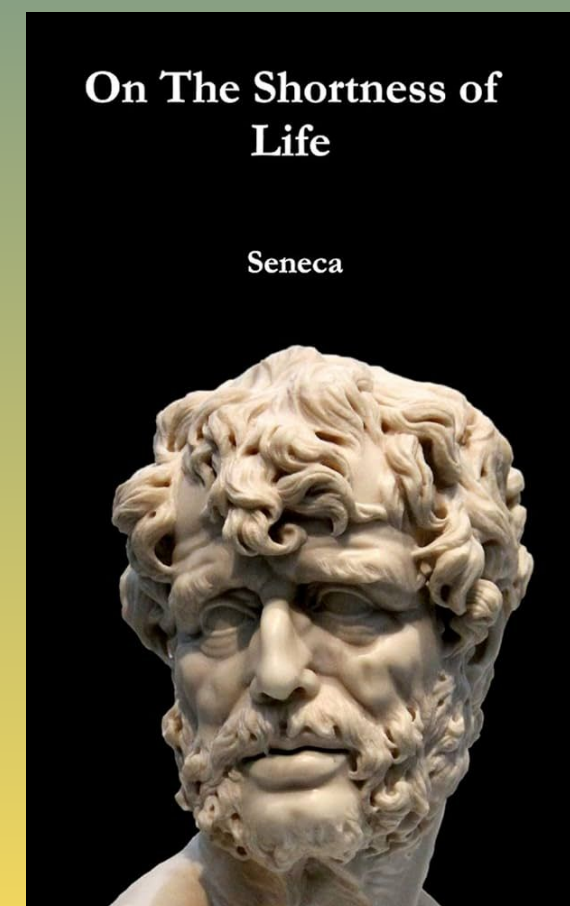


# On The Shortness of Life: Life is Long If You Know How to Use It

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Date: June 3rd, 2025  
Course: ECS 188 - Professor Mohammad Sadoghi, PhD

**Lucius Seneca**



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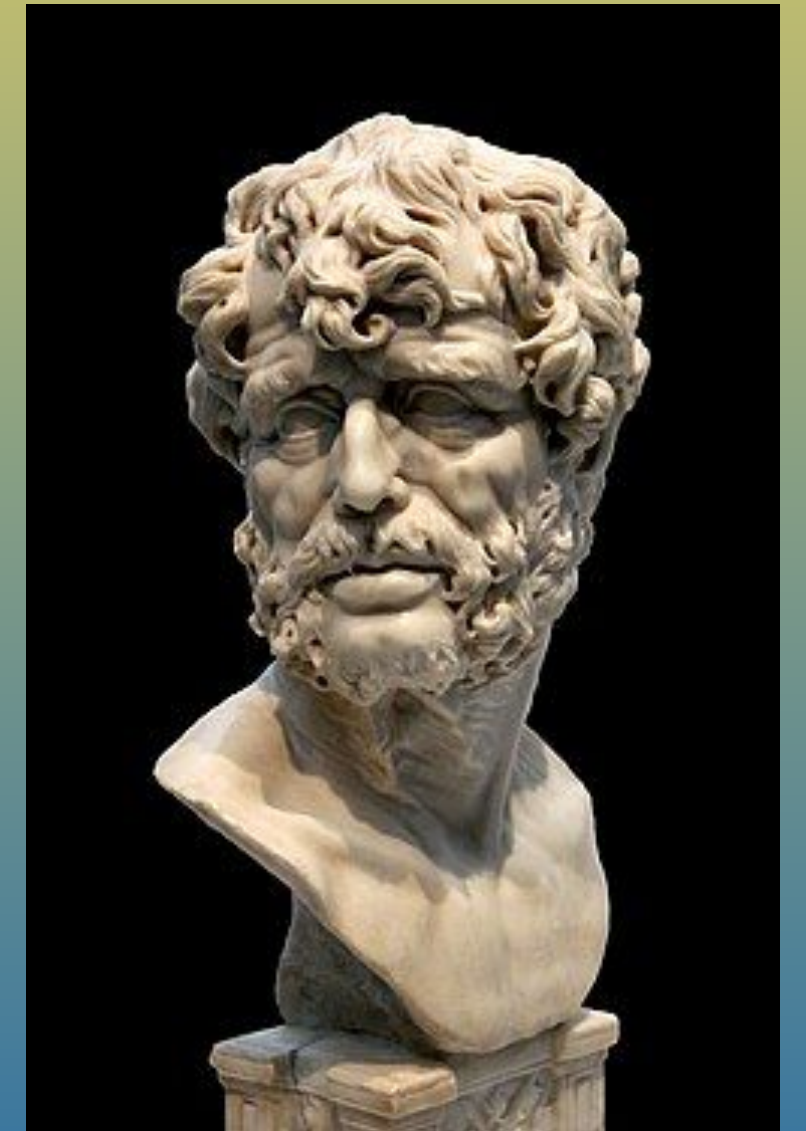
**On Tranquility of  
Mind**



