9.19 (Berno 2008, 560–562).

58) ThLL IX 1 248 s.v. *nausea* ll. 20–21 (“*adversa corporis valetudo, quam passi taedio afficiuntur, cibos fastidiunt vel vomunt*”); Forcellini s.v. *fastidium* (quoted above, n. 57); OLD s.vv. *fastidium* (1 “*aversion for food*”, “*squeamishness*”), *taedium* (2 “*a feeling of repugnance or disgust, aversion*”). On the ambiguity between *satietas* and *nausea*, Berno 2008, 562–564; see also below.

59) The repetitiveness of life is used as an argument in favour of suicide by the Stoic friend of Tullius Marcellinus in Seneca's Letter 77 (§ 6: *cogita quamdiu iam idem facias: cibus, somnus, libido – per hunc circulum curritur; mori velle non tantum*

*Taedium vitae* is a recurring topic in Latin literature which originates from Greek literature.<sup>60</sup> It is found mainly in Horace, Lucretius, and Seneca. The sentence *quousque eadem* is a traditional motif which is found also in the *De tranquillitate animi* (2.15) and in epist. 89.18. Giorgio Bernardi Perini studied the history of this *topos* inherited by Seneca in Letter 24. The scholar highlights Lucretius, Menander and Horace as significant antecedents, focusing mainly on Horace.<sup>61</sup> Given the many references to Epicurus and Lucretius noted above, I believe that the third book of *De rerum natura* is as relevant as Horace (ll. 933–949):

‘*Quid tibi tanto operest, mortalis, quod nimis aegrus  
luctibus indulges? quid mortem congemis ac fles?  
nam [si] grata fuit tibi vita ante acta priorque  
et non omnia pertusum congesta quasi in vas  
commoda perfluxere atque ingrata interiire;  
cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis  
aequo animoque capis securam, stulte, quietem?  
sin ea quae fructus cumque es periere profusa  
vitaque in offensost, cur amplius addere quaeris,  
rursum quod pereat male et ingratum occidat omne,  
non potius vitae finem facis atque laboris?  
nam tibi praeterea quod machiner inveniamque,  
quod placeat, nihil est; eadem sunt omnia semper.  
si tibi non annis corpus iam marcet et artus  
confecti languent, eadem tamen omnia restant,  
omnia si perges vivendo vincere saecla,  
atque etiam potius, si numquam sis moriturus.*’

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*prudens aut fortis aut miser, etiam fastidiosus potest*, “think how long you have been doing the same thing over and over: food, sleep, sex, round and round in a circle. It is not only the sensible person, the brave person, and the miserable person who can conceive a wish to die: sheer disgust may wish for it as well”). This Stoic friend exhorts Marcellinus to take his life recurring to philosophical arguments, but implying that Marcellinus is *fastidiosus*, that is, has a disgust for life. If we compare this passage to Letter 24, we can be sure that Seneca disapproves of this man’s arguments in favour of suicide. Indeed, in the following paragraph, Seneca states that Marcellinus did not need a persuader, but a helper: his Stoic friend cuts a poor figure.

60) On *taedium vitae* in ancient literature, Pigeaud 1981, 503–521; Bernardi Perini 2001, 269–274; Minois 2003, 5–34; Toohey 2004, 104–131; Berno 2008.

61) Bernardi Perini 2001, 269–274.

“What distresses you so deeply, mortal creature, that you abandon yourself to these puling lamentations? Why do you bemoan and bewep death? If your past life has been a boon, and if not all your blessings have flowed straight through you and run to waste like water poured into a riddled vessel, why, you fool, do you not retire from the feast of life like a satisfied guest and with equanimity resign yourself to undisturbed rest? If, however, all your enjoyments have been poured away and lost, and if life is a thorn, why do you seek to prolong your existence, when the future, just as surely as the past, would be ruined and utterly wasted? Why not rather put an end to life and trouble? There is nothing further that I can devise and discover for your pleasure: all things are always the same. Though your body is not yet shrunk with age, and your limbs are not exhausted and enfeebled, all things remain the same, yes, even if in length of life you should outlast all generations, or indeed even if you should be destined never to die.”

