

# Quaestiones Infinitae

PUBLICATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

VOLUME LX

Copyright © 2010 by I.M. Conradie

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License. You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work, and/or to adapt the work, under the following conditions:

Attribution — You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

Cover and book design: I.M. Conradie

Cover photographs: I.M. Conradie

*Above:* Raphael, *The School of Athens* (detail). Fresco, c. 1510-11. Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura, Rome. Depicted is Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412 BC – 323 BC), also known as Diogenes the Cynic.

*Below:* Double portrait of the philosophers Seneca (c. 4 BC – 65 AD) and Socrates (c. 469 BC – 399 BC) with ancient name inscriptions. Marble, Roman copy of the 3rd century AD, after a Greek original of the 1st century AD. Neues Museum, Berlin. Antikensammlung Sk 391.

Printed by Wöhrmann Printing Service, Zutphen.

ISBN 978 90 393 5360 8

# **Seneca in his cultural and literary context: Selected moral letters on the body**

Seneca in zijn culturele en literaire context:  
Een selectie morele brieven over het lichaam  
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Utrecht  
op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof.dr. J.C. Stoof,  
ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties  
in het openbaar te verdedigen  
op vrijdag 9 juli 2010 des middags te 12.45 uur

door

Irene Marianne Conradie

geboren op 15 maart 1981  
te Langedijk

Promotor: Prof.dr. K.A. Algra  
Co-promotor: Dr. T.L. Tieleman

# Contents

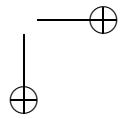
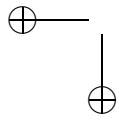
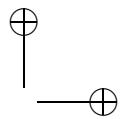
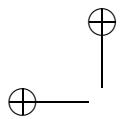
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	v
<b>Abbreviations</b>	vii
<b>General Introduction</b>	1
<b>I Seneca's <i>Epistulae Morales</i>: Author, text and context</b>	7
<b>1 Seneca and his cultural context</b>	9
1.1 The reception of the philosopher Seneca . . . . .	9
1.1.1 Approval and dismissal of Seneca's philosophy . . . . .	10
1.1.2 Directing man's soul and living philosophy . . . . .	15
1.2 A broader context: cultural theory . . . . .	19
1.2.1 Social memory and cultural identity . . . . .	20
1.3 Philosophy in Rome . . . . .	26
1.3.1 The role of philosophy in Roman education and Roman cultural life . . . . .	26
1.3.2 The Roman attitude towards Greek philosophy . . . . .	33
1.3.3 Seneca's intellectual formation, career and philosophy . . . . .	37
<b>2 The <i>Epistulae Morales</i> in their literary context</b>	43
2.1 Intertextuality . . . . .	43
2.1.1 Intertextuality as a theoretical concept . . . . .	43
2.1.2 Intertextuality in textual analysis . . . . .	45
2.1.3 Intertextuality and cultural identity . . . . .	57
2.2 Writing letters . . . . .	60
2.2.1 Genre and earlier models . . . . .	61
2.2.2 The question of genre . . . . .	67

2.2.3 Epistolary features . . . . .	69
2.2.4 The collection of letters . . . . .	75
2.2.5 Historical authenticity . . . . .	78
2.3 Author, addressee, audience . . . . .	79
2.3.1 Seneca: the author and his self-presentation . . . . .	79
2.3.2 The addressee Lucilius and the wider audience . . . . .	81
2.4 Purpose of the letters . . . . .	85
2.5 Identities in the <i>Epistulae Morales</i> . . . . .	87
2.5.1 Humans . . . . .	89
2.5.2 Romans . . . . .	91
2.5.3 The upper-class . . . . .	94
2.5.4 Philosophers . . . . .	97
2.5.5 Stoics . . . . .	103
2.5.6 Other aspects of identity . . . . .	105
<b>Preliminary Conclusion</b>	109
<b>II Letters on the body</b>	111
<b>3 Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character</b>	113
Text and translation . . . . .	113
Introduction . . . . .	116
Commentary . . . . .	117
Conclusion . . . . .	161
<b>4 Letter 15: In good health</b>	165
Text and translation . . . . .	165
Introduction . . . . .	169
Commentary . . . . .	171
Conclusion . . . . .	202
<b>5 Letter 78: The troubles of ill health</b>	205
Text and translation . . . . .	205
Introduction . . . . .	215
Commentary . . . . .	217
Conclusion . . . . .	279
<b>6 Letter 106: Body in theory</b>	283
Text and translation . . . . .	283
Introduction . . . . .	286

**Contents**

iii

Commentary . . . . .	287
Conclusion . . . . .	326
<b>General Conclusion</b>	329
<b>Bibliography</b>	335
<b>Index Locorum Potiorum</b>	359
<b>Samenvatting (Dutch summary)</b>	365
<b>Curriculum vitae</b>	371



# Acknowledgements

The process of writing a thesis involves the efforts and responses of many people, and it is a pleasure to thank all those who made this thesis possible. I owe a great deal to colleagues, friends and members of my family who, through their own research, comments and questions have encouraged, supported and enlightened me.

The first who should be mentioned is Dr. Teun Tielemans, whose enthusiastic supervision from the initial to the final level enabled me to develop a better understanding of the subject. I thank my promotor Prof. Keimpe Algra for providing valuable feedback and giving me great freedom to pursue independent work.

Furthermore, I am grateful to the distinguished scholars who agreed to be on my thesis committee: Prof. Anthony Long, Prof. Jan van Ophuijsen, Prof. Annette Merz, Prof. Paul Ziche and Prof. Ruurd Nauta, for their encouragement, insightful comments, and pertinent questions.

Thanks are also due to the members of the research project *Habent sua fata libelli* for numerous stimulating discussions over the years: Prof. Annette Merz, Dr. Teun Tielemans, Nicole Frank, Martin Ruf, and Anna Ntinti. Financial support of the HSFL research group was provided by Utrecht University's High Potentials Programme.

I want to express my gratitude to the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) for offering me the opportunity to spend some weeks in Rome in 2007 and 2009 for further study. The staff members at the Dutch Institute were extremely helpful in assisting my research, the efforts of Prof. Bernard Stolte were particularly appreciated.

During my studies, I have benefited greatly from participating in OIKOS, the National Research School in Classical Studies in the Netherlands. Thanks for making it possible to meet many new colleagues and friends and for providing a stimulating environment to share insights and learn from others. In this regard, it has been a privilege to help organise the Rome Masterclass of 2008, and a pleasure to work together with Mark Heerink, Tazuko van Berkel and Miko Flohr.

Among the many fine colleagues and friends I have met in the Philosophy Department at Utrecht University, I have been extremely fortunate with my fellow PhD's, who have often been happy to engage in discussion of the topics covered here, as

well as just about any other topic imaginable. The invaluable help, great sense of humour, and continuous encouragement of Maarten van Houte, Claartje van Sijl, Albert Joosse, Mark Aalderink, Anna Ntinti and Frederik Bakker made it a convivial place to work. *Grazie mille di cuore!* Special thanks also to Carin Cruisen, for her friendship and all the cups of tea we enjoy together.

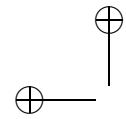
My final words go to my (extended) family in acknowledgement for their support. Thanks are due to my parents, my grandparents, and particularly Ellen, for being a great sister. Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to thank my boyfriend Sjoerd, for being there for me all the way, in writing this thesis and in all matters of life. I feel truly blessed to have you as my friend and my love.

Utrecht, 19 May 2010

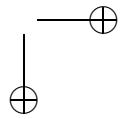
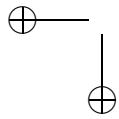
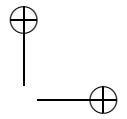
# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited collections:

- E.-K. L. Edelstein and I.G. Kidd (eds.), *Posidonius, Volume I: The Fragments*. This is the standard collection of evidence for Posidonius.
- IG B. Inwood and L.P. Gerson (eds.), *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*. This includes translations of the principal sources.
- LS A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley (eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987). Volume 1 includes translations of the principal sources, with philosophical commentary, and volume 2 gives the corresponding Greek and Latin texts with notes and bibliography.
- SVF *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1903-5). This is the standard collection of evidence for early Stoicism.
- Usener *Epicurea*, ed. H. Usener (Leipzig, 1887).



"ThesisConradie" — 2010/5/28 — 9:46 — page viii — #12



# General Introduction

I thank you for writing to me so often; for you are revealing your real self to me in the only way you can. I never receive a letter from you without being in your company forthwith. If the pictures of our absent friends are pleasing to us, though they only refresh the memory and lighten our longing by a solace that is unreal and unsubstantial, how much more pleasant is a letter, which brings us real traces, real evidences, of an absent friend! For that which is sweetest when we meet face to face is afforded by the impress of a friend's hand upon his letter—recognition.<sup>1</sup>

Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 40.1

In *Ep.* 40 Seneca shows his appreciation for the letters he has been receiving from his addressee Lucilius. Their exchange of letters serves as a substitute for spending time together, underlining at the same time their physical absence and spiritual presence.<sup>2</sup> While the image of a friend offers only a physical resemblance, his own letters are what shows more of him and are a genuine expression of him. What shines through in a friend's letter and when seeing him in person is his character—this is what is being recognised and what makes the other person a friend. Seneca's insight into the nature of friendship and his interest in discovering the real self of Lucilius are an indication that this is not just an affectionate note to a friend. The main subject of these letters is their shared philosophical endeavour towards becoming better men.

<sup>1</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 40.1: *Quod frequenter mihi scribis gratias ago; nam quo uno modo potes te mihi ostendis. Numquam epistulam tuam accipio ut non protinus una simus. Si imagines nobis amicorum absentium iucundae sunt, quae memoriam renovant et desiderium falso atque inani solacio levant, quanto iucundiores sunt litterae, quae vera amici absens vestigia, veras notas afferunt? Nam quod in conspectu dulcissimum est, id amici manus epistulae impressa praestat, agnoscere.* Unless otherwise indicated, the basic text used is L. Annaei Senecae *Ad Lucilium Epistulae morales* recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit L.D. Reynolds (Oxford Classical Texts), Vol. I. Oxford (1965); the English translation used is standardly the Loeb edition by R. Gummere.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Thraede (1970), 73-74.

In turn, when reading Seneca's own letters, we are invited to see them as attestations of their author's character and identity.

The focus of my study is the ongoing interaction between text and identity in Seneca's letters. In the *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca discusses the Stoic philosophical position he upholds and examines how this should be implemented in the Roman upper-class lives that he and his addressee Lucilius lead. He addresses the concerns that a cultured Roman audience might have when thinking about adopting a philosophical way of life. The work of I. and P. Hadot and others has shown that being dedicated to philosophy in antiquity required not only the acceptance of new insights and values but also adjustments in one's way of life.<sup>3</sup> Seneca points out the continuity and change of familiar beliefs and practices that such a philosophical commitment involves. Recently, there has been a growing interest in Seneca's philosophical work, but, to my mind, its philosophical aspects have not been studied sufficiently in their literary and cultural context.<sup>4</sup> Against this background I formulated the following central research questions. First, how does the use of literary texts and traditions function in the construction of a philosophical identity in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*? Second, how do these moral letters mediate between Seneca and his audience? In other words, how do they operate within their shared cultural framework?

To answer these questions, I have used a method for textual analysis that is based on cultural theory and the concept of intertextuality. The first part of my thesis, consisting of two chapters, examines the central theoretical concepts and how these can be applied effectively to the study of Seneca's letters. The first chapter discusses the cultural context of Seneca and his audience and how this shapes their sense of identity. The second chapter centres on intertextuality and the textual traditions to which the *Epistulae Morales* belong. In the second part of my thesis, four letters serve as case studies, each letter constituting one of the four chapters. A selection of letters was needed because a detailed discussion of the entire letter collection would have been beyond the scope of this study, and because the epistolary structure is best seen when the letters are examined from beginning to end. I have used a thematic criterion for selection, resulting in a set of letters with a focus on the body.

My approach is based upon a combination of conceptual tools from general cultural and literary theory. In my discussion of cultural theory, I have been aided in my thinking by a large body of work on the role of cultural identity and cultural mem-

---

<sup>3</sup>See e.g., I. Hadot (1969); I. Hadot (1986); P. Hadot et al. (1990); P. Hadot (1995a); P. Hadot (2002); Cooper (2007).

<sup>4</sup>For studies of Seneca's philosophical work see among others: Maurach (1975); Graver (1996); Hengelbrock (2000); Inwood (2005); Inwood (2007); Volk and Williams (2006); Fitch (2008); Bartsch and Wray (2009).

## General Introduction

### 3

ory, in particular writings by Jan Assmann.<sup>5</sup> While Assmann's work chiefly pertains to the study of ancient Egyptian and Jewish culture, the underlying interest into the mechanisms of intertextual production of meaning can and has been applied to other periods as well.<sup>6</sup> In general, communities tend to reinforce their own cultural identity in opposition to that of others; at the same time, they are in a continuous process of formulating and reformulating their core values and common background that unites them as a group. Authoritative figures and canonical texts are useful tools in constructing a shared past. In particular, I will underline the important role texts can play in establishing and interpreting cultural identity. What is interesting in the case of Seneca is that he, as a Roman philosopher, actively sets out to forge together different, sometimes conflicting, cultural identities in his philosophical writings. His Stoic philosophical message needs to be presented in a way that appeals to its intended Roman audience, while traditional Roman views and concepts need to be modified to suit a more philosophical perspective. As a result, Seneca needs to draw on various traditions, various role models and various authoritative texts.

Intertextual studies carried out in the area of comparative literature and literary theory can make a valuable contribution to such research.<sup>7</sup> An intertextual reference can be made to a wider tradition, such as a genre, or to an individual text. In either case, the reference in a given text to a predecessor, the pretext, draws attention to the way these texts are connected—e.g., in the form of a commentary, criticism, parody, allusion or quotation. We need to take account of the variety of intertextual relations present in the *Epistulae Morales*. Through his use of canonical works of past masters, stylistic means, and references to big names such as Socrates, Cato and Virgil, Seneca intends to create an authoritative text of his own. In addition, the choice for the epistolary form offers a friendly atmosphere suitable for philosophical discussion, while locating itself in a wider epistolary tradition. Although this cultural and intertextual approach is innovative to the field of ancient philosophy, the theoretical perspective advanced here can also be seen in connection with the Utrecht tradition of examining ancient philosophical texts in their historical context.<sup>8</sup>

Next, let us consider the common theme for the letters. Many recent studies have focused on the body in ancient Greek and Roman culture.<sup>9</sup> This renewed interest in

<sup>5</sup>Cf. J. Assmann (1995b); J. Assmann (1997); but also A. Assmann (1995a); Fentress and Wickham (1992); Connerton (1989).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Merz and Tieleman (2008).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Broich and Pfister (1985); Merz (2004).

<sup>8</sup>See e.g., Mansfeld (1994).

<sup>9</sup>See e.g., Wyke (1998); Porter (1999); Wright and Potter (2000); Fredrick (2002); Cairns (2005); Bartsch (2006); Roller (2006).

the body can to some extent be explained in view of modern discussions of the body.<sup>10</sup> These explore various aspects of the body, e.g., how human embodiment can function as a means of differentiation and likeness, to what extent the body is a part of nature or a cultural construct. Because various functions and meanings can be assigned to the body, it is a constitutive element of any identity. A person's views on the body reveal much of his beliefs and values. Consider, for example, how some view the body as an integral part of a human being, whereas others do not hold it to be an essential part. It can be seen as an instrument that performs our actions but also as something with its own inclinations. It can be viewed as something that is in agreement with the soul or in polar opposition to it. Additionally, the body forms the outer covering of a person and is one's physical representation to the outside world. As such, the body can function as a means of communication—through gesture, body language and dress—and plays a part in defining one's individual distinctiveness. Further, the body is involved in natural processes, it fulfils vital functions and is characterised by growth, change, and decay. Consequently, the body can be associated with impermanence and instability.

These different functions and meanings of the body call for interpretation. What does our body mean to us and what are appropriate ways of looking after it? The possibility for diverging perspectives on these questions makes this topic an interesting intersection of various cultural, social and philosophical views. How we perceive ourselves will affect the way we perceive our body, and as such it ties in well with our focus on cultural identity. Moreover, the body is claimed as the subject matter of various experts. Numerous disciplines—medicine, physiognomics, athleticism, rhetoric, and philosophy—each have their own perspective on what the body is, how it should function, and how it should or should not be treated. Although Seneca himself refers to different professions and professionals, it is important to note that these are adjustable labels rather than clearly defined professional classes.<sup>11</sup> As we shall discuss in Chapter 1, philosophy itself could be practised in various ways and members of the Roman elite, such as Seneca, would not consider themselves to be professional philosophers.<sup>12</sup> The various professional and cultural views on the body raise pertinent questions on the right valuation of the body and its moral significance, as well as generating rivalling conceptions of the appropriate bodily regimen and of the interpretation and manipulation of gesture and body language. This brief overview of the various meanings of the body and its different experts gives a preview of matters that will come into play in the selected letters.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, the collected articles in Featherstone et al. (1991), and the review of literature on the body in Frank (1990).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ch. 1, section 3.1, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ch. 1, section 3.1 (philosophical activities), 3.2 (Roman attitude towards philosophy) and 3.3 (Seneca's pursuit of philosophy).

## General Introduction

### 5

Furthermore, the choice for a thematically related set of letters was decided upon by taking certain practical requirements into account. First of all, each letter had to be primarily concerned with aspects of the body and the letters as a selection needed to shed light on various aspects of the body. Also, seeing that several case studies would lend more weight to this study, the individual letters needed to be of limited length. For this reason *Ep.* 66, 92 and 95 were excluded. Moreover, the selected letters needed to be taken from different parts in order to represent the *Epistulae Morales* as a whole. Especially in the early part of the work there are several letters concerned with the body, e.g., *Ep.* 5 and 14. These considerations resulted in the choice of four letters, *Ep.* 11, 15, 78, and 106.

In *Ep.* 11, Seneca comments on the blush of a young man with whom he was having a conversation. This blush gives occasion for discussing the different natural constitutions of individuals. A distinction is made between a human's natural and moral faults. Seneca shows himself a keen observer of others, someone who can identify natural predispositions and any underlying moral condition. His examples are all related to self-presentation in the context of public performance. Additionally, the closing section of the letter discusses how the imagined observation by revered others can contribute to one's moral improvement.

Next, in *Ep.* 15, a distinction is drawn between bodily and mental health. Seneca inveighs against the athletic bodily regimen and the artificial practices of vocal trainers, and the excessive extent to which these professionals look after the body. As an alternative, he offers his own advice on how to integrate some physical exercises in one's daily routine. However, the emphasis is, and should be, on training the mind.

Thirdly, *Ep.* 78 concentrates on the troubles of ill health. Seneca sympathises with the ailing Lucilius, details how he himself suffered a period of serious illness, and underlines the beneficial influence of friends and philosophy on a patient. Philosophy offers therapeutical thoughts that will help a patient to overcome his illness and even to demonstrate courage in the face of suffering. Philosophy in general contributes to becoming a much healthier, i.e. more virtuous, person.

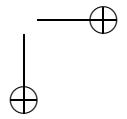
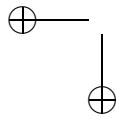
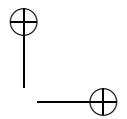
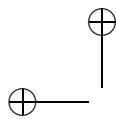
The final letter, *Ep.* 106, offers a more theoretical discussion of the body. The central question, whether the good is a body, requires the explanation of the particular Stoic doctrine that a human being is composed of two bodies—the soul and the body. Seneca describes the topic with reference to the emotions, these being a vivid example of how soul and body interact. Although he discusses this technical topic in detail, both at the opening of the letter and at the end Seneca expresses doubts about how such a theoretical discussion can contribute to wisdom and virtue.

Of each letter under discussion I provide the Latin text, an English translation, and extensive explanation and interpretation of the text and its literary and cultural context. The commentary will focus on how the letter works, both as an independent entity and as part of the collection. In placing emphasis on the arrangement of the

different themes within each letter, on how epistolary features are employed, and on how text and audience presuppose one another, I seek to further our understanding of these individual letters, of the *Epistulae Morales* as a literary and philosophical work, and of the ways in which Seneca conveys his philosophical message to his audience.

## Part I

# Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*: Author, text and context



# Chapter 1

## Seneca and his cultural context

When Seneca in the *Epistulae Morales* shares the benefit of his experience with his friend Lucilius, he does so in part by specifying what, to his mind, is valuable knowledge, good behaviour and suitable company. This draws our attention to the sense of identity underlying Seneca's advice. More precisely, it raises the question of who Seneca is, how he sees himself and to whom he closely relates. The first section will survey the reception of Seneca as a philosopher in the course of time, taking into account the recent emphasis on the practical orientation of ancient philosophy and how this has been applied to the philosophical works of Seneca. Next, I will argue for the relevance of cultural theory in this context with an examination of the theoretical concepts of cultural memory and cultural identity. Following this, I will focus my attention on philosophy in Rome, discussing the role of philosophy in Roman education and culture, the Roman attitude towards Greek philosophy, and Seneca's own education, career and philosophical alignment.

### 1.1 The reception of the philosopher Seneca

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Roman political figure, writer and philosopher, wrote quite a number of the complete Stoic writings that we possess. It should be taken into account that a complex figure like Seneca has been variously assessed for his political, literary and philosophical contributions, in alternate bouts praised and defamed, both in his own time and in later periods. This has resulted in diverse readings and assessments of his works and character throughout history. In what follows, my emphasis will be on the reception of the philosopher Seneca. Nevertheless, his personal life does have some bearing on the way his philosophical work has been appraised. His enormous wealth tarnished his reputation as a philosopher advocating a simple life, whereas,

on the other hand, his composed suicide seemed befitting to a philosopher.

According to A.A. Long, the reception of Seneca's philosophical work has progressed in three stages.<sup>1</sup> He enjoyed enormous popularity in the Renaissance and early Enlightenment. This first stage was followed by one of continuous neglect and disregard as scholars considered his philosophy to be eclectic, inconsistent, shallow and irrelevant. This lasted until the revival in the second half of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. Although the general outline Long provides serves its intended purpose, the history of Seneca's reception is in fact more complicated, especially from the seventeenth century onward. Movements and historical trends constituted different, often ambivalent, reactions to Seneca's philosophical works. Seneca's philosophical influence depended also on more general views on Stoicism, Roman or pagan culture and (later) ancient philosophy. In what follows, I will detail how some of the major changes in the intellectual landscape affected the assessment of Seneca's philosophical contribution.

### **1.1.1 Approval and dismissal of Seneca's philosophy**

Roman writers from the period following Seneca's death offered varying assessments of Seneca's roles as a statesman and writer. Cassius Dio stresses the negative influence Seneca had on Nero, while Tacitus emphasises Seneca's role as a shrewd, senior adviser who had to serve under a difficult ruler.<sup>2</sup> A more positive, apologetic image is presented in the tragedy *Octavia*, though its date is uncertain (possibly late 1st century) and its author is unknown.<sup>3</sup> These assessments of Seneca as a person had a direct bearing on his credibility as a moral adviser.

Although Seneca acquired admirers in his own circles, his philosophical contribution made a limited impression on the immediately following generations.<sup>4</sup> Professional philosophers in antiquity hardly made reference to Seneca, his example of writing philosophy in Latin was not followed and the decline of Stoicism in favour of more Platonising thinking further restricted his appeal.<sup>5</sup> In Roman culture he was

<sup>1</sup>Long (2006), 360.

<sup>2</sup>For instance, Cassius Dio *Hist. Rom.* 61.12.1, 61.20.3, 62.2.1, 62.25.1-3. Cf. Griffin (1976), 428. For references to Seneca in Tacitus, see e.g., *Ann.* 13.5, 14.2, 14.7, 14.52-55, 15.45, 15.60-64. A collection of ancient literary references to Seneca can be found in Trillitzsch (1971), Vol. 2, 301-62.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Trillitzsch (1971), Vol. 2, 325-30.

<sup>4</sup>For views on Seneca's popularity, cf. e.g., Quintilian *Inst.* 10.1.125-31; Tacitus *Ann.* 12.8, 13.3; Aulus Gellius *NA* 12.2.2-13. Cf. the collected *testimonia* in Trillitzsch (1971).

<sup>5</sup>A number of studies discuss Seneca's influence through the centuries. My account here is much indebted to Ross (1974), which specifically recounts the developments in Seneca's philosophical influence up until the seventeenth century; Schrijvers (1989) covers similar ground while drawing attention to the distinct reception in French and Spanish literature; finally, von

## 1.1 The reception of the philosopher Seneca

11

more popular at first, but his influence waned when rhetoricians eschewed teaching his works out of dislike of his style. Also, when historians assessed his conduct unfavourably he lost much of his eminence as moral authority.<sup>6</sup>

Early Christianity recognised points of convergence as well as insurmountable differences with Stoicism in general and Seneca in particular.<sup>7</sup> However, the fourth century pseudepigraphic correspondence between Seneca and Paul added to his renown in the Middle Ages and many of Seneca's aphorisms, *sententiae*, were incorporated into medieval collections of wise sayings.<sup>8</sup> However, professional philosophers around this time were scholastics who favoured dialectical reasoning, an abstract, logical approach to philosophy which stood in stark contrast to Seneca's work.

The Early Modern period witnessed the rise of humanism, a movement challenging the scholastic tradition. Humanists like Petrarch appreciated Seneca's Stoic notions of constancy and providence, and his combination of philosophical writing and eloquence. Neostoicism, founded by Lipsius, even tried to offer a practical philosophy which placed Stoic ethical ideas in a Christian context. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, French moralists such as Montaigne—who admired Lipsius and Seneca—believed that moral education needed a new foundation. For this purpose they found inspiration in Seneca and other classical authors.<sup>9</sup> Seneca's influence on French literature proved enduring because the works of those French authors, Montaigne, Rousseau and Corneille, who drew on Seneca for his pointed maxims and his study of moral character continued to be studied.<sup>10</sup> Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers, with a keen interest in the power of human reason, were drawn to the Stoic account of rational Nature, to Stoic virtues such as prudence, justice, self-control and their idea of duty.

From the seventeenth century onward it becomes more difficult to see clear, sys-

---

Albrecht (2004) devotes three chapters to Seneca's impact on later traditions, Ch. 7 'Seneca in der christlichen Tradition', Ch. 8 'Geistige Befreiung: Montaigne und Seneca', Ch. 9 'Das 19. Jahrhundert: Seneca als Naturphilosoph (Goethe), als Dialektiker (Hegel) und als Kultukritiker (Nietzsche)'. On the philosophical influence of Stoicism, cf. e.g., Colish (1985); Spanneut (1973); Osler (1991), which examines the way European thought has been influenced by Epicureanism and Stoicism.

<sup>6</sup>Ross (1974), 117-22.

<sup>7</sup>Seneca was mentioned by various early Christian authors, such as Jerome, Lactantius and Augustine; Tertullian acknowledged Seneca as *saepe noster*, "often one of us", Tertullian *De anima* 20.1. For their *testimonia* to Seneca, cf. Trillitzsch (1971), Vol. 2, 331-93.

<sup>8</sup>On Seneca in Christian antiquity and the Middle Ages, cf. Schrijvers (1989), 344-50; Ross (1974), 122-40; Colish (1985), 13-19.

<sup>9</sup>On Seneca's influence on Montaigne, see Ross (1974); Schrijvers (1989), 357-58; and especially the extensive discussion in von Albrecht (2004), 173-92.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Schrijvers (1989), 336, 357-58.

tematic trends, in large part due to the proliferation of ideologies and movements, and the influx of new ideas from a slowly globalising world. Still, the overall evaluation was for the most part negative. After being much read and admired in the Early Modern period, Seneca's popularity suffered a reversal and his morality was perceived as outdated. Romantics considered the Stoic ideal of the dispassionate sage unrealistic and cold-hearted, instead favouring a reappraisal of the emotions.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, a poet like Wordsworth could still appreciate Seneca's Stoicism for describing man's close connection with (divine) nature, another theme from the Romantic Age:

Spirit that knows no insulated spot,  
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link  
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.  
This is the freedom of the universe;  
Unfolded still the more, more visible,  
The more we know; and yet is reverenced least,  
And least respected in the human Mind  
Its most apparent home.<sup>12</sup>

A new perspective was opened up when in the late eighteenth century the modern historiography of philosophy emerged. Under the influence of German scholars in particular, e.g., Brucker and Hegel, historiography used the methodological concept "system of philosophy", distinguished from "eclecticism" and "syncretism".<sup>13</sup> By these standards, Seneca's philosophical contribution was inferior as it failed to develop philosophy into a systematic science, structured in a clear theoretical framework. By contrast, the philosopher Nietzsche expressed his admiration for Seneca as a moralist and culture critic: "Aber eingestehen muss man sich, dass unsere Zeit arm ist an grossen Moralisten, dass Pascal, Epiktet, Seneca, Plutarch wenig noch gelesen werden".<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche also recognised and approved of the practical orientation of ancient philosophy. Even so, the idea of ancient philosophy as a way of life was only first fully examined by Hadot and Foucault in the mid twentieth century.

In reaction to Romanticism, the primacy of reason was restored in the late nineteenth century when positivist thinking endorsed a strict scientific method. Analyti-

<sup>11</sup>On the marked contrast between Seneca's Stoicism and the views of the Romantics, cf. Wycislo (1999).

<sup>12</sup>Wordsworth, *Excursion* 9.1-20; Worthington (1946), 53. Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 41.1-2, 90.28, 92.30. For the influence of the Roman Stoics on Wordsworth, in particular Cicero and Seneca, see Worthington (1946), Ch. 3 'Wordsworth and Roman Stoicism', 43-74. J. Worthington also shows that Wordsworth was familiar with the writings of Seneca, see esp. 44-45.

<sup>13</sup>For a recent study which examines the origin and implications of the historiographical concept 'system of philosophy', see Catana (2008). On Seneca's influence on Hegel, some brief remarks can be found in von Albrecht (2004), 210.

<sup>14</sup>Nietzsche *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* §282. Cf. von Albrecht (2004), 210-12.

## 1.1 The reception of the philosopher Seneca

13

cal philosophy, which came to dominate the English-speaking world from the early twentieth century onward, adopted certain positivistic assumptions and developed an analytical concept of what constitutes philosophy. According to this view, a professional philosopher should investigate in a detached, logical manner and take up a clear position on a given philosophical subject, supporting it with arguments and premises whose validity we can then assess. This approach still is often encountered when the methods of analytical philosophy are applied directly to ancient texts.<sup>15</sup> Seneca's philosophical works do not fit well into this analytical profile, even though analytical philosophy rejects the 'grand theories' of system builders such as Hegel. Instead, the demand for strict philosophical argument and rigorous analysis cannot do justice to the literary form and fervent advocacy of a Stoic lifestyle to be found in Seneca. This, however, does not mean that Seneca has insufficient command of the philosophy of his Stoic predecessors and is therefore unable to put forward a solid argument.<sup>16</sup> He simply has a different intention, philosophy is here not only used for the sake of arguments but also to transform his audience.<sup>17</sup>

This brings us to the current revival of Seneca studies. The present interest, as Long explains it, is prompted not merely by a renewed appreciation of Seneca but also by a wider interest in both Roman intellectual culture and in philosophy from the period subsequent to the proverbial Golden Age of ancient philosophy.<sup>18</sup> The former had previously been overshadowed by Greek culture, the latter by what were considered to be the summits of ancient philosophy, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Thus, for quite some time, the amount of scholarly interest in Seneca had typically been in direct proportion to what light he could shed on other, more significant, philosophers. But recent work on Seneca as a philosopher in his own right has led to more insightful readings of his own works, challenging the accusations of eclecticism, inconsistency and shallowness.

Throughout history the main points of criticism were Seneca's moralism, his shallowness or lack of philosophical depth, and his inconsistency or lack of system, combined with charges of eclecticism. Allegations of eclecticism, i.e. in the sense of a random collecting of doctrines from opposing schools, are now generally regarded

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Annas (2004), where Julia Annas provides an interesting overview of some recent developments in ancient philosophy, giving special attention to the influence of analytical philosophy on classical scholarship and in what ways this influence can be put to good use. For discussion of negative views on Seneca in modern scholarship, see also Hachmann (1995), 2; Cancik (1967), 1-45.

<sup>16</sup>On the level of technical precision and consistency in Seneca's philosophical works, see Inwood (2005), 17-20, 81-85; Inwood (2007) is also interested in the more theoretical discussions. Cf. Rist (1989) and Veyne (2003).

<sup>17</sup>This will be examined in more detail in Ch. 2, section 2.4.

<sup>18</sup>Long (2006), 360-63.

as inaccurate. Although Seneca draws on several philosophical traditions, he does not gather his doctrines randomly and his views conform for the most part to traditional Stoic tenets. In fact, he considers himself to be a Stoic and uses the opinions of contending philosophers to reinforce his own Stoic claims.<sup>19</sup>

The accusation of inconsistency has always been more complicated and while careful reading has solved numerous problematic passages, other issues seem more persistent. The apparent contrast between Seneca's philosophical principles and actions can be seen as a practical form of inconsistency. A.L. Motto has investigated this issue by collecting all the negative and favourable accounts and finds the accusations brought against Seneca ultimately unconvincing.<sup>20</sup> Seneca himself states on several occasions that he has not achieved a sage's lifestyle (and has never made such a claim) and also that material wealth and other pleasures are neither a good nor an evil by definition.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not one may find this sufficiently conclusive, at least we know that Seneca made attempts to defend himself and that was all he could do.

More pressing is the issue of internal inconsistency in the *Epistulae Morales*.<sup>22</sup> In the latter half of the next chapter, I will draw attention to Seneca's self-assertion by means of different identities. The confrontation between varying roles, values and beliefs and how and when these are being emphasised in different contexts may provide

<sup>19</sup>Cf. e.g., Inwood (1985); Inwood (2005), Ch. 1 'Seneca in his Philosophical Milieu', 7-22; Inwood (2007), xix-xx.

<sup>20</sup>Motto (1966). See also Schönegg (1999), 231-35.

<sup>21</sup>On Seneca's self-assessment as a *proficiens*, a man who has chosen the path leading to virtue but who has not yet achieved the virtuous condition of the sage, cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 6.1, 8.2-3, 27.1, 45.4, 52.3.

<sup>22</sup>One possible explanation for Seneca's contradicting beliefs and attitudes in the *Epistulae Morales* is proposed in Edwards (1997). Catherine Edwards connects his (apparent) inconsistency to the conception of a true self and a fragmented self. Only the Stoic sage possesses a united and singular self, whereas the unwise person has an internally disparate and changing self. Edwards argues that the authorial self in the *Epistulae Morales* is meant to reveal the inability to maintain internal coherence of a self which, although self-improving, is still unorganised. I will explore the notion of authorial self, as discussed by Edwards, more closely later on in this chapter. Edwards' explanation is attuned to Seneca's philosophical ideas and assumes a sophisticated arrangement underlying the *Epistulae Morales*. It must be noted, however, that the polarity between a sage's self and the struggling self is not directly expressed in the text, which features an author and addressee both pursuing moral progress. Her argument would seem more plausible if the discrepancies reflecting the incoherent self stood in contrast to a consistent passage indicative of the sage's coherent self. Moreover, Edwards treats inconsistencies as a literary-philosophical device without considering them in their particular context. This account has difficulties explaining in which cases inconsistencies occur. It would need to be supplemented or even supplanted by an explanation that clarifies what causes particular inconsistencies.

## 1.1 The reception of the philosopher Seneca

15

an explanation for Seneca's divergent beliefs and attitudes in the *Epistulae Morales*.<sup>23</sup>

Though some scholars have seen Seneca's philosophical commitment as shallow and his message as irrelevant, these criticisms have come under attack in a range of scholarly studies and, in a way, this renewed attention is in itself a signal that many scholars have picked up new, exciting ideas and notions from his works.<sup>24</sup> Reassessing the philosophical content of Seneca's writings brings out new questions about his theoretical and practical understanding of philosophy. This last aspect has been brought to the fore especially by those historians of philosophy who call attention to the practical orientation of many ancient philosophers.

### 1.1.2 Directing man's soul and living philosophy

Research in the field of ancient philosophy has tended to focus on the doctrines and dogmas of the ancient philosophers, whereas ancient philosophy's practical orientation has been slow to receive the recognition it deserves. Rabbow's observation that care of the soul was indeed an important component of the Hellenistic and Roman philosophical systems and that (a wide variety of) moral exercises<sup>25</sup> were central to this goal, has generated a growing interest in the practical orientation of ancient philosophy.<sup>26</sup>

Subsequently, others such as Martha Nussbaum, Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot have pursued the role of therapeutic care in ancient schools of philosophy. Pierre Hadot, especially, gave prominence to the conception of (ancient) philosophy as an existential choice that must be lived. In his view, the Hellenistic and Roman schools conceived philosophy as more than just a discipline or profession consisting of merely or mostly a particular set of doctrines, to them it was first and foremost a way of life that is both supported and constituted by philosophical discourse.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Inwood (2007), xv-xvi, discussing Seneca's different roles in his works and life and how these contribute to contradictions and difficulties in understanding him.

<sup>24</sup>It should be noted that a number of recent studies take it as their task to present new approaches to reading Seneca: Bartsch and Wray (2009); Fitch (2008); Inwood (2005); Inwood (2007); Maso (1999); Mazzoli (1989); Reydams-Schils (2005); Schönegg (1999); Volk and Williams (2006).

<sup>25</sup>Rabbow uses the term 'moral exercise' because he considers 'spiritual exercise' only applicable to exercises in the religious domain, see Rabbow (1954), 18. Others, such as P. Hadot and I. Hadot do adopt the term 'spiritual exercise', cf. I. Hadot (1986); P. Hadot (1987).

<sup>26</sup>Numerous authors have taken up this theme over the years. Some scholars focus on ancient philosophy as spiritual guidance and a way of life, e.g., I. Hadot (1969, 1986); P. Hadot (1987); P. Hadot et al. (1990); P. Hadot (1998); Sellars (2003); Long (2006), 25-39. Others examine Hellenistic philosophy as (a form of) therapy of the soul, e.g., Foucault (1990); Voelke and Hadot (1993); Nussbaum (1994); Sorabji (2000); Reydams-Schils (2005) and Graver (1996).

<sup>27</sup>Here I refer to the works of Pierre Hadot that have been translated in English: P. Hadot

Recently, Cooper has called attention to the leading role that Socrates played in the development of philosophy as *ars vitae*.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, his study questions the importance of philosophy as a way of life with regard to earlier philosophies, in particular Presocratic thinking. In addition, the founders and authorities of various philosophical schools, e.g., Epicurus, Zeno of Citium and especially Socrates, earned praise for how they intertwined their philosophical knowledge with their philosophical lifestyle.<sup>29</sup> Philosophy, Hadot writes, should be understood as a life of continuous spiritual exercise:

By this term ['spiritual exercises'], I mean practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation, or intuitive, as in contemplation, but which were all intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practised them.<sup>30</sup>

These spiritual exercises played an important role in the philosophical life and hence it would not be apposite to value an ancient philosopher for (the originality of) his doctrines alone. It should be clear, however, that philosophy cannot be reduced to just these exercises. As John Sellars observes: "If philosophy were simply a series of exercises for the soul, then it would be nothing more than a process of habituation that would not involve the development of a rational understanding of what was being learned".<sup>31</sup> Stoic philosophy required a deep understanding of its rational principles (*logoi, decreta*) as well as practical training (*askēsis, praecepta*) to make these Stoic truths find expression in one's actions.<sup>32</sup> When understood in this manner, the notion of philosophy as a way of life and the importance of providing moral guidance justifies a renewed appreciation of what philosophers had to offer to their audiences. The philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period and Roman Empire are particularly well suited to this approach because these employ a wide variety of exercises to shape and strengthen their students.

Seneca, in fact, encourages spiritual exercises that stimulate self-examination and self-transformation and strongly objects to approaches of philosophy that centre on

(1995a, 1998, 2002). See also Sedley (1989). Long and Sedley (1989), 2, write that the choice for a philosophical school meant embracing a fundamentally different outlook on life.

<sup>28</sup>Cooper (2007). Cf. Hahn (1989), 39.

<sup>29</sup>There are numerous anecdotes of philosophers receiving praise (or blame) for their lives: on Epicurus, see e.g., Diogenes Laertius 10.9, 10.26, 10.138; Seneca *Ep.* 6.6, 66.47. On Zeno of Citium, see e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.6-11, 7.15, 7.27; Seneca *Ep.* 6.6. On Socrates, see e.g., Plato *Phd.* 118a16-17; Xenophon *Mem.* 1.2.1; Seneca *Ep.* 6.6, 64.10, 71.7, 104.21, 104.27-28. Cf. Mansfeld (1994), esp. 179-91, Hadot (2002).

<sup>30</sup>P. Hadot (2002), 6.

<sup>31</sup>Sellars (2003), 116.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Sellars (2003), Ch. 3 'The Stoic Conception of the Art of Living', 55-85.

## 1.1 The reception of the philosopher Seneca

17

textual interpretation and exegesis. Such bookishness, in his view, is a waste of time because it fails to improve lives.<sup>33</sup>

Ilsetraut Hadot has examined Seneca's role in providing care of the soul, *Seelenleitungen*, describing earlier philosophical traditions of directing the soul towards self-formation and happiness and Seneca's adaptation of these thoughts and practices in his own work.<sup>34</sup> Seneca, Hadot argues, first and foremost aimed at being a moral guide and in this respect he did what ancient philosophers were supposed to do: "Ancient philosophy was, above all, help with life's problems and spiritual guidance, and the ancient philosopher was, above all, a spiritual guide."<sup>35</sup>

Hadot asserts that Seneca's practical moral exhortation provides the best background against which we can interpret his work. I believe his self-assumed role of moral teacher and healer of minds is an important part of his authorial self-presentation but this is certainly not his only or most decisive role in the *Epistulae Morales*. Brad Inwood has previously suggested the same point:

It is tempting but unwarranted to assume that virtually all of Seneca's philosophical activity, his interest in theory and argumentation, his concern for understanding the phenomena of the natural and human world and for convincing his readers of what is the case about it, should be approached on the assumption that he is *first and foremost* a spiritual guide, someone whose interests, activity, and methods dominate over the more theoretical aspects of philosophy.<sup>36</sup>

The many-faceted *Epistulae Morales* may not receive the best possible interpretation when considered solely from the view of spiritual guidance.

Consequently, Inwood puts forward a more neutral authorial motivation, namely, "to regard him first and foremost as a man of letters, a *littérateur*, as a writer whose first concern is with his art and audience".<sup>37</sup> Although this provides us with a more general starting point, one cannot help but wonder to what extent this furthers our

<sup>33</sup>An extensive study on Seneca's interest in spiritual exercises is I. Hadot (1969); Teichert (1990), 63 discusses Seneca's view of philosophy as an active life. On his disapproval of those who only partake in philosophy by dwelling on the texts of earlier thinkers without producing something themselves, see *Ep.* 33.8-9. The idea of philosophy as *ars vitae* can be found in numerous passages throughout the *Epistulae Morales*, e.g., *Ep.* 20.1, 87.41, 89.23, and in the more general discussions on philosophy in *Ep.* 94 and 95. See also Epictetus *Diss.* 1.4.3-10, 1.8.6, 3.21.3-4; cf. Long (2002), 45-46, 111.

<sup>34</sup>I. Hadot (1969). John Cooper and Miriam Griffin both follow Ilsetraut Hadot in her view that practical moral exhortation is Seneca's main philosophical preoccupation, cf. Cooper (2004), Ch. 12, esp. 310, 313-14 and Griffin (1976), 3-8, 175.

<sup>35</sup>I. Hadot (1986), 444.

<sup>36</sup>Inwood (2007), xv.

<sup>37</sup>Inwood (2007), xviii.

understanding of Seneca as a philosophical author. Certainly Seneca is concerned with literature, he has written on many topics in several literary genres, yet somehow one would like to have a clearer outline of his motivation. Is this explanation sufficiently receptive to Seneca's choice to write philosophical works? What does Seneca want his art to achieve and his audience to understand? He not only discusses a wide range of philosophical issues, Seneca also compares certain groups, such as philosophers and other professionals (grammarians, orators), the Roman elite and the common crowd, he presents role models and seems keen to position himself and his audience in a wider context. Therefore, I would like to put forward an angle that has not been considered so far and that could be supplementary to work on Seneca's practical orientation and philosophical thinking: to examine the *Epistulae Morales* in the context of cultural identity.

The normative aspects—concerned with what we ought to do—that abound in this work can be connected with certain formative aspects—dealing with who we are. For instance, Seneca's discussion on the origin of culture (*Ep. 90*), his digressions on pedigrees and predecessors (e.g., *Ep. 44, 33, 64* and *108*), the past (e.g., *Ep. 95, 97*) and historical examples (e.g., *Ep. 13, 24, 104*), all serve the purpose of propagating a philosophical identity that can be developed from his audience's Roman identity. This, of course, was a project already started by Cicero.<sup>38</sup> In his *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca does not merely want his readers (and himself) to change, he wants them to change into *Roman philosophers*. To enable this, he needs to outline the cultural commonalities and start from some common ground.<sup>39</sup> His philosophical enterprise has everything to do with the topic of identity and its normative and formative aspects. It would thus be of interest to learn how Seneca represents himself (e.g., as philosopher, Roman, man), how he engages himself with other intellectuals and with other ideas and traditions, and in which traditions he places himself and to what extent he embraces or redefines their influences. Furthermore, he anticipates when and how his intended audience might agree or disagree with him and asks his readers to conform to what is presented as proper and refrain from what is said to be unfitting.

To some extent the theory of cultural identity ties in with the concept of self-fashioning. This term was first coined by Stephen Greenblatt to denote the conscious way in which a person tries to live up to a socially accepted standard.<sup>40</sup> Even though I

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Striker (1995) for Cicero's attempt to raise the status of philosophy in the eyes of his Roman contemporaries.

<sup>39</sup>The notion of Roman philosophers obviously raises the question 'what is meant by Roman philosophers?' In the following sections I will provide a more detailed discussion of this label.

<sup>40</sup>For the notion of cultural self-fashioning, see Greenblatt (1980). Although Greenblatt investigated this process in the art and literature of the Renaissance, it has successfully been applied to other periods and aesthetic mediums. A worthwhile study of Roman self-fashioning is Leach (1990), examining the self-presentation of Pliny the Younger.

## 1.2 A broader context: cultural theory

will refer to processes of self-fashioning, I ultimately find the theory of cultural identity better able to understand the dynamic processes of identity construction, covering not only the process of self-fashioning, but also the ongoing interaction with the cultural standards themselves, which in turn function to guide other group members who adhere to the same standards.

### 1.2 A broader context: cultural theory

This is the mean of which I approve; our life should observe a happy medium between the ways of a sage and the ways of the world at large; all men should admire it, but they should understand it also.

"Well then, shall we act like other men? Shall there be no distinction between ourselves and the world?" Yes, a very great one; let men find that we are unlike the common herd, if they look closely. If they visit us at home, they should admire us, rather than our household appointments.<sup>41</sup>

Seneca wants his audience to know that the way of life he is promoting is not a radical break with all that is familiar to them. At the same time, however, a transformation of the soul will render 'us' no longer like 'the others'. At first sight we should not stand out as it is not our goal to be conspicuous. A closer look, however, should reveal our distinctiveness. Here we see a connection between lifestyle and identity, between who we are, what we do and how others perceive us. Other scholars, such as I. Hadot (1969) and Rabbow (1954), have already detected certain normative aspects in discussing his works and Long (2006) recognises Seneca's use of normative identity.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, recent research has tended to focus not so much on the identity and self-presentation of Seneca and his audience in a more empirical sense as on Seneca's theoretical understanding of concepts such as identity and self.<sup>43</sup> Stoic social philosophy does, in fact, connect the human self and its social relations in an intricate way, principally through the notion of *oikeiōsis*.<sup>44</sup> However, I will focus my attention

<sup>41</sup>Seneca, *Ep. 5.5-6: Hic mihi modus placet: temperetur vita inter bonos mores et publicos; suspiciant omnes vitam nostram sed agnoscant. [6] Quid ergo? eadem faciemus quae ceteri? nihil inter nos et illos intererit?* Plurimum: dissimiles esse nos vulgo sciat qui inspicerit proprius; qui domum intraverit nos potius miretur quam supellectilem nostram. Tr. R. Gummere, Loeb edition.

<sup>42</sup>Of particular interest for our discussion on identity is Rabbow's description of novices experiencing a psychological crisis when exchanging their ordinary life for the life of philosophy and thus exchanging a previous set of norms and values for a new one, 261-63. On normative identity in Seneca, see Long (2006), 366-69.

<sup>43</sup>On ancient philosophical notions of the self, see e.g., Reydams-Schils (2005), Long (2006), Gill (2006), Bartsch and Wray (2009).

<sup>44</sup>I will discuss the Stoic concept of *oikeiōsis* in more detail in Ch. 2, section 5.5.

on the former, on formulating aspects of (group) identity and self-presentation that we can observe in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* so as to gain a fuller understanding of the manner in which he adjusts his presentation of Stoic philosophy to his Roman audience.

In general, group membership stems from socialisation and customs through which belonging and identity are constructed.<sup>45</sup> As a member, one needs to be informed about the social practices, traditions and history which all members of a community share, and know what makes one a member and excludes others. At the same time, one person belongs to a multiplicity of social contexts, e.g., one's family, profession, social class, nationality, ethnicity, political or religious affiliation, each with their own cultural background, past and agenda. Thus, personal identity is a point of convergence between different collective identities that may be more or less dominant. Texts can be very important tools in the assertion and definition of such collective self-images.

Now I will turn to some modern cultural theories relating to cultural memory and cultural identity that will form a theoretical backdrop for assessing the different identities that Seneca portrays in his *Epistulae Morales*. A theoretical understanding of what constitutes identity will enable us to formulate some of the empirical questions that can be examined in Seneca's philosophical work: who are called 'we' and 'others', in what contexts does Seneca affirm a certain identity and for what reasons does he do so?

### **1.2.1 Social memory and cultural identity**

Cultural identity in antiquity has become an increasingly central research theme in classical scholarly literature. These identity studies tend to focus on groups who feel themselves connected through a common ethnicity, religion, geography, language or culture (e.g., early Christians, Jews, Greek culture under Roman rule) and whose self-conceptualisation helps them to position themselves in a wider cultural context and shape their thoughts and lives in a distinct way.<sup>46</sup> The aim of such studies is to explain

<sup>45</sup>J. Assmann (1995b), 125.

<sup>46</sup>To name but a few: J. Assmann (1997) has investigated the normative and formative functions of constitutive texts in several ancient cultures, most notably Egyptian, Jewish and Greek society; Laurence and Berry (1998) study archaeological and historical evidence to explore cultural identities in the Roman Empire, though these studies are mostly concerned with the ways people at the outskirts of the Roman Empire conformed or resisted Romanisation; on Greek culture under imperial Rome, see Goldhill (2001). On Roman modes of thinking about selves and relationships with other peoples (though offering little on Seneca), see now Dench (2005); focusing on the transformations of Rome's society, culture and identity during the first century BC: Wallace-Hadrill (2008). For a critical survey of identity studies in the field of Roman

## 1.2 A broader context: cultural theory

21

those cultural changes and diversities that result from a group's shared self-image and reveal the power dynamics involved in the articulation of a group's identity.

Over the last century, especially during the last decades, a variety of social studies have concentrated on a phenomenon denoted by terms such as 'social memory', 'collective memory' or 'cultural memory'.<sup>47</sup> These terms are all used to address social contexts in which a person's memory, his perception of the past and the construction of his identity are framed. Memories belong to individual persons, but social frames organise and arrange these memories and in turn, particular memories can be constitutive in the self-fashioning of a social group.<sup>48</sup>

Paul Connerton aptly points out how individual and social memory are deeply intertwined: "The narrative of one life is part of an interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity".<sup>49</sup> Memory binds the past to our present concerns and this connection made scholars reflect once more on how we shape our past and how the past constitutes us. This resulted initially in two opposite positions. On the one hand, presentism points out the way the present (re)constructs the past, as set forth by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) with their influential idea of 'invention of tradition'. On the other hand, the past can be perceived as a dynamic force in its own right that actually directs and fixes our present beliefs and perceptions. Both dimensions have to be integrated eventually, for the past comprises both malleable and persistent elements.<sup>50</sup>

Of particular interest to our present study is the role of literary texts as guiding instruments within particular communities. In the words of Thomas Habinek: "literature is ... studied not only as a representation of society, but as an intervention in it as well".<sup>51</sup> Jan Assmann has investigated the normative and formative functions of constitutive texts in several ancient cultures, e.g., in Jewish, Egyptian and Greek culture, and was among the first to introduce the theory of cultural memory and made it cover "all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the inter-

---

archaeology, see Pitts (2007). On the notion of identity as a modern term, see P. Gleason (1983), 910-31.

<sup>47</sup>A good basic introduction with good bibliography is Olick and Robbins (1998), which covers this wide-ranging field of (social) memory studies, describing its historical development, its main definitions and disputes; see also the convenient literary survey by Kirk (2005), who discusses these different terms and their corresponding theories as well. 'Collective memory' is mainly associated with the work of Maurice Halbwachs, 'social memory' with Anglo-American scholarship, whereas 'cultural memory' was first introduced by Aleida and Jan Assmann.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. J. Assmann (1997), 36; Fentress and Wickham (1992), 26.

<sup>49</sup>Connerton (1989), 21. Thus, there is not some sort of collective mind existing disconnected from the individuals who actually remember. This criticism was brought against Maurice Halbwach's use of the term 'collective memory', cf. Olick and Robbins (1998), 109-12.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Olick and Robbins (1998), 128-30; Kirk (2005), 15; Connerton (1989), 103.

<sup>51</sup>Habinek (1998), 3.

active framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation."<sup>52</sup> Some further investigation of Assmann's theory of cultural memory may help us to acquire a better understanding of the normative and formative role texts can have within society.

According to this theory, it is part of the mnemonic culture (*Erinnerungskultur*) to inculcate social frameworks that shape a group member's perception of meaning and time.<sup>53</sup> Being part of a group affects what things are important to remember as well as the way one looks back on them. Collective memory can be distinguished from history in its emphasis on continuity and unity, telling the story of 'us', rather than taking account of differences and discontinuity.<sup>54</sup> The historical consciousness of communities operates on two planes of the past: the recent past—of the last three generations or so—that is still alive in the minds of the living, and the time of origin, carefully preserved as the community's moment of constitution. In between these two planes, there is a 'floating gap', an empty space that extends as time passes by. Only later significant events that mark some kind of new beginning can add new historical peaks.

For instance, many genealogies are attempts to combine these two levels of the past, starting with the great founding figures who are well-remembered, going over lesser known generations, down to the recent past with leading figures whose memories are still fresh. The emperors of the early Roman Empire tried to capitalise on their important immediate predecessors, Julius Caesar and Augustus, who in turn had traced their lineage to Aeneas and the goddess Venus. Thus, genealogies bridge the divide between present times and the time of origin and, through the seamless connection of the two, authenticate present situations and claims for authority.

Collective memory comprises two components, communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory is the informal everyday memory that is communicated between all the group's members. Whether it takes the form of a personal anecdote, graffiti on the wall or just exchanging rumours, these are unorganised communications to which every member can contribute as both speaker and audience. Communicative memory lives in the present and lacks a high degree of cultural formation.

Cultural memory, on the other hand, offers its group the 'concretion of identity' by safekeeping the collective experiences that affirm their shared unity and distinctiveness as a group. In this manner it sets up a horizon of belonging, affirming positively who 'we' are, or negatively, who 'we' are not, who are seen as 'others'.<sup>55</sup> These collec-

<sup>52</sup>J. Assmann (1995b), 126.

<sup>53</sup>J. Assmann (1997), 31.

<sup>54</sup>J. Assmann (1997), 42-44, see also Fentress and Wickham (1992), 88.

<sup>55</sup>J. Assmann (1995b), 128-30. Although Fentress and Wickham speak of social memory, they too note that a social group tends "to reinforce its own social identity in opposition to that of

## 1.2 A broader context: cultural theory

23

tive experiences need to be reconstructed continuously to uphold their significance as normative and formative forces. This reconstruction involves all types of interaction, e.g., reproduction, transformation, evaluation, criticism. The communicative situation of cultural memory is, unlike that of communicative memory, not informal but institutionalised and the domain of specialised experts who can claim cultural authority, e.g., priests, poets, teachers.<sup>56</sup> These bearers of the cultural memory reflect on their community's identity to explain, comment and control the group, look at their members' behaviour (by means of proverbs, maxims) and reflect on their shared self-presentation.<sup>57</sup>

Mnemonic figures (*Erinnerungsfiguren*) are concrete memories about persons, places, material objects or events that have become associated with a symbol or idea, turning them into markers that have special significance to a particular group. For the Romans, such a specific person would be Romulus, such a place the Senate, such an object the fasces, such an event the death of Tarquinius Superbus, marking the end of the monarchy.<sup>58</sup> All of these figures are powerful mnemonic devices that in some way tell Roman citizens who they are. But these mnemonic figures must be reconstructed again and again within the cultural framework of its group, their meaning must be specified and redefined according to changing circumstances.<sup>59</sup>

Authority and memory can intertwine in two ways: first of all, retrospectively, when looking back into the past for a line of descent or parentage that will legitimate authority (e.g., genealogies); and further, prospectively, when men of influence try to leave a legacy that will ensure their lasting renown to future generations (e.g., monuments, literary records).<sup>60</sup> Clearly concerned with the latter is Seneca's promise to Lucilius that owing to his *Epistulae Morales* they will be remembered in the ages to come (*Ep.* 21.5). A negative expression of the connection between power and memory is the *damnatio memoriae*, the removal of all references to a person who no longer fits into the story of his community. A Senecan example of obstructing claims to a particular descent can be found in *Apoc.* 5-6 where it is said that the late emperor Claudius was not a Roman at all: "[H]e was born at the sixteenth milestone from Vienne, a native Gaul. So of course he took Rome, as a good Gaul ought to do."<sup>61</sup> Claudius' place of birth enables Seneca to ascribe to him not merely a Gallic descent but even a Gallic identity and Claudius' 'invasion' of Rome serves as proof.

others", Fentress and Wickham (1992), 114.

<sup>56</sup>J. Assmann (1995b), 131; J. Assmann (1997), 53-55.

<sup>57</sup>J. Assmann (1995b), 132-33.

<sup>58</sup>On Romulus and Roman identity, cf. Dench (2005), esp. 11-25.

<sup>59</sup>J. Assmann (1997), 39-40.

<sup>60</sup>J. Assmann (1997), 70.

<sup>61</sup>Seneca *Apoc.* 6: ... ad sextum decimum lapidem natus est a Vienna, Gallus germanus. Itaque quod Gallum facere oportebat, Romam cepit. Tr. Loeb edition. Cf. Dench (2005), 49, 52-4, 155.

In literate cultures texts play a seminal role in cultural formation. Yet Fentress and Wickham are somewhat sceptical about the pervasive influence of literary works:

"[N]o society is an entirely literate culture, including our own ... and shared memory, whatever its sources, tends to be communicated above all in the area of the oral, through anecdote and gossip, with narrative patterns that can owe as much to oral as to literate tradition".<sup>62</sup>

The oral tradition certainly plays an important role in culture, but that need not limit the influence exerted by a literary tradition. What matters is not merely in what form discussion takes place but also how much weight it carries. Jan Assmann does not focus on the opposition between oral and literate, but rather stresses the distinction between communicative and cultural memory—both of which can be expressed in oral and literate renderings. At the same time, literary mnemonic devices are often part of cultural memory in literate cultures. And cultural memory tends to deploy institutionalisation and authority. In this way, texts are more likely to become deliberate and structural instruments to exert cultural influence.

Writing can transcend everyday communication and certain texts can attain special authority. When this happens, such texts will more often be discussed, copied and cited than others, gaining a classical status. A body of texts can be regarded as a canon, an established and fixed form of tradition of which the content is considered binding within a group, including its normative and formative values.<sup>63</sup>

Canonical texts have two distinctive features. Firstly, canonical texts are fixed, their content cannot be rewritten or adjusted and they demand to be handed down 'to the letter'. Secondly, considering their cultural significance, it is important that their meaning is well understood. These texts find themselves in need of interpretation, giving rise to commentary literature and a tradition of interpretation. Consequently, the distance between primary text and audience increases and an expert interpreter must mediate to reveal the text's message. Thus, the need for duplication and a need for interpretation result in cultivation of text (*Textpflege*) and cultivation of meaning (*Sinnpflege*), respectively.<sup>64</sup>

It may be instructive at this point to compare Assmann's description of cultural identity with a passage from one of Seneca's letters. In *Ep. 24* Lucilius needs to overcome his fear of possible misfortunes by recounting historical examples of men who showed resilience in the face of adversity—men who bravely faced prison, exile, tor-

<sup>62</sup>Fentress and Wickham (1992), 97.

<sup>63</sup>J. Assmann (1997), 92-93.

<sup>64</sup>J. Assmann (1997), 94. Seneca *Ep. 33.8-9* is relevant in this respect as well as it calls upon philosophical students not merely to copy and study the old texts, but really to be philosophers in every aspect of life.

## 1.2 A broader context: cultural theory

25

ture. But Seneca senses that Lucilius may be becoming quite blasé about such examples:

"Oh," say you, "those stories have been droned to death in all the schools; pretty soon, when you reach the topic 'On Despising Death,' you will be telling me about Cato."

But why should I not tell you about Cato, how he read Plato's book on that last glorious night, with a sword laid at his pillow? He had provided these two requisites for his last moments,—the first, that he might have the will to die, and the second, that he might have the means.<sup>65</sup>

Most importantly, this passage plays on the reader's expectations regarding philosophical tradition. Very well, these stories may not be new and neither is the topic, but Seneca insists that his examples are still of great value and he continues to use them. In spite of doctrinal differences, the philosophical schools shared many of their philosophical heroes, most notably Socrates, and used biographical anecdotes to bear witness to their philosophical truths.<sup>66</sup> Cato the Younger's high morals are reflected in the resolute manner he faces death. Furthermore, there is a certain overlap in standard philosophical themes, such as holding death in contempt, a topic that would be discussed by Stoics, Epicureans, Platonists and Cynics alike.

The added details of Cato's death are also of interest. Cato needed only two things to end his life, a tool and encouragement. Plato's book offered him philosophical inspiration.<sup>67</sup> The informed reader would identify this book as Plato's *Phaedo*, describing the death of Socrates in prison.<sup>68</sup> This creates another aspect of continuity: the philosophical theme of disparaging death is exemplified by the courageous suicide of Cato, who finds inspiration in the philosophical work of Plato that narrates another

<sup>65</sup>Seneca *Ep. 24.6*: 'Decantatae' inquis 'in omnibus scholis fabulae istae sunt; iam mihi, cum ad contempnendam mortem ventum fuerit, Catonem narrabis.' Quidni ego narrem ultima illa nocte Platonis librum legentem posito ad caput gladio? Duo haec in rebus extremis instrumenta prospexerat, alterum ut vellet mori, alterum ut posset. Tr. R. Gummere, Loeb edition. Cf. Seneca *Ep. 98.12*.

<sup>66</sup>Diogenes Laertius, for instance, deals with the life and ideas of a philosopher since both attest to his philosophy. Cf. Sellars (2003), Ch. 1.3 'The Philosopher's bios', 21-32. On the example of Socrates in the philosophical tradition, see Döring (1979); on his role in Hellenistic philosophy, see Long (1988).

<sup>67</sup>That reading philosophy could be a source of inspiration is also attested by other examples. In Diogenes Laertius 7.2, Zeno was persuaded to study philosophy after reading about Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*; cf. Themistius *Or. 23.295D* where the same role is fulfilled by Plato's *Apology*. The fact that here Cato finds support in philosophy is in marked contrast with the previous example of the Roman Mucius, "a man of no learning, not primed to face death and pain by any words of wisdom, and equipped only with the courage of a soldier" (24.5).

<sup>68</sup>For the detail that the *Phaedo* gave Cato the Younger the courage to end his life, cf. Florus 2.13.71; Lactantius *Div. inst. 3.18.8-12*.

philosopher's noble death, viz. Socrates. Because a philosopher especially must learn to face death, he will commemorate the deaths of his predecessors and look to them for guidance. Finally, it is Cato, a Stoic philosopher and Roman hero, who can fulfil an exemplary function to both a philosophical and a Roman audience. Because he is a part of both traditions he can incorporate Roman and philosophical values and demonstrate that these can be successfully combined. For this reason, he is Seneca's most favourite example. According to Seneca, Cato is a mnemonic figure who marks a formative moment: he is the founding father of a Roman Stoicism who as 'one of our own' exemplifies the right philosophical way of life.

So far, then, we have suggested that the concepts of cultural memory and cultural identity help to highlight the presence of different backgrounds. Next, it would be of interest to learn more about the coming together of two important cultural identities in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, the philosophical and Roman identity. After the main philosophical schools—Plato's Academy, the Lyceum of Aristotle, Stoa and the Epicurean Garden—had been founded, most philosophers were at least as much an interpreter of the texts and traditions of their own school and discipline as they were thinkers in their own right.<sup>69</sup> By the time philosophy made its way to Rome, it may have seemed innovative to many Romans but in fact it depended on an established and well-advanced tradition. At the same time, Roman culture already had its own traditions and *mores* and the arrival of philosophy, with its strong normative claims and call for a thorough change of life, received a mixed reaction.

### 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

#### 1.3.1 The role of philosophy in Roman education and Roman cultural life

In his *Dialogus de oratoribus* Tacitus describes how in the old days of Rome an orator's audience had marvelled at philosophical observations that were unknown to them, whereas contemporary audiences all seemed familiar with (at least a basic understanding of) philosophy.<sup>70</sup> Philosophy had made its way into the cultural life of imperial Rome. During the second century BC the wars in the east had brought many cultured Greeks to Rome and their learning did not remain unnoticed.<sup>71</sup> Still, it was

<sup>69</sup>The Cynics were an exception to some extent, since they tried to avoid philosophical theory and instead concentrated themselves entirely on lifestyle. Although they evidently were no scholars, they did have their own tradition with Cynical founding figures whose exemplary lives they knew well.

<sup>70</sup>Tacitus, *Dialogus de oratoribus* 19. Cf. Griffin (1989), 5.

<sup>71</sup>Griffin (1989), 2-5; Arnold (1911), Ch. 5 'The Stoic Sect in Rome', 99-127. Arnold also points to the increased Roman contact with intellectual centres such as Pergamum and Rhodes in the

### 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

27

not until a century later that Rome became an intellectual centre in its own right. Philosophy was an important part of the Greek cultural heritage and until the first century BC Athens had been the undisputed centre of philosophical activity, the city where the four main schools (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism) had originated. However, the Mithridatic Wars caused the majority of philosophers (and their libraries) to leave the city, thereby ending Athens's standing as nucleus of the philosophical world. Although the city within decades did recover part of its old reputation, attracting once again (Roman) youths to pursue their studies there, Athens would never regain its philosophical monopoly.<sup>72</sup>

Instead of these few clearly defined institutions, private teachers would set up their own little schools and teach smaller groups of students. The resulting decentralisation of philosophy altered the philosophical profession and led to an increased dependence on (the exegesis of) foundational texts.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, philosophy spread all over the Mediterranean and new centres sprang up in various other cities such as Alexandria—known for its vast library—, Tarsus, Rhodes, and also Rome:

By the mid to late first century BC, Rome had acquired what is probably as strong a claim as any city's to being a hub of Stoic activity. It is often remarked that the value system of patrician Romans made them natural Stoics. Admittedly, we know of surprisingly few Romans in this period who became Stoics, whereas these did include the most celebrated of all the Roman Stoics, Marcus Cato. We actually know of somewhat more late republican Romans who were Antiocheans, New Academics, or even Epicureans, than were Stoics.<sup>74</sup>

David Sedley rightly points out that Stoicism was certainly not the only philosophy to be found in the eternal city. Philosophers of various schools made their way to Rome and helped to enrich the local intellectual landscape.<sup>75</sup> But what did these philosophers do and who were they?

---

<sup>72</sup>On early second century BC, Arnold (1911), 99.

<sup>73</sup>On the decline of Athens as centre of philosophical activity, see Ferrary (1988), 469-71; Sedley (2003), 8; on Romans visiting philosophers in Athens, see Ferrary (1988), 602-607; Rawson (1985), 10-12. On the arrival of Stoicism in Rome see also Arnold (1911), 99-100; on Roman Stoics, Arnold (1911), 100-27. This period in which Greek philosophy adapted itself to the new Roman empire receives full attention in the essays collected in Ioppolo and Sedley (2007). Although several new centres of philosophy emerged, Athens never lost its philosophical standing entirely. For instance, when in the second century AD the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius established four chairs of philosophy to represent the principal schools, he chose their location to be in Athens.

<sup>74</sup>Sedley (2003), 28; Bénatouïl (2006), 421.

<sup>75</sup>Sedley (2003), 30-31.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Ferrary (1988), Rawson (1985), Donini (1982).

Education was the main branch of their professional activities.<sup>76</sup> Around the time Greek influence entered Roman culture, ancient Roman education matured from a basic, practical type of home schooling to a more developed school curriculum. This expansion of subject matter was accompanied by a process of specialisation. Hingley observes that "there had been a shift from a local hereditary Roman elite forming the basis of power and knowledge to a context in which a variety of specialists developed control over increasingly complex and technical fields of information and knowledge".<sup>77</sup> This program of study was inspired by Greek *paideia* and included a form of higher education in subjects such as literature, law, rhetoric and dialectic. Education involved three dominant professional groups: *grammatici*, rhetoricians, and philosophers. After learning to read, write and count in their elementary education, young boys would study Greek and Latin literature (including history) with a grammarian for several years, after which they would move on to more advanced topics under the supervision of specialised teachers, either or both a rhetorician and a philosopher.<sup>78</sup> Teachers of philosophy were mostly Greek, freeborn and cultured men who taught in cities such as Rome or attracted their pupils to travel abroad and come visit them in Greece.<sup>79</sup> Cicero visited Athens in his youth to attend lectures given by various Greek philosophers and sent his son Marcus there to study as well. Athenodorus of Tarsus and Arius Didymus were maintained by Augustus and around Seneca's time it was also possible to study philosophy with teachers in Rome.

The wide range of philosophical teaching was impressive. Philosophy judged itself to be the competent authority to deal with virtually all intellectual endeavours. This is reflected in the widely acknowledged threefold division of philosophical study into ethics, logic and physics.<sup>80</sup> For a single philosopher to master this large area of expertise would require the aid of a well-established tradition to support his claim to knowledge. In the absence of any official institutions of higher learning, there were no formal qualifications that made someone meet the requirements for teaching in general or teaching a particular subject. In the case of philosophy one simply could assert oneself as a teacher and try to attract pupils. Both one's education—preferably with a famous teacher—and the teaching itself would substantiate one's initial claim. Thus, self-presentation, self-promotion and a close connection with an established tradition or famous forerunner carried much weight.

<sup>76</sup>For a comprehensive discussion of the philosophical education in the Roman imperial period see Hadot (2003).

<sup>77</sup>Hingley (2005), 57.

<sup>78</sup>For studies of Roman education in general, see among others Rawson (1985), esp. 9-13, 66; Fantham (1996), 23-31. A focus on the role of philosophy in Roman education may be found, for example, in Hahn (1989), 61-62, Hadot (1984) and the earlier mentioned Hadot (2003).

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Hahn (1989), 148-52; Rawson (1985), 79-83.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.39-41; Seneca *Ep.* 88.24, 89.9; Trapp (2007), 2-13.

## 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

29

Nevertheless, education was not the only aspect of philosophical life. Considerable research has been done on how other disciplines, e.g., grammarians, lawyers, rhetoricians and sophists influenced cultural life in the Roman empire, but little has been said on the role of philosophers in this respect. As pictured by Hahn's study, the influence of philosophers on the cultural life of the Roman Empire was substantial and consolidated by their numerous activities.<sup>81</sup> Some were teachers in the classical sense, with their own group of students and teaching material, others worked as tutors and advisers in the company of an aristocrat and his family, and then there were those who were more like missionary preachers, advocating a radically new lifestyle to the people on the street. The last were almost exclusively Cynics, who made a public display of their open and 'natural' way of life.<sup>82</sup> Hahn also explains that these many forms of exercising philosophy should not be seen as neatly compartmentalised. In reality, several of these aspects could be combined, either simultaneously or throughout a professional career, because philosophy perceived itself more as a lifestyle than as a clearly defined profession.<sup>83</sup> The ideal philosopher would be a teacher, personal guide and role model in one. This professional variety was directly linked to the self-image and the special position philosophers attributed to themselves within the community.

Within the educational curriculum philosophy took a distinctive place. First, it was not merely held to be an advanced subject but philosophical teachers felt that all the other subjects were only preparatory to the pursuit of philosophy. They regarded philosophy as the summit and core of an education directed towards personal development.<sup>84</sup> Second, whereas other subjects trained skills that were aimed at public performance and that could be acquired within a limited amount of time, philosophy presented itself as a lifelong project of personal development that could take place both in public and private life.<sup>85</sup> The art of living, *ars vitae*, was the domain of philosophy and this could not be mastered within a few months or even years.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, not only adolescents required philosophical education, adults also would do well to attend lectures and continue their study.<sup>87</sup> So much so, that Seneca warns

<sup>81</sup>Hahn (1989). His discussion of ancient philosophers as cultural phenomenon has its focus on the period of the second and third century and although he does mention Seneca on occasion, the majority of his evidence comes from later times. For more recent explorations of the role of philosophy in the Roman empire, see Trapp (2007); Ahbel-Rappe (2006).

<sup>82</sup>Cf. Hahn (1989), 61; Trapp (2007), 21-22. On the Cynics and their influence on other philosophies in the Roman Empire, see Manning (1994).

<sup>83</sup>Hahn (1989), 61, 67-68.

<sup>84</sup>Trapp (2007), 18; see also Seneca *Ep. 88*, on the elevated position of philosophy with regard to the liberal arts.

<sup>85</sup>Trapp (2007), 235-36.

<sup>86</sup>Hahn (1989), 39, 54-58; Trapp (2007), 20-21.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 76*, where Seneca attends the lectures of the philosopher Metronax when

Lucilius not to put off his philosophical studies:

The study of philosophy is not to be postponed until you have leisure, but you must be unoccupied so you can practise philosophy; everything else is to be neglected in order that we may attend to this, for no amount of time is long enough for it, even though our lives be prolonged from boyhood to the uttermost bounds of time allotted to man.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, philosophy demanded not merely to be studied, but it stimulated self-examination and a conversion that changed a man's life. Being dedicated to philosophy involved adjustments in lifestyle and the acceptance of new insights and values. Philosophy intentionally tried to differentiate itself both from other professions and other lifestyles.<sup>89</sup>

The popular image of a philosopher was that of a man with unkempt long hair and a beard, dressed in a mere cloak, with a wooden staff and a knapsack as his typical accessories, though in reality only a small number would correspond exactly to this image. But it became a persistent stereotype that would appear in literature, art and in the theatre.<sup>90</sup> This radical and distinctive look was in fact almost solely fashionable among Cynics who would preach out on the street, prominently visible, creating thus the image of the pauper philosopher.<sup>91</sup> The most common feature of the philosopher was his beard, a sign of wisdom, virtue and distinction. It became such a powerful visual marker and part of the self-image of philosophers that some felt the need to warn outsiders that merely wearing a beard or long hair does not make one virtuous or wise.<sup>92</sup>

visiting Naples. See also Hahn (1989), 62, 93.

<sup>88</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 72.3: *Non cum vacaveris philosophandum est, sed ut philosopheri vacandum est; omnia alia neglegenda ut huic assideamus, cui nullum tempus satis magnum est, etiam si a pueritia usque ad longissimos humani aevi terminos vita producitur.* Tr. R. Gummere, Loeb edition, with minor adjustments.

<sup>89</sup>On the differentiation between philosophers and other professions, cf. Hahn (1989), 48-51; Trapp (2007), 23-28; on that between philosophers and the remainder of the population, cf. Hahn (1989), 33-41; Trapp (2007), 22-23. On the training of new habits and unlearning others in philosophical development, see Seneca *Ep.* 50.7; Teichert (1990), 64.

<sup>90</sup>On the popular image of the philosopher see Hahn (1989), 33-34, for the depiction of philosophers in visual art, see Zanker (1995), esp. Ch. 3.

<sup>91</sup>Manning (1994), 4995-96.

<sup>92</sup>Cf. Sellars (2003), Ch. 1.1 'The Philosopher's Beard', 15-20. For instance, Dio Chrysostom explains in *Orat.* 35.2-3 and 35.11 that long hair is not in itself an indication of virtue; Epictetus claims in *Diss.* 1.2.28 that he will not take off his beard because he is a philosopher; in another passage, (*SVF I* 51) *Diss.* 4.8.12, he warns that it is not wearing a cloak that should matter to a philosopher but what his doctrines are and how he applies those. Philosophical questions should deal with the understanding of doctrines rather than with attaining a philosophical

### 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

31

Although the stereotype turns out not to be very lifelike, some of philosophy's defining characteristics find expression in the image of the philosopher. It depicts someone whose simplicity reflects how little is needed for happiness, someone who is independent of externals and someone whose important message supersedes his looks. Perhaps most importantly, the image portrays the philosopher as *magister artis vitae*, a master of living well whose lifestyle conforms to his teaching. His image and what it stood for made the philosopher stand out from the rest of the crowd, placing him in a position to question and comment upon the lifestyles of others.<sup>93</sup>

Michael Trapp draws attention to the importance of a philosophical tradition with its own image, mores, practices and authoritative figures. Philosophers made the choice, *hairesis*, to commit themselves to one particular school, upholding and defending their school's beliefs and attacking rival views.<sup>94</sup> Competition and disputes between different schools were widespread and even within the schools opinions were not always shared. Discussion was inherent to philosophy and philosophical disagreement had become a cultural *topos*.<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, some were more open-minded about the value of views and methods of other schools, whereas several philosophers even tried to merge doctrines of separate schools into a more unifying perspective, still acting in the name of a long-standing tradition or authority.<sup>96</sup> David Sedley asserts that the significance of philosophical allegiance and the need for canonisation and authority is characteristic of this period: "Under the Roman Empire the large centralized schools gave way to individualized teachers with their small groups of adherents, but the role of loyalty to scriptures remained integral to the philosophical enterprise".<sup>97</sup> In every major school we can encounter reverence for ancient texts, the veneration of founding figures, and the need to fit predecessors into a genealogical pattern.<sup>98</sup>

Although Hahn, Trapp and Sedley do not discuss their observations against the backdrop of a more theoretical framework, I believe my earlier outlined account of

---

hairdo. Seneca warns in *Ep.* 5.2-3 that the stereotypical image of the scruffy and hairy philosopher might ward off others; he speaks of the philosopher's external appearance in *Ep.* 14.15 and 103.5; also, in *Ep.* 48.7 he makes a witty reference to the philosopher's beard.

<sup>93</sup>Cf. Hahn (1989), 40-41.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. e.g., Diogenes Laertius 1.17-21; Sextus Pyr. 1.1-17; Lucian *Hermot.* 15-18; Trapp (2007), 14-15. See also the polemical writings against rival schools of philosophy, e.g., Cleanthes' *Against Democritus* and *Against Aristarchus*, Diogenes Laertius 7.174; Sphaerius' *Against Atoms and Images*, Diogenes Laertius 7.178; Chrysippus' *Reply to the Method of Arcesilaus*, Diogenes Laertius 7.198; Plutarch wrote against the Stoics, e.g., *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* or *De Stoicorum repugnantiis*, and against the Epicureans, e.g., *Against Colotes* or *Adversus Colotem*.

<sup>95</sup>Hahn (1989), 109-10.

<sup>96</sup>Trapp (2007), 13-18.

<sup>97</sup>Sedley (1989), 100.

<sup>98</sup>Cf. Sedley (1989), 97-103, 117-18.

cultural identity adds a wider perspective to the phenomena they have described. The need to distinguish themselves as a group and not become too dispersed (especially after the decentralisation) made philosophers evoke their own distinctive past, embrace authoritative figures, select a philosophical canon of texts and define their special position. All these tendencies indicate the pressing need to build a philosophical identity by addressing normative and formative concerns and to ensure an ongoing philosophical tradition.

Naturally, the ambitious claims of philosophy to a privileged role in both education and the welfare of the community led to rivalry and conflicts with certain other professions, especially rhetoric. These professions challenged the philosophical claims, questioning the importance of philosophy and underscoring their own contributions. Rhetoricians believed their branch of study offered all the necessary instruction required to produce good men and citizens. Simultaneously, however, both rhetoricians and philosophers would try to appropriate texts, approaches and lessons from one another's field, claiming them as their own.<sup>99</sup> This could create confusion about who exactly were philosophers. As we have seen, there were no clear-cut boundaries between different professions and the label 'philosopher' could be applied to all sorts of people. Seneca himself often uses professional labels such as 'doctors' or 'athletes' in a general sense to denote those persons who are engaged in activities associated with that profession and who share the common assumptions and interests of the profession. Men like Dio Chrysostom or Apuleius who seemed to use philosophical topics for their own purposes, could be regarded by some philosophers as pseudo-enlightened figures who falsely associated themselves with the profession. But they would probably have been looked upon as philosophers by most people.<sup>100</sup> Here too, it was necessary to identify genuine philosophy and its true followers.

Not only other professions had reservations about philosophy and its self-perceived role in education and the community. There was a significant difference of opinion amongst Romans as well whether to embrace or reject philosophy. Despite the fact that philosophy increasingly became a part of Roman culture, some Romans would continue to follow it with a critical eye.

<sup>99</sup>On the interaction and exchange between philosophy and rhetoric, see Rawson (1985), 142-45; Hahn (1989), 46-53, 64, 86-87; Trapp (2007), 249-51.

<sup>100</sup>Trapp (2007), 23-27.

### 1.3.2 The Roman attitude towards Greek philosophy

The Roman attitude towards Greek culture in general and philosophy in particular was characterised by various degrees of ambivalence.<sup>101</sup> E.S. Gruen indicates that the Roman interest in Greek culture was pragmatic: "Romans took care from the outset to project the primacy of their own interests and the subordination of Hellenism to national goals".<sup>102</sup> This reflects a generally held belief among the mid- and late-republican Romans that Hellenic culture was both a powerful tool and worthy of appreciation, if not on its own account then certainly for the improvement and sophistication of their own Roman traditions. As a result, influence moved in two directions as philosophy further penetrated Roman culture and Romans tried to appropriate philosophy.<sup>103</sup>

But philosophy and its representatives faced further difficulties in securing an established place in Roman culture that went beyond its Greek descent. It was under debate to what extent philosophy could and did conform to Roman societal expectations and ideals. Trapp observes that there was "both an element of contact with contemporary elite notions of proper life-paths and worthwhile achievement, and sufficient divergences to make thoughts of unease and tension between outlooks entirely realistic".<sup>104</sup>

A serious objection to philosophy was that it seemed to imply criticism of the Roman value system and Roman way of life. Roman moral values were founded on the adherence to the *mos maiorum*, the ways of the great forefathers of Rome. Cautious about anything that would call into question ancient Roman practices and values, many Romans (e.g., Cato the Elder) opposed the idea of educating younger generations with these foreign ideas. Critical Romans disapproved of philosophy's unclear social status and its self-proclaimed goals in life, accusing philosophy especially of having a negative influence on public life and politics.

Roman unease ensued from philosophy's strong claims about its position in society and its assertion that its presence was needed in education, in public life and at home.<sup>105</sup> There had not been a Roman equivalent to such a position and philosophy would not let itself be forced into any existing role within the Roman hierarchy. At

<sup>101</sup>On the ambiguous Roman republican attitude toward Greek culture, cf. Rawson (1985), Ferrary (1988), Henrichs (1995) and MacMullen (1991). E.S. Gruen sees a fair degree of consistency in the Roman attitude toward the cultural life of Greece, cf. Gruen (1992), Ch. 6. On the aristocratic response to Greek philosophy during the early Republic in particular, see Jocelyn (1977).