# Seneca's Background

- Born c. 4 BCE, Cordoba, Spain - Died: 65 CE
- Roman Philosopher, statesman, orator, and tragedian.
  - Seneca was exiled to the island of Corsica in 41 AD by Emperor Claudius on a **charge of adultery with Julia Livilla**, the emperor's niece and Caligula's sister.
  - While the charge was not definitively proven, Seneca was convicted before the Senate, and Claudius commuted the death sentence to exile.
  - This exile lasted **eight years**.

This book was written a year after he returned, as a reflection of his mentality



# Book Context

**The problem isn't that we're given too little time - it's that we fail to take ownership of it.**

We fill our days with distraction, anxiety, ambition, and obligations to others, and then wonder why time slips through our fingers.

We're constantly pulled in a thousand directions in the modern world. Whether by work, notifications from your phone, expectations, and endless to-do lists which makes Seneca's words feel more relevant than ever. He invites us to ask:

- Are we **living**, or just **existing**?
- Are we spending our time on **what's meaningful**, or letting it be taken from us?
- Are we ready to face death with peace — because we've truly lived?





# On The Shortness of Life

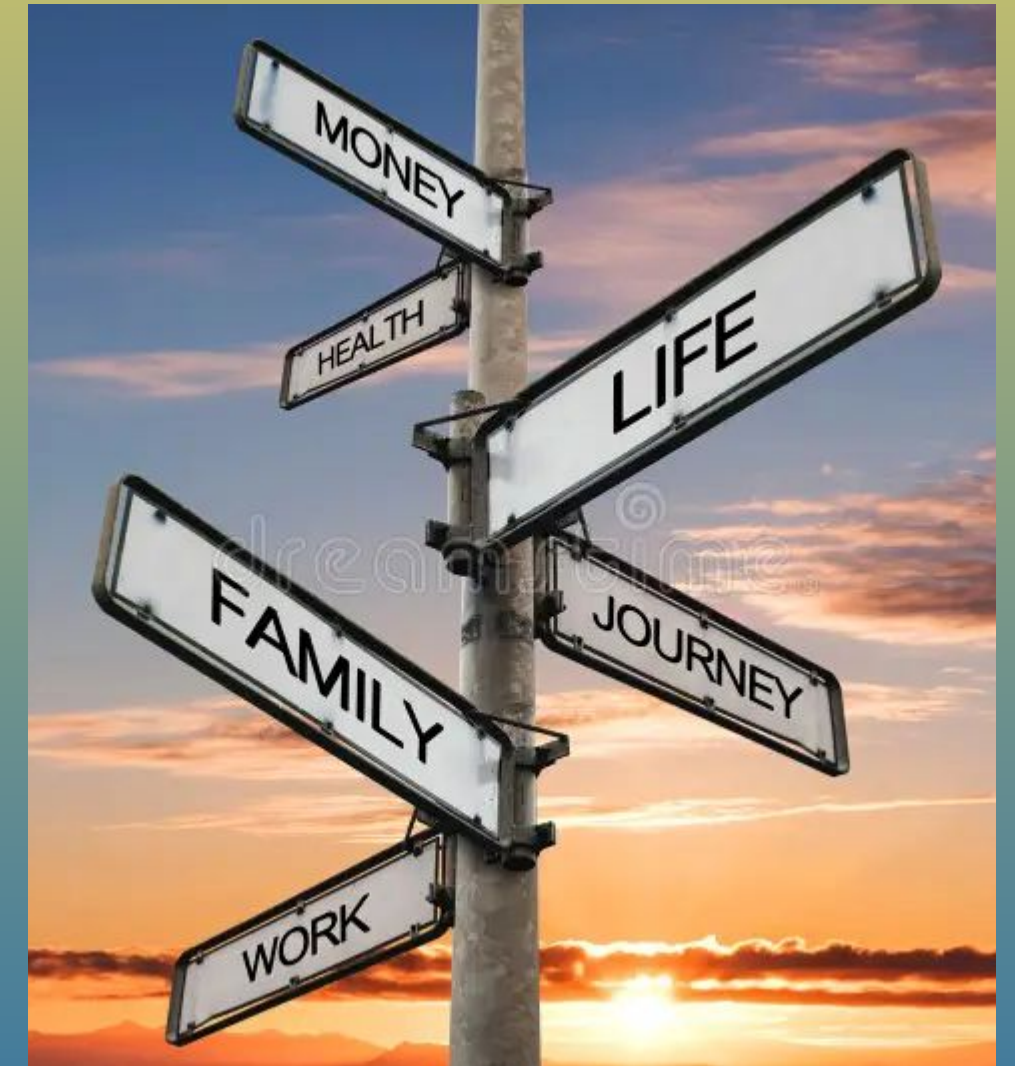
Theme: Mortality, How to Live Meaningfully