This is the famous *prosopopoeia* in which Nature personified reveals to humankind the cyclical and monotonous character of life, which is a part of the “immutable and inexorable laws of the universe that form the subject of the poem”.<sup>62</sup> Whether you like it or not, this is what Nature offers you: you can be satisfied with it, and leave life like a sated guest leaves the banquet, or you can loathe it, and leave life in any case. James Warren argues that the dilemma presented here by Lucretius encompasses two extreme cases: that of a truly complete life and that of an irredeemably misguided one.<sup>63</sup> I would like instead to emphasize how, in this passage, the condition of the sage and that of the fool are hardly distinguishable: they both incur in the same ever-repeating cycle of life, and they both have enough of it at some time. The difference is very subtle: the sage is sated (*plenus*, l. 938;<sup>64</sup> see also *satur ac plenus*, l. 960), while the fool

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62) Kenney 1971, 212. Nature’s *prosopopoeia* is one of the most significant and studied passages of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*; Carlo Giussani (1897, 138) highlights how the ending of the third book is the ‘centre’ of the whole work, both materially and ideologically. As far as commentaries are concerned, I will limit myself to mentioning Giussani 1897, 117–119, 138–148; Bailey 1947, 1148–1153; Ernout / Robin 1962b, 146–152; Kenney 1971, 212–222. Other important studies are Oltramare 1926, 111–115; Conte 1965; Wallach 1976 (especially 61–74 on these verses); Warren 2004, 135–142. All comments highlight the diatribical character of this passage.

63) Warren 2004, 136–137.

64) One may argue that the personified Nature is addressing man as *stulte* (l. 939), so it is not the sage who is *plenus*. But Lucretius’ reasoning runs as follows: if you are really content with your life (that is, if you are a sage), you should not

is disgusted. The former is affected by *satietas*, the latter by *nausia*. I believe that this ambiguity is quite the same expressed by Seneca at epist. 24.26: *taedium* is the condition of the foolish, while who is devoted to philosophy reaches *satietas*.<sup>65</sup> The *quousque eadem* used by Seneca seems to be echoing Lucretius' *eadem sunt omnia semper* (l. 945). So, paragraph 26 too is imbued with Epicurean philosophy,<sup>66</sup> which would be enough of an argument (in addition to those I adduced above) to justify an Epicurean integration as *sitiam*.

I want to bring my argument even further. Lucretius describes the man who attained complete life (i. e. the sage) as a *plenus vitae conviva*. The Epicurean sage is the one whose life is full of that kind of pleasure which Epicurus defines "katastematic", that is, deriving not from fulfilling a desire but from the absence of any desire. But this last condition is impossible for a human being, as everyone, including the sage, are subject to basic needs, or, in Epicurean terms, "natural and necessary desires". The condition of the sage, compared by Lucretius to a sated guest, is described by Epicurus' sentence τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγοῦν (Sent. Vat. 33). The only desires the sage has are in fact not desires, but basic natural needs, which are easily satisfied. The metaphor of the banquet, though common in philosophical and diatribal literature,<sup>67</sup> is very appropriate for Epicurean philosophy for its hedonistic character,<sup>68</sup> the sage,

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be crying; but since you are crying, you must not be content with your life; consequently you are not a sage.

65) The ambiguity between the concepts of satiety and nausea in Seneca's works has been duly studied by Francesca Romana Berno (2008).

66) The topic of *taedium vitae* must have been common in Epicurean literature: apart from Lucretius' passage just quoted, the theme appears also in Epicurus' maxim quoted by Seneca at epist. 24.22 (see above). On the unattractiveness of the Epicurean perfect life, see Warren's reflections discussed below.

67) On this metaphor, which is a commonplace in both Greek and Latin literature, Oltramare 1926, 111–112 (th. 43d); Wallach 1976, 57; Armisen-Marchetti 1989, 144, 194 n. 182; Berno 2008, 551–555 (especially the conspicuous list of passages in note 12). According to Hermann Usener (1887, 310), the use of this *topos* in philosophical and diatribal discourse may be traced back to Bion of Borysthenes (frg. 68 Kindstrand = Stob. 3.1.98 p. 46 Hense). More generally, on the relationship between Lucretius (especially the ending of the third book of the *De rerum natura*) and the diatribal tradition, Wallach 1976.