<sup>102</sup>Gruen (1992), 270. See also Hahn (1989), 61-66.

<sup>103</sup>Cf. Sedley (2003), 30-31; Griffin (1989), 12-18.

<sup>104</sup>Trapp (2007), 234.

<sup>105</sup>See my earlier description of the wide professional variety of philosophy in Ch. 1, section 3.1.

the same time, its teachings were often directly at odds with Roman elite culture. It seemed inherent to philosophy to stand out against public opinion and stress its different outlook on the world. For instance, there was a marked contrast between the goals and ambitions of the philosophical life compared to elite notions of success and well-being.<sup>106</sup> Philosophy attended not so much to outward display or reputation as to one's moral development. It viewed success in terms of a profound conversion to make progress toward inner strength and virtuous character. In the opinion of Roman aristocrats, success and happiness were publicly visible and could be compared and competed for.<sup>107</sup> Prestige, fame, wealth and public careers allowed a member of the Roman nobility to display his success for everyone to see. In other professional fields too, success was understood in terms of reward, fame and (canonical) status.<sup>108</sup>

Their opposing views about the good life made Romans wary of philosophy's opinion of and influence on public life and politics. Philosophy could be regarded as a bad influence in three ways.<sup>109</sup> Firstly, the pursuit of philosophy could become more than a leisure activity, eventually substituting a public career. Philosophers who endorsed a contemplative life were accused of luring Roman noblemen away from public life. Secondly, philosophy was said to make men defiant and resist the authorities, the most common example being the philosophical opposition in the Senate to the first-century emperors. However, it can be questioned to what extent it were indeed philosophical motivations that played a pivotal role in making the decision to oppose an emperor such as Nero. Scholars such as Griffin and Trapp have pointed out how other, social and political, considerations would certainly have been at play.<sup>110</sup> In fact, Griffin stresses that ancient philosophical theory often did not provide a conclusive, practical outcome in such cases, but that it did offer a more sophisticated language for phrasing and making such decisions:

The doctrines of the dogmatic sects were too complex to provide definite directives on particular occasions. But they provided the moral vocabulary for weighing alternatives and justifying decisions. To write or speak in philosophical terms, even insincerely, is to think in those terms. Philosophy thus played an important role in a society where religion had little metaphysics and less ethics.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>106</sup>On Seneca's attempts to bring together philosophical and traditional Roman notions of accomplishment, cf. Habinek (2000); Habinek (1998), Ch. 7 'An Aristocracy of Virtue', 137-50; Newman (2008). Glory based on virtue became a different matter.

<sup>107</sup>Cf. M. Gleason (1999), 68-69.

<sup>108</sup>Trapp (2007), 236.

<sup>109</sup>Cf. Griffin (1989), 20-21.

<sup>110</sup>Cf. Griffin (1989); Trapp (2007), 226-28.

<sup>111</sup>Griffin (1989), 36-37.

### 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

35

Philosophy offered a normative framework for making moral decisions.<sup>112</sup> But thinking in philosophical terms could be used both to support and resist authority. Thirdly, philosophy supposedly taught doctrines that were not designed to be carried out in public life and, as a result, would fail to prepare public officials for performing their public duties. Obviously, many philosophers tried to counter these accusations, either by proving them to be false, or by showing these issues to be irrelevant to a philosophical lifestyle.

Besides serious criticism, Greek philosophy also encountered some 'postured' criticism, often combined with xenophobic remarks, intended to provide a marked contrast to the supposedly more pertinent and practical approach of the Romans.<sup>113</sup> Greek philosophers were accused of wasting their time on puzzles instead of focusing on the real issues and of writing in a tedious and dry style that could not captivate an audience. Yet, these comments were not so much meant to 'silence' philosophy as clear the way for Romans to distinguish themselves with their own philosophical contributions and to showcase that they would not follow philosophy blindly.

At the same time, there were also positive responses. Around the time of Scipio Aemilianus, a number of Roman aristocrats embraced a wide variety of Greek learning and came into contact with several scholars and philosophers, including the Stoic Panaetius.<sup>114</sup> Later, Cato the Younger, the Epicurean poet Lucretius and especially Cicero played an important role in conveying that philosophy could in fact reinforce Roman values.<sup>115</sup> Of course, these Romans stressed the points of contact between Roman culture and philosophy rather than the (perceived) differences. Both philosophy and the Roman elite viewed human life as a course that curved upwards along several stages of achievement to a top available only to a limited few. Moreover, many philosophical virtues were central to the Roman tradition. For instance, Roman *gravitas* coincided with the philosophical emphasis on dignity and self-restraint and both favoured a manly demeanour.<sup>116</sup> The best way to make philosophy acceptable was to show how philosophical life accorded with the values of great figures from Roman history. For example, the simple life advocated by ethical principles coincided with the frugality of such early Roman heroes as Curius Dentatus and Cincinnatus; the philosopher's determination and strength of character resembled that of Mucius

<sup>112</sup>Cf. J. Assmann (1997), 142, where one of the main functions of normative texts is described as learning how to judge and make decisions correctly.

<sup>113</sup>Cf. Inwood (1995), 72-73. See e.g., Seneca *Ben.* 1.4.1.

<sup>114</sup>Some scholars have raised doubts about the Scipionic circle, questioning to what extent there actually was a distinct literary circle that revolved around Scipio Aemilianus, cf. Astin (1967), 294-306; Zetzel (1972), 173-79. Cf. Cicero *Amic.* 69.

<sup>115</sup>On Cicero's project of adapting Greek philosophy to a Roman audience, see Striker (1995).

<sup>116</sup>For a discussion of Roman elite male identity see M. Gleason (1999) and M. Gleason (1995). Cf. Trapp (2007), 235.

Scaevola and, of course, Cato the Younger, who was both Roman and philosopher. The latter provided a most valuable example of how one could combine a philosophical way of life with being Roman.

In the early Imperial period quite a number of literary works, e.g., by Horace, Ovid and Virgil, employed philosophical ideas and presented these in a more inviting form tailored to cultured minds.<sup>117</sup> The Sextian school, with Pythagorean and Stoic leanings, originated in Rome and was founded by Quintus Sextius the Elder during the reign of Augustus. That the school of Sextius was short-lived is already testified by Seneca himself.<sup>118</sup> In general, the label 'philosopher' had the positive connotations of being composed and knowledgeable. Philosophical works were recommended in reading lists and these works were widely available. Furthermore, we find philosophers represented in art and named in inscriptions.<sup>119</sup>

The claims of philosophy to teach mankind, preferably by example, led to high expectations. Moreover, there were all sorts of writings on the lives and habits of philosophers and these enhanced the image of philosophers as venerated cultural heroes, exemplary sages whose words and actions deserve attention. At the same time, these expectations served as a standard against which new philosophers should be assessed. As a result, some philosophers were considered worthy of praise, whereas others who failed to measure up to expectations were classified as impostors and met with disapproval and ridicule.<sup>120</sup> The worst crime philosophers could commit was to misrepresent themselves and not live in accordance with their teaching, whether by living a luxurious and corrupted lifestyle, by displaying (uncontrolled) emotions or by showing other immoral behaviour.<sup>121</sup> This critical attitude reflects the high expectations people held about philosophers and the moral task they had set themselves.

So far, we have discussed philosophers as professionals and these were mostly Greeks. In addition, those Roman aristocrats who engaged in philosophical study would call themselves Stoics, Academics or Epicureans, yet regard themselves ad-

<sup>117</sup>For the employment of philosophical themes in Latin literature one can think of Horace's *Epistles* and *Satires*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, esp. book 15 with a philosophical lecture by Pythagoras, and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Cf. Trapp (2007), 254-56.

<sup>118</sup>Seneca NQ 7.32.2; cf. *Ep.* 59.7, 64.1-2. Cf. Griffin (1976), 37; Morford (2002), 133-34.

<sup>119</sup>Trapp (2007), 245-49; on philosophers in art, cf. Zanker (1995); on philosophers named in inscriptions, cf. Hahn (1989), 149.

<sup>120</sup>The Cynic Demetrius, for instance, was praised by Seneca for his philosophical lifestyle (*Ben.* 7.1.3, 7.8.2; *Ep.* 20.9, 62.3, 67.14, 91.19), but criticised by Tacitus (*Hist.* 4.40.3) and Cassius Dio (66.13.1-2); cf. Billerbeck (1979), 18-20, 44-50; Hahn (1989), 24-25. In *Ep.* 29.6-7 Seneca records the criticism of practising philosophy superficially brought against a certain Aristo, the philosopher of Marcus Lepidus.

<sup>121</sup>Cf. the examples in Seneca *Ep.* 29.5-7, 52.15.

### 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

37

herents of philosophy rather than teachers or professional philosophers.<sup>122</sup> In the eyes of Roman nobility, philosophy, like other types of intellectual study, was either pursued for its contribution to state affairs and public life or as an appropriate form of *otium*. But to spend a considerable part or even the majority of one's time to intellectual pursuits, i.e. *otium*, was considered unsuitable for Roman *nobiles*.<sup>123</sup> However, for the elderly Roman who had retired after a public career, intellectual studies and writing were deemed a proper and useful way to spend one's time. He would not give public lectures but converse with friends on philosophical questions in the privacy of his home and turn some of those thoughts into writing.

All in all, philosophy gradually succeeded in obtaining a place for itself in Roman cultural life. Philosophy was incorporated into the educational curriculum and became a part of the knowledge that young Romans were expected to develop. In addition, quite a few members of the Roman elite would study philosophy in their spare time and would attract a Greek philosopher to be a member of their household. At the same time, philosophy was never entirely in the clear. Few Romans would be comfortable calling themselves a philosopher in the professional sense of the word. With its immodest claims to knowing right from wrong and its outspoken attitude, philosophy could still seem very foreign to many Romans.

#### 1.3.3 Seneca's intellectual formation, career and philosophy

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in c. 4 BC as the second son of Helvia and Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a wealthy and cultured equestrian of Corduba in Spain. Seneca the Elder saw to it that his sons received their education in Rome. There, young Seneca was sent to a *grammaticus* where he was taught Greek and Latin poetry, history and various aspects of language. He then probably continued his studies with one or two teachers of rhetoric to practise his eloquence in both speech and writing. In addition, education involved attending the lectures of specialists at Rome or travelling abroad to such renowned centres of learning as Athens or Rhodes. Seneca, however, does not appear to have visited Greece.<sup>124</sup>

Brad Inwood draws a comparison between Seneca's formative years and those of Cicero, about a century before. He presents a persuasive case that there were important dissimilarities that made Seneca's philosophical milieu notably different.<sup>125</sup> The

<sup>122</sup>Cf. Hahn (1989), 61-67.

<sup>123</sup>Cf. Rawson (1985), 38.

<sup>124</sup>I am dependent here on Griffin (1976), which is still the most important biography on Seneca. For Seneca's education, see Griffin (1976), 36-40, in *Ep.* 58.5 Seneca recounts attending a *grammaticus*.

<sup>125</sup>Inwood (1995).

philosophical scene itself witnessed several major changes, Inwood notes in particular:

... the decline of Academic scepticism and revival of dogmatic Platonism, the Andronican 'edition' of Aristotle's works and the consequent Peripatetic revival; the founding or refounding of Pyrrhonian scepticism. The one school with respect to which little seems to have changed was Epicureanism.<sup>126</sup>

Cicero had studied in Athens, the philosophical centre at the time, whereas Seneca stayed in Rome where Latin, at least in some circles, had become a more common language for expressing philosophical ideas. By this time it was common for philosophers either to attach themselves to individual aristocratic households or work in independently organised schools. It is plausible that Seneca received at least part of his philosophical training in a home environment.

At Rome, Seneca developed an early interest in philosophy, kindled by the lectures of Papirius Fabianus who was a family friend. This Roman declaimer, highly regarded by both Seneca and his father, was well-versed in rhetoric as well as philosophy. Fabianus was a Roman equestrian who wrote extensively on philosophical topics in Latin and this may have helped Seneca to perceive philosophy as something not intrinsically Greek.<sup>127</sup> Inwood concludes that "Seneca's generation was the first to grow up with such committed philosophers, working in Latin, available as role models".<sup>128</sup> He was an adherent of the school of the Sextii, the first philosophical school of Roman origin. Its founder, Q. Sextius, had propounded what Seneca called a Roman type of philosophy even though he wrote his works in Greek.<sup>129</sup> Its main characteristics included a pragmatic approach, scorn of dialectic, belief in the immortality of the soul and an ascetic lifestyle. Seneca also attended the lectures of another Sextian, the Egyptian philosopher Sotion. In addition, there was the lasting influence of Attalus, who instructed Seneca in the doctrines and practices of Stoic philosophy.<sup>130</sup> Later in life, acquaintance with the Cynic Demetrius would have a considerable impact on Seneca as well. Although these Sextians, Stoics and Cynics came from separate schools, they all shared an interest in an ascetic lifestyle and the use of paraenetic elements—ethical concerns expressed through persuasive eloquence and illustrative

<sup>126</sup>Inwood (1995), 71. More extensive discussion of philosophical schools and individual philosophers of the period may be found, for example, in André (1987), but see also Griffin (1989), 5-11; Sedley (1989); Manning (1994); Rawson (1985), Ch. 5, 79-83, and Ch. 19.

<sup>127</sup>Inwood (1995), 67.

<sup>128</sup>Inwood (1995), 66.

<sup>129</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 59.7.

<sup>130</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 108.3.

## 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

39

imagery—, aspects which we also find in Seneca's philosophical works.<sup>131</sup> C.E. Manning observes how Stoicism and Cynicism in the time of Seneca are much closer than they were in Cicero's days.<sup>132</sup> The interest of Stoics and Sextians in ethical concerns was supplemented with work on other topics, especially physics.<sup>133</sup>

Seneca's political career took a slow start, either from ill health, lack of interest in politics or a combination of both. During Gaius' reign his oratorical skills were already well-known. In 41 he was charged with adultery and sent into exile to Corsica, only to be recalled in 49 at the instigation of Agrippina, wife of emperor Claudius and mother of Nero. He returned to Rome, where he assumed the position of tutor of young Nero. He then was appointed senator and even became suffect consul for part of 56.<sup>134</sup> As is well-known, Seneca became one of Nero's chief advisers. In the later period of Nero's reign Seneca's influence diminished and in early 62 he made his first retirement request. Nero refused this and denied a second request to abandon public life in 64.<sup>135</sup> Seneca did, however, limit his public activities after his initial request and in the end locked himself up in his own quarters where he spent the remainder of his life, up to his suicide in 65.<sup>136</sup> Throughout his career he had continued to write philosophy, writing most of his works in exile and during his life in retirement (62-65).

We have seen that philosophy could be practised professionally—as a teacher, adviser and as a missionary preacher—or non-professionally. In the *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca mentions the activities of contemporary philosophers like Metronax, Demetrius and Papirius Fabianus, attesting to the variety in philosophical vocation. Metronax is portrayed as a teacher who holds public lectures, the Cynic Demetrius ostensibly lives a simple life while advising upper-class Romans, whereas the Sextian Fabianus combines rhetoric with philosophy in his teaching and writing. Seneca visits Metronax, he admires and speaks with Demetrius and recalls being taught by Fabianus, yet his own position does not correspond to that of one of them. The main difference seems to be that Seneca does not consider himself a 'professional', even though philosophy takes up much, and at the end of his life even most, of his time. It would be wrong to conclude that this makes his works amateurish. It rather

<sup>131</sup>Cf. Manning (1994), 4998-5012; Tietze Larson (1992), 51-56. Besides these local influences young Seneca is likely to have been exposed to rhetoric and eloquence through his father.

<sup>132</sup>Manning (1994), 5000, and on the Cynic revival, 5007-12.

<sup>133</sup>Recently, scholars have come to question the supposed dominance of ethics in philosophical works of the early Roman empire. Authors such as Cornutus, Seneca and Cleomedes wrote on a wide variety of topics that exceeded the scope of ethics. E.g., Gill (2003), 38-40; Trapp (2007), 11; Inwood (2005), 12-15.

<sup>134</sup>Griffin (1976), 51-73.

<sup>135</sup>Cf. Tacitus *Ann.* 14.53-56, 15.45.3; Suetonius *Nero* 35.5.

<sup>136</sup>Griffin (1976), 76, 93-94, 357-58, 362, 367.

suggests that he does not associate himself with philosophers out on the streets nor that he considers himself a teacher who instructs the outlines of Stoicism in a more traditional educational setting.

Seneca frequently refers to his own intellectual activities in the *Epistulae Morales* and this may help to further elucidate his philosophical self-image.<sup>137</sup> These activities include the reading of philosophical works as well as other forms of literature. Seneca considers reading a very useful pastime that informs and helps to develop one's own reflections.<sup>138</sup> Self-reflection and inner-monologue are important steps towards progress.<sup>139</sup> In addition, writing down one's own ideas is instrumental in the development of oneself and others.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, philosophical conversations with friends provide an opportunity to discuss philosophical works or problems in a social context.<sup>141</sup> Finally, Seneca educates himself further by attending lectures of other philosophers and in his contact with others tries to improve those as well.<sup>142</sup> Seneca presents himself more as a serious private philosopher, who has philosophical conversations with like-minded friends and who converts his studies into philosophical treatises that reflect his knowledge and experience. These works, however, are intended for publication and his 'private' efforts are written for a wider audience. It should be noted that his activities are manifold and perceived by Seneca as an interconnected cluster. Knowledge must be acquired and shared, personal progress is tied to an effort to improve others, those who teach can still learn in the process. Thus, in *Ep. 89.23* we can see this combination of activities when Seneca advises Lucilius:

Talk in this way to other men—provided that while you talk you also lis-

<sup>137</sup> On the different types of teaching in the *Epistulae Morales*, cf. Griffin (2007), 89-113, esp. 89-95.

<sup>138</sup> On reading in Seneca, see Graver (1996), especially Ch. 2 (46-90), Ch. 3 (91-136), and Ch. 5 (179-201). Seneca frequently refers to his own reading (*Ep. 2.5, 3.6, 8.7, 46, 51.1, 59.7, 65.1, 83.3, 84.1-2, 93.1, 117.23*) and to reading practices he endorses (e.g., *Ep. 2* and *84*).

<sup>139</sup> See, for example *Ep. 8.6* and *27.1*.

<sup>140</sup> Of course, by implication all of his written works attest to his writing practice. Explicit references to his own writing can be found in *Ep. 39.1, 86.1* and *108.1*.

<sup>141</sup> A conversation often serves as point of departure for further discussion in a letter, as is the case in *Ep. 11.1* and *30*. In *Ep. 62.3* Seneca recalls talking to the befriended philosopher Demetrius, in *Ep. 64.1* Seneca and some friends have a book by Sextius read to them during dinner and in *Ep. 65* Lucilius receives a full report on an earlier philosophical discussion. On top of that, in *Ep. 66* Seneca has within the context of a few days several conversations with his former schoolmate Claranus.

<sup>142</sup> In *Ep. 76.1* Seneca recounts his visits to the lectures of the philosopher Metronax and in *Ep. 100.12* he remembers attending the classes of Fabianus and in *Ep. 108* the teachings of his former masters, Sotion and Attalus. On his attempt to improve others, there are general remarks to be found in *Ep. 5.3* and *7.8*. A special case is *Ep. 29* where Seneca attempts to improve a mutual friend, Marcellinus.

### 1.3 Philosophy in Rome

41

ten; write in this way—provided that while you write you read, remembering that everything you hear or read, is to be applied to conduct, and to the alleviation of passion's fury. Study, not in order to add anything to your knowledge, but to make your knowledge better.<sup>143</sup>

A major factor that has shaped Seneca as a philosopher is his upper-class background and the way he connects this to his Stoic philosophy. Unlike Demetrius or Metronax, Seneca is not merely introduced to Roman elite circles, he is already a part of them. What is more, he identifies himself with the upper echelons of Roman society and commits himself to what he perceives as an upper-class Roman lifestyle. In this respect, the philosophising Roman nobleman Fabianus was more of an example to him. Moreover, both were prolific writers. Writing was a common activity among Roman *nobles* and many topics were suited to display one's learning and refinement. Seneca performs philosophy through conversation and in written form, choices which are acceptable in both the philosophical and Roman aristocratic tradition. Although Seneca frequently recommends lifestyle adjustments to make upper-class life more in agreement with a philosophical way of life, abandoning these privileged social circumstances is uncalled for because, in his opinion, the philosophical and upper-class lifestyles need not be incompatible. Hence, it is part of his project to substantiate this and show the value of philosophy, and Stoicism especially, to the Roman elite that forms his audience.

Just as philosophers operated in a variety of contexts so would their writings be adjusted to different situations. In a discussion of the different nature of several Stoic texts, Christopher Gill distinguishes between:

[1] formal exposition of Stoic texts in a curricular context; and [2] public lectures, speeches, or discussions based on Stoic doctrines but formulated in non-technical style, with audiences or participants who are not necessarily adherents of Stoicism.<sup>144</sup>

Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* correspond best to the second category. Accordingly, his writings are not meant as clear and balanced expositions of Stoic theory but rather as a popular medium to address concerns that interest his Roman audience from his own Stoic-philosophical perspective. At the same time, the above qualification does not prevent Seneca from discussing technical problems and details that would seem to be beyond the grasp of a novice.

<sup>143</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 89.23: *Haec aliis dic, ut dum dicis audias ipse, scribe, ut dum scribis legas, omnia ad mores et ad sedandam rabiem affectuum referens. Stude, non ut plus aliquid scias, sed ut melius.* Tr. R. Gummere, Loeb edition.

<sup>144</sup>Gill (2003), 36-38.

To recapitulate the argument of this chapter: to appreciate fully Seneca's project in the *Epistulae Morales* we must examine Seneca's cultural identity and the ways in which he tries to convey it to his audience. The historical reception of Seneca's philosophical contribution shows the various ways in which his philosophical work has been appraised, while at the same time highlighting the portrayal of Seneca as a moralist who fervently advocates a Stoic lifestyle in a distinct, eloquent literary style. Also, the growing interest in the practical orientation of ancient philosophy has helped to underline philosophy's task of imparting a transformational way of life to its followers. This attitude towards philosophy is best understood against the background of cultural theory, as presented by Jan Assmann. The related concepts of cultural identity and cultural memory have made us mindful of how self-identification with a particular group shapes one's perception of the world and of oneself in normative and formative ways. The examination of the role of philosophy in Roman cultural life provided us with the social context in which Seneca positions himself as a member of the philosophical tradition, but in such a way that it does not alienate him from his Roman roots. The topic of Seneca's cultural identity will receive further attention in the following chapter, where we will investigate the manner in which Seneca puts his forerunners' writings to use within the framework of his own work.

## Chapter 2

# The *Epistulae Morales* in their literary context

To place the *Epistulae Morales* in their literary context I will start with a brief introduction to the concept of intertextuality before exploring how such a concept can be of service in the case of the *Epistulae Morales*. In particular, I will focus on how intertextual relations bring together author, reader, text and context and how this communicative process relates to the cultural identity approach introduced in the previous chapter. In the next section I will look more closely at different aspects of the epistolary form, Seneca's use of earlier models and why Seneca chose to write letters. In the third section the role of author, addressee and audience will be studied further. Finally, my focus for the remainder of this chapter will be on the five main roles or identities that appear in the *Epistulae Morales*, namely humans, Romans, the upper-class, philosophers and Stoics.

### 2.1 Intertextuality

#### 2.1.1 Intertextuality as a theoretical concept

The *Epistulae Morales* only have two main characters, the author Seneca and the addressee Lucilius. At first glance, the limited cast and the absence of great adventures may seem to offer only a small fictional universe, quite detached from the outside world. In a way this is true: the letters just exchange the day-to-day routine of Seneca and Lucilius and what they have on their minds. However, alongside the personal interaction between the two of them, the text actively engages in a range of dialogues and discourses. What happens in the outside world is not the direct focus of

the letters—Seneca does not care to discuss political news, business details or family events—but through the shared pursuit of philosophical transformation these letters do reflect on many aspects of daily life and culture.<sup>1</sup> In the *Epistulae Morales* we do not merely hear from the sender and addressee, but from a plurality of voices. This presence of multiple, distinct voices within a text was first described by the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin as polyphony. When a work is in dialogue with other works or authors he calls this dialogism. Although Bakhtin is interested in the relationship between literature and society, the elements he explores are those that interact within the same text—the intratextual relations.<sup>2</sup> When the focus shifts to textual relations between separate texts, we speak of intertextuality.

The notion of intertextuality appeared in the late 1960s. It was first coined by Julia Kristeva but the term quickly spread and was appropriated differently by many scholars in several distinct approaches, but this did not result in a clear sense of how the term should be understood and used. Although in each case intertextuality is concerned with the multiplicity of ways in which texts interact with other texts, it is certainly not a straightforward concept that is shared by theorists in the same sense. For instance, the notion of texts itself is at issue—would these include just literary texts, events or all linguistic utterances? Broadly speaking intertextuality has been led into two directions, a more theoretical and a more applied strand.

As a theoretical concept, intertextuality is taken to be a general feature of all texts. Literary theorists such as Kristeva, Barthes and Riffaterre uphold a wider view of intertextuality in which all texts are intertexts, although each puts a different emphasis on the respective roles of author, reader and text. Because the boundaries between texts are blurred the intertextual text cannot exist as an independent entity. The domain of the intertext is not limited to one or a few texts, or to only literary texts in general, but to every utterance that signifies. In this sense, intertextuality serves to underscore a conceptual framework in which texts are interlocked with the general discourse. Though of interest as a theoretical take on literature, this interpretation is ineffective as a methodological tool for analysing individual texts. When every text refers to every other text than intertextuality is everywhere and no longer a distinguishing characteristic.

<sup>1</sup>For instance, in *Ep.* 18 Seneca discusses his participation in a Roman festival; *Ep.* 47 examines the relationship between master and slaves; *Ep.* 91 reports on the fire that burned down the city of Lugdunum (present-day Lyon, France) in 64 AD; *Ep.* 108 speaks of Seneca's own philosophical education.

<sup>2</sup>On Bakhtin's literary theory, see Schmitz (2007), Ch. 4 'Mikhail Bakhtin', 64-77; on the transition from Bakhtin's dialogism to Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, see Broich and Pfister (1985), 1-11.

### **2.1.2 Intertextuality in textual analysis**

Whereas the phenomenon of intertextuality is fairly straightforward, there is not a common view on how to apply this concept in textual analysis. Clearly, the more practical approach that I wish to pursue has to start from a more restricted definition of intertextuality. Intertextuality needs to be limited to being a special property of only particular texts and of only certain elements within a text.<sup>3</sup> The intertextual text includes a reference to the intertext or pretext, i.e. to the text or collection of texts that make up the intertextual text's background. However, such pretexts can consist of different types of knowledge, which besides other written works may also include historical events or social practices in everyday life. My emphasis will be on intended rather than latent forms of intertextual reference, which the author intended to be recognised by the reader to add to the meaning of the text.<sup>4</sup>

The interaction between texts can take a range of forms, such as explanation, praise, correction or continuation. The theorist Claes points out that an intertextual relation may share features of form or content with the pretext it refers to, while at the same time differ from it in certain respects. These transformations allow the intertextual text to variate on the pretext and add meaning.<sup>5</sup> To appreciate fully the effects of an intertextual element, a close reading of the text needs to be sensitive to both its shared features and its transformations. To help chart the rich variety of intertextual relations, I will discuss some distinctions between various types of intertextuality and some of their different functions that will be useful in an analysis of Seneca's letters. Intertextuality deals with relations between texts, but the focus of an intertextual reference can be on defining the text at hand or on defining the pretext. In the first case the intertextual reference has a text-oriented function, in the second case a pretext-oriented function. When the intertextual relation serves a text-oriented function, an intertextual reference to a pretext can serve to enrich the text's message and add perspective or emphasis. For instance, the text's message can be juxtaposed against that of an opposing text, or a reference to a canonical pretext may lend authority to the text at hand. In the case of a pretext-oriented function of intertextuality the text supplements a pretext with a reading instruction or commentary that aims primarily to change the way the pretext is understood, it is the pretext that is evaluated, clarified or reinterpreted. Commentary, interpretation and criticism are types of intertextual relations in which the (correct) meaning of the pretext plays a central role.<sup>6</sup> There-

<sup>3</sup>My account of intertextuality as a practical approach applicable to textual analysis is much indebted to Broich and Pfister (1985), Ch. 1 'Konzepte der Intertextualität' (Manfred Pfister), 1-30; Merz (2004), Ch. 2 'Theoretische Grundlegung: das Phänomen der Intertextualität und seine Analyse', 5-70; Gillmayr-Bucher (2006); Helbig (1996).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Broich and Pfister (1985), 23.

<sup>5</sup>Claes (1980), 26-27.

<sup>6</sup>This distinction is further discussed in Merz (2004), 58-60, where she uses the terms *texto-*

fore, whenever we encounter an intertextual reference it should be considered what its function is.

Another important distinction that has been explored by Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister identifies two basic forms of intertextuality, *Systemreferenz* and *Einzeltextreferenz*.<sup>7</sup> In English, scholars have referred to this distinction as one between *code* and *source passage*.<sup>8</sup> An intertextual reference can relate to one specific text or to a system of cues—a code. Sometimes we can indicate a particular pretext underlying an intertextual reference, but at other times it is not possible to isolate a single text from the general structure. Nevertheless, a reference to a code is relevant to our understanding of the text as these too exert influence on a text. Let us examine these two types of intertextual reference in more detail.

The reference to one distinct pretext, *Einzeltextreferenz*, can itself be further differentiated. Firstly, allusive (or quotational) intertextuality touches on a specific pretext or a particular part of it.<sup>9</sup> This type comprises familiar intertextual references such as quotation, allusion and echo. These vary primarily in their degree of explicit reference to the pretext. Quotation is perhaps the most straightforward form of intertextuality as it explicitly integrates part of the pretext without transformation. In the case of allusion, the reference to a pretext is less direct although the relation between text and pretext is intended to be noticed by competent readers. With an echo the intertextual relation is often less apparent and it is difficult to establish whether the suggested connection was intended by the author.

Let us examine a passage from the *Epistulae Morales* that contains both a quotation and an allusion. At the end of *Ep. 4*, Seneca presents the reader with a saying. Although he does not mention its author by name, he offers a clue:

But I must end my letter. Let me share with you that which pleased me today. It, too, is culled from another man's garden: "Poverty brought into conformity with the law of nature, is great wealth."<sup>10</sup>

The key word here is 'garden', which in the Loeb translation is visually marked with a capital 'G' to make the reference more obvious. The school of Epicurus was known as 'the Garden' and by saying that the following "too, is culled from another man's

*orientierten und referenztextorientierten Funktionen von Intertextualität.*

<sup>7</sup>Broich and Pfister (1985), 'Zur Einzeltextreferenz' (Ulrich Broich), 48-52; 'Zur Systemreferenz' (Manfred Pfister), 52-58. Cf. Merz (2004), Ch. 2.2, 22-26.

<sup>8</sup>These are the terms used by Stephen Hinds to translate the Italian terminology of Gian Biaggio Conte, cf. Hinds (1998), 41-42; Conte (1986), 31 (*modello codice ad modello esemplare*).

<sup>9</sup>Merz (2004), 22-23.

<sup>10</sup>Seneca *Ep. 4.10*: *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'*. (fr. 477 and 200 Usener).

## 2.1 Intertextuality

47

garden", the competent reader will recognise this as a saying by Epicurus, just as many of the quotations in the early letters are of Epicurean origin. The use of *alienis* emphasises the foreign, non-Stoic background of the pretext. A less informed reader might not identify the author but would still note the reference to another text as the quotation is clearly indicated. Although the reader should already have knowledge of the philosophical connotation of the word 'garden', there are small indicators that something more than its literal meaning is suggested. For instance, there is a subtle disruption in the text when Seneca mentions *ex ... hortulis sumptum est* because in their literal sense these words appear out of place. Moreover, the announcement of sharing something from his daily reading—itself an intratextual reference to Seneca's habit in the early letters to end with a saying—will make the audience wonder who the author of the quotation would be. This expectation encourages the reader to look for additional meaning in an already unusual remark. Because Seneca includes several precepts of Epicurus in consecutive letters, *et hoc quoque*, he can start to experiment with his reference to that author. Rather than naming Epicurus explicitly, Seneca suppresses the name in favour of an indirect description that invites the reader to do some extra thinking and draw connections between separate letters as well. Moreover, by alluding to knowledge that requires a certain amount of learning the reader and author can appreciate and confirm the privileged position they share.

Another type of *Einzeltextreferenz* is onomastic intertextuality. This reference includes the names of real or fictitious persons and places.<sup>11</sup> Names stand out in a text and the re-use of figures forges a direct connection between texts. A name like Socrates reminds the reader of that man's particulars: his biographical facts, philosophical beliefs and personal character. Consequently, the inclusion of a person's name results in a more general reference than a quotation as it calls to mind a whole range of details. In antiquity the rhetorical use of names was described with the technical notion of *exemplum*. This is the account of something done or said in the past that is relevant to the present along with the name of the person who did or said it.<sup>12</sup> Historical examples, *exempla*, can serve various purposes: they can function as a literary technique to adorn a text, they can be used to illustrate a particular virtue, to commemorate a significant event in a community's history, but also to promote a certain model of conduct for the audience to imitate. An exemplary figure can inspire others by reason of his authoritative power, *auctoritas*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Merz (2004), 23; cf. Müller (1991).

<sup>12</sup>Rhet. Her. 4.62: *Exemplum est alicuius facti aut dicti praeteriti cum certi auctoris nomine proposi-  
tio. Id sumitur isdem de causis, quibus similitudo. Rem ornatiorem facit, cum nullius rei nisi dignitatis  
causa sumitur; apertiorum, cum id, quod sit obscurius, magis dilucidum reddit; probabiliorem, cum  
magis veri similem facit; ante oculos ponit, cum exprimit omnia perspicue, ut res prope dicam manu  
temptari possit.*

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Tieleman (2007), 134-35.

The point deserves a little more discussion because Seneca's use of *exempla* stands out in several ways.<sup>14</sup> For the most part, he prefers to inspire his audience with the virtuous conduct of exemplary Romans, men like Cato, Scipio, Laelius, and Regulus. Occasionally he opts for unexpected examples, *exempla impria*, in which a person considered unlikely to portray a good quality fulfills an exemplary function.<sup>15</sup> These humble role models serve to encourage those who might feel unable to reach the level of heroic examples. Only rarely does he mention bad examples and only to condemn these in the strongest possible terms.<sup>16</sup> In sum, Seneca concentrates on positive examples that his audience should follow.

Furthermore, he is partial to pairing *exempla* into lists.<sup>17</sup> Taken out of their specific historical context, such a string of examples makes the commendable quality that connects them the focus of attention. Along these lines, Roller and Gowing both argue that Seneca values familiar Roman examples for their moral attitude rather than for their military genius or political views.<sup>18</sup> By reducing *exempla* to just their moral aspect, Seneca preserves them as a homogeneous collection of virtuous characters, any of which can be presented as an example for future generations.

In addition, there are numerous references to Greek philosophers in the *Epistulae Morales*. But unlike the Roman *exempla*, who display their virtue in action, philosophers are mentioned primarily for their wise sayings.<sup>19</sup> In several cases Seneca sub-

<sup>14</sup>The relevance of onomastic reference in Seneca has already been studied in part by Teun Tielemans who makes an inventory of onomastic references to Plato and the Platonists to gain new insight into Seneca's attitude to Plato and Platonism and about the level of education and expectations of his intended audience, see Tielemans (2007). For studies on Roman *exempla* in Seneca see Mayer (1991); the revised version of that paper, Mayer (2008); Roller (2001); on the special position of Socrates as *exemplum* in the philosophical tradition, see Döring (1979), Ch. 2 and Long (1988).

<sup>15</sup>Quintilian *Inst.* 5.11.9. Cf. Skidmore (1996), 87-89, 103. For such unexpected examples in Seneca, see the several gladiator examples in *Ep.* 70.19-27; and the example of a Spartan slave boy, *Ep.* 77.14-15. In all these cases they exemplify meeting death bravely, a duty which all human beings share.

<sup>16</sup>Seneca states that our spirit is naturally inclined to what is honourable and that this explains the effectiveness of positive exemplary figures, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 64.3-6, 104.23, 108.7-8. However, he is also aware of the impact that bad examples can have, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 94.61-68. Hence, Seneca advises his audience to stay away from bad company—the crowd as a whole or depraved individuals—, precisely because of their corrupting influence, cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 7.5-6, 99.17, 123.8.

<sup>17</sup>This point has been worked out in detail in Mayer (1991); Mayer (2008), 304-306.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Roller (2001), 88-108; Gowing (2005), 72-81. See also Dench (2005), 68, 72.

<sup>19</sup>Traditionally, Romans took pride in their historical examples and held these to surpass philosophical arguments in educating Roman values, cf. Cicero *Parad.* 10; Valerius Maximus 2.1.10: Roman *maiores* used to portray the deeds of their ancestors to inspire the young and Va-

## 2.1 Intertextuality

49

stantiates his point by words of wisdom from a Greek philosopher and by a Roman's actual application. To illustrate, in *Ep.* 11.8-9 Seneca brings up Epicurus' advice on adopting a moral guide, but suggests Cato and Laelius as good candidates; *Ep.* 25.5-6 includes Epicurus' encouragement to act as if under his supervision, but the proposed supervisors are Roman examples: Cato, Scipio, Laelius; in *Ep.* 67.11-16 the thought that desirable things are not easily obtained is demonstrated by Regulus and Cato and put into words by the philosophers Demetrius, Attalus and Epicurus.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Romans portray action-figures, whereas Greek philosophers provide words of wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, Seneca also carefully implies that words and deeds, and Roman morals and Greek ethics, are deeply intertwined. In the case of philosophers, their lives are an important testimony to their philosophical wisdom.<sup>22</sup> The ancient philosophers lived together and profited from one another's excellent company. Conversely, he redefines the notion of 'philosophers' or *sapientes* as those who assist in our moral improvement so as to include not only Greek philosophers but also Roman *exempla*.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the Romans do not have an exclusive claim to morally correct actions but neither do the Greek philosophers hold a monopoly on wisdom. The knowledge of what is right and the ability to act accordingly are in principle open to both and depend only on the willingness to improve.

Because historical figures can set an example for the present this makes their in-

---

terior questions whether any foreign philosophy could be more successful than this domestic tradition. Quintilian *Inst.* 12.2.29-30: the effectiveness of Roman examples of moral performance exceeds that of philosophical precepts. Sallust *Cat.* 8: the fame of Athenian achievements is due to a surplus of men with the spare time to write it all down, whereas the Romans were too busy doing heroic deeds to write about them. Cf. Skidmore (1996), 19, 23-24, 60, 65, 84.

<sup>20</sup>The popularity of collections of sayings, *chreiai*, in Greek literature helps to explain how philosophers' remarks and anecdotes could have been obtained and may even have contributed to the image of Greeks excelling in words rather than deeds.

<sup>21</sup>On the idea that Romans excel in deeds and Greeks in words, see Skidmore (1996), 23-24; Mayer (1991), 146. B. Inwood has noted that Seneca's own arrogant remarks about Greeks are only superficial, see Inwood (1995), 63-76, esp. 72-73. Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ben.* 1.4.1-5 on Chrysippus' typically Greek habit of diverting away from the important issues; *Ep.* 104.21 offers two separate lists of examples: first one of virtuous Romans, next one of Greek philosophers. Cf. Dench (2005), Ch. 4 'Flesh and Blood', 222-297, esp. 242-75, Ch. 5 'Languages and Literatures', 298-361.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 6.5-6, 20.2, 52.8, 108.38-39.

<sup>23</sup>That Roman *exempla* are added to the category of philosophical *sapientes* because of a new interpretation of *sapiens* as a 'teacher of the human race' has been pointed out by Döring (1979), 19-22. On the phrase 'teachers of the human race', *praeceptrores generis humani*, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 64.9.

terpretation all the more important. In other words, their exemplary status is already anchored in tradition but there is still room to determine how exactly they are valuable as examples. For instance, the example of Cato the Younger's suicide came to include a variety of meanings: he functioned in different contexts as an example of Stoic fortitude and self-control, of traditional Roman moral values, of resistance to tyranny and as a martyr of the republican cause.<sup>24</sup> Because Seneca often deals with popular, well-known examples, he can be as concise as he wishes. Sometimes he focuses on certain details, at other times he reduces examples to just the essential, as in *Ep.* 98.12:

Just say to yourself: "Of all these experiences that seem so frightful, none is insuperable. Separate trials have been overcome by many: fire by Mucius, crucifixion by Regulus, poison by Socrates, exile by Rutilius, and a sword-inflicted death by Cato; therefore, let us also overcome something."<sup>25</sup>

These snapshot examples have been taken from their original historical and social context and now serve as a symbol. Naming Cato and his sword is enough to recall the entire story of his death but at the same time excludes so much of the historical circumstances that the audience's attention will stay focused on the larger point. As Tieleman observes, "The name—in connection with a particular *deed* or *statement*—is essential. This understanding anticipates the present-day concept of onomastic reference as involving a deeply felt relation between audience and what the person referred to represents".<sup>26</sup> In the case of the passage just cited, *Ep.* 98.12, the *exempla* function together as an exhortation to face hardship as courageously as these men did. In my opinion, it is the brevity of many examples and their new combination that makes them suitable for Seneca's philosophical purpose while preserving their authoritative status.

These Roman *exempla* are recognisable to Seneca's audience and they demonstrate that Stoic philosophy addresses Romans as well. In fact, many of Seneca's Roman *exempla* are in some way connected to philosophy: Metellus studied philosophy during his exile, Rutilius and Tubero were both Stoics and Cato was Seneca's greatest Stoic

<sup>24</sup>For references to Cato's exemplary death see e.g., Cicero *Att.* 12.4.2; Horace *Carm.* 1.12.33-36; Virgil *Aen.* 8.670; Seneca *Ep.* 13.14, 24.6-8; Lucan 1.128. In addition, both Cicero and Brutus wrote a panegyric in praise of Cato, while Caesar and Octavian wrote an *Anti-Cato* in return. Cf. Cassius Dio 43.13.4; Suetonius *Iul.* 56.5; *Aug.* 85.1.

<sup>25</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 98.12: *Dic tibi ex istis quae terribilia videntur nihil est invictum'. Singula vicere iam multi, ignem Mucius, crucem Regulus, venenum Socrates, exilium Rutilius, mortem ferro adactam Cato: et nos vincamus aliquid.* Tr. Loeb ed. with minor adjustments of my own.

<sup>26</sup>Tieleman (2007), 148.

## 2.1 Intertextuality

51

hero.<sup>27</sup> By placing Roman heroes alongside Greek philosophers Seneca points out the continuity between them and their shared attainment of moral virtue.

Moreover, there is the case of the pseudo-intertextual reference. This involves a reference to a non-existing pretext, which the author invented and appears to interact with.<sup>28</sup> The author may refer to fictional persons, places or texts to achieve a particular rhetorical purpose. In a later section we will discuss the authenticity of the *Epistulae Morales* as a letter-collection more fully, but we may note already that since it seems plausible that the letter-collection is not a straightforward exchange of letters, then some and perhaps all references to Lucilius' letters could be seen as pseudo-intertextual references to a fictional pretext. Whether or not the exchange is real, the impression of epistolary responses that both include Lucilius' reactions to Seneca's message and his questions and requests that give rise to further letters are a necessary condition to frame the *Epistulae Morales* as an exchange of letters at all. Without the other half of their written interaction the *Epistulae Morales* could never achieve the same sense of a shared philosophical endeavour between friends.

Another type of reference is titular intertextuality, the intertextual reference in the title to another title.<sup>29</sup> This reference can either be to a source passage or to a code, such as the *Epistulae*. Titles are the briefest summary of a text and they are the first thing a reader will encounter. This function of the title as introduction to the text makes it an important reading instruction that will direct the reader's perception of the text. An intertextual reference in the title of a work is likely to suggest a deep-running connection that will leave the pretext present in the background throughout the reading of the text. In addition, the title is often perceived as separate from the main text and on that account it needs to be distinguished from allusive intertextuality.

The full title of Seneca's letter-collection is *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. The title informs the reader that these writings belong to the epistolary genre, that they have a moral interest and that they are addressed to Lucilius. This particular description of the work as 'moral letters' appears to originate with Seneca.<sup>30</sup> Although I will discuss the connections to earlier models and the epistolary genre more fully in a later

<sup>27</sup>Q. Caecilius Metellus and P. Rutilius Rufus (first century BC), were both banished by political opponents and remembered for their personal integrity. On Rutilius' interest in Stoicism, cf. Mayer (1991), 156n4. Q. Aelius Tubero (second century BC) was a pupil of Panaetius and was called 'the Stoic' and known for his frugality. Cato Uticensis (first century BC) studied Stoic ethics under Antipater of Tyre and was commemorated for his moral attitude culminating in his famous suicide.

<sup>28</sup>Merz (2004), 24.

<sup>29</sup>Merz (2004), 23-24.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Cugusi (1983), 196, who makes reference to the early testimony in Aulus Gellius *NA* praef. 9, 12.2.3.

section, it is easy to see that this title resembles the titles of other letter-collections, such as Cicero's *Epistulae ad Atticum*, Horace's *Epistularum liber primus* and *secundus* and Epicurus' *Epistolai*. The generic reference seems to be standard in such titles and as such it is difficult to establish whether Seneca's title could be seen as a variation on any distinct title or whether it, like all previous collections, stresses its connection to the epistolary genre in general. Through the name of Lucilius this title is also connected to another work of Seneca, his *Ad Lucilium De Providentia*.<sup>31</sup> Lucilius' status as a friend, a central aspect of the letters, is confirmed by the honour of being a repeated dedicatee of Seneca's works. The earlier title is also an indication of Lucilius' interest in philosophy. Other letter-collections are only referred to as 'Letters' and the qualifying term *Morales* in the title is significant in the light of Seneca's wish to establish a new Latin genre, the moral-philosophical letter. Thus, the title is what labels the text and this also connects it to the third type, onomastic intertextuality.

In addition to the individual references there are the intertextual relations that point to a *Systemreferenz*, a reference to a formative system or code that underlies a collection of texts.<sup>32</sup> In this case, the text constitutes itself partly or wholly in relation to the code to which it refers. Thus, texts stand in a certain tradition and Roman literature is full of examples of allusion and self-reflexivity, as shown by such scholars as Stephen Hinds and Michael von Albrecht.<sup>33</sup>

Consider, for example, Ovid's *Heroides*, a collection of verse letters presented as though written by legendary women addressing their absent husbands or lovers. In the first letter, Penelope writes to her husband Ulysses who still wanders far from his beloved Ithaca while the other Greek kings have returned home. The text opens with the following lines:

These words your Penelope, tardy Ulysses, sends to you.  
It's no good your writing back to me; come in person.<sup>34</sup>

The characters, Penelope and Ulysses, are derived from Homer's *Odyssey* and thus function as onomastic individual references. However, the salutation itself is not so much an intertextual reference to one specific text, but rather to the epistolary code itself. The reader will recognise that this text is shaped as a letter because it speaks of

<sup>31</sup>Lucilius is also the dedicatee of Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* but this work was published around the same time as the letters and there the name of Lucilius does not feature in the title. On Lucilius as addressee of Seneca, cf. Griffin (1976), 9, 71, 91, 372.

<sup>32</sup>On the distinction between *Einzeltextreferenz* and *Systemreferenz*, Broich and Pfister (1985) 17-19, 48-49; more specifically on *Systemreferenz*, Broich and Pfister (1985), 52-58; Merz (2004), 25-26.

<sup>33</sup>Hinds (1998); von Albrecht (1999); cf. Hardie (2002).

<sup>34</sup>Ovid *Her.* 1.1-2: *Haec tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixe; | nil mihi rescribas attinet: ipse veni.* Tr. taken from Hardie (2002), 107.

## 2.1 Intertextuality

53

a composer, 'your Penelope', and an addressee, 'tardy Ulysses'; it indicates that there is a distance between them that needs to be bridged by the letter; and it includes epistolary jargon, *mittit* and *rescribas*. Moreover, Ovid plays on epistolary expectations by letting Penelope insist on the return of Odysseus himself—sending a letter in reply is insufficient. We may also note another system reference here, viz. the thematic element of love which functions as a reference to elegiac poetry.

A system reference thus involves the author's engagement with a wider tradition and with stock material. An interesting case forms the *topos*, which "invokes its intertextual tradition as a collectivity, to which the individual contexts and connotations of individual prior instances are firmly subordinate".<sup>35</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that system references are often connected to individual references as particular texts function as models that play a formative role in shaping codes. Every system has codes that the author and reader recognise and often take for granted. By means of a system reference a text recalls or copies elements or structures of a system and follows or deviates from the system's codes.

Understanding a text requires involvement with certain linguistic or cultural codes. Thus, the *Epistulae Morales* take it for granted that the reader understands Latin, not merely the basic words and grammar, but also relevant associations and expressions. In addition, recognising the underlying cultural code presumes a considerable grasp of Roman culture, history and the code that defined Roman values, the *mos maiorum*. Formative systems in literature include that of genre, jargon and archetype. As we have already seen in our discussion of titular reference, the *Epistulae Morales* clearly presents itself as belonging to the epistolary genre. Generic references help to frame a text and allow the author and reader to position the text within a particular literary system. In the following section I will examine the epistolary features of the *Epistulae Morales* more closely.<sup>36</sup>

The question remaining is how to recognise these various intertextual references in our text. When an author intends intertextual references to be noted he will mark them more or less clearly, providing his audience with anything from a vague clue to a clear sign. These intertextual markers, or the lack thereof, offer information on how the author interacts with his audience and the kind of intertextual competence the author presupposes in his audience. The topic of intertextual markers and how to recognise them has been extensively studied in recent years, especially in German scholarly literature.<sup>37</sup> Above all, we can speak of intertextual marking when the pretext in some way stands out in the text, either by its textual structure, language,

<sup>35</sup>Hinds (1998), 34. See also Hinds (1998), 34-47, esp. 41-42 on 'topos-code'.

<sup>36</sup>See Ch. 2, section 2.3 'Epistolary features'.

<sup>37</sup>On the marking of intertextuality, see Broich and Pfister (1985), *Formen der Markierung von Intertextualität* (Ulrich Broich) 31-47; Merz (2004), 64-69; Gillmayr-Bucher (2006). The most complete study on this topic is Helbig (1996).

theme, or the usage of visual markers. Other important signs are the use of key words or names.

At the same time, not every intertextual relation needs to be indicated in an obvious way. To engage the reader in the text and show respect to the reader's intertextual competence the author can decide to keep markers less explicit. But when the reference is hidden too well it runs the risk of being missed by the intended reader and the connection with the pretext goes unnoticed. In addition, there is the phenomenon of 'intertextual erosion': over time the likelihood that intertextual relations are overlooked increases through cultural change or the emergence of a new readership with a different background.<sup>38</sup> This will especially be the case where intertextuality is marked only implicitly. In this context it should be pointed out that an intertextual marker is not simply a feature in the text, but a sign that acquires its meaning when it is read through a specific code, whether this is a cultural, literary or linguistic code or a particular pretext. An author will deploy certain signs with the expectation that his audience will find them relevant in their understanding of the text. Thus, a reader unfamiliar with the requisite code will not perceive the sign as a marker at all.

As modern readers of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* we have to concede that we no longer have all the relevant intertexts available to us and also that we are limited in recognising allusions and echoes with the same ease as the intended audience by our changed literary and cultural context. Nevertheless, it is important to note that we can further our understanding of the text without recognising all the intended references. Furthermore, close reading of the text combined with methodological instruments such as identifying intertextual markers will help to detect possible intertextual relations and assess their significance. The quantity of markers along with their intensity determines whether an intertextual relation will be easily detected or difficult to trace.<sup>39</sup>

In a meticulous study Jörg Helbig distinguishes four levels of intertextual marking, which gradually increase in explicitness.<sup>40</sup> The lowest level of marking is unmarked intertextuality and to note this type of intertextuality the reader must read the text carefully and be thoroughly familiar with the pretext.<sup>41</sup> An author can choose not to mark an intertextual relation, for example when a pretext is an absolute classic with the audience or when the author plagiarises from another text and does not want the intertextual reference to be noted at all.

The next level, implicitly marked intertextuality, includes a marker that is not

<sup>38</sup> Merz (2004), 61.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Broich and Pfister (1985), 33.

<sup>40</sup> Helbig speaks of a *Progressionsskala*, Helbig (1996), 83-142.

<sup>41</sup> Helbig (1996), 87-91. Compare, for example, Seneca *Ep.* 37.3, with its incorporation of the famous *Fit via vi* from Virgil *Aen.* 2.494.

## 2.1 Intertextuality

55

immediately obvious but should be recognised by a competent reader.<sup>42</sup> Implicit marking indicates an intertextual relation in a subtle and discreet manner that both respects and makes demands on the knowledge of the audience. By presupposing a certain amount of intertextual competence, it leaves room for readers to interact more closely with the text, to make their own discoveries and connections rather than hand them everything on a plate. Seneca's *Ep.* 76.20 is a case in point.

I said, if you happen to recall, that many people impetuously have scorned the things which are generally desired or feared. A person has been found who would reject wealth; a person has been found who would put his hand in the flames, whose laughter the torturer could not stop, who would shed no tear at his children's funeral, who would meet his own death untrembling. It was love, anger, and desire that insisted on courting dangers.<sup>43</sup>

At first glance, these cases do not seem to refer to specific persons, none of them are named. And yet, this type of list is usually made up of famous *exempla* and some of the details appear to be too specific. Who put his hand in the flames? That must be Mucius Scaevola, whose story is the subject of graphic description in *Ep.* 24.5, 66.51-53, and *Prov.* 3.5.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the other items on the list can also be traced back to historical persons, though in some cases there are several options.<sup>45</sup> It is a challenge to the reader to uncover the identities of these anonymous examples.

The third level, explicitly marked intertextuality, is intended to be easily perceived by any average reader and a form of marking is overtly present in the text.<sup>46</sup> Examples of explicit intertextual markers are onomastic signals, changes in linguistic code and visual markers. In Seneca we find numerous onomastic references: to historical figures such as Socrates, to fictional characters such as Meliboeus, or to other

<sup>42</sup> Helbig (1996), 91-111, esp. 91-97.

<sup>43</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 76.20: *Dixi, si forte meministi, et concupita vulgo et formidata inconsulto impetu plerosque calcasse: inventus est qui divitias proiceret, inventus est qui flammis manum inponeret, cuius risum non interrumperet tortor, qui in funere liberorum lacrimam non mitteret, qui morti non trepidus occurreret; amor enim, ira, cupiditas pericula depoposcerunt.* Tr. taken from Inwood (2007), 36. Cf. the discussion of this passage, Inwood (2007), 210-211.

<sup>44</sup> Mucius is also included in the concise list of examples I discussed earlier, see Seneca *Ep.* 98.12.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Inwood (2007), 210-211. In reply to Inwood we may note that, in light of their spur-of-the-moment, emotional motives, it is unlikely that these *exempla* would refer to philosophers. As such, I am not persuaded by Inwood's suggestion that Socrates or Cato could be the person 'who would meet his own death untrembling'. These examples are intended to prove that even non-philosophers can, on occasion, treat things with contempt that are otherwise desired or feared. See also Seneca's remark about Mucius being a simple, unlearned soldier in *Ep.* 24.5.

<sup>46</sup> Helbig (1996), 111-31.

authors such as Horace.<sup>47</sup> Changes in linguistic code are lines of poetry in the middle of prose text, the inclusion of Greek words in the Latin text, or a quotation's outdated language that stands out.<sup>48</sup> Seneca himself remarks:

I merely wish you to understand how many words, that were current in the works of Ennius and Accius, have become mouldy with age; while even in the case of Virgil, whose works are explored daily, some of his words have been filched away from us.<sup>49</sup>

Visual markers such as italic print, parentheses or quotational markers are useful indicators in modern texts, but in ancient Greek and Roman texts words run together in *scriptio continua*, which would make it hard to detect intertextual transitions visually.

The highest level of intertextual marking is reached when the intertextual relation itself is made the subject of discussion.<sup>50</sup> This can be indicated through words that describe reading or quoting a text, by direct reference to the author of the pretext, to its genre or content. The most explicit way of marking the pretext is by identifying it by name. Whereas Seneca often discusses his interaction with other texts, he rarely names a title explicitly.<sup>51</sup>

A final example, in which the intertextual relation is unmistakably marked. Here Seneca advises his audience not to grieve immoderately over the loss of a loved one:

Do you think that the law which I lay down for you is harsh, when the greatest of Greek poets has extended the privilege of weeping to one day only, in the lines where he tells us that even Niobe took thought of food?"<sup>52</sup>

The intertextual reference in this case is highly marked with information on the author, a description of the original content and discussion of how the pretext relates to Seneca's position. Although the author is not named directly, he is described as

<sup>47</sup>See also my earlier discussion on onomastic reference. On references to Socrates see e.g. Seneca *Ep.* 6.6, 24.4, 71.16-17, 104.28-29; on Meliboeus see Seneca *Ep.* 73.10, 101.2, on Horace see Seneca *Ep.* 86.13, 119.14, 120.21.

<sup>48</sup>A good example of a disruption in the linguistic code is Seneca *Ep.* 82.16 where an extensive description of the underworld (Virgil *Aen.* 6.400f., 8.296f.) demonstrates how stories increase men's fear of death; for the inclusion of Greek words see e.g. Seneca *Ep.* 58.6-7, 87.40, 89.7; on the topic of outdated language see e.g. Seneca *Ep.* 58.2-5, 108.35.

<sup>49</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 58.5: ... sed ut ex hoc intellegas quantum apud Ennium et Accium verborum situs occupaverit, cum apud hunc quoque, qui cotidie excutitur, aliqua nobis subducta sint.

<sup>50</sup>Helbig (1996), 131-38.

<sup>51</sup>The only cases I was able to find are in *Ep.* 81.3 where Seneca names his *De beneficiis*, and in *Ep.* 88.40 where he mentions by name Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssee*.

<sup>52</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 63.2: Duram tibi legem videor ponere, cum poetarum Graecorum maximus ius flendi dederit in unum dumtaxat diem, cum dixerit etiam Niobam de cibo cogitasse?

## 2.1 Intertextuality

57

"the greatest of Greek poets", which is a clear description of Homer. The name of Niobe is an onomastic signal and the reference is further developed by the mention of weeping only for a day and taking in food. This all helps to recall the story of how Niobe's boasting about having many more children than the goddess Leto lead to the subsequent loss of all her children. Homer mentions that even after this terrible turn of events Niobe ceased to weep and came to think of food.<sup>53</sup> Seneca intends to show how his own point, not to mourn excessively, finds support in a classic story told by the greatest poet in the Greek tradition. By connecting his own position to a highly authoritative text would add credibility to his argument and underline Seneca's own literary competence.

### 2.1.3 Intertextuality and cultural identity

Since my approach is based upon a combination of intertextual and identity aspects it should be explained in more detail how these relate to one another. Intertextuality calls attention to the communicative process that is present in the text. This involves the four participants identified by Kristeva as author, reader (recipient), text and context. The author has a certain intention that he tries to put across in the text and as such he needs to take the reader's point of view into consideration. In addition, the author is motivated by his own particular context. Although the author is in a sense limited by his context—he can only start from what is known to him, from his own literary and cultural background—this does not mean that within these boundaries there is no room left for authorial intentionality.<sup>54</sup>

The reader, in turn, will try to understand the text by developing his own reading, which is also influenced by his context that forms an interpretative background. For instance, sharing the same knowledge enables a reader to grasp a particular allusion. Moreover, when reading a text the reader will evaluate the text's message against his own system of ideas and ideals. In this respect, intertextuality ties in with some of the main concerns of reader response theory.<sup>55</sup> As Jane Tompson explains, reader response theory is primarily interested in the reading process. It attempts to clarify how a text can produce certain effects in its readers, the attitude an author shows toward his audience and the kind of readership that is presupposed by a particular text. In sum, intertextuality highlights the dialogical character of texts and signals that

<sup>53</sup>See the comment on this passage in Summers (1910), 245-46; the story of Niobe can be found in Homer *Il.* 19.228, 24.601.

<sup>54</sup>See Broich and Pfister (1985), 8-9, who argue against the poststructuralist dismissal of authorial intention, as advanced by, e.g., Kristeva (1977), 194-229; and Barthes (1984), 63-69, who describes this as part of the 'death' of the author.

<sup>55</sup>A convenient literary survey is the Introduction in Tompkins (1980), which covers a variety of reader response positions and points out the differences and commonalities between them.

none of its participants can operate in isolation but that they are subject to cultural constraints.

I will examine intertextual elements first and foremost as instances of communication and will examine what the effect of intertextuality is to the ongoing communicative process. As such, I am interested to see whether and how the author and reader are aware of an intertextual reference, how closely the pretext is integrated, which elements are incorporated and to what extent these have been adjusted to fit their new context. These considerations are much indebted to the set of parameters put forward by Broich and Pfister to indicate the degree and intensity of intertextuality.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to observe that this communicative process confirms that there is a cultural side to intertextuality. Literary texts play a role in accepting, reshaping, reproducing and manufacturing structures and elements of discourses, stereotypes and images. Furthermore, intertextuality itself serves as an indicator of engagement and debate. As Renate Lachmann notes:

Intertextuality demonstrates the process by which a culture ... continually rewrites and re-transcribes itself, constantly redefining itself through its signs. Writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation by which every new text is etched into memory space.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the connection between intertextuality and cultural identity is established in two ways. Firstly, the interactive process itself between texts and social groups shapes cultural memory through literary exchange. Secondly, the knowledge, codes and competences that are required to participate in such a communicative process form another point of contact between cultural identity and intertextuality. In sum, the various forms of the intertextual 'production of meaning' communicate important aspects of cultural identity.

In the previous section we already discussed the importance of cultural, literary and linguistic codes that shape a text. These codes require a corresponding cultural, literary and linguistic literacy or competence to interpret them. Each society has its own language with its own pre-existing associations and characteristics, and within

<sup>56</sup>Broich and Pfister (1985), 1-30; these criteria for classifying intertextual relations are also also discussed in Gillmayr-Bucher (2006). Broich and Pfister distinguish six qualitative criteria. 'Referentiality' is the degree in which explicit references to a pretext are made in the intertextual text. 'Communicativity' describes the awareness of both author and recipient of the intertextual character of the text. 'Autoreflexivity' considers how the presence of intertextuality is being reflected upon in the text. 'Structurality' observes the syntagmatic integration of structural features of the pretext into the intertextual text. 'Selectivity' looks at the author's selective use of elements from the pretext. 'Dialogism' signals semantic and ideological conflicts between pretext and intertextual text.

<sup>57</sup>Lachmann (2004), 173.

## 2.1 Intertextuality

59

society there are smaller interpretative communities with their own traditions, values and conventions. Cultural codes, in particular, tend to be tacit understandings with which its adherents have been long familiarised, describing and prescribing nearly every part of daily life from dress codes, to gender roles and gesture signs. A good example can be found in *Ep. 114* where Seneca's discussion of physical appearance is infused with moral implications:

You note this tendency in those who pluck out, or thin out, their beards, or who closely shear and shave the upper lip while preserving the rest of the hair and allowing it to grow, or in those who wear cloaks of outlandish colours, who wear transparent togas, and who never deign to do anything which will escape general notice; they endeavour to excite and attract men's attention, and they put up even with censure, provided that they can advertise themselves. That is the style of Maecenas and all the others who stray from the path, not by hazard, but consciously and voluntarily.<sup>58</sup>

Here he assumes his audience to be familiar with certain practices, to understand the significance of wearing the toga and how an improper fabric or colour signals indecency and loose morals. Seneca may draw the connection between improper appearance and immoral character and direct his criticism to a specified group, but he expects the reader to already share cultural norms about the implications of colour use, about inappropriate ways of self-presentation and attracting male attention. As a result, this passage offers a new perspective while reinforcing existing values.

As a highly intertextual writer, Seneca is acquainted with a broad variety of traditions, ranging from Latin prose and poetry to Greek tragedy, from the works of the grammarians and rhetoricians to satire and medical writings, and of course the literature from the different schools of philosophy. Moreover, Seneca is informed about how these various traditions and backgrounds shape the reading process. In *Ep. 108.24-35* he provides several examples of how one single text can lead to distinct readings by different professional groups. Their particular outlook explains why a philosopher reads sound moral advice in a passage from Virgil or Cicero, whereas a philologist or a scholar will focus on linguistic issues and literary models and trace the historical background of its characters. He thus shows himself conscious of how different readers relate differently to the same text and adds the following reading instruction:

<sup>58</sup>Seneca *Ep. 114.21*: *Quod vides istos sequi qui aut vellunt barbam aut intervellunt, qui labra prescius tondent et adradunt servata et summissa cetera parte, qui lacernas coloris improbi sumunt, qui perlucentem togam, qui nolunt facere quicquam quod hominum oculis transire liceat: irritant illos et in se avertunt, volunt vel reprehendi dum conspici. Talis est oratio Maecenatis omniumque aliorum qui non casu errant sed scientes volentesque.*

But that I, too, while engaged upon another task, may not slip into the department of the philologist or the scholar, my advice is this—that all study of philosophy and all reading should be applied to the idea of living the happy life, that we should not hunt out archaic or far-fetched words and eccentric metaphors and figures of speech, but that we should seek precepts which will help us, utterances of courage and spirit which may at once be turned into facts.<sup>59</sup>

Even reading can be done in a philosophical manner and the influence of leading a philosophical life should transform one's outlook and have an effect on how one deals with literature.

## 2.2 Writing letters

Michael Trapp offers the following concise description of the letter's generic features:

A letter is a written message from one person (or set of people) to another, requiring to be set down in a tangible medium, which itself is to be physically conveyed from sender(s) to recipient(s). Formally, it is a piece of writing that is overtly addressed from sender(s) to recipient(s), by the use at beginning and end of one of a limited set of conventional formulae of salutation (or some allusive variation on them) which specify both parties to the transaction. One might also add, by way of further explanation, that the need for a letter as a medium of communication normally arises because the two parties are physically distant (separated) from each other, and so unable to communicate by unmediated voice or gesture; and that a letter is normally expected to be of relatively limited length.<sup>60</sup>

This definition still leaves much room for variation. Letters can be private or public, deal with a variety of topics from business matters to love affairs, and can involve real persons or fictional characters. As Trapp indicates, the rich variety of letters makes it difficult to define them as a genre in a neat, clear-cut manner. Thus, the earlier mentioned criteria should be taken as more generally shared points of reference rather than strict rules to set up clear boundaries between letters and non-letters.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 108.35: *Sed ne et ipse, dum aliud ago, in philologum aut grammaticum delabar, illud admoneo, auditionem philosophorum lectionemque ad propositum beatae vitae trahendam, non ut verba prisca aut facta captemus et translationes inprobas figurasy dicendi, sed ut profutura praecepta et magnificas voces et animosas quae mox in rem transferantur.*

<sup>60</sup>Trapp (2003), 1.

<sup>61</sup>Trapp (2003), 1-3.

Although Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* meet most of these criteria, it has been doubted whether these really are letters or whether they would fit more closely in another genre, viz. essays, hortatory or didactic literature. Moreover, the historical authenticity of this letter-collection has been contested and the question has been raised to what extent these letters can be considered to constitute a genuine correspondence. These two questions about genre and authenticity are in a sense linked to one another. Can the *Epistulae Morales* be a collection of letters if they were in fact written for another purpose than to convey a written message to the addressee Lucilius? This question already suggests that the letter form itself seems to be associated with an atmosphere of frankness and truthfulness. As will be suggested below, this is precisely why the letter form is attractive and could have become prominent as a literary genre.

The central question that arises from these discussions is why Seneca chose to write about philosophy in an epistolary form. In the following section I will examine what inspired Seneca to write letters, who were his earlier models and which is the best way to classify the *Epistulae Morales*. Next, I will briefly discuss the topic of historical authenticity and then pay attention to the epistolary features, their use and function. Subsequently, I will study how the *Epistulae Morales* work as a collection of letters and finally make some concluding comments on the general purpose of this work.

### **2.2.1 Genre and earlier models**

What inspired Seneca to write letters at the height of a literary career that included a variety of works such as philosophical treatises, consolations and tragedies?<sup>62</sup> By the first century AD, there was a long-standing tradition of letter-writing, both as a social practice and as a literary form. Several collections of private letters had been published for a wider audience. Famous letter-collections in the Latin tradition were those by Cato the Elder, Cornelia and especially Cicero. Philosophers also discovered the letter-form. There were philosophical letters ascribed to important figures, e.g. to Pythagoras and other Pythagoreans such as Archytas, Melissa and Theano, to Plato and Aristotle. In addition, a collection was devoted to Socrates and the Socratics, a set of Cynic epistles were in circulation, as well as the letter-collection of Epicurus.<sup>63</sup> Diogenes Laertius also attributes a work of letters to the philosopher Aristo of Chios, a pupil of Zeno, and also the Stoic Posidonius was said to have written letters.<sup>64</sup> In other forms of literature too the epistolary form made its appearance, e.g., the quotation

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Graver (1996), 30-35 and Inwood (2007), 136-37.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Trapp (2003), 12.

<sup>64</sup>These are among the numerous authors Maurach mentions in his discussion of Seneca's epistolary predecessors in Maurach (1970), 181-206.

of whole missives in drama, poems and histories. When looking for Seneca's most important models, I believe three collections of letters stand out, those by Epicurus, Cicero and Horace. I will discuss these three letter-collections more thoroughly and note which features would have been attractive for Seneca to incorporate into his own work.

Epicurus was one of the first writers to employ the epistolary form to get his philosophical message across to a wider audience. It was in the fourth century BC that Epicurus wrote an extensive letter-collection of which only three letters, to Pythocles, Herodotus and to Menoeceus, are preserved entirely in Diogenes Laertius's description of the life of Epicurus.<sup>65</sup> The extant fragments of some of the other letters and the references to them by later authors indicate that these letters were familiar and renowned. They covered a rich variety of both technical and non-technical subjects, discussed physical theory, moral issues concerning friendship and the pursuit of pleasure, and offered friendly advice, polemic and personal example. These letters were addressed to many different persons, including unknown recipients as well as leading Epicureans and Epicurean communities.<sup>66</sup> The letters in Diogenes Laertius seem to have been modified, their typical Epicurean salutation *hugiaiein* replaced with the common Greek *chairein* and the archon dating formula removed.<sup>67</sup> The former salutation was one of the ways in which a distinction could be emphasised between philosophers and non-philosophers. Instead of blindly copying a standard formula, Epicurus attempts to show a true and serious understanding of wishing someone well-being.<sup>68</sup> Seneca alludes to this practice when he offers a modification of a traditional Roman opening statement:

It was a custom in the old times, preserved right up to my own time, to add to a letter the opening words "if you are in good health, it is well, I am in good health too". The right thing for us would be to say "if you are doing philosophy, it is well". Because this is precisely what "being in good health" means.<sup>69</sup>

Seneca refers to the letters by Epicurus and those of his students in several instances and he certainly read many of them.<sup>70</sup> The letter-collection by Epicurus pro-

<sup>65</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, book 10.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Trapp (2003), 12, 22, and Inwood (2007), 142-46. The fragments of these other letters can be found in several critical editions, most notably Arrighetti (1973), Isnardi Parente (1974) and also in Salem (1982).

<sup>67</sup> Inwood (2007), 143.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Trapp (2003), 35; Lucian, *Pro lapsu* 3-6.

<sup>69</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 15.1: *Mos antiquis fuit, usque ad meam servatus aetatem, primis epistulae verbis adipere 'si vales bene est, ego valeo'. Recte nos dicimus 'si philosopharis, bene est'. Valere enim hoc demum est.* See Ch. 4 for a detailed discussion of *Ep.* 15.

<sup>70</sup> For references to letters by Epicurus see Seneca *Ep.* 7.11, 9.1, 18.9 which mentions the dating

## 2.2 Writing letters

63

vides an interesting model in numerous ways, as pointed out by Brad Inwood:

It is particularly important to note that the blend of personal experience and moral advice (so often thought to be a distinctive characteristic of Seneca's letters), the combination of technical and non-technical letters, and especially the inclusion of mini-treatises alongside more plausibly epistolary compositions were all features of Seneca's most generic model.<sup>71</sup>

One of the main reasons that Epicurus is seen as an important influence on Seneca's letters is the latter's frequent quotation of Epicurean sayings in the early letters in the collection. Scholars have tried to explain this use of foreign philosophical ideas either by reference to Seneca's eclecticism or to Epicurean bias in the addressee Lucilius. Instead, Brad Inwood finds it "more likely that the entire theme of Epicureanism in the early letters is a tribute to a generic model and a deliberate indication of the target of Seneca's literary rivalry. Its philosophical significance may be much less than has been routinely assumed in the past."<sup>72</sup>

I agree with Inwood that generic rivalry certainly has a role to play. However, these references to Epicurus also have considerable philosophical importance, but for other reasons than so far have been assumed. The early letters incorporate (mostly) Epicurean quotations that emphasise their overall philosophical message. Seneca frequently points out that these pieces of wisdom are available for all to use and he himself employs them to support his own views.<sup>73</sup> These sayings are taken from their original Epicurean context and now convey general philosophical wisdom—they show that philosophers have valuable insights to share with the world. In this sense, they form a nice addition to the positive philosophical image Seneca wants to present.

In addition, these Epicurean sayings can form a prelude to later topics.<sup>74</sup> For instance, in the latter half of *Ep. 33* Seneca speaks of the importance of making one's own contribution to philosophy, but this point is already alluded to in earlier letters. In *Ep. 8.7, 16.7, and 22.13* Seneca admits that he still borrows sayings from Epicurus (and others), though in *Ep. 12.11* he claims that any truth is his own property. However, in *Ep. 26.8* he promises to come up with his own words of wisdom soon.<sup>75</sup>

---

by archonship, 21.3-4, 22.5, 79.15, 92.25; letters by Metrodorus are referred to in Seneca *Ep. 79.16, 98.9* and *99.25*. On Epicureanism in the Roman Empire, see Ferguson (1990), attesting to Seneca's familiarity with Epicurus. More specifically on Seneca, see Setaioli (1988), 171-182; Hachmann (1995), 220-37; Maurach (1970), 186-88; Griffin (1976), 3-4; Trapp (2003), 26.

<sup>71</sup>Inwood (2007), 145.

<sup>72</sup>Inwood (2007), 146.

<sup>73</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 8.8, 12.11, 14.18, 16.7, 29.11, 33.2*.

<sup>74</sup>See also the discussion on internalised forms of guidance in Ch. 3, 157 f.

<sup>75</sup>The closing sentence of *Ep. 34* appears to be a saying by Seneca: "If a man's acts are out of

The crucial turning point is *Ep.* 33, in which Seneca is no longer willing to include wise sayings. He gives several reasons in support of his decision, but all of them reveal a marked contrast between Epicurean and Stoic texts and their didactic purposes.

Therefore, you need not call upon me for extracts and quotations; such thoughts as one may extract here and there in the works of other philosophers run through the whole body of our writings. Hence we have no "show-window goods," nor do we deceive the purchaser in such a way that, if he enters our shop, he will find nothing except that which is displayed in the window. We allow the purchasers themselves to get their samples from anywhere they please.<sup>76</sup>

This passage shows that Seneca considers Stoic literature to be of a consistent good quality, making it hard, as well as unnecessary, to select only the interesting bits and store these into collections of sayings. He accuses the Epicureans of being disingenuous in presenting highlights that are not supported by the overall quality of their writings. We are familiar with Epicurean collections of maxims, but this letter suggests that the apparent absence of similar Stoic collections might have been intentional, or at least, that Seneca felt the need to come up with a possible explanation for the absence. Aldo Setaioli notes that the Epicurean sayings Seneca himself uses probably came from a gnomology, a collection of wise aphorisms.<sup>77</sup>

The rest of the letter expresses the need to become an independent philosopher—a point on which the Stoics do well, contrary to the Epicureans.<sup>78</sup> It requires the student to move on to the next stage of the philosophical training. Children may rely on elementary expressions of wisdom, but in order to grow up philosophically we should study philosophical works as a whole and should make our own contribution to philosophy as well. This explains why it was appropriate to include these sayings in the early letters, but only up to a point. We cannot stay around on the lower level (of the Epicureans), but we have to advance in the footsteps of the Stoics. So the initial generic rivalry is settled in *Ep.* 33 in favour of Seneca and the Stoics. Furthermore, it is part of the transition from a wider philosophical perspective to a more specifically

harmony, his soul is crooked". *Non est huius animus in recto, cuius acta discordant* (34.4). Similarly, *Ep.* 46 discusses a philosophical work written by Lucilius and in *Ep.* 106, 108 and 109 Seneca speaks of a comprehensive work on moral philosophy that he is working on.

<sup>76</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 33.3: *Non est ergo quod exigas excerpta et repetita: continuum est apud nostros quidquid apud alios excerpitur. Non habemus itaque ista ocligeria nec emptorem decipimus nihil inventurum cum intraverit praeter illa quae in fronte suspensa sunt: ipsis permittimus unde velint sumere exemplar.*

<sup>77</sup>Setaioli (1988), 182-223.

<sup>78</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 33.4-11.

Stoic attitude that we find in the letters. The benefits of philosophy are gradually supplanted by the specific advantages of Stoic philosophy.

Those who defend Seneca's supposed eclecticism or Lucilius' Epicurean preference have difficulty explaining this radical change of direction as there is nothing that would suggest a change in Seneca's philosophical position or a sudden conversion of Lucilius. When we go along with Inwood's explanation of generic rivalry, including the growing philosophical tensions, then the use of Epicurean sayings serves as an interaction with the Epicurean letters that invites a comparison between the two collections. For instance, in *Ep. 21.5* Seneca likens the fame that Epicurus' letters brought their addressee Idomeneus to the fame that awaits Lucilius as a result of Seneca's letters.<sup>79</sup> In the course of the *Epistulae Morales*, the close association with the generic model is curtailed in *Ep. 33* as by now the letters themselves can stand on their own and can function as a Stoic alternative.

A second model to consider is the correspondence of Marcus Tullius Cicero.<sup>80</sup> He wrote a very large number of letters; there are over nine hundred of them left today. Both for private and official purposes, these letters were written to friends, family and to the most influential political figures of his time. They dealt with a variety of topics, ranging from daily affairs to the latest gossip, from business agreements to requests and recommendations. Cicero might have already considered publication but this was not achieved until after his death by his secretary Tiro. For publication the letters were arranged in separate sets, of which now only the *Ad Atticum*, *Ad familiares*, *Ad Quintum fratrem* and *Ad Brutum* remain. The letters to Atticus were published last, only during the reign of Nero, and this correspondence between two long-time friends counts as an important model to Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*.<sup>81</sup> Due to its cultivated style and personal content set against the backdrop of a very eventful period of history, this collection soon acquired a classical status.

Most of interest to Seneca in Cicero's letters to Atticus is the fact that they constitute a genuine correspondence written to a single addressee, the friendship between sender and recipient, Cicero's eloquence and the letters' literary success.<sup>82</sup> As Inwood remarks: "If it is right to see Seneca's desire to make his mark on Latin literature as part of his authorial strategy, then of course Cicero must have played a central role for Seneca".<sup>83</sup> What warrants imitation in the case of Cicero is to some extent different than in the case of Epicurus. Language, style, single addressee and authenticity are the features that would have seemed the positive characteristics of Cicero's letters

<sup>79</sup>The passage is quoted below in Ch. 2, section 2.5, 78.

<sup>80</sup>On Cicero's letter-collections see Trapp (2003), 13-14; de Pretis (2004), 35-36.

<sup>81</sup>A direct reference to these letters can be found in *Ep. 21.4-5* and 97.3.

<sup>82</sup>On Cicero's influence on Seneca's letters, see Griffin (1976), 3, 349-53; Graver (1996), 20-30; Coleman (1974), 287-88; Wilson (2001), 186-87; Inwood (2007), 141-42.

<sup>83</sup>Inwood (2007), 141.

to Seneca, whereas Epicurus' strong points were his use of philosophy, alternation of technical with personal topics and variety of tone. But both Cicero and Epicurus achieved literary fame through their writings. This is reflected in the comments Seneca makes about Cicero's correspondence. In *Ep.* 21.5 Atticus is said to owe his fame more to his correspondence with Cicero than to any other relationship, just as Epicurus gave Idomeneus' name lasting renown. But there is also some criticism. Seneca finds fault with Cicero for advising Atticus to write whatever comes to mind. Instead of writing on the latest news and gossip, we should concentrate on our own failings and what inspires us to improve.<sup>84</sup> As a model, Cicero leaves room for further improvement.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the positive qualifications Seneca attributes to Cicero all concern his eloquence in speech and writing, e.g., "most eloquent man" (*vir dissertissimus*) and "with whom Roman oratory sprang into prominence" (*a quo Romana eloquentia exsiluit*).<sup>86</sup>

The third model, Horace, wrote a book with verse epistles addressed to various friends.<sup>87</sup> In a frank and witty tone these letters advice, amuse, and counsel on moral themes such as friendship and virtue, discuss poetry and recount more casual topics such as dining and drinking. Here, epistolary features are used occasionally and mixed with characteristics of poetry and short prose treatises. The interest in moral instruction can be seen in Seneca as well. Seneca knew Horace's verse epistles well, though it has been debated to what extent he used them as a model.<sup>88</sup> Wilson sees aspects of Horace in the *Epistulae Morales*, "with their humour, ethical commentary, and skilful manipulations of persona and voice".<sup>89</sup> H. Cancik stresses two features shared by Horace and Seneca as indication that Horace did have an impact on Seneca, viz. their deliberate self-presentation and moral exhortation. Brad Inwood, on the other hand, underlines that Seneca wrote against the background of an established philosophical epistolary tradition, whereas Horace is likely to have been influenced by hexameter satire and wrote in verse.<sup>90</sup> In the *Epistulae Morales* there is less mention of Horace and his role as a model seems certainly more limited than that of Epicurus and Cicero.<sup>91</sup> Assessing possible influences is hampered by the overlap in shared

<sup>84</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 118.1-5. Cf. Trapp (2003), 26.

<sup>85</sup>Cf. Cugusi (1983), 201-5; Lana (1991), 260-61. Cf. Seneca *Brev.* 5 where he quotes a statement from a letter by Cicero to Atticus; although Seneca finds the text moving, it is not the sort of thing a wise man would say.

<sup>86</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 118.1: *vir dissertissimus*, 40.11: *a quo Romana eloquentia exsiluit*, cf. *Ep.* 100.7, 107.10, 111.1.

<sup>87</sup>For Horace's epistolary writing see Trapp (2003), 23-24; de Pretis (2004); Morrison (2007).

<sup>88</sup>Griffin (1976), 3.

<sup>89</sup>Wilson (2001), 187.

<sup>90</sup>Cf. Cancik (1967), 54-58 and Inwood (2007), 137.

<sup>91</sup>For references to Horace, see Seneca *Ep.* 86.13, 119.13-14, 120.20-21.

features between previous authors. Seneca's decision to write moral philosophy in an epistolary form can be traced back either to the philosophical epistolary tradition, for example the Epicurean letters, or to a Latin hortatory tradition, with Horace, Lucilius (who, too, at times adopted the epistolary form) and other satirists. Horace too might have known the Epicurean letter-collection, certainly his use of the letter-format for moral guidance has been related to the philosophical practice of moral counselling.<sup>92</sup> A similar example of the problem of recovering literary lineage can be made of Seneca's use of witty remarks and pointed aphorisms. These have been traced back both to the Stoic-Cynic tradition of the diatribe and to the Latin hortatory tradition. It seems hard, if not impossible, to resolve these issues. Alternatively, we can choose to emphasise these features of content and style to be precisely the sort of characteristics Seneca would look for in his attempt to bring philosophy to his Roman audience. Exactly because they did not feel foreign against a Roman or philosophical background, these would work best in form and content for his purpose.