**“It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it.”**

Seneca claims we squander time on:

- Anxiety about the future
- Pleasures and distractions
- Ambition and social obligations
- Idle conversation and entertainment

Which emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice, highlighting the values of **existentialism**. Sartre teaches that we are free to live how we want to live and make our own choices. If life feels meaningless it's because we have failed to live it authentically

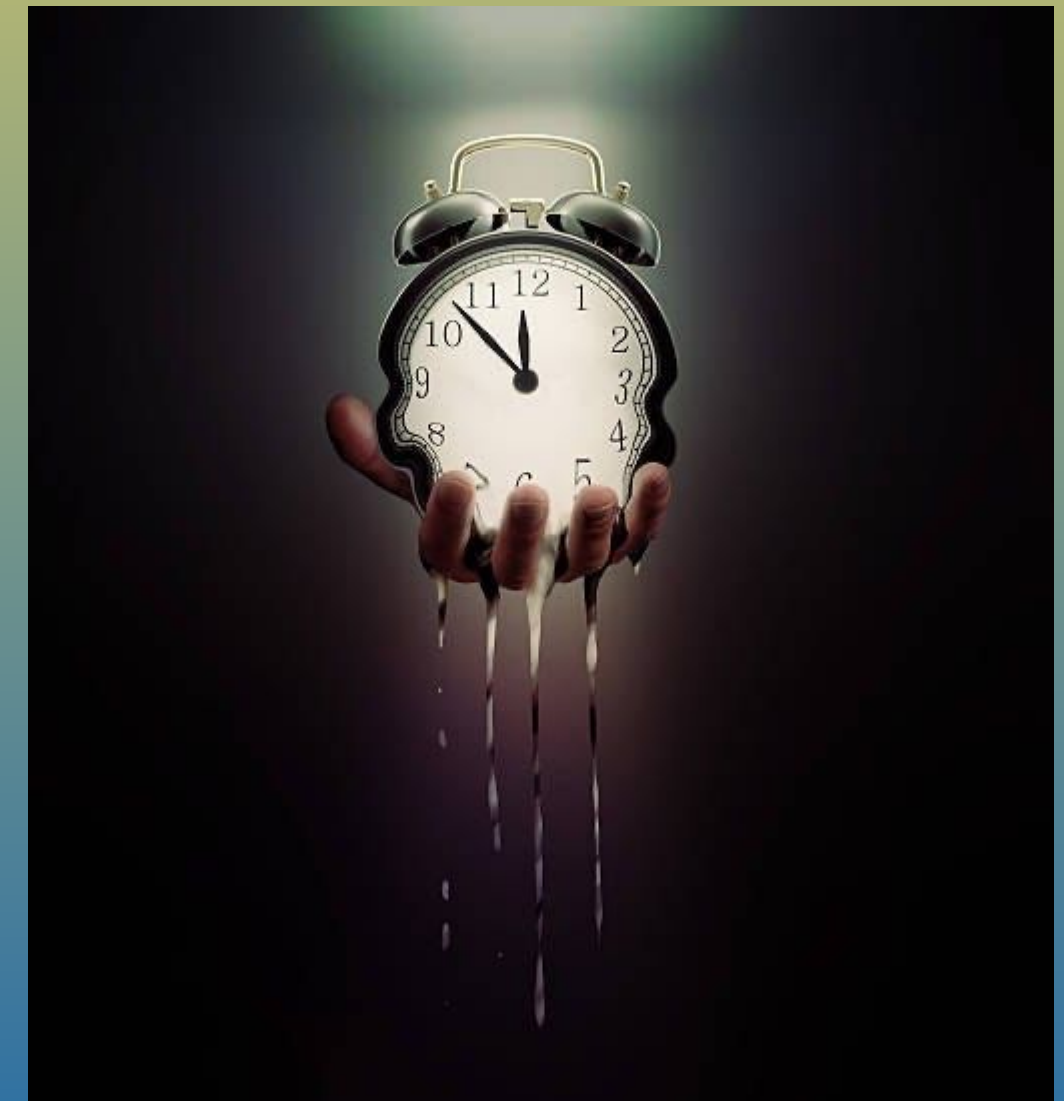


# On The Shortness of Life

**“People are frugal in guarding their personal property; but as soon as it comes to squandering time, they are most wasteful of the one thing in which it is right to be stingy.”**