68) Cicero (Tusc. 5.118) attributes to Epicurus the saying *aut bibeat aut abeat*; see also Lucr. 3.912–918 (the banquet metaphor is anticipated by *insatiabiliter* at l. 907).

however, does not indulge in unrestraint eating and drinking, but consumes just enough to go on living. This conception closely links the idea of ‘satiating’ and that of ‘natural and necessary needs’ within Epicurean philosophy: this same conception can be found both in the third book of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* and in Seneca’s Letter 24.

However, while Lucretius peacefully accepts this Epicurean conception, Seneca’s position is more nuanced: the condition of satiation that should qualify the sage is not always a positive one, because it can lead to *fastidium* and *nausia*. I believe that this is a case of intertextuality, in which Seneca exploits Epicurus and Lucretius precisely in order to rectify their theory; such an attitude is very common in Seneca’s philosophical works.<sup>69</sup> As I have already anticipated, the dividing line between the fool who hates life and the realized sage who got his life completed is not clear-cut at all in Epicurean philosophy: I believe that Seneca wants to highlight this Epicurean conundrum, and to warn his readers that they have to be cautious with a kind of philosophy which, instead of providing a happy life, may cause them to loathe it.

Indeed, the Epicurean doctrine of happy life has to face a substantial problem, which has been duly highlighted by James Warren.<sup>70</sup> It is worthy to quote him at some length:

The Epicureans appear to offer not a particularly satisfying conclusion. The Epicureans appear to offer no significant positive reason for wishing to continue to live, beyond a mere inertia. If life is pleasant there is no need to curtail it. This amounts to saying that the Epicurean will simply continue to live with no sufficient reason either to kill himself or to want to survive until tomorrow. As a picture of the happy life this is quite unappealing, but it is clear why the Epicureans have allowed themselves to be pushed into this position. So great is their emphasis on removing any sense in which death might be an evil, they have left themselves with precious few resources to explain why continued life is worth pursuing.<sup>71</sup>

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69) Notoriously, the first three books of the *Epistulae morales* contain plenty of quotations from Epicurus or other Epicureans, which Seneca exploits to validate his Stoic arguments, sometimes even against Epicureanism itself (Freise 1989; Schiarsaro 2015; Graver 2016; Letters 12 and 26 are particularly telling, as Seneca quotes Epicurus in order to justify suicide, which is quite the opposite of what happens in Letter 24). A similar attitude can be found also in Letters 58 and 65 in relation to Plato (Boys-Stones 2013).

70) Warren 2004, 199–212.

71) Warren 2004, 210.

His argument is based on a wide range of ancient sources, including Lucretius, Philodemus, Cicero, and Seneca. I will limit myself to quoting a passage from Philodemus' *De morte*, which I find most meaningful regarding the attitude of the Epicurean sage (38.14–19 Henry):

Ὁ δὲ νοῦν ἔχων, ἀπειληφῶς ὁ δύναται πᾶν περιποιησάι [τ]ὸ πρὸς εὐδαιμόνια βίον αὐταρκές, εὐθύς ἤδη τὸ λοιπὸν ἐντεταφιασμένος περιπατεῖ.

But the sensible man, having received that which can secure the whole of what is sufficient for a happy life, immediately then for the rest (of his life) goes about laid out for burial.<sup>72</sup>

According to Philodemus, the sage is “laid out for burial”, which means that his condition is no different from that of a dead man. This is the most compelling evidence that the Epicureans were well aware that the Epicurean way of life did not look very attractive. In fact, once the Epicurean has attained the complete life, he will go on living without any goal or desire in his life. An element neglected by Warren in describing the Epicurean complete life is that the sage will live on just to satisfy the so-called ‘natural and necessary desires’, that is, to fulfil the basic needs that man requires to stay alive. But even so, he is convincing in arguing that the Epicurean complete life was not perceived as appealing, and that the Epicureans themselves described the sage as someone who went on living just in order to survive.

James Warren uses a passage of Seneca's *De vita beata* as evidence for his argument.<sup>73</sup> In this passage (19.1), Seneca tells about an Epicurean philosopher, Diodorus, who committed suicide; he was accused of madness (*dementia*) and rashness (*temeritas*), but instead (Seneca argues) his life had been quiet and happy. As Warren highlights, Seneca does not give any reason why Diodorus took his own life, which was a happy one: this is why he was accused of acting out of senselessness. But this passage strengthens a fortiori the picture of the Epicurean sage who takes his own life not despite being happy and realized, but actually because he is happy and realized.