### **2.2.2 The question of genre**

One of the most contested matters is to which genre the *Epistulae Morales* actually belong. The letters have certain epistolary markers but at the same time share features with such diverse genres as moral exhortation, pedagogical or didactic treatise, the essay, dialogue, diatribe and satire. Under varying terms, this ambivalence has been widely recognised. Thomas Habinek, for instance, writes of Seneca's works as belonging to or at least associated with the Roman hortatory tradition.<sup>93</sup> Many twentieth century scholars were of the opinion that the *Epistulae Morales* should be classified as moral essays.<sup>94</sup> Miriam Griffin calls Seneca's letters "dialogues with an epistolary veneer".<sup>95</sup>

Wilson, on the other hand, rightly signals that these scholars tend to neglect the epistolarity as a serious aspect of the letters. To him the inability to fit the letters into any one traditional form is not inappropriate to the letter form itself:

This what the Senecan epistle is, a fluid form characterized by a controlled volatility of mode. ... The freedom of form is not out of keeping, though, with the nature of a personal letter between friends".<sup>96</sup>

He counters the suggestion that the *Epistulae Morales* are moral essays by pointing out that this fails to address the role of Lucilius and the tension between private and

<sup>92</sup>Cf. de Pretis (2004), 34-35.

<sup>93</sup>Habinek (1998), 138-41; cf. the discussion in Wilson (2001), 169-70.

<sup>94</sup>For instance, Coleman (1974), 288; Campbell (1969), 21; Quinn (1979), 213; cf. the discussion in Wilson (2001), 165-68.

<sup>95</sup>Griffin (1976), 350, 419.

<sup>96</sup>Wilson (2001), 178.

public that the epistolary form evokes with its three-way connection between author, addressee and audience. Furthermore, the connection between separate letters and how they are arranged, their intratextuality, is ignored. Also, not all letters are essayistic, some are just little notes, others address a variety of topics. Finally, the notion of essay is not a singular category in itself.<sup>97</sup>

Wilson also objects to Habinek's claim that Seneca's letters are really hortatory literature on the grounds that Habinek is oversimplifying when he labels all of Seneca's works as hortatory without a reference to their generic differences, and that Habinek is mistaken in his understanding of the role of Lucilius and Seneca.<sup>98</sup> Habinek claims that Seneca presents himself as possessing privileged knowledge and that the correspondence excludes external readers with its focus on Seneca and Lucilius thus stressing an exclusive elite circle.<sup>99</sup> For the letters to be primarily hortatory, or pedagogical for that matter, one would expect the author to claim profound insight. In the *Epistulae Morales*, however, Seneca sets himself on a more equal level with Lucilius and draws attention to the authority of others or to his own status as fellow *proficiens* as opposed to *sapiens*.<sup>100</sup> Wilson concludes: "Habinek's hypothesis is contradicted by ancient epistolary theory which took the epistle not as an opportunity for exhortation but as a substitute for conversation".<sup>101</sup>

This would seem to approach Miriam Griffin's position—the *Epistulae Morales* as "dialogues with an epistolary veneer"—which Wilson does not discuss.<sup>102</sup> However, the conversational aspect is a standard feature of what constitutes the letter form. Thus, calling Seneca's letters dialogues in disguise is something which might be said of a great many letters. As a substitute for conversation they are bound to share characteristics with dialogue, a genre that attempts to represent a reciprocal conversation.<sup>103</sup> A particular feature of a genre, in this case conversational tone, may be characteristic of a single genre, yet not unique to it. Already in antiquity a resemblance with other genres could lead to suspicion, and not just in the case of Seneca's letters:

Those that are too long, and in addition rather pretentious in style, would not count as letters in the true sense, but as treatises with 'Dear So-and-so' attached, like many of Plato's and that one of Thucydides.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Wilson (2001), 167-68.

<sup>98</sup> Wilson (2001), 169-71.

<sup>99</sup> Habinek (1998), 141.

<sup>100</sup> E.g., Seneca *Ep.* 1.4, 6.1-4, 8.2-3, 27.1, 57.3, 64.9-10, 68.8-9.

<sup>101</sup> Wilson (2001), 170. Cf. Demetrius *Eloc.* 225; Malherbe (1988), 17.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Griffin (1976), 350, 419.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Thraede (1970), 65, 72.

<sup>104</sup> Demetrius *Eloc.* 228: αἱ δὲ ἄγαν μακραὶ καὶ προσέτι κατὰ τὴν ἐρμηνείαν ὀγκωδέστεραι οὐ μὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐπιστολαὶ γένοιντο ἦν, ἀλλὰ συγγράμματα τὸ χαίρειν ἔχοντα προσγεγραμμένον, καθάπερ τῶν Πλάτωνος πολλαὶ καὶ ἡ Θουκυδίδου.

## 2.2 Writing letters

69

In addition, Wilson's argument against viewing the letters as essays works just as well against viewing the letters as dialogues. He notes that the epistolary sequence adds an extra dimension to the letter-collection, something which the dialogue cannot capture or explain.<sup>105</sup> Although the *Epistulae Morales* share features with many other genres, the question of genre cannot be answered by viewing the letters as something exclusively other than letters. It thus seems warranted to examine in more detail what form the epistolarity in the *Epistulae Morales* takes on.

### 2.2.3 Epistolary features

A letter shares features with other letters, which makes it possible to identify it as letter rather than poem or novel. In this sense genre is an intertextual concept as its shape and content are understood against the background of writings of the same type. Over a period of time, letter-writers and readers develop a code of what constitutes the letter form. For instance, as Trapp remarks, the earliest Greek letters we possess show "a lack of familiarity with what are later to emerge as standard conventions of letter-writing".<sup>106</sup> Around the third century BC the epistolary form becomes established and acknowledged as a separate literary form in Greek culture.<sup>107</sup> By Seneca's day the epistolary tradition has created certain standards. His readership will have brought to the text a set of expectations relating to its letter form. Alastair Fowler argues that "the system of generic expectations amounts to a code, by the use of which (or by departure from which) composition becomes more economical".<sup>108</sup> Writer and reader share assumptions about what it means to read a letter and this helps to frame their communication. These shared assumptions are not culturally neutral, and to recognise a text as part of a particular genre requires a cultural literacy that is acquired through practice and habituation. The best way to approach Seneca's letters as letters is to focus on how his readers will have identified the *Epistulae Morales* as belonging to the letter genre.

In antiquity there were already epistolary theorists who wrote treatises on the appropriate form, style and content of the letter.<sup>109</sup> The characteristics they

<sup>105</sup>Cf. Wilson (2001), 183-87, esp. 185 where Wilson speaks of 'serial epistolography' to highlight the significance of the growing relationship between writer and addressee as they share their journey on the path to virtue.

<sup>106</sup>Trapp (2003), 6.

<sup>107</sup>Trapp (2003), 7.

<sup>108</sup>Fowler (1989), 215.

<sup>109</sup>For a selection of ancient texts on epistolary theory, including Demetrius *Eloc.* 223-35; Seneca *Ep.* 75.1-4; C. Julius Victor *Ars rhetorica* 27; Libanius/Proclus *De forma epistolari* 1-4, 46-51, see Trapp (2003), 180-192. On ancient epistolary theory, cf. Trapp (2003), 42-46; Malherbe (1988); Inwood (2007), 138-39.

attributed to the letter closely resemble the generic features formulated by Michael Trapp.<sup>110</sup> The earliest of these treatises was written around the mid-second century BC by Demetrius. In his *On style*, or *De elocutione*, he expounds the requirements for good letter-writing and to teach readers of letters how to separate the wheat from the chaff. He describes letters as a literary form that employs a not too formal style. The letter is a friendly medium, often used among friends and thus associated with warm friendship. A good letter reveals the sender's character as it is a very personal form of writing. Demetrius also draws a comparison between dialogue and letter, both possessing a conversational tone, though the main difference between them is that a letter is less spontaneous than real conversation. Stylistically, it holds a mean between a casual communicative style associated with dialogue and the more elegant style of rhetorical treatises and speeches. The epistolary form calls for clarity and frankness and should avoid being too lengthy or discuss topics considered unsuited for letters.<sup>111</sup>

Seneca conforms to an epistolary code in various ways.<sup>112</sup> For instance, he includes a salutation and farewell; he writes about their different locations—Seneca and Lucilius are portrayed as separated from one another; he frequently mentions their personal relationship as friends; he employs an informal style of writing; and he makes occasional reference to the epistolary procedure. This last feature includes mention of the delivery by a letter-carrier (*Ep.* 50.1), of the seal that closes the letter (*Ep.* 22.13), or of the way a reader would handle the letter: "But I must not exceed the bounds of a letter, which ought not to fill the reader's left hand".<sup>113</sup> As Gummere explains: "A book was unrolled with the right hand; the reader gathered up the part already perused with his left hand. Nearly all books at this time were papyrus rolls, as were letters of any great length".<sup>114</sup> Seneca frames every letter in the collection with familiar epistolary formulae of well-wishing, starting with the opening salutation *Seneca Lucilio suo salutem*, and ending with the closing formula *Vale*. A salutation formula consisting of 'Sender - Recipient - greeting phrase' was common in Latin. The phrase here is only made up of *salutem* and has some type of verb, such as *dicit*, understood. It corresponds closely to the spoken greeting *Salve*, wishing health or well-being. The name of the recipient is expanded with a small addition, *Lucilio suo*, the combination indicating their personal relation and friendship. The final greeting *Vale*, 'Farewell', often takes on additional significance as most letters deal with

<sup>110</sup>I have cited these epistolary features at the beginning of Ch. 2, section 2.

<sup>111</sup>Demetrius *Eloc.* 223 to 235 can be found in Greek with an English translation and commentary in Trapp (2003), 180-83 (text and translation) and 317-20 (commentary).

<sup>112</sup>Cf. Thraede (1970), 65-74.

<sup>113</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 45.13: *Sed ne epistulae modum excedam, quae non debet sinistram manum legentis implere.*

<sup>114</sup>Gummere (1970), Vol. I, 298.

personal improvement and well-being.

The opening statement immediately after the salutation and the closing paragraph most often add epistolary 'colour'.<sup>115</sup> At the beginning of a letter Seneca often makes a comment on the process of correspondence. He may refer to a 'friend' of Lucilius who carried his letter to Seneca (*Ep. 3.1*), remark how the Alexandrian ships bring new letters from friends (*Ep. 77.1-2*) or how he is pleased to receive Lucilius' letter (*Ep. 59.1*) or still awaits a letter from Lucilius (*Ep. 79.1*). In *Ep. 110.1* Seneca opens by stating his best wishes for Lucilius, viz. to keep a sound spirit, another frequently used opening statement in the letter genre. Near the ending of a letter he sometimes announces that it is time to end the letter (e.g., *Ep. 4.10, 26.8, 28.9*) and a letter on the contemplation of death is closed by the humorous comment that: "what I really ought to fear is that you will hate this long letter worse than death itself; so I shall stop".<sup>116</sup>

Many letters in antiquity close by adding little communications to others besides the recipient. It should be noted that Seneca's letters are not used for this purpose. To be sure, there are a few references to mutual friends and their personal situation, but no requests are made to pass on greetings, messages or contact others. Throughout the *Epistulae Morales* the focus stays on Seneca and Lucilius as it is their shared development and communication that takes centre stage. Another epistolary feature that is lacking is a date added to the letters even though they do imply a chronological order.<sup>117</sup>

In the *Epistulae Morales* Seneca carefully chooses a casual and simple style of communication and uses a conversational tone as one of the elements to create a private, personal and friendly atmosphere.<sup>118</sup> This is a private correspondence in the sense that it presents the communication as one between two individuals outside their public function. For instance, Seneca nowhere addresses Lucilius in his official function as procurator of Sicily and at no point turns their discussion to current public or political affairs. When Seneca asks Lucilius how he spends his time his real question is whether he spends it philosophically or not.<sup>119</sup> In fact, the public aspect of their character is made irrelevant and only aspects of their private life are mentioned.

Instead of discussing what is going on in the outside world, the communication between Seneca and Lucilius revolves around their own moral development and their

---

<sup>115</sup>On common practices of epistolary writing see Trapp (2003), 34-42.

<sup>116</sup>Seneca *Ep. 30.18*: *Sed vereri debo ne tam longas epistulas peius quam mortem oderis. Itaque finem faciam.*

<sup>117</sup>Wilson (2001), 184 and Griffin (1976), 400.

<sup>118</sup>Cf. *Ep. 75.1* where Seneca defends his style by referring to the conversational character of his letters.

<sup>119</sup>Cf. *Ep. 118* where Seneca disagrees with Cicero's choice of subject-matter and excludes daily news and gossip as a relevant theme to write about.

personal relationship and thus becomes more personal and confidential. Colloquiality is a prime characteristic of the personal, friendly letter.<sup>120</sup> On numerous occasions Seneca draws a parallel between his letters and conversation.<sup>121</sup> Seneca uses moments of spontaneity, emotional outbursts and direct engagement with Lucilius to give the letters a more conversational feel.<sup>122</sup> This is also reflected in the letters' structure that, like a conversation, tends to proceed by the association of ideas rather than depend on a logical argumentative structure.<sup>123</sup> Lucilius takes on an active role when he introduces new topics, raises questions, requests books to read, wants to exchange more letters or has complaints about their content or style.<sup>124</sup> In a more passive role, Lucilius is subject to requests, to exhortation and dissuasion and is anticipated as a listener who might interrupt or object at a particular point.<sup>125</sup> Seneca responds to Lucilius' interests and needs and tries to please him with little proverbs and sayings at the end of the first letters.<sup>126</sup> A good example of their conversational interaction is the opening of *Ep.* 85 where Lucilius asks for more syllogisms but Seneca tries to curb his wishes with an appeal to epistolary brevity:

But now you bid me include the entire bulk either of our own syllogisms or of those which have been devised by other schools for the purpose of belittling us. If I shall be willing to do this, the result will be a book, instead of a letter. And I declare again and again that I take no pleasure in such proofs.<sup>127</sup>

This constant interaction between Lucilius and Seneca also serves as an indication of their close relationship. Consequently, the conversational atmosphere in the *Epistulae Morales* is closely connected to the context of friendship. Ulrich Knoche has drawn

<sup>120</sup>Cf. Coleman (1974), 278.

<sup>121</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 55.10-11, 67.1, 75.1.

<sup>122</sup>For instance, in *Ep.* 60.1 and 115.17 Seneca opts for a more emotional tone.

<sup>123</sup>Coleman (1974), 285.

<sup>124</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 38.1 and 118.1 (Lucilius demands a more frequent exchange of letters), *Ep.* 39.1 (Lucilius has a request for notes), *Ep.* 75.1 (Lucilius comments on the rather careless style of Seneca's letters), *Ep.* 74.1 (Lucilius' letter stimulates Seneca), *Ep.* 113.1 (Lucilius wants Seneca's opinion).

<sup>125</sup>To name only a few instances, in *Ep.* 7, 8 and 10 Seneca urges Lucilius to stay away from the crowd and choose his company wisely, in *Ep.* 79.1 Seneca asks Lucilius to climb up mountain Aetna to do some research, and in *Ep.* 53.8 Lucilius is told to devote himself wholly to philosophy and forget about his business duties.

<sup>126</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 1-31. Most of these are by Epicurus.

<sup>127</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 85.1: *Iubes me quidquid est interroga*re *aut nostrarum aut ad traductionem nos*trum *excogitatarum comprehendere: quod si facere voluero, non erit epistula sed liber. Illud totiens testor,* *hoc me argumentorum genere non delectari.* On Seneca's attitude to logic and syllogistic reasoning, cf. Barnes (1997), 12-23.

attention to this aspect of friendship in Seneca's letters to Lucilius.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Cicero had once described the letter as the means to converse with absent friends, *amicorum colloquia absentium*.<sup>129</sup>

A letter of friendship is based on the three important principles of *philophrónēsis*, *parousia*, and *homilia*.<sup>130</sup> *Philophrónēsis* indicates the friendly bonds between sender and recipient and shows from the desire of the sender to establish or revive his personal relationship with the recipient.<sup>131</sup> Thus, Seneca speaks in several letters explicitly of his friendship with Lucilius (e.g., *Ep.* 6.2) and how much he enjoys receiving letters from Lucilius (e.g., *Ep.* 19.1, 59.1). Indeed, at *Ep.* 10.1 he seems almost possessive about their relationship. *Parousia*, conveying the presence of the sender while separated or anticipating the coming reunion between sender and addressee, serves to sustain and strengthen the feeling of friendship.<sup>132</sup> The actual absence is bridged by either an emphasis on the letter as substitute for the sender's physical company or on the short period of time before the friends will meet again. A nice illustration of *philophrónēsis* and *parousia* can be found at the end of *Ep.* 78:

Refresh yourself with such thoughts as these, and meanwhile reserve some hours for our letters. There will come a time when we shall be united again and brought together; however short this time may be, we shall make it long by knowing how to employ it.<sup>133</sup>

Seneca is on the whole optimistic about the capacity of the letter to overcome the distance separating sender and recipient and at *Ep.* 75.1-3 he claims to write exactly as he would speak when in Lucilius' company. With personal letters there is a sense of looking over the shoulder of someone else and catch a glimpse of that person's life, his feelings and actions. Like true friends Lucilius and Seneca desire to know everything about one another and urge one another to be an open book. At the opening of *Ep.* 32 Seneca tells how he asks others to report about Lucilius' activities and whereabouts, in *Ep.* 76 and again in *Ep.* 83 we see the situation reversed when Lucilius insists on being informed about Seneca's day-to-day life. *Homilia* points to the

<sup>128</sup>See Knoche (1975); on the Stoic concept of friendship, see Lesses (1993).

<sup>129</sup>Cicero *Phil.* 2.7.

<sup>130</sup>See Demetrius *Eloc.* 225; Seneca *Ep.* 75.1-4; Koskenniemi (1956); Thraede (1970); Stowers (1986), 58-70; Trapp (2003), 38-42.

<sup>131</sup>On *philophrónēsis*, Koskenniemi (1956), 35-37; Thraede (1970), 24-27, 37-38, 44-45, 65, 72, 125-46

<sup>132</sup>On *parousia*, Koskenniemi (1956), 38-42; Thraede (1970), 52-55, 64, 70-71 (in Seneca).

<sup>133</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 78.28: *His te cogitationibus recreat et interim epistulis nostris vaca. Veniet aliquando tempus quod nos iterum iungat ac misceat; quantulumlibet sit illud, longum faciet scientia utendi.* Cf. *Ep.* 45.2 where Seneca hopes and expects to be with Lucilius soon and otherwise would be willing to even swim to Sicily to meet him. Another example is *Ep.* 55.10-11 where Seneca is in his thoughts close to Lucilius, as friends should be.

mutual discussion or dialogue between friends which yields further insight.<sup>134</sup> Letter 6 discusses friendship and explicitly mentions the mutual benefit derived from their discussions.<sup>135</sup>

A friendly atmosphere allows open and frank communication. Candour and frank criticism were seen as a quality that distinguished the true friend from the flatterer, sharing experiences and giving support and guidance whenever necessary. In *Ep.* 76 Seneca entrusts Lucilius that he visits a philosopher's lectures. Here, the personal letters between friends are used to confide in one another. A friend is permitted to speak his mind and to comment on the other's character, behaviour and choices. This delight in openness and frankness suits the philosophical message of self-improvement and character development. One must be willing to face one's faults and weaknesses in order to overcome them. At the same time this candour fits the role of the philosopher as someone who assesses characters.

This context of friendship also provides the most important epistolary topics. Michael Trapp sees as central themes the perceived separation between sender and recipient—Seneca can refer to Lucilius as "You over there"<sup>136</sup>—and the extent to which the letter can bridge this distance<sup>137</sup>, exchange of information about what the other is doing and what interests him, and giving support in order to be a friend even when away.<sup>138</sup> In addition, there are two more observations to be made about Seneca's choice of epistolary topics. Brad Inwood notes that Seneca's choice of topics is best explained against the background of epistolary theory:

If the rules of the letter-writing game indicate that in general (though not absolutely, as the example of Epicurus shows) logic and physics should be absent from letters, Seneca (not out of character) goes one step further. He not only omits them, he attacks them; he flaunts before the reader his awareness of generic constraints—and plays with the reader as well, for there really is a great deal of physics in the letters, not just in 113 and 117, where the topic is dismissed only to be raised, in the manner of a clever *recusatio*, but also in more straightforward treatments such as letter 121 on *oikeiōsis*.<sup>139</sup>

After all, Seneca did write his *Naturales Quaestiones* and other later Stoics wrote on natural philosophy as well.<sup>140</sup> The second observation that I believe applies to Seneca

<sup>134</sup>On *homilia*, Koskenniemi (1956), 42-47; Thraede (1970), 83-84, 152-53, 182-85.

<sup>135</sup>The same idea is also expressed in *Ep.* 23.1.

<sup>136</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 51.1: *tu istic*.

<sup>137</sup>See above.

<sup>138</sup>Trapp (2003), 38-42.

<sup>139</sup>Inwood (2007), 141.

<sup>140</sup>Cf. Inwood (2007), 140; Gill (2003), 38-40; Algra (2009).

is made by Michael Trapp with regard to aristocratic correspondence. The letter as medium of communication was used by the higher classes for a wider variety of topics than handling one's daily affairs, often urgent family or business matters. On the whole, members of the upper-class would write less functional and more cultivated letters—they had a better education and could afford the papyrus—than the more practical letters written by the lower classes.<sup>141</sup> Seneca's letters show both in style and in his choice of subject-matter an educated sophistication typical of the upper echelons of Roman society. Of course, the letters do have a function, but it is not of the practical kind one might expect of letters. Here, the letter is not used primarily to take care of pressing business matters, to report news or make practical requests, but instead it is developed into a philosophical version and interpretation of a correspondence between friends.

#### 2.2.4 The collection of letters

A key feature of the *Epistulae Morales* is that these letters form a collection. They are interconnected and put together they are more than just an accumulation of discrete letters. Instead, as Wilson argues, there is an epistolary sequence: "They tell a story of the growing relationship between the writer and the recipient and the developing depth and resolve of the philosophy of both".<sup>142</sup> For example, the daily thought at the end of the first letters becomes a regular feature that Seneca repeats in various ways and even teases Lucilius with.<sup>143</sup> The closing quotations function thus both as individual snippets of wisdom and as running gags. In this sense, the letter-collection enhances the epistolary features occurring in the individual letters and those items in the collection that are less epistolary in form are coloured by the surrounding letters.<sup>144</sup> What is more, the growing relationship that is at the centre of the letters builds a sense of community between author, addressee and a wider readership.

There is also an internal chronology within the letter-collection. This is indicated by Seneca's travels, the seasonal weather and by numerous references to what was said in earlier letters.<sup>145</sup> Another matter is whether there is a didactic 'plot' that follows the progress of the addressee or author. Miriam Griffin is reluctant about detecting a direct line of progress in the addressee: "We must admit that Seneca's picture

---

<sup>141</sup>Inwood (2007), 11.

<sup>142</sup>Wilson (2001), 185.

<sup>143</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 1-31.

<sup>144</sup>Cf. Morello and Morrison (2007), x-xi.

<sup>145</sup>To name only a few examples, Seneca *Ep.* 26 calls attention to what was said about old age in *Ep.* 12; when Seneca returns to Naples from Baiae by land in *Ep.* 57 he alludes to his unpleasant sea journey to Baiae in *Ep.* 53; in *Ep.* 75.9-10 Seneca explicitly refers back to an earlier letter (71.4), and also in *Ep.* 76 there are several references back to *Ep.* 74.

of his personality in the Letters lacks plausibility and consistency".<sup>146</sup> She points out how Lucilius is repeatedly praised for his progress, making him a model student, but how he can later on be reprimanded for flaws and then be praised once again. This would seem to indicate both enormous improvement as well as an inconsistent kind of progress. As to the first charge of unreasonable progress, what is praised most by Seneca about Lucilius are his attitude and effort, not practical results. By comparison, if a running coach along the way shouts to his pupil that he is doing great and he keeps shouting this on numerous occasions, we would be wrong to add up these motivations and conclude that the pupil is improving so rapidly that by the finish line he must have reached the level of an Olympic runner. What Seneca has to say about Lucilius functions as motivation rather than as moral judgment.

Then there are the instances where Seneca or Lucilius are discredited by their moral lapses.<sup>147</sup> An interesting parallel here is Horace, who in his *Epistles* also suffers from occasional backsliding. As A.D. Morrison proposes, Horace's struggle to apply a particular moral lesson consistently serves as an aid and encouragement to his audience.<sup>148</sup> The teacher is not perfect himself and shows that becoming a good person is no small feat. As Catharine Edwards observes, "[t]his strategy serves, in part, to present an appealing picture of Seneca as a man aware of his own faults, rather than a faultless superior offering advice to humbler persons".<sup>149</sup> Their moral lapses only illustrate the need for reform. In the case of the *Epistulae Morales*, both Seneca and Lucilius can be seen to experience occasional regressions. Consequently, there does not seem to be a straight and clear-cut line of progress in either of them and it would in fact be unlikely to expect them to end up as moral sages by the end of the collection. There simply is no happy ending or a philosophical answer that solves everything on the last page. Because the philosophical life is not easy and demands our constant effort, we cannot expect to achieve moral perfection within a day or a week. Morrison points out the close connection between the everyday form, the letter, and philosophy as a daily activity.<sup>150</sup> His conclusion applies just as well to the philosophical studies of Seneca and Lucilius.<sup>151</sup>

Although it may be difficult to see a clear development in the main characters of the *Epistulae Morales*, we can see a maturation in the topics under discussion and in the general length of the letters. The initial letters are fairly brief and concerned with

<sup>146</sup> Griffin (1976), 53.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 21.1, 24.1, 63.14, 93.1.

<sup>148</sup> See the discussion of A.D. Morrison about didacticism and epistolarity in Horace in Morrison (2007). His observations with regard to Horace can, to a large extent, be applied to Seneca as well.

<sup>149</sup> Edwards (1997), 32.

<sup>150</sup> Morrison (2007), 131.

<sup>151</sup> See also Edwards (1997).

## 2.2 Writing letters

the issues and questions of a philosophical novice. Gradually the topics become more technical and the letters more lengthy. Although Seneca at several places states that he wants to avoid too many technicalities and especially sophistical argumentation and wordplay—after all, his business is to change lives—he does in fact discuss technical subjects. For example, in letters such as *Ep.* 58 he compares different philosophical views on types of being, *Ep.* 89 explains that philosophy consists of different parts and *Ep.* 113 discusses whether the Stoics held that the attributes of the soul such as virtue and justice are themselves living things. It is in these later letters also that there is more attention to the differences between the philosophical schools and to competing Stoic views. As the *Epistulae Morales* progress, there is more room to bring up philosophical details and advanced problems.<sup>152</sup>

In addition, scholars have attempted to find a general structure underlying the work. But first we need to consider how the work was arranged. The 124 letters in the extant collection fall into twenty books. Aulus Gellius provides us with the earliest testimony that the *Epistulae Morales* were divided into books and his reference to a twenty-second book confirms that the letter-collection we now possess is incomplete.<sup>153</sup> The division of the letter-collection into two volumes, comprising *Ep.* 1-88 and 89-124, is of a later, medieval date. The letters within each volume appear to be in sequence.<sup>154</sup> This leaves open the question whether the missing letters could be added at the end or perhaps in the middle, at the joint of the two volumes, or even at both places.<sup>155</sup> This obviously complicates any attempt to assign a pedagogical or philosophical plan to the structure of the collection. Scholars such as Cancik and Maurach have nevertheless made an attempt to identify certain clusters of letters that belong together. They convincingly argue that the *Epistulae Morales* should be seen as a well-organised literary work in letter form that revolves around certain main themes and smaller themes, down to the individual letters. Whereas Cancik finds unity within the separate books, Maurach holds the clusters of letters to transcend the book divisions.<sup>156</sup> However, a certain caution is called for when considering these groups and their status as isolated units. On the one hand, Seneca often handles a variety of themes within a single letter, thus making it easy to allude to themes previously discussed or yet to come. On the other hand, there are bound to be some central themes in the collection, as a discussion of the philosophical life needs to ad-

---

<sup>152</sup>Cf. Inwood (2007), xv.

<sup>153</sup>Aulus Gellius *NA* 12.2.3-13; cf. Cugusi (1983), 195, 200.

<sup>154</sup>Reynolds (1965), 17.

<sup>155</sup>Reynolds (1965) discusses only the option that letters at the end are missing; Cancik (1967) 8-12, also discusses the incompleteness of the collection and considers letters missing in the middle, at the joint of the two volumes; Inwood (2007), xiii.

<sup>156</sup>Cancik (1967), 'Hinweise zur Komposition der EM', 138-51; Maurach (1970), 128-29; Schönegg (1999).

dress certain issues such as how to spend one's time, how to deal with others, what the good life consists of, and how to deal with old age and death. A recurrence of themes, quotations or phrases evidently confirms the intratextuality within the work but may in itself not be sufficient to make absolute distinctions between (groups of) letters. I believe an underlying structure can be found, not by pointing out strict divisions between letters, but by recognising the versatile way of connecting and unifying the collection as a whole. In the second part, in Chs. 3-6, I will further explore some possible connections between the letters at hand and their immediate literary context.

### 2.2.5 Historical authenticity

Whether the letters are 'real' has been a matter of debate. Attempts to settle this issue have focused both on the dating of the letters, the absence of letters in reply and the presence of epistolary features. We know Seneca wrote his letters late in life (after 62 and prior to his death in 65).<sup>157</sup> If these letters were real then he wrote many of them within a short period of time, often sending them in packages rather than awaiting an answer after writing each letter. Furthermore, although the letters suggest a correspondence there are no reports or finds of any letters written by Lucilius himself. The presence of epistolary features has been presented as an argument both in favour of and against the letters' historical authenticity. The same features—the letters' opening and closing sections, the personal remarks and travel descriptions—may be taken either at face value as indications of authenticity or as well-chosen devices that add an epistolary 'colour' to a literary work.

All in all, the question of historical authenticity has not been settled decisively although the general scholarly opinion nowadays tends to regard these letters as fictional.<sup>158</sup> Despite the personal address to Lucilius, it is by now hardly disputed that Seneca probably was not engaged in an ongoing correspondence with Lucilius and that he intended to send his moral messages to a wider audience. This can be seen in Seneca's promise to Lucilius that these letters will bring him renown:

That which Epicurus could promise his friend, this I promise you, Lucilius. I shall find favour among later generations; I can take with me names that will endure as long as mine.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>157</sup> See Griffin (1976), Appendix B4.

<sup>158</sup> See for extensive discussions of the historical authenticity of the letters Griffin (1976), 351-52, Appendix B4; Abel (1981), esp. 473-77; Mazzoli (1989), 1846-50; Graver (1996), Ch. 1. By comparison, some scholars take up an intermediate position that considers the *Epistulae Morales* as a refined and improved version of genuine letters, cf. Cugusi (1983), 202; Lana (1991), 261.

<sup>159</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 21.5: *Quod Epicurus amico suo potuit promittere, hoc tibi promitto, Lucili: habebo apud posteros gratiam, possum tecum duratura nomina educere.* Cf. Seneca's statement in an earlier

This promise implies that his *Epistulae Morales* will not remain unnoticed, that others will read their correspondence and thus will remember Lucilius. The lasting renown that awaits Lucilius and Seneca's intention to teach future generations (cf. *Ep.* 8.2-3, 8.6) shows his serious attempt to make a contribution that will spread wide and last for a longer period of time. It seems therefore unlikely that the *Epistulae Morales* were written exclusively for the benefit of Lucilius. Its personal tone is certainly part of Seneca's strategy to provide his audience with an informal and friendly atmosphere. In my view, the debate on whether these letters are 'real' was previously sharpened by an underlying assumption that historical inauthenticity would inevitably diminish the value of the letters themselves. Recent years have brought a new appreciation of these letters as interesting and able to perform a moral function even when taken as works of fiction.

It is important to understand that letters can be fictionalised to different degrees and that this tension between fact and fiction was explored already in antiquity.<sup>160</sup> There were letters that were written and sent to the original addressee with no intention to be published. Some of these may later have ended up in a letter-collection (such as Cicero's letters). This may have involved a more or less extensive process of editing by the author or someone else. Other letters were meant from the start to reach a wider audience (such as Pliny the Younger's *Epistulae*) and some may never have been intended to be sent. Finally, certain letters were pseudoePIGRAPHICAL (at least some letters in the collections of Demosthenes, Isocrates and Plato) or even featured fictive characters (such as Ovid's *Heroides*, epistolary poems written from the perspective of Greek and Roman mythological heroines). Thus, a sharp divide between 'real' and 'made up' letters turns out to be rather difficult because letter-writers always to some extent filter and frame their message in their own words and are concerned with their self-presentation.<sup>161</sup>

## 2.3 Author, addressee, audience

### 2.3.1 Seneca: the author and his self-presentation

When studying the authorial self of Seneca in the *Epistulae Morales* it is helpful to keep in mind that the 'Seneca' in these letters does not necessarily correspond to the historical Seneca and that the personal voice we encounter may not coincide in all

letter that he works for the benefit of future generations (*Ep.* 8.2-3, 8.6), though this could also be referring to his other writings.

<sup>160</sup>See Trapp (2003), 3-4. Both Trapp (2003) and Morello and Morrison (2007) examine a wide variety of letters that use different degrees of fictionalisation.

<sup>161</sup>I will discuss the issue of self-presentation and use of *persona* further in the following section where I consider the role of author, addressee and audience.

aspects with, and needs to be distinguished from, Seneca's real feelings and motivations.<sup>162</sup> Seneca can use his *persona* to do or say things (in ways) that are unlike the 'real' Seneca. Still, this literary self could not diverge from the historical Seneca to such an extent that his audience would stumble upon major and obvious discrepancies between author and character. He needs to present his *persona* as a psychologically realistic character, overall consistent and in line with what was known about the real Seneca.

More remarkable in the *Epistulae Morales* is the scantiness of self-revelation that makes us get to know Seneca as a person, especially when compared to Cicero's private letters. Seneca is accomplished in employing his *persona* and personal details to affect his readership. When he describes his private life, his daily habits or personal thoughts, these serve as *exempla* that are being introduced primarily for philosophical purposes.<sup>163</sup> His daily life is examined, he explains how he acquired certain habits (such as eating simple fare and taking cold baths) and why he stopped to follow up on others (e.g., his vegetarianism), but all in order to expatiate on the philosophical way of life that suits a Roman gentleman. As such, Seneca also practises elite self-fashioning, depicting behaviour and manners which members from the upper-class were expected to adopt in society.<sup>164</sup>

The epistolary form gives the author the opportunity of portraying his *persona* in a friendly setting. The depiction of one's character in the letters can serve both the purpose of self-justification and of creating a sense of intimacy.<sup>165</sup> It seems as if the author reveals his true self in the letters and the presence of a teacher or model is itself an important part of philosophical guidance, "an attempt to reproduce this personal element of philosophic instruction in a written medium".<sup>166</sup> The requests from author and addressee to stay informed about the other's daily activities and a focus on the inner life also help to create an atmosphere of openness and self-examination.<sup>167</sup> The need for self-scrutiny and introspection is frequently brought to the fore, for example when Seneca describes how he watches over himself and addresses himself (*Ep.* 26.4-7). After disclosing his inner thoughts he concludes: "This is what I say to myself,

<sup>162</sup> See Edwards (1997); Inwood (2007), xx-xxi; Inwood (2005), Ch. 12, esp. 346ff.; Long (2006), 370f.; and Griffin (1976), 349-53, Appendix B4.

<sup>163</sup> See Edwards (1997), 23; Griffin (1976), 4.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Greenblatt (1980), and the earlier discussion in Ch. 1, 18.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 6.6: "Cleanthes could not have been the express image of Zeno, if he had merely heard his lectures; he shared in his life, saw into his hidden purposes, and watched him to see whether he lived according to his own rules"; *Zenonem Cleanthes non expressisset, si tantummodo audisset: vitae eius interfuit, secreta perspexit, observavit illum, an ex formula sua viveret.*

<sup>166</sup> Graver (1996), 33; cf. Trapp (2003), 15.

<sup>167</sup> See also Edwards (1997), 28-33. Self-examination is described and encouraged at various places, to name a few: Seneca *Ep.* 6.1-3, 16.2, 23.3, 25.5, 27.1, 30.17, 32.1, 35.1, 40.1, 68.6-7, 83.2.

but I would have you think that I have said it to you also".<sup>168</sup> Here, we see how inner dialogue and self-examination are combined with assisting the other. This way, by being an open book and watching over themselves and each another, they work to their mutual benefit.

Seneca's self-representation is not uncomplicated. We already noticed in the first chapter how he takes on a variety of roles, viz. that of friend, adviser, fellow-student and critic of others. As a friend he is involved in Lucilius' life, he wishes him well, is interested in his affairs and in his general well-being. His tone is friendly, sometimes frank.<sup>169</sup> As an adviser and teacher he both informs his addressee and offers advice on numerous topics, ranging from theoretical philosophical issues to practical ethical matters, from speaking in public to physical activities and literature.<sup>170</sup> As a fellow-student Seneca himself struggles to improve. His moral successes and failures serve as *exempla* to teach and illustrate. In *Ep. 68.9* he prefers to view himself as a patient rather than as a doctor. His experience comes from suffering diseases first hand and sharing the remedies that helped him most. As a critic of others he warns against and decries other lifestyles and competing philosophies. It is partly in contrast with others that Seneca can position himself more clearly.

Furthermore, he is also committed to certain identities. Seneca at times stresses his background as cultured member of the Roman upper-class and emphasises his philosophical position as Stoic. I will examine these identities more extensively in a later section (2.5).

### 2.3.2 The addressee Lucilius and the wider audience

The direct addressee of all the letters in the *Epistulae Morales* is Gaius Lucilius Iunior.<sup>171</sup> Little is known about him for certain and what we do know about him can easily be summarised. He was a Roman man of equestrian rank, several years younger than Seneca (mention of Lucilius being younger may also be a playful reference to his name Iunior more than to the actual age difference between them). The limited evidence suggests that Lucilius did exist and it should be added that it would have been quite uncommon in Roman literature to dedicate a work to an obscure and fictive character. Lucilius is also the dedicatee of Seneca's *De providentia* and is

<sup>168</sup>Seneca *Ep. 26.7*: *Haec mecum loquor, sed tecum quoque me locutum puta.*

<sup>169</sup>See the earlier subsection on epistolary features where the friendship element in the letters is discussed.

<sup>170</sup>See Hadot (1969) for an extensive study of Seneca's role as spiritual guide.

<sup>171</sup>Griffin (1976), 91, 94, 347-53, Appendix A1; Maurach (1970), 11; R. Hanslik, 'Lucilius', Nr. II 4, *Der kleine Pauly*, Bd. 3 (1969), 754-55; W. Kroll, 'Lucilius' (Nr. 26), *RE XIII*, 2 (1927), 1645; U. Weidemann, 'Lucilius Iunior', *Lexikon der Antike Welt*, 1770.

briefly described in the *Naturales Quaestiones* and the *Epistulae Morales*.<sup>172</sup> From the descriptions in these works arises a general impression of a civilised and educated member of the Roman upper-class. He may not have moved in the highest circles but his equestrian status (perhaps in combination with Seneca's political influence at the time) did enable him to pursue a political career and fulfil several public duties. In the letters some remarks are made about Lucilius serving as procurator in Sicily. This fact is brought to the fore when discussing the benefits of withdrawal from public life and the distance that separates Lucilius from Seneca, who is either in Rome or in Campania.

Lucilius, like Seneca, had an interest in both literature and philosophy. In *Ep. 46* Seneca expresses his satisfaction with a book written by Lucilius and compliments him on his work. Because *Ep. 79* deals with the Sicilian Mount Etna, its volcanic activity and literary descriptions of this natural phenomenon, some scholars have suggested that a poetical work on the Etna can be attributed to Lucilius. A remark in *Ep. 49* about Pompeii being dear to Lucilius could indicate that he was originally from that area. His philosophical interest is demonstrated by the philosophical works dedicated to him, the increasing technicality in the letters and in the questions concerning philosophy that are attributed to him. Regardless of the fictionality of the correspondence, it needs to be at least plausible to ascribe such a philosophical interest to Lucilius. Just as in Seneca's case, the literary *persona* should not be too readily identified with the historical person, yet there needs to be a realistic connection between the one and the other.<sup>173</sup>

Just like Seneca, Lucilius takes on varying roles throughout the letters. Lucilius is a friend, a writer himself and a fellow-student who is sometimes struggling, sometimes setting an example. Indeed, he is not the passive recipient of Seneca's learning but an independent and cultured man with literary and philosophical aspirations. He does need philosophical instruction, though he is already acquainted with the main philosophical positions and their doctrines. It is rather the application of these philosophical truths in daily life and the finer philosophical distinctions that need elucidation. His function in the *Epistulae Morales* is an important one as he is the sole addressee and internal reader of the work, the recipient to whom all letters are written. Seneca frequently addresses Lucilius in affectionate and respectful terms (see Table 2.1). Moreover, in antiquity the letter was often conceived as a type of gift, as something shaped specifically for the receiver. So a letter should show sensitivity to its particular addressee and his circumstances.

Lucilius is the addressee of the *Epistulae Morales* but he is hardly the single focus of the letters. They are written in a general tone and there is hardly mention of spe-

<sup>172</sup>Seneca *NQ* 3.1.1, 4 pref. 1, 4 pref. 9; *Ep.* 1.5, 19.1, 19.5, 33.7, 35.2, 44.2, 49.1, 53.1, 70.1, 96.3.

<sup>173</sup>See also Graver (1996), 25.

Table 2.1: Onomastic references to Lucilius in the *Epistulae Morales*.

Lucilio suo (salu- tation)	Lucili	mi Lucili	Lucili viro- rum optime	Lucili caris- sime
Total: 124	Total: 32	Total: 45	Total: 7	Total: 7
1-124	1.3; 6.1; 13.4; 15.10; 16.1; 16.5; 18.7; 20.12; 21.2; 21.5; 22.11; 24.11; 30.4; 41.2; 51.13; 52.1; 58.26; 62.1; 70.2; 73.12; 76.5; 82.15; 93.4; 96.5; 98.1; 98.2; 104.25; 108.15; 120.8; 122.19; 123.14; 124.10	1.1; 1.2; 5.7; 7.12; 9.13; 11.9; 13.8; 15.2; 18.12; 18.15; 20.1; 22.9; 23.3; 24.25; 29.3; 30.15; 31.1: Lucilium meum; 47.16; 48.12; 49.1; 50.7; 54.5; 55.4; 55.11; 57.4; 58.6; 63.7; 66.31; 67.1; 67.4; 74.1; 90.1; 90.20; 96.2; 97.1; 98.17; 101.10: Lucili mi; 102.4; 111.3; 114.26; 115.1; 117.25; 118.3; 119.2; 120.15	13.16; 48.4; 66.49; 71.6; 78.4; 82.8; 89.18	23.6; 32.3; 53.7; 61.4; 63.16; 79.13; 113.1

cific situations known only to Seneca and Lucilius.<sup>174</sup> This suggests that the letters were written with a wider audience in mind. We have already seen Seneca's promise of fame that the *Epistulae Morales* would bring Lucilius.<sup>175</sup> To further illustrate this, there are instances where Lucilius seems not to be the direct addressee at all. In *Ep.* 17, Lucilius is said not to be poor himself but the letter continues to discuss the best way to handle limited finances.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, Lucilius is complimented in *Ep.* 47 for treating his slaves well and is said not to require the exhortation to associate with slaves and treat them right that is the letter's central topic. Margaret Graver considers it problematic that Lucilius fulfils such a variety of roles, from younger student to critical observant, from regressing fool to exemplary role model.<sup>177</sup> She regards

<sup>174</sup>Graver (1996), 12, 16.

<sup>175</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 21.5.

<sup>176</sup>See also Graver (1996), 37.

<sup>177</sup>Graver (1996), 21.

the disparity between different roles as symptomatic for Seneca's effort to reach a wider audience. As Lucilius is not the true focus of the work, Graver points out that he could be best regarded as a dedicatee, in a manner that can be compared to Cicero's introduction of characters based on and named after contemporaries. Thus, the historical Lucilius would feel honoured to feature in these letters but would not necessarily need the instruction they contained.<sup>178</sup> In my view, Seneca does indeed aim at a wider audience but this also includes Lucilius. After all, even if Lucilius is more advanced than the letters at times show, he would still benefit from their content as the Stoic objective of living a life in accordance with virtue is not easily attained.

Seneca writes for an audience of cultured Roman men with an interest in learning and a readiness for self-improvement. By writing his letters in Latin he introduces philosophy in an accessible form to an audience not familiar with Greek philosophical works.<sup>179</sup> Any specialist in philosophy would have had to work primarily with Greek texts. Seneca, however, avoids Greek terminology whenever possible or compares it to the best Latin equivalent term, he translates a Greek philosophical poem into Latin and acknowledges his audience's preference for Roman role-models.<sup>180</sup> Philosophical expertise is not required and the letters tend to favour personal effort over endless book studies. Both Seneca and Lucilius are adults and the letters deal with the responsibilities of adult life and speak to those who are concerned about the implications of leading a philosophical life. Thus, the letters do not only cover normative issues about how philosophers behave, but also formative issues about what it is like to become and to be a philosopher and how this does affect one's identity. Seneca presupposes a cultivated and well-read audience that is familiar with the main figures of Roman history and the great works of literature. Although he writes 'just' letters, their tone and sophistication make them stand out as much more. As Graver aptly remarks:

Casual references to the circumstances of the author's own class, gender, and economic level, together with the elegance of his style and manner, do create the impression that he is writing for "the very best kind of people". But "best" is to be redefined in accordance with Stoic values, as the reader is invited to join another elite based on factors of motivation and imaginative involvement in the work at hand.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>178</sup>Graver (1996), 28-29.

<sup>179</sup>See Inwood (1995), 68; Graver (1996), Ch. 1. For an interesting discussion of Roman linguistic prejudices to both Latin and Greek, see Toohey (1981).

<sup>180</sup>On avoiding Greek terminology and offering Latin renditions, see for example Ep. 9.1, 33.7, 54.1 and 58.1, Seneca sets Latin positively off against Greek in Ep. 40.11. In Ep. 64 the Greek writings of Sextius are contrasted with their Roman moral content, Roman *exempla* are named first at Ep. 64.10 and Greek models are optional at Ep. 104.21. In Ep. 107.11 Seneca offers a translation of lines from Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*.

<sup>181</sup>Graver (1996), 42. See also Ep. 44 where Seneca redefines nobility in terms of personal

## 2.4 Purpose of the letters

Thus far we have seen that it may be impossible to determine with certainty whether the *Epistulae Morales* are historically authentic letters. More important is that they function as letters and that their epistolary form is intended to support the philosophical content they frame. The friendly tone and informal atmosphere encourage the reader to feel included in a private conversation, to reflect on the issues at hand and find inspiration for a philosophical way of life. At this point, I would like to assess briefly the multiple purposes of the letters. I will discuss the philosophical, didactic and aesthetic purpose and the purpose of self-presentation separately, though they are in fact closely connected.

Firstly, Seneca has a philosophical purpose in writing the letters. He wants to discuss philosophy, its theoretical notions, its practical concerns and the spiritual transformation it requires. It seems a fair assumption that Seneca also found personal inspiration and stimulus in his work. Like Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, these letters in their impressive quantity serve as a spiritual exercise to their author. At the same time, this pursuit of personal development is always connected with the concern for like-minded others.<sup>182</sup> Seneca is clear about his intention to bring about a change in Lucilius.<sup>183</sup> In this sense, Seneca shows that one needs to be actively engaged in the philosophical life, that it is a shared process of self-questioning in which we draw on our own experiences to understand and acquire philosophical skills and concepts. He is keen to emphasise how the philosophical life is best pursued in the company of fellow students and teachers where they can learn from one another.<sup>184</sup>

Secondly, the didactic purpose is closely connected to the philosophical. This is demonstrated in Seneca's remark that the philosopher is really the pedagogue of the human race.<sup>185</sup> He exhorts readers to change their life, dissuades them from future transgressions and teaches them the right way of life and proper attitude.<sup>186</sup>

---

growth and moral progress.

<sup>182</sup>A clear example is *Ep.* 6.2-6 where Seneca expresses his desire to share his knowledge with others. Nevertheless, in *Ep.* 7.8 and 29.1-3 he indicates that converting others should be restricted to those who are open to change. This is in marked contrast with the Cynic approach to preach to all and sundry in the street.

<sup>183</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 16.3, 50.1, 53.8, 58.26, 88.28. Not only does he try to change Lucilius, several letters (e.g., *Ep.* 29.1-3) discuss how and when a philosopher should talk to others about their way of life and Seneca mentions some of his own attempts. For instance, his approach to the stubborn and witty Marcellinus (*Ep.* 29.4-9), and his message to the excessively grieving Marullus (*Ep.* 99).

<sup>184</sup>Cf. *Ep.* 7.8-9.

<sup>185</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 64.9-10.

<sup>186</sup>Exhortation is easily recognised by the frequent use of imperative expressions, e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 1.1, 19.1 (*ita fac*); 3.2, 15.10, 19.8, 59.16, 75.15, 103.3 (*cogita*); 20.3 (*observa te*); 29.9 (*componere*

Thirdly, the aesthetic or literary purpose is not a primary one but rather an accompanying objective. Seneca stresses in several passages that it is not philosophy's purpose to entertain and warns readers not to take such works as passive enjoyment.<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, he acknowledges that presenting philosophy in an inviting manner does help his audience to 'swallow the medicine'.<sup>188</sup> Not that philosophy is really in need of this: "One enjoys other cures only after health is restored, but a draught of philosophy is at the same moment wholesome and pleasant".<sup>189</sup>

Finally, another important purpose of the letters is the self-presentation of Seneca himself. In this context it is interesting to consider the various motives the ancients had to share a letter-collection with a wider audience. Michael Trapp names three possible reasons, "to safeguard reputations and help in the building of personal monuments, to document a key period of history or set of events, to preserve the valuable lessons and/or fine writing contained".<sup>190</sup> In the case of the *Epistulae Morales* it is probably a combination of the first and third motive, Seneca's self-image and the philosophical truth in an attractive literary form. Certainly self-representation is at stake here, Seneca's claims to bring fame to the addressee Lucilius would apply to himself as well and through these letters he has ample space to present his *persona* in a favourable light. In this sense we could speak of the *Epistulae Morales* as a personal monument. Written late in life, the letters offer a personal portrait in which he wants to be an example to others and chooses roles that emphasise his experience. In addition, he accentuates certain identities to which he is particularly committed and the normative and formative aspects of these identities.

As with all ideologies, there are two levels of truth at work, two levels of perception that need to be reconciled. On the one hand, there is the philosophical truth, in Seneca's case the Stoic doctrines that state how the world is composed, how it works and how human beings fit in there, and on the other hand there is the experience of daily life, our practical understanding of how we perceive, feel and interact with our surroundings. A philosopher must bring these two levels in agreement in order to make sense of the world and our place in it. In the *Epistulae Morales* we can see this very process at work: the letters describe and investigate how our common sense ideas and everyday experiences fit in with the philosophical life as expounded by

*mores tuos, attolle animum, adversus formidata consiste*). Another characteristic feature is dissuasion by an antithetical structure, e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 53.8, 62.1, 78.12-13.

<sup>187</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 16.3, 52.14, 75.3-7, 100.10, 115.1. Similarly, in *Ep.* 40.12 Fabianus is praised first and foremost for his life and knowledge and only then for his eloquence.

<sup>188</sup>On presenting philosophy in a more appealing way, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 40.8-14, 75.3-5, 100.3-5; Lucretius *DRN* 1.937-38, 1.943-50.

<sup>189</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 50.9: *Aliorum remediorum post sanitatem voluptas est, philosophia pariter et salutaris et dulcis est.*

<sup>190</sup>Trapp (2003), 12.

Stoic theory. The earliest letters deal more with the sort of questions a novice might have: do I have to neglect my appearance just like some philosophers do? (*Ep.* 5), can philosophy help me overcome natural weaknesses such as blushing? (*Ep.* 11), how should I prioritise my duties, my affairs and philosophical study? (*Ep.* 17, 19), what is a philosophical way to spend my time? (*Ep.* 1, 8) Later letters can concentrate on more advanced matters: how is philosophy related to the other *artes*? (*Ep.* 88), how did philosophy originate and did it contrive other types of knowledge and skills as well? (*Ep.* 90). All these questions help to portray what a Roman philosophical life could look like. I agree with Marcus Wilson when he declares that "[Seneca] re-discovers his philosophy through different situations, ... Later epistles do not cancel out earlier ones but revisit ideas in new circumstances and combinations".<sup>191</sup> Consequently, there is an ongoing exploration of the interaction between philosophical notions about the good life and the everyday life one leads.

Seneca wants the Stoic philosophical truths he stands for to come alive in a Roman upper-class setting. In the words of A.A. Long: "[T]he main purpose of his philosophical writings is the creative application of a Stoic framework to the practical concerns of his addressees and himself".<sup>192</sup> A description by Michael Trapp about Pliny the Younger's letter-collection would apply to Seneca's letters as well, that "they give the impression of a collection carefully calculated to show off their author in all the identities he prided himself on".<sup>193</sup> For Seneca this means presenting himself as an educated Roman upper-class man who is also a philosopher committed to the Stoic position. All these aspects are emphasised at different places throughout the letters and it is Seneca's undertaking to connect and combine these different identities into a lifestyle worthy of admiration and imitation.

## 2.5 Identities in the *Epistulae Morales*

The concept 'identity' is in vogue these days in classical studies (among others). Even though, as has been shown by Philip Gleason, it has only developed its current meaning over the last century or so.<sup>194</sup> There is not an ancient equivalent to the term, yet the Stoic theory of roles (Latin *personae*, Greek *prosôpa*) is in certain ways a surprising anticipation of how construction of selfhood proceeds from the multiple parts played by a person.<sup>195</sup> There are multiple roles or identities present in the *Epistulae Morales*. In the following five sections I will discuss what I believe to be the most important

<sup>191</sup>Wilson (2001), 167.

<sup>192</sup>Long (2003), 204.

<sup>193</sup>Trapp (2003), 14.

<sup>194</sup>P. Gleason (1983), 910-31.

<sup>195</sup>Cf. Cicero *Off.* 1.107-21 (four *personae* theory, derived from Panaetius), which examines how a person should perform his different roles as a human being, as an individual and in relation

ones, that of human, Roman, upper-class, philosophical and Stoic identity. In the final section I will reflect on other aspects of identity that are also present in the letters. Epistolary writing involves the active construction of a self-image. The way Seneca relates to others—whether he identifies himself with or dissociates himself from a particular group—pertains to his representation of himself. Thus, a discussion of identities in the letters is relevant to our understanding of Seneca's self-presentation, of how he perceived his audience and their self-image, and of the purpose of the letters as presenting a new way of life that combines the best of diverse cultural worlds.

Several aspects can function as identity markers. First of all, I have studied Seneca's different uses of 'we' and 'us', especially where these are contrasted with (implicit) 'others'. This involves clarifying who are members of a certain group and who are not, who within a group set the right example and who are misguiding others with their false beliefs or improper actions. Also, the topics and the types of problems addressed in the letters are indicators of the concerns of his audience and what Seneca held to be important information to share. Furthermore, onomastic references provide us with an understanding of who mattered and in what role. A particular example is the appropriation of other writers and philosophers. For instance, Seneca can speak of 'our Virgil' (*Vergilius noster*) and 'our Zeno' (*Zenon noster*).<sup>196</sup> The use of jargon and typical imagery can be another characteristic of group identity.

One aspect that deserves special attention is that of male identity. In the *Epistulae Morales*, the perspective is persistently male-oriented. Masculinity matters in all the different roles that I will discuss.<sup>197</sup> All the role models in the *Epistulae Morales* are men, whether they are Romans or philosophers. Whereas the opposition between male and female is scarcely turned into a topic of discussion, the right way of being

to his social and professional obligations, 3.51-57, 63 (Stoic casuistry); De Lacy (1977), 163-72; Gill (1988); Inwood (2003), 41. Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.2.30, 3.2.4; Long (2002), Ch. 9 'Appropriate Actions and Feelings', 231-58.

<sup>196</sup> Instances where Seneca speaks of 'our Virgil' can be found in *Ep.* 21.5, 28.3, 56.12, 59.3, 70.2, 84.3, 86.15, 92.9, 95.69, 104.24, 115.4. The same epithet is used for the Roman ancestors (*Ep.* 110.1), for the philosophers Zeno (*Ep.* 82.9, 83.10) Cleanthes (*Ep.* 107.10), Posidonius (*Ep.* 113.28), Hecato (*Ep.* 5.7), Attalus (*Ep.* 63.5, 81.22), the Cynic Demetrius (*Ep.* 20.9, 62.3, 67.14, 91.19), and Stoics in general (*Ep.* 65.2). In addition, it is used for the orator Cicero (*Ep.* 40.11), but also for mutual friends and acquaintances such as Marcellinus (*Ep.* 29.1 and 29.4), Aufidius Bassus (*Ep.* 30.3 and 30.5), Claranus (*Ep.* 66.2), Crispus (*Ep.* 56.3) and Aebutius Liberalis (*Ep.* 91.1, 91.3, 91.13). A variation can be found in *Ep.* 87.2 where Seneca speaks of his friend Maximus as *Maximus meus* and in the numerous instances of *mi Lucili*, e.g., *Ep.* 1.1, 5.7, 11.9, 22.9, 30.15, 74.1, 101.10, 111.3, 114.26.

<sup>197</sup> On the role and presence of women in Seneca's writings, see Manning (1973); Harich (1993); Föllinger (1996); Mauch (1997). On Roman elite male identity, see M. Gleason (1999); Williams (1999), Ch. 4 'Effeminacy and Masculinity', 125-59.

## 2.5 Identities in the *Epistulae Morales*

masculine is of great import. The question of what constitutes real manhood matters greatly to Seneca's audience and in many contexts Seneca examines the manly way to deal with things—how to bear pain or adversity like a man.<sup>198</sup> The 'others' described in the letters are not women—they are hardly ever present in the text—but effeminate men, *delicati*. Their soft and unmanly lifestyle is despised both by Romans and philosophers and this shared dislike is optimally used by Seneca to condemn them in the strongest possible terms.<sup>199</sup>

### 2.5.1 Humans

Seneca's view of humanity is to a large extent shaped by Stoic conceptions of human identity. For human beings the most important thing to master is the art of 'following nature' or 'living in accordance with nature', *homologoumenôs tēi phusei zēn*.<sup>200</sup> This key concept has two aspects. It indicates that we need to follow the rational laws of the universe and should fully assent to the natural course of events. But in a more specific sense, the most distinctive feature of human beings is their reason and this sets us apart from all those who lack it either entirely, such as animals and plants, or temporarily, such as young children and those of unsound mind.<sup>201</sup> Rationality is shared with the gods, though their rationality is perfect and they are not mortal like us.<sup>202</sup>

What is best in man? Reason: with this he precedes the animals and follows the gods. Therefore perfect reason is man's peculiar good, the rest he shares with animals and plants ... what is the peculiar characteristic of a man? Reason—which when right and perfect makes the full sum of human happiness.<sup>203</sup>

Each thing should live in accordance to nature, but in the case of man this will be a different way of life than in the case of a tiger or of a tree. Rationality plays a key part in the development of human beings. By developing our human rationality and

<sup>198</sup>This is an important aspect of *Ep. 78*, discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>199</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep. 66.49*, 82.1-2, 114.21, 115.2-3, and on the unnatural lives of those night-dwellers, Seneca *Ep. 122*.

<sup>200</sup>See e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.87 (SVF 1.179[1]; IG II-94.87); Stobaeus 2.75-76 (SVF 1.179[2], 1.552; IG II-95.6a); Cicero *Fin. 4.14* (SVF 1.179[3]).

<sup>201</sup>On the lack of rationality in children, see Seneca *Ep. 121.4*, 124.9; on the non-rationality of animals, see *Ep. 85.8*, 113.17, 124.8.

<sup>202</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 41.8*, 76.9-11, 92.27-30, 113.17, 121.14, 124.14, 124.21-23.

<sup>203</sup>Seneca *Ep. 76.9-10*: *In homine quid est optimum? ratio: hac antecedit animalia, deos sequitur. Ratio ergo perfecta proprium bonum est, cetera illi cum animalibus satisque communia sunt. ... Quid est in homine proprium? ratio: haec recta et consummata felicitatem hominis implevit.* Tr. taken from Long and Sedley (1989), 395.

living in agreement with reason we can become a good specimen of the human race and in this rational and virtuous life lies our happiness.

At the same time, the Stoics recognise various stages of development on the way to reaching our full human potential. The Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* establishes that Nature has provided human beings with a natural kinship towards themselves and towards others.<sup>204</sup> Human beings are by nature prone to strive for self-preservation, and as such they are inclined to acquire what is their appropriate good and avoid what is inappropriate and bad. This natural instinct for self-preservation is actually present in all living beings.<sup>205</sup>

As we mature, it is natural and appropriate for human beings to develop social relationships and to feel affection for others. This is a natural "process of familiarisation".<sup>206</sup> Our rationality enables us to understand how others are related to us: "Nature produced us related to one another, since she created us from the same source and to the same end. She engendered in us mutual affection, and made us prone to friendships".<sup>207</sup> Living in a community is in accordance with this natural, rational life, for humans are social and their reason enables them to have conversations, to make agreements, and conduct all sorts of social, rational behaviour.<sup>208</sup> Man, "that social creature that it is and born for the common good, views the world as the universal home of mankind."<sup>209</sup>

As human beings develop their reason even further and come across virtue and what is honourable, they come to understand that only virtue is a good and only vice an evil. Thus, there is a direct relation between the development of reason and human sociability and moral virtue. Living a virtuous life means to live in accordance with reason.

<sup>204</sup>Cf. e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.85-89; Hierocles 9.3-10, 11.14-18 (LS 57D); Cicero *Fin.* 3.16-22, 3.62-68 (LS 57F); Hierocles ap. Stobaeus 4.671,7-673,11 (LS 57G); Seneca *Ep.* 121; cf. the discussion in Long and Sedley (1989), 350-54; Pembroke (1971), 114-49; Striker (1983), 145-67; Lee (2002), esp. Ch. 4 'Wahrnehmung und Oikeiosis', 59-91, Ch. 5 'Vernunft und Oikeiosis', 92-142; Algra (2003), 265-96; Brennan (2005), Ch. 10 'Oikeiosis and Others', 154-168.

<sup>205</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 121.

<sup>206</sup>Algra (2003), 288.

<sup>207</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 95.52: *Natura nos cognatos edidit, cum ex isdem et in eadem gigneret; haec nobis amorem indidit mutuum et sociabiles fecit.*

<sup>208</sup>K. Algra already noted the naturalness of the rational aspect of *oikeiosis*: "Yet there is also continuity between this stage and the earlier stages in so far as the rationality of the sage is no more or no less natural than are the instincts of infants, and in so far as both the earlier and the later stages are stages of *appropriation*: the mechanism is not itself suddenly changed for another one." Algra (2003), 289.

<sup>209</sup>Seneca *Ben.* 7.1.7: *si sociale animal et in commune genitus mundum ut unam omnium domum spectat.* Tr. taken from the Loeb edition.

## 2.5 Identities in the *Epistulae Morales*

91

Animals and humans in particular are set off against one another. Seneca repeatedly highlights the natural differences between the two. Although some animals may be stronger, faster or bigger, have better taste or smell, it is our rationality that puts us on another level entirely. As a result, what is inborn and naturally present in animals needs to be acquired through experience and reasoning in humans.<sup>210</sup> We cannot, however, maintain that the differences in natural advantages are unfair to us.<sup>211</sup> In fact, our human condition should lead us to embrace and cultivate reason and engage in intellectual endeavours, such as philosophy. Those who fail to acknowledge this fact cannot live up to their full human potential and threaten the happiness of others whom they might lead astray.

### 2.5.2 Romans

Roman identity has proven itself to be an elusive topic. As noted in the first chapter, identity is not static and its content may change over time, vary in different locations and in different social settings. This is certainly the case with Roman identity, which, as Richard Hingley sums up, "was, therefore, not a matter of a person's ethnicity, nation, linguistic group or descent, but a status that had been inherited, achieved or awarded".<sup>212</sup> As a result, different people could feel themselves Roman in their own way, be it as a senator or plebeian, as freeborn or freedman, as man or woman. Within the group of Romans who shared citizenship there was still room for much diversity. In recent years, various scholars have attempted to capture in what sense and in which contexts Roman identity could be experienced and expressed.<sup>213</sup> My focus here will be on how Seneca in the *Epistulae Morales* represents his own Roman identity and that of his audience.

What is lacking in the letters is a clear definition of who are considered to be Romans. Nevertheless, three aspects stand out. Firstly, Seneca can describe as non-Romans all foreigners, such as Greeks, Germans, Parthians or Carthaginians. They have their own traditions and languages and as such differ from Romans and can be used for contrast.<sup>214</sup> Secondly, there are those who might actually be Romans but who

<sup>210</sup>Cf. *Ep.* 15.2, 74.15-16, 121.6, 121.22-23, 124.22.

<sup>211</sup>Cf. *Ep.* 74.20-21.

<sup>212</sup>Hingley (2005), 56.

<sup>213</sup>For general studies of Roman culture see among others Hingley (2005) and Laurence and Berry (1998); Roman culture during the period of its imperial expansion, Wallace-Hadrill (2008). I can offer here only a small selection of a growing subject: on the role of the (contradicting) founding myths of Rome in the formation of Roman identity, see Dench (2005); on Roman male elite identity, see M. Gleason (1999); on socio-political aspects of Latin literature, see Habinek (1998); Gruen (1992) tackles the issue of how Republican Rome took possession of Hellenic culture to redefine itself.

<sup>214</sup>On the distinctions between different nationalities, see *Ep.* 58.12, on other peoples with

fail to live up to the standard of a Roman way of life. They are frowned upon for not living in accordance with Roman values. The real question in such cases is how such a deviation from 'the Roman way' is determined and by whom. Thirdly, although the Roman people included both males and females, Seneca writes about Roman identity to an intended male audience from a masculine perspective. As such, his advice often takes as its focus how a real Roman man should think, act and present himself.<sup>215</sup>

The standard for Roman morality was set by the *maiores*, the Roman forebears whose traditional values continued to exert great influence on societal norms. The ancient Roman manners, the *mores maiorum*, formed a constant point of reference and anything that was perceived as contrary to the usage and the customs of the Roman ancestors was unwelcome. As such, Romans held strongly to their traditional values and attitudes and looked back in history for moral inspiration. The positive image of what it meant to be Roman was exemplified by famous historical figures. In the *Epistulae Morales* these frequently appear in support of Seneca's views: Cato the Censor and Cato the Younger, Scipio Africanus and Laelius, Regulus, Rutilius Rufus and Mucius Scaevola.<sup>216</sup> The *Epistulae Morales* depict these Romans as simple, decent, hardworking people. Seneca is keen to add Roman heroes as exemplary figures in his work so as to demonstrate that they too understood and expressed a virtuous way of life. Real Romans are presented as tough men who are certainly not effeminate or spoiled by luxury. By implication, all self-indulgent and unmanly individuals bring shame on their Roman background. Cato the Younger (95-48 BC) enjoys pride of place in the *Epistulae Morales* as the ideal Roman model, combining philosophical insight with traditional Roman values.<sup>217</sup>

Negative examples serve in the *Epistulae Morales* as an indication of what can go wrong when moral values are neglected. In the following example a famous Roman, Mark Antony, is brought to destruction by immoral behaviour:

Mark Antony was a great man, a man of distinguished ability; but what ruined him and drove him into foreign habits and un-Roman vices, if it was not drunkenness and—no less potent than wine—love of Cleopatra? This it was that made him an enemy of the state ...<sup>218</sup>

their own language and tradition and their dissimilarity with Roman ways, see *Ep.* 36.7, 40.11, 51.7, 59.7, 82.8, 83.25, 94.62, 124.22.

<sup>215</sup>Cf. M. Gleason (1999).

<sup>216</sup>To name a few places where these *exempla* are introduced, either alone or grouped together: *Ep.* 11.10, 13.14, 24.4-7, 66.51, 86.1-12, 98.12-13, 104.21. See also Arnold (1911), 297, on the reference to wise Romans in Roman Stoicism.

<sup>217</sup>On the exemplary role of M. Porcius Cato see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 14.12-13, 64.10, 95.69-72, 104.21, 104.29-33; also Arnold (1911), 386-88.

<sup>218</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 83.25: *M. Antonium, magnum virum et ingeni nobilis, quae alia res perdidit et in externos mores ac vitia non Romana traiecit quam ebrietas nec minor vino Cleopatrae amor?* Haec

His dissolute lifestyle shows a disregard for many Roman virtues such as *frugalitas*, *gravitas* and *virtus*.<sup>219</sup> Due to his immorality he becomes an enemy of Rome, which in turn is a violation of *pietas* to his country. The foreignness of his behaviour implicitly recalls the sober way of living of the old, respectable *maiores*; their frugality and sternness contrasts with his decadence.<sup>220</sup> These two threats to Roman well-being, the presence of foreign characteristics (*externos mores ac vitia non Romana*) and an enemy of Rome (*hostem rei publicae*), are nicely set side by side in another context where Seneca remarks that "while Scipio fought against our enemies, Cato fought against our bad morals".<sup>221</sup> Both were of benefit to the protection of Roman identity.

Moreover, casual remarks report Roman social practices, traditions and festivals. Seneca speaks of their common Roman ancestors as *maiores nostri*, he attends the Saturnalia—though in a moderate and restrained way—and knows his Roman history.<sup>222</sup> In his imagery and examples he frequently draws on different areas associated with Roman public life, viz. the law-courts, the forum, the elections and the senate-chamber, the baths, games and the theatre.<sup>223</sup> He uses jargon from the military, economic, political and legal-judicial professions to enliven and explain his letters:

When at a meeting of the Senate we vote in favour of someone's motion, it cannot be said, "A. is more in accord with the motion than B." All alike vote for the same motion. I make the same statement with regard to virtues,—they are all in accord with nature; and I make it with regard to goods also,—they are all in accord with nature.<sup>224</sup>

In addition to the historical *exempla*, there are other cultural authorities that a Roman could pride himself on and would know by heart. The works of great Roman authors

*illum res hostem rei publicae ...* Cicero accuses Mark Antony in his *Philippics* of lacking Roman moral qualities. See also Seneca *Ep.* 19.9 in which the corruption of Maecenas is described, and 120.19.

<sup>219</sup>On traditional Roman virtues, see Roller (2001), Ch. 1.2 'Traditional Roman Ethical Discourse', 20-29; Earl (1967), 30. Cf. the list of virtues in Cicero *Cat.* 2.25.

<sup>220</sup>See, for example, Seneca *Ep.* 86, 114 and 122 for similar comparisons.

<sup>221</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 87.9: *alter enim cum hostibus nostris bellum, alter cum moribus gessit.*

<sup>222</sup>The ways of the forefathers, *maiores*, are explicitly referred to in Seneca *Ep.* 47.14, 88.19 and 110.1. In *Ep.* 18.1 Seneca considers the best way to attend and celebrate the Saturnalia, in *Ep.* 47.14 he recounts the tradition of appointing a special day on which masters and slaves shared their meal. He also mentions the Floralia (*Ep.* 97.8) and Parentalia (*Ep.* 12.8-9, 122.3).

<sup>223</sup>To name a few examples: Seneca *Ep.* 8.6, 49.2, 97.7-8 (law-courts); *Ep.* 4.2, 28.6 (forum); *Ep.* 3.1, 71.11 (elections); *Ep.* 66.41, 113.20 (senate-chamber); *Ep.* 56.1-4, 86.6-8 (baths); *Ep.* 4.7, 7.2-5, 117.30 (games); *Ep.* 11.7, 108.6 (theatre).

<sup>224</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 66.41: *Cum alicuius in senatu sententiam sequimur, non potest dici: ille magis adsentitur quam ille. Ab omnibus in eandem sententiam itur. Idem de virtutibus dico: omnes naturae adsentiuntur. Idem de bonis dico: omnia naturae adsentiuntur.*

such as Ennius, Livius, Cicero, Horace, Ovid, Lucretius and especially Virgil are cited in numerous places.<sup>225</sup> They display Roman accomplishment in poetry, prose, history, oratory and philosophy.

### 2.5.3 The upper-class

This form of identity is in many respects closely connected to the one we previously discussed. The upper-class Romans considered themselves as the quintessence of being Roman: the Roman tradition was their tradition and their heroes and forefathers were venerated.<sup>226</sup> In this regard, the upper-class identity can partly be seen as a 'stronger' version of the Roman one, as a subdivision within Roman identity to which only a selected few belong. It is a heterogeneous group, corresponding to those in the Roman equestrian and senatorial order, of which the criteria for membership are high birth, wealth, and moral excellence.<sup>227</sup> Defining who is included in the Roman elite is not straightforward. The upper-class Roman male is independent—free and self-ruling—he has social standing, can exert (political) influence and is a gentleman of wealth who can enjoy leisure activities; he is aware of his cultural heritage and has received a good education.<sup>228</sup>

It was contested which of these characteristics could be seen as necessary or sufficient and someone lacking in just one of these aspects would have to prove that it was not an insurmountable obstacle for inclusion. Ancestry played an important role in establishing oneself as a member of the nobility.<sup>229</sup> As a result, a *homo novus* such as Cicero had to compensate for his modest background and lack of military experience by displaying his oratorical skills in public speaking and by drawing attention to his cultural learning in his writings. The term *homo novus* itself indicates a perceived division between members and newcomers.<sup>230</sup> Even someone who had the financial means and Roman background to qualify as *eques* might still be regarded as an outsider. The contrast with the lower strata was considerable:

<sup>225</sup>Seneca mentions a variety of Roman authors by name. The mentioned authors can be found in the following passages: Ennius in *Ep.* 58.5, 108.33-34; Livius in *Ep.* 46.1, 100.9; Cicero (as author) in *Ep.* 17.2, 21.4, 40.11, 58.6, 97.3, 97.8, 100.7, 100.9, 107.10, 108.30, 108.32, 108.34, 111.1, 114.16, 118.1-2; Horace in *Ep.* 86.13, 119.14, 120.21, Ovid in *Ep.* 79.5, 110.1, Lucretius in *Ep.* 58.12, 95.11, 106.8, 110.6-7; and Virgil in *Ep.* 21.5, 28.3, 53.3, 56.12, 58.2-3, 58.4, 58.20, 59.3, 70.2, 79.5, 84.3, 86.15, 92.9, 95.69, 101.13, 104.24, 108.24-5, 108.28, 108.34, 115.4, 122.2.

<sup>226</sup>On the role of Roman nobility as the cultural, social and political elite, see M. Gleason (1999), Alföldy (1985), 106-41; Garnsey and Saller (1987), 107-23, 178-95; Hingley (2005), 50-71.

<sup>227</sup>Cf. Garnsey and Saller (1987), 112-18.

<sup>228</sup>Here we may note the same tendency to focus on the masculine perspective.

<sup>229</sup>Cf. Cicero *Phil.* 3.15; Tacitus *Ann.* 3.55.

<sup>230</sup>Cf. Alföldy (1985), 111.

## 2.5 Identities in the *Epistulae Morales*

95

The social distinction gained very clear and significant expression in the ever more well-defined legal notions of '*honestior*' and '*humilior*'. The 'better' were treated with special respect by the lower strata and by the state on the basis of formal and informal privileges.<sup>231</sup>

Elite values concentrated on acquiring public prestige. Above all, the confirmation of one's status depended on how one was judged by one's peers.<sup>232</sup> Since Roman life knew many public activities such as visiting the forum, meetings, the bathhouse or religious ceremonies, one's public self-presentation would be of consequence. The nobility competed for offices and honours as high status could be achieved by means of military glory and leading roles in society. However, in the early empire these options became increasingly hard to obtain as the emperor personally made important appointments and other functions lost much of their significance. Outside of the *cursus honorum* a member of the Roman upper-class could attempt to increase his reputation through the display of wealth, through patronage and civic beneficence, or by establishing a name as a man of culture. Generally, the elite had a low opinion of all productive and manual labour. Commercial activities were not something to be proud of either, though they could be a considerable source of income for some.<sup>233</sup>

We can find several indications of an upper-class identity in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*. Firstly, he makes a point of showing by the descriptions of his own life that he is an educated, cultured man of considerable wealth who is familiar with socialising in the upper echelons of Roman society and who has first-hand experience of Senate affairs, business arrangements and public performances.<sup>234</sup> Secondly, he has presuppositions about the financial means of his audience, about their way of thinking and expectations that reflect their elite background. Only the affluent could afford to ride around in a litter, to possess slaves and own property, to travel abroad and consider running for public offices.<sup>235</sup> Even their anticipated vices are evidence of their well-to-do condition: they might be over-ambitious in their public careers, cling to their riches or lose themselves in a luxurious lifestyle.<sup>236</sup> Another aspect is the privileged concern about the proper way to spend leisure time. Seneca thinks it is

<sup>231</sup> Alföldy (1985), 109.

<sup>232</sup> Garnsey and Saller (1987), 118.

<sup>233</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 88.1 where Seneca holds no respect for any art which results in money-making.

<sup>234</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 45.1 (his substantial collection of books), 55.1 (making a ride in his litter), 56.9 (recalling his previous role in public life), 104.1 (his villa at Nomentum), 123.1 (visiting his Alban villa).

<sup>235</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 101.6: "We plan distant voyages and long-postponed home-comings after roaming over foreign shores, we plan for military service and the slow rewards of hard campaigns, we canvass for governorships and the promotions of one office after another ...".

<sup>236</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 47 on the proper treatment of slaves, [and more].

best to invest in one's personal development, to read and write literature or attend a lecture rather than pursue a life of idleness and frivolity at the baths, the gymnasium, the games or at the theatre.<sup>237</sup> The choice is presented as one between engaging in enlightening or superficial leisure activities, whereas having no time for leisure is not a relevant concern.

The Roman elitist way of thinking can also be seen in Seneca's use of examples, in his choice of jargon and imagery, and in his references to great works of literature. Often the imagery is drawn from economical, legal or military contexts.<sup>238</sup> Most of the *exempla* mentioned are Roman historical leaders who get to display their *virtus* in a military or political context or Greek wise men who command respect for their knowledge and way of life. In those few cases where the *exemplum* is only a gladiator or a slave boy, the example's effect is derived precisely from the unlikely occasion that those people could be a role model. These *exempla imparia* are cases in which even an insignificant person (of lower social status) unexpectedly outdoes himself.<sup>239</sup> When such an unsavoury character can do the right thing, surely we can too: "If such a spirit is possessed by abandoned and dangerous men, shall it not be possessed also by those who have trained themselves to meet such contingencies by long meditation, and by reason, the mistress of all things?".<sup>240</sup>

The issue of social standing is touched upon from an insider's perspective—Seneca and his audience as members of the elite—who look down on the lower classes and look for inspiration among their social equals.<sup>241</sup> The lower classes are described as "this ignorant rabble" and "the more squalid mob" and some letters include elitist sneers at the wealth acquired by freedmen: "he had the bank-account and the brains of a freedman".<sup>242</sup> By contrast, Lucilius is on several occasions complimented for being a cultured gentleman.<sup>243</sup>

<sup>237</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 15 (preferring mental exercise over physical exercise), 51.6 (avoiding luxurious baths), 76.4 (preferring a lecture over the theatre), 80.1 (preferring study over a boxing-match).

<sup>238</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 37.1, 64.7, 72.7, 96.5; cf. the collected evidence in Armisen-Marchetti (1989), 'Argent', 74-75; 'Propriété', 157-59; 'Droit', 106-108; 'Procès', 155-57; 'Armée', 75-77.

<sup>239</sup>Quintilian *Inst.* 5.11.9. Cf. Skidmore (1996), 87-89, 103. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 70.19-27, 77.14-15.

<sup>240</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 70.27: *Quid ergo? quod animi perdit quoque noxiosi habent non habebunt illi quos adversus hos casus instruxit longa meditatio et magistra rerum omnium ratio?*, 77.15: *Quid ergo est, cur perturberis, si mori fortiter etiam puerile est?*

<sup>241</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 74.7-9 on how a sensible man leaves the theatre when there is a dole and the plundering rabble grapples for favours. Seneca *Ep.* 117.23: "I read lately a most disgraceful doctrine, uttered (more shame to him!) by a learned gentleman".

<sup>242</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 79.15 (*imperitorum turba*), 114.12 (*corona sordidio*), 27.5: *et patrimonium habebat libertini et ingenium*. On freedmen who have amassed wealth but lack cultural substance, see also *Ep.* 86.7.

<sup>243</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 15.2. Also, in *Ep.* 47.1 Lucilius receives compliments for treating his slaves

Seneca recognises and sympathises with the Roman elite way of thinking, although conversely he tries to inform his audience that in a philosophical life certain of their prejudices and assumptions cannot be maintained. At such moments he is conscious of the fact that social standing holds little real value:

Indeed you ought not to wonder that corrupt speech is welcomed not merely by the more squalid mob but also by our more cultured throng; for it is only in their dress and not in their judgments that they differ.<sup>244</sup>

Passages such as these open up the possibility to discuss a further division within the Roman elite: those who have the wrong priorities in life and follow their desires and ambitions and those who understand that a life of virtue is the only road to happiness.<sup>245</sup>

Furthermore, Seneca not only makes use of elite notions, at times he actively redefines them to suit his own purposes.<sup>246</sup> For instance, the terms *otium* and *negotium* are construed in such a way as to add value to Seneca's own philosophical activities and to account for his absence from public life at the end of his career.<sup>247</sup> Through his philosophical writings Seneca intends to help others and although he is not active in public life in the traditional sense, his active type of leisure should be sharply distinguished from the idle leisure of others.<sup>248</sup> Another example is his examination and redefinition of *gloria* that should allow members of the Roman elite to attain distinction in other areas than the traditional military and political context in which the term was used.<sup>249</sup>

#### **2.5.4 Philosophers**

In Roman society parentage made up an important part of a person's self-presentation. Ancestry did not necessarily imply sharing the same blood but rather participating in a common background and origin. According to Seneca, the common background that defines us can also be the philosophical pursuit of virtue, as can be seen in *Ep. 44.2-3*:

well: "This befits a sensible and well-educated man like yourself".

<sup>244</sup>Seneca *Ep. 114.12*: *Mirari quidem non debes corrupta excipi non tantum a corona sordidiore sed ab hac quoque turba cultiore; togis enim inter se isti, non iudicis distant.* Seneca tries to downplay social differences elsewhere too, e.g., *Ep. 31.11, 44.6*.

<sup>245</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep. 73.3-4, 78.26-27*.

<sup>246</sup>I would like to thank Ruurd Nauta for pointing me into this direction.

<sup>247</sup>Cf. the discussion in Ch. 5, 270f.

<sup>248</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 8.1-6* and *De Otio*.

<sup>249</sup>Cf. the discussion in Ch. 4, 200. For more detailed studies of Seneca's views of *gloria* and (moral) achievement, see Newman (2008) and Habinek (2000).