We protect our material wealth but are careless with our most finite resource which is time. Every moment you give away thoughtlessly is a moral failure.

- From a rational egoist lens, we should act in our own *real* self-interest - protecting your own time. Other things and people would happily consume your time, unless you defend it the same way you'd defend your wallet.
- Kantianism: You are morally responsible for using reason to direct your time. If we feel wronged when someone wastes our time, we should see wasting our own time as equally unethical.





# Consolation to Helvia

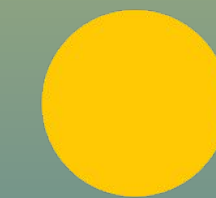
## Goal

Written to Seneca's mother Helvia, consoling his mother for his exile and her own suffering.

Elevate her mind by teaching her to think about loss, fortune, and suffering in a rational manner



**A wise person can be content everywhere because the good of life depends on your character, not its circumstances**





# Consolation to Helvia

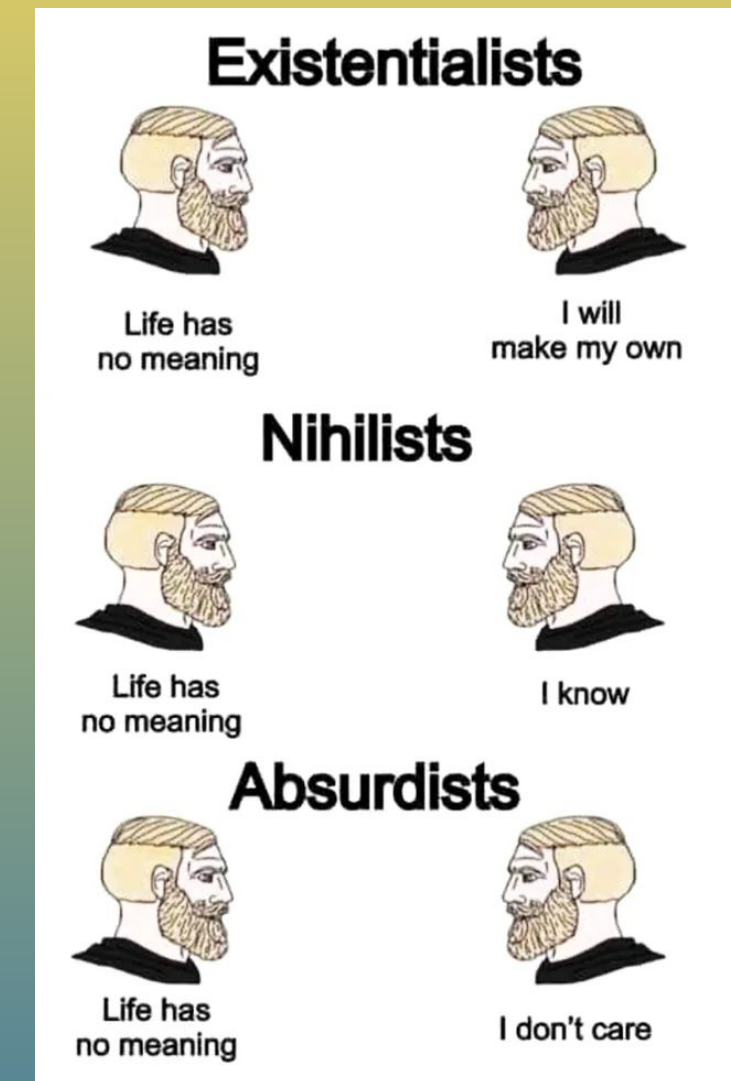
## Misfortune is an Opinion

**“A wise person can be content everywhere because the good of life depends on your character, not its circumstances”**

**“No one is exiled; it is only a change of place.”**

Existentialism: Sartre would argue that “**existence precedes essence**” your condition doesn't define you (exile); your choices do. Seneca anticipates this: being “in exile” only carries meaning **if you assign it negative value**.

