

Chapter 5

Conclusion

“homo, sacra res homini,” (man is sacred to man)

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, letters to Lucilius.

This is not a book about philosophy, but it started with something that the ancient philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca wrote to his friend, Lucilius, noting how fast things change and if those changes are rapid, usually for the worse (“increases are of sluggish growth, but ruin is rapid”). So, I would like to conclude it with some more words that Seneca wrote to Lucilius: *“homo, sacra res homini,”* “man is sacred to man.” Quite possibly, Seneca wrote these words in direct opposition to the saying, *“homo homini lupus”* (“man is wolf to man”), already well-known in his times. The Latins used the term “man” in a way that we see as politically incorrect today, but they meant “humankind” and Seneca meant to say that humankind is sacred. It is the basic tenet of the Stoic philosophy, a school that goes back to the Greek Philosopher Zeno, during the 3rd century BCE, who used to teach his disciples in the colonnade in the Agora of Athens known as the “Stoa.”

Stoicism is a philosophy that permeates the Roman way of thinking. It also deeply influenced the later Christian philosophy and we can still feel its influence in our world, today. The Stoics hadn’t developed the concept of entropy but they had arrived at a similar idea in emphasizing that the universe keeps changing. It is unavoidable; it is a flow that continuously moves things, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. And the essence of the Stoic philosophy is that human beings must accept these changes; they cannot fight them and they even shouldn’t. A stoic would not fight against entropy but would accept the changes that entropy generates. In bad times, a stoic would maintain what we would call today a “moral stance.” We could say that Stoics thought that “virtue is its own reward” although, of course, there is much more than that in Stoicism and in what it can still give to us, in modern times.

According to Seneca, man is far from being the monster that today we sometimes define as *“homo economicus,”* a creature that’s 100% dedicated to maximizing its utility function and who sees no value in a tree until it is felled. Yet, it is impressive

to see how many people, today, maintain that it is justified for humankind destroy everything in the name of economic growth and profit maximization. But if you think that this attitude is not only wrong but an insult to anyone who doesn't see him or herself as a member of this species of brutish creatures, then it is not impossible to hope for a better world. It is a hope, not necessarily a prediction but the only thing that's truly unavoidable is change, and we will see many changes in the future. Because of this, remember that, while sometimes you can solve a problem, you can't solve a change. Change, like collapse, is not a bug, it is a feature.

So, you need to face change without fearing it, but accepting it, which is the Stoic way of facing the world. This attitude is perhaps, best described by another Latin author, Horace (65 BCE-8B CE), who wrote how the Stoic remains calm in all circumstances, good and bad. If we accept change and we don't fight it, then the future will be in our hands.