72) Translation by Henry 2009.

73) Warren 2004, 207–208.

In my opinion, Letter 24 may further confirm Warren's arguments.<sup>74</sup> I believe that the picture that emerges especially from § 26 is exactly the one he describes and that can be found in Lucretius and Philodemus: that is, a philosophy which, on balance, does not offer any positive and active reason for the sage to go on living. *Tedium vitae* is a risk not just for uneducated people, but also for those who devote themselves to philosophy: once you have got rid of all evils, fears, and anxieties, you live a monotonous and ever-repeating cycle of life, in which you only need to fulfil your basic needs – *non esurire, non sitire, non algere*. Seneca was well aware of this risk, and warns his readers not to fall into *tedium vitae* because of devotion to (Epicurean) philosophy. I hope that this perhaps long analysis of the Epicurean elements of Seneca's Letter 24 corroborates the need to integrate *sitiam* at § 26.

### 7. Conclusions

I would like to conclude this paper summarising the main points of my argument. I believe that epist. 24.26 needs to be integrated like this: *expergiscar dormiam, esuriam (sitiam), algebo aestuabo*. This emendation had already been proposed by Brakman in 1909, but has not met wide academic approval. Despite the unanimity of the manuscript tradition (*expergiscar dormiam esuriam algebo aestuabo*), all printed editions, starting from Erasmus' one, felt the need to integrate this five-verb sequence with one more word. Despite Giorgio Bernardi Perini's arguments against any need to emend the passage, I believe that its stylistic features require the integration of a verb. However, I think that the most commonly accepted ones (*satiabor* in the past, *edam* nowadays) are not correct. In my opinion, the right way to emend this piece of text is the one proposed by Cornelius Brakman, *sitiam*. His proposal rested upon correspondences with other Senecan passages (epist. 4.10, 113.21, 119.7). Furthermore, the loss of *sitiam* may be explained better than *satiabor*: it is indeed more probable that the copist missed a word that forms a homoioteleuton with both *dormiam* and *esuriam*.

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74) He just refers to paragraphs 22–24 at p. 206 n. 81, without discussing the passage.

In addition to Brakman's arguments, I think that also Cicero (Tusc. 2.34) and Epicurus (Sent. Vat. 33) point towards *sitiam*. More specifically, I argue that Seneca has in mind precisely the Epicurean maxim (τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥιγοῦν) at epist. 24.26. Contextual analysis of Letter 24 reveals that the whole epistle is continuously related to Epicurean philosophy. In particular, the topic Seneca is at issue with is the feasibility of a perfect Epicurean life. Seneca is aware that Epicurean philosophy did not offer a really positive reason to go on living once man has attained the complete life: instead of being happy, he realizes that life is monotonous, so he falls into *fastidium vitae* and kills himself. The topic of *taedium vitae* in Epicurean philosophy is strictly connected to the satisfaction of those basic needs technically known as 'natural and necessary desires': once the complete life is attained, the only aim of the sage is not to feel hunger, thirst, and cold. This is how Epicurus himself describes the complete life of the sage in Sent. Vat. 33. I believe that, in such a context, a reference to the Epicurean maxim is not only reasonable, but also necessary, as the theory of the 'natural and necessary desires' is a key point in order for Seneca to demonstrate that the allegedly perfect Epicurean life may in fact lead to *taedium vitae* and to suicide.

I hope that this paper will at least point out the problematic nature of epist. 24.26; that it is not uncommon that a strictly technical operation, like a one-word integration, may require a wide-ranging approach to the text; and that such a small philological emendation may affect, to some extent, our understanding of broader themes. In this case, I hope that my paper will add a piece (however small) to our picture of the relationship between Seneca and Epicurus, which is generally marked by dialectical openness, but has also room for dissent; and it will also hopefully give some contribution to the study of Epicurus' general reception in ancient Rome, as well as of the Epicurean views on the happy life and on suicide.

## Abbreviations:

Forcellini = E. Forcellini, Totius latinitatis lexicon  
 Kindstrand = Kindstrand 1976  
 OLD = Oxford Latin Dictionary  
 SVF = Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta  
 ThLL = Thesaurus Linguae Latinae  
 Us. = Usener 1887

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