- This lens emphasizes **radical freedom**: even when deprived of status or home, one can still choose **how to live**.
- Seneca urges Helvia (and himself) to recognize that **you define your experience**, not the place you are in.





# On Tranquility of Mind

**Main Idea:** Seneca is attempting to assist his friend, Serenus, with his insecurity of pursuing a virtuous and stoic life.

**Tranquility:** A calm state of mind in which one is not disturbed or overwhelmed by strong emotions or passions, impulses or wishes

“If you happen to live at a time when public life is hard to cope with, you will just have to claim more time for leisure and literary work, seek a safe harbour...” (Seneca 82)

“Don’t wait for public life to dismiss you but voluntarily release yourself from it first” (Seneca 82)

# On Tranquility of Mind



## **Yourself**

Look first at ourselves



## **Activities**

Then Look at the activities we shall be attempting

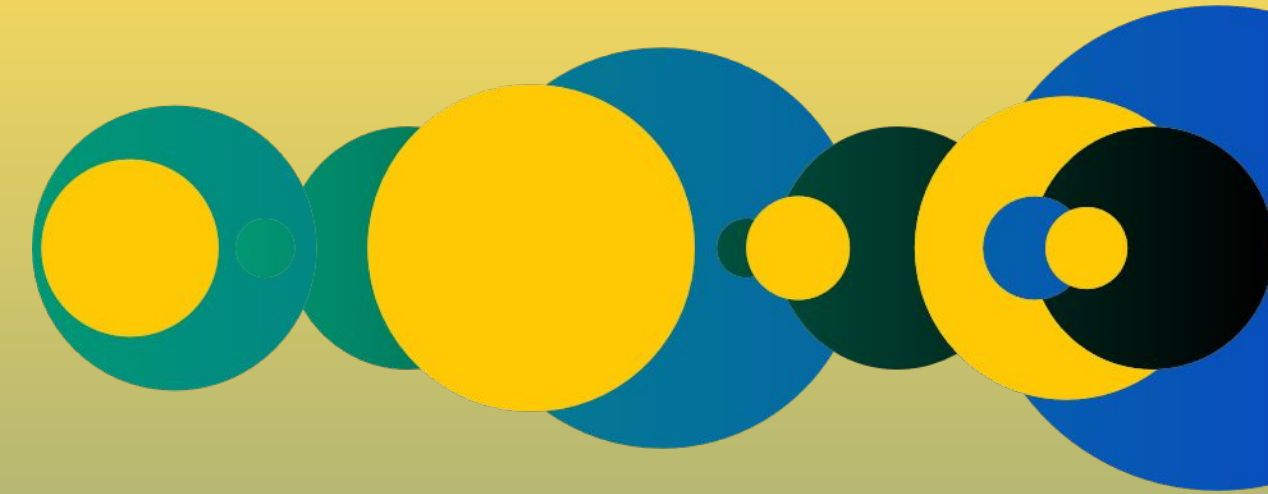


## **Others**

Then look at those whose sake and with whom we are attempting them with.

# Rejection of Lenses

Utilitarianism, Contractualism, Hedonism



## Utilitarianism

Never concerned with maximizing happiness of the general public - its all about how YOU can maximize the outcomes for the state of your own soul

## Contractualism

Seneca's ideals are not about obligation between people, it's about individual flourishing

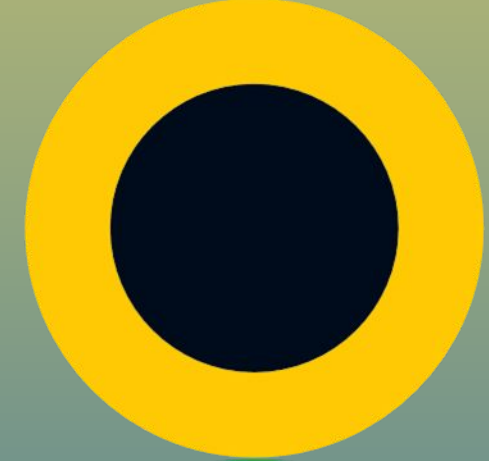
Seneca's focus is internal and metaphysical, not societal

## Hedonism

Redefine Pleasure where it results you with calmness and happiness. Don't reside to instant pleasure but fight to earn long-term pleasure, MAXIMIZING it to earn virtue.

# **Philosophical Message**

**Think about your life now.  
Now question, are you  
living your life to the  
fullest? What is your  
meaning to life?**





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