Philosophy neither rejects nor selects anyone; its light shines for all. Socrates was no aristocrat. Cleanthes worked at a well and served as a hired man watering a garden. Philosophy did not find Plato already a nobleman; it made him one. Why then should you despair of becoming able to rank with men like these? They are all your ancestors [*maiores*], if you conduct yourself in a manner worthy of them; and you will do so if you convince yourself at the outset that no man outdoes you in real nobility.<sup>250</sup>

Seneca defines the concept of nobility by character rather than by birth, in accordance with the Stoic evaluation of *eugenia* or 'being well-born'.<sup>251</sup> Thus, the exclusiveness of the *nobiles* persists, while Seneca is able to assign the title to his philosophical predecessors who demonstrate that philosophy ennobles a person. Moreover, he applies the customs associated with Roman *maiores* to the philosophical ancestors; they deserve our greatest respect and our emulation to increase their legacy.<sup>252</sup> Seneca makes his Roman readers heirs of the philosophical tradition and its representatives by means of an essential element of the Roman tradition.

In the *Epistulae Morales* Seneca makes it clear that philosophy requires a special way of living. But what does it mean to be a philosopher and to live a philosophical life? As we have already seen, philosophy can consist of various activities and a person could be engaged in philosophy without considering himself a professional philosopher.<sup>253</sup> As a 'gentleman philosopher', Seneca would not practise philosophy to make a living, only to become a better person. In *Ep.* 89.4-5 Seneca records several definitions of philosophy: 'the love of wisdom, and the endeavour to attain it', 'the study of virtue', 'a study of the way to amend the mind', and 'the search for right reason'.<sup>254</sup> What these definitions have in common is the emphasis on the search for wisdom and virtue that will improve a person by acquiring a greater understanding

<sup>250</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 44.2-3: *Nec reicit quemquam philosophia nec eligit: omnibus lucet. Patricius Socrates non fuit; Cleanthes aquam traxit et rigando horto locavit manus; Platonem non accepit nobilem philosophia sed fecit: quid est quare desperes his te posse fieri parem? Omnes hi maiores tui sunt, si te illis geris dignum; geres autem, si hoc protinus tibi ipse persuaseris, a nullo te nobilitate superari.* A related passage is *Ep.* 108.13 in which Seneca's philosophical master Attalus is compared to a king.

<sup>251</sup>On the more purified Stoic form of *eugenia*, see Tieleman (1996), 250-53. But see also Sallust *Iug.* 85.17: *quod si iure me despiciunt, faciant item maioribus suis, quibus, uti mihi, ex virtute nobilitas coepit.*

<sup>252</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 33.7-8, 64.7-10, 71.6-8.

<sup>253</sup>See the discussion in Ch. 1, section 3.1, 32.

<sup>254</sup>These four definitions in *Ep.* 89.4-5 correspond to the Latin: *philosophia sapientiae amor est et affectatio, studium ... virtutis, studium corrigendae mentis, and adpetitio rectae rationis.* A.L. Motto has collected relevant Senecan passages on philosophy and other professions in Motto (1970).

into all things human and divine. In *Ep.* 90.1 Seneca describes how "living well is the gift of philosophy" while philosophy itself is a gift from the gods.<sup>255</sup>

Philosophy aims at both theoretical and practical knowledge and offers guidance to improve a person's soul.<sup>256</sup> It works for the well-being of mankind and is a noble art, independent of the other *artes*.<sup>257</sup> Philosophy clearly positions itself as a distinctive form of learning and in numerous passages Seneca points out the contrast between philosophy and other professions:

But there is only one really liberal study, — that which gives a man his liberty. It is the study of wisdom, and that is lofty, brave, and great-souled. All other studies are puny and puerile. You surely do not believe that there is good in any of the subjects whose teachers are, as you see, men of the most ignoble and base stamp? We ought not to be learning such things; we should have done with learning them.<sup>258</sup>

Not only do other professions dwell on insignificant topics that one should have mastered early on in the school curriculum, their teachers are substandard too. Seneca is most critical of those professions that deal with bodily pleasures—e.g. cooks, artists, athletes—, and those who use the mind for trivial investigations—e.g. mathematicians, grammarians.<sup>259</sup> Although these latter studies have their use, they are only preparatory to more serious thinking. More complicated is the relation with

<sup>255</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 90.1: *munus sit ... philosophiae quod bene vivimus*. See also *Ep.* 90.2-3 with further praise of philosophy as the study that aims to discover truth and is directly connected to the virtues. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 31.8, 110.8.

<sup>256</sup>On the theoretical and practical aspect of philosophy, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 95.10-12; on philosophy's task of bringing health and harmony to the soul, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 15.1-2, 16.3, 50.9, 88.28.

<sup>257</sup>On the beneficial role of philosophy, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 48.7-9, 58.26, 89.2, 90.3, 111.2-4. Those who think they can fight fortune without the aid of philosophy are mistaken, Seneca *Ep.* 82.7. Philosophy is worthy of worship, Seneca *Ep.* 14.11, 55.4; it is a noble art, Seneca *Ep.* 48.10-11, 102.20; it relies on none of the other arts, Seneca *Ep.* 85.32, 88.28.

<sup>258</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 88.2: *Ceterum unum studium vere liberale est quod liberum facit, hoc est sapientiae, sublime, forte, magnanimum: cetera pusilla et puerilia sunt. An tu quicquam in istis esse credis boni quorum professores turpissimos omnium ac flagitosissimos cernis? Non discere debemus ista, sed didicisse.* On the supremacy of philosophy, see also Seneca *NQ* 2.53.3.

<sup>259</sup>Professions such as cookery, painting and wrestling are not to be counted among the traditional liberal studies, Seneca *Ep.* 88.18-19; cookery even spoils men, Seneca *Ep.* 95.23; even the traditional liberal arts do not pursue virtue, but are only preparatory to the study of virtue, Seneca *Ep.* 88.20. Seneca is repeatedly critical of grammar and the work of grammarians, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 87.15-17, 88.5-8, 108.24-25, 108.28-35. Mathematics is also not concerned with teaching right from wrong, Seneca *Ep.* 88.10, and only supports philosophical study, Seneca *Ep.* 88.27-29.

rhetoric and medicine where it becomes evident that there is a considerable exchange of knowledge and methodology. Criticism of those fields is often concerned with appropriation rather than with a complete dismissal.<sup>260</sup>

Besides the external competitors who promote their own profession at the expense of philosophy, there are those within the profession who call themselves philosophers but fail to earn the title. Philosophy is a distinguished subject that should not be blemished by unworthy figures. At times this can move into the direction of a more elitist stance towards philosophy, where it is seen as something that belongs only to the educated few. But Seneca can also state with great emphasis that philosophy is open to all who are willing to reform.<sup>261</sup> He wants to avoid the extremes of only lifestyle or only theory and emphasises the need to put philosophical theory into practice. In other words, proper philosophical study should comprise both thought and action. Bad philosophers disappoint because they do not practise what they preach or because their work is not philosophical enough.<sup>262</sup> The latter can be the case when a philosopher only reads and copies old texts but fails to add something of his own, or when he spends his time on pointless puzzles and sophistical argumentation rather than be of assistance to mankind.<sup>263</sup>

Because philosophy has such an urgent role to play in people's lives it is important to recognise the real philosophers from the imitators. Good philosophers are a role model to others on account of their thinking as well as their exemplary lives.<sup>264</sup> They engage in various philosophical activities such as teaching, reading, writing and

<sup>260</sup>In the case of rhetoric, Seneca frequently stresses that attention to subject matter should outweigh eloquence, Seneca *Ep.* 52.14, 75.3-7, 100.10, 115.1. At the same time, he does not deny that persuasiveness in speech and writing helps the philosopher, Seneca *Ep.* 40.12, 58.6, 75.3-7. Medical analogies portray philosophy as the spiritual doctor that looks after the soul in the same way as the doctor cares for a patient's physical health, Seneca *Ep.* 40.4-5, 50.4, 50.9, 72.6-7, 89.19. Although this is an acknowledgement of the medical profession's usefulness, the emphasis of the physician on bodily health is also its greatest shortcoming, see Seneca *Ep.* 72.7, 78.5. Moreover, the doctor need not be a good person to restore health in a patient, see Seneca *Ep.* 85.36, 87.17.

<sup>261</sup>See Seneca *Ep.* 44.2-3, 90.2.

<sup>262</sup>On the accusation of incongruity between practice and teachings, see Seneca *Ep.* 29.5-7, 108.36; a related point is found in 108.23 where philosophical advisers are at fault when they teach their students debating skills rather than living well. Philosophical students can also set their priorities wrong, see Seneca *Ep.* 108.6 and 108.36. The combination of philosophical theory and practice is also an important topic in Seneca *Vit. Beat.*, e.g., 18.1-3, 20.1-6, 26.7-8, 27.1-6.

<sup>263</sup>On the fault of only studying the works of others, see Seneca *Ep.* 33.7-10; cf. Epict. *Diss.* 1.4.3-10; cf. Long (2002), 45-46. On making matters too difficult, see Seneca *Ep.* 71.6. On the dangers of dialectic, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 45.5-13, 48.4-7, 48.10-12, 82.19-20, 117.25, 117.33.

<sup>264</sup>On differentiating true philosophers, cf. Hahn (1989), 61.

having philosophical conversations. A real philosopher also understands that it takes much time, continuous effort and dedication to make philosophical progress.<sup>265</sup>

A discussion of philosophical identity should also consider the mnemonic figures—concrete memories about persons, places, material objects or events that have become associated with a symbol or idea—that have special significance to philosophers.<sup>266</sup> But in the case of material objects philosophy forms an exception. On the whole, philosophy places a central focus on the soul and its immaterial goods. This explains why philosophers do not tend to cherish particular objects that might be linked to predecessors. A philosopher's most lasting contribution is made by offering philosophical insight and living well.<sup>267</sup> Also, the philosopher's appearance should be sober, with his beard considered a trademark.<sup>268</sup> Thus, it would not be in line with their philosophical thinking to worship Socrates' cloak or visit the tub in which Diogenes had lived. Instead, followers of philosophy should live their lives in the likeness of such exemplary figures. In other words, the best way to commemorate philosophers of the past is through emulation and imitation of their teachings and way of life.

Philosophers, on the other hand, play a vital role in the formation of philosophical identity. Not only are they important as the founders of particular schools, they have given rise to philosophical archetypes, such as the philosopher who goes against public opinion (Heraclitus, Xenophanes, Socrates, Diogenes of Sinope); the philosopher who scorns pain and disease (Epicurus, Cato), the philosopher who lives a simple, consistent and independent life (Diogenes of Sinope, Zeno of Citium, Metrodorus of Lampsacus (the younger)); the philosopher who bravely meets death (Socrates, Cato). Seneca approves of revering great philosophers and this is most obvious in the following passage where he speaks of his philosophical predecessors:

They deserve respect, however, and should be worshipped with a divine ritual. Why should I not keep statues of great men to kindle my enthusiasm, and celebrate their birthdays? Why should I not continually greet them with respect and honour? The reverence which I owe to my own teachers I owe in like measure to those teachers of the human race, the source from which the beginnings of such great blessings have flowed. If I meet a consul or a praetor, I shall pay him all the honour which his post of honour is wont to receive: I shall dismount, uncover, and yield

<sup>265</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 17.5-10, 53.8-10, 72.3-4, 82.8, 94.72, 110.8. See also *De Otio* in which Seneca discusses the best ways to spend leisure and how philosophy requires a substantial amount of time.

<sup>266</sup>On mnemonic figures, *Erinnerungsfiguren*, see the earlier discussion in Ch. 1, section 2.1.

<sup>267</sup>Cf. the description of Seneca's own death scene in Tacitus *Ann.* 15.62-64.

<sup>268</sup>On the philosopher's appearance, see the earlier discussion in Ch. 1, section 3.1.

the road. What, then? Shall I admit into my soul with less than the highest marks of respect Marcus Cato, the Elder and the Younger, Laelius the Wise, Socrates and Plato, Zeno and Cleanthes? I worship them in very truth, and always rise to do honour to such noble names.<sup>269</sup>

This passage clearly shows that Seneca in several ways tries to construct a philosophical identity that includes its own rituals, practices and heroes. The role models named here are all wise men and philosophers; Seneca names the Roman *exempla* first, followed by the Greeks, both in chronological order.<sup>270</sup> Although these philosophical predecessors are revered authorities, it is indeed possible to argue on level ground with them and they do not have a hallowed status that does not permit ongoing discussion.<sup>271</sup> There is always more philosophical work to be done. Moreover, it is an honour to be part of this rich philosophical tradition, as Seneca confirms in several passages:

Pick up the list of the philosophers; that very act will compel you to wake up, when you see how many men have been working for your benefit. You will desire eagerly to be one of them yourself ...<sup>272</sup>  
They are all your ancestors, if you conduct yourself in a manner worthy of them.<sup>273</sup>

Seneca tries to do honour to these men through various philosophical practices. These include the earlier mentioned activities of discussing, studying and writing philosophy, living virtuously and doing spiritual exercises that keep one mindful of the

<sup>269</sup>Seneca Ep. 64.9-10: *Suspiciendi tamen sunt et ritu deorum colendi. Quidni ego magnorum viorum et imagines habeam incitamenta animi et natales celebrem? quidni ego illos honoris causa semper appellem? Quam venerationem praceptoribus meis debo, eandem illis praceptoribus generis humani, a quibus tanti initia fluxerunt. Si consulem video aut praetorem, omnia quibus honor haberi honori solet faciam: equo desiliam, caput adaperiam, semita cedam. Quid ergo? Marcum Catonem utrumque et Laelium Sapientem et Socraten cum Platone et Zenonem Cleanthenque in animum meum sine dignatione summa recipiam? Ego vero illos veneror et tantis nominibus semper assurgo.* Cf. Seneca Ep. 64.7-8. The Epicureans would annually celebrate the birthday of their founder hero with communal meals, see Diogenes Laertius 10.18; Pliny NH 35.5; Plutarch *Adv. Col.* 1117AB; cf. the study of the cult of Epicurus in Clay (1998), Ch. 1, esp. 55-102.

<sup>270</sup>Cato the Elder was not a philosopher and would never have called himself one, but he was renowned for his wisdom and was surnamed the Wise (*Sapiens*), an epithet he shared with Laelius. Furthermore, his strictness, simple life and emphasis on traditional moral values made him fit the philosophical profile.

<sup>271</sup>Seneca Ep. 33.10, 64.7-8, 80.1.

<sup>272</sup>Seneca Ep. 39.2: *Sume in manus indicem philosophorum: haec ipsa res expurgisci te coget, si videris quam multi tibi laboraverint. Concupisces et ipse ex illis unus esse ....*

<sup>273</sup>Seneca Ep. 44.3: *Omnis hi maiores tui sunt, si te illis geris dignum.*

proper philosophical attitudes and doctrines. Thus, one should be privately inspired by philosophical examples or gather like-minded friends to pursue philosophy together. In fact, philosophers living together can be considered a *topos* in its own right and much philosophical literature employs the setting of a discussion between friends. The two literary forms that most obviously attest to this are the dialogue and the letter.<sup>274</sup> Thus, the social aspect of philosophical study forms an essential part of its identity.<sup>275</sup>

### 2.5.5 Stoics

Seneca often needs to distinguish between different philosophical schools to clarify his specific Stoic position. On a few occasions he takes up his own position and dissociates himself from the school view.<sup>276</sup> But even in disagreeing, he still speaks of how his opinion is different from 'our school' or 'our view'.<sup>277</sup> He can afford to speak out his mind because he never doubts his own allegiance to the school. Overall, Seneca identifies himself closely with Stoic thinking and proudly speaks of his Stoic forerunners.<sup>278</sup> Whenever he sums up different Stoic philosophers this is almost always in chronological order.<sup>279</sup> This seems to suggest a great concern for genealogical correctness that is missing in his other groupings of *exempla*. Seneca considers himself a successor in the Stoic tradition and wants to place himself in line with Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Panaetius and Posidonius. Moreover, Tieleman calls attention to the relatively few quotations attributed to individual Stoics. Seneca justifies this himself by presenting Stoic philosophy as a coherent system that is not well-suited to be chopped up into catch-phrases.<sup>280</sup> Also, by stressing that Stoic philosophy should be studied in its entirety instead of being summarised, Seneca can play a more prominent

---

<sup>274</sup> Both dialogues and letters presuppose multiple characters who share their interest in philosophy. The dialogues of Plato are the most famous examples, but Xenophon wrote his own *Symposium*, Aristotle wrote several philosophical dialogues which we no longer have, and in Roman times Cicero continued to use the dialogue form in many of his writings, e.g., *De finibus*, *De natura deorum*, *De oratore*, *De re publica*, and the lost *Hortensius*. Cf. Tieleman (2010b).

<sup>275</sup> See Seneca *Ep.* 6.5-6 where Seneca holds that the best way to learn is by watching a philosophical example in everyday life and be in his company.

<sup>276</sup> We may note that the Stoics prided themselves on having more liberty than other philosophers. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 33.4, cited below; Snyder (2000), Ch. 1 "Not subjects of a despot": Stoics', 14-44.

<sup>277</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 13, 74.23, 117.1.

<sup>278</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 22.1, 83.9 on Zeno, 108.2-3, 108.13-16, 108.23 on Attalus.

<sup>279</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 33.4.

<sup>280</sup> By comparison, he frequently quotes Epicurus and often mentions his name in doing so. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 2.5, 7.11, 8.7, 9.8, 11.9, 12.11, 13.17, 14.17, 16.7, 17.11, 18.9, 19.10, 20.9-11, 21.3, 21.7, 22.5, 22.13, 23.9, 24.22, 25.5-6, 26.8, 27.9, 28.9, 29.11, 30.14.

role as the spokesman of Stoicism.<sup>281</sup> As Tieleman notes, "Seneca is his own favourite Stoic, the one who will give Stoicism its voice for his own and future generations".<sup>282</sup>

The search for wisdom and well-being being a shared undertaking, the philosophical debate concentrated on what precisely is the best world view, what constitutes human happiness and how this should be accomplished. In the *Epistulae Morales* opposing views are introduced as a contrast to further clarify Seneca's Stoic position. Unlike Plato, the Stoics believed the universe to be completely material, composed of the active substance God and the passive substance matter. As a result, both body and soul are material.<sup>283</sup> As opposed to Epicureanism, the Stoics maintained that the world is governed by a provident and rational God.<sup>284</sup> Moreover, they held that we should harmonise our reason with the universal reason of God or Nature and that living virtuously is by itself sufficient for leading a happy life.<sup>285</sup> This is contrary to the Epicurean thought that pleasure is the greatest good and goes against the Peripatetic view that the good life also requires some external factors such as wealth, health and a considerable life span.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, the Stoic sage should be free from irrational judgments and on that ground eradicate all emotions. The Peripatetic school, on the other hand, believed that emotions should be permitted in a moderate form.<sup>287</sup> The Stoics differed from Cynics in their rejection of unconventional external appearance and in that the Stoic sage would overcome hardship while still feeling it.<sup>288</sup>

The conventional image of Stoicism was that of a harsh philosophy that makes difficult, if not impossible, demands on people to adopt a radically new way of life. Seneca explains that only those with the wrong outlook are put off by the requirements of Stoicism:

Many think that we Stoics are holding out expectations greater than our human lot admits of; and they have a right to think so. For they have regard to the body only. But let them turn back to the soul, and they will soon measure man by the standard of God.<sup>289</sup>

Our rational soul has the capacity to develop reason and lead a virtuous life. Seneca

<sup>281</sup>Tieleman (2007), 137-38.

<sup>282</sup>Tieleman (2007), 138.

<sup>283</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 106.5.

<sup>284</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 72.9, 90.35.

<sup>285</sup>On living in accordance with Nature, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 16.7, 25.4, 66.39; on virtue as the only thing needed for a good life, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 85.1, 85.31, 92.23-24, 120.12.

<sup>286</sup>On the opposition between the Epicurean and Stoic greatest good, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 99.28, 124.2-4.

<sup>287</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 75.3-4, 116.1.

<sup>288</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 5, 9.3.

<sup>289</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 71.6: *Multis videmur maiora promittere quam recipit humana condicio, non immerito; ad corpus enim respiciunt. Revertantur ad animum: iam hominem deo metientur.*

## 2.5 Identities in the *Epistulae Morales*

105

defends the Stoic aims as challenging though achievable, but on occasion he adopts a milder tone.<sup>290</sup>

A point that Seneca is keen to emphasise is that Stoics are independent philosophers. They are not restrained by a predecessor whose authority cannot be questioned. This sets them apart from the Epicureans who all conform to the opinions of their founder:

We are not subjects of a despot: each of us lays claim to his own freedom. With them, on the other hand, whatever Hermarchus says or Metrodorus, is ascribed to one source. In that brotherhood, everything that any man utters is spoken under the leadership and commanding authority of one alone.<sup>291</sup>

The followers of Epicurus are presented as adhering to their founder's opinions to the letter. Although Seneca has great respect for his Stoic predecessors, he feels free to explore different philosophical routes. The Stoics not only vary from other philosophies, but their philosophy can also be distinguished from more traditional opinions and common vocabulary:

I received great pleasure from your letter; kindly allow me to use these words in their everyday meaning, without insisting upon their Stoic import. For we Stoics hold that pleasure is a vice.<sup>292</sup>

The word 'pleasure' has special significance in Stoic philosophy and Seneca's enthusiastic opening phrase is used as an ostensible reason to point to the differences in terminology between the Stoic and the layperson. The Stoic distinguishes himself in his actions, his beliefs and even in his wording.

### 2.5.6 Other aspects of identity

The context of each letter will determine which group identity is emphasised, often through the use of a form of 'us' or 'we'. For example, when making general statements about the human condition 'our' shared humanity is the main focus; the views of the common people can be differentiated from 'ours', which are more educated and

<sup>290</sup>Seneca refutes the accusation against Stoicism of setting impossible goals in *Ep.* 116.7-8. He chooses a milder style in *Ep.* 13.4.

<sup>291</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 33.4: *Non sumus sub rege: sibi quisque se vindicat. Apud istos quidquid Hermarchus dixit, quidquid Metrodorus, ad unum refertur; omnia quae quisquam in illo contubernio locutus est unius ductu et auspiciis dicta sunt.* Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 80.1.

<sup>292</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 59.1: *Magnam ex epistula tua percepi voluptatem; permitte enim mihi uti verbis publicis nec illa ad significationem Stoicam revoca. Vitium esse voluptatem credimus.* Seneca frequently indicates that certain words have special Stoic significance, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 3.1, 13.4, 99.28.

refined; when discussing particular philosophical details it is necessary to distinguish 'our' Stoic view from those of other schools, e.g. Peripatetic, Academic, Epicurean, Cynic. Again and again, a shift in context causes a shift in perspective and identity.

Yet, as we have noted, there is also a considerable overlap in identities. On the one hand, Seneca is keen to connect the different identities that are dear to him. For instance, he equates traditional Roman beliefs with Stoic theological ideas when he writes: "I would have you remember that our ancestors, who followed such a creed, have become Stoics; for they have assigned a Genius or a Juno to every individual".<sup>293</sup> "Our ancestors" are the Roman *maiores*, who held the belief that every individual has a divine guardian present. Seneca connects this to the Stoic thought that God dwells in each of us.<sup>294</sup>

On the other hand, certain identities relate themselves more directly to others. Just as the Roman upper-class identity considers itself a special type of Roman identity, so does the Stoic outlook relate itself to the philosophical identity as a more specified kind. I have included below a visual representation of the interrelation of these Senecan identities (see Figure 2.1). This Venn-diagram represents how the different identities that are central in the *Epistulae Morales* can be combined. All philosophers and Romans are also human beings and those who fall outside of both circles are human beings who are not occupied with philosophy and do not share in the Roman identity either, e.g., German gladiators or Greek mathematicians. Stoic identity necessarily entails philosophical involvement, just as a member of the Roman upper-class has to be a Roman in the first place. The only aspect that is not represented is that of male identity, but one can assume this to be present throughout the diagram. Although I have not included the 'others' in this picture, one could easily visualise them as well. We can mark a criticism as external when its focus is on an outsider, for instance, when Seneca from the perspective of his philosophical identity criticises other professional groups, such as grammarians or mathematicians. In the case of internal criticism, Seneca objects to the beliefs or practices of those who share (part of) his own identity. As a Roman philosopher he can make fun of Greek philosophers or he may reject the behaviour of other Romans who do not share his philosophical lifestyle. Finally, what this diagram also intends to represent is Seneca's own central position. He shares in all of these identities and this makes him a member of the most exclusive group: that of upper-class Romans who live in accordance with Stoic philosophy.

Besides these central identities there are other aspects that are relevant as well. This depiction of Senecan identities into five central categories obviously offers a

<sup>293</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 110.1: ... ut memineris maiores nostros qui crediderunt Stoicos fuisse; singulis enim et Genium et Iunonem dederunt.

<sup>294</sup>On the divine presence within ourselves, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 10.5, 41.1: *prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est.*

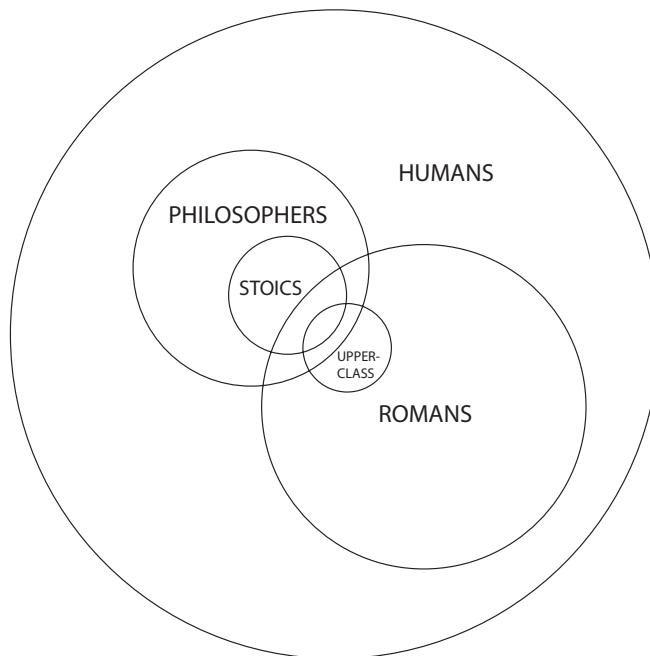
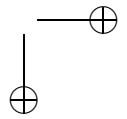
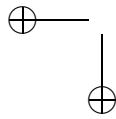
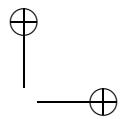
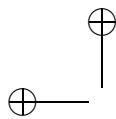


Figure 2.1: The interrelation of central identities in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*

somewhat simplified picture. Therefore, I will point out some finer distinctions here. When discussing the philosophical life Seneca frequently differentiates between the philosophical novice, the *proficiens* and the wise man.<sup>295</sup> The philosophical progress that needs to be made will result in students who can be considered philosophers in varying degrees.<sup>296</sup> Moreover, as we have discussed earlier in this chapter, the philosophical profession could be practised in a variety of ways—as a teacher, student, personal adviser or by preaching out on the street. In the case of human beings we already pointed out how children or the (temporarily) insane do not meet the criterion of rationality that is required by Stoic philosophy. Clearly, it is possible to add further detail within many of these group identities.

<sup>295</sup>Cf. Roskam (2005), 71: Seneca *Const. Sap.* 16.3; *Tranq.* 11.1; *Vit. Beat.* 24.4; *Ben.* 2.18.4; *Ep.* 35.4, 51.2, 83.17, 92.29, 109.15.

<sup>296</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 27.9, 52.3-6, 75.8-9, 95.36-37. On Stoic moral progress, see Roskam (2005).



# Preliminary Conclusion

The aim of this first part of the study was to develop a conceptual framework for analysing Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*. By acquiring a deeper understanding of the cultural context and the textual traditions in which Seneca worked, we are better able to recognise his project of forging together different identities. By way of a preliminary conclusion, I would like to assess briefly the main findings of these two chapters and how these will contribute to the study of the individual letters that are the focus of the next four chapters.

The first chapter provided an overview of the historical reception of the philosopher Seneca, noting the more recent interest in ancient philosophy as a way of life. I have shown here that the significant requirements of a philosophical lifestyle are best understood against the theoretical backdrop of cultural theory, such as proposed by Jan Assmann and others. The central notions of cultural memory and cultural identity bring out the processes by which social groups construct a shared past and establish their own codes and competences. Also, I have called attention to the normative and formative roles that texts can play in establishing and negotiating cultural identity. Furthermore, the examination of philosophy in Rome up to Seneca's time showed the ambitious task philosophy had set itself in educating and transforming others, as well as the ambivalent Roman attitude towards Greek philosophy.

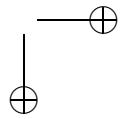
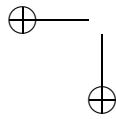
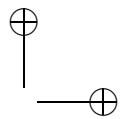
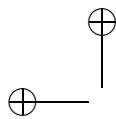
The second chapter added a more text-oriented perspective, marking out an intertextual approach to the textual analysis of the letters. Intertextual references, whether made to an individual pretext or to a wider tradition, play an important role in the transmission of doctrines and precepts in Seneca's moral letters. Seneca's use of authoritative material, onomastic reference as well as stylistic means enable us to recognise the intertextual 'production of meaning'. His choice for employing the epistolary form—which invites comparison between his letters and other (philosophical) letters—provides a friendly, personal setting in which he can offer a personal portrait of himself that emphasises his experience and good qualities, depict the moral progress of Lucilius and himself, and define his Stoic philosophy in a Roman context. As such, self-image plays an important role in the transmission of doctrines and pre-

cepts in the letters. I have singled out five specific identities—the human, Roman, upper-class, philosophical and Stoic identity—to shed light on the issues that are of concern to Seneca as well as the cultural codes that he adheres to.

In short, in these two chapters I have connected the theme of identity with that of intertextuality by establishing the importance of self-presentation and of self-identification in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* through its use of earlier texts and traditions. In the second part we will investigate in detail how a thematically related set of letters on the body reflect these normative and formative aspects.

## Part II

# Letters on the body



## Chapter 3

# Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character

### Text and translation

SENECA LUCILIO SUO SALUTEM,  
**(1)** *Locutus est mecum amicus tuus  
bonae indolis, in quo quantum esset  
animi, quantum ingenii, quantum  
iam etiam profectus, sermo primus  
ostendit. Dedit nobis gustum, ad  
quem respondebit; non enim ex  
praeparato locutus est, sed subito  
deprehensus. Ubi se colligebat,  
verecundiam, bonum in adulescente  
signum, vix potuit excutere; adeo  
illi ex alto suffusus est rubor. Hic  
illum, quantum suspicor, etiam  
cum se confirmaverit et omnibus  
vitiis exuerit, sapientem quoque  
sequetur. Nulla enim sapientia*

Seneca sends best wishes to his Lucilius.<sup>1</sup>

**(1)** As your friend—someone of great natural ability—talked to me, the beginning of the conversation showed in him such spirit, such natural capacity, already even such progress. He gave us a taste and he will live up to that; not because he spoke with preparation, but because he was unexpectedly caught off guard. While he was pulling himself together, he could hardly shake off his modesty, a good sign in a youth; so much did the blush well up from deep within. This will attend him, as far as I can conjecture, even after he will have made himself stronger and he will have stripped off all his faults, also when wise. For through no wisdom can

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the basic text used is L. Annaei Senecae *Ad Lucilium Epistulae morales* recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit L.D. Reynolds (Oxford Classical Texts), Vol. I. Oxford (1965). This translation is my own, but I have taken into account the translation by R. Gummere in the Loeb edition and the notes and vocabulary by A.L. Motto in Motto (1985), 54-59.

*naturalia corporis aut animi vitia ponuntur: quidquid infixum et ingenitum est lenitur arte, non vincitur.*

(2) *Quibusdam etiam constantissimis in conspectu populi sudor erumpit non aliter quam fatigatis et aestuantibus solet, quibusdam tremunt genua dicturis, quorundam dentes colliduntur, lingua titubat, labra concurrunt: haec nec disciplina nec usus umquam excutit, sed natura vim suam exercet et illo vicio sui etiam robustissimos admonet.*

(3) *Inter haec esse et ruborem scio, qui gravissimis quoque viris subitus affunditur. Magis quidem in iuvenibus appareat, quibus et plus caloris est et tenera frons; nihilominus et veteranos et senes tangit. Quidam numquam magis quam cum erubuerint timendi sunt, quasi omnem verecundiam effuderint.*

(4) *Sulla tunc erat violentissimus cum faciem eius sanguis invaserat. Nihil erat mollius ore Pompei; numquam non coram pluribus rubuit, utique in contionibus. Fabianum, cum in senatum testis esset inductus, erubuisse memini, et hic illum mire pudor decuit.*

(5) *Non accidit hoc ab infirmitate mentis sed a novitate rei, quae inexercitatos, etiam si non concutit, movet naturali in hoc facilitate corporis pronus; nam ut quidam boni sanguinis sunt, ita quidam incitati et mobilis et cito in os prodeuntis.*

natural faults of body or soul be disposed off: that which is predetermined and inborn can be softened by training, not subdued.

(2) With the steadiest men as well sweat breaks out before the public, as happens to those being exhausted and hot. Of some the knees tremble when they are about to speak, of others the teeth chatter, the tongue stumbles, the lips squeeze together: neither instruction nor experience can ever knock these out, but Nature exerts her own force and through that weakness reminds even the sturdiest men of her power.

(3) I know that blushing is one of these things, colouring even the most dignified men suddenly. Certainly it appears more in young men, to whom there is more heat and a sensitive countenance. Nevertheless, it does affect mature men as well as the elderly. Some are to be feared most when they redden, as if they had cast away all sense of shame.

(4) Sulla was at his fiercest when the blood had rushed into his face. Nothing was as delicate as Pompey's face; he always grew red in the presence of a crowd, particularly in public meetings. I remember how Fabianus reddened when he was brought in as a witness in the senate, and this propriety befitted him in an extraordinary way.

(5) This does not happen as a consequence of mental weakness but of the novelty of the situation, which even if it does not unhinge the inexperienced, does affect them if they are predisposed to this by a natural tendency of the body. Just as there are some with good blood, so there are others with a rushed blood, active and quickly emerging in the face.

(6) *Haec, ut dixi, nulla sapientia abigit: alioquin haberet rerum naturam sub imperio, si omnia eraderet vitia. Quaecumque attribuit condicio nascendi et corporis temperatura, cum multum se diuque animus composuerit, haerebunt; nihil horum veteri potest, non magis quam accersi.*

(7) *Artifices scaenici, qui imitantur affectus, qui metum et trepidationem exprimunt, qui tristitiam repreäsentant, hoc indicio imitantur verecundiam. Deiciunt enim vultum, verba summittunt, figunt in terram oculos et depriment: ruborem sibi exprimere non possunt; nec prohibetur hic nec adducitur. Nihil adversus haec sapientia promittit, nihil proficit: sui iuris sunt, iniussa veniunt, iniussa discedunt.*

(8) *Iam clausulam epistula poscit. Accipe, et quidem utilem ac salutarem, quam te affigere animo volo: 'aliquis vir bonus nobis diligendus est ac semper ante oculos habendus, ut sic tamquam illo spectante vivamus et omnia tamquam illo vidente faciamus'.*

(9) *Hoc, mi Lucili, Epicurus praecepit; custodem nobis et paedagogum dedit, nec inmerito: magna pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis adsistit. Aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cuius auctoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius faciat. O felicem illum qui non praesens tantum sed*

(6) These traits, as I have said, no wisdom can get rid of: otherwise, wisdom would have the nature of things under its control, if it could wipe all faults. All that has been allotted to us by the condition to which we are born and the composition of elements mixed in the body, will cling to us, however much and however long the soul will have control over itself; none of these can be barred any more than they can be brought about.

(7) Stage-artists, who imitate emotions, who express fear and confusion, who represent sadness, imitate modesty by means of these signs: for they lower the face, speak words humbly, fix their eyes to the ground and look down. Yet they cannot extract a blush: this is neither held back nor staged. Towards these traits, wisdom has nothing to promise and no progress to make: they have their own autonomy and come and leave of their own accord.

(8) But now the letter demands a closing remark. Please accept this, indeed something both useful and salutary, which I want you to fix firmly in your mind: 'We must direct our devotion towards some good man and we must always have him before our eyes, so that we may live just as if he was looking and so we may do everything as if he was watching'.

(9) This, my dear Lucilius, is what Epicurus instructed; he gave to us a guardian and educator, and not without cause: a large part of all sins can be averted if a witness stands by those who are about to go wrong. The soul should have someone to revere, someone by whose authority it even renders its own hidden interior more hallowed. O happy the man who frees others from faults not merely when

*etiam cogitatus emendat! O felicem  
qui sic aliquem vereri potest ut ad  
memoriam quoque eius se componat  
atque ordinet! Qui sic aliquem  
vereri potest cito erit verendus.*

(10) *Elige itaque Catonem; si hic  
tibi videtur nimis rigidus, elige  
remissioris animi virum Laelium.  
Elige eum cuius tibi placuit et vita  
et oratio et ipse animum ante se  
ferens vultus; illum tibi semper  
ostende vel custodem vel exemplum.  
Opus est, inquam, aliquo ad quem  
mores nostri se ipsi exigant: nisi ad  
regulam prava non corriges. Vale.*

present but even when thought of! O happy who can so revere someone as to collect and even regulate himself by the mere recollection of him! Who can revere someone to such an extent, will soon be worthy of reverence.

(10) Accordingly, choose a Cato; and if this seems excessively rigid, choose a Laelius type of man with a milder soul. Choose someone whose life, speech and whose very soul-expressing face<sup>2</sup> seems right to you; show him to yourself always as your guardian or role-model. What is needed is someone by whose standard our very own morals are measured: for without a ruler you cannot straighten what is crooked. Farewell.

## Introduction

As in many other Senecan letters, it is an apparently trivial incident that constitutes the starting point for the letter. While Seneca is having a conversation with a friend of Lucilius, this friend suddenly blushes. His blush presents an occasion to explore what kind of occurrence this is, and more generally, to reflect on the corporeality of natural characteristics, what causes them and why wisdom cannot offer a cure against them.

Moreover, the blush is associated with certain feelings of self-consciousness, i.e. *verecundia* and *pudor*. Examination of these concepts will further our understanding of how blushing involves both a sensitivity to the opinion of others and a concern for maintaining a positive self-image. The person with *verecundia* has a heightened perception of what constitutes a breach of decorum and is anxious about his social performance. As such, concepts such as *decorum*, role-playing and identity have a bearing on the letter as well. Furthermore, Seneca shows here, as in other letters, interest in the proper role of the philosopher.

In addition to these social concerns, there is also a physiological side to the blush. In the middle part of the letter, Seneca pays attention to the underlying physiological process involved in blushing. His familiarity with earlier philosophical and medical theories show from the explanations that he offers. The issue of individual characteristics also leads to a further examination of the relation between a person's character

<sup>2</sup>The wording "soul-expressing face" is taken from R. Gummere's Loeb translation.

## Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character

and his or her natural predispositions. According to the Stoics, the material that constitutes a person's body and soul has its own distinctive composition. Furthermore, the combined interest in individuality and natural constitution should also be seen in light of the bigger issue of moral progress. Knowing what characteristics are appropriate to the wise man is relevant to see what falls within the task of philosophy to improve and what is simply a natural fact of life that is not within our power.

Seneca's ability to recognise the youth's blushing as a case of *verecundia* points to the interconnection between a person's inside and outside, but also to the competence of reading the physical signals correctly. In the inference of character from a person's features, Seneca's philosophical perspective seems to be of considerable value. The letter provides us with several of such examples. In doing so, Seneca calls attention to the perceptibility of character and it would be of interest to learn how exactly he views the interrelation between soul and body, and more specifically, between a person's state of mind and his physical appearance.

At the same time, the blush is a 'public' effect that one is unable to hide from others. The topic of visibility and one's sense of shame is another central aspect in this letter. At the outset of the letter a friend blushes, which is being seen and evaluated by Seneca, many of the examples deal with public performances, and at the end of the letter the concern for what is in sight intensifies with the introduction of a role model seen in the mind's eye as a witness to one's every action. Seeing oneself being seen by a revered other should help us refrain from doing bad deeds.

Although this is an intriguing letter, few studies have looked at *Ep. 11*. Walter Summers offers a brief introduction to the letter followed by some explanatory notes.<sup>3</sup> In addition, both Giuseppe Scarpato and Christine Richardson-Hay provide a more extensive introduction and commentary of the letters in the first book (*Ep. 1-12*), the latter with a particular focus on their interrelationships.<sup>4</sup> However, many relevant points are not sufficiently examined, especially the philosophical dimensions of the letter.

## Commentary

**Seneca Lucilio suo salutem.**

This is the standard opening phrase that is used in all of Seneca's letters.<sup>5</sup>

(11.1)

**Locutus est mecum amicus tuus bonae indolis, in quo quantum esset animi, quan-**

<sup>3</sup>Summers (1910), 163-68.

<sup>4</sup>For the discussion of *Ep. 11*, see Scarpato (1975), 249-275; Richardson-Hay (2006), 331-47.

<sup>5</sup>See the discussion in Ch. 2, section 2.3, 70.

**tum ingenii, quantum iam etiam profectus, sermo primus ostendit.**

Without any introduction the letter opens with a real life event. The story includes a number of relevant aspects that will play a role throughout the letter. Seneca describes that he was having a conversation with a young man, someone with whom Lucilius is familiar as well, *amicus tuus*. At the same time, it is the lack of information in this story that is worth noting. Nothing is said about who this young man is, about his relation to Seneca, about the occasion of their encounter or where and when their conversation takes place. As such, Seneca records only what he considers to be the essential facts. The story is thus not so much a detailed recollection of a particular event as a concise anecdote that serves to make a philosophical point.

Although it does not seem to be relevant who exactly the young man is, what is established is his character and his connection to Lucilius as a friend. Notably, in *Ep. 3* Seneca instructed his audience that choosing one's friends should be done selectively and with regard to their good character.<sup>6</sup> The fact that Seneca talks to this friend of Lucilius, and then writes to Lucilius about it, strengthens the impression that the two correspondents really participate in one another's life—they know and share their friends and their experiences. We may also presuppose that introducing a shared acquaintance will increase Lucilius' interest in the letter.

In numerous passages in the *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca insists on the value of conversation, *sermo*. Because it is an intimate form of social communication that touches the soul, being engaged in conversation suits philosophy and can help to promote philosophical progress.<sup>7</sup> Although the content of their conversation is not explicitly stated to be philosophical, mention is made of the friend's progress, *profectus*, which in this context does suggest a shared interest in philosophy. Seneca uses the word *profectus*, here and elsewhere, as a technical philosophical term to denote moral progress and the word *proficiens* to signify the person who is making progress.<sup>8</sup> So here we find Seneca and the promising young friend engaged in a significant philosophical

<sup>6</sup>Seneca *Ep. 3.2*: "Ponder for a long time whether you shall admit a given person to your friendship; but when you have decided to admit him, welcome him with all your heart and soul. Speak as boldly with him as with yourself"; *Diu cogita an tibi in amicitiam aliquis recipiendus sit. Cum placuerit fieri, toto illum pectore admitte; tam audaciter cum illo loquere quam tecum.*

<sup>7</sup>On the influential role of conversation and its place in philosophy, see e.g., Seneca *Ep. 15.6, 38.1*. Conversely, because it is such a powerful instrument, conversation (with the wrong people) can also have a negative impact on a person, see *Ep. 105.6, 123.8*. Seneca presents himself in several letters as talking to friends, having philosophical discussions and reading philosophical works, e.g., Seneca *Ep. 63.2, 66.4-5, 78.4*. For a more general discussion of the Greek philosophical attitudes towards written and oral discourse, see Tieleman (2010b).

<sup>8</sup>For instance, on progress (*profectus*) in the *Epistulae Morales*, see e.g., Seneca *Ep. 20.1, 29.3, 33.7, 68.9, 71.35-36, 79.14, 95.36, 100.11, 115.18, 124.1*. On the person making moral progress (*proficiens*), see e.g., Seneca *Ep. 35.4, 71.30, 75.8, 75.10, 94.50, 109.15*. For a recent overview of the Stoic doctrine of moral progress, Greek *prokopē*, see Roskam (2005), Ch. 1 'The problem of

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

activity.

The combination of qualities ascribed to Lucilius' friend is also of interest and is underlined by the anaphora of *quantum*.<sup>9</sup> He is said to be of great natural ability, *bona indoles*, and to show considerable spirit, *animus*, natural capacity, *ingenium*, and progress, *profectus*. In Roman literature, *bona indoles* is often ascribed to someone who is either of noble birth, a youth, or both. Good qualities are more commonly expected in Roman nobility, while a youth is someone who still has to live up to his potential, thus the combination *bona indoles* often occurs in educational contexts.<sup>10</sup> Two of these concepts, *animus* and *profectus*, require persistent training to be improved and their condition refers specifically to one's moral health. By contrast, the other two characteristics, *bona indoles* and *ingenium*, point to innate characteristics that are natural to a person. As a matter of fact, one of the central concerns in this letter is to clarify what is up to us and what is a matter of natural constitution. The natural abilities of the *proficiens* play an important role in the process of moral progress. Those who are more gifted will make progress with admirable ease, while others require more

---

moral progress in Ancient Stoicism', 15-32, Ch. 2 'The doctrine of moral progress in later Stoic thinking', 33-136, esp. on Seneca, 60-98. In this work he examines the seemingly paradoxical Stoic view that in spite of the strict dichotomy of mankind between wise men and fools, moral progress is indeed possible. In addition, there are other works which address the question of moral progress in Seneca: Cancik-Lindemaier (2006), 325-341; Hengelbrock (2000). Specifically in connection with *Ep. 11*, see Richardson-Hay (2006), 331-47. On the topic of progress in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, see Inwood (2005), 138-39, who points to *Ep. 34.2-3* and *71.36*.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Richardson-Hay (2006), 335.

<sup>10</sup>We find that the exception—someone from a humble background too can have excellent natural ability—confirms the rule in Valerius Maximus 3.8.7: "Humble people should of course respect the distinguished but people of noble birth should likewise cherish good qualities in an unexpected person, rather than looking down on him", tr. H.J. Walker, in ; *nam ut humilitas amplitudinem venerari debet, ita nobilitati fovenda magis quam spernenda bonae indolis novitas est*. On the use of *bona indoles* in the case of educating promising youths, cf. Quintilian *Inst. 1.2.5*; Seneca speaks of a teacher arousing the best in his pupil in *Ben. 6.16.6*; in *Ep. 100.12* he recalls how a lecture of Fabianus would "inspire young men of promise"; Cicero *Sen. 8.26*: "For just as wise men, when they are old, take delight in the society of youths endowed with sprightly wit, and the burdens of age are rendered lighter to those who are courted and highly esteemed by the young, so young men find pleasure in their elders, by whose precepts they are led into virtue's paths", tr. Loeb edition; *Ut enim adulescentibus bona indole praeditis sapientes senes delectantur, leviorque fit senectus eorum qui a iuventute coluntur et diliguntur, sic adulescentes senum praeceptis gaudent, quibus ad virtutum studia ducuntur*. Compare also Cicero *Att. 15.12.2* where similar qualities (*satis ingeni, satis animi ... bona indoles*) are ascribed to the young Octavian. Another occurrence of *bona indoles* in Seneca, in *Ep. 76.30*, shows how a good natural bent comes close to a fully perfected soul in recognising the true good. Cf. Richardson-Hay (2006), 331, 335.

assistance, or even need to be forced to improve.<sup>11</sup> Lucilius' friend is praised both for aspects he has developed through training as well as for those that are naturally becoming to him.<sup>12</sup>

**Dedit nobis gustum, ad quem respondebit; non enim ex praeparato locutus est, sed subito deprehensus. Ubi se colligebat, verecundiam, bonum in adulescente signum, vix potuit excutere; adeo illi ex alto suffusus est rubor.**

Seneca sounds confident about the friend's progress and the future tense of *respondebit* suggests that further improvement is just a matter of time.<sup>13</sup> Both this first "taste" of the good things to come and the friend's *bona indoles* are reasons for optimism, although they do call for further development.

The phrase *ex praeparato* refers to a prepared address that would suit the context of a public speech. However, it is not the friend's trained skill in oratory that impresses Seneca. In fact, he is caught off guard, *deprehensus*. Summers already noted that the addition of *subito* seems redundant in combination with *deprehensus*, which is also used as a technical term, *deprendi*, for having to speak unprepared.<sup>14</sup> It does, however, put additional emphasis on the feeling of surprise that the friend experiences and is one in a series of words to express the suddenness with which natural features may appear.

The friend's loss of control is also reflected in his effort to regain himself, *colligebat*.<sup>15</sup> But what threw him off balance to begin with? A reason is not mentioned—was it something Seneca said, something the friend himself said or did, or failed to do or say? Be that as it may, Seneca does note that it is the occurrence of *verecundia* that causes his interlocutor to blush. The youth is, after all, in the company of someone who is both his senior and a philosopher. Knowing that he is placed under scrutiny puts additional strain on how well he plays his role in the conversation. Because at some point the young man feels self-conscious about how he will look in the eyes of Seneca, he cannot help but turn red.

It is highly likely that this friend is the one who is mentioned again in *Ep.* 25.1-2 as the younger of two friends, even though Seneca sounds a lot less positive there. Both the opening and closing sections of *Ep.* 25 are closely similar what we find here. Just as in *Ep.* 11, the opening section features a youth whose self-consciousness has

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 27.9, 52.3-6, 95.36-37; *Ben.* 5.25.5. On moral progress and the natural qualities of a *proficiens* in Seneca, see Roskam (2005), 74-75.

<sup>12</sup>On a similar combination of good disposition and progress, cf. Cicero *Off.* 3.14: *Haec enim officia, de quibus his libris disputamus, media Stoici appellant; ea communia sunt et late patent, quae et ingenii bonitate multi assequuntur et progressione discendi.*; cf. Long (1986), 214-15.

<sup>13</sup>For similar comments regarding the potential and progress of Lucilius, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 10.1, 10.3, 16.2, 31.1, 34.1-2.

<sup>14</sup>Summers (1910), 164. For a technical use of *deprendi*, cf. Seneca *Contr.* 3 pr. 6.

<sup>15</sup>On the confusion and loss of self-control associated with the blush, cf. Barton (1999), 215-17.

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

**121**

a restraining influence, and at the end of *Ep.* 25, Seneca discusses once more the Epicurean advice of imagining oneself being seen by a revered role model. In *Ep.* 25.1-2, the condition of the younger friend is the more reassuring of the two, owing to his youth and his blush:

As regards our other friend I am not sufficiently confident, either, except for the fact that he still has sense of shame enough to blush for his sins. This modesty should be fostered; so long as it endures in his soul, there is some room for hope.<sup>16</sup>

His sense of shame, *pudor*, suggests that he has not been seriously corrupted yet and that he may still welcome the philosophical remedies Seneca offers. It is a positive indication even though the young man still needs to improve a great deal. By contrast, the older friend, who is already in his forties, is described as a *veteranus*, a term which designates his advanced age but could also point to the fact that he has had long experience in sinfulness. Dealing with his hardened vices will require a more severe treatment.<sup>17</sup>

Although I have translated it here with modesty, that is only a rough approximation of what *verecundia* comprises. Similarly, the related, but distinct, concept *pudor*—roughly shame and respect—is not a straightforward label either. We have to take a closer look at these concepts as *pudor* also occurs in *Ep.* 11.4, *verecundia* reappears in 11.7, and in 11.9 we find numerous variant forms, *vereatur*, *vereri* and *verendus*, that are etymologically linked to *verecundia* and as such recall its earlier use in the letter.<sup>18</sup> Since (Stoic) philosophy and Roman culture are the two most important backgrounds to Seneca's letters, we must consider the place of *verecundia* and *pudor* in these contexts to see what exactly Seneca may have in mind here and to what extent it coincides with particular philosophical or Roman conceptions.

An attempt to find correlating philosophical views has to start with identifying the Greek terms that may (roughly) correspond to *verecundia* and *pudor*. The terms that describe similar feelings of modesty, shame and self-consciousness in Greek are *aidōs* and *aischunē*.<sup>19</sup> However, *aidōs* in particular is a broad concept, as noted by A. Long:

<sup>16</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 25.2: *Ne de altero quidem satis fiduciae habeo, excepto eo quod adhuc peccare erubescit; nutriendus est hic pudor, qui quamdiu in animo eius duraverit, aliquis erit bonaे spei locus.*

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.18.2.

<sup>18</sup>The term *pudor* is not only mentioned in *Ep.* 11.4 but also in the passage in *Ep.* 25.1 that I have just discussed.

<sup>19</sup>It is clear that *verecundia* and *pudor* are the Latin terms used to describe the affective states roughly covered in Greek by *aidōs* and *aischunē*. Cf. Aulus Gellius *NA* 19.6.3, Cicero *Rep.* 5.6; Kamtekar (1998), 148n.1; Kaster (2005), 33, 161-162; Konstan (2006), 297.

The noun *aidôs* and its adjectival form *aidêmôn* had long been used to signify one or more of the following attitudes—shame, modesty, moderation, respect for public opinion, and regard for other persons' dignity. ... Persons motivated by *aidôs* may simply be inhibited by fear of social disapproval or by concern to maintain their reputation, but *aidôs* can also signify self-respect and the internalized respect for moral norms that we call conscience.<sup>20</sup>

Because *aidôs* covers a wide range of attitudes and motivations, it should not come as a surprise that it underwent different classifications and evaluations in antiquity and was discussed by various philosophers. Appraisal of the concept could be variously positive or negative as it was classed among the emotions, and could even be associated with the virtuous condition of the sage.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, *aidôs* can both be directed towards others—feeling respect for others and be concerned with how they see me, or be a self-regarding attitude.

Traditional Stoics distinguished sharply between *aidôs* and *aischunê* and the terms recur in various doxographical lists. Diogenes Laertius includes *aidôs* among the good feelings known as *eupatheiai*.<sup>22</sup> There are three basic types of *eupatheiai*, joy, caution and wish, and *aidôs* is considered a species of caution, *eulabeia*. As such, *aidôs* is caution—the appropriate variant of fear—concerning right censure.<sup>23</sup> A cognate form of *aidôs*, *aidêmosunê*, is mentioned as a type of *sôphrosunê*, temperance, which is one of the four cardinal virtues of the Stoics.<sup>24</sup> Thus, both *aidôs* and *aidêmosunê* are commendable features that are ascribed to the Stoic sage only.

By contrast, *aischunê* features in early Stoic schemas as a subspecies of fear. This emotion is experienced by the non-sage, being defined as fear of bad reputation.<sup>25</sup> The division fits in well with Stoic thinking. One's reputation is an external, indifferent thing that one cannot fully control and worrying about it, having *aischunê*, is an inappropriate and irrational emotion. On the other hand, the one who has *aidôs* knows that morally bad deeds give rise to justified censure and that his moral actions are his own responsibility. In addition, we find a problematic report in Nemesius that confuses the Stoic distinction between *aischunê* and *aidôs* by calling both of them types of fear, the latter being 'fear of the expectation of blame'. According to Nemesius, the difference between them is "that the shameful one hides on account of what he has

<sup>20</sup>Long (2002), 223.

<sup>21</sup>On the various responses to *aidôs* in ancient Greek literature, see Cairns (1993).

<sup>22</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.116 (SVF 3.431); cf. Kamtekar (1998), 137-38. A *eupatheia* is a correct impulse that proceeds from a right value judgment and is the correct counterpart of an emotion. Cf. Inwood (1985), 173-75, 237-39; Graver (2007), 51-55, 58-59.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Andronicus *Peri pathôn* 6 (SVF 3.432); cf. Kamtekar (1998), 137-38.

<sup>24</sup>Stobaeus 2.60.9 (SVF 3.264); cf. Kamtekar (1998), 137.

<sup>25</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.112 (SVF 3.407).

## Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character

123

done, whereas the one who has *aidōs* fears that he will fall into some disrepute".<sup>26</sup> Here, time is the distinctive characteristic: either someone has done something for which he feels ashamed or someone fears the possibility of censure.

Another, additional take on *aidōs*, can be found in the thinking of the late Stoic Epictetus (55 - c. 135 AD). In her study of *aidōs* in Epictetus, Rachana Kamtekar points out that it seems awkward to place the concept of *aidōs* in the select grouping of *eupatheiai*, in which case *aidōs* would only be experienced by the sage. She notes how Epictetus ascribes *aidōs* explicitly to the *prokoptón*, the person who tries to make moral progress but has not yet achieved wisdom. To such a person *aidōs* can be an important instrument on the path to virtue because his sense of shame is making him more aware of how his actions affect others and reflect on himself. As such, he will be more inclined to avoid bad deeds.<sup>27</sup> In addition, as Anthony Long observes, "Epictetus is largely silent concerning the traditional Stoic virtues and their analysis as epistemic dispositions confined to the ideal sage".<sup>28</sup> The orthodox classifications are not particularly helpful to Epictetus' perspective and seem to have arisen in a completely different philosophical context. Instead, Epictetus is more concerned with the role *aidōs* can play in the lives of those resolved to better themselves. He presents *aidōs* as an ethical quality that is a natural endowment belonging specifically to human beings:<sup>29</sup>

How are we endowed by nature? As free, as honourable, as respectful.  
For what other animal blushes or has an impression of what is shameful?<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, nature has given me *aidōs* and I often blush when I think that I am saying something disgraceful. This movement does not permit me to set down pleasure as the good and end of life.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Nemesius *Nat. Hom.* 21 (SVF 3.416), tr. Kamtekar (1998), 140-141. R. Kamtekar argues that Nemesius may have had the Stoic Epictetus in mind when listing *aidōs* among the emotions; another option she mentions is that Nemesius was influenced by Aristotle and is not offering a Stoic view. Either way, it seems incompatible with the early Stoic position.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Kamtekar (1998), 146-60.

<sup>28</sup>Long (2002), 228, cf. 33.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Long (2002), 223-227, 230.

<sup>30</sup>Epictetus *Diss.* 3.7.27-28: περήκαμεν δὲ πῶς; ώς ἐλεύθεροι, ώς γενναῖοι, ώς αἰδήμονες. ποῖον γὰρ ἄλλο ζῷον ἐρυθριᾶ, ποῖον αἰσχροῦ φαντασίαν λαμβάνει. Tr. Long (2002), 224. Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.25.3-6, 2.10.22-3; cf. Kamtekar (1998), 144.

<sup>31</sup>Epictetus fr. 14: καίτοι καὶ δέδωκέ μοι ἡ φύσις αἰδῶ καὶ πολλὰ ὑπερυθριῶ, ὅταν τι ὑπολάβω αἰσχρὸν λέγειν. τοῦτο με τὸ κίνημα οὐκ ἔχει τὴν ἡδονὴν θέσθαι ἀγαθὸν καὶ τέλος τοῦ βίου. Tr. Kamtekar (1998), 144. The final, negative comment on pleasure as the *telos* of life occurs in the wider context of his criticism of Epicurean philosophy.

These passages suggest two facts: that *aidōs* is experienced by the non-sage, and that it is an innate and characteristic feature of human beings. By calling attention to their natural ethical qualities, Epictetus shows that people are not starting from scratch with their moral development. This should motivate his students to strive for virtue and knowledge, aiming at the fuller realisation of their human potential.<sup>32</sup>

For the present, we may note that in the context of *Ep. 11 verecundia* and, as we shall soon see, *pudor* are both viewed positively. They are both ascribed to persons who are, though not sages yet, intent on making moral progress. Just as in the case of Epictetus, there appears to be hardly any connection between the Stoic use of *aidōs* that we find in the doxographical evidence and the point Seneca is trying to make here. Above all, this letter is not concerned with establishing an exact definition of *verecundia* or *pudor*. Moreover, what we find here is neither a blameworthy experience of shame, *aischunē*, nor a perfected form of *aidōs*, but rather the sense of shame or modesty that is becoming in a youth, or more generally, in someone who still has much to learn but has an aptitude for moral progress.

Holding our sense of shame to be a natural inborn characteristic and uniquely human capacity, as it appears in Epictetus, is a view found in many philosophers.<sup>33</sup> In Cicero too there are several passages in which *verecundia* and *pudor* are presented as innate human traits linked to the social nature of mankind. In the following passage Cicero purports to give the view of Xenocrates and Aristotle:

Also, humans are the only animals born with a sense of shame and modesty and the desire to live in society with their fellow humans. In all that they do and say they are concerned that everything should take place with honour and decorum. Hence, it is from these starting points or (as I called them before) seeds bestowed by nature that temperance, moderation, justice and all morality has been developed in full.<sup>34</sup>

Here and elsewhere Cicero speaks of certain "seeds of virtue" that have been be-

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.6.18-9; Long (2002), 33, 224-228.

<sup>33</sup>For instance, in Plato *Prot.* 320c-322d there is a myth on the creation of mankind in which the possession of a due regard for others, *aidōs*, plays an important part. Of particular interest is the close association between *aidōs* and *sôphrosunê*. Cf. Cairns (1993), 356-60; D. Cairns also points to several passages in which the removal of *aidōs* forms a threat to human morals: Hesiod *WD* 200-1; *Theognis* 289-92, 635-6, 647-8; Sophocles *El.* 245-50; Euripides *Med.* 439-40; IA 1089-97.

<sup>34</sup>Cicero *Fin.* 4.18: *quodque hoc solum animal natum est pudoris ac verecundiae particeps appetensque coniunctionum hominum ad societatem animadvertisque in omnibus rebus, quas ageret aut diceret, ut ne quid ab eo fieret nisi honeste ac decore, his initii, ut ante dixi, <et> seminibus a natura datis temperantia, modestia, iustitia et omnis honestas perfecte absoluta est.* Tr. R. Woolf, in Annas (2004), 96-97. Cf. Cicero *Rep.* 5.6 in which *verecundia* is given to man by Nature to deter him from crime.

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character****125**

stowed upon human beings by nature.<sup>35</sup> From these beginnings the actual virtues can spring up. The virtues he mentions here—temperance, moderation, justice—can all be seen in some connection to self-restraint and a sense of shame. The Stoics, too, acknowledged such seeds of virtue and knowledge, which some of these Ciceronian passages may reflect.

According to Stoic philosophy, it is our rational capacity that provides human beings with the potential to become virtuous and wise. As such, our natural course is to follow reason. However, by nature the human mind is endowed with only the elements of virtue, but not virtue itself.<sup>36</sup> Along these lines Diogenes Laertius states that “the starting points provided by nature are uncorrupted”.<sup>37</sup> Stobaeus makes a similar observation:

According to Cleanthes all people have from nature starting points toward virtue. They are like half-lines of poetry, as it were: worthless when incomplete, but worthwhile [or righteous, *spoudaioi*] when completed.<sup>38</sup>

These natural starting points, *aphormai*, are a good start, but of real importance is whether they are brought to completion or not. With the development of reason, our instinctual inclinations toward appropriate actions, such as feeling affection to relatives, should mature into virtues. In general, however, this process is hampered by the corrupting influence of others and the compelling force of external events.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, the letter’s anecdote calls to mind similar philosophical narratives. In general, frankness and self-examination were part and parcel of ancient philosophical discourse and these were likely to bring about painful feelings of self-consciousness, embarrassment and remorse in the novice.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Aulus Gellius notes that in the opinion of the Stoic Musonius Rufus (fl. 1st century AD) a philosopher’s discourse should arouse intense feelings in the audience:

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Cicero *Fin.* 2.113, 5.18, 5.43, 5.59-60.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Cicero *Fin.* 5.59-60; Seneca *Ep.* 90.44-46, 108.8, 120.4-5; *Ira* 2.10.6; Musonius Rufus, fr. 2.8.1-2 H; Clemens (SVF 224, 225). For similar remarks on reason and philosophical wisdom, see Cicero *Leg.* 1.9.27 (SVF 3.220); Seneca *Ep.* 49.11 (SVF 3.219), 90.1-2. Seneca *Ep.* 124.11 describes how Nature requires a thing to be brought to perfection rather than have its good from the start. See also Dyson (2009), “Introduction: The Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge”, xv-xxxiii, 126-127; Roskam (2005), 86-87; Inwood (2007), 324.

<sup>37</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.89 (SVF 3.39; IG II-94.98): ἐπεὶ ή φύσις ἀφορμὰς δίδωσιν ἀδιαστρόφους, tr. Inwood and Gerson (1997), 192.

<sup>38</sup>Stobaeus 2.65 (SVF 1.566; LS 61L; IG II-95.5b8): Πάντας γὰρ ἀνθρώπους ἀφορμὰς ἔχειν ἐκ φύσεως πρὸς ἀρετὴν, καὶ οἶον τὸν τῶν ἡμιάμβων λόγον ἔχειν κατὰ τὸν Κλεάνθην, ὅθεν ἀτελεῖς μὲν ὄντας εἶναι φαύλους, τελεωθέντας δὲ σπουδαίους. Tr. Graver (2007), 246. See also Graver (2007), 153. Cf. Stobaeus 2.62 (IG II-95.5b3); Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1069E (SVF 3.491; LS 59A).

<sup>39</sup>Cf. e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.89 (SVF 3.39; IG II-94.98).

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Graver (2007), 206-208.

Whoever the hearer may be, unless he is wholly lost, during the course of the philosopher's address he must necessarily shudder and feel secret shame and repentance, or rejoice and wonder, and even show changes of countenance and betray varying emotions, according as the philosopher's discourse has affected him and his consciousness of the different tendencies of his mind, whether noble or base.<sup>41</sup>

A philosopher should stimulate and, at times, even throw his listener into confusion so as to bring about any real moral change. Consider also the anecdote in the previous letter in which Crates warns a young man for walking alone and communing just with himself: "Pray be careful, then," said Crates, "and take good heed; you are communing with a bad man!"<sup>42</sup> In this letter, Seneca self-consciously styles himself as doing what great philosophers before him have done: being engaged in a philosophical discussion that has a transformational effect on a promising youth.

All in all, the storyline of a person blushing in the company of a philosopher is not unusual, and can even be seen as something of a *topos*. For instance, Diogenes the Cynic once saw a youth blush and told him to take courage since blushing is the complexion of virtue.<sup>43</sup> But the most famous philosopher in this respect is Socrates. In several Platonic dialogues, Socrates is engaged in conversation with (young) men who start to blush.<sup>44</sup> The *Charmides* in particular contains an opening anecdote comparable to the one here. At the beginning of the dialogue, Critias informs Socrates that his young nephew Charmides is not only beautiful in appearance but also in character.<sup>45</sup> Socrates asks the young boy a tricky question to see whether he really is moderate in the estimation of his own abilities:

"So tell me yourself: do you agree with your friend and assert that you already partake sufficiently of temperance, or would you say that you are lacking in it?"

<sup>41</sup> Aulus Gellius NA 5.1.2-4: *Quisquis ille est, qui audit, nisi ille est plane deperditus, inter ipsam philosophi orationem et perhorrescat necesse est et pudeat tacitus et paeniteat et gaudeat et admiretur, varios adeo vultus disparilesque sensus gerat, proinde ut eum conscientiamque eius adficerit utrariumque animi partium aut sincerarum aut aegrarum philosophi pertractatio.* (tr. Loeb edition) Cf. Seneca Ep. 38.2, 52.12, 108.6, 108.14.

<sup>42</sup> Ep. 10.1: *Cui Crates 'cave' inquit 'rogo et diligenter attende: cum homine malo loqueris'.* On the connections between Ep. 10 and 11, see Richardson-Hay (2006), 331-41, 344, 346.

<sup>43</sup> Diogenes Laertius 6.54; cf. Summers (1910), 163.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Plato Chrm. 158c (Charmides); Euthyd. 275d (Clinias), 297a (Dionysodorus); Lys. 204b-c (Hippothales), 213d (Lysis), 222b (Hippothales); Protag. 312a (Hippocrates); Rep. 350d (Thrasymachus); Ps. Plato Eryx. 395c (Eryxias); Gooch (1987) points out that those blushing are mostly young men, 126.

<sup>45</sup> Plato Chrm. 154d.

At first Charmides blushed and looked more beautiful than ever, and his bashfulness was becoming at his age.<sup>46</sup>

There are clear similarities with *Ep.* 11.1. Charmides' beauty pertains both to body and soul and is visible on the outside; his blush is a becoming feature, here identified as bashfulness, *aischuntēlon*, a characteristic appropriate in someone of his age. Additionally, the conversation goes on to examine the precise meaning of *sôphrosunê*, temperance. After an unsuccessful first suggestion, Charmides proposes next that *sôphrosunê* is the same as modesty, *aidōs*. Socrates takes issue with this line of thought because Homer observes that modesty is not good for all people, while they agree that *sôphrosunê* is.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, Charmides' proposed definition indicates that a close connection between the two concepts was widely recognised, even though it does not suffice as a satisfactory definition in the dialogue.<sup>48</sup> Still, Charmides' initial positive impression, his blushing and his dignified answer, would suggest that he possesses at least some rudimentary form of temperance.<sup>49</sup> As we shall see next, Roman culture too has mixed views about the merits of blushing and modesty.

The meaning and valuation of *verecundia* and *pudor* in Roman culture have been examined in great detail by Robert Kaster.<sup>50</sup> He describes *verecundia* as a worry about maintaining smooth relations in social contexts. A further distinction can be made between *verecundia* in its dispositional form, the general propensity to feel modesty easily and to react in a self-effacing way, and its occurrent form, i.e. the actual experience of the emotion in a particular situation.<sup>51</sup> The distinction between long-term characteristics and actual episodes of emotion was already made in Greek philosophy, e.g., by Aristotle and the Stoics. They used the Greek term *hēxis* for the disposition and

<sup>46</sup> Plato *Chrm.* 158c: αὐτὸς οὖν μοι εἰπὲ πότερον ὁμολογεῖς τῷδε καὶ τρῆς ἵκανως ἥδη σωφροσύνης μετέχειν ή ἐνδεῖς εἶναι; Ἀνερυθρίασας οὖν ὁ Χαρμίδης πρῶτον μὲν ἔτι καλλίων ἐφάνη - καὶ γὰρ τὸ αἰσχυντηλὸν αὐτοῦ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ ἔπρεψεν. Tr. Cooper and Hutchinson (1997), 644.

<sup>47</sup> Plato *Chrm.* 160e.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Aristotle *EE* 1234a30-3; Cairns (1993), 104, 127, 314-15, 339, 373.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Cairns (1993), 315.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Kaster offers a clear and extensive treatment of these lexical items in Kaster (2005), see especially Ch. 1 'Between Respect and Shame: Verecundia and the Art of Social Worry', 13-27, and Ch. 2 'Fifty Ways to Feel your Pudor', 28-65. His focus is on the Roman views of the first century BC and AD, which make his findings pertinent to the present investigation. Carlin Barton offers additional insights on two related topics: in Barton (1999) she looks at the Roman blush, and in Barton (2002) she reviews the relationship between shame and sight in Roman culture.

<sup>51</sup> Kaster (2005), 16-17, 154n.8-9. Every dispositional form of an emotion constitutes an ethical trait. For instance, the irascible person, *iracundus*, is prone to feel anger, *ira*, more easily and more strongly than others who are not predisposed in this manner.

*pathos* for the actual emotion.<sup>52</sup> Our personality is to a large extent made up of our characteristic dispositions.

The *verecundus* person will habitually feel concern for how well he plays his part in social interactions. Such a person will try to avoid causing offence to others and try to show sufficient self-restraint. As such, *verecundia* requires ongoing self-monitoring and self-assessment in order not to call attention to oneself in an unseemly way or to an improper degree.<sup>53</sup> In addition, this wariness is an important way of showing respect and regard for others. It is out of respect for the other that one restrains oneself.<sup>54</sup> Hence, it can also be seen in close association with the related virtues *temperantia* and *modestia*.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, there is the possibility of having too much *verecundia*—thinking too little of oneself and one's interests is neither desirable nor praiseworthy.<sup>56</sup>

By comparison, *pudor* is a more multifaceted emotion that evolves around the notion of seeing oneself being seen by others in a way that puts one's face as a decent person under strain. Kaster explains: "All experiences of *pudor* depend upon notions of personal worthiness (*dignitas*) and value (*existimatio*), which in turn derive from seeing my self being seen as *discredited*, when the value that I or others grant that self is not what I would have it be".<sup>57</sup> Kaster differentiates *pudor* according to six scripts.<sup>58</sup> In the one closest to *verecundia*, entailing a discreditable 'extension' of the

<sup>52</sup>On the use of *hexis* in Aristotle, see e.g., *Nic. Eth.* 1105b20-1; *Met.* 1022b10-12. For Stoic uses of the term, see e.g., Stobaeus 2.70-71 (SVF 3.104; IG II-95.5f); Diogenes Laertius 7.98 (SVF 3.105; IG II-94.98); Simplicius (SVF 2.393, 2.403). Seneca uses the term *habitus* for disposition in *Ep.* 113.7. Cf. Inwood (1985), 39-40, 189-91; Graver (2007), 136-48, translates *hexis* with 'condition'.

<sup>53</sup>Kaster (2005), 16-19; cf. e.g., Cicero *Tusc.* 5.74; *Rep.* 5.6.

<sup>54</sup>This aspect of reverence for others will reappear at 11.9-10.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Cicero *Fin.* 4.18; *Off.* 1.93.

<sup>56</sup>Kaster (2005), 15.

<sup>57</sup>Kaster (2005), 29.

<sup>58</sup>Kaster (2005), 31-48. His taxonomy of *pudor*-scripts consists of the following six types: 1) the situation in which *pudor* is not 'up to me', but simply a fact of life (e.g., having a lowly place of birth or physical disfigurement); 2) when it is not 'up to me', but 'up to' another who acts directly upon me and impairs my 'face' (e.g., in the case of rejection, ridicule or rape); 3) when it is not 'up to me', but 'up to' another with whom I feel associated (e.g., the devaluation of a close friend or family member); 4) the situation in which *pudor* is 'up to me', entailing a discreditable 'extension' of the self (e.g., desert friend in need or tell an expert how to handle his affairs); 5) when it is 'up to me', entailing a discreditable 'retraction' of the self (e.g., being too lazy or cowardly in defending one's interests); 6) when it is 'up to me', entailing a discreditable 'lowering' of the self (e.g., doing something that is in itself filthy or humiliating). Kaster notes that in philosophical discussions of shame the focus is exclusively on those situations where a person is himself responsible for what is happening, i.e. only the latter three scripts where *pudor* is 'up to me'.

self, I "should enact this script of *pudor* when I have behaved (or am on the brink of behaving) as though I am the only one with claims that matter, or as though others are of no account, or both".<sup>59</sup> Feeling *pudor* in its dispositional form could actually prevent someone from ending up in a situation in which he behaves in a self-serving manner. As such, there are certain contexts in which the meaning of *verecundia* and *pudor* is difficult to tell apart, even though they are not the same thing.

The Romans also noted how both are physically distinct from other types of fear, with which they are commonly associated. Whereas fear generally pales the face, both *verecundia* and *pudor* are associated with blushing and reticence.<sup>60</sup> These visible effects, especially the blush, cannot be covered up or kept out of the public eye and this can make one feel exposed. Such unintended openness was considered by some a disadvantage, but by others, such as Seneca, a good sign. Carlin Barton also notes this ambivalent attitude: "The blush represented the loss of self-control—and so was indeed a fault (*vitium*)—but a Roman audience found the blush rather an endearing imperfection; the blusher could trust in, could 'presume upon' the goodwill of, his or her audience."<sup>61</sup> As we shall see, these aspects of visibility and being seen by others will come into view once more at the end of the letter (*Ep. 11.8-10*).

Now, we can consider the role of *verecundia* in Seneca's philosophical writings. First of all, it is classified and regarded as a quality of a mild character. In many cases it is presented as a positive feature, with the exception of the following passage in *De Ira* where Seneca asks: "Are not gentler minds ... joined to milder failings—pity, love, shame?".<sup>62</sup> Here, *verecundia* is included in a list of sympathetic *vitia*—typical of a mild character. In certain cases, *verecundia* can hold back a person from certain achievements and neither too much modesty nor false shame is favourably looked upon.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, as an ethical trait, i.e. in its dispositional form, it is connected to appropriate behaviour, to respect for others and to self-respect and self-restraint.<sup>64</sup> In particular, *verecundia* is mentioned repeatedly in combination with sinning, based on the supposition that a sense of shame can keep someone from doing wrong.<sup>65</sup> These

<sup>59</sup>Kaster (2005), 45.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 4.16.9, 4.19.2; Aulus Gellius *NA* 19.6.3; see also Kaster (2005), 161n.13. Although reticence may not seem to be a visible effect, in *Ep. 11.7* actors in the theatre use their body language to express *verecundia*.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Barton (1999), 216-17.

<sup>62</sup>Seneca *Ira* 2.15.3: *non mitioribus animis vitia leniora coniuncta sunt, ut misericordia et amor et verecundia?* Cf. Seneca *Ira* 3.6.2; *Marc.* 19.6, 24.2 (Metilius' modesty); *Tranq.* 6.2; *Pol.* 2.6 (Polybius' modesty); *Helv.* 9.2 (Helvia's sister's modesty); *Clem.* 1.22.3.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Seneca *Marc.* 24.2 (Metilius' modesty); *Tranq.* 6.2; *Pol.* 2.6; *Ben.* 2.10.1; 7.26.3 (false shame); *Ep.* 81.5, 87.4 (Seneca's own false shame).

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Seneca *Marc.* 3.4; *Ben.* 2.18.3, 2.23.2, 5.20.7, 7.23.3; *Ep.* 40.13-14, 99.29, 114.1; *NQ* 1.16.6, 7.30.1.

<sup>65</sup>The combination of *verecundia* and *peccandi* can be found in Seneca *Ira* 2.9.1; *Vit. Beat.* 12.5;

passages recall the position we noted in other philosophers such as Plato, Cicero, and Epictetus, that a sense of shame is a natural human quality that has the capacity to develop into a virtuous disposition. As such, the presence of such a sense of shame can play an effective role in both education and in moral progress.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, the young man, despite his promising appearance, is not a sage. As such, *verecundia* cannot be a Stoic virtue nor a good affection, *eupatheia*, which both occur only in the sage. But what is *verecundia* and what does Seneca, or any other Stoic, refer to when he describes promising signs in a person who is not yet virtuous? This question points to the ambivalent attitude taken by the Stoics to moral progress. The basic idea is simple and straightforward: one is either a sage or a sinner, one has a virtuous or a vicious character. Correspondingly, the sage experiences good feelings, *eupatheiai*, the bad person experiences emotions, *pathê*.

Yet, in spite of the marked contrast between the morally good and the morally bad, moral progress is indeed possible.<sup>67</sup> For instance, the Stoics discriminated between non-scalar conditions (*diathêseis*) and scalar conditions (*hexeis*) and applied this to their moral psychology.<sup>68</sup> The most well-known *diathêseis*, i.e. virtues and vices, are stable conditions in that they do not admit of degrees. The wise person possesses all the virtues completely and cannot be more virtuous than another sage.<sup>69</sup> By comparison, dispositions, *hexeis*, are variable in degree. In the case of two hot-tempered persons, one can be more irascible than the other. While the position of virtues and vices remains constant and uniform, there is also some room for a graduated range of moral states. Besides, when Epictetus ascribes *aidôs* to the aspiring philosopher, or when humans have sound starting points (*aphormai*) by nature, these can be seen as attempts to counterbalance and to take the edge off the dichotomy between sage and sinner, to motivate beginners, and to explain how virtue is both a natural and an attainable goal. Moreover, the blush of Charmides and of Seneca's young friend suggest an aptitude for moral progress. This point is also confirmed by the Stoic founder Zeno, who mentions ethical attractiveness in the context of the wise man choosing a lover "on account of beauty being apparent".<sup>70</sup> A promising youth already has a cer-

<sup>66</sup>Clem. 1.22.3; Ep. 83.19; NQ 1.16.4. Cf. the passage in *Ep.* 25.1 discussed above in which *pudor* makes someone blush for his sins.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ira* 1.16.4; *Ben.* 7.28.3; *Clem.* 1.16.3.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. Roskam (2005), Ch. 1 'The problem of moral progress in Ancient Stoicism', 15-32, Ch. 2 'The doctrine of moral progress in later Stoic thinking', 33-136, esp. on Seneca, 60-98.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Simplicius in *Cat.* 8.237-38 (LS 47S); Inwood (1985), 36, 39-40; Graver (2007), 135-39. The term *hexis* was used by the Stoics to denote the genus 'condition', which was itself subdivided into *diathêseis*, 'states', and (again) *hexeis*, 'dispositions'.

<sup>70</sup>Cf. SVF 3.557-562; in particular, Stobaeus 2.66-67 (SVF 3.560; LS 61G; IG II-95.5b10).

<sup>70</sup>Stobaeus 2.115.1-2, tr. Schofield (1991), 117. Cf. Clement *Paedag.* 3.11.74 (SVF 1.246); Diogenes Laertius 7.100-101. See also the discussion in Schofield (1991), 115-118. See also Seneca

## Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character

tain beauty of the soul that is visible to the wise. As we have seen, Cleanthes stressed that the natural starting points, *aphormai*, need to lead up to virtues in order to be called good. This qualification makes it clear that what is promising is not truly good in itself, though it bears some semblance to it.

Although there is too little Stoic evidence on the specific issue of blushing and *verecundia* to be conclusive, it seems reasonable to make the following suggestions about where we can fit these phenomena in Stoic moral psychology. The blush, *rubor*, that precedes the actual feeling of *verecundia* would be classified in Stoic theory as a *propatheia*, a 'preliminary emotion'.<sup>71</sup> These *propatheiae* are 'first movements', involuntary affective reactions that can come about when a presentation, *phantasia*, strikes the mind. The term is coined precisely to set the phenomena concerned apart from emotions, so the term 'preliminary emotions' should be understood in the sense that in some cases these involuntary reactions can be followed by the mind's assent. Only then do the Stoics speak of an emotion, *pathos*. Blushing occurs without the mind's assent, it is found in both sages and fools and is not morally reprehensible.

*Verecundia* itself cannot be a *propatheia*, because it is not the same spontaneous, involuntary affective movement. As we have seen, the term *verecundia* comprises both a dispositional and an occurrent form. In its dispositional form, *verecundia* is the tendency to feel a kind of social anxiety. This tendency corresponds to the Stoic concept *euemptōsia*, 'proneness'.<sup>72</sup> Other examples of *euemptōsiai* are irascibility, envyousness and nervousness.<sup>73</sup> These tendencies may be linked to one's natural constitution, as

*Ep.* 106.5-9 and the commentary in Ch. 6.

<sup>71</sup> In the earlier Stoics there is no mention of *propatheiae*, but we do find terms such as 'bites', 'contractions' and 'relaxations' that indicate the non-rational, involuntary responses affecting the soul. Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.83; Galen *PHP* 4.3.2 (SVF 1.209); Plutarch *Virt. mor.* 449D (SVF 3.468); Aulus Gellius *NA* 19.1.14-20; Seneca *Ira* 1.16.7 (SVF 1.215), which was quoted earlier; cf. Inwood (1985), 175-81; Hadot (1969), 131-33, 182-84; Griffin (1976), 180-81; and more recent studies in this connection: Sorabji (2000), Ch. 4 'Seneca's Defence: First Movements as Answering Posidonius', 66-75; Tieleman (2003), 128, 257, 282-84; Graver (2007), Ch. 4 'Feelings without Assent', 85-107.

<sup>72</sup> The Stoics used the term 'predisposition' or 'proneness', *euemptōsia*, to indicate the tendency towards having an emotion, see Stobaeus 2.93 (SVF 3.421; IG II-95.10e); Diogenes Laertius 7.115 (SVF 3.422; IG II-94.10e). Cf. also SVF 3.423-30; Seneca *Ep.* 94.36; Kidd (1983); Tieleman (2003), 107, 155n.64; Roskam (2005), 57-58; Graver (2007), 137-38, 142-45, 165.

