The first book of the *Natural Questions* opens with an enthusiastic praise of theology, conceived of as a personal search after the nature and ontological essence of godhead, beyond all representations transmitted by cultural and literary tradition or fostered by institutional and political conventions. In Varronian terms, one might say that here Seneca favors the *theologia naturalis* over both the *theologia fabulosa* and the *theologia civilis*; or, according to the terminology used by Seneca himself in his lost *De superstitione*, in this page he is concerned with the *res*, the “thing itself,” rather than the *mos*, the convention or custom of the generally accepted religious practice. Here theology is, to all effects, identified with physics: the cosmos is conceived of as God’s visible manifestation, and, as we shall see, knowledge of God is required in order to honor him correctly. For this reason, Seneca grants physics (i.e., theology) primacy over the two other branches of philosophy—not merely over logic, but over ethics as well: obviously, a correct moral behavior and progress toward virtue (the main object of Seneca’s philosophical writing) cannot be achieved without gaining a correct knowledge of God and our relationship to him.

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1 Submitted for publication in 2007.
4 Cf. *SVF* II 42, where theology is presented as the crowning of physics.
5 The Stoics, in fact, defined philosophy as ἐπιστήμην θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων (*SVF* II 36; cf. 35, 1017), a definition accepted by Seneca (*divinorum et humanorum scientiam: epist.* 89.5; cf. 90.3). These two components can hardly be separated. Contemplation, that is meditation directed at higher realities, cannot be separated from action (*dial.* 8 [= *de otio*], 5.8). Only he who knows God can properly honor him (*epist.* 95.47), but we can do so only by
Seneca’s texts on God and our relationship to him are numerous and permit us to sketch a clear picture of his standpoint. To begin with, there are passages that testify to a strong religious sensitivity. The beauty of nature, in particular, gives him an indefinite religious shiver—\textit{quaedam religionis suspicio}. The Greek Stoics, too, drew the idea of God from the beauty of the cosmos, but most of the times they favored rational inference: the perfection of the created universe testifies to the wisdom of a divine craftsman—a sort of cosmological proof of God’s existence, which, of course, repeatedly appears in Seneca, too. The latter, however, aims to communicate the inner experience of the divine. Significantly, he experiences the same religious shiver both when he faces unspoiled and uncontaminated nature and when he pictures the ethical perfection of the soul of the good and wise man. Aesthetic and religious experiences are inextricably intertwined, as are sensible and moral beauty, inasmuch as they are complementary aspects of the divine. Seneca, however, is fully aware of the fact that this instinctual stage is indeed very far from the knowledge of God’s innermost essence, which, in his own words, “escapes the eyes and must be viewed by thought.”

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