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Graver explains that these *euemptōsiai*, which she calls 'proclivities', are set apart by their own typical response, rather than triggered by a particular external object. For example, a nervous person will be inclined to respond nervously in a variety of circumstances, not exclusively to spiders, heights or women. By contrast, 'sickesses' (*nosēmata*), 'infirmities' (*arrōstēmata*), and 'aversions' (*proskopai*) are characterised by the particular external object that provokes them, e.g., fondness for money or wine, misanthropy or misogyny. Cf. Graver (2007), Ch. 6 'Traits of Character', 133-48.

we will examine later, but they are also connected to one's particular thoughts and beliefs. This is even more obvious in the occurrent form of *verecundia*. Just as irascibility makes a person more quickly and more frequently angry, so the dispositional form of *verecundia* easily leads to its occurrent form—easily, indeed, but not necessarily. After all, anger is an emotion that requires assent and so is the occurrent form of *verecundia*.

But this constitutes a problem. If *verecundia* is an emotion, *pathos*, then it is a bad thing according to the Stoics. Nevertheless, it is praised here by Seneca. We have already noted that as a kind of social anxiety, *verecundia* plays a part in regulating social interaction and can eventually be developed into a virtue such as *temperantia* or *modestia*.<sup>74</sup> As such, it seems to be associated with the *aphormai*. Returning to Cleanthes' statement that natural starting points are like a half-line of poetry, we see that *verecundia* can be a semblance of virtue, but not its full realisation. Because it is experienced by a bad person, it is an emotion; instead, the sage would experience 'caution', one of the *eupatheia*.

What can set an emotion like *verecundia* apart from other emotions, is being oriented to the right object—to be concerned with what is truly good and evil, namely one's own moral condition.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the emotion desire is not a good thing, but the desire for moral improvement seems suitable to the philosophical student. Of course, a sage would not get emotionally upset or anxious about his moral performance, but Seneca's friend is not a sage yet.<sup>76</sup> Let us compare this to the famous case of Alcibiades who feels remorse for his bad actions.<sup>77</sup> Margaret Graver has examined this example in detail to see how the Stoics could account for emotions that are strictly speaking a bad thing, but can be conducive to moral progress. She argues that these specific emotions are analogous to the *eupatheiai*. The contrast between the *eupatheiai* of the sage and the feelings of the person who is making moral progress shows both similarities and differences (see Table 3.1 below).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Cicero *Fin.* 4.18, this passage was quoted and discussed above; Cicero *Off.* 1.93.

<sup>75</sup>This is a particular focus that *verecundia* can have, though not all instances of *verecundia* are concerned with one's moral well-being. Also, we have noted that there are inappropriate forms of *verecundia*.

<sup>76</sup>On the sage not feeling remorse, cf. Seneca *Ben.* 4.34 (SVF 3.565).

<sup>77</sup>Several accounts offer a portrayal of Alcibiades' remorse and his willingness to improve: Plato *Symp.* 215e-216c; *Alc.* 118b-c, 127d; Cicero *Tusc.* 3.77-78; Plutarch *Alc.* 4; *Adul. amic.* 29 (*Mor.* 1.69E-F); Aelius Aristides *Defense of the Four* 576-77; Augustine *Civ. Dei* 14.8. Cf. Graver (2007), Ch. 9 'The Tears of Alcibiades', 191-211.

<sup>78</sup>This table is an adapted version from Graver (2007), 195. Graver argues that there could not be a counterpart to 'joy' because only the sage knows happiness. However, the satisfaction from making progress would seem to be a likely candidate. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 6.1-2, whose awareness of his own progress appears to constitute a positive feeling and something that Seneca is keen to share with Lucilius.

Analogous genera in the nonwise		
Eupathic genera		
	<i>present</i>	<i>in prospect</i>
<i>good</i>	<b>joy</b>	<b>wish</b>
<i>evil</i>	-	<b>caution</b>

	<i>present</i>	<i>in prospect</i>
<i>good</i>	<b>satisfaction</b> from improvement	<b>desire</b> for improvement
<i>evil</i>	<b>distress</b> over moral failure	<b>fear</b> of future error

Table 3.1: Eupathic genera / analogous genera in the nonwise.

In common with the *eupatheiai*, these feelings are correct value judgments, inasmuch as they correctly regard one's moral condition to be a good. Unlike the eupathic responses of the sage, they are still excessive affective movements and they are not derived from firmly established knowledge. For that reason, the analogous states cannot match the *eupatheiai* completely. Whereas the sage is free from evil, the fool still feels distress and remorse.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, these feelings are based on true opinion and a part of moral progress. As such, they are not as bad as emotions that are excessively oriented to external goods, such as money, reputation, or pleasure, and that are based on false opinion. In fact, Seneca often speaks of the importance of recognising one's own mistakes, of acknowledging one's own condition—this may be a painful but necessary step to moral progress.<sup>80</sup> Thus, feeling particular emotions about one's moral condition may be a developmental phase on the path to virtue. It is striking that here in *Ep. 11.1*, in the case of Zeno's lover, in Plato's *Charmides*, and in the famous anecdote of Alcibiades, the subjects of these stories are all youths. Their natural aptitude to virtue suggests an 'immature form' of *eupatheiai* that should be further developed.

Seneca approves of his interlocutor's blush and calls his *verecundia* a good sign in a young man. For Seneca, blushing is a proof of decency. This is simultaneously a normative remark on what is becoming in a youth, a compliment on the condition of the friend, as well as a signal, *signum*, that can be read from his appearance. It also confirms that Lucilius' friend is probably a young man himself, especially when compared to the older Seneca. The underlying condition of *verecundia* is directly connected to the physiological process in which the face colours red, *rubor*. This blush comes from deep within and connects what happens on the inside to a person's exterior.

It was commonplace in the Greco-Roman world to trace a direct relationship between a person's outer appearance and his or her inner character. Thus, speech, style

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Graver (2007), 195.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep. 4.1*, 39.2, 51.13, 59.14, 59.16, 71.36: "but the greater part of progress is the desire to progress"; *sed magna pars est profectus velle proficere*, tr. Loeb edition.

and personality were thought of as being closely related. The idea that soul and body are mutually influenced can be found in philosophers as well as in other disciplines, such as rhetoric, medicine and, most notably, physiognomy.<sup>81</sup> The latter is the specific expertise of inferring character from a person's features. The scientific background against which physiognomics was studied involved a conception of the human body consisting of four elementary qualities. This traditional theory of the four elements was widely shared by physicians and philosophers, including Hippocrates, Aristotle, the Stoics and Galen.<sup>82</sup> The rhetorician's interest in physiognomy follows from the importance of rhetorical delivery, or as Tamsyn Barton observes: "This part of the art was devoted to teaching the would-be orator to use his physical presence to present his case most effectively; thus, stress was laid on the way in which the character of the speaker, his *ethos*, was revealed by his body".<sup>83</sup>

This brings up the Greek concept of *to prepon*, Latin *decorum*.<sup>84</sup> The notions of *decorum*, *decor*, and *quod decet* all revolve around the concept of being becoming and befitting. This can refer both to what makes something, or more frequently, someone, beautiful<sup>85</sup> and to what is suitable to the requirements of a certain type of person or

<sup>81</sup> Consider, for example, the Greek physician, writer, and philosopher Galen (129 – c. 216 AD), who wrote a treatise on psychophysical causation called *Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur* (*That the Faculties of the Soul Follow the mixtures of the Body*). For studies of mind-body interaction in these disciplines see among others Wright and Potter (2000), which contains various relevant chapters on the mind-body relation in Hippocratic medicine, Aristotle, Plato and Galen; see also Barton (1994). A convenient literary survey is Evans (1969), which covers the role of physiognomics in various disciplines in the ancient world, including philosophy.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Evans (1969), esp. 17-28; Wright and Potter (2000), Ch. 1, 3, 4. These four elementary qualities will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>83</sup> Barton (1994), 103-104.

<sup>84</sup> A good overview of *to prepon* in Greek thought is Pohlenz (1965); for a study concentrating on Panaetius, see Phillipson (1930).

<sup>85</sup> External *decor* are adornments that intend to increase the beauty of its wearer. Seneca, however, maintains that external additions to one's physical beauty have no genuine attraction as they are not part of someone's true self. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 124.22, where the natural comeliness of animals is contrasted favourably with human efforts to embellish themselves. In *Ep.* 41.6-7, Seneca explains the audience's preference for the wild lion in the arena on account of the lion's natural charm. He is more becoming because he has retained his pure, fierce nature whereas the trimmed and embellished lion has been robbed of his natural, wild beauty. The natural condition of a wild animal is more befitting than a decorative and tamed existence. The same idea is applied to man: he has no need for embellishments. What is more, these additions are merely the result of chance. Fortune may easily take them away again. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 78.17-18 where this point is associated with the more general Stoic tenet that external goods can never qualify as more than 'preferred indifferents', which Seneca calls *commoda*, corresponding to the Greek term *proēgmena*.

his role or duty.<sup>86</sup> An important text in this respect is Cicero’s *De Officiis* 1.93-151, which sets out the theory of what is *decorum*.<sup>87</sup> Notably, the first two books of *De Officiis* are regarded as being part of Panaetian ethical doctrine.<sup>88</sup> Included in the section on *decorum* is also the four-*personae* theory (*Off.* 1.107-121) that attempts to distinguish how a person should perform his different roles.<sup>89</sup> Each person is constituted by the following functions: his *persona* as a human being, as an individual with his own characteristics, and as someone who has acquired specific social and professional roles. We find similar concerns in this letter, about how to deal with one’s human natural constitution, with one’s individual characteristics and social obligations.

Likewise, Seneca is of the opinion that a person’s social and professional duties define the context for proper behaviour. For instance, he frequently advises on the proper comportment and attitude of a virtuous man.<sup>90</sup> Besides, he also discusses in several contexts what is appropriate to different roles and functions. Seneca’s *De Ira* was addressed to Novatus, who held a public office, and there special attention is paid to the proper attitude of a judge and public figure.<sup>91</sup> In *De Clementia*, dedicated to Nero, Seneca commands mercy as especially appropriate to a ruler because he has the power to do good on a grand scale.<sup>92</sup> A man of social standing has special responsibilities as well.<sup>93</sup> In the *Epistulae Morales* the style of the philosopher is examined.<sup>94</sup> In *Ep.* 54.3 Seneca uses self-deprecating humour to describe what is befitting to him in his role as a cold-water bather, *quomodo psychrolutam decet*. Moreover, Seneca regards

<sup>86</sup>For a more extensive discussion of the relation between physiognomy and beauty, see Raina (2005). A certain style in writing, speech or presentation may befit someone or be regarded as improper. Often this is closely associated with a fitting pattern of behaviour and character. In Seneca the connection between outward appearance and someone’s mental and moral qualities is most extensively developed in *Ep.* 114. For a general account on style in Seneca, see Setaioli (1985); cf. Graver (1998) in which Seneca’s critical attitude toward the appearance, style and character of Maecenas is studied in detail. A counter-example of the congruity of style and personality is mentioned in *De Ira* 1.20.8 where the speech and outward appearance of Gaius Caesar (Caligula) would suggest greatness of character but this is a deception.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. the extensive commentary to *Off.* 1.93-151 in Dyck (1996), 238-338; see also the notes to the translation in Walsh (2000), 145-155.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. Dyck (1996), 17-29, esp. 28.

<sup>89</sup>Cf. De Lacy (1977), 163-72.

<sup>90</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 47.1, 51.2, 63.7, 66.5-6, 74.30, 120.22; *Clem.* 2.5.4.

<sup>91</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ira* 1.15.3, 1.19.2.

<sup>92</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Clem.* 1.19.1, *Clem.* 1.16.1.

<sup>93</sup>Cf. Seneca *Pol.* 6.2, *Ep.* 47.1 and in *Ben.* 3.22.1 it is told that a slave can do his master a favour that would befit even men of higher social standing.

<sup>94</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 40.7, 100.

style as an indicator of a person's mental condition.<sup>95</sup>

Of course, the clearest and most admirable example is the Stoic sage. He truly is an image of grace and excellence as a virtuous condition makes someone beautiful.<sup>96</sup> It is virtue that represents the perfect combination of moral beauty and what is appropriate to man.<sup>97</sup> Although this beauty comes from the inside, it is also clearly visible in a person's outward appearance. As such, virtues are befitting to man.<sup>98</sup> Seneca concludes in another letter that "virtue needs nothing to set it off; it is its own great glory, and it hallows the body in which it dwells".<sup>99</sup> This virtuous attractiveness can be recognised by those attuned to this.

Stoic theory discerned two components of beauty, *symmetria* and *decorum*. As W. Tatarkiewicz explains: "*Decorum* embodied the concern for the adjustment of parts to the whole, while *symmetria* was concerned with the agreement of parts among themselves. There was a further, more essential difference: in *decorum* the ancients saw individual beauty, adjusted to fit the specific character of each object, human being or situation, while *symmetria* signified an accord with the general laws of beauty".<sup>100</sup> In his discussion of the features of discourse, Diogenes of Babylon says, "Fittingness ... is style proper to the subject".<sup>101</sup> *Decorum* is relative to the nature of a thing or person and can change under different circumstances.<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, in the previous letter Seneca is proud of Lucilius for uttering some noble phrases: "These words did not come from the edge of the lips; these utterances have a solid foundation".<sup>103</sup> Lucilius' words show real inner strength and are not merely superficial display. This is also the case in *Ep.* 11.1: the blush is a positive indication

<sup>95</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ira* 1.19.2, *Ep.* 114.

<sup>96</sup> On the Stoic view that the sage alone is beautiful on account of the perfect condition of his soul, cf. Cicero *Mur.* 61 (SVF 1.221 [1]), cf. the case of Claranus in Seneca *Ep.* 66.1-3; Cicero *Fin.* 3.75 (SVF 1.221 [2], 3.591); *Acad. Pr.* 2.136 (SVF 3.599); Philo (SVF 3.592); Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1072F (SVF 3.719).

<sup>97</sup> On the beautiful being good, see Stobaeus 2.77.16 W (SVF 3.16); SVF 3.29-37.

<sup>98</sup> Seneca *Clem.* 1.5.2-3, *Clem.* 2.5.4-5, *Ep.* 92.3. In *Ep.* 99.24 the distinction between proper human response and animal reaction is made regarding grief.

<sup>99</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 66.2: *Non enim ulla honestamento eget: ipsa magnum sui decus est et corpus suum consecrat.* See also *Vit. Beat.* 9.4; *Ep.* 66.6-9, 115.3-5. By contrast, emotional distress and a vicious character are what makes a person ugly and this shows in their outward appearance too, see *Ira* 1.20.3, 2.35.3; *Ep.* 52.12, 122.4. In these passages the outward ugliness is subsidiary to the hideous condition of the soul itself. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.100 (SVF 3.83); Stobaeus 2.77 (SVF 3.16).

<sup>100</sup> Tatarkiewicz et al. (2006), 189.

<sup>101</sup> Diogenes Laertius 7.59 (SVF 3.24 [DB]; IG II-3.59): πρέπον ... ἐστὶ λέξις οὐκεία τῷ πράγματι, tr. Inwood and Gerson (1997), 115.

<sup>102</sup> Tatarkiewicz et al. (2006), 190. Cf. Seneca *Ira* 3.26.3 and *Ben.* 2.16.1.

<sup>103</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 10.3: *non a summis labris ista venerunt, habent hae voces fundamentum.*

## Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character

137

of modesty, *verecundia*, which comes from deep within and discloses the friend's true nature.

**Hic illum, quantum suspicor, etiam cum se confirmaverit et omnibus vitiis exuerit, sapientem quoque sequetur.**

From the early indications of progress, *profectus*, and the first taste of the friend's development, *gustum*, Seneca turns to some future scenario in which vices have been removed and even true wisdom has been achieved. That this can be read as a progressive development is indicated by *Ep. 75* where different levels of moral progress are described. Those who are closest to wisdom are "men who have already laid aside all passions and vices".<sup>104</sup> The sentence thus moves gradually from the specific situation of a promising—though far from accomplished—youth to a future sage who has secured wisdom. It is stated clearly that such a state of wisdom requires both inner strength and the removal of all faults. The stability that is acquired by the sage contrasts with the current condition of the unsettled friend.<sup>105</sup>

Rather than the more general meaning of 'fault', 'blemish' or 'imperfection', *vitium* is used here in the more particular sense of 'vice', a moral failing that reveals weakness of character.<sup>106</sup> So whatever is affecting the sage cannot be a moral error of judgment. The thought that some affective state may still be experienced by the sage is also expressed in *De Ira 1.16.7*:

'Tell me then. When the wise man has to deal with something of this sort, will his mind not be touched by some unwonted excitement?' It will, I admit. He will feel a slight, tiny throb. As Zeno says, the soul of the wise man too, even when the wound is healed, shows the scar. He will feel a hint or shadow of them, but will be without the affections themselves.<sup>107</sup>

This passage explains how the sage, who no longer experiences emotions, will still experience *propatheiai* such as blushing or shivering—in this sense, he is not unlike

<sup>104</sup>Seneca *Ep. 75.9: omnes iam adfectus ac vitia posuerunt*. Cf. the discussion in Roskam (2005), 77-78.

<sup>105</sup>Cf. Roskam (2005), 71-72.

<sup>106</sup>The Greek concept for vice, *kakia*, is rendered in Latin as *vitium*; cf. Cicero *Fin. 3.40* where the term *vitium* is considered the best option because it forms the perfect contrary to virtue. On *vitium* as a weakness of character, cf. Cicero *Tusc. 4.29* (SVF 3.425). For general technical Stoic use of the term 'vice', see e.g., Plutarch *Stoic. rep. 1042E* (SVF 3.85), which deals with the perceptibility of vices and virtues; Diogenes Laertius 7.93 (SVF 3.265); Seneca *Ep. 20.3, 59.1, 75.9, 83.19-20, 101.8*. On the Stoic contrast between vice and virtue, see Roskam (2005), 16.

<sup>107</sup>Seneca *Ira 1.16.7* (SVF 1.215): 'Quid ergo? non, cum eiusmodi aliquid sapiens habebit in manibus, tangetur animus eius eritque solito commotior?' Fateor: sentiet levem quendam tenuemque motum; nam, ut dicit Zenon, in sapientis quoque animo, etiam cum vulnus sanatum est, cicatrix manet. Sentiet itaque suspiciones quasdam et umbras adfectuum, ipsis quidem carebit.

other human beings.<sup>108</sup>

**Nulla enim sapientia naturalia corporis aut animi vitia ponuntur:**

Now we come to the generalisation that all natural weaknesses of body and mind are beyond the realm of wisdom. This is an unusual thing to say for a philosopher.<sup>109</sup> Seneca mostly concentrates on the accomplishments of the philosophical tradition and its potential to improve human lives. Although it might be needed to temper unrealistic expectations about the promises of philosophy, it is also worth noting that both *vitium* and *sapientia* occur in the previous sentence as well as in this one. Their juxtaposition here constructs some kind of paradox. First it is said that only when all faults are overcome wisdom can be achieved whereas the following sentence declares that wisdom is powerless against natural faults of body and mind.

The crux of the matter is that the term *vitium* cannot have the same meaning in both cases. In the second instance, the natural faults are not moral failings that result from bad judgment but a consequence of a person's individual constitution. Certain things, such as blushing, might generally be thought of as imperfections, but the only truly reprehensible faults are moral failures. It is left as an exercise to the reader to determine what sense of *vitium* is intended.

This still leaves open what exactly these natural faults of body and mind are. They are all individual characteristics fixed by our natural constitution. Those of the body would pertain to physical peculiarities, in some a tendency to sweat easily and heavily, in others a predisposition to turn red. The natural faults of the mind cannot be moral failings as this would completely undercut Stoic assumptions about the authority and power of reason to achieve both wisdom and virtue. Moreover, Seneca stated just in the previous sentence that the sage has removed all his vices, *se ... omnibus vitiis exuerit*.

An alternative option, along the same lines as the physical faults, would be to see these faults of the mind as referring to individual, mental predispositions (*euemptōsiai*).<sup>110</sup> These *naturalia animi vitia* would then form a contrast with the fault that is exemplified by anger and which Seneca describes in *De Ira* 2.2.2 as *voluntarium animi vitium*. Elsewhere in *De Ira* Seneca uses *vitia* not in a moral sense but as natural failings of a particular type of human constitution.<sup>111</sup> The assent to an emotion is a

<sup>108</sup> See the discussion above.

<sup>109</sup> Madvig had tried to solve this problem by removing *aut animi* after *corporis* from the Latin text. Richard Gummere accepts this in the Loeb edition but I will argue that this is an unnecessary emendation. The OCT text by Reynolds also includes *aut animi*.

<sup>110</sup> The Stoics used the term *euemptōsia*, to indicate the tendency towards having an emotion, see the discussion above.

<sup>111</sup> Seneca *Ira* 2.15.3: *vitia leniora*, "milder failings", 2.20.4: *inertiora vitia*, "more sluggish failings". Other passages that mention natural feelings include Seneca *Ep. 57.4: naturalis adfectio inexpugnabilis rationi*, 71.29: *Ne extra rerum naturam vagari virtus nostra videatur, et tremet sapiens*

voluntary fault of the mind and for this error of judgment we can and should be held responsible. But these natural faults cannot be disposed off, the best we can do is soften them and withhold assent. For instance, a person who is hot-tempered will easily feel inclined to get angry, but how he chooses to react is his own responsibility.

Obviously, Lucilius' friend is not commended for having a physical constitution that is prone to turn red. He is complimented for actually being sensitive to his interaction with others, in particular with persons who command respect. A similar case is that of *iracundia*, the predisposition to feel anger. This seems to be the case with Sulla in *Ep. 11.4*, as I will discuss later, but a passage from *De Ira* is also relevant in this respect:

So if we are aware of being prone to anger, we should pick out people who adapt themselves to our looks and words. That, of course, will make us spoiled, and give us the bad habit of not listening to anything that we do not want to hear. But it will be some use to give our failing a break and a bit of peace. Even those of an obdurate, untamed nature can bear to be flattered—nothing is harsh and fierce if you stroke it.<sup>112</sup>

Whatever the strength of this remedy, one thing is clear: those who are prone to anger are well-advised to avoid being aroused further. The irascible person, as Kaster points out, is more easily angered because he will sooner imagine something to be an insult and will perceive the world around him differently from a fearful or joyful person.<sup>113</sup> But with the final sentence Seneca reassures his audience that even difficult natures can be overcome—not by removing the natural inclination, but by adapting to it. Conversely, in *Ep. 90.44* Seneca explains that even the favourable constitution of the earliest men is not the same as being virtuous:

However, not all were endowed with mental faculties of highest perfection (*ingenia ... consummata*), though in all cases their native powers were more sturdy (*indoles fortior*) than ours and more fitted for toil. For nature does not bestow virtue; it is an art to become good.<sup>114</sup>

Natural constitution only gets us so far, in the end moral progress requires learning

*et dolebit et expallescet*, 99.18: *lacrimas naturalis necessitas exprimit*, 99.20: *illis nec humanitas nec dignitas deesset*. Cf. Graver (2007), 99-101.

<sup>112</sup>Seneca *Ira* 3.8.7: *Eligamus ergo vel hos potius, si consciit nobis iracundiae sumus, qui vultum nostrum ac sermonem sequantur: facient quidem nos delicatos et in malam consuetudinem inducent nihil contra voluntatem audiendi, sed proderit vitio suo intervallum et quietem dare. Difficiles quoque et indomiti natura blandientem ferent: nihil asperum tetricumque palpanti est.*

<sup>113</sup>Kaster (2005), 16-18.

<sup>114</sup>Seneca *Ep. 90.44*: *Quemadmodum autem omnibus indoles fortior fuit et ad labores paratior, ita non erant ingenia omnibus consummata. Non enim dat natura virtutem: ars est bonum fieri.*

and practice, viz. through a life of philosophy.<sup>115</sup>

**quidquid infixum et ingenitum est lenitur arte, non vincitur.**

Regardless of one's level of wisdom, these features are anchored in our constitution and the combination of *infixum et ingenitum* underscores how rooted they are. It is conceded that training may tone them down, but it cannot remove them altogether. Seneca raises the issue of how natural characteristics can be modified but does not treat it any further in this letter. This recalls a line from *De Ira* 2.4.2: "These [physical reactions] cannot be overcome by reason, though habituation and constant attention may perhaps lessen them".<sup>116</sup> The focus here is on their inevitability. Under the heading of *arte* falls philosophy but also the other arts. So although philosophy may not be able to counter naturally inborn characteristics, neither do the other arts, such as rhetoric or medicine. Moreover, philosophy is not restricted in achieving its goals as its focus is on the *vitia* that actually need to be removed.

(11.2)

**Quibusdam etiam constantissimis in conspectu populi sudor erumpit non aliter quam fatigatis et aestuantibus solet, quibusdam tremunt genua dicturis, quorundam dentes colliduntur, lingua titubat, labra concurrunt:**

The superlative of *constantissimis* brings out the fact that what is said still applies to even the best of men. Even among such persons psychophysiological disturbances can occur when facing an audience.<sup>117</sup> The setting of a public speaker showing his

<sup>115</sup> See also Seneca *Ep.* 124.14 where the difference between perfection by nature or by training is what distinguishes god from human beings: "The good of one of them, god's of course, is perfect by nature, the other's, man's, by practice." (tr. Long and Sedley, LS 60H), *Ex his ergo unius bonum natura perficit, dei scilicet, alterius cura, hominis.*

<sup>116</sup> Seneca *Ira* 2.4.2: *ista non potest ratio vincere, consuetudo fortasse et adsidua observatio extenuat,* tr. Cooper and Procopé (1995), 45. Knowledge of our constitution and a change of habit may in fact help us to improve our own natural weaknesses, see *De Ira* 2.20.2-4. Even the Stoic founder Zeno, who was aware of his morose and melancholic nature, maintained that drinking moderate quantities of wine made him more affable; cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.16, 7.26; Athenaeus 2.55F (SVF 1.285).

<sup>117</sup> These examples of physical responses are similar to those in Seneca *Ira* 2.3.3: "Thus it is that even the bravest man often turns pale as he puts on his armour, that the knees of even the fiercest soldier tremble a little as the signal is given for battle, that a great general's heart is in his mouth before the lines have charged against one another, that the most eloquent orator goes numb at the fingers as he prepares to speak". *Itaque et fortissimus plerumque vir dum armatur expalluit et signo pugnae dato ferocissimo militi paulum genua tremuerunt et magno imperatori antequam inter se acies arietarent cor exiluit et oratori eloquentissimo dum ad dicendum componitur summa riguerunt.* There too we find that even the best in their respective fields are overcome by involuntary reactions. A difference is that the descriptions here in *Ep.* 11 all pertain to a public speaker. For the Stoic view on such involuntary responses and the underlying physical

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

**141**

nervousness must have been familiar to his audience.<sup>118</sup> Roman men in a higher social position performed in front of their peers and the people in courts, in the senate and during public meetings. The sweating speaker experiences a natural physiological reaction, just like people who are tired or hot. Under certain circumstances the body will by its nature respond in a certain way.

**haec nec disciplina nec usus umquam excutit, sed natura vim suam exercet et illo vitio sui etiam robustissimos admonet.**

Training and habit are of no avail here. Nature exerts her power and through that weakness reveals her power even to the toughest of men. The reference to *illo vitio* is again to a natural defect and not to any moral failing. It should remind us not to underestimate Nature and to remember what is and is not up to us. The Stoic colouring of this line is undeniable, most notably through the concept of Nature and the personified image of Nature using her power. Stoic Nature is a complex notion in which the role of universal, rational and all-pervasive cause of all that happens is combined with the role of provident force that steers the world, with that of ethical guide and inspiration to humans and with that of necessity of fate.<sup>119</sup> Here, Nature is viewed primarily under the aspect of an independent force that is its own cause. Yet it is not entirely distinct from our individual human nature, "for our natures are parts of the nature of the whole".<sup>120</sup> It is an accepted Stoic view that Nature works through all parts of the world and this includes human beings.

Now the provident role of Nature may seem difficult to square with the use of *vitium* in the same sentence. To begin with, *vitium* is not used here in the sense of moral failing, but only in that of a natural weakness. People have certain natural predispositions, whether favourable or not, but are not forced to assent in accordance with them. Most importantly, our actions are still the result of our own choices and our moral responsibility remains unhampered.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, the Stoics acknowledged that Nature or God has to work within certain practical constraints and this has some implications for our human constitution as well.<sup>122</sup>

principles, cf. Tielemans (2003), Ch. 4 'The Therapeutics (Book IV)', 140-197.

<sup>118</sup>Quintilian speaks on this topic on several occasions and in 12.5.2-4 he remarks that showing some degree of nervousness makes a good impression on the audience as it signals modesty.

<sup>119</sup>See e.g., Cicero *ND* 1.39: "... god is the world itself, and the universal pervasiveness of its mind; also that he is the world's own commanding-faculty, since he is located in intellect and reason; that he is the common nature of things, universal and all-embracing; also the force of fate and the necessity of future events", tr. Long and Sedley (LS 54B; SVF 2.1077); Diogenes Laertius 7.147-48 (SVF 2.1022, 2.1132; LS 43A, 54A); Cicero *ND* 2.44, 2.73-164 (LS 54J, 54L-N; IG II-23.73-164).

<sup>120</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.88: μέρη γάρ εἰσιν αἱ ἡμέτεραι φύσεις τῆς τοῦ ὄλου. Tr. Long and Sedley (1989), LS 63C2.

<sup>121</sup>Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 4.1.100.

<sup>122</sup>Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.1.7-12, 1.1.17, 4.1.100.

Nevertheless, the Stoic spokesman Balbus can claim that "the governance of the cosmos contains nothing which is subject to criticism; the best possible result which could be produced from those natures which existed was indeed produced".<sup>123</sup>

(11.3)

**Inter haec esse et ruborem scio, qui gravissimis quoque viris subitus affunditur.**

The blush belongs to this category of natural characteristics and Seneca returns to the specific subject of blushing. The first sentence of *Ep.* 11.3 resembles that of 11.2: in both the natural defect (*sudor* and *rubor*, respectively) suddenly occurs with exemplary men (*constantissimis* and *gravissimis ... viris*). Just as in *Ep.* 11.1 we can note that *subitus* indicates the abrupt and unforeseen element of the blush.

**Magis quidem in iuvenibus appetit, quibus et plus caloris est et tenera frons; nihilominus et veteranos et senes tangit.**

Seneca proceeds with a more theoretical account of the underlying causes of blushing and of who is most affected. Young men are particularly susceptible because of their natural constitution. At their age the innate heat and tender countenance make the blood rush to the face more easily.

A unique mixture of the four elements constitutes each human being whose character assumes the properties of the elements most strongly present.<sup>124</sup> Fire and air are seen as active elements, water and earth as passive.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, a predominance of heat in the mind results in a bold and irascible character—literally hot-tempered, whereas cold makes a person withdrawn and cowardly, those characterised by moist need time to build up their emotions and dryness leads to strong emotions that pass quickly.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, the differences in personality are not random, but are determined by race, gender and age, whereby Seneca implicitly favoured the mature Roman male who embodied the ideal.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, men of a more mature age

---

<sup>123</sup> Cicero *ND* 2.86 (IG II-23.86): *Cuius quidem administratio nihil habet in se quod reprehendi possit; ex his enim naturis quae erant quod effici optimum potuit effectum est*, tr. Inwood and Gerson (1997), 154. Cf. Philo *Prov.* 2.74 (SVF 1.548); Cicero *ND* 2.140, 145-148 (IG II-23.140, 145-48), in which the great abilities are listed that the gods have bestowed on men.

<sup>124</sup> Seneca *Ira* 2.19.1: "There are four elements—fire, water, air and earth—and each has its corresponding property—hot, cold, dry, wet. Variations between places, living creatures, bodies and characters are produced by the mixture of elements; and the tendencies of a given temperament reflect the predominance of a given element in it", *Nam cum elementa sint quattuor, ignis aquae aeris terrae, potestates pares his sunt, fervida frigida arida atque umida; et locorum itaque et animalium et corporum et morum varietates mixtura elementorum facit, et proinde aliquo magis incumbunt ingenia prout alicuius elementi maior vis abundavit*. Tr. Cooper and Procopé (1995), 57-58.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Wildberger (2006), 61, A371 (576); Nemesius *Nat. Hom.* 5 (SVF 2.418; cf. LS 57D); Galen *Nat. Fac.* 106.13-17 (SVF 2.406; LS 47E).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.19.2-4.

<sup>127</sup> Seneca *Ira* 2.15.1-5; 2.19.5. Cf. Harris (2001), 222, who discusses anger in Seneca as linked

### **Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

are not free from blushing either.

**Quidam numquam magis quam cum erubuerint timendi sunt, quasi omnem verecundiam effuderint;**

The attention shifts from the physiological process of blushing to what this reddening may be suggesting. The general statement that some are most to be feared when turning red, already points ahead to the case of Sulla in *Ep.* 11.4. Apparently, in this case the reddening is an indication of anger and imminent aggression that triggers an arising fear in its spectators.<sup>128</sup> This fits with the description of Sulla that follows. In *De Ira* and *De Clementia*, Seneca had already associated Sulla with cruelty and inspiring fear in others:

'Tell me, then. Might not some utterances poured out in anger seem to be outpourings of a great mind?' You mean outpourings of ignorance about true greatness, like that dire, detestable saying: 'let them hate, provided that they fear.' A sentence, as you can see, from the time of Sulla!<sup>129</sup>

The addition "as if they had cast away all sense of shame" is likely to accentuate that reddening can be an indication of two emotions that are directly opposed to one another. *Verecundia* is associated with mildness of character whereas anger, *ira*, is an aggressive trait of character that disregards propriety.<sup>130</sup> In addition, Scarpato notes

---

specifically to non-Romans; Hoof (2007), 67, points out how anger is associated with weakness and with those who represent this: the old, foreigners, the sickly, women and children. On the more unstable constitutions of women, cf. *Ira* 1.12.1; 2.19.1; *Marc.* 1.1; on children and the aged, cf. *Ira* 1.13.5, 2.19.4. The role of women in Seneca's writings is a complicated one—pejorative comments on women alternate with praise for exemplary individuals such as Marcia, Seneca's mother Helvia, his aunt and his wife Paulina. For further studies on this matter, see Manning (1973); Harich (1993); Föllinger (1996); Mauch (1997).

<sup>128</sup>Stoic sources confirm that anger was associated with aggression and, on a physiological level, with the boiling of the blood and evaporation of bile. This would account for the reddening of the face. Cf. Seneca *Ira* 1.1.4-5, 1.2.3-1.3.8, 2.36.2, 3.4.1; Stobaeus 2.91 (SVF 3.395; IG II-95.10b-c); Andronicus *Peri pathōn* 4 (SVF 3.397); Nemesius *Nat. Hom.* 20 (SVF 3.416). The latter definition stems from Aristotle *De An.* 403a31, to which Seneca also refers in *Ira* 1.3.3.

<sup>129</sup>Seneca *Ira* 1.20.4: 'Quid ergo? non aliquae voces ab iratis emittuntur quae magno emissae videantur animo?' <Immo> veram ignorantibus magnitudinem, qualis illa dira et abominanda 'oderint, dum metuant'. *Sullano scias saeculo scriptam.* Tr. Cooper and Procopé (1995), 39. As Cooper and Procopé remark, this citation is derived from the tragedy *Atreus* by Lucius Accius (Fragment 168, *Remains of Old Latin* Loeb edition (London 1936 II, 382)). Cf. Seneca *Clem.* 1.12.4 where the same line is tied to Sulla's regime and 2.2.2 where the citation is part of a series of misguided sayings. See also Seneca *Ep.* 24.4 in which Rutilius is praised for not returning from exile when summoned by Sulla, 'and nobody in those days said "No" to Sulla' (*alter redditum suum Sullae negavit, cui nihil tunc negabatur*).

<sup>130</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ira* 1.5.2, 2.17.2, 2.35.3.

the playful variations on the verb *fundere*, with *suffusus* (11.1), *affunditur* (11.3), and *effuderint* (11.4).<sup>131</sup>

At the same time, there is another connection between having a sense of shame and feeling anger that throws a new light on the "as if" part of this sentence. For some people a counterattack is the only adequate response to a diminished face. As a result, an embarrassing situation actually triggers their anger.<sup>132</sup> Kaster notes that "one of the important fault lines in Roman emotional culture, determined (we can suspect) as much by individual temperament as by anything else, distinguished those who had a 'reflexive' sense of honor, demanding vengeance for even a mildly face-threatening slight, from those who did not".<sup>133</sup> This type of reaction was most common in military circles, which makes the example to come of the quick-tempered Sulla particularly well-chosen.<sup>134</sup>

#### (11.4)

**Sulla tunc erat violentissimus cum faciem eius sanguis invaserat.**

This is the first example in a series of Roman men who turned red in public: Sulla, Pompey, and Fabianus.<sup>135</sup> Sulla is historically the earliest and clearly also the most negative example of the three. His reddening is linked to a state of aggression and is expressed in similarly violent terms: the blood invades his face as if it were a hostile army. Just as at the start of *Ep. 11.2* and *11.3* we find a superlative (*violentissimus*), but this time not as an indication of a good but of a bad quality.

**Nihil erat mollius ore Pompei; numquam non coram pluribus rubuit, utique in contionibus.**

Pompey represents a more gentle kind of blush that is attributed to his delicate face. He was most susceptible to blushing in front of an audience. The word *mollius* can imply something being too soft, almost feminine, but it is not sure whether this is implied here. No specific evaluation of his blush is added that indicates its appropriateness. Thus, the example of Pompey seems neutral in tone, especially as it is placed

<sup>131</sup>? , 264-65.

<sup>132</sup>Cf. Barton (1999), 221; Livy 9.3.12-13; Virgil *Aen.* 9.44.

<sup>133</sup>Kaster (2005), 35. By 'reflexive' Kaster means a tendency that leads to an automatic and absolute response.

<sup>134</sup>On the combination of shame and anger in military and heroic settings see, e.g., Livy 40.27.10; Valerius Maximus 3.2.23; Lucan 6.153-55; cf. Cairns (1993), 383; Kaster (2005), 53.

<sup>135</sup>There are several references to these men in the *Epistulae Morales*. Sulla is only explicitly referred to in *Ep. 24.4*. Pompey is introduced mostly in the context of the civil war, but also with regard to his murder: *Ep. 4.7*, 14.12-3, 24.9, 51.11, 71.9, 83.12, 94.64, 95.70, 97.8, 104.29-30, 104.32-3, 118.2. Papirius Fabianus is spoken highly of, either for his character, life, knowledge or eloquence in speech and writing, see *Ep. 40.12*, 52.11, 58.6 and throughout *Ep. 100* that deals with the writings of Fabianus.

in between a negative and a positive example.

**Fabianum, cum in senatum testis esset inductus, erubuisse memini, et hic illum mire pudor decuit.**

Fabianus is the last *exemplum* presented in this section and the only one to be commended. Papirius Fabianus was a member of the short-lived philosophical school of the Sextii and one of Seneca's own teachers.<sup>136</sup> The event takes place in the senate where Fabianus has to appear as a witness and Seneca recalls it from his own memory. This makes it a more recent example that Seneca personally remembers.

In the case of Fabianus, the blush is an indication of *pudor*, a Roman concept tied to honour, shame and self-respect.<sup>137</sup> The word combination *mire pudor decuit* is particularly significant as it portrays Fabianus' *pudor* as something wonderfully becoming that is visible to others. The blush is what signals this underlying state of mind; but because blushing can have several meanings, it is at least as important to interpret this sign correctly.

We may note that Sulla was a prominent public figure and that Pompey and Fabianus are both portrayed as making a public performance. Feeling *pudor* often occurs in connection with being seen by others and, as pointed out by Kaster, it does not necessarily entail being in error:

Correspondingly, public speaking and giving testimony are the chief occasions where this mode of seeing is at work for a male. Arising to speak, a Roman man will commonly acknowledge experiencing *pudor*—in fact, acknowledge that *pudor* is properly felt—not because the act by its nature compels him to see himself being seen in discreditable terms but because the act by its nature causes him to see himself being seen conspicuously—stepping into the center of attention and claiming the authority to speak—in circumstances where it is all too easy, at the same time, for the mind's eye to see the many ways he can fail.<sup>138</sup>

That Fabianus is not regarded as acting improperly is clear from the choice of *decuit*. This connects the psychophysiological state of blushing and feeling *pudor* to the concern for what is proper, the Latin *decorum* and Greek *to prepon*.<sup>139</sup> The fact that

<sup>136</sup> Fabianus is mentioned in Seneca *Brev. Vit.* 10.1, 13.9; *Marc.* 23.5; *Ep.* 40.12, 52.11, 58.6, 100.9; *NQ* 3.27.3; cf. Motto (1970), 152. The Sextian school, with Pythagorean and Stoic leanings, originated in Rome and was founded by Quintus Sextius the Elder during the reign of Augustus. Sextian influence can be seen in two of Seneca's teachers, Papirius Fabianus and Sotion. That the school of Sextius was short-lived is already testified by Seneca himself in *NQ* 7.32.2. Cf. Griffin (1976), 37; Morford (2002), 133-134.

<sup>137</sup> See Kaster (2005), Ch. 2, 28-65.

<sup>138</sup> Kaster (2005), 59-60.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Ovid *Am.* 1.8.35: *Erubuit. 'decet alba quidem pudor ora, sed iste, si simules, prodest; verus*

Fabianus was not in the senate as a senator, which Seneca was, but only as a witness, underscores the status-conscious aspect of *pudor*.

By contrast, the Cynics were known for, and took pride in, their shamelessness and rejection of cultural conventions and customs.<sup>140</sup> That this was hard to accept for most Romans is expressed most clearly by Cicero:

Those same philosophers offer further examples to the same effect to impugn modesty. But we should follow nature, and avoid whatever our eyes and ears do not approve. Our stance and walk, our sitting and reclining, our facial expression and our eyes, and the movement of our hands should all preserve that element of propriety.<sup>141</sup>

Of course, the Cynics denounced all conventional formalities as social constructs, *nomos*, in order to return to a natural way of life, *phusis*. But as Cicero sees it, shame and modesty offer us natural boundaries of decency that should not be transgressed.<sup>142</sup> The fact that Seneca here labels *pudor* as *mire decuit*, is one indication that he shares Cicero's views. Moreover, as we have seen in *Ep. 25.1-2*, there is hope for improvement because the young friend still has his *pudor*. Thus, *pudor* appears to be a natural characteristic that is in danger of being lost through moral corruption. Kaster's account of *pudor* and *verecundia* helps explain why Seneca in this letter speaks of *verecundia* when the young man blushes, but in *Ep. 25.1-2* of *pudor*. In this letter the blush is mentioned in the context of a conversation with Seneca, the youth's blush is the result of his regard for the other and of how his behaviour reflects on their social interaction. In *Ep. 25.1-2*, on the other hand, the focus is self-regarding, the youth blushes on account of his own wrongdoing. He blushes because his public face has been threatened by his own improper behaviour.

---

*obesse solet.*

<sup>140</sup>On the Cynics and their shamelessness, see e.g., *Ep. Diog.* 6; Dio Chrysostomus *Or.* 8.36; Diogenes Laertius 6.20-82 offers an anecdotal life of Diogenes of Sinope, including various 'shameless' deeds that shocked bystanders. Cf. Barton (1999), 222. The earlier Stoics seemed more inclined to approve the shameless manners of the Cynics, at least to some extent, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.3, 7.26-27 (on Zeno); SVF 3.743-56 (on Chrysippus).

<sup>141</sup>Cicero *Off.* 1.128: ... *pluraque in eam sententiam ab eisdem contra verecundiam disputantur.* *Nos autem naturam sequamur et ab omni, quod abhorret ab oculorum auriumque approbatione fugiamus; status, incessus, sessio, accubitio, vultus, oculi, manuum motus teneat illud decorum.* Tr. Walsh (2000), 43. Cf. Cicero *Off.* 1.99, 1.126-29, 1.148; Martial 4.53. For corroborative remarks on this suggestion, with particular reference to the different Stoic traditions, see Mansfeld (1986), 347. Mansfeld also notes here that Seneca portrays the Cynic Demetrius "in a very decent Stoic manner". On the reception of Cynicism, see Griffin (1996); Krueger (1996).

<sup>142</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 5.1-5.

**(11.5)**

**Non accidit hoc ab infirmitate mentis sed a novitate rei, quae inexercitatos, etiam si non concutit, movet naturali in hoc facilitate corporis pronus;**

Seneca starts his explanation of the underlying causes of blushing by pointing out that it is certainly not brought on by mental weakness. Blushing does not result from a flawed condition of the soul but rather from a combination of a particular trigger, viz. an unfamiliar situation, and a physiological predisposition that moves the body to form a blush. Seneca had already explained in *De Ira* 2.2.1 that certain responses arise without our assent:

For all sensations that do not result from our own volition are uncontrolled and unavoidable, as, for example, shivering when we are dashed with cold water and recoilment from certain contacts; bad news makes the hair stand on end, vile language causes a blush to spread, and when one looks down from a precipice, dizziness follows. Because none of these things lies within our control, no reasoning can keep them from happening.<sup>143</sup>

Added to the text from *De Ira* 2.2.1 is the inclusion of the body's innate predisposition to peculiar responses to account for individual differences. In *De Ira* the treatment of *propatheiai* is meant to distinguish them from genuine emotions. *Propatheiai*, unlike emotions, are not morally reprehensible because they are not the result of a voluntary assent of reason. This is what *Ep.* 11.5 reminds us of when denying that the blush results from mental weakness. At the same time, it undertakes to explain why some blush more than others.

**nam ut quidam boni sanguinis sunt, ita quidam incitati et mobilis et cito in os prodeuntis.**

The word *nam* indicates that this line is to be taken as further support for the previous statement. The inclination to a certain response such as blushing is predetermined by one's natural constitution. Different blood types have their own characteristics and so the particular properties of a person's blood influence the way a bodily process evolves. Two examples are named explicitly. There are those with good blood and there are those with rushed and active blood. The blood of the latter type, we are told, quickly emerges in the face. This mobile blood is what seems to be at work when the blush wells up from the inside to the young man's face (*Ep.* 11.1) and, more generally, when a youth is said to be prone to blushing on account of the excess heat

<sup>143</sup>Seneca *Ira* 2.2.1: *Omnis enim motus qui non voluntate nostra fiunt invicti et inevitabiles sunt, ut horror frigida adpersis, ad quosdam tactus aspernatio; ad peiores nuntios surriguntur pili et rubor ad improba verba suffunditur sequiturque vertigo praerupta cernentis: quorum quia nihil in nostra potestate est, nulla quominus fiant ratio persuadet.* See also the remarks on *propatheiai* in the commentary to *Ep.* 11.1.

that corresponds to that phase of life (*Ep.* 11.3). The fact that blushing overwhelms people suddenly, with *subitus* in *Ep.* 11.3, also confirms the active character of their blood.

But there is also mention of another kind of blood, which is simply described as *bonus* and of which no further consequences are mentioned. In an attempt to clarify its meaning, Gummere chooses to translate *boni sanguinis* with 'full-blooded' and Summers expresses it with 'healthy'.<sup>144</sup> W.S. Watt takes issue with these and similar translations and agrees with Axelson that *incitati et mobilis* requires a clear contrast and the opposite extreme.<sup>145</sup> For that reason, Watt proposes the solution *ut quidam boni <lenti> sanguinis sunt*, as this addition yields an exact opposition to *incitati et mobilis*.<sup>146</sup> This would make for the obvious contrast between slow versus active blood. However, in my opinion no emendation is necessary, for the text still renders good sense without the addition of such an explicit contrast. The presence of 'good blood' in opposition to blood that is characterised by a hurried movement already implies that such a rapid movement is not desirable. Whether that implies that it is in fact slow is not at all apparent. Moreover, slow blood is not necessarily a positive thing.<sup>147</sup>

Alternatively, 'good' blood could indicate that it moves at a more regular rate rather than slowly. In a Stoic fragment in Galen we find that "[i]ndeed the idea is not at all untenable that the psychic *pneuma* is a sort of exhalation of useful blood".<sup>148</sup> This 'useful blood', *haimatos chrēstou*, corresponds to the *boni sanguinis* in 11.5.<sup>149</sup> Now the blood, according to the Stoics, is what nourishes the *pneuma*, the fiery breath out of which the soul is made up.<sup>150</sup> The blood thus plays an important role in the workings of both body and soul. *Anathymiasis*, evaporation, is the physiological process whereby the soul is nourished from the blood contained in the heart, under the influence of the innate heat.<sup>151</sup> In youth there is more innate heat present and this in

<sup>144</sup> See Gummere (1970), Vol. 1, 62-63; Summers (1910), 166.

<sup>145</sup> Watt (1982), 399; Axelson (1939), 44.

<sup>146</sup> Watt (1982), 399.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.20.4: "Those of a moister, drier or cold nature are not in danger from anger; they have more sluggish failings to fear—nervousness, intractability, hopelessness, suspicion". *Umidioribus siccioribusque et frigidis non est ab ira periculum, sed inertiora vitia metuenda sunt, pavor et difficultas et desperatio et suspiciones*. Slow blood brings with it problems of its own.

<sup>148</sup> Chrys. ap. Galen, *De Usu Partium* 3.496 K (SVF 2.781): οὐδὲ γάρ οὐδ' οὗτος ὁ λόγος ὀδύνατος, ὡς ἀναθυμίασις τίς ἔστιν αἴματος χρηστοῦ τὸ ψυχικὸν πνεῦμα. Translation by M. Tallmadge May in Tallmadge May (1968), 324.

<sup>149</sup> For further references to *haimatos chrēstou*, cf. e.g., Galen *Temp.* 1.608.13 K, 1.680.1 K; *Nat. Fac.* 2.108.8 K. Further comments on the role of the blood in ancient medicine and Stoicism can be found in Tieleman (1996), 57-59, 71-94, 237-241.

<sup>150</sup> Chrys. ap. Galen, *De Usu Partium* 3.496 K (SVF 2.781); SVF 782, 783.

<sup>151</sup> Tieleman (1996), 87-94, 237-41. Cf. Marcus Aurelius *Med.* 6.15. Interestingly, it is, in what appears to be a perverted form, also causally involved in the physical effects of anger, see

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

**149**

turn affects the blood.<sup>152</sup> Peter Brain, in explaining Galen's conception of the role of blood, remarks:

One of the most important functions of the innate heat is to preside over pepsis or digestion, the conversion of food and drink in the gut into useful blood. ... Perfectly pure blood does not exist in the body, just as unmixed elements are not found on earth; it always has some admixture of the other three humours. In the useful blood, which provides the best nourishment to the tissues of the body, no particular quality prevails; it is well tempered or balanced. For blood of this kind to be produced, the amount of heat applied to the digestive process must be exactly right.<sup>153</sup>

The 'good' or 'useful' blood would be of a kind that is not dominated by any particular quality whereas the 'rushed and active' blood indicates an excess of heat.<sup>154</sup>

**(11.6)**

**Haec, ut dixi, nulla sapientia abigit: alioquin haberet rerum naturam sub imperio, si omnia eraderet vitia.**

The division between wisdom and nature is made explicit: what is under the command of nature cannot also be controlled by wisdom.<sup>155</sup> This time it is put in the form of an absurd suggestion: if wisdom would have those things under its control that properly belong to nature, it could remove all faults. But of course that is impossible. The preceding discussion of *vitia* has shown that Seneca plays with the implications of this important concept. As it is, wisdom can only remove the moral faults in men, the real faults, not those natural faults that are outside its control. A similar division of command, *imperium*, is found in *Ep. 74.31*:

Chrys. ap. Galen PHP 3.2 (SVF 2.886); cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.19.1.

<sup>152</sup>Innate heat is what makes us grow and as we age, more and more of it is consumed. As a result, when we get older our constitution becomes cooler and drier. Cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.19.4; see also Galen's treatise of his old age *The habits of the mind follow the temperaments of the body*, QAM c.3, SM II pp. 37-8, 44-48 Müller; Tieleman (1996), xxvi, 9; Brain (1986), 8-9.

<sup>153</sup>Brain (1986), 9-10.

<sup>154</sup>See also the discussion in 11.6 on *temperatura*.

<sup>155</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 57.3-5*, and *71.29*: "You must not think that our human virtue transcends nature; the wise man will tremble, will feel pain, will turn pale. For all these are sensations of the body." *Ne extra rerum naturam vagari virtus nostra videatur, et tremet sapiens et dolebit et expallescet; hi enim omnes corporis sensus sunt*. This passage also stresses that the power of wisdom or virtue does not extend into the domain of what is natural. Although *Ep 71.29* calls phenomena such as trembling or turning pale sensations of the body, in other contexts Seneca gives examples that certainly include mental states as well. Cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.3.2-3; Inwood (2005), Ch. 2 'Seneca and Psychological Dualism', 23-64, esp. 60.

"What," you ask, "will the wise man experience no emotion like disturbance of spirit? Will not his features change colour, his countenance be agitated, and his limbs grow cold? And there are other things which we do, not under the influence of the will, but unconsciously and as the result of a sort of natural impulse." I admit that this is true; but the sage will retain the firm belief that none of these things is evil, or important enough to make a healthy mind break down.<sup>156</sup>

In this passage it is stressed that natural *vitia* do not impair one's capacity to become virtuous, though they pose a challenge for us.<sup>157</sup> However, if we can overcome these obstacles, this will make virtue shine forth all the more.

**Quaecumque adtribuit condicio nascendi et corporis temperatura, cum multum se diuque animus composuerit, haerebunt;**

The natural condition to which one is born, *condicio nascendi*, refers to the particular circumstances of an individual.<sup>158</sup> In this case it can be taken more narrowly as those personal and natural characteristics that one is born with. These individual features are the result of the particular mixture of elements that make up one's constitution. In *De Ira* 2.19.1-20.4, Seneca describes how individual characters may differ as a consequence of the different mixture of elements. This is also related to their different blood types.<sup>159</sup>

**nihil horum vetari potest, non magis quam accersi.**

The inability to control this aspect of our natural constitution works both ways: it is not in our power either to avoid or arouse occurrences like blushing at will. Stoic theory distinguishes clearly between that which is 'up to us', *eph' hēmin*, and what is not.<sup>160</sup> Holding certain beliefs and giving assent are *eph' hēmin* and that is why

<sup>156</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 74.31: 'Quid ergo? non aliiquid perturbationi simile patietur? non et color eius mutabitur et vultus agitatibus et artus refrigerescens? et quidquid aliud non ex imperio animi, sed inconsulto quodam naturae impetu geritur?' *Fateor; sed manebit illi persuasio eadem, nihil illorum malum esse nec dignum ad quod mens sana deficiat.*

<sup>157</sup> The same point is made with regard to natural disasters in Seneca *Ep.* 107.7: floods and fires too are under the control of nature but are not an insurmountable barrier to virtue or happiness. Cf. Seneca *NQ* 6.3.1; *Ira* 2.27.1; *Prov.* 3.1, for references to a greater plan that is controlled by Nature. The idea of a challenge also shows from *Ep.* 11.2: *natura ... sui etiam robustissimos admonet.*

<sup>158</sup> The same expression is used in *De Otio* 4.1 to distinguish the citizenship that results from the particular town where one happened to be born from one's membership to the overall commonwealth of gods and men.

<sup>159</sup> On the role of blood in affecting one's constitution, see the discussion at *Ep.* 11.5.

<sup>160</sup> On what is 'up to us' (Latin *in nostra potestate*, Greek *eph' hēmin*), see Cicero *Tusc.* 4.14, Alexander of Aphrodisias *De Fato* 26, 196.21-197.3 Bruns (SVF 2.984; IG II-88); cf. Inwood (1985), 89-91, 130.

we are morally responsible for having the emotions that we feel, but not for our *propatheiai*. The *euemptōsiai* are a different matter as they point to a certain condition of the mind. A person is only called irascible or envious when he is accustomed to give in to these inclinations. As such, a predisposition can easily turn into a habit, while learning good habits can help to suppress the inclination. Although it does not compromise our ability to attain virtue, the soul's command is limited—it cannot change the composition of elements—and this reminds us of the earlier passages in which even the wisest are unable to correct their natural characteristics. So far it has been discussed extensively how one is unable to prevent involuntary reactions, but the opposite aspect, the inability to make them appear at will, is the topic of *Ep. 11.7*.

**(11.7)**

**Artifices scaenici, qui imitantur affectus, qui metum et trepidationem exprimunt, qui tristitiam repraesentant, hoc indicio imitantur verecundiam.**

The introduction of stage-artists trying to convey emotions and feelings in front of an audience adds a new perspective. On the one hand, these actors want something different from what we have seen so far: instead of being involuntarily overwhelmed by a natural feeling, they actually try to summon it and want to portray the signals associated with emotions. On the other hand, there is the contrast between the naturalness of these feelings as felt by people in everyday life and the artificial attempt by stage-artists to convey them to others. Again, *verecundia* is singled out as a special case to consider in more detail. *Verecundia* requires a particular display of symptoms.<sup>161</sup>

The use of *indicio* here underlines that it is possible to infer a person's inner state from outward physical signs. Actors implicitly accept this correspondence between appearance and state of mind when portraying emotions. It is also of importance to the Stoics, who held that good and evil states of mind can be read from a person's looks and behaviour.<sup>162</sup> Not only were the Stoics familiar with physiognomical theory, we even have evidence that it was put into practice by the early Stoic Cleanthes. He exposed an tough-looking man as a *cinaedus*, an effeminate, by his sneeze.<sup>163</sup> Seneca reports that Posidonius endorsed the study of ethology, which "gives the signs and marks which belong to each virtue and vice, so that by them distinction may be drawn between like things".<sup>164</sup> We have also noted that Zeno's

<sup>161</sup>On the particular symptoms associated with *verecundia*, cf. Virgil *Aen.* 1.561, 3.320, 6.862; Seneca *Clem.* 2.6.3; ?, 269-70. Seneca's discussion of different facial expressions suggests that these actors performed without masks.

<sup>162</sup>This view is ascribed to Chrysippus in Plutarch, *Stoic. rep.* 1042E-F (SVF 3.85; LS 60R). Cf. Inwood (2007), 268; Evans (1969), 26-28; Tieleman (1996), 63-65.

<sup>163</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.173 (SVF 1.204); cf. Dio Chrysostomus *Or.* 33.53-55.

<sup>164</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 95.65.

wise man can discern ethical attractiveness in a potential lover.<sup>165</sup>

**Deiciunt enim vultum, verba summittunt, figunt in terram oculos et deprimunt: ruborem sibi exprimere non possunt; nec prohibetur hic nec adducitur.**

The actors know what the manifestations of *verecundia* are and try to reproduce the outward signs in their posture, looks and speech. However, they fail to accomplish all of the defining features because the blush cannot be summoned. There is a certain overlap between voluntary behaviour and involuntary natural responses. Stumbling over words can be a natural reaction to feeling insecure or can be done on purpose when on stage. A smile might be a spontaneous response or a conscious gesture. But in the case of the blush there is only the involuntary natural movement that cannot be captured in controlled performance.

**Nihil adversus haec sapientia promittit, nihil proficit: sui iuris sunt, iniussa veniunt, iniussa discedunt.**

Wisdom seems to indicate here not the ultimate perfection of knowledge, but the art which leads us towards it, viz. philosophy. The only progress that concerns philosophical wisdom is moral progress, such as the potential progress that was anticipated in the case of the young friend in *Ep. 11.1*. The pursuit of wisdom is a natural task for human beings, but even so there are still aspects of Nature that are not within our power, e.g., our natural constitution. Each person comes into being with his own particular constitution, but—regardless of the mixture—each can come to terms with his constitution and develop into a rational human being. Philosophy does not remove one's predispositions, but it can teach one how to cope with ill temper or sluggishness.<sup>166</sup> Seneca uses a legal phrase, *sui iuris*, to indicate that these characteristics are independent of us. In Roman civil law a person who is *sui iuris* possesses legal competence. Rather than be subject to another's power, as the minor is to his *pater familias*, such a person has the capacity to manage his own affairs. Natural characteristics certainly have 'laws of their own', viz. the laws of Nature.<sup>167</sup> Despite the complete contrast of their original meanings, *iuris* and *iniussa* both make the same point: these reactions are not under our *potestas* but have their own way of coming about.

### (11.8)

#### **Iam clausulam epistula poscit.**

As the letter draws to an end, Seneca arrives at the closing section. The association

<sup>165</sup>Stobaeus 2.115.1-2, tr. Schofield (1991), 117. Cf. Clement *Paedag.* 3.11.74 (SVF 1.246); Diogenes Laertius 7.100-101. See also the discussion in Schofield (1991), 115-118. See the earlier discussion at *Ep. 11.1*.

<sup>166</sup>For instance, Seneca deals extensively with the treatment of anger in the third book of *De Ira*.

<sup>167</sup>Cf. Cicero *Rep.* 3.33 (SVF 3.325, LS 67S).

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

with a legal context that was started with *sui iuris* continues with *clausula*. In the specialised sense this indicates the conclusion of a legal formula. The end of the letter is thus clearly marked.<sup>168</sup>

**Accipe, et quidem utilem ac salutarem, quam te affigere animo volo:**

In these early letters the letter typically concludes either by indicating that now is the time to end the letter, by offering Lucilius a final farewell present in the form of some good advice, or with a combination of both. In this letter we find both aspects together. Lucilius receives a piece of advice that is described as both useful and salutary.<sup>169</sup> It is customary for Seneca in these early letters to end with some words of wisdom from another author. This is referred to as a little present to Lucilius or, later on, as an outstanding payment when Lucilius becomes so accustomed of receiving them that there arises a sense of obligation.<sup>170</sup> By ascribing beneficial qualities to the advice, Seneca, by extension, connects these with philosophy in general and with the letter itself as well. Advice can be useful and wholesome and good advice is exactly what philosophy has to offer. Philosophy, he notes in other contexts, has the capacity to reform a person, it brings a harmony to the soul that is needed to acquire a lasting condition of happiness and health.<sup>171</sup> After the discussion of what belongs to the domain of knowledge and training, the attention now shifts to the promises that philosophy is willing to make and the progress it aims at. The advice must not simply be read but has to be internalised and incorporated into one's way of life.

**'aliquis vir bonus nobis diligendus est ac semper ante oculos habendus, ut sic tamquam illo spectante vivamus et omnia tamquam illo vidente faciamus'.**

A good man can be a moral example to us and deserves our admiration. We must always have him before our eyes because our moral development requires our full attention.<sup>172</sup> This reinforces the comment made in advance that this advice should be impressed on our soul. Dedication is presented as a necessary condition. The *vir bonus* will serve as an observer of our daily life and will see our every action. The inspection now comes from the side of the good man. We should look up to him and

<sup>168</sup>On Seneca's practice of clearly marking a letter's closing section, see e.g., *Ep. 4.10: Sed ut finem epistulae inponam*, 8.7: *Sed iam finis faciendus est*, 12.10: *Sed iam debo epistulam includere*, 13.16: *Sed iam finem epistulae faciam*; cf. Summers (1910), 154; Richardson-Hay (2006), 344.

<sup>169</sup>On *accipe* and the offering of a gift at the end of the letters, see e.g., *Ep. 4.10: accipe quod mihi hodierno die placuit*, 7.10: *unum haec epistula in debitum solvet, duo in antecessum accipe*.

<sup>170</sup>Cf. the earlier discussion of these literary gifts in Ch. 2, section 1.2 and 2.1.

<sup>171</sup>On the beneficial qualities of philosophy, see e.g., Seneca *Ep. 41.1, 50.9, 53.8-9, 55.4-5*.

<sup>172</sup>The phrase *ante oculos* is a very common expression in Latin literature, in Greek *pro ophthalmôν*; see e.g., Seneca *Ben. 1.12.1; Ep. 94.25*, also, more specifically, in the context of keeping something in one's mental view, *Ben. 4.11.5; Marc. 2.2; Ep. 12.6, 91.8; NQ 3 pr. 17*. Keeping particular things or events 'before our eyes' could be a type of spiritual exercise, cf. Hadot (1995a), 85; Rabbow (1954), 330.

he, in turn, will study us. Or at least, so we must imagine. The advice consists of the internalisation of an external observer.

**(11.9)**

**Hoc, mi Lucili, Epicurus preecepit; custodem nobis et paedagogum dedit, nec in merito:**

The instruction is attributed to Epicurus who provides us with a guardian and guide. The fact that he gives us a guide is already an indication that Epicurus himself is not considered suitable to fulfil this role.<sup>173</sup> In *Ep. 25* Seneca returns to this same counsel and there it becomes obvious that in the original Epicurean context the student should model himself on Epicurus and have him in mind as *exemplum*.<sup>174</sup> Only in a later letter does Seneca put himself forward in the role of Lucilius' internalised observer.<sup>175</sup> These words, *preecepit, custodem, paedagogum*, all suggest a context of guidance and of being students at the receiving end of instruction. At this point we need assistance and directions in doing the right thing. Although the saying is credited to Epicurus, the message represents a more general philosophical position. The Stoic founder Zeno is associated with a similar recommendation in the following anecdote: "When asked how a youth could make as little mistakes as possible, Zeno replied: 'You must always keep before your eyes those whom you honour and respect most'."<sup>176</sup> Zeno also mentions the importance of having a role model, someone who one may look up to, such a person needs to be present in one's mental view as a guiding force and thus will prevent one from making mistakes.

**magna pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis adsistit.**

The initial claim that the advice offered has useful and salutary effects is substantiated by the urgent need to have a witness present to observe our actions. The presence of a witness holds back those who might otherwise do wrong. The connection between doing wrong and not being seen has a long history in Greek and Roman literature.<sup>177</sup> For instance, Plato and Cicero use the story of Gyges to explore (in)visibility to others

<sup>173</sup>This is also supported by his exclusion in 11.10 when Seneca names specific Roman historical characters to keep in mind as role models.

<sup>174</sup>See Seneca *Ep. 25.5-6*. In 25.5 the advice is to do everything as if Epicurus is watching (*Sic fac ... omnia tamquam spectet Epicurus*). But there, too, Seneca is only accepting the general point that it is good to have an authority present for moral guidance. In 25.6 he names Cato, Scipio or Laelius as possible candidates.

<sup>175</sup>Seneca *Ep. 32.1*: "You cannot deceive me; for I am with you. Live just as if I were sure to get news of your doings, nay, as if I were sure to behold them." *Verba dare non potes: tecum sum. Sic vive tamquam quid facias auditurus sim, immo tamquam visurus.* Cf. *Ep. 55.11*.

<sup>176</sup>Stobaeus 2.31.81 (SVF 1.319): Ζήνων ἐρωτηθείς, πῶς ἂν τις νέος ἐλάχιστα ἀμαρτάνοι "εἰ πρὸ δοφθαλμῶν ἔχοι, ἔφη, οὐς μάλιστα τιμῆ καὶ αἰσχύνεται. My translation.

<sup>177</sup>Cf. Bartsch (2006), Ch. 4 'The Self on Display', 183-229.

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

as a possible criterion for immoral actions.<sup>178</sup>

A person who is making moral progress is still in a stage of moral sin.<sup>179</sup> A good man will try to prevent a crime from being committed, he "has surveyed the human condition" and is "a reformer of wrongdoers".<sup>180</sup> In *Ep. 11.9*, being subject to scrutiny by an exemplary man would hold back wrong-doers. Such a historical instance could be found in Cato of whom it was said that "no one would have the effrontery to do wrong in the presence of Cato!".<sup>181</sup> The only instance of a witness, *testis*, in this letter is in *Ep. 11.4* where Fabianus is introduced as a witness to appear in front of the senate. Seneca's former teacher would have had exemplary status to Seneca and in other letters Fabianus is typically portrayed as an inspiring philosopher who not only speaks eloquently but also acts in accordance with his principles.<sup>182</sup>

**Aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cuius auctoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius faciat.**

The focal interest here is the soul and its good condition. Correspondingly, what is most admirable in the good man is his strength of character, his well-developed rationality and virtue. It has a deep impact on the soul to have such an authoritative figure present.<sup>183</sup> Even what is hidden in the soul is made more hallowed. This calls to mind the religious image of a temple shrine, the most sacred and inner part of a sanctuary.<sup>184</sup> This metaphor stresses both the sanctity of the soul as well as its po-

<sup>178</sup> Plato *Rep.* 2.359c-360c; Cicero *Off.* 3.37-39. Numerous philosophers point out that peace of mind requires a virtuous mode of conduct and that not being caught for a crime will not truly be beneficial to that person. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 43.4-5, 97.13.

<sup>179</sup> Seneca *Clem.* 1.6.4; cf. Seneca *Ep.* 50.7, 75.16.

<sup>180</sup> Seneca *Ira* 2.10.6: *condicōnem humanae vitae perspectam habet*, 2.10.7: *corrector peccantium*. Cf. Seneca *Ira* 1.19.7: "As Plato says, a man of sense punishes not because a crime has been—but to prevent its being—committed"; *nam, ut Plato ait, nemo prudens punit quia peccatum est, sed ne peccetur; ...* The reference is to *Laws* 934a-b, Cooper and Procopé (1995), 38. In *Ira* 1.14.1-19.8 on punishment, and 2.6.1-10.8 on anger towards wickedness, the word *peccatum* and related terms are used to denote crime and criminal behaviour in the context of a judge who needs to consider each case with the right state of mind, viz. not punish in anger.

<sup>181</sup> Seneca *Marc.* 20.6: *neminem ausurum coram Catone peccare*. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 97.2: "you will find—to man's shame be it spoken—that sin never stalked abroad more openly than in Cato's very presence"; *pudet dicere, numquam apertius quam coram Catone peccatum est*. The people's reservation in the presence of Cato is again affirmed in *Ep. 97.8*: "yes, that very Cato whose presence, it is said, caused the people to refrain from demanding the usual quips and cranks of naked actresses at the *Floralia*"; *Catonem inquam illum quo sedente populus negatur permisisse sibi postulare Florales iocos nudandarum meretricum*.

<sup>182</sup> See the note on Fabianus above, at *Ep. 11.4*.

<sup>183</sup> See the example of Cato described above.

<sup>184</sup> See Gummere (1970), Vol. 1, 64; Summers (1910), 167; Richardson-Hay (2006), 345-46; Armisen-Marchetti (1989), 102. Gummere points to the image of a temple shrine in Virgil,

sition on the inside of a person, not directly exposed to the sight of others.<sup>185</sup> But a virtuous way of life rules out private secrets.<sup>186</sup> Here, too, the presence of a role model is an effective means to moral improvement:

You must go to the scene of action, first, because men put more faith in their eyes than in their ears, and second, because the way is long if one follows precepts, but short and helpful, if one follows patterns. Cleanthes could not have been the express image of Zeno, if he had merely heard his lectures; he shared in his life, saw into his hidden purposes, and watched him to see whether he lived according to his own rules.<sup>187</sup>

To see wisdom and virtue displayed in front of us is a forceful stimulus to adjust and improve one's own way of life in a similar fashion. The good man strives for transparency as he has nothing to hide and his virtue is beautiful to behold.<sup>188</sup> The example of Cleanthes illustrates that Zeno's life was a source of inspiration because of its virtue and honesty and that it became Cleanthes' goal to mirror his own life to that of his master. In this sense, these men truly shared their lives.

**O felicem illum qui non praesens tantum sed etiam cogitatus emendat! O felicem qui sic aliquem vereri potest ut ad memoriam quoque eius se componat atque ordinet! Qui sic aliquem vereri potest cito erit verendum.**

In both sentences Seneca uses an exclamation, *O felicem*, accompanied by an interjection as an emotional element to express strong approval.<sup>189</sup> This dense formulation is a colloquial construction that creates an informal tone. It is as if Seneca can see the happy men before his very eyes. The noun attracts all of the attention and the rest of the sentence serves as a further explanation of what constitutes this man's happiness. The double occurrence of *O felicem* reflects the similarities between model and follower and the parallel, yet distinct, causes for their happy state. The good man sets the example, the student mirrors him and, as a result, becomes like him in happiness. Such a philosophical partnership based on shared interest and commitment both promotes moral development and leads to contentment. The idea of moral progress can be seen in the verbs *emendat*, *se componat* and *ordinet*, and also in

Aen. 6.10: *secretæ Sibyllæ*. See also Seneca *Helv.* 13.8; *Ben.* 7.1.7; *Ep.* 41.2, 41.4-5, 55.4, 65.24, 66.2, 81.20; Marcus Aurelius *Med.* 5.27.

<sup>185</sup> A similar metaphor is applied to philosophy in Seneca *Ep.* 52.18.

<sup>186</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 3.4-5, 6.3, 43.4-5.

<sup>187</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 6.5: ... in rem præsentem venias oportet, primum quia homines amplius oculis quam auribus credunt, deinde quia longum iter est per præcepta, breve et efficax per exempla. [6] Zenonem Cleanthes non expressisset, si tantummodo audisset: vitae eius interfuit, secreta perspexit, observavit illum, an ex formula sua viveret. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 94.40, 94.44.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Cicero *Off.* 3.38: "for good men aim to secure not secrecy but the right", *honestæ enim bonis viris, non occulta quaeruntur*.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Panhuis (2006), 184.

**Letter 11: The blush, a physical sign of character**

**157**

the result that is promised, *cito erit verendus*. The swift progress reminds again of *Ep.* 6.5 where following a pattern is said to be a short and easy road compared to just following precepts.

Another aspect to note is the repetition of forms of *vereri* throughout *Ep.* 11.9. The soul needs someone to revere (*vereatur*), happy is the one who can revere by recollection (*vereri potest*), a person who can thus revere (*vereri potest*), will soon be worthy of reverence (*erit verendus*). This creates an atmosphere of commanding respect for moral accomplishments and the reverence felt towards a mentor that befits a student.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, *vereri* is closely connected to *verecundia*, and thus the relation with the blushing in the earlier part of the letter, becomes obvious. This reinforces the impression of Seneca himself as a figure to look up to.

A central issue is the respectful attitude and reverence for a senior role model. When we adopt a role model as our witness, we will imagine ourselves being seen through his eyes.<sup>191</sup> With such an audience at the back of our mind, our sense of shame should be activated. The possibility of moral failure, resulting in actual shame, will inspire us to try our best not to disappoint both our witness and ourselves.<sup>192</sup> At the same time, seeing ourselves being seen, we will identify ourselves with the moral standards of our model. In this context, Shadi Bartsch explores the importance of the *imago* in Roman culture: "the ancestral face that gazes and is gazed upon, that incites exemplary behavior by providing a model and a sense, however fanciful, of a present witness".<sup>193</sup> Proper restraint of the self needs to become a continuous and lasting concern.<sup>194</sup> The wish to avoid face-impairing actions typically makes a person mindful of what others can actually see. Here, it is extended to what an internalised other could see. Social control is gradually transformed into self-control through the mediation of an imagined witness.

In this sense, the Epicurean saying preludes the ongoing process of internalised forms of guidance that is found in several later letters.<sup>195</sup> As we have seen, in *Ep.* 25.5-6 the same Epicurean lesson is repeated, and in *Ep.* 32.1 Seneca himself takes on the role of observing mentor. Furthermore, in *Ep.* 41.2 Seneca describes how one can be guided by the God within, while in *Ep.* 43.4-5 Lucilius is instructed to have a good conscience and to be his own witness, *testis*.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>190</sup>Cf. *Ep.* 41.4 on the reverence felt for a wise man.

<sup>191</sup>On the notion of 'seeing oneself being seen' in Roman culture, cf. Barton (2002).

<sup>192</sup>Cf. Kaster (2005), 56-57.

<sup>193</sup>Bartsch (2006), 138; cf. 117-138 on the *imago* and on the visual impact of the *imagines* of deceased ancestors.

<sup>194</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 40.8 on the philosopher's concern for his dignity of character.

<sup>195</sup>I would like to thank Ruurd Nauta for pointing me in this direction.

<sup>196</sup>On the idea of the divine within us, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 10.5, 41.1-2; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.14.11-14, 2.19.26-27; Long (2002), 176-77. On the imitation of God, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 95.50, 95.72. In the

In addition, this passage points to the internalisation of the intellectual relationship between student and teacher. Whereas in *Ep.* 6.5 the physical presence of Zeno encouraged Cleanthes in his progress, in *Ep.* 11.9 the words *non praesens, etiam cogitatus* and *ad memoriam* stress that even during his absence the good man may still exert his influence.<sup>197</sup> This proposed solution of presence in thought is applicable to the *Epistulae Morales* as well: despite his absence Seneca can exert a beneficial influence on Lucilius.<sup>198</sup>

(11.10)

**Elige itaque Catonem; si hic tibi videtur nimis rigidus, elige remissioris animi virum Laelium.**

Seneca finally proposes two names of men whom we may select as models. Although his suggestions point the reader in a particular direction, he also gives weight to individual preferences—some would rather have a Cato, others a Laelius. Clearly the *animus* is the relevant aspect to consider here. It is by virtue of their character that they serve as *exemplum* and it is our soul that has to follow and mirror theirs.<sup>199</sup>

Why name these two, Cato and Laelius? For one thing, both are prominent historical figures from Roman history. Still, we first need to consider who is meant by 'Cato'. Both Cato the Elder and Cato the Younger feature in the *Epistulae Morales*. The description of a 'rigid' type of person is inconclusive and could apply equally well to either one of them.<sup>200</sup> It seems plausible that Seneca is intentionally imprecise on this point. Both Cato's serve as a desirable model and in other passages Seneca mentions the Cato's together as virtuous *exempla*.<sup>201</sup> The associations are manifold and will get the reader to think about which Cato did which exemplary deeds and who could be intended. Recalling their virtuous actions would be a useful exercise in itself.

In favour of Cato the Younger it might be said that he is most frequently referred

context of *Ep.* 43.4-5, cf. Marcus Aurelius *Med.* 6.16.3: "But by reverencing and prizing thine own mind, thou shalt make thyself pleasing in thine own sight"; ή δὲ τῆς ἴδιας διανοίας αἰδώς καὶ τῷ σεαυτῷ τε ἀρεστόν σε ποιήσει; tr. Loeb edition. It is important, though, that one's conscience is developed well enough to function properly, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 10.1-3, 23.7-8.

<sup>197</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 52.7: philosophers from the past can still be of service to us.

<sup>198</sup>Cf. Tieleman (2010b). On the benefit of being in the company of a philosopher, see also Plato *Thet.* 150d, where Socrates attributes the progress of his pupils to their conversing with him; Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.1.1, where Socrates has a beneficial influence on others, whether they are in his company or merely think of him.

<sup>199</sup>See the discussion above at *Ep.* 11.9.

<sup>200</sup>On the uncompromising moral character of Cato the Younger, see e.g., Cicero *Mur.* 3.1-5; Plutarch *Cat Mi.* 1.2, 4.1; Martial 10.20.21; Juvenal 11.90. On the strict morals of Cato the Elder, see e.g., Plutarch *Cat Mai.* 16.6, 19.1.

<sup>201</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Marc.* 25.2; *Ep.* 70.22, 104.21, 120.19; cf. e.g., Cicero *Amic.* 21; *De Or.* 2.290, 3.56.

to in the *Epistulae Morales* and that in *Ep.* 11.9 the presence of a good man discouraging bad behaviour is reminiscent of anecdotes featuring Cato the Younger.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, in his *Pro Murena* Cicero contrasts Cato the Younger's rigid attitude with the mildness of Scipio and with Laelius who was well-known for his mild character.<sup>203</sup>

However, there is also a strong case for thinking back to Cato the Elder. For instance, one of Cato's famous sayings dealt with the youth's blush:

Cato indeed said that in the young he preferred the flush of colour to pallor, rightly training and teaching us to dread censure more than labour, and disapproval more than peril.<sup>204</sup>

Furthermore, Cato the Elder was also known as Cato the Censor or Cato the Wise.<sup>205</sup> The latter epithet, *Sapiens*, was also applied to Laelius.<sup>206</sup> This is worthy of attention as it occurs in a letter where the topic of wisdom figures prominently. Both Cato and Laelius were called wise men, but they were characterised by different personalities. Another common element between these two men is that Cicero wrote a treatise in their name, *Cato Maior de Senectute* and *Laelius de Amicitia*.

Also of interest is Cato's other epithet, *Censorius*. The function fulfilled by the good man in *Ep.* 11 fits the profile of a censor supervising public morality. Plutarch describes the censor as someone with the duty "to watch, admonish, and chastise, that no one should turn aside to wantonness and forsake his native and customary mode of life".<sup>207</sup> It was a highly respectable function, only to be performed by dignified men. Cato fulfilled his censorship so well that, so Plutarch recounts, a statue was erected in his honour with the inscription: "that when the Roman state was tottering to its fall, he was made censor, and by helpful guidance, wise restraints, and sound teachings, restored it again".<sup>208</sup> Through his teaching and correction, the censor was the guardian of public morality and was looked up to as an example in his own life.

<sup>202</sup>See the note at *Ep.* 11.9.

<sup>203</sup>Cicero *Mur.* 66. On Laelius' mildness, cf. Cicero *Off.* 1.108; *De Or.* 2.22; Horace *Sat.* 2.1.72: *mitis sapientia Laeli*.

<sup>204</sup>Plutarch *Vitios. Pud.* 3.528F): ὁ μὲν οὖν Κάτων ἔλεγε τῶν νέων μᾶλλον ἀγαπᾶν τοὺς ἐρυθριώντας ἢ τοὺς ωχριώντας, δρόθως ἐθίζων καὶ διδάσκων τὸν ψόγον μᾶλλον ἢ τὸν πόνον δεδιέναι καὶ τὴν ὑποψίαν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸν κίνδυνον. Tr. Loeb edition. Cf. Plutarch *Cat Mai.* 9.4; *Apophthil. Rom.* Cato 6 (*Mor.* 3.179E). Cf. Summers (1910), 163.

<sup>205</sup>Cf. Cicero *Amic.* 6; *Div. in Caec.* 66; *Leg.* 2.5; *Off.* 3.16.

<sup>206</sup>Cf. Cicero *Off.* 2.40; *Fin.* 2.24; *Brut.* 213; *Tusc.* 4.5.

<sup>207</sup>Plutarch *Cat Mai.* 16.2: φύλακα καὶ σωφρονιστὴν καὶ κολαστὴν τοῦ μηδένα καθ' ἡδονὰς ἐκτρέπεοθαι καὶ παρεκβαίνειν τὸν ἐπιχώριον καὶ συνήθη βίον ἥροῦντο; tr. Loeb edition. Cf. Livy 4.8, 24.18, 40.46, 41.27; cf. Barton (1999), 213-14.

<sup>208</sup>Plutarch *Cat Mai.* 19.3: ὅτι τὴν Ἱρωμάτων πολιτείαν ἐγκεκλιμένην καὶ ὁρεύουσαν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον τιμητὴς γενόμενος χρησταῖς ἀγωγαῖς καὶ σώφροσιν ἐθισμοῖς καὶ διδασκαλίαις εἰς ὄρθδν αὖθις ἀποκατέστησε. Tr. Loeb edition.

Seneca could subtly fit this acknowledged and respected Roman function into his description of the philosophical life.<sup>209</sup>

**Elige eum cuius tibi placuit et vita et oratio et ipse animum ante se ferens vultus; illum tibi semper ostende vel custodem vel exemplum.**

This letter presents physical constitution as underlying a person's individual predisposition and innate character. Seneca here shows himself to be responsive to the fact that individual preferences may play a role in the choice of one's *exemplum*. A role model should match our own personality, *tibi placuit*. Not every wise man has the same personality, as the diverse characters of Cato and Laelius illustrate. As we have seen, the wise man chooses a lover in whom he discerns moral beauty.<sup>210</sup> Both in the case of a lover with a beautiful soul and of the model with a soul-inspiring face, the match is based on observable ethical attractiveness. In addition, the combination of these three terms—*vita, oratio, animum ante se ferens vultus*—expresses how Seneca thinks a model should exemplify the philosophical life. The wise man has to live a good life, has to speak truthfully and should reveal his inner character to his surroundings.<sup>211</sup>

**Opus est, inquam, aliquo ad quem mores nostri se ipsi exigant: nisi ad regulam prava non corriges. Vale.**

The image of a ruler by which one straightens what is crooked fits both the description of the Roman censor as well as the Stoic sage.<sup>212</sup> Both should be an example of rectitude, should observe the public and correct the faults of others. Relevant at this point is Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* where the Stoic gives praise to god in the following words: "But you know how to make things crooked straight and to order things disorderly."<sup>213</sup> In Cleanthes it is the Stoic god who sets things straight. We know that Seneca was familiar with the text of Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* as he translates the first few lines in *Ep. 107.10*. Moreover, the proper use of reason is described in Stoicism as right reason, *ratio recta*, generating figurative language that speaks of reason as a straight line or straight rule.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Seneca assigns the function of censor to the gods in *Vit. Beat.* 20.5: "I shall know that the whole world is my country, that its rulers are the gods, and that they abide above me and around me, the censors of my words and deeds." *Patriam meam esse mundum sciam et praesides deos, hos supra me circaque me stare factorum dictorumque censure.*

<sup>210</sup> Stobaeus 2.115.1-2, tr. Schofield (1991), 117. See above, at *Ep. 11.1* and *11.7*.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep. 52.8*.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep. 71.19, 76.14*.

<sup>213</sup> Cleanthes *Hymn to Zeus* lines 17-18 (SVF 1.537, LS 541.3): Ἀλλὰ σὺ καὶ τὰ περισσὰ ἐπίστασαι ὅρτια θένται, καὶ κομψέν τάκοσμα. Tr. Long and Sedley (1989), 326-27.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep. 66.11* and *66.32*.

## Conclusion

Seneca unfolds his argument in the conversational tone that suits the epistolary genre. Instead of a dry exposition of the evidence, this letter has an informal structure that resembles the way in which a conversation progresses. Just as an interlocutor would come up with new questions, so too this letter adds different perspectives to the topic—who is most affected by the blush, who were famous men that used to blush, what are its causes, whether it is in our power to avoid or arouse a blush.

This results in what may at first sight seem a loosely connected series of observations—all of which however contribute towards a better understanding of the theme at hand. This strategy also enables Seneca to connect different letters as many of them tend to skirt along and intersect with topics that feature in other letters. Different aspects of *Ep. 11* touch upon earlier discussions, e.g., on friendship (*Ep. 3*), on the importance of spending one's time in the right company (*Ep. 7 and 8*), on acting with *decorum* (*Ep. 5*), and on praise for those who make progress (*Ep. 10*).

We have seen several points of contact between the discussion of blushing and the later advice on thinking of a guardian who looks over us. Firstly, the young friend needs to blush in reaction to a person of authority, i.e. Seneca. Secondly, the notion of performing in front of an audience and having someone who sees and evaluates one's actions. Thirdly, the contrast between natural *vitia* that wisdom cannot cure and the moral *vitia* that can be overcome and prevented. Here, Seneca secures the task of philosophy to improve man's soul (*Ep. 11.9, emendat*). His explanation clarifies what is up to us and what is not, without putting our moral progress at risk.

In addition to the relevance of the surrounding letters in the *Epistulae Morales*, *Ep. 11* is also further elucidated against the background of other (Stoic) literature. In his *De Ira*, Seneca already distinguished emotions, most notably anger, from other occurrences that have bearing on our emotional life, such as *propatheia* and predispositions. Drawing on Panaetius, Cicero's *De Officiis* 1.93-151 discusses *verecundia* in relation to appropriate social behaviour, *decorum*. Furthermore, he pays attention to the different roles of a person, which combines human natural characteristics, individual predispositions, and social and professional obligations. In Cicero too, we may note a special interest in the connection between inner states and physical appearance and in the role of nature in providing us with positive inclinations, *aphormai*.

From a Stoic viewpoint, the blush as a sign of *verecundia* is an interesting yet complicated phenomenon. It comes closest to the Greek *aidōs*, which in the doxographical evidence is included among the *eupatheiai*, but in Epictetus it is a natural starting point that can be ascribed to the philosophical beginner. As such, it can evolve into a real virtue. On the one hand, it appears to be a typical emotion, *pathos*. The blush is a *propatheia* that precedes the actual emotion *verecundia*. The proneness to feel *verecundia* is an *euemptōsia*. Yet, this is a special case because the *verecundia* occurs

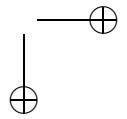
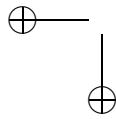
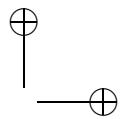
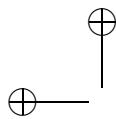
in a promising youth with an aptitude for virtue. In this respect, the young friend's modest blush in front of Seneca resembles Charmides in his contact with Socrates. Because *verecundia* is here focused on moral well-being in the person with an aptitude for virtue, it appears to be an 'immature form' of the *eupatheiai* that corresponds to the sage's *eulabeia* or 'caution'. *Verecundia* is strictly seen not a good thing, but as a stage in the youth's moral development it is a step in the right direction.

The *verecundia* and *rubor* of Lucilius' friend are a good sign, indicating his true character. This ties in with the Stoic view that the aptitude for virtue is apparent from one's countenance, both of the youth (*Ep. 11.1*) and of the instructor (*Ep. 11.10*). The conversation between Seneca and the friend is put in a new light and can be read as a partnership between model and student. Seneca notices his student's blush and shows himself as a philosopher who is a keen observer of others. All in all, there is a cluster of key interests which Seneca connects in this letter. It examines how blushing is connected to the themes of nature and wisdom. The psychophysiological explanation points to issues regarding the interrelation of body and soul. Moreover, the visibility and public gaze (seeing oneself and being seen by others) is connected with how blushing and other natural characteristics can be a sign of underlying affections and feelings. This in turn allows people to evaluate others on the basis of their appearance. Being seen in a certain way and being unable to hide certain personal traits can make one feel exposed, touches on shame (*pudor, verecundia*). It questions what is under our control. The final section reinterprets certain themes by internalising an external figure to watch over us. This figure, like a Roman censor, is both role model and corrector. He can be either stern or more lenient, depending on our own personal preference, but he should in all cases be a wise man whom we may respect. Reverence and respect are central to the notions of *verecundia* and *pudor* and Seneca's advice in *Ep. 11.9-10* offers the student an internalised form of social control.

Several of the early letters (*Ep. 5, 7, 10, 11, 25*) show Seneca's interest in the right philosophical way of social interaction. Being part of a society that is teeming with corruption and bad examples presents difficulties. Nonetheless, the Stoic cares about the bond he shares with his fellow man (*oikeiōsis*) and Stoicism is not intended to be an anti-social philosophy. Thus, on the one hand Seneca notes how the crowd is likely to be a bad influence on one's moral progress and that contact with such persons is not without risk. On the other hand, the right people can be a source of inspiration (cf. *Ep. 6, 11*) and in this letter he approves of the blush as a positive sign of *verecundia*. Being sensitive to the views of certain others and having a sense of self-respect that prohibits bad actions helps us to make progress. This point is restated in *Ep. 25*.

Finally, we should note that this really is a letter for beginners, suitable to the early part of the correspondence. On the one hand, there is a high degree of optimism. Lucilius' friend shows promising signs and has a favourable natural constitution. On the other hand, the end of the letter indicates that there is still a strong need for as-

sistance in his audience. The reverence towards people who are morally superior is used as an exercise to reinforce one's sense of shame and inspire good behaviour. But this also underlines that this is just a first step on the way to complete independence and critical self-evaluation.



## Chapter 4

### Letter 15: In good health

#### Text and translation

SENECA LUCILIO SUO SALUTEM,

(1) *Mos antiquis fuit, usque ad meam servatus aetatem, primis epistulae verbis adipiscere 'si vales bene est, ego valeo'. Recte nos dicimus 'si philosopharis, bene est'. Valere enim hoc demum est. Sine hoc aeger est animus; corpus quoque, etiam si magnas habet vires, non aliter quam furiosi aut frenetici validum est.*

(2) *Ergo hanc praecipue valitudinem cura, deinde et illam secundam; quae non magno tibi constabit, si volueris bene valere. Stulta est enim, mi Lucili, et minime conveniens litterato viro occupatio exercendi lacertos*

Seneca sends best wishes to his Lucilius.<sup>1</sup>

(1) It was a custom of the ancients, preserved right up to my own time, to add to the opening words of a letter "if you are in good health, it is well, I am in good health too". The right thing is what we say "if you are doing philosophy, it is well". Because this is precisely what "being in good health" means. Without philosophical study the mind is sickly; and also the body, even though it has great force, has no strength beyond that of madmen or maniacs.

(2) Accordingly, take care of this health first and foremost, only then of the second: that one will not cost you much, if you wish to be in good health the right way. It certainly is foolish, my dear Lucilius, and not at all appropriate to a learned man to busy himself with building up biceps and broadening

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the basic text used is L. Annaei Senecae *Ad Lucilium Epistulae morales* recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit L.D. Reynolds (Oxford Classical Texts), Vol. I. Oxford (1965). This translation is my own, but I have taken into account the translation by R. Gummere in the Loeb edition and the notes and vocabulary by A.L. Motto in Motto (1985), 64-71.

*et dilatandi cervicem ac latera  
firmandi; cum tibi feliciter sagina  
cesserit et tori creverint, nec vires  
umquam opimi bovis nec pondus  
aequabis. Adice nunc quod maiore  
corporis sarcina animus eliditur et  
minus agilis est. Itaque quantum  
potes circumscribe corpus tuum et  
animo locum laxa.*

(3) *Multa sequuntur incommoda  
huic deditos curae: primum exercita-  
tiones, quarum labor spiritum  
exhaurit et inhabilem intentioni  
ac studiis acrioribus reddit; deinde  
copia ciborum subtilitas impeditur.  
Accedunt pessimae notae mancipia  
in magisterium recepta, homines  
inter oleum et vinum occupati,  
quibus ad votum dies actus est si  
bene desudaverunt, si in locum  
eius quod effluxit multum potionis  
altius in ieiuno iturae regesserunt.  
Bibere et sudare vita cardiaci est.*

(4) *Sunt exercitationes et faciles  
et breves, quae corpus et sine  
mora lassent et tempori parcant,  
cuius praecipua ratio habenda  
est: cursus et cum aliquo pondere  
manus motae et saltus vel ille qui*

the shoulders and strengthening the lungs.<sup>2</sup> Even when stuffing yourself has proceeded successfully<sup>3</sup> and the muscles have grown, you will never equal the strength nor weight of a well-fed bull. Add then the fact that the mind gets squashed by the excessive weight of the body and is less alert. So restrain your body as much as you can and make room for the mind.

(3) Many inconveniences trouble those who are caught up in this business: first, the exercises, the exertion of which tires out the life-force and makes it unfit for further effort or more demanding studies; next, large quantities of food stand in the way of a sharp mind. What is more, slaves of the worst kind are accepted as instructors, men who divide their time between oil and wine, to whom a day has passed according to their wish when they have worked up a good sweat, and when, as a replacement for what poured out, they have knocked back a lot of drinks that will go down more deeply during a period of fasting. Drinking and sweating is the life of a dyspeptic patient!

(4) There are short and simple exercises, which tire the body straightaway and save time, and time in particular must be taken into account. These include running and lifting some hand weights and jumping, either the kind that brings the body upwards

<sup>2</sup>I have translated *latera* here as 'lungs'. Although *latus* can also mean 'flank' or 'side', *Ep.* 15.7-8 concentrates on vocal training and in *Ep.* 15.8 *latus* is used in the meaning of 'lung'.

<sup>3</sup>Although the verb *cedere* generally means 'to go' or 'to move', here—in combination with *feliciter*—it means 'to turn out well' or 'to succeed'. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 60.1, 97.12. The resulting image of a large, heavyweight athlete ties in with the other references to heaviness: the description of the bull's weight, *pondus*, to the *maiore corporis sarcina* in the next sentence and *copia ciborum* in *Ep.* 15.3. This view also finds support in the translations by R. Gummere in the Loeb edition, "although your heavy feeding produce good results"; and in the translation by R.W. Fortuin, "wenn Dir die Mästung geglückt ist", in Fortuin (1996), 325.

*corpus in altum levat vel ille qui in longum mittit vel ille, ut ita dicam, saliaris aut, ut contumeliosius dicam, fullonius: quoslibet ex his elige †usum rude facile†.*

(5) *Quidquid facies, cito redi a corpore ad animum; illum noctibus ac diebus exerce. Labore modico alitur ille; hanc exercitationem non frigus, non aestus impediet, ne senectus quidem. Id bonum cura quod vetustate fit melius.*

(6) *Neque ego te iubeo semper in minere libro aut pugillaribus: dandum est aliquod intervallum animo, ita tamen ut non resolvatur, sed remittatur. Gestatio et corpus concutit et studio non officit: possis legere, possis dictare, possis loqui, possis audire, quorum nihil ne ambulatio quidem vetat fieri.*

(7) *Nec tu intentionem vocis contempseris, quam veto te per gradus et certos modos extollere, deinde deprimere. Quid si velis deinde quemadmodum ambules discere? Admitte istos quos nova artificia docuit fames: erit qui gradus tuos temperet et buccas edentis observet et in tantum procedat in quantum audaciam eius patientia et credulitate produxeris. Quid ergo? a clamore protinus et a summa contentione vox tua incipiet? usque eo naturale est paulatim incitari ut litigantes quoque a sermone incipient, ad vociferationem transeant; nemo statim Quiritium fidem implorat.*

(8) *Ergo utcumque tibi impetus*

or that which sends it forward or that, if I can put it that way, of the Salian priests, or, with a more derogatory name, the bouncing of the laundry man. Pick any one of these [...].

(5) Whatever you do, quickly return from body to mind; that you must work night and day. It is nourished by moderate effort, and no cold, no heat, not even old age prevents this type of activity. Look after this good that becomes better over the years.

(6) I certainly don't tell you to be always bending over a book or over your writing tablets: it's necessary to give the mind a break on occasion, yet in such a way that it's not weakened, but only loosened up. Riding around in a litter shakes up the body and doesn't interfere with study; you can read, you can dictate, you can have a conversation, you can listen; nor does a walk restrict any of these things.

(7) And you should not look down on vocal exercise either, but I forbid you to raise and then lower the voice through certain steps and methods. What if next you want to learn in which manner you should walk? Welcome those whom hunger taught new tricks; and such a person will slow down your pace and check what you are putting in your mouth and will go on as far as his impudence lets him, encouraged by your patience and readiness to believe him. So what then? Is your voice to begin directly with a big shout and a maximum straining? Of course not; so much is it natural to be built up progressively that people who are having a quarrel also begin with speech before they move on to shouting loudly. Nobody appeals right from the start to the Roman citizens for help.

(8) Thus, in whatever way the impulse of

*animi suaserit, modo vehementius fac vitiis convicium, modo lentius, prout vox te quoque hortabitur †in id latus†; modesta, cum recipies illam revocarisque, descendat, non decidat; †mediatorisui habeat et hoc† indocto et rustico more desaeviat. Non enim id agimus ut exerceatur vox, sed ut exerceat.*

(9) *Detraxi tibi non pusillum negotii: una mercedula et unum graecum ad haec beneficia accedet. Ecce insigne praeceptum: 'stulta vita ingrata est, trepida; tota in futurum fertur'. 'Quis hoc' inquis 'dicit?' idem qui supra. Quam tu nunc vitam dici existimas stultam? Babae et Isionis? Non ita est: nostra dicitur, quos caeca cupiditas in nocitura, certe numquam satiatura praecipitat, quibus si quid satis esse posset, fuisse, qui non cogitamus quam iucundum sit nihil poscere, quam magnificum*

the spirit urges you, at one moment reproach faults more loudly, at another more mildly, as your voice also prompts you [...].<sup>4</sup> Gently let your voice, when you take it back and let it subside, climb down, not fall down. [...] nor die away in an unlearned and boorish manner.<sup>5</sup> Because we are not concerned to be working on our voice, but to put it to work.

(9) I have taken away from you no small amount of trouble; a small compensation and something Greek, will be added to these favours.<sup>6</sup> Look at this noted precept: "A foolish way of life is ungrateful and disturbed: it is entirely taken up by what is to come". "Who said this?", you ask. The same as before.<sup>7</sup> Which way of life do you reckon is called foolish here? That of Baba and Ision?<sup>8</sup> No, it is not like that: it speaks of our own, we whom blind desire plunges into circumstances that will hurt but certainly will not satisfy us; if anything could have satisfied us it would have, we who have not realised how pleasing it is to desire nothing,

<sup>4</sup>W.H. Alexander emends the phrase †in id latus† to *inclinabit latus*, see Alexander (1940), 185-186. However, this results in an unattractive asyndeton and positions *latus* somewhat oddly in between *vox* and *modesta ... illam*. I owe this point to Professor R. Nauta.

<sup>5</sup>The proposal *nec διὰ τόνων abeat et hoc*, suggested by Lelièvre (1966), 44-45, seems a rather fanciful suggestion. Indeed, διὰ τόνων is not attested as *textus traditus* and it is not necessary to presuppose a renewed reference to the practices of the vocal trainer here. This was kindly pointed out to me by Professor R. Nauta.

<sup>6</sup>L.D. Reynolds presents *unum graecum* as a *locus desperatus* that needs to be placed within *cruces*. Although the sentence is somewhat disjointed, I do not consider the wording unworkable. The editor of the Loeb edition also omits *cruces* in the Latin text, cf. Gummere (1970), 100. As such, I doubt whether one needs to accept an emendation such as proposed by J.L. Heller, see Heller (1968), 54-55.

<sup>7</sup>Most of the precepts included at the end of the early letters are by Epicurus, see Chapter 2, section 2.1, 2.3. The previous four letters also included sayings by Epicurus, cf. *Ep.* 11.8-9, 12.10-11, 13.16, 14.18.

<sup>8</sup>Baba and Ision were two court fools. One of them, Baba, is also briefly mentioned in Seneca *Apoc.* 3 where he is predestined to die around the same time as the emperor Claudius.

### Letter 15: In good health

*sit plenum esse nec ex fortuna pendere.*

(10) *Subinde itaque, Lucili, quam multa sis consecutus recordare; cum aspexeris quot te antecedant, cogita quot sequantur. Si vis gratus esse adversus deos et adversus vitam tuam, cogita quam multos antecesseris. Quid tibi cum ceteris? te ipse antecessisti.*

(11) *Finem constitue quem transire ne possis quidem si velis; discedant aliquando ista insidiosa bona et sperantibus meliora quam assecutis. Si quid in illis esset solidi, aliquando et implerent: nunc haurientium sitim concitant. Mittantur speciosi apparatus; et quod futuri temporis incerta sors volvit, quare potius a fortuna impetrem ut det, quam a me ne petam? Quare autem petam? oblitus fragilitatis humanae congeram? in quid laborem? Ecce hic dies ultimus est; ut non sit, prope ab ultimo est. Vale.*

how noble it is to be satisfied and not to be dependent on fortune.

(10) That is why, Lucilius, you must continually call to mind how much you have achieved. When you consider how many have surpassed you, think of how many come behind. If you want to be grateful towards the gods and towards your own life, think of how many you have surpassed. But what are those others to you? You have surpassed yourself.

(11) Set a limit, which you could not even cross if you wanted to. Then finally be disposed of these deceitful goods that look better to those who hope for them than to those who have obtained them. If there was anything substantial to them, they would satisfy at some point; now they rouse the thirst of their consumers. Dump the fancy stuff; and as to what the future's uncertain fate holds, why should I sooner impel fortune that she give, than demand myself not to desire? And why should I desire? Should I, forgetting about the frailty of mankind, pile up possessions? For what reason should I labour? Look, this day is the last; if not so, it is close to the last. Farewell.

## Introduction

This letter deals with the topic of health and the pursuit of suitable activities that benefit our well-being. As such, it provides an interesting case to examine how Seneca explores issues of identity in a discussion on lifestyle. In this context, I will review which activities are recommended and which are to be dispensed with, indicating the role that identity plays in the considerations underlying this choice of activities. I will show that Seneca deliberately brings together elements of Roman aristocratic mentality and philosophy to downplay the benefit and importance of other professions and, by contrast, to idealise the Roman upper-class philosopher and his way of

life. Thus, *Ep.* 15 offers us a good example of how Seneca in his letters connects and combines different identities into a lifestyle worthy of admiration and imitation. The final sections concentrate on the errors of the foolish way of life and this portrays the opposite of the philosophical ideal. Moreover, the close intertextual relations with the immediately surrounding letters and the presentation of numerous fundamental tenets form an introduction to the curriculum of the letter-collection.

Another issue is the letter's overall structure that seems to consist of unrelated parts. While the opening section is closely related to the main text, the closing sections of the letter do not constitute an obvious sequel. As a result, the letter seems to be divided into two principal parts, the opening and main section in *Ep.* 15.1-8 and the closing section in *Ep.* 15.9-11. Yet, there certainly are underlying connections. I will argue that the central themes of exercise and well-being are retained throughout the various parts of the letter: the opening section prefers mental to physical well-being, the main section discusses physical exercise and care for the body, and the closing section—with its discussion of emotional distress—deals with care for the soul. The fact that Seneca favours mental health (*Ep.* 15.1) helps to explain the considerable length of the closing sections.

So far this letter has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Some studies have concentrated on philological aspects of the letter or made only minor notes to the text. For instance, several articles deal with particular textual issues and possible emendations of corrupted passages, viz. at *Ep.* 15.4, 15.8, 15.9, 15.11.<sup>9</sup> Since it is not my intention to engage in philological interpretation, I have followed these suggestions whenever they seemed plausible. In addition, Motto (1985) includes *Ep.* 15 in her text edition with some small notes and Summers (1910) covers it in his selection of letters with commentary, as do Préchac and Noblot (1985) in their edition with translation and notes. These comments are helpful, but it is not their intention to cover the different issues in the letter extensively, to question how these are connected or to explore in detail the wider context of the letter.

Others have studied the letter only from a specific angle. For example, Hachmann (1995) and Maurach (1970) discuss the role of *Ep.* 15 as part of a wider group of letters. Hachmann sees the letter as part of a cluster made up of letters 13 through 16, whereas Maurach makes a connection between letters 12 through 15.<sup>10</sup> As they are both mostly interested in how *Ep.* 15 can be linked to the surrounding letters, they tend to concentrate on the opening and closing sections that contain the more fundamental philosophical points and gloss over the contents of *Ep.* 15.2-8 that deal with physical exercises and vocal training. By contrast, Gouw (2007), Fortuin (1996) and

<sup>9</sup>On emendations of *Ep.* 15, see Alexander (1940); Heller (1968); Lelièvre (1966); Shackleton Bailey (1970).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Maurach (1970), 71-73; Hachmann (1995), 134-39.

König (2005) examine the letter only in the context of sports in the Roman Empire and M. Gleason (1995) treats *Ep.* 15 as part of her review of vocal training and its practices in ancient Rome.

Meanwhile, the letter has not been examined very thoroughly as a whole. One of the considerations given less attention than it deserves is how Seneca interprets the central themes in this letter—care for the body and soul, health, the philosophical life, (in)dependence, the various errors of the fool—and why he believes that collecting them in a single letter is a worthwhile enterprise. Thus, a thorough commentary and analysis of *Ep.* 15 in its entirety that brings together the various observations pertaining to individual aspects seems called for.

## Commentary

### **Seneca Lucilio suo salutem.**

This is the standard opening phrase that is used in all of Seneca's letters.<sup>11</sup>

(15.1)

**Mos antiquis fuit, usque ad meam servatus aetatem, primis epistulae verbis adicere 'si vales bene est, ego valeo'.**

The custom that Seneca mentions is a traditional Roman opening phrase to a letter. He seems indeed right to observe that this formulaic greeting was losing popularity.<sup>12</sup> It can be found frequently in Cicero's letters, sometimes in the abbreviated form *S.v.b.e.v.*, or in other variations.<sup>13</sup> When Seneca states that he himself witnessed this custom he adds a personal note. He is sharing his thoughts, uses a personal observation and will turn this familiar phrase into a philosophical lesson. Moreover, the formula itself confirms the close connection between friends, as the well-being of the one friend affects the other as well. Seneca's revision does not diminish the friendly intention of the formula in any way. By examining the formula he calls attention to its original meaning and asks his audience to consider what they are really saying when they use such common expressions.

**Recte nos dicimus 'si philosopharis, bene est'.**

<sup>11</sup>See the discussion in Ch. 2, section 2.3, 70.

<sup>12</sup>Summers (1910), 176 points to similar observations in Cicero and Pliny the Younger.

<sup>13</sup>The exact same opening phrase '*si vales, bene est; ego valeo*' is used in Cicero *Fam.* 14.8.1 and in 14.15.1; in 5.1.1 there is only '*si vales, bene est*'. Abbreviations of such greetings are found frequently in Cicero's letters, of the form *S.v.b.e.e.v.* in Cicero *Fam.* 5.9.1, 10.34.1; of the form *S.v.b.e.e.q.v.* in Cicero *Fam.* 5.10a.1, 10.33.1, 12.11.1, 12.12.1; and of the form *S.v.b.e.v.* in Cicero *Fam.* 5.14.1, 12, 13.1, 13.6.1, 14.11.1, 14.16.1, 14.17.1, 14.21.1, 14.22.1, 14.23.1, 14.24.1. Later, Pliny the Younger will recall it in one of his letters and describe it as a formula used by his predecessors, *Epist.* 1.11.1.

When the customary formula is contrasted with the mentioned 'we' this is not a contrast in time between those of the old days and people nowadays, as one might expect, but the indication of a specific philosophical adaptation. The 'we' therefore refers to Seneca and Lucilius (and a wider readership of the letter) as students of philosophy. As a normative directive aimed at a particular audience it speaks specifically of what befits 'us'. Enquiring after someone's health is a regular epistolary theme, but Seneca here, and in later letters, is interested primarily in his addressee's state of mind.<sup>14</sup> The traditional formula is adjusted in accord with the philosophical standard. Thus, it is given a new form which serves the purpose, not merely of being a witty variation but, even more so, of setting the tone for the rest of the letter. The importance of philosophy and of adopting a philosophical way of life will return in many later letters.<sup>15</sup> Also, by marking philosophy as an activity, *philosopharis*, it is appropriate to the letter's overall investigation of suitable activities and the manner in which they should be pursued. Both Maurach and Hachmann connect the focus on philosophy in the opening of *Ep.* 15 with the earlier thought expressed in *Ep.* 14.11 that we should take refuge in philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

**Valere enim hoc demum est. Sine hoc aeger est animus;**

This is an explication of the previous statement. Philosophy is needed to acquire the harmonious and undisturbed mind that good health consists in. Without it, the result can only be a condition where health is lacking, e.g., sickness. Philosophy is the right way and the proper therapy to attain a healthy soul.<sup>17</sup>

**corpus quoque, etiam si magnas habet vires, non aliter quam furiosi aut frenetici validum est.**

The need for philosophical progress becomes even more urgent when it turns out that physical well-being alone does not amount to a true sense of health. The comparison with madmen and maniacs, besides a nice alliteration, depicts an appalling situation in which someone has a working body but lacks the soundness of mind to put it to good use. The deterrent examples of madness and frenzy denote a complete loss of self-control—one can think of such famous *furiosi* as Ajax, Orestes, Medea and Hercules.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Cf. *Ep.* 16.1 (*bona mens*), 17.1 (*ad bonam mentem ... tende*), 23.1 (*nisi ut te exhorter ad bonam mentem*), 37.1 (*Quod maximum vinculum est ad bonam mentem*), 41.1 (*Facis rem optimam et tibi salutarem si, ut scribis, perseveras ire ad bonam mentem*).

<sup>15</sup>On philosophy having both theoretical and practical relevance, cf. Hadot (1969) and e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 95.10.

<sup>16</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 14.11: *ad philosophiam ergo configiendum est*. Cf. Maurach (1970), 71; Hachmann (1995), 134. Maurach sees a further connection between *Ep.* 14.11 where philosophy is indicated as *hae litterae* and *Ep.* 15.2 where Lucilius is addressed as *litterato viro*.

<sup>17</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 38.2, 50.9, 64.9, 108.3, 108.23.

<sup>18</sup>On the importance of being in control of oneself, cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 2.53; Seneca *Ep.* 67.4. Ajax

(15.2)

**Ergo hanc praecipue valetudinem cura, deinde et illam secundam;**

The previous section stated how philosophy contributes to a healthy soul and now it is explained just how important that is. Physical health only comes second place and it actually depends on the soul's health because one cannot have the one without the other. In the Stoic system, the soul is held in higher regard than the body, as we can see from a passage preserved by Stobaeus:

Since the soul is more important than the body, they also say that the things of the soul which are natural and preferred have more value for the natural life than bodily and external things; for example, natural ability in the soul is more helpful for virtue than natural ability in the body, and similarly for the others.<sup>19</sup>

The Stoics are committed to the claim that physical health is not a good, although under morally equal circumstances it is by nature preferred (*proëgmenos*).<sup>20</sup> But what matters most to one's happiness is moral rectitude and as such mental health is the key to living virtuously. The soul is superior and we attend to the body only in order to secure its well-being, not to overindulge it.<sup>21</sup> This view echoes the opening section of *Ep. 14* in which Seneca also asserted that the body deserves our attention, but only up to a certain limit.<sup>22</sup>

**quae non magno tibi constabit, si volueris bene valere.**

Physical health is not only secondary in importance, it is not particularly hard to achieve either.<sup>23</sup> Seneca uses an everyday, commercial expression here, *quae non*

---

and Hercules are particularly interesting because they combine madness with great physical strength. Seneca's tragedies are full of madness and mental disturbance, e.g., in his *Hercules Furens*, see Fitch (1987), 28-33; cf. Nussbaum (1994), Ch. 12 'Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*', 439-83.

<sup>19</sup>Stobaeus 2.82 (LS 58C; IG II-95.7b): Τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς οὖσης κυριωτέρας τοῦ σώματος καὶ πρὸς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ζῆν φασὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν <ψυχήν> κατὰ φύσιν ὄντα καὶ προηγμένα πλείονα τὴν <ἀξίαν> ἔχειν τῶν περὶ <σώματα> καὶ τῶν <έκτός>, οἷον εὐφυίαν ψυχῆς πρὸς ἀρετὴν ὑπεράγειν τῆς τοῦ σώματος εὐφυίας καὶ ὁμοίως ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἔχειν. Tr. Inwood and Gerson (1997), 214. Cf. Marcus Aurelius *Med.* 6.16.1-3.

<sup>20</sup>For the Stoic view that health is a naturally preferable thing, see e.g., Stobaeus 2.79-81 (LS 58C; IG II-95.7-7b); Diogenes Laertius 7.102-107 (SVF 3.119; LS 58A-B; IG II-94.102-107); Cicero *Fin.* 3.43-45 (SVF 3.60); cf. the discussion in Long and Sedley (1989), 357-59. Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.2.33-37, where attention to the body is considered useful even without achieving perfection; Long (2002), 240-41.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 8.5, 10.4, 13.1, 14.1-2, 65.21-2, 65.24, 80.2, 88.18; NQ. I praef. 5. Cf. Husner (1924), 98; Sevenster (1961), 69-84.

<sup>22</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 14.1-2; cf. Hachmann (1995), 135.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 8.5, 92.1, 92.13.

*magno tibi constabit*, meaning 'which will not cost you much'.<sup>24</sup> The idea that physical health can be bought for a small price is in stark contrast with the attitude of those who are professionally engaged in shaping and displaying the body, e.g., athletes, actors, rhetoricians, singers. This letter not merely attempts to show the right way of pursuing mental and physical health but also demonstrates that other professions are on the wrong track.

***Stulta est enim, mi Lucili, et minime conveniens litterato viro occupatio exercendi lacertos et dilatandi cervicem ac latera firmandi;***

The remainder of this section intends to show that a life dedicated to physical exercise is foolish and inappropriate, pointless and unhealthy. *Stulta* sets the tone and will make another appearance in *Ep.* 15.9. The stupidity of over-exercising is further explained in the rest of this and the following section. It is worth noting that excessive physical exercise is especially inappropriate to Lucilius because Seneca considers him to be a learned man. This compliment to Lucilius affirms his distinguished status while at the same time this identification excludes certain actions and types of behaviour. A man of letters is not a man of muscles. The occurrence of the word 'man' (*vir*) in this context also has bearing on Seneca's perception of the elite male identity as it disconnects masculinity from being muscular.<sup>25</sup> Calling Lucilius a learned man once again emphasises the value of the mental over the physical.

The athletic way of life is called foolish, *stulta*, in contrast to the pursuit of philosophy.<sup>26</sup> What is more, the word *stultus* in philosophical literature is usually applied to someone who is not merely less perceptive, but the emblematic antithesis of the wise.<sup>27</sup> The part on athletic exercise as a way of life is surrounded by negative terminology: first there were the *furiosi aut frenetici* with healthy bodies but defective minds, in the section itself the *occupatio* of athletes is called *stulta* and the following passage draws a comparison between the proper nature of man and animal. All in all, these associations further add to the stereotypical image that those active in the

<sup>24</sup> As Motto explains, *magno* is an ablative of price with *pretio* understood, literally 'which will not cost you a great price', cf. Motto (1985), 65.

<sup>25</sup> In this context, M. Gleason (1999), 74, points out that "in antiquity a gentleman had no desire to acquire the physique of a manual laborer". Cf. Seneca *Contr.* 3. pr. 16; Persius 3.86; Summers (1910), 176.

<sup>26</sup> A more general contrast between the right philosophical way of life and others who live wrong can be found more frequently in Stoic philosophy, cf. Stobaeus 2.96-97, 99 (SVF 3.501; LS 59M-N).

<sup>27</sup> There is much evidence available on the bifurcation of mankind into the virtuous and the base, see SVF 1.216-29, 3.548-684; in particular, Stobaeus 2.99 (SVF 1.216; IG II-95.11g), 2.111-12 (SVF 3.548; IG II-95.11m); Seneca *Ben.* 2.35 (SVF 3.580), 4.34 (SVF 3.565); cf. Roskam (2005), 16, 21-22, 29.

athletic profession are lacking in intelligence.<sup>28</sup>

**cum tibi feliciter sagina cesserit et tori creverint, nec vires umquam opimi bovis nec pondus aequabis.**

Seneca likes to give a vivid picture of bad habits.<sup>29</sup> The graphic detail lies here in the word *sagina*, meaning 'a stuffing', 'rich nourishment', 'fatted animal', 'obesity'. In this case it denotes corpulence that results from deliberate overeating.<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that Seneca comes up with a distinct image of the person who engages in physical exercise. Such a man is not portrayed as a lean, muscular athlete—the runner type—but as a beefy heavyweight, someone who would practise boxing or the pancration. But the main point here is the comparison between man and bull. In a direct confrontation, *tibi / opimi bovis, sagina / pondus, tori / vires*, the trained man is no match for the bull. The comparison between the physical accomplishments of humans and the more specialised strengths of animals is a recurrent theme in Greek and Roman literature and in the philosophical tradition in particular. Seneca himself uses it on several occasions to point out that the distinctive characteristic of human beings rests in their rationality rather than in any physical attribute.<sup>31</sup>

**Adice nunc quod maiore corporis sarcina animus eliditur et minus agilis est. Itaque quantum potes circumscribe corpus tuum et animo locum laxa.**

It can even be harmful to over-exercise. Seneca here suggests that the mind is compressed by the expanding body size and that it is best to limit the body and leave room for the mind. Two observations—the athletes' increased bulk of flesh and their dulled intellect—are brought together in a powerful image of the soul being crushed and compressed by a mass of flesh. In addition, the contrast between them is strengthened by the double use of alliterations, *circumscribe corpus* and *locum laxa*.<sup>32</sup> This image seems a variation on his more widely used metaphor of the soul being trapped inside the body. For instance, at *Helv.* 11.6 Seneca writes about the soul being "hampered by mortal limbs and encompassed by the heavy burden of the flesh"<sup>33</sup> But in this passage the soul is not merely trapped, it is actually being squashed by a bulky

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Husner (1924), 98.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 78.23-24, 122.4.

<sup>30</sup>For similar uses of *sagina* being applied to human corpulence and heavy feeding, see e.g., Juvenal 4.67; Quintilian *Inst.* 2.15.25; Seneca *Ep.* 122.4 compares human night-dwellers to fatted birds kept in the dark; Tacitus *Hist.* 2.88 describes big portions of food as 'gladiator's rations', *gladiatoria sagina*. Finally, Seneca *Ep.* 88.19 seems to echo this letter when it tells of men "whose bodies are fed to fatness while their minds are thin and dull"; *quorum corpora in sagina, animi in macie et veterno sunt*.

<sup>31</sup>For other passages in Seneca, see *Ep.* 76.9; *Ben.* 2.29. Cf. Summers (1910), 176. Stefan Müller offers a clear overview of the human-animal *topos* in Müller (1995), 178-188.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Maurach (1970), 71.

<sup>33</sup>Seneca *Helv.* 11.6: *quantum per moras membrorum et hanc circumfusam gravem sarcinam licet.* Cf. also *Marc.* 24.5: "By these things the soul is crushed and strangled and stained and, im-

body. Although this may not be an accurate physiological description, some medical writers did see connections between the athletic regimen and the negative impact this could have on one's physical and mental or spiritual health. To understand this better, we need to examine some of the prevalent medical views regarding physical constitution and the role of exercise.

On the authority of Hippocratic and other medical writings, the human body was understood to be a mixture of various elements, the active hot and dry, and passive wet and cold, whose imbalance causes disease.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, these were identified as the four humours—black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. In addition, *pneuma*, a subtle fiery breath, constituted the body's vital heat. Thus, the key to health is to find and keep a good balance between the different humours that constitute the body, whereas diseases were associated with an excess or deficiency of those humours.<sup>35</sup>

The concept of basic elements together with that of *pneuma* appear in both medical and philosophical models.<sup>36</sup> Stoic theory, for instance, integrated the concept of *pneuma* into its own system as the vehicle of *logos* in structuring matter and the four elements as the basic constituents of all bodies. The elements of hot and cold—fire and air—, combine to form the fiery breath or *pneuma*.<sup>37</sup> The medical tradition provided an important starting point for Stoic philosophical thinking and they are on many points in agreement concerning the human constitution.

Besides natural constitution the medical tradition also recognised the influence of outside factors, or non-naturals, such as food and drink, sleep and physical exercise, that would directly influence one's physical and mental condition.<sup>38</sup> Staying in

---

prisoned in error, is kept far from its true and natural sphere. It constantly struggles against this weight of the flesh in the effort to avoid being dragged back and sunk; ..."; *Obruitur his, offocatur, inficitur, arcetur a veris et suis in falsa coiectus. Omne illi cum hac gravi carne certamen est, ne abstrahatur et sidat;* ...

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Nutton (2004), Ch. 5 'Hippocratic theories', 72-86, for a clear discussion of the various Hippocratic ideas about health, illness and human constitution.

<sup>35</sup>M. Gleason (1999), 70.

<sup>36</sup>On ancient medicine in general, see van der Eijk (2005); Nutton (2004); King and Dasen (2008); a good basic introduction to Roman medicine is Hanson (2006); Rawson (1985), Ch. 12 'Medicine', 170-184; and on ancient medicine and philosophy see Frede (1987), Ch. 12 'Philosophy and medicine in antiquity', 225-242; Edelstein (1967b). For a more specific exploration of the relation between Stoic philosophy and medicine, see Hankinson (2003); Tieleman (2010a). On the concept of health in antiquity, see King (2005).

<sup>37</sup>For the Stoic view that *pneuma* is the constituent material of the soul, see the evidence collected in Long and Sedley (1989), Ch. 47 'Elements, breath, tenor, tension' and Ch. 53 'Soul'; e.g., Cicero *ND* 2.23-5, 28-30 (LS 47C); Galen *PHP* 5.3.8 (SVF 2.841; LS 47H); Hierocles 1.5-33, 4.38-53 (LS 53B); Calcidius 220 (SVF 2.879; LS 53G); Aetius 4.21.1-4 (SVF 2.836; LS 53H).

<sup>38</sup>On the influence of food and drink on one's mental disposition, cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.19.5; on the danger of too much exercise, cf. *Ira* 3.9.3-4; on the negative influence of sleep deprivation,

good health required bodily care and training that would have an effect on nearly every aspect of daily life. Medical treatises such as those by Celsus, Galen and Oribasius all prescribe health-promoting activities, dietary rules, and how these should be combined in the proper measure and order. Dietetics formed an important part of medicine that set up rules for good health. The ideal, a balanced and moderate way of life, could only be accomplished with the right type and right amount of physical exertion and the proper diet. Healthy living required a regimen that would take into account one's particular condition, constitution and environment.<sup>39</sup>

The medical profession discussed the athletic lifestyle as it was clear that the athlete chose to cultivate a different body type. Critics described athletes as overfed and overtrained and they considered the athletic body as a deviation from a more normal body type that had a detrimental effect on the athletes' health. As Maud Gleason remarks: "In general, educated people felt a preference for flesh that was rarefied and light, as opposed to dense and heavy, because of its association with health and intelligence".<sup>40</sup> The active elements of fire and air were associated with intelligence and the adult male embodied the ideal with a constitution that is slightly more warm and dry. Athletes followed an intensive training and meat-heavy diet aimed at growing a large and dense body. As a result of this, their bodies would burn up the natural heat too quickly, leading to a constitution in which the cold and dry predominated.<sup>41</sup> This had an adverse effect on their intellectual powers. So the claim that athletes had less brainpower could be substantiated with a physiological explanation.

By contrast, moderate exercise and the right diet could be used to cool or heat the body, thus helping to restore the natural balance. Especially Galen is determined to propagate his own moderate regimen in opposition to the excessive training of athletes.<sup>42</sup> In a passage strikingly similar to the one under discussion here, Galen condemns the athletes' unhealthy focus on the body:

They do not even know that they have a soul in the first place, so far are they from comprehending its rational qualities. For they are so busy accumulating a mass of flesh and blood that their soul is extinguished as if

sickness, hunger and thirst, cf. *Ira* 2.19.5; 2.20.1, and 3.9.4-5. For a more general account of the importance of health to Roman men, cf. M. Gleason (1995), 84-91. Further material on the topics of physical exercise and health in Rome has been collected in Fortuin (1996), 267-402.

<sup>39</sup>On the important role of diet and dietetics in antiquity, see e.g., Edelstein (1967a); Craik (1995); Wilkins (2005); Grimm (2006).

<sup>40</sup>M. Gleason (1995), 85; Antyllus, *On Hygienic Declamation* 13, 15-16 (M. Gleason (1995), 85n.19).

<sup>41</sup>König (2005), 282-83. Cf. Galen *Good Condition* 4.754 K.

<sup>42</sup>On moderate exercise in Galen, see Nutton (2004), 241-42; König (2005), 274-91. On criticism of the athletic regimen, see also Galen *Exercise with the Small Ball* 5.905 K, in König (2005), 286.

beneath a heap of filth, and they are incapable of thinking about anything clearly; instead they become mindless like the irrational animals.<sup>43</sup>

Both Galen and Seneca point out how the athletic regimen is focused on the body at the expense of the soul, both mention the large quantities of food that are part of the athletic diet, resulting in the image of the soul crushed under the weight of the body. Also, both authors draw a comparison between athletes and animals. It is not necessary to assume a direct relation between these texts, rather it attests to the existence of a number of standard criticisms that would be prevalent in those disciplines—medicine and philosophy, in particular—that could benefit from attacking athleticism.<sup>44</sup> Seneca incorporates many of those in this letter.

### (15.3)

**Multa sequuntur incommoda huic deditos curae: primum exercitationes, quarum labor spiritum exhaustit et inhabilem intentioni ac studiis acrioribus reddit;**

Next, Seneca stresses the troubles of an athletic lifestyle.<sup>45</sup> One objection is that much physical exercise will leave its mark on a person and make him incapable to do more serious thinking. Obviously, time that is spent on physical exercise is lost to other pursuits. But the point here is rather that one's *spiritus* is drained, which has continuing effects. The term *spiritus* translates the Greek *pneuma* and this medical term refers in Stoic theory to one's life-force, the substance that constitutes the soul.<sup>46</sup> This permeats the body and accounts for sensation, self-motion and consciousness. Here, exercise deprives the *spiritus* of its strength and fatigue prevents activities of the soul to be performed in a competent manner.<sup>47</sup> The various functions and faculties of the soul all subsist on *pneuma*.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, when the vital functions of the soul use

<sup>43</sup> Galen *Protr.* 1.27 K: τὴν ἀρχὴν γάρ οὐδέ, εἰ ψυχὴν ἔχουσι, γιγνώσκουσι τοσοῦτον ἀποδέουσι τοῦ λογικὴν αὐτὴν ἐπίστασθαι. σαρκῶν γάρ δεῖ καὶ αἴματος ἀθροίζοντες πλῆθος ὡς ἐν βορβόρῳ πολλῷ τὴν ψυχὴν <τὴν> ἔχουσι κατεσθεσμένην, οὐδὲν ἀκριβὲς νοῆσαι δυναμένην, ἀλλ' ἄνουν ὁμοίως τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζῷοις. Tr. König (2005), 296. The Platonic depiction of body and soul in this passage, especially ἐν βορβόρῳ, corresponds to Galen's philosophical leanings.

<sup>44</sup> The rivalry between these different disciplines was mutual. As M. Gleason notes: "For their part, athletic trainers were known to claim that intellectual conversation at dinner impaired nutrition and made the head 'heavy.'"; cf. M. Gleason (1999), 74.

<sup>45</sup> The word *incommoda* is sometimes used in the *Epistulae Morales* to denote the Stoic philosophical term *apoproëgmenon*, an indifferent thing which normally is to be avoided, see e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.102, 7.105-106 (LS 58A-B; IG II-94.102, 105-106); Sextus Empiricus *M* 11.62-66 (SVF 3.122; IG II-116.62-66). However, in this context the focus is merely on the inconvenience of athletic exercise rather than on the particular Stoic interpretation. In *Ep.* 78.16 Seneca even draws a comparison between the physical training of athletes and torture.

<sup>46</sup> See the earlier discussion on *pneuma* in this chapter.

<sup>47</sup> See also the discussion on levels of exertion at 15.4.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Calcidius 220 (SVF 2.879; LS 53G).

up too much of it—through bodily motion, digestion, and so on—, this will have an adverse effect on the performance of the rational functions of the soul.

A related point that needs clarification is how Seneca represents the interaction between body and soul and how this reflects his Stoic background. A human being is a composite of body and soul—these are two distinct bodies that are deeply interconnected. This view can be emphasised in two ways. First, a Stoic can concentrate on the distinct natures of body and soul. For instance, in several Stoic passages it is argued that the health of the body does not entail the health of the soul and vice versa.<sup>49</sup> This is what Seneca has in mind in *Ep. 15.1-2* when he distinguishes health of the mind and health of the body. In other letters he offers examples of men whose poor physical health is not representative of their mental strength and well-being: his friend Aufidius Bassus (*Ep. 30*), his friend Claranus (*Ep. 66*), and Seneca himself (*Ep. 78*). Yet, there is also close interaction between these two bodies. Being composed of a material substance, *pneuma*, the soul is itself corporeal, just as the body.<sup>50</sup> As such, it is easier to conceive how the body can be moved by the soul, for example, in the case of the emotions.<sup>51</sup> Seneca's remarks in *Ep. 15.2-3* stress the direct relation between the condition of the body and the soul's ability to function well. Although the Stoics may appear to have been of two minds, these are really just different accents within the same view.

Similarly, when Seneca in another letter stays home to study while everyone else is off to see a boxing match, he remarks:

How many men, I say to myself, train their bodies, and how few train their minds! ... How feather-brained are the athletes whose muscles and shoulders we admire!"<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Theodoretus *Graec. aff.* 45 (SVF 3.149); Clemens *Al. Strom.* 4.5 (SVF 3.150). The soul needs to maintain a certain independence of the body to ensure that physical illness does not lead to moral infirmity. Such a strong interdependence would undercut the Stoic views that the wise man's good is secure under all circumstances.

<sup>50</sup>Tertullian *De Anim.* 5 (SVF 1.137); Diogenes Laertius 7.156 (SVF 2.774); Alexander of Aphrodisias *Mant.* p. 117 (SVF 2.792); Stobaeus 2.64 (SVF 3.305; IG II-95.5b7); cf. Hahn (1977), 4.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. e.g., Hierocles 1.5-33, 4.38-53 (LS 53B, esp. 53B.5-6); Plutarch *Virt. mor.* 10, 449D (SVF 3.468). On the relation between body and mind/soul in Stoic theory see Long (1996), Ch. 10, previously published as Long (1982); also Tieleman (2003), 102-114. Emotions are an interesting case in point as they are tied to both rationality and physiology and cannot be described in terms of either bodily responses or mental states alone; cf. the extensive treatment of Stoic thinking on body and soul interaction in relation to the emotions in Tieleman (2010a). See also the discussion in Ch. 6 on *Ep. 106*.

<sup>52</sup>Seneca *Ep. 80.2*: *Cogito mecum quam multi corpora exerceant, ingenia quam pauci; ... quam inbecilli animo sint quorum lacertos umerosque miramur.* Cf. Seneca *Ep. 88.19*. The opposite example

The athlete's physical appearance may look impressive, his weak mind, *inbecilli animo*, certainly disappoints. This type of remark recalls the widespread cliché that athletes are thick-headed and that too much sport can make one dull.<sup>53</sup>

**deinde copia ciborum subtilitas impeditur.**

Another physiological objection is the large quantity of food that is needed in support of an athletic diet. Although the athlete's nourishment would be harmful to a normal person, in this passage Seneca points to the more general disadvantage that a heavy diet hinders one's *subtilitas*.<sup>54</sup> This underscores the aforementioned criticism that athletes are dull—first from exertion, now from their diet.<sup>55</sup> The word *subtilitas* is used in a positive sense here to denote the capacity of making fine distinctions.<sup>56</sup> The terms *agilis* in 15.2 and *acrioribus* and *subtilitas* in 15.3 all point to an intellectual sharpness and nimble mind that the dull, heavyset athlete lacks.<sup>57</sup>

**Accedunt pessimae notae mancipia in magisterium recepta, homines inter oleum et vinum occupati, quibus ad votum dies actus est si bene desudaverunt, si in locum eius quod effluxit multum potionis altius in iejuno iturae regesserunt.**

The third objection is partly of a social nature: athletic trainers are unsuitable company because of their servitude and inferior social status. Such men are poles apart from Lucilius who in *Ep.* 15.2 was called a *vir litteratus*. What is more, it is also moral criticism. The problem with athletic trainers lies primarily in the fact that they are bad men, and as such bad role models. Clearly, these men are unaware of their responsibility as instructors. A teacher should set the example and he should inspire through his own life and actions.<sup>58</sup> In *Ep.* 88.1 Seneca restates that a subject taught by dishonourable teachers cannot be any good. The bad habits of certain gymnastic

---

in *Ep.* 30.2-3 is Aufidius Bassus whose body is weak through old age, but whose mind is still vigorous: *ita in senili corpore aliquatenus inbecillitas sustineri et fulciri potest. ... Bassus tamen noster alacer animo est.*

<sup>53</sup>On Roman stereotypes of (Greek) athletes, see König (2005), 207-12. Needless to say, this is clearly not the right place to bring up the anecdote that the Stoic Cleanthes used to be a boxer. Cleanthes' early career as a boxer is mentioned in Diogenes Laertius 7.168. Also in the Life of Cleanthes it is remarked that he was not particularly bright, though this is not attributed to his boxing days.

<sup>54</sup>On the importance of diet, see the discussion at *Ep.* 15.2. Cicero makes similar observations: at *ND* 2.43 (IG II-23.43) that one's diet has an effect on one's mental acuity, and at *Tusc.* 5.100 that one's understanding is impaired by overeating and excessive drinking.

<sup>55</sup>See also Celsus *Med.* 1.1.3, 1.2.7-8, on the excessive training and diet of athletes.

<sup>56</sup>For similar, positive instances, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 106.11, 107.1. It can also take on a negative meaning in cases of hair-splitting, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 82.24, 88.43, 113.1.

<sup>57</sup>The airy, breath-like quality of the soul's *pneuma* makes it able to move quickly and easily, cf. Seneca *NQ* 2.10.1, 5.5.2, 6.17.2; *Tranq.* 2.11; *Ep.* 50.6; see Wildberger (2006), A371 (576).

<sup>58</sup>On the influence of a teacher's example, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 6.5-6, 102.30; by contrast, a bad example is likely to have a bad influence, e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 7.7, 104.21.

teachers are something the rhetorician Quintilian also warns against:

I will not blame even those who give a certain amount of time to the teacher of gymnastics. I am not speaking of those, who spend part of their life in rubbing themselves with oil and part in wine-bibbing, and kill the mind by over-attention to the body: indeed, I would have such as these kept as far as possible from the boy whom we are training.<sup>59</sup>

Quintilian berates the teacher of gymnastics for his bad example and also associates too much care for the body with deterioration of the mind. These men are 'of the worst kind' because instead of displaying any intellectual or moral capacities they spend their time rubbing oil and drinking wine.

Even though recurrent fasting seems to be part of the athletic diet as well, Seneca mentions it here only as pretext to get more drunk.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, in the previous letter Seneca had asserted that moderation is a requirement for good health.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the student in the *palaestra* gives up the control over his life to an athletic trainer who tries to make one obey strict dietary rules but sets a bad example of immoderation himself. Thus, the athletic life makes one a slave to the body and obedient to slaves.

**Bibere et sudare vita cardiaci est.**

The pun that this lifestyle resembles that of a sick person calls attention once more to the central theme of good health. The recommended cure for a patient with heart-burn or stomach-ache was to drink wine and a familiar symptom of the *cardiacus* was excessive sweating.<sup>62</sup> This negative conclusion also marks the end of this section on the exercises of athletes.

**(15.4)**

**Sunt exercitationes et faciles et breves, quae corpus et sine mora lassent**

Seneca returns to the claim made in Ep. 15.2 that physical health is easy to come by. He offers some simple physical exercises that quickly do the job, i.e. exhaust someone

<sup>59</sup> Quintilian *Inst. 1.11.15*: *Ne illos quidem reprehendendos puto qui paulum etiam palaestricis vacaverunt. Non de iis loquor quibus pars vitae in oleo, pars in vino consumitur, qui corporum cura mentem obruerunt (hos enim abesse ab eo quem instituimus quam longissime velim.* This passage is also referred to in Summers (1910), 175.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Ep. 122.6; Inwood (2007), 350; Summers (1910), 177. A similar situation of wine-drinking and sweating at the baths is described in Petronius *Sat. 28*. Cf. Andronicus *Peri pathôn 4* (SVF 3.397) where numerous desires are listed, including the excessive desire to be in good physical shape, the excessive desire to eat, and the excess of wine. On immoderation in athleticism, see König (2005), 283-291.

<sup>61</sup> Seneca *Ep. 14.15*.

<sup>62</sup> See Celsus *Med. 3.19.1-2*.

right away. Eberhard Mähł notes that Celsus in his *De Medicina* draws a distinction between two degrees of tiredness: *lassitudo* and *fatigatio*.<sup>63</sup>

But the exercise ought to come to an end with sweating, or at any rate lassitude (*lassitudo*), which should be well this side of fatigue (*fatigatio*); and sometimes less, sometimes more, is to be done. But in these matters, as before, the example of athletes should not be followed, with their fixed rules and immoderate labour.<sup>64</sup>

Both the result of exertion, *lassitudo* leads to a modest physical tiredness that keeps the mind alert and ready for intellectual activities, whereas *fatigatio* results in exhaustion. Only in the case of *lassitudo* can one quickly move from physical exercise to mental effort without being over-exhausted, and that is exactly what Seneca prescribes at *Ep.* 15.5.<sup>65</sup> Although Seneca does not comment on it, his recommendation of moderate exercise here is in line with what is prescribed in medical treatises.<sup>66</sup>

**et tempori parcant, cuius praecipua ratio habenda est:**

The issue of saving time and having little time is a theme that recurs throughout the *Epistulae Morales* and the topic will make a short recurrence at the end of this letter at 15.11.<sup>67</sup> The regard for time is part of a tactic of indirect appropriation.<sup>68</sup> Seneca rejects the extensive training practices at the *palaestra*, while adopting them on a smaller scale in the form of the exercises he himself prescribes. Thus far Seneca appeared to be critical of physical exercise in general, but in this section it becomes clear that he only condemns the athletic approach to it. As Jason König concludes: "The rejection of bodily training becomes instead a recuperation and redefinition of it".<sup>69</sup> Seneca suggests a moderate regimen that would have seemed quite conventional to an aristocratic Roman.<sup>70</sup>

The notion that a philosopher needs to spend his time wisely and hence cannot invest his time in extensive bodily training subtly underscores the philosopher's im-

<sup>63</sup>Mähł (1974), 12.

<sup>64</sup>Celsus Med. 1.2.7: *Exercitationis autem plerumque finis esse sudor aut certe lassitudo, quae citra fatigationem sit, idque ipsum modo minus, modo magis faciendum est. Ac ne his quidem athletarum exemplo uel certa esse lex uel inmodicus labor debet.* See for this passage also Fortuin (1996), 316.

<sup>65</sup>Mähł (1974), 12, points to the use of *sine mora lassent* at *Ep.* 15.4 and *lassus sum* at *Ep.* 83.3 as variations on *lassitudo*. He also connects this to Seneca's advice in *Ep.* 15.5 to *cito redi a corpore ad animum*.

<sup>66</sup>As we have noted, both Galen and Celsus are in favour of moderate exercise and have a poor opinion of the athletic regimen. Cf. Oribasius 6.10.16.

<sup>67</sup>On the need to spend one's time well, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 1.1, 49.2-4, 67.13-14, 70.1, 108.24-28; cf. Grimal (1968); Motto (1970).

<sup>68</sup>The same argument of limited time can be found in Seneca *Ep.* 49.5.

<sup>69</sup>König (2005), 138.

<sup>70</sup>Cf. König (2005), 137-38.

portance and the athlete's failure. Expertise in the area of athleticism is a waste of valuable time and that is something the philosopher cannot afford. In a similar case, Quintilian discusses that both the orator and singer share the need for voice training. However, because the orator is always busy he cannot afford an extensive physical training. Quintilian's solution consists of a shorter version or selection of exercises.<sup>71</sup> **cursus et cum aliquo pondere manus motae et saltus vel ille qui corpus in altum levat vel ille qui in longum mittit vel ille, ut ita dicam, saliaris aut, ut contumeliosius dicam, fullonius:**

The recommended activities include running, lifting dumbbells, jumping high or far and some kind of jumping dance that can be best compared either with the ritual of Salian priests or that of fullers at work cleaning clothes. The third type of jumping receives only an implicit description. His audience must be familiar with the activity of the dancing priests of Mars and that of the fullers to be able to understand how the exercise should be carried out.<sup>72</sup> Whereas the priests performed a sacred rite, the fullers jumped in a tub filled with water and urine to scour clothes. With the aside *ut contumeliosius dicam* Seneca acknowledges that his unpretentious equation of the priests' ritual leaping dance with the fullers' stamping in a tub might seem somewhat impertinent. Although the jumping movement is similar in both instances, its significance is markedly different.

**quoslibet ex his elige †usum rude facile†.**

Seneca leaves it up to the reader to decide which of these exercises he will perform since they do not require further instruction or support. He trusts his audience to manage their physical condition from here onward with his advice in mind. By contrast, the athletic trainer oversees one's training constantly and orders what one should do, eat and drink, when and how. Seneca assumes a cultured gentleman like Lucilius is able to set out his own course and prefers to be independent. This already touches upon the philosophical ideal of *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency, that will be referred to in 15.9-10.<sup>73</sup>

In the *Epistulae Morales* Seneca also mentions some of his own short exercises. For

<sup>71</sup> Quintilian *Inst.* 11.3.22: "For the orator is too much occupied by civil affairs to be able to allot fixed times for taking a walk, and he cannot tune his voice through all the notes of the scale nor spare it exertion, since it is frequently necessary for him to speak in several cases in succession." *Nam neque certa tempora ad spatiandum dari possunt tot civilibus officiis occupato, nec praeparare ab imis sonis vocem ad summos nec semper a contentione condere licet, cum pluribus iudiciis saepe dicendum sit;* tr. Loeb edition.

<sup>72</sup> For a description of the priestly college of the Salii and their practices, see O'Neill (1897), 714-18.

<sup>73</sup> On the self-sufficiency of the Stoic wise man, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 9.3-5, 59.8, 85.37-41, 120.12-13. On virtue being self-sufficient, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 74.12, 74.25. Cf. Inwood (1985), 212; Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1070B.

instance, in *Ep. 83.3-4* he goes running in the company of a slave boy:

A brief space has been given over to bodily exercise, and on this ground I can thank old age—my exercise costs very little effort; as soon as I stir, I am tired. And weariness is the aim and end of exercise, no matter how strong one is. Do you ask who are my pacemakers? One is enough for me,—the slave Pharius, a pleasant fellow, as you know; but I shall exchange him for another. At my time of life I need one who is of still more tender years. Pharius, at any rate, says that he and I are at the same period of life; for we are both losing our teeth. Yet even now I can scarcely follow his pace as he runs, and within a very short time I shall not be able to follow him at all; so you see what profit we get from daily exercise.<sup>74</sup>

The passage has much in common with the section under discussion here.<sup>75</sup> Seneca does not spend much time on physical exercise and he is glad that his old age tires him out even sooner than before. His bodily training clearly is not his highest priority.<sup>76</sup>

Further, Seneca's running in the company of a young slave is not antithetical to his rejection of athletic trainers. In the *palaestra* one must submit oneself to a trainer who gives instructions on what to do, when and how. The athletic regimen expects someone to give up control to an inferior man. In the case of *Ep. 83.3-4*, it is Seneca himself who determines what he needs and the slave merely functions as a tool. In fact, he can easily be replaced when his running pace no longer matches that of Seneca. What sets Seneca's exercises in *Ep. 15.4* apart from regular athletic training is that they do not require an instructor to be present at all times or a particular training environment such as the *palaestra*. His activities can be done at any time or location.

The personal accounts elsewhere raise the question why Seneca does not appear as a role model in this letter. In fact, *Ep. 15* features not a single *exemplum*. A closer look at the autobiographical remarks on his own exercises shows that these do not serve to underline Seneca's physical fitness—*Ep. 83* opens with Lucilius' request to know more about Seneca's daily activities and it stresses the old age and frailty of Seneca in comparison to the boy Pharius. There the reader is not so much inspired

<sup>74</sup>Seneca *Ep. 83.3-4*: *minimum exercitationi corporis datum, et hoc nomine ago gratias senectuti: non magno mihi constat. Cum me movi, lassus sum; hic autem est exercitationis etiam fortissimis finis. Progymnastas meos quaeris? unus mihi sufficit Pharius, puer, ut scis, amabilis, sed mutabitur: iam aliquem teneriorem quaero. Hic quidem ait nos eandem crisin habere, quia utrique dentes cadunt. Sed iam vix illum adsequor currentem et intra paucissimos dies non potero: vide quid exercitatio cotidiana proficiat.*

<sup>75</sup>See Mähl (1974), 17n.53 on the textual congruence between *Ep. 15.4* and *Ep. 83.3*.

<sup>76</sup>Also, in *Ep. 83.5* Seneca mentions how he used to go take a plunge in the cold water of the Virgo aqueduct and later in the Tiber. This, however, he perceives as taking a cold bath rather than as an exhausting activity.

by Seneca's physical good health—which he does not have—as by his perseverance in keeping at his exercises and by his creative adjustments to work around the physical limitations of his old age. Seneca does not hope to be an exemplary figure for his physical performances, but for his moral and intellectual accomplishments. The absence of *exempla* confirms how Seneca further minimises the importance of physical exercise: what kind of achievement is it to jump up and down or to run around? Nothing special. Seneca resorts to exemplary figures when he wants to showcase an admirable accomplishment and to him that does not mean physical, but moral excellence.

(15.5)

**Quidquid facies, cito redi a corpore ad animum; illum noctibus ac diebus exerce.**

Just as Seneca's proposed exercises take up little time to execute, so does the discussion of them occupy only a small part of the letter, and Seneca quickly moves on as he urges his reader to turn attention away from the body and focus on the mind. Expressions of "day and night" are quite common in literature up to Seneca's time.<sup>77</sup> Such an expression is usually employed in the context of a continuous and ongoing motion like that of the heavenly bodies, of a relentless effort such as a military attack, or of the unceasing liberality of the gods. Here it helps to express the tireless dedication that is needed in philosophy and this is certainly not an instance of excess as was the case in athletic effort.

**Labore modico alitur ille; hanc exercitationem non frigus, non aestus impedit, ne senectus quidem.**

Diligent, intellectual study requires moderate exercise. The mind must be put to work, but there is no excessive use as we saw in the case of athletes. On the contrary, whereas physical exertion drains the *spiritus*, here Seneca speaks of *alitur*: modest study is what nourishes and strengthens the soul. Maurach reads this as an instance of Seneca's milder tone, his *remissior vox*.<sup>78</sup> Instead, I feel the contrast that is being made here is not a stricter Stoic view on philosophical study, but the excess of athletic training. When Seneca calls his type of study *modico* this is not meant to signify lenient and undemanding, but rather controlled and in proper measure.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup>This recalls first and foremost Epicurus' advice in his letter to Menoikeus, Diogenes Laertius 10.135: "Exercise thyself in these and kindred precepts day and night, both by thyself and with him who is like unto thee"; Ταῦτα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῆ μελέτα πρὸς σεαυτὸν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς πρός <τε> τὸν ὅμοιον σεαυτῷ, tr. Loeb edition. For similar expressions of day and night, see e.g., Cicero *Rep.* 3.3; *Tusc.* 1.68; ND 2.88; Pliny *HN* 2.236, 6.211, 7.215; Seneca *Contr.* 1 pr. 14; Livy *Epon.* 25.34.5; and in other passages in Seneca's own work, e.g., *Pol.* 12.4; *Ben.* 4.3.2.

<sup>78</sup>Maurach (1970), 71.

<sup>79</sup>My reading of 15.6 will strengthen this view further.

Furthermore, mental effort has the advantage that it is not dependent on special circumstances. External circumstances will not distract or preclude intellectual activities. Although it is stated positively here, that the mind only improves and is not stopped by cold, hot or by old age, it implies another criticism of physical training. The body requires numerous special conditions to improve and those who are accustomed to train under ideal circumstances may not perform well in real situations.<sup>80</sup> Seneca aptly sums up the contrast between the needy body and the self-sufficient mind in *Ep. 80.3*:

For although the body needs many things in order to be strong, yet the mind grows from within, giving to itself nourishment and exercise. Yonder athletes must have copious food, copious drink, copious quantities of oil, and long training besides; but you can acquire virtue without equipment and without expense.<sup>81</sup>

While the philosopher is self-sufficient in the same way as the mind, the athlete is dependent like the body itself. In Seneca's own case, there are several other letters where he confirms his weak physical condition, and although he may confess to some minor errors in judgment, there is not a letter in which he complains of inadequate mental capacities. Nature has given him all he needs: his body may fail him frequently, his mind is always capable to perform its task.<sup>82</sup>

**Id bonum cura quod vetustate fit melius.**

Careful attention to the mind will allow for continuous improvement, even into old age. Let us look at a passage from Cicero's *Cato Maior De Senectute* where Cato the Elder, the main character of the dialogue, addresses his young friends:

But it is our duty, Laelius and Scipio, to resist old age; to compensate for its defects by a watchful care; to fight against it as we would fight against disease; to adopt a regimen of health; to practise moderate exercise; and to take just enough of food and drink to restore our strength and not to overburden it. Nor, indeed, are we to give our attention solely to the body; much greater care is due to the mind and soul; for they, too, like lamps, grow dim with time, unless we keep them supplied with oil. Moreover, exercise causes the body to become heavy with fatigue, but

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Gouw (2007), 142-46, 150; König (2005), 272, 292-94.

<sup>81</sup>Seneca *Ep. 80.3*: *Corpus enim multis eget rebus ut valeat: animus ex se crescit, se ipse alit, se exercet. Illis multo cibo, multa potionem opus est, multo oleo, longa denique opera: tibi continget virtus sine apparatu, sine impensa.*

<sup>82</sup>On Seneca's ill health, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 54.1-3, 61.1, 65.1, 67.2, 78.1-4, 104.1; cf. Motto (1970), 187. In addition, there are many references in the *Epistulae Morales* to Seneca's old age in which his physical limitations are mentioned, see Motto (1970), 187.

intellectual activity gives buoyancy to the mind.<sup>83</sup>

The advice of Cato the Elder corresponds to that of Seneca on every point. First, it is appropriate to care for one's health, but we must observe moderation in training and diet. Second, the body is not as important as the mind. Third, the body is exhausted by exercise while study strengthens the mind. In Cicero's dialogue this passage is only a small part of a larger discussion of old age and the best ways to deal with it. Seneca, however, makes the topic of preserving bodily and mental health central to this letter. In addition, Cato the Elder was a distinguished member of the Roman community, who represented the sober and decent lifestyle in which the Romans took pride. Seneca presents his health regimen in a philosophical framework even though it effectively agrees with traditional Roman views.

To be sure, the topic of exercise was not new to Stoic philosophers. Under the heading of *askēsis* several Stoics discussed how training played a part in the philosophical curriculum.<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, most of these works are lost, though we do have a short treatise by Musonius Rufus and one by Epictetus, both with the title *On Exercise*.<sup>85</sup> The content of Musonius Rufus' work and that of Epictetus are much the same and I will take the exposition of Musonius as the starting point of my comparison. Like Seneca, Musonius agrees that attention should be given to both body and soul, that the soul should be the primary focus of care and that a detailed program of physical exercise is unnecessary.

However, there are also a few important differences that help to highlight Seneca's particular focus in this letter. First of all, Musonius and Epictetus identify *askēsis* with philosophical training that helps to develop one's inner strength. Whereas Musonius differentiates between those exercises that pertain just to the soul and those that are concerned with both body and soul, Seneca seems to make a threefold division.<sup>86</sup> He discusses initially the exercises that focus solely on the body (athletic exercises in *Ep.*

<sup>83</sup>Cicero *Sen.* 11.35-36: *Resistendum, Laeli et Scipio, senectuti est, eiusque vitia diligentia compensanda sunt, pugnandum tamquam contra morbum sic contra senectutem; habenda ratio valetudinis, utendum exercitationibus modicis, tantum cibi et potionis adhibendum ut reficiantur vires, non opprimantur. Nec vero corpori solum subveniendum est, sed menti atque animo multo magis; nam haec quoque, nisi tamquam lumini oleum instilles, extinguitur senectute. Et corpora quidem exercitationum defatigatione ingravescunt, animi autem exercendo levantur.* Tr. largely based on the Loeb edition. This same passage is also discussed in Fortuin (1996), 305-7.

<sup>84</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.166 and 7.167 list in the works of Herillus and in those of Dionysius a treatise with the title *On Exercise*.

<sup>85</sup>Musonius Rufus' *Peri Askēsēōs* or *On Exercise* is the sixth in the collection of discourses, cf. Lutz (1947); for Epictetus' *Peri Askēsēōs* or *On Exercise*, see Diss. 3.12.1-7; cf. Long (2002), 111-13. On the role of such spiritual exercises in philosophy, see Hadot (1995a), Ch. 3 'Spiritual Exercises', 81-125.

<sup>86</sup>Epictetus does not indicate different types of exercise.

15.2-3 and his own recommendations in *Ep.* 15.4), in the middle part those that can benefit both body and soul (activities such as riding, conversing and walking in *Ep.* 15.6 and vocal training in *Ep.* 15.7-8), and at the end exercises of the soul, contemplating philosophical precepts in *Ep.* 15.9-11.

As a result, the specific exercises they recommend are quite different. The exercises of Musonius are altogether philosophical in nature and revolve around disciplining oneself to endure difficult circumstances:

We use the training common to both when we discipline ourselves to cold, heat, thirst, hunger, meagre rations, hard beds, avoidance of pleasures, and patience under suffering. For by these things and others like them the body is strengthened and becomes capable of enduring hardship, sturdy and ready for any task; the soul too is strengthened since it is trained for courage by patience under hardship and for self-control by abstinence from pleasures. Training which is peculiar to the soul consists first of all in seeing that the proofs pertaining to apparent goods as not being real goods are always ready at hand and likewise those pertaining to apparent evils as not being real evils, and in learning to recognize the things which are truly good and in becoming accustomed to distinguish them from what are not truly good.<sup>87</sup>

By facing hardship, we teach the body to deal with desire and aversion rather than train it in any conventional sense. By comparison, the physical exercises recommended by Seneca—running, jumping, vocal training—are much more in keeping with existing practices. Additionally, Seneca discusses how non-philosophers work out and he condemns alternative forms of training. Furthermore, he gradually moves from a conventional notion of physical training to a philosophical adaptation, whereas Musonius and Epictetus work within their philosophical frame of reference and do not prepare their audience for their philosophical understanding of *askēsis*. We may assume that Seneca’s audience still has more traditional views and is only just being introduced to a more philosophical mindset.

<sup>87</sup> Musonius Rufus 6.37-48: κοινὴ μὲν οὖν ἀσκησὶς ἀμφοῖν γενήσεται, συνεθιζομένων ἡμῶν ρίγει, θάλπει, δίψει, λιμῷ, τροφῆς λιτότητι, κοίτης οκληρότητι, ἀποχῇ τῶν ἡδέων, ὑπομονῇ τῶν ἐπιπόνων. διὰ γὰρ τούτων καὶ τῶν τοιούτων ὁώννυται μὲν τὸ σῶμα καὶ γίνεται δυσπαθές τε καὶ στερεόν καὶ χρήσιμον πρὸς ἄπαν ἔργον, ὁώννυται δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ γυμναζομένη διὰ μὲν τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῶν ἐπιπόνων πρὸς ἀνδρείαν, διὰ δὲ τῆς ἀποχῆς τῶν ἡδέων πρὸς σωφροσύνην. Ιδίᾳ δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀσκησίς ἔστι πρῶτον μὲν τὰς ἀποδεῖξεις προχείρους ποιεῖσθαι τάς τε περὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τῶν δοκούντων ὡς οὐκ ἀγαθά, καὶ τὰς περὶ τῶν κακῶν τῶν δοκούντων ὡς οὐ κακά, καὶ τὰ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθὰ γνωρίζειν τε καὶ διακρίνειν ἀπὸ τῶν μὴ ἀληθῶς ἐθίζεοθαι; tr. Lutz (1947), 55. For similar exercises in Seneca, cf. e.g., *Ep.* 18.5-12, 20.12-13, 107.4, 108.15-16, 108.23.

(15.6)

**Neque ego te iubeo semper inminere libro aut pugillaribus: dandum est aliquod intervallum animo, ita tamen ut non resolvatur, sed remittatur.**

Seneca needs to shed more light on his earlier statement that the mind must work day and night. He admits that, of course, a short break is needed once a while.<sup>88</sup> But this small concession actually has its focus on the physically uncomfortable position of bending over one's books and writing tables. We need a pause from continuously sitting in the same pose and doing the same type of activity. This helps to explain why the transition that follows is not to alternatives for mental exercise that interrupt one's study, but to different activities that loosen up the body while one can continue to work the mind. It is important to recall here the thought expressed in *Ep. 15.5* that moderate, mental effort is always possible and it seems to be suggested here that this is partly the case due to the wide variety of mental activities.

**Gestatio et corpus concutit et studio non officit: possis legere, possis dictare, possis loqui, possis audire, quorum nihil ne ambulatio quidem vetat fieri.**

The numerous possibilities are summarised in anaphora: *possis legere, possis dictare, possis loqui, possis audire*. Whether in a litter or during a walk, one can exercise the mind while moving the body. The possibilities are diverse and the choice is, again, left to the reader. *Gestatio* was considered a passive exercise in the medical tradition that shakes up the body, for instance in a litter or on a boat.<sup>89</sup> Of course, riding in a litter was only accessible to the more wealthy members of society, but these were the same persons who could afford to worry about the appropriate measure and way of exercise.

(15.7)

**Nec tu intentionem vocis contempseris, quam veto te per gradus et certos modos extollere, deinde deprimere.**

In *Ep. 15.7-8* Seneca introduces a new activity, that of vocal training. His response is not as adverse as that to athletic training but he certainly has explicit directions about the proper practice of vocal exercises. In order to answer questions such as 'Why is vocal training not to be looked down on?' or 'Why is practising modulations forbidden?', we need to place this passage in the wider context of vocal training, consider briefly what the perceived benefits of vocal training were and what kind of activities were associated with its practice.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ira* 3.9.1-2; *Tranq.* 17.4-11.

<sup>89</sup>See e.g., Celsus *Med.* 2.15.1-3, 3.12.6, 3.20.5; cf. Fortuin (1996), 316-321. Seneca mentions travelling in a litter on several occasions, see *Ep.* 29.6, 55.1, 104.19. The first is an anecdote about a so-called philosopher whose philosophical activities all take place in his carriage. The latter two passages both refer to the beneficial influence of making a ride in a litter. *Gestatio* is also mentioned in Pliny the Younger, see e.g., *Epist.* 2.17.18, 5.6.17.

Maud Gleason calls attention to the importance of vocal training in the lives of upper-class Romans: "The voice in particular was subjected to regular discipline, and both physicians and educated laymen believed that the training of the voice affected not only a man's speech, but also the well-being of his entire body".<sup>90</sup> Vocal training could improve a man's speech by working on tonal variety, vocal stability and volume.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, vocal training was widely regarded as a technique of bodily self-care that would benefit one's overall health. The medical writer Oribasius explains that declamation "provides valuable exercise of the chest, the vocal organs, and especially the body's vital heat. It augments, purifies, tones, and refines this natural heat and renders the solid parts of the body vigorous, pure, and resistant."<sup>92</sup> A similar account can be found in Plutarch where the voice helps to heat the body and has a purging effect.<sup>93</sup> Seneca himself in *Ep. 78.5* remarks that a doctor is likely to prescribe declamation to a recovering patient. The most extensive description of the vocal regimen can be found in Oribasius. Gleason summarises his recommendations:

One should begin by emptying one's bowels and taking a light massage of the lower body. Then one should sponge one's face and warm up with some preliminary chat—or, better yet, go for a little walk before beginning to declaim. Educated persons should declaim a passage from memory; epic hexameters are best.<sup>94</sup>

When declaiming a passage, the best method is to start with low tones to high and back down again. Especially the low tones are beneficial as they expand the throat and neck most of all.<sup>95</sup> In other authors we find similar descriptions—though not as detailed—of health-promoting activities associated with vocal practice: taking walks, talking, reciting and practising scales.<sup>96</sup>

When we return to *Ep. 15.7-8* we understand why vocal exercises are an appropriate topic in a discussion on good health. First of all, it is a type of exercise similar to those named just above in *Ep. 15.6*. Activities such as riding in a litter, walking and voice training are all exercises that are expected to contribute to one's health. This leads to a second reason for bringing up the subject of vocal training. Its physiological effects are in fact opposed to those of athletic training. The latter was said to make

<sup>90</sup> M. Gleason (1995), 84. On this subject see especially M. Gleason (1995), Ch. 4 'Voice training and the callisthenics of gender', 83-102. Cf. Celsus *Med.* 1.2.6-7.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. M. Gleason (1995), 104; *Rhet. Her.* 3.11.20.

<sup>92</sup> Oribasius 6.7-9; M. Gleason (1995), 88.

<sup>93</sup> Plutarch *Mor.* 130A-B (*De Tuenda Sanitate Praecepta*, 16).

<sup>94</sup> This is a paraphrase by Gleason of Oribasius 6.9.2-3, in M. Gleason (1995), 88-89.

<sup>95</sup> M. Gleason (1995), 89.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep. 78.5*, Oribasius 6.10.23-24, Plutarch *Mor.* 780A, Caelius Aurelianus, *On Chronic Diseases* 1.162-65, cf. M. Gleason (1995), 90-94.

the body more dense whereas vocal training would render the body lighter. Seneca offers advice on the correct use of both.

**Quid si velis deinde quemadmodum ambules discere?**

Seneca's rhetorical question draws a comparison between the use of our voice and our particular way of walking, neither of which needs additional coaching because they are both skills which we have already acquired naturally.

**Admitte istos quos nova artifacia docuit fames: erit qui gradus tuos temperet et buccas edentis observet et in tantum procedat in quantum audaciam eius patientia et credulitate produxeris.**

The ironic tone is carried on as Seneca describes what it would be like to take instructions from a vocal trainer. It would be ridiculous to give up control over our lives like that. The subject matter of *Ep. 15.7* moves from practising modulations to walking and having one's pace and diet checked. What looks like a haphazardly organised argument turns out to be an indirect description of the training components proposed by vocal trainers.

Besides alluding to practices associated with vocal exercise, the trainer becomes the object of scorn. Just as in other disciplines with a physical orientation, the vocal trainer has his own recommended bodily regimen. His hunger, possibly caused by poverty, spurs him on to impose all sorts of unnecessary rules and habits, sneeringly called 'new tricks', *nova artifacia*, and his attitude is dismissed as impudent. The critical attitude to vocal trainers runs parallel to *Ep. 15.3* where athletic trainers are held in contempt. What motivates the trainer is his hunger and not care for the student. The vocal trainer is portrayed as some kind of impostor and as an instructor he fails just as the athletic trainer did. Similarly, the vocal trainer lays down the law on his pupil and will try to control his life as much as possible. Seneca suggests that the more dependent one's attitude, the more such a trainer will try to encroach on one's daily life.

The topic of profession and professionalism is of special significance. Seneca is highly critical about vocal trainers and how Roman members of the elite depended on them to guide their way of life. Moreover, vocal exercises were closely associated with acting and singing, both disreputable professions. A nobleman would not want to be professionally engaged in either one. Aristotle already noted that singing was not the sort of thing a gentleman did for a living, just for fun or when drunk.<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, some Romans did obsess over their voice and the emperor Nero proved to be such an example, as other sources confirmed:

... omitting none of those exercises by which artists of that kind preserve and strengthen their voices. Rather, he would lie on his back, holding a

<sup>97</sup> Aristotle *Pol.* 1339b8; Duey (1946), 398-9. On vocal art in antiquity and its reputation, see Duey (1946).

lead tablet on his chest, and cleanse his system with a syringe and with vomiting, and he would abstain from fruits and other foods harmful to the voice.<sup>98</sup>

Nor would he undertake any business, serious or frivolous, unless a voice-coach was standing by to give advice, relax his windpipe, and apply a towel to his mouth.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, one of Nero's other great interests was athletic exercise, in particular wrestling.<sup>100</sup> To the people of Rome he provided the Neronia, a Greek-style festival which included athletic competition, poetry and theater.<sup>101</sup> Thus, an understanding audience might read this letter as a condemnation of Nero's obsessive attention to the body, both in the form of athletics and vocal training.

**Quid ergo? a clamore protinus et a summa contentione vox tua incipiet? usque eo naturale est paulatim incitari ut litigantes quoque a sermone incipient, ad vociferationem transeant;**

It is not like someone should begin to shout at the top of his voice. Not at all. In fact, it is natural for the human voice to build up slowly. The example of people who start their disagreement with an exchange of words before turning to shout at one another shows that no-one needs lessons in building up the voice gradually. People naturally know how to use their voice. It is a typical Stoic solution to refer back to nature as the best guideline for action. After all, when the natural way works well in a spontaneous situation then the same will hold for the artificial circumstances of declamation that are mentioned next.

**nemo statim Quiritium fidem implorat.**

The rhetorical context of vocal training is reinforced as Seneca calls attention to the situation of an orator who builds up to the dramatic moment in his speech. At the climax of the speech the orator would typically appeal to the citizens of Rome, the Quirites, to make his plea.<sup>102</sup> It is stated as common knowledge that in a public

<sup>98</sup> Suetonius Nero 20: ... neque eorum quicquam omittere, quae generis eius artifices vel conservandae vocis causa vel augendae factitarent; sed et plumbeam chartam supinus pectore sustinere et clystere vomituque purgari et abstinere pomis cibisque officientibus. Tr. Edwards (2000), 204.

<sup>99</sup> Suetonius Nero 25: Ac post haec tantum afit a remittendo laxandoque studio, ut conservandae vocis gratia neque milites umquam, nisi absens aut alio verba pronuntiante, appellaret neque quicquam serio iocove egerit, nisi astante phonasco, qui moneret parceret arteriis ac sudarium ad os applicaret. Tr. Edwards (2000), 208. On Nero's vocal training and singing qualities, see also Frazer (1971).

<sup>100</sup> On Nero's interest in sport, see e.g., Suetonius Nero 40; for his activities as a wrestler, see e.g., Suetonius Nero 53.

<sup>101</sup> On the Neronia, cf. Suetonius Nero 12; Tacitus *Ann.* 14.20, 16.2; Cassius Dio 61.21.

<sup>102</sup> See e.g., Cicero *Leg agr.* 2.65, 2.103; *Cat.* 3.29; Aulus Gellius *NA* 15.12.3-4; Apuleius *Met.* 2.27.

speech the appeal is not the proper way to start because if the orator should gradually come to a crescendo, both in his volume (*magnitudo*) and message.<sup>103</sup> This example reminds us that vocal training is not merely of importance to singers and actors but also highly relevant to public speaking and as such to Roman gentlemen.<sup>104</sup>

The objection that is raised represents the concern about using the voice properly in a more serious and honourable context. Cultured men who could benefit from vocal training were keen to point out that they were not involved in entertainment. Any performing Roman would have to endure public scrutiny and could be criticised for his voice, gesture or language.<sup>105</sup>

#### (15.8)

**Ergo utcumque tibi impetus animi suaserit, modo vehementius fac vitiis convicium, modo lentius, prout vox te quoque hortabitur †in id latus†<sup>106</sup>**

Vottero points out that making a loud and forceful reproach, *convicium facere*, was often associated with the moral outcry of philosophers against those who act unwisely.<sup>107</sup> Whatever his approach, the philosopher needs to talk to others in the appropriate tone and volume. Both oratory and philosophy addressed a wider audience and public speaking was a skill considered of great importance for any individual member of the elite to possess and to display. But Seneca reassures the reader on this point that the mind and body can co-operate: the impulse of the soul to speak out in a more fierce or milder tone corresponds to the inclination of the voice (and possibly the lungs). When we trust the soul, the body will follow accordingly.

**modesta, cum recipies illam revocarisque, descendat, non decidat; †mediatorisui habeat et hoc† indocto et rustico more desaeviat.**

Approaching the end of this topic, Seneca discusses how to lower the voice gently, just as he had started off with the suitable way to start using one's voice in *Ep. 15.7*. Thus, his discussion of the proper use of the voice follows itself a gradual build up

<sup>103</sup>For a clear exposition on this subject, see Dominik and Hall (2007), Ch. 17 'Oratorical Delivery and the Emotions: Theory and Practice' by J. Hall, 218-34, esp. the section on voice, 220-24. Here, J. Hall discusses how various vocal tones are prescribed to suit particular rhetorical circumstances. The heightened tone, *amplificatio*, is only required when the orator concludes with an emotional appeal, in the case of a trial this is the final plea either to convict the accused (*cohortatio*) or to show mercy (*conquestio*), cf. *Rhet. Her.* 3.25. For Roman discussions of the appropriate use of voice, see *Rhet. Her.* 3.20-25; Cicero *De Or.* 3.217-19; Quintilian *Inst.* 11.3.15-65.

<sup>104</sup>Cf. Quintilian *Inst.* 11.3.22.

<sup>105</sup>On the importance of public speaking for the Roman aristocracy and the critical observation of public speakers, see Steel (2006), Ch. 3 'The Practising Orator'. Cf. Rawson (1985), Ch. 10 'Rhetoric', 149-152; M. Gleason (1995), 84, 103; M. Gleason (1999), 68, 74, 82.

<sup>106</sup>On the reconstruction of the text at *Ep. 15.8-9*, see the notes at Text and translation.

<sup>107</sup>Vottero (1998), 320. See e.g., Cicero *Off.* 3.83; Seneca *Marc.* 10.2; *Ben.* 7.25.2; *Ep.* 76.4, 108.9; Quintilian *Inst.* 4.2.27; 6.2.16.

and fade-out.

The word *modesta* is significant as it points to a middle course that avoids excess and steers clear of making a bad impression. Here he touches upon the larger issue of how appearance reveals a person's character. Maud Gleason indicates that appearing artificial was not without risk: "Too much pliability, in voice or posture, evokes both the subservience of women and the suspect versatility of the professional performer".<sup>108</sup> The fault of practising scales is thus not only that it is the kind of excess that makes one look effeminate, but also that it shows a lack of natural style. It takes vocal training to a professional level that is undesirable. The other extreme, however, does not directly correlate to any philosophical issue. Instead, the mistake of sounding too much like a peasant is a social concern of the upper-class. Close parallels can be found in rhetorical literature where the audience is cautioned against the extremes of style. In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* we read that both artificial elegance and vulgarity must be avoided in correct delivery, "lest we give the impression that we are either actors or day labourers".<sup>109</sup>

Gleason wonders why Seneca would object to practising scales and she maintains that Seneca is concerned with gait and that cultivating this too much could make a public speaker look unmanly. She certainly seems right in pointing out the self-consciousness of the Roman aristocracy and the need to present one's style as manly and dignified. Seneca himself discusses this topic in *Ep. 114*.<sup>110</sup> However, this explanation fails to show why Seneca approves vocal training, what kind of vocal exercise would be suitable and for what reasons.

One important element is missing, and that is the concept of nature and what is natural. As said earlier, vocal exercises could train the voice and benefit one's physical constitution. Seneca dislikes vocal training as an artificial profession but he approves of it as part of a medical regimen.<sup>111</sup> Taking care of one's health is natural whereas training one's voice to reach extremes is not. Seneca's concept of nature is based on Stoic philosophy, but it is used here also in support of a Roman aristocratic mentality. What is natural coincides with established opinions of what is suitable to a cultured man. It is standard Stoic doctrine, often echoed in Seneca, that nature defines a being's constitution and proper actions.<sup>112</sup> The Stoic conception of nature

<sup>108</sup> M. Gleason (1999), 82.

<sup>109</sup> *Rhet. ad Her.* 3.15.26, tr. H. Caplan, Loeb edition. Cf. Cicero *De Or.* 1.251; *Off.* 1.129; Quintilian *Inst.* 11.3.30.

<sup>110</sup> For an account of Seneca's style, see Setaioli (1985).

<sup>111</sup> Other professions may teach tricks, but there is nothing artificial about philosophy, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 16.3, 82.19, 108.36, 111.3, cf. 71.6; Wildberger (2006), A738 (693).

<sup>112</sup> On Stoic doctrine concerning the concept of nature and its relation to human nature, see Inwood (1985), Ch. 2 'Human Nature and the Rational Soul', 18-41. For further material see Long and Sedley (1989), Ch. 57 'Impulse and appropriateness', Ch. 58 'Value and indifference',

explains why different beings have different natures—why bulls are naturally strong and hares are naturally swift runners. What is more, nature also functions as an ethical guide. What is natural is appropriate and sets the standard.

Seneca claims that the proper use of the voice does not require expert instruction, as the natural use of it is already the most appropriate. What is more, it would be unnatural and therefore unbecoming to a man to spend much time trying to sound like a singing bird. Seneca continuously hints at our natural ability to use our voice: it is as natural to us as walking, persons who argue build up their volume naturally, the orator's speech follows the same, conventional pattern, following our natural impulse will produce the right result and adopting a middle course avoids artificial and unsuitable excess.

**Non enim id agimus ut exerceatur vox, sed ut exerceat.**

The final sentence of *Ep. 15.8* is a short aphorism that completes the topic in a typically Senecan manner. Exercising the voice should not be done for its own sake, rather it must be put to good use. This emphasis on functional use offers an indication of the exercise Seneca has in mind when he approves vocal training. It is to read texts aloud, probably philosophical works or at least edifying forms of literature, or to deliver speeches. These activities have the additional advantage that they combine bodily exertion with mental effort—something which he also approved of in *Ep. 15.6*.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, in using the voice we can move and persuade others and that is an important part of philosophy. At the same time, it is typically Roman to emphasise the usefulness and practical application of the voice.

(15.9)

**Detraxi tibi non pusillum negotii: una mercedula et unum graecum ad haec beneficia accedet.**<sup>114</sup>

In the closing sections of the letter, Seneca conventionally places a renewed emphasis on his relationship with Lucilius and gives prominence to epistolary features. It is not always immediately obvious how the epilogue ties in with the earlier subject matter and at times they seem to be just additional samples of philosophical tenets that will keep one thinking even after the letter has ended. Whereas the main content is often a practical and well-argued unit, the closing section often contains gathered philosophical insights that are not placed in a wider context but are only briefly commented upon. In this case, *Ep. 15.9-11* function as an exercise of the soul in training the right mental attitude, thus picking up on the theme of exercise, but also form an

---

Ch. 59 'Proper functions'.

<sup>113</sup>Cf. Pliny *Epist. 3.1.4-9* with the example of the elderly Spurinna who stays in good health by combining physical and mental exercise.

<sup>114</sup>On the textual reconstruction of *Ep. 15.9*, see above.

introduction to some of the central themes of *Ep. 16*.<sup>115</sup>

The main section is closed off when Seneca concludes that he has relieved Lucilius of pointless physical training. At no point in the letter was there any indication that exercise was a concern that was actually bothering Lucilius, or that he had written to Seneca about how to maintain his physical health. On the other hand, it does fit in with the overall purpose of the *Epistulae Morales* to provide insight and guidance into adopting a philosophical way of life. Also, both in *Ep. 14.1-2* and *15.1-2* the point has been made that care for the body is appropriate up to a certain point.<sup>116</sup> When someone knows that philosophers care more for the soul than for the body, what would a philosophical take on physical exercise and bodily health be like? What would be the appropriate thing to do and how would that differ from the instructions of other professionals? In that sense, Seneca does offer useful directions.

Next, he moves on to add something extra, a return to the habit in the early letters to end each letter with a gift or payment to Lucilius in the form of a wise saying.<sup>117</sup> Adding these little gifts reinforces the friendly exchange between Seneca and Lucilius and the continuation of the added bonus motif brings unity to these early letters. The closest parallel to what we find in this letter is *Ep. 6.7* where Seneca says he owes Lucilius his daily contribution, *diurnam tibi mercedulam debo*. Special mention is made of the fact that it is something Greek. This could be a subtle reminder that the discussed professions, athleticism and voice training, were Greek in origin. Also, it could create the impression that an exotic gift—look, something Greek!—is even more special. That it is added as a *beneficium* suggests not only that it is done as a favour to Lucilius but also that it is intended to be beneficial to him. After all, the gift consists in a piece of philosophical advice and philosophy should do someone good.

**Ecce insigne praeceptum: ‘stulta vita ingrata est, trepida; tota in futurum fertur’.** In presenting his gift Seneca describes that what we are looking at is a noted precept, so Seneca is not offering something cheap. Without further introduction the saying is given.<sup>118</sup> Although it was announced as something Greek, the saying itself has been translated into Latin. It describes ‘the foolish way of life’ in deprecatory terms as ungrateful and disturbed. This is further explained by claiming that it only considers the future.

**‘Quis hoc’ inquis ‘dicit?’ idem qui supra.**

First of all, the reader wants to know whose saying this is. Seneca’s allusive remark asks the reader to recall what was said before. It refers to Epicurus, though Seneca obscured matters in the previous letter as well by saying it could be from Epicurus,

<sup>115</sup>Cf. Hachmann (1995), 135, 139.

<sup>116</sup>Cf Hachmann (1995), 135.

<sup>117</sup>On the letters forming a collection and the role in the first letters of these customary ‘gifts of wisdom’, see Ch. 2, section 2.4.

<sup>118</sup>Seneca *Ep. 15.9* (Epicurus, fr. 491 Usener).

or Metrodorus, or anyone of that shop.<sup>119</sup> The previous letter offers another reason for suppressing the author's name: "But what difference does it make who spoke the words? They were uttered for the world".<sup>120</sup> Seneca makes this point several times, that words of wisdom are not the property of one particular person or school, but belong to all.<sup>121</sup> Despite its Epicurean background, this saying contains a useful insight that could benefit more people than just Epicureans.

**Quam tu nunc vitam dici existimas stultam? Babae et Isionis?**

Seneca proceeds to comment on the saying itself. First, he issues a warning that it should not be taken in a literal sense: we should not be fooled into thinking this deals with jokers and jesters. His example of Baba and Ision refers to two court fools of the period of whom we know little.<sup>122</sup>

**Non ita est: nostra dicitur, quos caeca cupiditas in nocitura, certe numquam satiatura praecipitat, quibus si quid satis esse posset, fuisset, qui non cogitamus quam iucundum sit nihil possere, quam magnificum sit plenum esse nec ex fortuna pendere.**

The contrast between licensed and inadvertent fools is explained more fully. The foolish way of life is our own. We are the real fools who live unwisely. Again we come across the word *stulta*, but now it refers to the archetypical fool who lives an unphilosophical, misguided kind of life and who is in every way the sage's opposite.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the fool's characteristic ingratititude, distress and concern over the future is diametrically opposed by the sage's gratitude, peace of mind and attention to the present. With hindsight, the label 'fool' in *Ep. 15.2* affirms more strongly the wrong lives of those who are active in extensive physical training.

Seneca's choice to apply the label of 'fool' on 'us' is not as strange as it might seem at first. To the Stoics everyone who was not a sage should strictly speaking be considered a fool.<sup>124</sup> The 'us' in this context refers to all people who have not yet attained the level of full wisdom. Studying philosophy does not turn someone into a sage straightaway and it is important for the reader to realise this. Only by acknowledging our shortcomings can we work on our moral progress. Moreover, the purpose of a philosophical precept is to improve and this means that it has to be applied to our own lives.

At this point, it may be instructive to compare this quotation of Epicurus with a passage from Seneca's *De Beneficiis* in which he discusses similar Epicurean views:

<sup>119</sup>Seneca *Ep. 14.17*: *Epicuri est aut Metrodori aut alicuius ex illa officina.*

<sup>120</sup>Seneca *Ep. 14.18*: *Et quid interest quis dixerit? omnibus dixit.*

<sup>121</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep. 8.8, 12.11, 16.7, 21.9, 33.1.*

<sup>122</sup>Baba is also named in Seneca *Apoc. 3.4* as a contemporary of emperor Claudius.

<sup>123</sup>On passages that refer to the fool in this sense, see e.g., Seneca *Ep. 9.14* (where such a distinction is attributed to Chrysippus), 10.2, 13.16.

<sup>124</sup>Cf. Roskam (2005), 68-70.

Here I must give Epicurus due acknowledgment. He is constantly complaining that we are ungrateful towards the past, that we never remember any blessing received or count it among our pleasures, although there is no surer pleasure than one which cannot be taken away. ... Future blessings hang before us uncertainly. Only what is past lies stored in safety. How can anyone be thankful for favours, if he has passed his life dedicated entirely to things present and future?<sup>125</sup>

What is of interest for us is that this passage from *De beneficiis* actually offers a more extensive and faithful picture of the Epicurean position.<sup>126</sup> By comparison, Seneca's elucidation here adapts a short Epicurean line to suit a Stoic context. What he retains from the Epicurean view is the portrayal of the fool as ungrateful for what lies in the past and his misplaced focus on future advantages. These ideas can be considered in agreement with Stoic thinking. But the Epicurean focus on pleasure is no longer emphasised: instead of past pleasures he will go on to speak of Lucilius' past achievements (*Ep.* 15.10), whereas future pleasure is described as blind desire.<sup>127</sup> By taking the quote out of context, the Epicurean lesson on the right conception of pleasure is supplanted by the Stoic advice to desire nothing, to be satisfied and not to depend on fortune. Moreover, in a Stoic context the reference to the fool implies a marked contrast to the sage, relating this discussion to the theme of moral progress to a state of virtue. Thus, the commentary itself is of a thoroughly Stoic character and reworks the Epicurean text to a considerable degree.

In his comment on Epicurus' saying and in the remainder of this letter Seneca brings up several philosophical tenets. Both Hachmann and Maurach point out that this is a summary of Stoic *decreta*, in unusual number and related to themes recurring in the surrounding letters. Whereas most letters include only one or two of such philo-

<sup>125</sup>Seneca *Ben.* 3.4.1-2: *Hoc loco reddendum est Epicuro testimonium, qui adsidue queritur, quod adversus praeterita simus ingrati, quod, quaecumque percipimus bona, non reducamus nec inter voluptates numeremus, cum certior nulla sit voluptas, quam quae iam eripi non potest. ... futura pendent et incerta sunt; quod praeterit, inter tuta sepositum est. Quomodo gratus esse quisquam adversus beneficia potest, qui omnem vitam suam transilit praesentium totus ac futurorum?*; tr. Cooper and Procopé (1995), 244. Seneca *Ben.* 3.4.1 (Epicurus, fr. 435 Usener). Cf. Horace *Epist.* 1.18.110; *Carm.* 1.11.8, 2.16.25.

<sup>126</sup>Cf. Epicurus *SV* 17 (LS 21F); Lucretius *DRN* 3.955-60.

<sup>127</sup>For the Epicurean attitude on the recollection of past and the prospect of future pleasures, cf. Cicero *Fin.* 5.95 (Epicurus, fr. 439 Usener; LS 21T); *Tusc.* 3.33 (Epicurus, fr. 444 Usener), 5.74, 5.88 (Epicurus, fr. 122 Usener); Diogenes Laertius 10.22 (Epicurus, fr. 138 Usener); cf. Seneca *Ep.* 66.47. In general, on the Epicurean doctrine of the intrinsic goodness of pleasure, see the collected evidence and discussion in Long and Sedley (1989), Ch. 21 'Pleasure', 112-25; e.g., Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 127-32 (Diogenes Laertius 10.127-32; LS 21B); Epicurus *KD* 18, 25, 30 (LS 21E); Lucretius *DRN* 2.1-61 (LS 21W).

sophical principles, in *Ep. 15* Maurach counts four of them and Hachmann five.<sup>128</sup> Maurach argues that because *Ep. 15* rounds off the group that is formed by *Ep. 12-15*, the large number of tenets can be explained as an effort to remind the reader of many of the points made in the previous letters as well as pave the way for the topics to come in *Ep. 16*.<sup>129</sup> Maurach and Hachmann even share the opinion that the importance of the final part in this case outweighs that of the main section.<sup>130</sup> In addition, Summers notes that the worry that goes with looking forward to the future was also the topic of the closing section of *Ep. 5*.<sup>131</sup>

Seneca's explanation of the foolish life takes note of our misguided desire to follow things that fail to satisfy and instead only hurt us. Obviously, such a course of life cannot lead to happiness. In opposition to this Seneca introduces a positive alternative that we still have to comprehend, to desire nothing (rather than want everything), to be satisfied (rather than crave for more), be independent (rather than rely on fortune). For instance, the following letter will introduce the important tenet to live in accordance with Nature (*Ep. 16.7*) and *Ep. 17* centres on poverty as a good starting point in the pursuit of philosophy. These blind desires direct our focus to the future and make us greedy for more when instead we should rely on ourselves and enjoy what we have achieved so far.<sup>132</sup> The exact same expression 'blind desires' returns in *Ep. 16.9*: "Recall your steps, therefore, from idle things, and when you would know whether that which you seek is based upon a natural or upon a blind desire, consider whether it can stop at any definite point".<sup>133</sup> Seneca's advice not to rely on fortune for one's happiness, *nec ex fortuna pendere*, is restated in a reversed form in *Ep. 98.1* where it is said that the only goods are those that depend on us, not we on them.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Maurach (1970), 71-72; Hachmann (1995), 136-37, 139. They count differently due to slight variations in emphasis. This can be explained from the fact that these tenets are closely knitted together.

<sup>129</sup> Maurach (1970), 72-73, where *Ep. 15* is called the 'Schlußstück' of the entire group of letter.

<sup>130</sup> Maurach (1970), 71-72; Hachmann (1995), 13, 136-37.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep. 5.7-9*; Summers (1910), 176.

<sup>132</sup> Similar points are made in Seneca *Ep. 12.8, 13.16*; cf. Maurach (1970), 71-72. The argument made here is repeated in Seneca *Ep. 73.2-3*. The Stoic definition of desire already stresses its connection with a future good, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.113 (IG II-94.113); Stobaeus 2.90 (IG II-95.10b).

<sup>133</sup> Seneca *Ep. 16.9*: *Retrahe ergo te a vanis, et cum voles scire quod petes, utrum naturalem habeat an caecam cupiditatem, considera num possit alicubi consistere.* Cf. Hachmann (1995), 141. Also, the 'definite point' reminds of the 'limit' (*finem*) in *Ep. 15.11*.

<sup>134</sup> Seneca *Ep. 98.1*: *sed ita si illa ex nobis pendent, non ex illis nos.* On this and other connections between *Ep. 15* and 98, see Hachmann (1995), 137.

(15.10)

**Subinde itaque, Lucili, quam multa sis consecutus recordare; cum aspexeris quod te antecedant, cogita quod sequuntur.**

Seneca now offers specific advice to counter this future-oriented way of thinking. Looking back to the past and remembering his own achievements helps Lucilius to be grateful and appreciate what is his. It is directed personally to Lucilius and this suggests that Seneca can think of specific accomplishments and specific progress.<sup>135</sup> In other letters Lucilius' ambition and achievements are discussed as well.<sup>136</sup>

**Si vis gratus esse adversus deos et adversus vitam tuam, cogita quam multos antecesseris.**

In addition, feeling gratitude will limit his desires for what others have attained.<sup>137</sup> The gratitude towards the gods, *adversus deos*, represents being satisfied with the overall course of the world, which in the Stoic view is a provident arrangement.<sup>138</sup> The word *cogita* here and also in the previous sentence mark these as mental exercises.

**Quid tibi cum ceteris? te ipse antecessisti.**

One can be grateful for one's achievements in comparison with others. However, it is even better not to compare at all. The real profit here does not consist in outdoing others but in one's personal development. Looking only to one's own progress marks an independent attitude, in keeping with the ideal of *autarkeia*.<sup>139</sup> This second step involves a radical new way of self-assessment. The Roman aristocratic obsession with considering each other's value and *gloria* in terms of public recognition is supplanted by self-scrutiny.<sup>140</sup> Rather than setting the attainments of one person against those of another, the only thing to measure is how limited one's own desires have become. Moral progress revolves around self-improvement.

(15.11)

**Finem constitue quem transire ne possis quidem si velis;**

Setting up limits is a good strategy in becoming more independent and living in the

<sup>135</sup>Cf. Hachmann (1995), 137; Maurach (1989), 71, points to *Ep.* 10 where Lucilius is already praised for his progress (10.3).

<sup>136</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 19.3, 22.4, 44.1.

<sup>137</sup>That feeling gratitude can limit further desires was a recurring topic, cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.25.3-5, 2.16.28; Seneca *Ben.* 2.27.4, 3.3.1-3; *Ira* 3.31.2; cf. Cooper and Procopé (1995), 244.

<sup>138</sup>On gratitude towards the gods, cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.25.3-5, 2.16.28, 4.5.35-36. By contrast, consider Seneca *Ben.* 4.4.19 (Epicurus, fr. 364 Usener), where Seneca questions Epicurus' gratitude towards the gods.

<sup>139</sup>Cf. Maurach (1970), 72.

<sup>140</sup>On Seneca's views of *gloria* and (moral) achievement, see Newman (2008) and Habinek (2000).

present.<sup>141</sup> Even if it could be possible to obtain or achieve things, one should not have the desire to chase after them for then one's focus would always be on future possibilities. These goals that always lie at the horizon prove themselves to be an endless torment. However, Seneca remains vague about the actual limits that need to be put up and this will only be explicated in the letters to come.<sup>142</sup>

**discedant aliquando ista insidiosa bona et sperantibus meliora quam assecutis. Si quid in illis esset solidi, aliquando et implerent: nunc haurientium sitim concitant.** The word combination *ista insidiosa bona* shows the conflict between the appearance of things as goods and their treacherous nature that Seneca wishes to reveal. The wrong desires and their inability to bring lasting satisfaction only lead to increased anxiety about how to acquire and increase them. This is a connection that in various ways features in three, consecutive, final sections, *Ep. 13.16-17, 14.17-18* and *15.9-11*.<sup>143</sup> Thus, we note another intertextual continuity between various letters. Further, the thirst that is roused portrays desires in physical imagery that connects it to the earlier theme of the body.

**Mittantur speciosi apparatus; et quod futuri temporis incerta sors volvit, quare potius a fortuna impetrem ut det, quam a me ne petam?**

It is time to let go of the 'fancy stuff'; the word combination *speciosi apparatus* denotes being inessential and suited for play and display rather than for actual use. His next point is phrased in a typical Senecan twist of perspective: rather put my hopes on fortune to deliver what I want, I should ask myself to stop wanting altogether. Seneca prefers to underline this variation with visually similar words, *quare ... impetrem* and *quam ... petam*.<sup>144</sup>

**Quare autem petam? oblitus fragilitatis humanae congeram? in quid laborem?**

Seneca pursues the notion of desire. The end of life cuts short all futile attempts at attaining more external goods that cannot stay with us.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, being reminded of the frailty of human life will encourage the reader to break through his dissatisfying and ill-fated pattern before it is too late. The foolish way of life is not worth the hard work people put into it.

**Ecce hic dies ultimus est; ut non sit, prope ab ultimo est. Vale.**

With *Ecce* Seneca draws attention to his final statement in exactly the same way as to the noted precept and this adds to the importance of what Seneca has to say here. The suggestion that this day might be the last, or at least close to the last resembles

<sup>141</sup>On finding the limits of one's desires, see *Ep. 16.9*.

<sup>142</sup>Cf. Hachmann (1995), 137.

<sup>143</sup>Cf. Hachmann (1995), 135.

<sup>144</sup>In this letter we may note *Ep. 15.6 non resolvatur, sed remittatur; 15.8 descendat, non decidat; 15.8 Non ... ut exerceatur vox, sed ut exerceat.* Cf. Summers (1910), 180, lxxxvi.

<sup>145</sup>For a similar thought on death freeing us from our earthly possessions, see *Ep. 98.11* (Hachmann (1995), 138).

the common philosophical idea that one should live each day as if it were the last.<sup>146</sup> A final epistolary aspect to note is the combination of form and content. *Finem* at the beginning of *Ep.* 15.11 was already marking the end of the letter and the actual closing words are *ultimo est*. The end.

## Conclusion

The body is a topic claimed by many professions. Whereas other philosophers such as Musonius Rufus and Epictetus focus exclusively on philosophical *askēsis*, Seneca contrasts his philosophical views on mental and physical health with those of other professions. At the outset he expresses the primacy of the mind over the body and in doing so he strengthens the claims of philosophy in contributing to health. Philosophy is most suited to care for the soul but philosophical advice pertains to one's physical health as well. Accordingly, he contests the health claims of such other disciplines as athleticism and vocal training. Moreover, a clear effort is made to combine a Roman aristocratic mentality with a philosophical attitude. This can be seen in a number of ways: firstly, in Seneca's philosophical variation on and reinterpretation of a traditionally Roman opening phrase; secondly, Seneca's concept of Nature and what is natural is connected to Roman as well as Stoic points of view; thirdly, in a shared disdain for certain (other) professions; and finally, in a shared emphasis on the need for independence.

The concept of Nature underlies many of Seneca's arguments. Living in accordance with Nature means to develop and conform to one's rationality—man's natural characteristic. Athletes are called fools, they are compared to animals (*Ep.* 15.2) and their way of life resembles that of a patient (*Ep.* 15.4). These comparisons underline how their excessive attention to the body at the cost of the mind deviates from a healthy human condition. By contrast, Seneca's own exercises are presented as simple and to the point, without draining the life-force and saving valuable time for intellectual study. In general, advanced physical training is objectionable and Seneca presents it as a contrived attempt to achieve an unnatural condition. What these trainers are recommending goes against old customs and what comes natural. At the end of the letter, it is man's natural condition, his frailty, that is appealed to in order to curb excessive desires.

In the critical attitude to other professions we also find many overlaps between the perspective of the Roman upper-class and that of the Stoic philosopher. Seneca accepts the usefulness of physical exercise for health purposes and the workout he prescribes exercises is quite conventional to Roman standards. It is worth noting that Seneca places the discussion of health in the context of health's maintenance rather

---

<sup>146</sup>On the little time left in life, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 12.

than its restoration.<sup>147</sup> This helps Seneca to circumvent the contribution of medicine and give pride of place to philosophy. Elsewhere he speaks quite positively about the contributions of medicine, but here the profession is entirely absent. Now Seneca can praise the beneficial influence of philosophy on human health, both of mind and body, in marked contrast to the professions of athleticism and vocal training that offer superfluous exercises, which are unhealthy, inconvenient, time-consuming and involve the company of vile instructors. How to spend one's time and keeping the right (moral) company are issues of concern to members of the Roman elite. Moreover, no decent Roman would want to be professionally engaged in sport or singing. Voice training was important in public speaking and thus in the lives of Roman gentlemen, yet it needed to be confined to useful purposes that required limited exercise (*Ep.* 15.8).

More specifically, Seneca's regimen does not require the presence of a teacher or trainer to observe and instruct. By taking orders from inferiors (*Ep.* 15.4, 15.7) and adhering slavishly to the rules of others one would showcase an unseemly submissive attitude. It is up to oneself to decide which exercises need to be done and in what order. Thus, he reinforces the elite notion of independence and the philosophical concept of *autarkeia*, arguing that a Roman member of the upper-class is sufficiently capable of tending to his own physical health in everyday life. It is not necessary to rely on self-acclaimed experts because it is not that complicated to understand what matters most about physical health nor is it difficult to achieve. This dependent attitude finds an echo in the later sections where the fool will rely for his happiness on fortune and on the fulfilment of his endless desires.

Besides the central themes of health and the pursuit of suitable activities there are certain keywords that appear several times and bring coherence to the letter and help to put things in a new perspective. *Stulta* forms a marked contrast to the right way of life and features both in Seneca's comment on athletic practices and in the Epicurean quotation. The saying by Epicurus is itself given a new meaning by being incorporated into a wider Stoic context. Also, the meaning of health, *valere* is redefined. It is brought into direct connection with the pursuit of philosophy (*Ep.* 15.1), should have the well-being of the soul as its primary focus (*Ep.* 15.2) rather than the body (*Ep.* 15.2-5) and the new meaning of health adds a special dimension to the customary goodbye *Vale* (*Ep.* 15.11).

Furthermore, we have indicated the letter's continuity in view of the fact that the philosophical advice in the final sections is just as much a part of Seneca's training. The need for training of the soul, expressed in *Ep.* 15.1, 15.2 and 15.5, is put to practice at the end where Lucilius is instructed on various mental exercises: look at the precept

<sup>147</sup>Cf. Ch. 5 on *Ep.* 78, where philosophy helps to regain (physical) health and where medicine also has a preventive side.

I give to you, call to mind past achievements, think of how many lagged behind, think of how many one has surpassed. The occurrence of *non cogitamus* and *cogita* not only offers a clear instruction but also demonstrates that philosophical exercise takes the mind as its focus of attention. The gradual transition from only physical exercise, followed by combination training that benefits both mind and body, to exercises for the soul, shows the letter's line of development.

Although this is the most extensive discussion of how to take care of one's physical health, the topic of health is also touched upon elsewhere. The point that physical health is not a good and the body should not be the focus of our attention is made frequently.<sup>148</sup> But the most obvious connection to the other letters is formed by the customary (Epicurean) precept and the philosophical tenets at the end (*Ep.* 15.9-11) as these discuss central aspects of Stoic thought. How this letter is situated in the wider letter-collection has been examined extensively by both Hachmann and Maurach. Not only is *Ep.* 15 closely connected to the immediately surrounding letters 14 and 16, the topics of moderate attention to the body, practical application of philosophical values and discussion of central Stoic themes are to be found in other letters such as *Ep.* 5, 8, 10, 55, 80, 83 and 98. All these letters converge to show that philosophy understands best what is right and natural, what contributes to good health and what needs to be done to live a healthy life.

In Seneca's view, physical exercise should not be glorified or be presented as a stimulating activity in its own right. His modest, amateur approach to physical training gives the impression of a task that needs to be dealt with on account of its usefulness in maintaining physical fitness: just a few simple exercises and then we can continue to focus on what really matters, philosophy.

<sup>148</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 76.12, 82.10-12, 92.11, 92.13, 94.8, 117.8.

## Chapter 5

# Letter 78: The troubles of ill health

### Text and translation

SENECA LUCILIO SUO SALUTEM,

(1) *Vexari te destillationibus crebris ac febriculis, quae longas destillationes et in consuetudinem adductas sequuntur, eo molestius mihi est quia expertus sum hoc genus valitudinis, quod inter initia contempti – poterat adhuc adulescentia iniurias ferre et se adversus morbos contumaciter gerere – deinde succubui et eo perductus sum ut ipse destillarem, ad summam maciem deductus.*

(2) *Saepe impetum cepi abrumpendae vitae: patris me indulgentissimi senectus retinuit. Cogitavi enim non quam fortiter ego mori possem, sed quam ille*

Seneca sends best wishes to his Lucilius.<sup>1</sup>

(1) That you are being troubled by persistent running colds and light fever attacks induced by extended and chronic running colds, bothers me all the more because I have experienced this sort of infirmity myself. In its initial stages I brushed it aside—my youth could still cope with such blows and behave obstinately in the face of disease. After that I succumbed to it and was brought to the point of just dripping empty until I was reduced to extreme thinness.

(2) Often I felt the impulse to end my life: but the old age of my most kindhearted father held me back. For I gave thought not to how I could die bravely, but to how he could not bravely bear the loss of me. Therefore I

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the basic text used is L. Annaei Senecae *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit L.D. Reynolds (Oxford Classical Texts), Vol. I. Oxford (1965). This translation is my own, but I have taken into account the translations by R. Gummere in the Loeb edition and C.D.N. Costa in Costa (1988), 44-55.

*fortiter desiderare non posset.  
Itaque imperavi mihi ut viverem;  
aliquando enim et vivere fortiter  
facere est.*

(3) *Quae mihi tunc fuerint solacio  
dicam, si prius hoc dixerim, haec ipsa  
quibus adquiescebam medicinae  
vim habuisse; in remedium cedunt  
honesta solacia, et quidquid  
animum erexit etiam corpori  
prodest. Studia mihi nostra saluti  
fuerunt; philosophiae acceptum  
fero quod surrexi, quod convalui;  
illi vitam debo et nihil illi minus  
debeo.*

(4) *Multum autem mihi con-  
tulerunt ad bonam valetudinem  
<et> amici, quorum adhorta-  
tionibus, vigiliis, sermonibus  
adlevabar. Nihil aequa, Lucili,  
virorum optime, aegrum reficit  
atque adiuvat quam amicorum  
adfectus, nihil aequa expectationem  
mortis ac metum subripit: non  
iudicabam me, cum illos super-  
stites relinquem, mori. Putabam,  
inquam, me victurum non cum  
illis, sed per illos; non effundere  
mihi spiritum videbar, sed tradere.  
Haec mihi dederunt voluntatem  
adiuvandi me et patiendi omne  
t tormentum; alioqui miserrimum  
est, cum animum moriendi  
proieceris, non habere vivendi.*

(5) *Ad haec ergo remedia te confer.  
Medicus tibi quantum ambules,  
quantum exercearis monstrabit;  
ne indulgeas otio, ad quod vergit  
iners valetudo; ut legas clarius et  
spiritum, cuius iter ac receptacu-*

ordered myself to live—because sometimes even living is a brave thing to do.

(3) I will tell you what things were my consolation at the time, but I should say in advance that these thoughts which calmed me down had the potency of medicine. Honourable consolations become a remedy; and whatever has uplifted the soul is also beneficial to the body. Our studies were my salvation. To philosophy I am indebted for getting back up and for regaining my health; I owe her my life and that is the least of my debts to her.

(4) Moreover, a considerable contribution to my well-being was made by my friends, by whose words of encouragement, their watching over me and our conversations together I was comforted. Nothing, Lucilius, you best of men, revives and helps a sick man so much as the compassion of his friends, nothing so snatches away the expectation and fear of death. I did not believe that, if I were to leave behind these men to outlive me, I would die. I mean, I thought that I was going to live on, not with them, but through them. I would not pour out my soul, or so I imagined, but entrust it to them. These thoughts gave me the will to help myself and endure all suffering; otherwise it is a most miserable condition, when you have given up the intention to die, but lack the will to live.

(5) So these are the remedies you should turn to. The doctor will prescribe you how much walking you need, how much exercise; that you should not indulge in inactivity, as the indolent patient is inclined to do; that you should read out loud in a clear voice

*lum laborat, exerceas; ut naviges et viscera molli iactatione concutias; quibus cibis utaris, vinum quando virium causa advokes, quando intermittas ne inritet et exasperet tussim. Ego tibi illud praecipio quod non tantum huius morbi sed totius vitae remedium est: contemne mortem. Nihil triste est cum huius metum effugimus.*

(6) *Tria haec in omni morbo gravia sunt: metus mortis, dolor corporis, intermissio voluptatum. De morte satis dictum est: hoc unum dicam, non morbi hunc esse sed naturae metum. Multorum mortem distulit morbus et saluti illis fuit videri perire. Morieris, non quia aegrotas, sed quia vivis. Ista te res et sanatum manet; cum convalueris, non mortem sed valetudinem effugeris.*

(7) *Ad illud nunc proprium incommodum revertamur: magnos cruciatus habet morbus, sed hos tolerabiles intervalla faciunt. Nam summi doloris intentio inventit finem; nemo potest valde dolere et diu; sic nos amantissima nostri natura disposuit ut dolorem aut tolerabilem aut brevem faceret.*

(8) *Maximi dolores consistunt in macerrimis corporis partibus: nervi articulique et quidquid aliud exile est acerrime saevit cum in arto vitia concepit. Sed cito hae*

and should exercise your breathing, since your airways and lung reservoir are troubled; that you should go sailing to stir the internal organs by the gentle rocking of the boat; what foods you should eat, when you should turn to wine to gain strength, when you should abstain from it so as not to irritate your cough and further provoke it. Now I have got this precept for you that is a remedy, not only for this disease, but for the whole of life: despise death. Nothing is sorrowful when we have escaped this fear.

(6) There are these three grave concerns about every illness: the fear of death, the bodily pain and the interruption of our pleasures. Enough has been said on death, but I will add one more thing, that this is not a fear of disease but a fear of nature. In many cases sickness has put off death and has brought those people health through the prospect of dying. You will die, not because you are ill, but because you are alive. This end awaits you even when your health has been restored: when you have recovered, it is not death but ill health that you have escaped.

(7) Let us now return to that characteristic discomfort: disease brings with it great torment, but intervals make these pains bearable. For an increase of the most extreme pain brings about its end, since no one can suffer pain both intense and long. Thus Nature, loving us most dearly, has so molded us as to make pain either bearable or brief.

(8) The sharpest pains fill the thinnest parts of the body. Tendons, joints and any other slender parts raise hell when injuries take place in their confined area. But soon these parts become numb and owing to the pain

*partes obstopescunt et ipso dolore sensum doloris amittunt, sive quia spiritus naturali prohibitus cursu et mutatus in peius vim suam qua viget admonetque nos perdit, sive quia corruptus humor, cum desit habere quo confluat, ipse se elidit et iis quae nimis implevit excutit sensum.*

(9) *Sic podagra et cheragra et omnis vertebrarum dolor nervorumque interquiescit cum illa quae torquebat hebetavit; omnium istorum prima verminatio vexat, impetus mora extinguitur et finis dolendi est optorpuisse. Dentium, oculorum, aurium dolor ob hoc ipsum acutissimus est quod inter angusta corporis nascitur, non minus, mehercule, quam capitis ipsius; sed si incitator est, in alienationem soporemque convertitur.*

(10) *Hoc itaque solacium vasti doloris est, quod necesse est desinas illum sentire si nimis senseris. Illud autem est quod inperitos in vexatione corporis male habet: non adsueverunt animo esse contenti; multum illis cum corpore fuit. Ideo vir magnus ac prudens animum diducit a corpore et multum cum meliore ac divina parte versatur, cum hac querula et fragili quantum necesse est.*

(11) *'Sed molestum est' inquit 'carere adsuetis voluptatibus, abstinere cibo, sitire, esurire.' Haec prima abstinentia gravia sunt, deinde cupiditas relanguescit ipsis*

itself they lose their pain perception, either because the vital force is blocked in its natural course and being thus impaired it loses its active power to alert us, or because a diseased humour, when it no longer has a place into which it may flow, discharges itself and those parts that have been overfilled are deprived of sensation.

(9) Thus gout of the feet and hands and all pain in the vertebrae and tendons ease off temporarily when it has numbed the parts which it has tortured. In all these cases an itching pain plagues one initially, the attack of which is quenched over time and there comes an end to the suffering with the loss of sensation. Pain in the teeth, eyes, and ears is really the sharpest because it springs up in the confined spaces of the body,—no less sharp, indeed, than in the head itself. But if it is exceptionally violent, it turns to delirium and stupor.

(10) So there is this consolation for great pain, that inevitably you cease to feel it if you feel it to excess. However, the reason why the inexperienced respond to their physical pain so badly is this: they have not accustomed themselves to be contented in spirit and have been very occupied with their body. That is why a great and sensible man separates his soul from the body and is mostly concerned with his better and divine part, but with this complaining and frail part only insofar as necessary.

(11) "But it is annoying", one says, "to be deprived of our usual pleasures, to abstain from food, to be thirsty and suffer hunger." These are hard to bear when one first abstains from them, but then the yearnings subside as

*per [se] quae cupimus fatigatis ac deficientibus; inde morosus est stomachus, inde cuius fuit aviditas cibi odium est. Desideria ipsa moriuntur; non est autem acerbum carere eo quod cupere desieris.*

(12) *Adice quod nullus non intermittitur dolor aut certe remittitur. Adice quod licet cavere venturum et obsistere inminenti remediis; nullus enim non signa praemittit, utique qui ex solito revertitur. Tolerabilis est morbi patientia, si contempseris id quod extremum minatur.*

(13) *Noli mala tua facere tibi ipse graviora et te querelis onerare: levis est dolor si nihil illi opinio adiecerit. Contra si exhortari te cooperis ac dicere 'nihil est aut certe exiguum est; duremus; iam desinet', levem illum, dum putas, facies. Omnia ex opinione suspensa sunt; non ambitio tantum ad illam respicit et luxuria et avaritia: ad opinionem dolemus.*

(14) *Tam miser est quisque quam credidit. Detrahendas praeteritorum dolorum conquestiones puto et illa verba: 'nulli umquam fuit peius. Quos cruciatus, quanta mala pertuli! Nemo me surrecturum putavit. Quotiens deploratus sum a meis, quotiens a medicis relictus! In eculeum inpositi non sic distrahuntur.' Etiam*

our appetitive parts themselves grow tired and fall short. Next, the stomach becomes irritable, and then the food that roused our appetite becomes unpalatable.<sup>2</sup> The desires themselves die away and there is nothing harsh in being cut off from that which you no longer desire.

(12) Add to this that no pain is without interruptions or in any case eases off. Add to this that one may guard against its onset and, when it is impending, oppose it by way of treatments. For every pain sends signals in advance, or at least the one that habitually recurs. It is bearable to put up with disease if you have come to despise its worst-case scenario.

(13) Do not make your ills more burdensome yourself and aggravate your situation by complaining. Pain is a light matter if opinion has added nothing to it. On the other hand, if you begin to encourage yourself by saying "It's nothing, or at least nothing important. Let's deal with it, soon it'll be over", while thinking it a light matter, you will make it so. Everything rests on opinion. Not merely ambition looks back on it, or luxury or greed: it is according to opinion that we suffer.

(14) A man is as wretched as he thinks he is. I say we should get rid of complaints about past sufferings and words like these: "No one was ever more unfortunate than me. What torment, what ills have I faced! Nobody thought I would recover. How often was I lamented by my loved ones and given up by the doctors! Those placed on the rack aren't torn to pieces as I was." Even if all that is true, it has passed now. What is the use of reliving

<sup>2</sup>Following Madvig, I adopt *cuius* instead of the MSS reading *quibus*. Cf. the Loeb edition, Gummere (1970), Vol. 2, 188.

*si sunt vera ista, transierunt: quid iuvat praeteritos dolores retractare et miserum esse quia fueris? Quid quod nemo non multum malis suis adicit et sibi ipse mentitur? Deinde quod acerbum fuit ferre, tulisse iucundum est: naturale est mali sui fine gaudere. Circumcidenda ergo duo sunt, et futuri timor et veteris incommodi memoria: hoc ad me iam non pertinet, illud nondum.*

(15) *In ipsis positus difficultatibus dicat,*

*forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.*

*Toto contra ille pugnet animo; vincetur si cesserit, vincet si se contra dolorem suum intenderit: nunc hoc plerique faciunt, adtrahunt in se ruinam cui obstandum est. Istud quod premit, quod inpendet, quod urguit, si subducere te coeporis, sequetur et gravius incumbet; si contra steteris et obniti volueris, repelletur.*

(16) *Athletae quantum plagarum ore, quantum toto corpore excipiunt! ferunt tamen omne tormentum gloriae cupiditate nec tantum quia pugnant ista patiuntur, sed ut pugnant: exercitatio ipsa tormentum est. Nos quoque evincamus omnia, quorum praemium non corona nec palma est nec tubicen praedicationi nominis nostri silentium faciens,*

past sufferings and being miserable just because you once were? What of the fact that there is no one who does not exaggerate his own ills and is misleading even to himself? Besides, what was harsh to bear, is pleasant to have borne: it is natural to find joy in the cessation of one's ills. Consequently, what has to be cut out are two mental states: the fear of future discomforts and the memory of past ones: the second does not concern me any longer, the first not yet.

(15) When placed in the midst of crisis one should say:

Someday, perhaps, the memory of even these things will bring delight.<sup>3</sup>

Such a man should fight against this with full spirit. He will be overcome if he gives way to it, but he prevails if he tries hard against his pain. Now this is what most people do, they draw toward themselves the downfall which they ought to be withstanding. Once you begin to back down, that which presses hard upon you, weighs on you and urges you, will follow and rush more violently towards you. But if you stand firm and are willing to struggle against it, it will be forced back.

(16) How many punches to the face do athletes receive and all over their bodies! And yet they take on every kind of torment in their desire for glory and they submit to those things not merely because they are fighting, but so they may fight: their training itself is a torment. Let us too win victory over all challenges: our reward is not a garland or palm branch or a trumpeter calling for silence at the announcement of our names, but virtue and steadfastness of soul and lasting peace

<sup>3</sup>Virgil *Aen.* 1.203.

*sed virtus et firmitas animi et pax  
in ceterum parta, si semel in aliquo  
certamine debellata fortuna est.*

(17) 'Dolorem gravem sentio.' Quid ergo? non sentis si illum muliebriter tuleris? Quemadmodum perniciosior est hostis fugientibus, sic omne fortuitum incommodum magis instat cedenti et averso. 'Sed grave est.' Quid? nos ad hoc fortes sumus, ut levia portemus? Utrum vis longum esse morbum an concitatum et brevem? Si longus est, habet intercedinem, dat refectioni locum, multum temporis donat, necesse est, ut exurgit, et desinat: brevis morbus ac praecipit alterutrum faciet, aut extinguetur aut extinguet. Quid autem interest, non sit an non sim? in utroque finis dolendi est.

(18) Illud quoque proderit, ad alias cogitationes avertere animum et a dolore discedere. Cogita quid honeste, quid fortiter feceris; bonas partes tecum ipse tracta; memoriam in ea quae maxime miratus es sparge; tunc tibi fortissimus quisque et victor doloris occurrat: ille qui dum varices exsecandas praebaret legere librum perseveravit, ille qui non desit ridere cum hoc ipsum irati tortores omnia instrumenta crudelitatis sua experirentur. Non vincetur dolor ratione, qui victus est risu?

acquired for the future, if ever the struggle with fortune should be ended firmly.

(17) "I feel a terrible pain." So what? You do not feel it when you take it like a woman? Just as the enemy is more destructive to a retreating army, so every discomfort that fortune brings harasses us more if we yield and are put to flight. "But it is serious." What? Is that why we are strong, so we may carry light burdens? Would you prefer an illness to be long-lasting or intense and brief? If it is long, it has intermissions, it enables a respite, affords us with plenty of time; as it gains strength, so it must also subside.<sup>4</sup> A short and sudden illness will cause one of two things, either it shall be put to an end or it shall put an end to us. What does it really matter, whether it is not or I am not? Either way the suffering ends.

(18) This will be beneficial as well: to turn the mind away to other thoughts and distance yourself from the pain. Think of what honourable and brave deeds you have done; recount the good roles in which you yourself starred; peruse in your memory those things that you have admired most, then let every truly brave man and conqueror of pain occur to you: the man who kept on reading a book while he allowed his varicose veins to be cut out; the man who did not stop laughing when this very attitude so enraged his torturers that they tested on him every instrument of their cruelty. Will pain not be conquered by reason if it has been conquered by laughter?

<sup>4</sup>Following Haase, I adopt *exurgit* instead of the MSS reading *ex(s)urgat*. Cf. the Loeb edition, Gummere (1970), Vol. 2, 192.

(19) *Quidquid vis nunc licet dicas, destillationes et vim continuae tussis egerentem viscerum partes et febrem praecordia ipsa torrentem et sitim et artus in diversum articulis exeuntibus tortos: plus est flamma et eculeus et lamina et vulneribus ipsis intumescentibus quod illa renovaret et altius urgueret impressum. Inter haec tamen aliquis non gemuit. Parum est: non rogavit. Parum est: non respondit. Parum est: risit et quidem ex animo. Vis tu post hoc dolorem deridere?*

(20) *'Sed nihil' inquit 'agere sinit morbus, qui me omnibus abduxit officiis.' Corpus tuum valetudo tenet, non et animum. Itaque cursoris moratur pedes, sutoris aut fabri manus impedit: si animus tibi esse in usu solet, suadebis docebis, audies disces, quaeres recordaberis. Quid porro? nihil agere te credis si temperans aeger sis? ostendes morbum posse superari vel certe sustineri.*

(21) *Est, mihi crede, virtuti etiam in lectulo locus. Non tantum arma et acies dant argumenta alacris animi indomitique terroribus: et in vestimentis vir fortis appetet. Habis quod agas: bene luctare cum morbo. Si nihil te coegerit, si nihil exoraverit, insigne prodis exemplum. O quam magna erat gloriae materia, si spectaremur*

(19) You may mention now whatever you want, persistent running colds, chronic coughing so hard it brings up bits of one's insides, fever scorching the very entrails, thirst and limbs so twisted that the joints protrude in different directions. Even worse is a blazing fire, the rack, the red-hot plates and the instrument that reopens already swollen wounds and presses the imprint still deeper. Still, some men have not let out a groan amid these torments. That is saying too little! He has not begged yet. That is saying too little! He has not answered yet. That is saying too little! He has laughed and wholeheartedly too. Surely you will have the intention, after such an example, to laugh at pain?

(20) "But my illness", one says, "does not permit me to do anything, it has kept me away from all my duties." Ill health holds back your body, not your mind as well. In this manner it slows down the runner's feet, it hampers the cobbler's and workman's hands: but if your mind is accustomed to be put to use regularly, you will advise and teach, listen and learn, examine and think things over. What then? Do you believe you are doing nothing if you exercise self-control in your illness? You will demonstrate that illness can be overcome or at least be endured.

(21) Believe me, there is room for virtue even on our sickbed. Not only arms and battle offer proof of a keen spirit that is unflinching in the face of terrors: even wrapped in bedclothes a man can reveal his bravery. This is what you have to do: wrestle bravely with your illness. If it will have forced you to nothing, if it will have induced you to nothing, you are setting a notable example. O what a great occasion would there be for glory, if we could be

*aegri! ipse te specta, ipse te lauda.*

(22) *Praeterea duo genera sunt voluptatum. Corporales morbus inhibet, non tamen tollit; immo, si verum aestimes, incitat. Magis iuvat bibere sitientem, gravior est esurienti cibus; quidquid ex abstinentia contingit avidius excipitur. Illas vero animi voluptates, quae maiores certioresque sunt, nemo medicus aegro negat. Has quisquis sequitur et bene intellegit omnia sensuum blandimenta contemnit.*

(23) 'O infelicem aegrum!' Quare? quia non vino nivem diluit? quia non rigorem potionis sua, quam capaci scypho miscuit, renovat fracta insuper glacie? quia non ostrea illi Lucrina in ipsa mensa aperiuntur? quia non circa cenationem eius tumultus cocorum est ipsos cum opsoniis focos transferentium? Hoc enim iam luxuria commenta est: ne quis intepescat cibus, ne quid palato iam calloso parum ferveat, cenam culina prosequitur.

(24) 'O infelicem aegrum!' Edet quantum concoquat; non iacebit in conspectu aper ut vilis caro a mensa relegatus, nec in repositorio eius pectora avium (totas enim videre fastidium est) congesta ponentur. Quid tibi mali factum est? cenabis tamquam aeger, immo aliquando tamquam sanus.

(25) Sed omnia ista facile perfere-

watched in our sickness! Be your own spectator, greet yourself with applause.

(22) Moreover, there are two kinds of pleasure. Disease interferes with the pleasures of the body, but it does not really get rid of them; in fact, if you actually consider this, it arouses them. A thirsty man takes more pleasure in drinking, food is more pleasing when hungry; whatever comes your way after a period of abstinence you will take in more eagerly. Certainly those pleasures of the soul, which are higher and of greater certainty, no doctor can refuse to the sick man. Whoever follows these and comes to know them well scoffs at the charms of the senses.

(23) "O you poor sick man!" Why? Because he cannot mix snow with his wine? Because he cannot revive the chill of his drink, which is mixed in a sizable drinking cup, by crushing ice on top? Because for him Lucrine oysters are not opened fresh at his table? Because there is no commotion of cooks all over his dining-room who are moving in the side dishes along with the stoves? For this is what luxury has devised by now: in order to keep any food from becoming lukewarm and not be boiling hot enough for an already hard-skinned palate, the kitchen now accompanies the dinner.

(24) "O you poor sick man!" He will eat as much as he can digest. There will not be a boar on display, banished from the table as if it were cheap meat, nor will bird's breasts be piled up on his tray (for to look at the whole birds arouses disgust). What evil has befallen you? You will dine like a sick man, no indeed, finally like a healthy man.

(25) But all these things we can easily put

*mus, sorbitonem, aquam calidam, et quidquid aliud intolerabile videtur delicatis et luxu fluentibus magisque animo quam corpore morbidis: tantum mortem desinamus horrere. Desinemus autem, si fines bonorum ac malorum cognoverimus; ita demum nec vita taedio erit nec mors timori.*

(26) *Vitam enim occupare satietas sui non potest tot res varias, magnas, divinas percensem: in odium illam sui adducere solet iners otium. Rerum naturam peragranti numquam in fastidium veritas veniet: falsa satiabunt.*

(27) *Rursus si mors accedit et vocat, licet immatura sit, licet medium praecidat aetatem, perceptus longissimae fructus est. Cognita est illi ex magna parte natura; scit tempore honesta non crescere: iis necesse est videri omnem vitam brevem qui illam voluptatibus vanis et ideo infinitis metiuntur.*

(28) *His te cogitationibus recrea et interim epistulis nostris vaca. Veniet aliquando tempus quod nos iterum iungat ac misceat; quantulumlibet sit illud, longum faciet scientia utendi. Nam, ut Posidonius ait, 'unus dies hominum eruditorum plus patet quam imperitis longissima aetas'.*

(29) *Interim hoc tene, hoc morde: adversis non succumbere, laetis non credere, omnem fortunae licentiam in oculis habere, tamquam quidquid potest facere factura sit.*

up with—broth, warm water, or anything else that seems intolerable to self-indulgent people who are immersed in luxury and are diseased more in their minds than in their bodies—as long as we stop to be terrified of death. And we shall stop, if we have come to understand the ends of good and bad things; only then will life not be a nuisance and death not a cause for fear.

(26) For feeling fed up with itself cannot take hold of a life that explores all things in their variety, greatness and divine nature: only idle leisure is wont to induce hatred of life. For the person who wanders through the natural phenomena, truth will never bring on loathing: fake things will make him grow weary.

(27) On the other hand, if death approaches and summons him, although it may be untimely and though it may cut short a man's life in his prime, that man has felt the reward of even the longest life. Such a man has in large part come to know nature; he knows that honourable things do not grow bigger over time. But any life must seem short to those who measure it by pleasures that are empty and therefore endless.

(28) Let these thoughts give you new energy and meanwhile spare some time for our letters. The time will come when we shall be united again and in each other's company; and no matter what little time there will be, the knowledge of using it well will make it long-lasting. For, as Posidonius says, "To enlightened men a single day extends far beyond the longest lifetime for the ignorant".

(29) Meanwhile, hold this thought and cling to it: do not give in to adversity, do not trust prosperity, have before your eyes all of fortune's unbounded license, as if she will do whatever she is capable of doing. Anything

*Quidquid expectatum est diu,  
levius accedit. Vale.*

that has been expected for a long time is more easy when it actually comes near. Farewell.

## Introduction

Disease has a profound impact on a person's life. It affects someone not just physically, but also emotionally and even socially. It takes time to adjust to such changes and a person will need to learn how to cope with the demands of the illness as well as with its treatment. A sick person will be limited in his activities and mobility and this can have a negative effect on his self-image and the way he relates to others.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a doctor is likely to prescribe a regimen that imposes strict dietary rules, regular exercise and medication. In *Ep. 78* Seneca addresses these concerns, arguing that those persons who are willing to learn, seek support from others, and actively care for themselves will do well in life.

*Ep. 78* is included in the commentaries by Charles Costa and by Walter Summers. Both provide a brief introduction to the letter followed by a collection of notes to individual words and phrases.<sup>6</sup> In this commentary I will frequently refer to their pertinent observations. These are, however, not intended to supply the reader with a thorough discussion of the letter and that is what I hope to offer here. Besides acquiring an insight into the letter itself, another important issue is how *Ep. 78* should be read in relation to the other letters in the collection. For instance, Costa points out that a considerable thematic overlap can be found with letters 24 (in which Lucilius is also offered consolation) and 54 (describing another of Seneca's illnesses, asthma). Gregor Maurach too concludes that *Ep. 78* was not written in isolation from the surrounding letters and points to the close connection in style and content with the preceding *Ep. 77*.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Hildegard Cancik attempts to show that *Ep. 78* is a good representative of the paraenetic method that Seneca employs in many letters.<sup>8</sup>

Let us consider briefly another issue that is relevant to this letter. Catherine Edwards makes the helpful point that Seneca is particularly concerned about turning pain into something that has meaning and can be of use. She suggests that "a case can be made for linking this with the part played by pain, and in particular the part played by pain as spectacle, in Roman culture".<sup>9</sup> Edwards goes on to show at length

<sup>5</sup>On the devaluation of self associated with disease and illness, see e.g. Vlahogiannis (2005), 180-81.

<sup>6</sup>Costa (1988), 177-82; Summers (1910), 261-70.

<sup>7</sup>Maurach (1970), 165-67.

<sup>8</sup>Cancik (1967), 31-35.

<sup>9</sup>Edwards (1999), 254.

how one has to conclude that if the ability to endure pain is closely associated with masculinity and courage, then there should also be the possibility to display one's suffering, for the audience grants publicly acknowledged success, support and admiration. Thus, she is quite right that we cannot see Seneca's explicit descriptions of suffering as merely cheap rhetorical tricks nor can we see his attention to his own physical condition as just an indication of hypochondria.<sup>10</sup>

The most extensive treatment of *Ep. 78* has been provided by Piet Schrijvers. In his detailed analysis of this letter, Schrijvers draws some important conclusions. Firstly, he examines the letter's structure and notes Seneca's considerate tone towards Lucilius and his use of *insinuatio* rather than straightforward criticism. The Stoic position that illness is neither good nor bad but an *adiaphoron*, an indifferent thing that should not affect us, is initially presented with caution so as not to upset the reader.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the diseases and symptoms under discussion in the introductory part (fever, colds, cough) differ from those in the later sections of the letter. Especially gout plays an increasingly important role even though it is not ascribed to Lucilius. I am not convinced by Schrijvers' suggestion that Lucilius may have suffered from this condition but wanted to hide it. Furthermore, gout also features in other discussions of pain.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly, he makes a cogent argument that the thesis put forward in *Ep. 78.7-9* that long-lasting pains are bearable on account of intervals is not of Epicurean origin. In fact, both Seneca's explanation on intervals, which is framed in medical formulations, and the Epicurean tenet that pain is either brief or bearable (*si gravis, brevis, si longus, levis*) can be traced back to the Hippocratic tradition.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Schrijvers shows how *Ep. 78* in many ways interacts with an earlier discussion of the endurance of pain, the second book of Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Charles Costa mentions that Panaetius also devoted a letter to the topic of how to deal with pain.<sup>15</sup> It certainly was not uncharted territory but rather a popular and well-known philosophical subject.

All in all, I believe that more can be said on the epistolary features and the structure of the letter, especially on the function and connection of the different parts. I will say much more on this in the commentary itself and the conclusion. Moreover, the detailed analysis of Piet Schrijvers covers *Ep. 78.1-21* extensively, but disregards the final sections of the letter. These later sections are often overlooked and have not been commented upon at length. In my opinion it is necessary to examine all parts and an

<sup>10</sup>Edwards (1999), 252-53, 264.

<sup>11</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 374-79. Cf. Seneca *Ep. 82.10*; Cicero *Fin. 3.50*.

<sup>12</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 379-81.

<sup>13</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 382-90.

<sup>14</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 390-94. That Seneca's *Ep. 78* has much in common with the second book of Cicero's *Tusculanae* was already noted in Summers (1910), 261.

<sup>15</sup>Costa (1988), 177; reference to this Panaetian letter is found in Cicero *Fin. 4.23*.

analysis of the letter in its entirety will teach us more about its overall purpose. One consideration regarding this letter that has been given less attention than it deserves is the positioning and characterisation of philosophy and the role of other identities. We have spoken in the introductory chapters about the importance of identity and writing to Seneca and this will be a central focus in this chapter as well.

## Commentary

**Seneca Lucilio suo salutem.**

This is the standard opening phrase that is used in all of Seneca's letters.<sup>16</sup>

(78.1)

**Vexari te destillationibus crebris ac febriculis, quae longas destillationes et in consuetudinem adductas sequuntur,**

The first word of this letter, *vexari*, sets the tone. Lucilius is feeling sick and this weighs him down. Instead of a medically oriented study of how to avoid or treat physical pain, the topic at hand is rather how to cope with it. Although Lucilius' health problems give rise to the discussion of the impact and significance of pain and disease, his individual circumstances are hardly considered. Only the first sentence informs the reader about his symptoms, catarrh and short fevers, and that these are a matter of concern to Lucilius. The letter does not return to the topic of Lucilius' condition, nor do any of the following letters mention either his recovery or a continuation of his ill health. In fact, in the following letter Seneca requests Lucilius to go out on a field trip to investigate some of the natural wonders of Sicily. This would imply that his health allows for such a journey, or perhaps just that the outcome of Lucilius' ailments is not of sufficient interest to be mentioned any further.<sup>17</sup>

**eo molestius mihi est quia expertus sum hoc genus valetudinis,**

Seneca expresses concern for Lucilius' well-being with *eo molestius mihi est*, as is customary for (philosophical) friends who share their pleasure and, in this case, their pain.<sup>18</sup> But at the same time, he takes over the subject by pointing out his own familiarity with that type of ill health. He appeals to his expertise on the matter: he really knows what it is like to be sick. His personal experience with disease lends force to his empathy and gives him authority on the topic.

<sup>16</sup>See the discussion in Ch. 2, section 2.3, 70.

<sup>17</sup>On the image of Lucilius in this letter, see Schrijvers (1990), 378-79, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 103.1. On the irrelevance of Lucilius' recovery see the comment in Henderson (2006), 135.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.23, 7.124 (SVF 3.631; LS 67P); Seneca *Ep.* 3.1-3, 6.2-3, 9.8, 35.2, 48.2-3, 95.63, 109.15. The affinity between friends is connected to the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*, as is explained in detail in Algra (2003).

**quod inter initia contempsi – poterat adhuc adulescentia iniurias ferre et se adversus morbos contumaciter gerere – deinde succubui et eo perductus sum ut ipse destillarem, ad summam maciem deductus.**

Although Seneca has expressed his sympathy with Lucilius, it can be questioned to what extent Lucilius' complaints are taken seriously. As Schrijvers observes, not only is Lucilius quickly replaced as the central focus of the letter, Seneca's own suffering lasted for a longer period and was much more severe.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it can be said that Seneca uses his own example as a means of helping Lucilius bear his disease. The fact that he writes on the topic of disease in this letter makes it clear that it is taken seriously.

Seneca's initial contempt of his disease failed to overcome it and the disease consumed him.<sup>20</sup> In this first section we find three cognate verbs, *adductas*, *perductus*, *deductus*, that give a continuous sense of movement from being led towards illness, through it and then brought down by it. The seriousness of the ailments are going from bad to worse: what started off with a sniffle ends with a near-death experience.<sup>21</sup>

(78.2)

**Saepe impetum cepi abrumpendae vitae:**

The term *impetus* can be used as a Stoic philosophical term corresponding to the Greek *hormē*.<sup>22</sup> An *impetus* is a motivating force in the soul, a 'conation' that leads the agent to a particular action. Seneca repeatedly felt the urge to end his life, but there was still room for reflection on the desirability to act on this impulse. This desire to end his life resembles the similar case of Tullius Marcellinus who, during a long and bothersome

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 1.6.28-36 where having a running nose is seen as trivial next to the challenges faced by Heracles. See also Schrijvers (1990), 378.

<sup>20</sup>Seneca mentions his own poor health in other letters as well, primarily in *Ep.* 54.1-3, 54.6 (on his respiratory problems), briefly at *Ep.* 61.1, 65.1-2, 67.2 and 104.1. Catherine Edwards notes that Seneca uses his ill health in *Ep.* 54 as an opportunity to rehearse death, Edwards (1999), 261-62. *Destillatio* or catarrh is described in several letters: in *Ep.* 120.16 it figures among the physical ailments that trouble men; in *Ep.* 75.12 an incidental occurrence of catarrh is said to produce a cough that becomes consumption when it turns into a chronic condition. Cf. Griffin (1976), 41; Costa (1988), 177-78.

<sup>21</sup>Catherine Edwards notes that the verb *destillare* is also used by Seneca in *Ep.* 24.5 when Mucius puts his hand in the enemy's fire and watches the flesh drop from his bones, Edwards (2007), 106.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. e.g., Stobaeus 2.86-88 (SVF 3.169, 3.171; LS 33I, 53Q; IG II-95.9-10); Cicero *ND* 2.58 (SVF 1.172; LS 53Y; IG II-23.58); *Fat.* 40-42 (SVF 2.499, 2.974; LS 62C; IG II-90.40-42); *Off.* 1.132 (LS 53J); Seneca *Ep.* 16.6, 24.24, 71.32, 89.15; Inwood (1985), 47-53. It is common to translate *hormē* with 'impulse', though Richard Sorabji correctly points out that there may be nothing impulsive about it, see Sorabji (2000), 42.

illness, starts to consider suicide.<sup>23</sup> He is assisted by a befriended Stoic during these last days. Seneca, however, decides not to act upon his initial impulse for reasons he discusses next. Although suicide may be a valid option to choose under certain circumstances, Seneca will argue that in his own case living was the right choice. The fact that he considers suicide should not be taken as a sign of weakness. Because a true Stoic is only concerned with what is morally good or bad and being alive is not morally good per se, he is justified in contemplating the best course of action: living or dying.

Instead of following this impulse blindly, Seneca is trying to establish the appropriate thing to do, his 'proper function' or *kathēkon*.<sup>24</sup> A Stoic may commit suicide in the light of virtue, in which case it is described as 'sensible removal', *eulogos exagôgê*.<sup>25</sup> In this case, it is the moral well-being of Seneca's father that is at stake. Hence, it depends entirely on the nature of a person and his circumstances whether it is an appropriate action to remain in or depart from life, a view also found in Cicero:

When a man has a preponderance of the things in accordance with nature, it is his proper function to remain alive; when he has or foresees a preponderance of their opposites, it is his proper function to depart from life.<sup>26</sup>

#### **patris me indulgentissimi senectus retinuit.**

In view of Seneca's particular circumstances at that time, it was not appropriate to end his life. He had the filial duty to stay alive. Thus, it was for the sake of his father that Seneca did not follow up on his impulse to die. Respect for elders and family, and for others in general, *pietas*, was widely perceived as an honourable motivation.<sup>27</sup> His father seemed to have had a considerable influence on Seneca, which also shows

---

<sup>23</sup>The anecdote of Tullius Marcellinus (*Ep.* 77.5-9) begins when Marcellinus starts to think about his own death, *coepit deliberare de morte* (*Ep.* 77.5).

<sup>24</sup>On the Stoic notion of *kathēkon*, Latin *officium*, see the collected evidence in SVF 3.491-99 and in LS 59, 66, e.g., Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1069E (SVF 3.491; LS 59A); Stobaeus 2.85-86 (SVF 3.494; LS 59B); Diogenes Laertius 7.107-109 (SVF 3.493, 3.495-96; LS 59C, 59E); Cicero *Fin.* 3.17, 20-22 (SVF 3.497-98; LS 59D); also see Inwood (1985), 84-85, 200-201; Rist (1969) Ch. 6.

<sup>25</sup>On the Stoic view of *eulogos exagôgê* as a *kathēkon*, cf. SVF 3.757-68; e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.130 (SVF 3.757, IG II-94.130); Stobaeus 2.110 (SVF 3.758, IG II-95.11m).

<sup>26</sup>Cicero *Fin.* 3.60 (SVF 3.763; LS 66G): *in quo enim plura sunt quae secundum naturam sunt, huius officium est in vita manere; in quo autem aut sunt plura contraria aut fore videntur, huius officium est de vita excedere*, tr. Long and Sedley (1989), 425. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.130, in which severe pain and incurable disease are listed as good reasons for the sage to commit suicide; Seneca *Ep.* 65.22. On the calculation whether it is worth remaining alive, cf. Edwards (2007), 98-100.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. *Ep.* 120.2 where taking dutiful care of an old father is taken as an example of what is widely considered to be right conduct.

from the personal anecdote in *Ep.* 108.22 where Seneca gives up on his vegetarian diet at his father's request.

It is out of consideration for someone else—his dear old father—that Seneca does not end his life. He mentions in other contexts as well that it is worth staying alive as long as one's life can still contribute to others.<sup>28</sup> In *Ep.* 70 Seneca uses the example of Socrates' death to demonstrate the concern for others involved in Socrates' decision to await his sentence in prison. Socrates stayed alive, not because he hoped to be rescued or to be exempted from his death penalty, "but in order that he might show himself submissive to the laws and make the last moments of Socrates an edification to his friends".<sup>29</sup> Even though he was close to death, his life was still of value to others and thus worthwhile. In the end, this outweighs his personal suffering.

**Cogitavi enim non quam fortiter ego mori possem, sed quam ille fortiter desiderare non posset.**

Seneca goes into further detail about his considerations. *Cogitavi* shows that the thinking process involved is of great importance: Seneca reflects on the situation and deliberates what the best course of action would be. Here he puts to practice the advice given in *Ep.* 24 that the impulse to end one's life should not be followed upon rashly: "even when reason advises us to make an end of it, the impulse is not to be adopted without reflection or at headlong speed".<sup>30</sup> Although there may be valid reasons to commit suicide, it is wrong to take only oneself into consideration.

His own situation here demonstrates that selecting death is not always the right option. In the previous letter Seneca had expanded on the view that death is often a commendable choice and that life is not worth living under all circumstances. In this letter, however, this point is slightly modified. Instead of emphasising the need and advantages of choosing death, remaining alive can be an appropriate action too. In fact, it can be a brave thing to do.<sup>31</sup> Whereas in *Ep.* 77 choosing to die is portrayed as a brave thing, the repeated references here to bravery, *fortiter*, indicate that Seneca is sensitive about offering a more balanced view but also about his self-presentation. He wishes to avoid the impression that putting off his suicide plans was an act of weakness: after all, only a coward clings to life.<sup>32</sup> That is why Seneca stresses that his decision was both brave and considerate. He would have been brave enough to die,

<sup>28</sup> See Seneca *Ep.* 98.15-16, 104.3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 70.9: *sed ut praeberet se legibus, ut fruendum amicis extremum Socraten daret.*

<sup>30</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 24.24: *Etiam cum ratio suadet finire se, non temere nec cum procursu capiendus est impetus;* tr. Loeb edition.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Edwards (2007), 106. Notably, Cicero in different places emphasises the importance of fortitude: he holds that philosophy favours the brave and helps to bring out that quality in men, Cicero *Tusc.* 2.11; that bravery cannot be combined with lamenting over one's pain, Cicero *Tusc.* 2.32-33; and that distress is incompatible with fortitude, Cicero *Tusc.* 3.14.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 4.5, 70.4-5, 77.15, 77.20.

of course! But because his father could not bravely bear the loss of his son, Seneca was being unselfish in choosing to live on.

**Itaque imperavi mihi ut viverem;**

When Seneca commands himself to live, he is clearly back in control. This forms a turning point in his narrative: from hereon Seneca only speaks of his recovery and what helped him to get better. Apparently, once he decided to keep on living the worst part of his illness was over. This also contrasts the increasing physical deterioration with his growing mental attitude—his low spirits are turned into confidence and strength of will.

**aliquando enim et vivere fortiter facere est.**

The conclusion that under certain circumstances even living can be a brave thing should be taken as a direct comment on *Ep. 77* and related discussions on the proper circumstances for ending one’s life. *Ep. 77* concentrated on dying as the final duty of man and the importance of pursuing an honourable life rather than longevity. Dying bravely is a recurrent motif in that letter:

Often, however, one must leave off bravely, and our reasons therefore need not be momentous ... (*Ep. 77.4*)

... it is important to die honourably, sensibly, bravely. (*Ep. 77.6*)

You would die more bravely, I suppose, in the company of many thousands ... (*Ep. 77.13*)

Why therefore are you distressed, when even a boy can die so bravely? (*Ep. 77.15*).<sup>33</sup>

Against all these cases of brave deaths Seneca places himself as an example that life is not by itself the easier option and that choosing life over death can be just as well an act of courage. In the end, what adds value to such an action is the reason for living or dying. Virtue is the principle by which our actions may be judged—virtue is what makes a life or a death honourable.<sup>34</sup> Here, the moral condition of Seneca’s father was at stake. Seneca demonstrates by remaining alive that even an ailing patient like himself can show courage, and can even be of service to his father in this respect.

(78.3)

**Quae mihi tunc fuerint solacio dicam, si prius hoc dixero, haec ipsa quibus adquiscebam medicinae vim habuisse**

<sup>33</sup>Seneca *Ep. 77.4*: *Saepe autem et fortiter desinendum est et non ex maximis causis; Ep. 77.6: magnum est honeste mori, prudenter, fortiter; Ep. 77.13: Fortior, ut opinor, esses, si multa milia tibi commorerentur; Ep. 77.15: Quid ergo est cur perturberis, si mori fortiter etiam puerile est?* On the relation between *Ep. 77* and 78, see Maurach (1970), 165–67.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Stobaeus 2.110 (SVF 3.758, IG II-95.11m); Seneca *Ep. 67.4, 71.5*.

Seneca will now share with his readership what helped him get through his suffering. It follows from his phrasing that these things have already proven their merit in the case of Seneca himself. That which brought him comfort has the force of medicine, *medicinae vim*, and this shows that Seneca is deliberately drawing a comparison between his recommendations and the medical cure prescribed by doctors. Just as a doctor cares for and cures the patient's body, so too the philosopher looks after the health and well-being of the patient's soul.<sup>35</sup> This medical analogy has a long tradition in philosophy:

There is, I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavor with all our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves.<sup>36</sup>

In this passage, the medical analogy is presented as a helpful metaphor in understanding the function of philosophy, its methods and procedures. However, Teun Tieleman has pointed out that for the Stoics the medical analogy was more than just a figure of speech: the Stoic corporeality of the soul allowed for a more extensive physical similarity between soul and body.<sup>37</sup> Although Seneca throughout the letter uses medical imagery—philosophy as medicine (*Ep.* 78.3), or remedy (*Ep.* 78.3, 78.5)—he seems not to play up this physical correspondence between body and soul. His philosophical treatment here consists of consolation and does not prescribe any health-promoting activities or dietary rules.<sup>38</sup>

**in remedium cedunt honesta solacia, et quidquid animum erexit etiam corpori prodest.**

Seneca continues to use medical terminology to emphasise the health-promoting

<sup>35</sup>On the medical analogy in philosophy, see Frede (1987), Ch. 12 'Philosophy and medicine in antiquity', 225-242; Edelstein (1967b), 349-50; Nussbaum (1994), 13-29. More specifically, in the Stoic tradition the medical analogy can be found in Stobaeus 4.34.68, p. 845 H. (SVF 1.323); Diogenes Laertius 7.115; Galen PHP 5.2.22-24, 5.2.31 (SVF 3.471); Cicero *Tusc.* 2.11, 3.6, 4.23, 4.30-31. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Tieleman (2003), Ch. 4.2 'The Medical Analogy', 142-157. On the analogy between medicine and philosophy in Seneca, cf. Edwards (1999), 257, 264-65. On the use of medical imagery in Seneca, see especially *Ep.* 53; cf. Armisen-Marchetti (1989) 'Médecine', 136-138.

<sup>36</sup>Cicero *Tusc.* 3.6: *est profecto animi medicina, philosophia; cuius auxilium non ut in corporis morbis petendum est foris, omnibusque opibus viribus, ut nosmet ipsi nobis mederi possimus, elaborandum est*, tr. Nussbaum (1994), 14. Cf. Nussbaum (1994), Ch. 4 'Epicurean Surgery: Argument and Empty Desire', 102-139, for a discussion of Epicurean therapy and its reference to the medical tradition.

<sup>37</sup>Tieleman (2003), Ch. 4.2 'The Medical Analogy', 142-157.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Ch. 4 on *Ep.* 15.

qualities of his remedy, which relies on virtuous consolations, *honesta solacia*.<sup>39</sup> This immediately reveals that what we find here is not a medical treatment, but rather a moral one.

That the consolations are referred to as honourable also distinguishes them from the average reassuring comments made by others. In the previous letter several friends offered their advice to Tullius in accordance with their own character, but only the Stoic knew the right things to say and do and thus be of help.<sup>40</sup> Thus, what makes consolations honourable is that they are provided for the right reasons and in the right manner.<sup>41</sup> In Seneca's opinion, the discipline most qualified to teach what is honourable and to provide such comfort is philosophy.

The added remark that whatever encourages the soul is also of benefit to the body strengthens the point that philosophy can contribute to one's bodily health as well.<sup>42</sup> The honourable consolations are clearly intended to bring about a change in the patient's mindset and an uplifted spirit aids the overall recuperation. The Stoics are committed to the claim that the material nature of both body and soul accounts for their close interaction. Thus what aids the soul can also in a physiological sense benefit the body. On this theme it is relevant to recall that the characteristic concerns of a patient—fear of death, being troubled by physical suffering and the interruption of pleasures (*Ep. 78.6*)—are likely to bring about feelings of distress, sadness and frustration that will have a negative impact on one's mental and physical condition.<sup>43</sup> The expression *animum erexit* reminds of a similar view expressed in *Ep. 76.17*:

If every good is in the soul, then whatever strengthens, uplifts, and enlarges the soul, is a good; virtue, however, does make the soul stronger, loftier, and larger. For all other things, which arouse our desires, depress the soul and weaken it, and when we think that they are uplifting the soul, they are merely puffing it up and cheating it with much emptiness. Therefore, that alone is good which will make the soul better.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup>The expression *honesta solacia* does not seem to have a particular technical meaning or specified content. In Seneca *Prov. 3.10* the consolation consists of doing what is honourable, which will draw one's attention away from the actual suffering. At the beginning of Seneca's death scene in Tacitus *Ann. 15.63* the expression is used and that may be an intended reference to its usage here.

<sup>40</sup>Seneca *Ep. 77.5-8*.

<sup>41</sup>See Seneca *Ep. 95.43*.

<sup>42</sup>See also the discussion in Ch. 4 on *Ep. 15*.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 13.4-5, 66.31-32, 74.2*.

<sup>44</sup>Seneca *Ep. 76.17*: *Si omne in animo bonum est, quidquid illum confirmat, extollit, amplificat, bonum est; validorem autem animum et excelsiorem et ampliorem facit virtus. Nam cetera quae cupiditates nostras irritant deprimunt quoque animum et labefaciunt et cum videntur attollere inflant ac multa vanitate deludunt. Ergo id unum bonum est quo melior animus efficitur.*

Looking back at this passage the beneficial effect on the soul that is achieved through honourable consolations becomes more obvious. Only the good can have a lasting and favourable effect on the soul. Moreover, this is described in physiological terms of psychic strength and weakness that calls to mind the importance of acquiring a strong tenor of the soul.<sup>45</sup>

**Studia mihi nostra saluti fuerunt; philosophiae acceptum fero quod surrexi, quod convalui; illi vitam debo et nihil illi minus debo.**

The phrase is reminiscent in its structure of the earlier line that introduced this section. It seems to answer the previous announcement. Let me tell you what things were my consolation: our studies were my salvation. The shared studies of Seneca and Lucilius, *nostra studia*, are further explicated as philosophy. Seneca formulates philosophical study in varying terms that praise its effectiveness in terms of its restorative powers and contribution to good health: honourable consolations lead to a cure, our studies have brought soundness, philosophy restores, revives and Seneca even holds that he owes his life to philosophy, and more.

(78.4)

**Multum autem mihi contulerunt ad bonam valetudinem <et> amici, quorum adhortationibus, vigiliis, sermonibus adlevabar.**

As a second source of consolation Seneca credits his friends. The importance of friends has been emphasised in other letters, but here it is directly linked to good health.<sup>46</sup> His friends supported him: their encouragements motivated Seneca, their presence by his bedside showed their concern and their conversations would both distract from the disease and focus on more high-minded topics. These activities are in agreement with the philosophical life. In this letter Seneca cites as the two most important consolations during his illness philosophy and supportive friends. By clearly stating their great benefit, Seneca validates his own authorial position as a friend who comforts Lucilius using the lessons of philosophy.

**Nihil aequa, Lucili, virorum optime, aegrum reficit atque adiuvat quam amicorum adfectus, nihil aequa expectationem mortis ac metum subripit**

The cordial address to Lucilius, *virorum optime*, underlines that Seneca is writing to a

<sup>45</sup>Composition and tension of the body and mind substance explain different states of the body and of the mind. In physical terms, the unstable soul has too little tension to hold a straight course and it will waver between extremes. See e.g., Stobaeus 2.88.10 (SVF 3.378; LS 65A); Diogenes Laertius 7.110; Cicero *Tusc.* 4.11. Cf. Tieleman (2003), 113-117, 128, 237-9; Tieleman (2010a).

<sup>46</sup>On the importance and pleasure of having friends, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 6.2-4, 9.6-7, 9.17-18, 35.1, 119.15; humans are naturally prone to friendship, Seneca *Ep.* 9.17-18, 95.52. On friends sitting by the bedside of another friend, see Seneca *Ep.* 9.8, 95.43 and 101.3. For Seneca's view on friendship in the *Epistulae Morales*, see Knoche (1975).

real friend.<sup>47</sup> Sympathy shown by friends encourages a sick person. Admittedly, the affection and good wishes of loved ones are not beneficial in all cases.<sup>48</sup> As has been noted, in *Ep. 77.5-6* Tullius Marcellinus consults various friends, but not all of them offer good advice. But it is the other claim, that friends take away the expectation and fear of death, that Seneca goes on to develop further.

**non iudicabam me, cum illos superstites relinquarem, mori. Putabam, inquam, me victurum non cum illis, sed per illos; non effundere mihi spiritum videbar, sed tradere.**

The argument here turns on the likeness between friends and the deep connection between them. Many philosophers described friendship in terms of affinity and the Stoics were no exception.<sup>49</sup> Friends were considered kindred spirits and friendship a "union of like-minded people", who share their experiences, thoughts and have a similar character.<sup>50</sup> Although Seneca might not live on with his friends because he will die at some point, he can still live on through them because they are so alike. Friends who share much time together will start to reflect one another in their own lives. The suggestion that Seneca will not die with such good friends is also supported by the view expressed in other passages that a friend we hold dear is always present in our mind, he is never really gone.<sup>51</sup> In that sense too Seneca will be remembered. This also portrays his friends as a living testament to Seneca's life and legacy: he entrusts his soul to them, the most valuable and meaningful thing he has to offer.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup>The Stoics placed great emphasis on the connection between a good moral condition and the ability to be a friend. Hence, Lucilius is better able to be a real friend on account of his philosophical study. Cf. Diogenes 7.124 (SVF 3.631; LS 67P); Clemens Al. Strom. 2 (SVF 3.723); Knoche (1975).

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 31.2*, 94.53.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *EN* 9.4, 1166a31-32, 1170b6-7, who famously speaks of a friend as 'another self'; cf. Konstan (1997), 101, 121; on affinity in Epicurean friendship, cf. Cicero *Fin.* 1.67-68 (LS 22O; IG I-26.67-68). For the same thought in Stoicism, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.23, 7.124 (SVF 3.631; LS 67P); Seneca *Ep.* 3.1-3, 6.2-3, 9.8, 35.2, 48.2-3, 95.63, 109.15; *Ben.* 2.15.1, 2.22.1. The aspect of friends as kindred souls is also reflected in the unanimity of the wise, cf. Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1068F (SVF 3.627); Stobaeus 2.108 (SVF 3.630). On friendship in Stoicism, cf. Lesses (1993); Banateanu (2001); in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, Knoche (1975).

<sup>50</sup>Seneca *Ben.* 2.21.2: *quae similes iungit*, tr. Cooper and Procopé (1995), 229.

<sup>51</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 55.9-11, 74.23-24.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Tacitus *Ann.* 15.62, which describes Seneca's farewell to his friends in his last hours: *conversus ad amicos, quando meritis eorum referre gratiam prohiberetur, quod unum iam et tamen pulcherrimum habeat, imaginem vitae sua relinquere testatur, cuius si memores essent, bonarum artium famam fructum constantis amicitiae laturos.* "Then Seneca turned to his friends. 'Being forbidden', he said, 'to show gratitude for your services, I leave you my one remaining possession, and my best: the pattern of my life. If you remember it, your devoted friendship will be rewarded by

**Haec mihi dederunt voluntatem adiuvandi me et patiendi omne tormentum; alioqui miserrimum est, cum animum moriendi proieceris, non habere vivendi.**

Seneca concludes that these things gave him the will to help himself: with his renewed self-motivation he can cope with any hardship. Ultimately, philosophy and friendship provide us with the inspiration to motivate oneself, *voluntatem adiuvandi me*, and take control, *imperavi mihi ut viverem*. Seneca considered to end his life but decided against it, and now, thanks to philosophy and to his friends, he wants to face life's challenges bravely. In fact, this really is the only meaningful outcome. Without maintaining the motivation to go on living, one would feel very miserable and be stuck in a no man's land between life and death.

(78.5)

**Ad haec ergo remedia te confer.**

Seneca wants to make it clear that his personal anecdote has a didactic purpose and is not intended as just a story: Lucilius can remedy his own situation by taking Seneca's advice to heart. At the same time this section closes off the introductory part. By calling his recommendations *remedia* he both credits them with the status of something that actually restores health and invites comparison with the medical profession and their remedies.

**Medicus tibi quantum ambules, quantum exercearis monstrabit; ne indulgeas otio, ad quod vergit iners valetudo;**

The contrast between the medical and philosophical approach to pain and disease is worked out in more detail. The doctor, *medicus*, prescribes a whole list of guidelines that restrict the patient's daily life. Recommended activities are summed up to tell the patient what to do, when, how and why. This medical practice of stipulating a detailed mode of living to the patient was referred to as *daiita*—a regimen that included exercises and dietary rules tailored to the patient's individual requirements. Dietetics formed one of the main departments of medicine that aimed at promoting health.<sup>53</sup> In addition to an adjusted mode of living, the need for a physical workout by means of walking and doing exercises is in opposition to the tendency of sick persons to be inactive. The doctor knows what is best in this case and he does not hesitate to go against his patient's wishes.

**ut legas clarius et spiritum, cuius iter ac receptaculum laborat, exerceas; ut naves et viscera molli iactatione concutias; quibus cibis utaris, vinum quando virium causa advokes, quando intermittas ne inritet et exasperet tussim.**

The described activities are chosen with the patient's particular illness in mind. The doctor chooses exercises that can be expected to have a positive influence and Seneca

a name for virtuous accomplishments."

<sup>53</sup>On the important role of diet and dietetics in antiquity, see e.g. Edelstein (1967a), Craik (1995), Wilkins (2005) and Grimm (2006).

explains that reading aloud benefits the respiratory organs, going on a boat trip shakes up the internal organs, and that food and drink need to be regulated as well. **Ego tibi illud praecipio quod non tantum huius morbi sed totius vitae remedium est: contemne mortem. Nihil triste est cum huius metum effugimus.**

After the long list that a doctor sets down in order to cure or alleviate symptoms, Seneca has a recommendation that can be put in a nutshell and that extends to the whole of life. Despising death has a wholesome effect on one's entire life. Learning to scorn death is a persistent concern of Seneca and a similar line of thought can be found in other texts as well.<sup>54</sup> The background to Seneca's position is more fully expressed in *Tranq. 11.6* and *Ep. 4.9*, respectively:

He who fears death will never do anything worthy of a man who is alive, but he who knows that these were the terms drawn up for him at the moment of his conception will live according to the bond, and at the same time will also with like strength of mind guarantee that none of the things that happen shall be unexpected.<sup>55</sup>

Take my word for it: since the day you were born you are being led thither. We must ponder this thought, and thoughts of the like nature, if we desire to be calm as we await that last hour, the fear of which makes all previous hours uneasy.<sup>56</sup>

Dying is an inevitable part of living and as long as one fears death one can never enjoy true peace of mind or have a real understanding of good and evil.<sup>57</sup> In *Ep. 82.15-17*

<sup>54</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep. 24.11-14*, 36.8, 80.5, 91.19-21; *Tranq. 11.5-6*; *Prov. 6.6*; cf. Motto (1970), 61. The Stoics qualified death as an *apoprogmenon*, an indifferent thing which is to be rejected. On death included in lists of rejected indifferents, see e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.102 (LS 58A; IG II-94.102), 7.106 (IG II-94.106); Seneca *Ep. 82.10-13*. More specifically on the thought that death is not to be feared, cf. Epictetus *Ench. 5* (LS 65U); Seneca *Ep. 82.7* (SVF 1.196), which discusses a syllogism by Zeno that intends to prove that death is not an evil. Another relevant background is the first book of Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes* that deals with the fear of death; cf. Cicero *Tusc. 1.9*; Plato *Rep. 486a*; Edwards (2007), 85-86. On contempt for death in Cicero, cf. *Tusc. 2.2, 2.43*.

<sup>55</sup>Seneca *Tranq. 11.6*: *Qui mortem timebit, nihil umquam pro homine vivo faciet; at qui sciet hoc sibi cum conciperetur statim condicatum, vivet ad formulam et simul illud quoque eodem animi robore praestabit, ne quid ex iis quae eveniunt subitum sit.* (tr. Loeb edition).

<sup>56</sup>Seneca *Ep. 4.9*: *Ita dico: ex quo natus es, duceris. Haec et eiusmodi versanda in animo sunt si volumus ultimam illam horam placidi exspectare cuius metus omnes alias inquietas facit.* (tr. Loeb edition) Cf. Seneca *Ep. 74.11*.

<sup>57</sup>Catherine Edwards discusses in detail how Roman philosophical writings of the late republic and early principate approached the fear of death and offered strategies to overcome this fear, in Edwards (2007), Ch. 3 'Fighting the Fear of Death', 78-112.

Seneca explains in more detail that death is not an evil but bears some resemblance to evil because we care for our self-preservation, because death is unfamiliar and we are scared by stories of a painful afterlife in hell or the perspective of going nowhere at all. Tranquillity of mind and wisdom can only come to a person who fears nothing.<sup>58</sup>

In *Ep.* 78.1-5 Seneca offers a short pathography, a disease narrative that presents his suffering almost as an adventure story.<sup>59</sup> He describes the developments in his condition, highlighting the extraordinary circumstances he is in. His suffering takes on heroic proportions that both show his courageous attitude and lend him authority on the subject. The main focus is on the personal experience of his illness, its significance and impact on him and what helped him to recover. The motives he has to write about his ill health include constructing a positive self-image, establishing his authority on the subject, offering Lucilius support, but also to demonstrate the blessings of philosophy. Seneca's successful recovery would be of interest to a larger audience. His personal remedy is placed side by side with the treatment a doctor would propose and is thus intended as a counterbalance to the prevalent view that all a patient requires is medical treatment.

Although Seneca feels he needs to add his own treatment to that of the medical profession, there is no criticism as regards the medical prescriptions themselves. Nowhere does he hold that the medical approach is wrong or that one should deviate from its recommendations. The point seems rather to be that his own philosophical approach covers a type of well-being that is not dealt with by the medical profession. This ties in with his comments elsewhere that we all need philosophy, whereas we only visit the doctor when we feel sick.<sup>60</sup> Medicine aims to restore a patient's health, something the Stoics consider a preferred indifferent.<sup>61</sup> If circumstances allow, the Stoic prefers health to illness, but health is not a good. Only philosophy looks after one's true good, i.e. virtue, or conformity with right reason.<sup>62</sup> In general, although medicine is not in the same league as philosophy, a medical treatment can agree with philosophical remedies. For instance, it seems quite compatible when one has to read out loud to train one's lungs that one chooses a text that ennobles the mind as well. This is the sort of advice that can be found in *Ep.* 15 where Seneca discusses how care

<sup>58</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 87.3; *Vit. Beata* 3.4, 4.3, 5.1; *Tranq.* 11.1, 11.6; cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 2.2; on the role of philosophy 2.11.

<sup>59</sup> On disease narrative and descriptions of suffering in contemporary literature, see Savitt (2002); on the characteristics of patient narratives of illness, see Hawkins (1999).

<sup>60</sup> See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 53.7-10. On philosophy being necessary for the cultivation of the soul, cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 2.13.

<sup>61</sup> On health as a preferred indifferent in Seneca, see e.g., *Ep.* 8.5, 15.2, 82.10-12, 85.40, 92.11, 94.8, 117.8; cf. Kudlien (1968); Kudlien (1974). See also the discussion of health in Ch. 4 on *Ep.* 15.

<sup>62</sup> See also Ch. 4 on *Ep.* 15.

for the body can be consistent with care for the soul.

Something must be said next about the presence of consolatory features in the letter. Notably, Seneca himself wrote other works that belong in the consolatory tradition. He composed several *consolaciones*, to Marcia on the death of her son, to Polybius on the death of his brother, to Helvia on Seneca's own exile, and in several letters he consoles others, most notably in *Ep. 63* and *99*.<sup>63</sup> The person being consoled here is Lucilius, who needs solace and advice in coping with his illness. Consolation aimed at the bereaved or distressed had developed in Greek and Roman times into a literary form with its own generic features.<sup>64</sup> It could take on various forms, such as consolatory (funerary) speeches, treatises, poems or letters.

Consolatory literature, as pictured by Mitchell's study, is commonly characterised by three central elements that should comfort the distressed person. The first of these is commiseration, by which the writer expresses his sympathy with the addressee. This element is touched upon in *Ep. 78.1*. The second feature is the *paramythesis* or actual *consolatio*, the consolatory arguments that serve as appeals to reason. These are often familiar views from literature or the philosophical schools and include such rationalisations as "pain is not an evil", "what happened is part of the human condition", "overreacting is of no use", and so on.<sup>65</sup> In *Ep. 78* Seneca addresses the main concerns of being ill, listed in *Ep. 78.6*, and he explains with several arguments why these should not make us despair. His arguments, however, are not all easily distinguishable or clearly organised and turn up throughout *Ep. 78.6-27*. The third central element is the exhortation to adopt a particular attitude that will help control one's distress.<sup>66</sup> Lucilius is told to follow these remedies (*Ep. 78.5*), not to make his ills more burdensome (*Ep. 78.13*), get rid of complaints (*Ep. 78.14*), win victory over all challenges (*Ep. 78.16*), think of what honourable deeds he has done (*Ep. 78.18*), believe Seneca (*Ep. 78.21*), wrestle bravely with illness (*Ep. 78.21*), hold the thought that nothing fortune brings should be trusted but all should be expected (*Ep. 78.29*).

Philosophy was expected to teach people to be free from anxieties of the soul and to cope with pain and distress.<sup>67</sup> For that reason philosophers developed their own therapeutic arguments and techniques that have their own place in the consolatory

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Manning (1974), whose case study is Seneca's *Ep. 63*.

<sup>64</sup>A good overview of consolatory theory and literature, with a particular focus on consolatory letters, may be found in Mitchell (1968), esp. 299-312; cf. J.H.D. Scourfield, 'Consolation', *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. For the extension of the study of the consolatory tradition to Seneca see Manning (1974). On the topics commonly associated with consolation, cf. Cicero *Tusc. 3.81*.

<sup>65</sup>Cf. J.H.D. Scourfield, 'Consolation', *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. For instance, in his *Tusculanae Disputationes* Cicero makes ample use of passages from literature and philosophy.

<sup>66</sup>Mitchell (1968), 299-304.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. Cicero *Tusc. 2.33, 2.43*. On the (self-)conception of the philosopher, see Hadot (1995a), 30-34.

literature.<sup>68</sup> Cicero explains that though all consolation aims to do away with distress, the recommended arguments and strategies vary between different philosophers:

There are some who think it is the sole duty of a comforter to insist that the evil has no existence at all, as is the view of Cleanthes; some, like the Peripatetics, favour the lesson that the evil is not serious. Some again favour the withdrawal of attention from evil to good, as Epicurus does; some, like the Cyrenaics, think it enough to show that nothing unexpected has taken place. Chrysippus on the other hand considers that the main thing in giving comfort is to remove from the mind of the mourner the belief already described, in case he should think he is discharging a regular duty which is obligatory. There are some too in favour of concentrating all these ways of administering comfort (for one man is influenced in one way, one in another) pretty nearly as in my *Consolation* I threw them all into one attempt at consolation; for my soul was in a feverish state and I attempted every means of curing its condition.<sup>69</sup>

Although I will discuss Seneca's philosophical arguments and approaches in more detail later on, we may note that he makes use of numerous, different remedies. In this sense, he appears to agree with Cicero that one should try to alleviate distress by various means.

In addition to the common characteristics of consolation, other possible features included the citation of philosophy as an aid against pain (*Ep. 78.3*) and the use of examples. In this case, Seneca presents an account of his own sickbed as the prime example. Furthermore, we find general references to the physical pain endured by athletes (*Ep. 78.16*) and by persons being tortured (*Ep. 78.18-19*). This should help the addressee to put his own pain into perspective and endure it more bravely. In this letter Seneca takes up the theme of *consolatio* with frequent references to typical consolatory elements. In this way, he gives comfort to his friend Lucilius and demonstrates the value of philosophy in overcoming any distress.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. Nussbaum (1994), Ch. 1 'Therapeutic Arguments', 13-47.

<sup>69</sup>Cicero *Tusc. 3.76*: *sunt qui unum officium consolantis putent malum illud omnino non esse, ut Cleanthi placet; sunt qui non magnum malum, ut Peripatetici; sunt qui abducant a malis ad bona, ut Epicurus; sunt qui satis putent ostendere nihil inopinati accidisse, <ut Cyrenaici . . . . > nihil mali. Chrysippus autem caput esse censem in consolando detrahere illam opinionem maerentis, qua se officio fungi putet iusto atque debito. sunt etiam qui haec omnia genera consolandi colligant – alius enim alio modo movetur –, ut fere nos in *Consolatione* omnia in consolationem unam coniecimus; erat enim in tumore animus, et omnis in eo temptabatur curatio* (tr. Loeb edition). As mentioned in this passage, Cicero wrote a *Consolationis liber*, which has been lost except for some fragments. These have been collected in Vitelli (1979).

(78.6)

**Tria haec in omni morbo gravia sunt: metus mortis, dolor corporis, intermissione voluptatum.**

At this point the tone of the letter becomes more formal and there are no more personal asides such as confiding remarks about Seneca's own life or comments that directly address Lucilius. The tripartite classification announces a more philosophical exposition on the adverse effects that illness has on a patient. Cicero as well aims to refute commonly held views on similar issues—in the first book of his *Tusculanae Disputationes* the notion that death is an evil, in the second book that pain is an evil. As a matter of fact, these topics were well-established philosophical issues. Of course, in Epicurean philosophy the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure play a fundamental role and fear of death is considered a serious obstacle to peace of mind. But in other philosophical schools too the prospect of death and the role of pain and pleasure demanded special attention.<sup>70</sup> As we have seen, the Stoics consider the condition of the body to be an indifferent thing, though under morally neutral circumstances death and pain are to be rejected and pleasure is to be preferred.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, Seneca's selection of these three as the most troublesome disadvantages of illness would appeal to a general audience. The fact that these are named 'grave concerns', *gravia*, indicates that here Seneca assumes the perspective of the non-philosophical layman. To the average person, fear of death, physical pain and the interruption of pleasure are certainly things to get upset about. Seneca acknowledges that they are considered as serious difficulties, but he does not agree. Instead, he tries to make light of these concerns and proves them to be overrated: fear of death is unjustified, pain can be overcome and the interruption of pleasures is not a bad thing at all.

**De morte satis dictum est: hoc unum dicam, non morbi hunc esse sed naturae metum.**

In the previous letter and in other contexts the topic of death has been discussed extensively.<sup>72</sup> He just wants to add one point that should clarify what exactly it is

<sup>70</sup>It is beyond the scope of this study to expand on the views on pleasure and pain in the different philosophical schools. However, I will note similarities and differences in relation to particular points raised in the letter. For a detailed discussion of the different philosophical analyses of pleasure, esp. those of Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus, see Gosling and Taylor (1982); Van Riel (2000) covers the views of Plato, Aristotle, the Neoplatonists and, more briefly, the Stoics and Epicureans.

<sup>71</sup>The Stoics used the term pleasure, *hēdonē/voluptas*, to indicate the emotion (*pathos*) as well as the physical feeling that supervenes on normal life. For this sense of *hēdonē/voluptas* as a by-product, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.85-86 (SVF 3.178; LS 57A; IG II-94.85-86).

<sup>72</sup>For his comments on fear of death, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 4.5, 22.16, 24.23, 36.8-10, 74.3, 77.11, 80.5, 91.19, 120.18; *Helv.* 13.2; cf. Motto (1970), 60-61.

we fear. We need to understand that illness and death are neither one and the same thing nor even necessarily connected. One might become seriously ill and yet make a full recovery or one might be healthy and nevertheless get killed somehow. Thus, the fear of death is the fear of a natural event, namely that one's life will come to an end. It is a natural law that all those who have been given life must one day face death.<sup>73</sup> Because death and illness are not to be equated, it is foolish to fear death when one is suffering from ill health.

**Multorum mortem distulit morbus et saluti illis fuit videri perire. Morieris, non quia aegrotas, sed quia vivis. Ista te res et sanatum manet; cum convalueris, non mortem sed valetudinem effugeris.**

Illness is the negative counterpart of health; death is the absence of life. If we start to mix up these pairs of concepts we will acquire false opinions. But once we make the distinction, we come to realise that just as illness does not imply the proximity of our death, so our recovery does not mean an escape from death either.<sup>74</sup> A sick person is not necessarily closer to death than someone in good health.

#### (78.7)

**Ad illud nunc proprium incommodum revertamur: magnos cruciatus habet morbus, sed hos tolerabiles intervalla faciunt.**

Seneca now addresses the second issue, the pain associated with disease. Rather than as a grave concern it is now described by Seneca as an inconvenience, *incommodum*. Although this has the general meaning of discomfort (cf. *Ep.* 15.3) it can also have the more specialised, Stoic connotation of a naturally dispreferred thing. In its philosophical context it is used to describe those things that we would not prefer under natural circumstances such as poverty, illness, bad reputation or death. These should not be seen as evils but as difficulties that need to be overcome. As Seneca puts it in an earlier letter: "when a man is about to do something honourable, he should not regard any obstacles as evils, even though he regard them as inconvenient, but he should will to do the deed, and do it willingly".<sup>75</sup>

What Seneca discusses in *Ep.* 78.7-9 are the physical pains that accompany illness. Indeed, diseases can be very painful, but at least these painful moments are interrupted by intervals that bring relief. The background to these sections has been examined in detail by Piet Schrijvers.<sup>76</sup> The old dictum that pain is either brief or bearable, as Schrijvers explains, is a general philosophical stock phrase that can be traced

<sup>73</sup>See Seneca *Ep.* 94.7.

<sup>74</sup>For a similar argument on pain and death, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 98.18.

<sup>75</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 66.17: *Itaque qui honeste aliquid facturus est, quidquid opponitur, id etiam si incommodum putat, malum non putet, velit, libens faciat.* Cf. *Ep.* 9.3, 66.29, 72.5, 87.36; Diogenes Laertius 7.101-105 (LS 58A-B; IG II-94.101-105).

<sup>76</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 382-90.

back to Epicurus.<sup>77</sup> But the point made here, which in fact backs up that maxim, is that long-lasting pains are made bearable due to the intervening periods of relief. Piet Schrijvers suggests that this idea is not of Epicurean origin. For instance, the reference to a caring Nature at the end of *Ep.* 78.7 does not fit in with Epicurean thinking but is consonant with Stoic philosophy. This last point does not rule out Epicurean influence, I think, because Seneca often appropriates a thought or quotation and adapts it to his own (Stoic) purpose.

Instead, Schrijvers argues that Seneca probably developed this view by himself while relying on medical works of the Hippocratic tradition for supporting evidence.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the thought that pain is either brief or bearable can be linked to the medical tradition as well where the distinction was made between acute and chronic diseases.<sup>79</sup> Schrijvers presents a persuasive case that Seneca was familiar with medical writings.<sup>80</sup> We may note that Cornelius Celsus (c. 25 BC - c. 50 AD) wrote several books on medicine, *De Medicina*, which were part of a larger compendium of scientific subjects. Moreover, he was a member of the philosophical school of the Sextii.<sup>81</sup> Because Seneca shows an interest in medicine and was familiar with this philosophical circle—he names Papirius Fabianus, Sotion, and the school's founder Sextius—it seems plausible that Seneca would have been familiar with the work of Celsus.<sup>82</sup> However, this does not require us to downplay the Epicurean background. As we shall see later, there are several more implicit references to Epicurean thought throughout the letter.

**Nam summi doloris intentio invenit finem; nemo potest valde dolere et diu;**

By showing numbness as a natural response to extreme pain, Seneca can uphold the distinction that pain is either brief or bearable.<sup>83</sup> This will help to make those suffering from illness understand that what they are facing has its limits. The patient should not get overwhelmed and overpowered by pain but take to heart that his suffering cannot go on endlessly.

**sic nos amantissima nostri natura disposuit ut dolorem aut tolerabilem aut brevem faceret.**

<sup>77</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 382. Seneca describes this thought in *Ep.* 24.12, 30.14 (where it is ascribed to Epicurus), 94.7; *Prov.* 6.6.; *Rem fort.* 6.

<sup>78</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 384-90.

<sup>79</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 384-85. Cf. Celsus 3.1.

<sup>80</sup>In particular, Hippocrates *Morb. sacr.*, Ch. 12. For other passages in which Seneca makes use of medical literature, see *Ira* 3.10.3 (on epilepsy); *Brev. Vit.* 1.1; *Ep.* 95.20.

<sup>81</sup>Cf. Quintilian *Inst.* 10.1.124: "Cornelius Celsus, a follower of the Sextii, wrote a number of philosophical works, which have considerable grace and polish"; tr. Loeb edition. *Scriptis non parum multa Cornelius Celsus, Sextios secutus, non sine cultu ac nitore.*

<sup>82</sup>Schrijvers points to the similar discussion in Seneca *Ep.* 95.20 and Celsus *Med.* 4.31.1-2.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 24.14.

Moreover, the fact that our bodies are regulated by a natural process that shuts down pain perception in the most extreme cases indicates a well-intended design. The medical explanation is introduced here to reinforce the Stoic view about the providence of a divine Nature. It should be noted, however, that God's just, beneficent attitude to mankind can be characterised as tough love, intended to treat human beings harshly with the intent to make them stronger and more honourable. Nevertheless, it is not Nature's intention to torture us beyond what we can bear.<sup>84</sup> In the Stoic world view God is a rational and provident being who cares for the world and takes thought for humanity. It was common Stoic practice to identify instances of God's beneficence to be at work in the natural phenomena.<sup>85</sup> Numbness of painful body parts shows that God cares for us by putting a limit to the amount of pain we can experience.

(78.8)

**Maximi dolores consistunt in macerrimis corporis partibus: nervi articulique et quidquid aliud exile est acerrime saevit cum in arto vitia concepit. Sed cito hae partes obstupescunt et ipso dolore sensum doloris amittunt, sive quia spiritus naturali prohibitus cursu et mutatus in peius vim suam qua viget admonetque nos perdit, sive quia corruptus umor, cum desiit habere quo confluat, ipse se elidit et iis quae nimis implevit excutit sensum.**

In *Ep. 78.8-9* Seneca expounds on particular medical conditions to prove his point that severe pains are made bearable due to the intervening periods of relief. Thus the natural restraint on pain will encourage us to put up with it and validate the maxim that pain is either short or endurable. His description of great pains peculiar to the more narrow parts of the body may be originating from the Hippocratic tract *De Affectionibus*.<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that medicine is of value here insofar as its theories

<sup>84</sup>On the Stoic background of this thought, cf. Schrijvers (1990), 383-84, who also points to the following parallel passage in Seneca *Prov. 2.7*: *Miraris tu, si deus ille bonorum amantissimus, qui illos quam optimos esse atque excellentissimos uult, fortunam illis cum qua exerceantur adsignat?*; "Do you wonder if that God, who most dearly loves the good, who wishes them to become supremely good and virtuous, allots to them a fortune that will make them struggle?" (tr. Loeb edition), cf. Seneca *Prov. 4.7*. For the idea that God does not allow real evil to befall good men, cf. Seneca *Prov. 2.1, 6.1*; that Nature's necessity teaches us to bear adversity bravely, cf. e.g., Seneca *Tranq. 10.1-2; Ep. 13.2-3*.

<sup>85</sup>For instance, Seneca mentions as Nature's benefits to mankind the regular course of the heavens, *Ep. 93.9*, seasonal change, *Ep. 107.8*, God's gift of reason to human beings, *Ep. 31.9-11*, 94.56; *De Otio* 5.3-4; *Ben. 6.23.6*; cf. Motto (1970), 137-38. In addition, we may note Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* (LS 54I); the selected evidence in SVF 2.1152-1167, esp. Porphyrius *De Abstin.* 3.20 (SVF 2.1152); Cicero *ND* 2.127-33, 2.140-64 (SVF 2.1154); Cicero *Acad. Pr.* 2.120 (SVF 2.1161).

<sup>86</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 386.

can clarify physiological processes and thus underlines Seneca's philosophical discussion on coping with pain. Seneca offers two possible explanations of how pain can numb the senses.<sup>87</sup> He does not, however, favour one of these two nor does he examine their explanatory merits any further. In the end he is not after the correct, underlying medical description. Rather, he wants to showcase his medical knowledge in the service of philosophy. These explanations are medical in origin but have long since been appropriated and used in formulating Stoic anthropological thought.<sup>88</sup>

(78.9)

**Sic podagra et cheragra et omnis vertebrarum dolor nervorumque interquiescit cum illa quae torquebat hebetavit; omnium istorum prima verminatio vexat, impetus mora extinguitur et finis dolendi est optorpuisse.**

At this point we are presented with a whole range of afflictions that are unrelated to the initial symptoms of which Lucilius was suffering at the beginning of the letter. One of these, gout, stands out because it seems connected to some of the other themes of this letter such as torture and luxury. Furthermore, its symptoms recur again in a later section (*Ep. 78.19*). The agonizing pain accompanying gout was frequently compared to torture. The disease was generally held to be the result of a decadent and corrupt lifestyle and was often considered a punishment thereof. Hence it was not only a painful medical problem, but also an embarrassing one. Schrijvers considers some of the reasons why gout may have been included here by Seneca. He suggests that it is in part a response to references to gout made by Cicero in his *De Finibus* and *Tusculanae Disputationes*, but also an indication that Lucilius may have suffered from the condition.<sup>89</sup> Although I think the connection with Cicero is persuasively argued for by Schrijvers, the second point seems too doubtful to prove. In my opinion, the link with Cicero and the opportunities to connect it with other themes in the letter would seem to be sufficient reason why Seneca includes gout here.

Cicero's second book of the *Tusculanae Disputationes* opens with a theoretical account (*Tusc. 2.1-41*) that is followed by a more practical, therapeutical discussion (*Tusc. 2.44-67*). It is this second part in particular that Schrijvers finds comparable

<sup>87</sup>In his *Naturales Quaestiones*, Seneca also frequently offers several possible explanations without favouring one of them.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. Frede (1987), Ch. 12 'Philosophy and medicine in antiquity', 225-242; Edelstein (1967b). For a more specific exploration of the relationship between Stoic philosophy and medicine, see Hankinson (2003); Tieleman (1996), Part II, Ch. 3 'Chrysippus and Science', 189-195; Tieleman (2003), Ch. 4 'The Therapeutics (Book IV)', 140-197, esp. Ch. 4.8 'The Medical Backdrop: Hippocratic and Other Writings', 190-196; Tieleman (2010a).

<sup>89</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 380-382.

to *Ep.* 78.<sup>90</sup> For the present, I will give an outline of the many parallels Schrijvers draws between these two texts (see Table 5.1). I agree that Seneca must have been

Table 5.1: Parallel passages in Cicero *Tusc.* 2.44-67 and Seneca *Ep.* 78.

Cicero <i>Tusc.</i>	Seneca <i>Ep.</i> 78	Subject
2.44	78.17	A famous saying by Epicurus
2.45	78.7-9	The duration and severity of pain
2.45	78.9	The example of gout
2.47	78.2	To command oneself ( <i>sibi imperare</i> )
2.48	78.4	Positive role of friendship
2.53	78.18	Anecdote of Marius' varicose veins
2.54-56	78.15-17	Examples of determination
2.59-64	78.20-21	Courage shown during illness
2.61	78.28	Reference to Posidonius
2.63-64	78.21	Being one's own audience

influenced by Cicero's text in writing this letter. Moreover, Cicero's text, with its clearer structure and more specific descriptions, can actually help to elucidate some of the intentions underlying *Ep.* 78.<sup>91</sup> The particular details of these parallels I will further discuss in the relevant sections.

**Dentium, oculorum, aurium dolor ob hoc ipsum acutissimus est quod inter angusta corporis nascitur, non minus, mehercule, quam capitum ipsius; sed si incitator est, in alienationem soporemque convertitur.**

Again, we find a description of excruciating pains that have a natural limit that poses a restriction on human suffering. Schrijvers notes that the usual order found in medical treatises, from head to toes, is not used here. This could be an indication that Seneca did not follow a medical author closely in writing down this observation.

#### (78.10)

**Hoc itaque solacium vasti doloris est, quod necesse est desinas illum sentire si nimis senseris.**

The argument so far is concluded and summarised: one may face great physical pain but beyond what is bearable we cease to feel it. Thus great pain will never be too great. The term *solacium* has featured twice in *Ep.* 78.3 and by describing his counsel on the natural limits of pain also as a consolation this topic is closed and the label reminds the reader that Seneca's advice is still intended to offer support.

**Illud autem est quod inperitos in vexatione corporis male habet: non adsueverunt**

<sup>90</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 390-394.

<sup>91</sup>Schrijvers (1990), 391.

**animo esse contenti; multum illis cum corpore fuit.**

What has to be considered next is the best way to deal with pain. This is in two ways a continuation of the previous argument. On the one hand, the natural limit put on our pain perception implies that it is not up to us to decide how much pain we can bear. Nature has taken care of it that it is never too much and whatever pain still comes our way is not unreasonable or unbearable. Thus, Seneca offers a Stoic providential explanation of why we are spared unmanageable pain. On the other hand, the physical aspect of pain, as discussed up to this point, is only a small part of being ill. It is, according to the Stoics, at least as important to adopt the right mental attitude and learn how to cope with one's disease. Thus, those who fail to understand that we are never in more pain than we can bear and who have adopted the wrong attitude towards the body are really causing themselves to feel miserable.

Seneca reproaches ignorant people for getting upset when only their bodily well-being is somehow compromised. The expression *male habet* is aptly ambiguous: these people respond badly to physical pain because they are of the opinion that it is a bad thing, a *malum*.<sup>92</sup> In the following sections there are many occurrences of (forms of) *malum* and this should make us wonder whether the misfortunes which are called by this term are truly a bad thing. He uses the term *inperitos* not to outline a well-defined group but to indicate non-philosophers in general—all those who fail to comprehend the true meaning of things and their underlying causes. In several letters Seneca describes the ways and views of the ill-informed as an exact opposite to the philosophical approach of the sage or philosopher as is the case at hand here.<sup>93</sup>

**Ideo vir magnus ac prudens animum diducit a corpore et multum cum meliore ac divina parte versatur, cum hac querula et fragili quantum necesse est.**

The weakness and ignorance of the non-philosopher is linked to his attachment to the body. By contrast, the great and sensible man is not just capable of being content in spirit but also knows that his good rests with his soul.<sup>94</sup> The *vir magnus ac prudens* is a man with advanced understanding who has developed his virtues. Even so, Seneca is not talking of the rare Stoic sage per se. Any advanced *proficiens* would have learned to put the soul's interest first.

The qualities of *prudentia* and greatness are closely connected to the rest of the letter.<sup>95</sup> *Prudentia* is acting in accordance with good judgment and in Ep. 78.13-14 Seneca

<sup>92</sup>The frequently used expression *male habet* can be found in Seneca (Ep. 56.8, 118.7) as well as in numerous authors before Seneca, e.g. Lucretius *DRN* 3.826. See also Summers (1910), 238, 264. Of particular interest is the frequent use in a medical context by Celsus, see 2.8.34, 2.10.6, 3.6.4, 3.21.1, 3.22.1, 5.26.34b, 5.28.7b, 7.7.7a.

<sup>93</sup>See e.g., Seneca Ep. 56.13, 72.8-9, 76.34-5.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Hachmann (1995), 290.

<sup>95</sup>*Prudentia* corresponds to the Greek *phronēsis*. Cf. e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.92-96; Cicero *Fin.* 3.25. *Phronēsis* or *prudentia* was one of the four cardinal virtues, cf. Seneca Ep. 74.13, 115.3;

considers the great extent to which opinions shape how we experience our own circumstances. Only by having the right opinion about our bodily condition—that our illness is not truly bad and that we can handle its consequences—will we behave sensibly.

The soul is described as a human being's better and divine part and such qualifications are found in other letters as well.<sup>96</sup> In an earlier letter we read of a similar distinction between body and soul:

But when you want to undertake a true valuation of a person and want to know what he is like, do the inspection when he is naked. Let him set aside his inheritance, set aside his public offices and other trickeries of fortune, let him shed his very body. Inspect his mind, what it is like, how great it is—whether it is great by its own resources or someone else's.<sup>97</sup>

Needless to say, it is not in a literal sense that the body is shed (*Ep.* 76.32) or the soul should be separated from the body (*Ep.* 78.10). The main point Seneca intends to make is that the soul is what matters most and is the very thing that adds true value to a human being. By comparison, his body is no more than an accessory. Brad Inwood speaks in this context of the 'evaluative dualism of body and soul'.<sup>98</sup> The opposition between a strong, good soul and a weak, demanding body is played out most effectively in the context of *Ep.* 78. Here the body is especially weak and demanding due to illness and its accompanying pain. Seneca adds a new dimension by arguing that the soul's strength provides the cure to deal with the body's frailty. Persons become alike to that which they take as their objective.<sup>99</sup> Thus, ignorant people—whose main focus is on their bodily condition—are of the same opinion as their whining and frail bodies. By contrast, the sensible philosopher—whose main focus is on the condition of his soul—knows to be content under all circumstances and possesses strength of character.

(78.11)

**'Sed molestum est' inquit 'carere adsuetis voluptatibus, abstinere cibo, sitire, esurire.'**

This section starts off with a possible objection. Although this complaint ties in with

and the evidence collected in SVF 3.262-294, in particular Diogenes Laertius 7.92 (SVF 3.265); Stobaeus 2.59-60 (SVF 3.262, 264; LS 61H); Cicero *Off.* 1.52 (LS 59P).

<sup>96</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 66.12, 82.1, 92.10; cf. Cicero *Fin.* 4.28 (SVF 3.20).

<sup>97</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 76.32: *Atqui cum voles veram hominis aestimationem inire et scire qualis sit, nudum inspicere; ponat patrimonium, ponat honores et alia fortunae mendacia, corpus ipsum exuat: animum intuere, qualis quantusque sit, alieno an suo magnus.* Tr. Inwood (2007), 38.

<sup>98</sup>Inwood (2007), 215.

<sup>99</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 15.2-3 and the corresponding discussion in Ch. 3.

the protesting body from the previous section, this section suddenly turns away from the topic of pain and begins to discuss how illness interrupts our pleasures and leaves us hungry and thirsty. This point is only briefly considered here and in *Ep. 78.12-19* Seneca returns to examine the right attitude to pain. Generally, the haphazard order in which topics are treated in this letter has been seen by scholars such as Costa and Schrijvers as indicative of Seneca's epistolary style.<sup>100</sup> But in the case of *Ep. 78.11* Hildegard Cancik points out that the interruption is stronger than usual because it does not seem to fit in the context, it interjects the ongoing theme and lacks the connector words Seneca commonly uses to join arguments and sections. She argues that *Ep. 78.11* would better be located in between *Ep. 78.21* and *78.22* and originally belongs there.<sup>101</sup>

Even though Cancik's proposed solution sounds plausible, it does require a substantial alteration in the text. Instead, I would like to propose another explanation that finds support in the letter's content. Up to this point, the letter presents a lengthy discussion of the great pains encountered in ill health and how these are always interrupted by intervals or remissions and from *Ep. 78.12* onwards the topic of pain is picked up again. In the middle we find this one section on pleasure that functions exactly as a short intermission, a brief respite, in a larger section on pain. At the same time, the return to the topic of pain means an interruption of the examination of pleasure. This too affirms the letter's subject: the discussion of pleasure is cut short just as illness breaks in on our customary pleasures, *intermissio voluptatum*. In this manner, Seneca purposely integrates form and content of the letter.

**Haec prima abstinentia gravia sunt, deinde cupiditas relanguescit ipsis per [se] quae cupimus fatigatis ac deficientibus; inde morosus est stomachus, inde cuius fuit aviditas cibi odium est. Desideria ipsa moriuntur; non est autem acerbum carere eo quod cupere desieris.**

Seneca sets out to refute the objection. Although these feelings of discomfort may initially seem aggravating, soon one's desires will wear out and that essentially solves the problem. This answer merits further examination. Notably, just as in the case of physical pain (*Ep. 78.7*) we can detect a natural mechanism that regulates bodily processes in what could be considered a beneficent manner. In response to the withholding of pleasures, the desires are strong at first but the appetitive parts soon tire out and when our stomach becomes irritable the desires die altogether. Nature does not allow our desires to persist endlessly but breaks them off at some point. Furthermore, the body is shown to be inconstant in its signals. Initially it is hard to do without pleasures and we feel strong discomfort, but then the body calms

<sup>100</sup>Costa comments that "this broken up sequence of themes suits the unstructured character of a letter", Costa (1988), 177. P. Schrijvers attributes it partly to Seneca's epistolary style, partly to contradicting consolatory strategies, Schrijvers (1990), 374-75.

<sup>101</sup>Cancik (1967), 33-34n.53.

down and its desires abate. That the bodily desires fade quickly shows that they were not of great importance to begin with. The wise man knows this: he only tends to the necessary demands of the body (*Ep.* 78.10: *quantum necesse est*) and not to all its wishes. One should not, like the inexperienced person, allow the body to guide one's decisions as it is unable to steer a steady course. The one moment it will want food, the next it is repulsed by the very thing it asked for. In this section the desires themselves are crying out, growing weak and tired, and eventually passing away. They are described in a process similar to the one the sick person is in.

(78.12)

**Adice quod nullus non intermittitur dolor aut certe remittitur. Adice quod licet caverre venturum et obsistere imminentem remediis; nullus enim non signa praemittit, utique qui ex solito revertitur. Tolerabilis est morbi patientia, si contempseris id quod extreum minatur.**

Seneca returns to the topic of pain and quickly goes over an assortment of considerations. These are all minor pieces of advice that are brought together before moving on to the next larger argument. In this section we also find a similar variation of verbs as in *Ep.* 78.1, *intermittitur*, *remittitur* and *praemittit*.<sup>102</sup> This subtle wordplay showcases Seneca's writerly skills.

Pain is interrupted or has periods in which the affliction is less. This sums up the earlier discussion and picks up where it left off. Even when the pain returns we are often warned and can prepare ourselves by having treatments ready. It is not obvious whether these *remedia* are just medical or may include philosophical remedies as well. By now Seneca has used this term in various contexts and one could imagine that getting into the right philosophical mindset would count as preparation too. We can tell in advance if another attack is coming because of the signals, *signa*, that recurring diseases send forth. Seneca holds that both diseases of the body and of the mind can be anticipated thanks to signals. Thus, in a passage in *De Ira* he draws a comparison between symptoms of oncoming emotion and the various signs that can point to an imminent epileptic attack.<sup>103</sup>

Finally, when we are no longer afraid of dying it will be easier to put up with disease because we are not adding further worries. This refers back to the earlier theme of the fear of death, but it also marks the transition to therapeutic advice that concentrates explicitly on the role of the mind. Hopefully, we might have found some relief in the thought that the body can only feel so much pain but now we must also train the soul to tackle pain and disease bravely.

---

<sup>102</sup>Cf. Costa (1988), 179.

<sup>103</sup>Seneca *Ira* 3.10.2; cf. *Ep.* 74.33.

(78.13)

**Noli mala tua facere tibi ipse graviora et te querelis onerare: levis est dolor si nihil illi opinio adiecerit.**

Just as the fear of death will unsettle someone who is seriously ill, so other thoughts too will have their impact on someone's perception of disease and his attitude toward it. In the following section the central argument will be that our opinions are what determine our experiences most of all. When we view our condition as hopeless we will thus make it so; when we complain loudly we will only upset ourselves more; when we relive past experiences of ill health or fear future ills we will unnerve ourselves in the present as well.

Seneca firmly forbids Lucilius to add to his worries. Complaining would only make matters worse and this reminds us of the body being described earlier on as 'this complaining and frail part'. This kind of annoyed response would be highly unsuitable to a philosopher. Instead, he should make light of his situation. Just as in *Ep. 78.10* the ignorant were starkly contrasted with the sensible man and their focus on the body opposed his care for the soul, so we find here a contrast between those opinions and attitudes that make circumstances harder to bear and those that alleviate them.

'Heavy' and 'light', *grave* and *levis*, are used in this context to emphasise the major impact that opinion has on the appraisal of a situation. *Grave* refers in other contexts of the letter to grave concerns that trouble us, to circumstances that weigh us down and to the seriousness of an affliction (cf. *Ep. 78.6, 78.11, 78.13, 78.15, 78.17*). By contrast, in the letter the term *levius* refers to those things that uplift us and to easy, light and trivial matters (*Ep. 78.4, 78.13, 78.17, 78.29*). Throughout the letter we find heavy as a negative and light as a positive connotation, with only one exception in *Ep. 78.17*. There we find a different consolatory strategy. Rather than treating the circumstances lightly, Seneca states that we can handle such a serious challenge. Indeed certain things are tough, but people are made to take on heavy loads.

**Contra si exhortari te cooperis ac dicere 'nihil est aut certe exiguum est; duremus; iam desinet', levem illum, dum putas, facies.**

What Seneca offers here is self-encouragement. Knowing how to address oneself when a painful situation is at hand is a helpful tool. It is also a positive thought that functions as an alternative to the objection voiced in *Ep. 78.11* and the tendency to complain in *Ep. 78.13*. The thought that it is nothing serious and that it will soon be over reflects the earlier discussion of pain as something limited in its extent or duration (*Ep. 78.7-9*). The medical evidence presented there gives a justification for this therapeutic strategy.

**Omnia ex opinione suspensa sunt; non ambitio tantum ad illam respicit et luxuria et avaritia: ad opinionem dolemus.**

Seneca indicates not only that an individual's beliefs shape his values, but he also

calls for a critical evaluation of those values. All the mentioned examples—ambition, luxury, greed, suffering—are undesirable and to say that all things are depending on (*suspensa sunt*) opinion suggests a state of uncertainty. Opinion can be used in a dismissive sense as ‘mere opinion’ in contrast with well-founded understanding.<sup>104</sup> In an earlier letter Seneca observed that the virtuous soul “assigns value to things in accordance with nature and not on the basis of mere opinion”.<sup>105</sup> Value should be assigned true to the Stoic formula “living in agreement with nature”. As a basis for assigning value, opinion represents the negative counterpart of Nature. The Stoic goal is to harmonise one’s thoughts and actions to the rational and divine principle of Nature and not to follow opinion that represents false beliefs.

Thus, holding the right opinions is a key concern in all areas of life, not merely in the case of disease. Seneca points out that wrong opinions are at the basis of all weakness of character.<sup>106</sup> Even our suffering can be traced back to our opinion. In all these cases we form an opinion based on pre-existing ways of thinking. For instance, a person who believes that he cannot be happy without his health will feel miserable when he suffers physical harm. A revision of one’s views directly affects a person’s perception and valuation of a situation:

But poverty, grief, and ambition are felt differently by different people according as their minds are coloured by habit, and a false presumption, which arouses a fear of things that are not to be feared, makes a man weak and unresisting.<sup>107</sup>

In this sense, Seneca’s discussion of opinion explicates an important step in the judgment process.

(78.14)

**Tam miser est quisque quam creditit.**

Seneca tends to let a new point or section take its cue from something said before. Here, the section gets its direction from the previous sentence. Opinion is what makes us suffer, and consequently it is our own thinking that makes us miserable.

<sup>104</sup>The Stoics regarded opinion, *opinio*, in Greek *oīēsis* or *doxa*, as an unstable assent that contrasts with certain knowledge. As such, the Stoic wise man has no opinions, cf. Stobaeus 2.111 (SVF 3.548; IG II-95.11m), Diogenes Laertius 7.23 (SVF 1.71), 7.121 (SVF 3.549; IG II-94.121), Sextus Empiricus M 7.151 (SVF 2.90; IG III-18.151), 7.157 (SVF 3.550; IG III-18.157).

<sup>105</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 66.6: *Animus ... non ex opinione sed ex natura pretia rebus imponens*, tr. Inwood (2007), 16. Cf. *Ep.* 81.8.

<sup>106</sup>Cf. Stobaeus 2.88-89 (SVF 3.378; LS 65A; IG II-95.10); Cicero *Tusc.* 3.24-25 (SVF 3.385), 4.14 (SVF 3.380, 3.393); Cicero *Fin.* 3.35 (SVF 3.381).

<sup>107</sup>Seneca *Marc.* 7.4: *Paupertatem luctum ambitionem alius aliter sentit prout illum consuetudo inficit, et inbecillum inpatientemque reddit praesumpta opinio de non timendis terribilis.*

The gravity of our situation boils down to a matter of belief. In the wretched man's case his thoughts act as a self-inflicted poison.

**Detrahendas praeteritorum dolorum conquestiones puto et illa verba: 'nulli umquam fuit peius. Quos cruciatus, quanta mala pertuli! Nemo me surrectum putavit. Quotiens deploratus sum a meis, quotiens a medicis relictus! In eculeum inpositi non sic distrahuntur.'**

Our self-perception extends over time and affects how we judge our past, present and future.<sup>108</sup> Seneca not only deals with the best way to come to terms with one's illness and its treatment in the present, but also with how we should carry on once the worst is over. The previous warning against negative thinking during one's illness is extended to repetitive thoughts concerning one's past sufferings. To engage in rumination for no other reason than to focus on the negative details, relive the moment and exaggerate the events, will prevent someone from making progress in developing a strong character. Such a ruminative way of thinking will only reinforce one's negative mood. This example of self-lament is based on the wrong opinions that no one was ever unluckier than the patient himself, not even someone under torture, and that his circumstances were really bad, *quanta mala*. It is indeed a vivid description of someone making himself miserable and forms the exact opposite of the self-address Seneca had suggested in the previous section.

Characteristic of this negative self-address is that it is very much a subjective response, as opposed to the Stoic who adopts an objective, more comprehensive outlook on things. The focus is only on what the patient himself experienced and this reveals the inability to put everything into perspective: his own pain outweighs that of all others, no one was closer to death. Moreover, it also demonstrates a complete lack of empathy: the suffering of others is set aside and he only speaks of how terrible things were for him and no reference is made to the sadness of his lamenting loved ones. By contrast, Seneca still thought of his beloved father during his own illness. The self-centered perspective and lack of empathy are in strong disagreement with Stoic teaching. The Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* establishes that Nature has created human beings with a natural kinship towards themselves and towards others. As such, it is natural and appropriate to develop social relationships and to feel affection for others.<sup>109</sup>

It is also worth noting that this letter contains numerous instances of self-address, which include both positive and negative examples. In *Ep. 78.2* we were let in on Seneca's own thoughts when he considered whether or not to end his life; in *Ep. 78.13*

<sup>108</sup>R. Sorabji offers a comprehensive account of therapeutic exercises common to different philosophical schools that deal with the passage of time, Sorabji (2000), Ch. 16 'Exercises Concerned with Time and the Self', 228-252.

<sup>109</sup>Cf. e.g., Hierocles 9.3-10, 11.14-18 (LS 57D); Cicero *Fim.* 3.62-68 (LS 57F); Hierocles ap. Stobaeus 4.671,7-673,11 (LS 57G); cf. the discussion in Long and Sedley (1989), 350-54; Algra (2003).

the warning against self-pity is supplemented with an example of self-encouragement that belittles the seriousness of one's condition; here at *Ep. 78.14* we find a harmful monologue recalling past miseries; in *Ep. 78.15* a quotation that would function well as a self-address; in *Ep. 78.18* Seneca wants the patient to be distracted and his advice is to think of other things than the pain one is in; *Ep. 78.21* suggests that we ourselves should be the supporting audience in our sickness and applaud ourselves. When we reflect on the character and context of the letter this attention to self-address is actually quite appropriate. The sick person will often experience a certain degree of social isolation, spend much time all by himself and have plenty of opportunity to reflect on his situation, or at worst, mull over his misery. Seneca is aware of the specific circumstances and understands the importance of a beneficial inner monologue to those who are confined by sickness.

***Etiam si sunt vera ista, transierunt: quid iuvat praeteritos dolores retractare et miserum esse quia fueris? Quid quod nemo non multum malis suis adicit et sibi ipse mentitur?***

People often exaggerate the gravity of their situation, but even when it truly was severe, once it is over the matter should be left behind. Why would someone allow past sufferings to taint his present mood? Instead, Seneca insists, we should be happy to have overcome our illness and now be in a better condition. Moreover, to harp on about physical suffering of times past is another example of being overly occupied with the body, as we were warned against in *Ep. 78.10*. The tendency to exaggerate one's own miseries is presented as a typical human fault. One could wonder whether this affects Seneca's personal account at the beginning of this letter as well. Seneca does recognise that pain is not a matter of objective fact: we distinctly perceive our own pain, perhaps overstate it, but even when we watch another person suffer we can only imagine what such pain would feel like to us. We never feel another's pain directly. This gap can become an obstacle in feeling sympathy for another's suffering and this clearly is the case in the above story.

***Deinde quod acerbum fuit ferre, tulisse iucundum est: naturale est mali sui fine gaudere.***

Charles Costa notes the attractive composition of the first part of this sentence in which the verbs concisely support the opposition between past suffering and present delight, *quod acerbum fuit* with *iucundum est* and *ferre* with *tulisse*.<sup>110</sup> Suffering that is over becomes a source of joy. This leads to the conclusion that it is natural to feel relief and to find joy in the cessation of one's ills. To say that it is natural, *naturale est*, has in this context a connotation of what is normal, what is understandable or reasonable, and what in the Stoic sense is 'in accordance with Nature'. Of course, the appeal to Nature has great authoritative strength, especially within Stoic philosophy. What is

---

<sup>110</sup>Costa (1988), 179.

### Letter 78: The troubles of ill health

in accordance with Nature reflects the way things should go and how we should respond. Although health is classified as an indifferent, under equal circumstances the Stoic will prefer health over illness.

**Circumcidenda ergo duo sunt, et futuri timor et veteris incommodi memoria: hoc ad me iam non pertinet, illud nondum.**

The use of *ergo* indicates that what follows is a concluding remark, a more general point. What is not at hand, because it is in the past or still in the future, should not be a source of distress. This reminds us of the Epicurean view, as reported by Diogenes Laertius:

... while he [Epicurus] thinks that pains of the soul are worse, since the flesh is only troubled by the present, but the soul is troubled by the past and the present and the future. In the same way, then, the soul also has greater pleasures.<sup>111</sup>

By anticipating future ills or recollecting past misfortunes, we only cause ourselves to be unhappy now. In short, Epicurus' advice is to think happy thoughts, to foresee future pleasures and remind oneself of past pleasures.<sup>112</sup> As we will see, Seneca agrees that worrying is inadvisable, but his position on thinking about the past is noticeably different.

The aspect of worry about future ills has not been discussed so far in this letter, but the combination of past and future concerns is a regular one and it is easily woven into the present context. Seneca frequently notes that it is useless and disheartening to relive past sufferings or worry about troubles that may lie ahead.<sup>113</sup> It is striking that at this point Seneca chooses the word *incommodi*, whereas throughout this section he spoke of *mali*. It seems plausible that here in the precept that functions as a summary the need for the correct philosophical terminology outweighs the benefit of simple, everyday language that connects better to popular perceptions. Seneca can afford to use more colloquial terminology at times provided that his formulation of the key philosophical points stays accurate.

<sup>111</sup>Diogenes Laertius 10.137: ... ὁ δὲ τὰς ψυχικάς. τὴν γοῦν σάρκα τὸ παρὸν μόνον χειμάζειν, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ παρελθόν καὶ τὸ παρὸν καὶ τὸ μέλλον. οὕτως οὖν καὶ μείζονας ἥδονάς εἶναι τῆς ψυχῆς. Tr. Inwood and Gerson (1997), 43 (LS 21R; IG I-9.137).

<sup>112</sup>Cf. Cicero *Fin.* 1.55-57 (LS 21U; IG I-23.55-57); *Tusc.* 5.95-96 (LS 21T; IG I-25.96).

<sup>113</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 5.9, 13.4-14, 15.9, 45.12-13, 74.34, 101.1-9; *Ben.* 7.2.4. On the value of concentrating on the present, making the most of the past and on the appropriate ancient exercises, cf. Sorabji (2000), Ch. 16 'Exercises Concerned with Time and the Self', 228-252; Hadot (1995a), Ch. 8 ““Only the Present is our Happiness”: The Value of the Present Instant in Goethe and in Ancient Philosophy”, 217-237. See also the commentary at *Ep.* 15.9 in Ch. 3.

(78.15)

**In ipsis positus difficultibus dicat, forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.**

In response to the misguided, self-lamenting monologue in *Ep. 78.14* and to the topic of past suffering, this section starts with a better form of self-address. Its content is a direct quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid* 1.203. Let us take a look at the original context. At this part of the story, Aeneas and his Trojan comrades have only just survived a terrible storm that was unleashed upon them by the goddess Juno. When only a few of their ships reach the shore, a worn out Aeneas gives an encouraging speech to his companions:

... And then Aeneas  
Spoke to his men to ease their hearts:

“Trojans! This is not our first taste of trouble.  
You have suffered worse than this, my friends,  
And God will grant an end to this also.  
You faced Scylla’s fury in her thundering crags  
And braved the Cyclops’ rocks. Recall your courage  
And put aside your fear and grief. Someday, perhaps,  
It will delight to remember these troubles as well.  
...”<sup>114</sup>

We may note several important similarities between the two texts. First of all, both Seneca and Aeneas intend to provide inspiration to others in a moment of crisis. Moreover, their strategy is to recall other troubles that have been overcome in the past and to draw attention to the strength and courage that were shown then.<sup>115</sup> Because these hardships are in the past, they can be a source of pleasure to us now. As such, this quotation precedes and hints at the topic in *Ep. 78.18*, the recollection of brave deeds of oneself or others. Human beings by nature enjoy the recollection of past accomplishments.<sup>116</sup> This is also of interest in comparison with the Epicurean therapeutic strategy of turning away from one’s present pain by recalling pleasant moments.<sup>117</sup> Seneca here proves that past hardships can become a pleasant moment

<sup>114</sup> Virgil *Aen.* 1.198-203: ... et dictis maerentia pectora mulcet: | ‘O socii (neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum), | o passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem. | vos et Scyllaeam rabiem penitusque sonantis | accestis scopulos, vos et Cyclopia saxa | experti: revocate animos maestumque timorem | mittite; forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit. Tr., with some minor adjustments, Lombardo (2006), 7.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Sorabji (2000), 233.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Homer *Od.* 15.398-401; Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.11, 1370b4; Cicero *Fin.* 2.105; Seneca *Herc. Fur.* 656-57; Juvenal 12.81-2.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.32-33; Armisen-Marchetti (2008), 104-105.

to remember and thus offers an alternative to the Epicurean remedy—another implicit reference to Epicurus. In addition, there is an appeal to adopt the right attitude now, to be courageous rather than fearful and dejected. This is an exhortative feature commonly found in consolatory texts. Finally, we may consider the reference to God. No matter what befalls us, God will bring an end to our suffering. We have already seen in *Ep.* 78.7-9 and 78.12 that there are natural limits to the pain and feelings of discomfort we experience. All in all, it is understandable why Seneca recalls this passage from the *Aeneid* here. Aside from the similarities, Seneca of course also appreciates the heroic setting and the authority of a Roman literary figure such as Virgil.

**Toto contra ille pugnet animo; vincetur si cesserit, vincet si se contra dolorem suum intenderit:**

With *toto ... animo*, Seneca underlines the dedication that is required but also how the mental aspect is central in this struggle.<sup>118</sup> The soul fights against pain. The image of a fight is introduced here with words as *contra ille pugnet*, *vincetur* and *vincet* and the adversary is not another athlete, but *dolorem suum*. What matters is that a fight requires active participation—one is not a weak patient, but a fighter—and that the fight can be either won or lost. This opens the possibility of a victory and where there is a victory there is glory and honour to be obtained. Of course it would be valuable to any person to take on an active stance in relation to their pain and disease, but to a male member of the Roman upper class in particular it would have been of great import to see himself in a fight that could win him glory.<sup>119</sup> The fighting image returns in the following sections: in *Ep.* 78.16 we find the physical fight of athletes and our matching inner struggle and in *Ep.* 78.17 there is a comparison with enemies in a battle.<sup>120</sup> The physically ill need to maintain a positive self-image and Seneca sets up this imagery of an inner struggle as a means to achieve success: instead of being overpowered by their pain, they can stand up to it and defeat it. In fact, this image of putting up a fight can already be found in the medical tradition: “The patient must co-operate with the doctor in combating the disease”.<sup>121</sup> The right course of action for such a person is to take on his pain. But because this is not a customary opponent

<sup>118</sup>The expression *toto animo* is common in Latin writers. Cf. Catullus 64.70; Cicero *Tusc.* 1.90, 5.115; *Fam.* 1.7.3; *Att.* 2.5.2; *Q. Fr.* 1.1.27; Lucretius *DRN* 3.109; Seneca *Contr.* 7.5.12; Seneca *Marc.* 2.4; *Brev. Vit.* 14.2; *Ep.* 53.9, 72.2, 95.5, 104.7, 108.27, 110.12; *NQ* 6.3.4, 7.31.1; Valerius Maximus 3.8(ext).1.

<sup>119</sup>On the conception of glory in Seneca, cf. Habinek (2000); Newman (2008). I will return to this point in my discussion of *Ep.* 78.16.

<sup>120</sup>On athletics as a metaphor for philosophical virtue, cf. König (2005), 132-139; on the athletic metaphor in Roman literature, Müller (1995), 189-206; on the imagery of an athletic contest or battle in Seneca, Armisen-Marchetti (1989) ‘Athlétisme’, 81-83; ‘Combat’, 94-97.

<sup>121</sup>Hippocrates *Epid.* 1.2.5 (2.634.8-636.4L): ὑπεναντιοῦθαι τῷ νοσήματι τὸν νοσεῦντα μετὰ τοῦ ἡτροῦ χρόνι, tr. Longrigg (1998), 102.

with whom blows can be exchanged, Seneca needs to redefine what constitutes loss and victory. A person loses the fight against his adversary, pain, by surrendering to it, whereas he wins by taking a stand and refusing to act in accordance with pain. These are the rules of the game.

**nunc hoc plerique faciunt, adtrahunt in se ruinam cui obstandum est.**

What should be done—offer resistance to one’s pain—is contrasted with the misguided response of the many, *plerique*, who bring about their own downfall. Rather than oppose their pain they give in to it, immediately and fully. This is exactly what happened in the example above where the wretched man’s exaggerated complaints only put himself at risk of losing the fight—the price he has to pay is self-induced misery.

**Istud quod premit, quod inpendet, quod urguit, si subducere te cooperis, sequetur et gravius incumbet; si contra steteris et obniti volueris, repelletur.**

Seneca describes the process in which an incoming force that is not opposed can increase its pressure and impact. This is most likely derived from a fighting context such as boxing, wrestling or the pancration.<sup>122</sup> An interesting parallel can be found in Dio Chrysostomus who gives an account of Diogenes the Cynic’s visit to the Isthmian games. Diogenes compares the match between athletes with the fight against hardships and points out that in both cases retreat under fear tends to result in even greater injuries:

And indeed, just as skilful boxers, if they anticipate their opponents, are not hit at all, but often actually end by winning the bout themselves, but if, on the contrary, they give ground through fear, they receive the heaviest blow; in the same way, if we accept our hardships in a spirit of contempt for them and approach them cheerfully, they avail very little against us; but if we hang back and give way, they appear altogether greater and more severe.<sup>123</sup>

This both ties in with the overall fighting imagery and with the consideration of athletes in the next section. The word *gravius* is another instance where the severity of things is dependent on one’s attitude. Once we stand our ground pain loses its force.

<sup>122</sup>Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 3.25.1-5 for a similar athletic metaphor of our moral struggle as a contest.

<sup>123</sup>Dio Chrysostomus *Orat.* 8.18: καὶ γάρ δή, ὡσπερ οἱ πυκτεύειν εἰδότες, ἐὰν μὲν προλάβωσι τὸν ἀνταγωνιστὴν, οὐ παίονται τὴν ἀρχήν, πολλάκις δὲ ἀπέβησαν αὐτοὶ καταβαλόντες· ἐὰν δὲ ὑποχωρῶσι φοβούμενοι, τότ' ἵσχυροτάτας πληγὰς λαμβάνουσιν· οὕτως ἐὰν μὲν τις τοὺς πόνους δέχηται καταφρονῶν καὶ πλησιάζῃ προθύμως, οὐ πάνυ ἵσχύουσι πρὸς αὐτόν· ἐὰν δὲ ἀφιστῆται καὶ ἀναχωρῇ, τῷ παντὶ μείζους καὶ σφιδρότεροι δοκοῦσι. (tr. Loeb edition).

**Letter 78: The troubles of ill health****(78.16)****Athleta quantum plagarum ore, quantum toto corpore excipiunt!**

Athletes are portrayed as men who are willing and able to put up with physical discomfort and they can be an inspiration to others.<sup>124</sup> People look up to such sportsmen who endure pain and make every effort to win. This martial spirit can rouse the audience, as Pliny the Younger describes in the context of a gladiator fight:

Next a *spectaculum* was put on—nothing lax or dissolute to soften and shatter man's spirits, but one to inspire them to face fine wounds and show scorn of death, by exhibiting love of glory and desire for victory even in the persons of slaves and convicted criminals.<sup>125</sup>

Seneca sees the potential of the athletic metaphor to inspire others, but he does not adopt it without further evaluation. In the description of the athletes' attitude *toto corpore* is contrasted with the *toto ... animo* in the section above.<sup>126</sup> The athlete's main instrument is his body while the philosopher principally uses his mind. This point will be worked out in more detail in *Ep. 78.20* where occupations that require physical labour are contrasted with the philosopher's intellectual activities.

**ferunt tamen omne tormentum gloriae cupiditate nec tantum quia pugnant ista patiuntur, sed ut pugnant: exercitatio ipsa tormentum est.**

So although the stout resistance to pain shown by athletes is admirable, it nevertheless can be questioned whether they act for the right reasons. Seneca concludes that it is their desire for glory that motivates athletes to accept the hardship of both the fighting itself and all the training that this requires.

Catherine Edwards makes the compelling suggestion that the theme of training can be understood in another sense as well. She points out that in Seneca's view the struggle against one's illness can in itself be a form of training: "If the athlete's training is torture, ... then the sick person's torture may itself be training. Facing up to adversity reinforces one's ability to face adversity in the future".<sup>127</sup> Fighting our illness will make us stronger and will have the effect of a moral workout.

**Nos quoque evincamus omnia, quorum praemium non corona nec palma est nec tubicen praedicationi nominis nostri silentium faciens, sed virtus et firmitas animi**

<sup>124</sup>Cf. König (2005), 132-139; Müller (1995), 189-206; Armisen-Marchetti (1989) 'Athlétisme', 81-83.

<sup>125</sup>Pliny *Pan.* 33: *Visum est spectaculum inde non enerve, nec fluxum, nec quod animos virorum molliret et frangeret, sed quod ad pulchra vulnera contemptumque mortis accenderet: quum in servorum etiam noxiiorumque corporibus amor laudis et cupidio victoriae cerneretur.* Tr. Parkin and Pomeroy (2007), 348.

<sup>126</sup>See Mähl (1974), 61, on the contrast between the ultimate goals of athletes as compared to 'our' philosophical goals.

<sup>127</sup>Edwards (1999), 260.

**et pax in ceterum parta, si semel in aliquo certamine debellata fortuna est.**

That we too should succeed in everything capitalises on the inspiring example, but at the same time Seneca wants to raise the bar. He wants to translate the athletic example that is only partially correct into a proper philosophical model that his audience should adopt. What we should appropriate is their fighting spirit and willingness to tolerate pain in order to win. But instead of physical combat the philosopher will fight the greater struggle against all of life's hardships and the athletes' small trophies are replaced with truly honourable rewards: virtue, steadfastness of mind and lasting peace. These are characteristic goals set by philosophy, Stoicism in particular. But here they are set out as the prizes to be won for our victory over pain. Again, we find a similar account in Dio Chrysostom's oration on Diogenes:

But the noble man holds his hardships to be his greatest antagonists, and with them he is ever wont to battle day and night, not to win a sprig of parsley as so many goats might do, nor for a bit of wild olive, or of pine, but to win happiness and virtue throughout all the days of his life, ...<sup>128</sup>

Our struggle, which is much like that of Diogenes' noble man, takes place on a whole different plane than the punches exchanged between athletes. Happiness and virtue are better and lasting rewards that clearly exceed the symbolic awards given to athletes.

As we have noted, the athlete's motivation to endure pain is to win glory. In this respect, too, the philosopher differs, as Newman observes when he writes, with regard to the philosopher's motivation: "Virtue is the glory of the wise man. When considered in itself, virtue contains its own glory and therefore needs no outside recognition. The wise men who praise virtue do not thereby confer glory. On the contrary, virtue necessarily compels praise from the *sapiens*."<sup>129</sup> Hence, the glory of the philosopher does not depend on bystanders to acknowledge his success.

#### (78.17)

**'Dolorem gravem sentio.' Quid ergo? non sentis si illum muliebriter tuleris?**

The interjection "I feel a terrible pain" is cut short immediately. Seneca seems to lose his patience with yet another whine. His wry comment is that an effeminate response does not make the pain go away. The word *muliebriter* sums up what the wrong reaction to pain looks like: unmanly whimpering and very unlike the tough, assertive

---

<sup>128</sup>Dio Chrysostomus *Orat.* 8.15: ὁ δὲ ἀνὴρ ὁ γενναῖος ἡγεῖται τοὺς πόνους ἀνταγωνιστὰς μεγίστους, καὶ τούτοις ἀεὶ φιλεῖ μάχεσθαι καὶ τὴν νύκτα καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν, οὐχ ὑπὲρ σελίνου, ὥσπερ αἱ αἴγες, οὐδὲ κοτίνου καὶ πίτυος, ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ εὐδαιμονίας καὶ ἀρετῆς παρὰ πάντα τὸν βίον, ... Tr. Loeb edition.

<sup>129</sup>Newman (2008), 331.

attitude Seneca propagated in *Ep. 78.15-16*. In an earlier letter he had already expressed a similar view:

Nor am I so mad as to crave illness; but if I must suffer illness, I shall desire that I may do nothing which shows lack of restraint, and nothing that is unmanly. The conclusion is, not that hardships are desirable, but that virtue is desirable, which enables us patiently to endure hardships.<sup>130</sup>

Both passages refer to the importance of performing one's role as a man and the danger of acting in an effeminate way. Roman masculinity was closely associated with being in control and with the ability to endure pain.<sup>131</sup> In his study of Roman homosexuality, Craig Williams characterises the Roman male identity in terms of different contrasts:

The oppositional pair masculine/effeminate can be aligned with various other binarisms: moderation/excess; hardness/softness; courage/timidity; strength/weakness; activity/passivity; sexual penetration/being sexually penetrated; and, encompassing all of these, domination/submission. If a man is associated with the second term in any of these antitheses, he is *ipso facto* effeminate.<sup>132</sup>

These opposing qualities are present throughout the letter. They show Seneca's attempt to disassociate the ailing man from such negative qualities as weakness, passivity and submission. Seneca insists that to exhibit virtuous qualities is the best way to be a real man. This was not an uncommon view: the connection between *vir* and *virtus*, man and excellence, as more than a linguistic one was prevalent in Roman society.<sup>133</sup> According to Seneca, only virtue enables us to face hardships in a composed manner that is worthy of respect. That is why it is so important for him to show that even a patient can exercise control over his disease and exemplify strength and courage.

The use of *gravem* highlights that it is one's own negative thinking that paints the situation as a heavy burden and a meek attitude only makes matters worse. This is in line with the Stoic analysis of emotion. Every emotion, the Stoics tell us, starts from an impression that serves as preliminary cause and has a mental and physical impact, followed by the twofold assent to the impression that something good or bad

<sup>130</sup>Seneca *Ep. 67.4*: *Non sum tam demens ut aegrotare cupiam; sed si aegrotandum fuerit, ut nihil intemperanter, nihil effeminate faciam optabo. Ita non incomoda optabilia sunt, sed virtus qua preferuntur incomoda.* (tr. Loeb edition) Cf. Cicero *Fin. 2.94*.

<sup>131</sup>Cf. Edwards (1999), 252; Williams (1999), Ch. 4 'Effeminacy and Masculinity', 125-159.

<sup>132</sup>Williams (1999), 142. Cf. Seneca *Ep. 52.12*.

<sup>133</sup>Cf. M. Gleason (1999), esp. 67.

is present or at hand and that this justifies a certain emotional response. This assent turns the impulsive impression this time into a proper impulse (*hormê, impetus*), which is accompanied by physiological manifestations and which leads to action.<sup>134</sup> They identified four central emotions: fear, desire, pleasure and distress.<sup>135</sup>

**Quemadmodum perniciosior est hostis fugientibus, sic omne fortuitum incommodum magis instat cedenti et averso.**

His answer comprises a military simile that underlines the masculine and martial attitude to pain. The idea behind it is the same as that in *Ep. 78.15*: the retreating party, whether in battle or in a match, often sustains the more serious injuries. It is best to stand one's ground and take the offensive.

**'Sed grave est.' Quid? nos ad hoc fortés sumus, ut levia portemus?**

The restated protest "But it is serious" adds a repetitiveness that accords with the complaining type of person.<sup>136</sup> The person here has an impression of physical pain, he assents to the thought that it is bad to be in such pain and also to the thought that the appropriate response would be to get upset. As a result he will feel the emotion distress and respond to this by complaining and crying over his miserable situation. Here Seneca argues against the second thought, that an emotional reaction is appropriate. It is effeminate and it certainly does not help one's situation.

This time Seneca's response heads in a slightly different direction. What he criticises this time is that hardship is considered to be a bad thing, i.e. the first thought in the analysis of emotion. But rather than respond as he did before, by saying that it is not hard at all and that we should make light of our situation, Seneca takes up the position that human beings were not made to be free from difficulties. Just as in *Ep. 78.14*, Seneca does not deny that the professed troubles are a real challenge. More precisely, he connects hardship with strong character. Those who are strong are made to take on serious challenges; only the effeminate wimps wish for circumstances that

<sup>134</sup>This emotional process is described by Seneca in *Ira* 2.1.3, 2.3.4 and *Ep. 75.12*; on the impression, see *Ira* 2.1.3; on the mental and physical responses to the impression, the *propatheiai*, see *Ira* 2.2.1-2, 2.3.1-3, 2.3.5, 2.4.2 and *Ep. 11.1-2, 11.5-7*; on assent, see *Ira* 2.1.3 and 2.3.4-5; on the impulse with its behavioural response and physiological manifestations, see *Ira* 1.1.4-7, 2.3.4, 2.35.3. For the Stoic theory of emotion, see e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.110-14 (SVF 3.396, 3.400, 3.407, 3.412; IG II-94.110-14); Stobaeus 2.88-89 (SVF 3.378; LS 65A; IG II-95.10); Cicero *Tusc.* 3.24-25 (SVF 3.385), 4.14 (SVF 3.380, 3.393); Cicero *Fin.* 3.35 (SVF 3.381); and also the collected evidence in SVF 3.377-420 and in Long and Sedley (1989), Ch. 65 'The passions'. Cf. Inwood (1985): Ch. 5 'The Passions', 127-181; Graver (2007).

<sup>135</sup>Those emotions that pertain to the future are desire (*epithumia/libido*) and fear (*phobos/metus*), those to a present situation are pleasure (*hêdonê/laetitia*) and distress (*lupê/aegritudo*). Cf. e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.110-14 (IG II-94.110-14); Stobaeus 2.88-89 (SVF 3.378; LS 65A; IG II-95.10).

<sup>136</sup>See the discussion at *Ep. 78.13*.

are light and undemanding. *Levia* is used here in the sense of light and easy things, but this is the only instance where "light" is not desirable. Sometimes circumstances are difficult and we just have to accept that.

Seneca's reply that we are made strong to take on challenges is very similar to a passage in *Ep. 71*:

What element of evil is there in torture and in the other things which we call hardships? It seems to me that there is this evil,—that the mind sags, and bends, and collapses. But none of these things can happen to the sage; he stands erect under any load. Nothing can subdue him; nothing that must be endured annoys him. For he does not complain that he has been struck by that which can strike any man. He knows his own strength; he knows that he was born to carry burdens.<sup>137</sup>

The worst thing that can happen is that we are weak and give up. Thus, the interjections express the wrong opinion: the fact that circumstances are hard does not mean that they are unjust or an evil. The only real evil is a feeble mind. But the wise man is willing and able to carry all burdens, without making complaints. Likewise, we should not wish for light burdens or protest against our heavy load, but should recognise our own strength and be willing to face hardships. In several passages Seneca stresses that Nature wants to toughen us up, that Fortune only sends real challenges to men of character; in short, that difficult circumstances are an opportunity rather than a bane.<sup>138</sup>

**Utrum vis longum esse morbum an concitatum et brevem?**

After showing that one should not wish for light burdens he pursues the matter in relation to the type of disease one suffers from. Would one rather wish for a long-lasting illness or a swift one? Seneca weighs up the pros and cons of both types but in the end it makes little difference.

**Si longus est, habet intercedinem, dat refectioni locum, multum temporis donat, necesse est, ut exurgit, et desinat:**

A long-lasting illness may seem troublesome but the disease will need intervals to build up renewed momentum and this gives the patient a break.<sup>139</sup> Because of the extensive explanation in *Ep. 78.7-9* Seneca can here state with confidence that

<sup>137</sup>Seneca *Ep. 71.26*: *Quid est in tormentis, quid est in aliis quae adversa appellamus mali? hoc, ut opinor, succidere mentem et incurvari et succumbere. Quorum nihil sapienti viro potest evenire: stat rectus sub quolibet pondere. Nulla illum res minorem facit; nihil illi eorum quae ferenda sunt displicet. Nam quidquid cadere in hominem potest in se cecidisse non queritur. Vires suas novit; scit se esse oneri ferendo.*

<sup>138</sup>Cf. Seneca *Prov. 2.1, 4.7, 6.1; Tranq. 10.1-2; Ep. 13.2-3.*

<sup>139</sup>Cf. *Ep. 29.8* where in the case of vices and mental disease intervals are seen as a useful respite.

although a disease can be painful, intervals make these pains bearable. Thus, the argument works not only to explain how one cannot feel too much pain but also to balance long diseases against short attacks of illness.

**brevis morbus ac praecipus alterutrum faciet, aut extinguetur aut extinguit.** *Quid autem interest, non sit an non sim? in utroque finis dolendi est.*

The brief and sudden illness attacks aggressively in an all or nothing attempt. The result is either the end of the disease or the end of its patient. Whatever the outcome,—we get better or we die—our pains are over soon. It is the one or the other, *aut extinguetur aut extinguit, non sit an non sim*. Summers notes that the same idea is expressed in Seneca *Prov.* 6.6: "Scorn pain; it will either be relieved or relieve you".<sup>140</sup>

(78.18)

**Illud quoque proderit, ad alias cogitationes avertere animum et a dolore discedere.** Seneca introduces this next point as another helpful instruction, *Illud quoque proderit*. It is just a little reminder of the overall purpose: to offer Lucilius philosophical advice from which he will benefit. Someone who is troubled by disease can take his mind off his pains for a while (*avertere animum*). This would seem to be in line with Epicurean therapeutic advice, but rather than thinking back to more pleasurable moments, Seneca will recommend to remember examples of one's own fortitude.<sup>141</sup>

**Cogita quid honeste, quid fortiter feceris; bonas partes tecum ipse tracta;**

Seneca explores two connected distractive responses that take the attention away from the pain: thinking of the important accomplishments of oneself and remembering the great deeds of others. These strategies can be read as Stoic alternatives to the Epicurean technique of remembering past pleasures.<sup>142</sup> Instead of taking pleasure as their focus, they concentrate on virtue, i.e. the Stoic central concept. Besides, these are more than just diversion tactics, they are beneficial as well. Looking back on past achievements of oneself and others forms a source of inspiration that offers guidance to one's subsequent actions. It has earlier been said that we are strong, *Ep.* 78.17: *fortes sumus*, and here we are asked to recall actions that attest to this. This positive thinking in terms of achievements contrasts with the person in *Ep.* 78.14 who by looking back at past suffering only weighed himself down. Charles Costa points to parallel passages in *Ep.* 14.13 and *Ben.* 1.2.4 where Seneca describes one's roles in life as *partes*.<sup>143</sup> This reminds one of actors playing their part, but to fulfil a 'good role' also recalls

<sup>140</sup> Seneca *Prov.* 6.6: *Contemnite dolorem: aut solvetur aut solvet.* (tr. Loeb edition). Summers (1910), 267.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.32ff.

<sup>142</sup> See Cicero *Fin.* 1.55-57 (LS 21U; IG I-23.55-57); *Tusc.* 5.95-96 (LS 21T; IG I-25.96); cf. Diogenes Laertius 10.137 (LS 21R; IG I-9.137), quoted above.

<sup>143</sup> Costa (1988), 180.

Cicero's discussion of the four-*personae* theory (*Off.* 1.107-121), which examines how a person should perform his different roles as a human being, as an individual and in relation to his social and professional obligations.<sup>144</sup>

**memoriam in ea quae maxime miratus es sparge; tunc tibi fortissimus quisque et victor doloris occurrat:**

The examples of others consist of those whom we remember because of their exceptional impact on us: we will see every bravest man, *fortissimus*, who truly is a conqueror of pain, *victor doloris*. These terms connect closely with the sections above and the fighting imagery there.

**ille qui dum varices exsecandas preeberet legere librum perseveravit,**

This first *exemplum*, only indicated with *ille*, largely overlaps with an anecdote about the Roman general and politician Gaius Marius.<sup>145</sup> In the Ciceronian account Marius is reported to have been the first patient to have his varicose veins cut out without being tied down to a table.<sup>146</sup> His self-mastery alone was sufficient against the pain. The original story continues that Marius after the treatment of his first leg decided that the pain was not worth the cure and stopped the procedure without having his other leg treated. But that part is excluded here.

Further, this example stands out from most other *exempla* in that it describes a private situation. Of course there would have been several persons present at the time—doctors, slaves, a few friends perhaps—but altogether the setting is private rather than public. This example does not portray Marius as a hero on the battlefield or a leading statesman, but as a tough man whose courage shows on the operating table. In this way the anecdote fits in well with the letter: it shows a man with health problems who is not afraid of intense pain and possesses the endurance to willingly undergo a painful procedure.

The element that is missing in other accounts but that we find here is that during the medical procedure he continued to read his book. It might be that Seneca knew a detail that others failed to mention but this seems rather unlikely. The accounts in Cicero and Plutarch are both quite extensive while Seneca only hints at the story and, what is more, Marius was renowned for his political role and military endeavours, not for any particular intellectual interests. Why would he read a book? In *Ep.* 24.6, Seneca mentions Cato the Younger who read a book by Plato, i.e. presumably the *Phaedo*, on the night of his death.<sup>147</sup> It is impossible to decide whether Seneca inadvertently added this detail because he wrote without verifying its exact origin or whether he really wanted to give the story a more philosophical bearing by adding

<sup>144</sup>Cf. De Lacy (1977), 163-72.

<sup>145</sup>Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 2.35, 2.53; Schrijvers (1990), 392-93; Plutarch *Mor.* Gaius Marius B2. Marius does not feature regularly in the letters, only in *Ep.* 51.11 and 94.66 is he mentioned by name.

<sup>146</sup>On varicose veins or *varices* see Celsus 7.8, 7.17 fin., 7.31.

<sup>147</sup>This passage has been discussed in detail in Chapter 1, section 2.1.

an intellectual activity. Either way, the overall effect is that of an exemplary figure who is tough, determined and learned. It also ties in well with the point to be made in *Ep.* 78.20 that the philosopher can keep working under all circumstances.

**ille qui non desit ridere cum hoc ipsum irati tortores omnia instrumenta crudelitatis sua experirentur.**

Ironically, there is a smooth transition from the one man who has his veins cut out by a surgeon to the other who bravely defies his torturers and their instruments of cruelty. The Roman declamatory tradition had a predilection for explicit and cruel stories in general and the stock character who shows a defiant attitude to his torturer offered both a way to induce an emotional response from the audience and to display one's rhetorical skills. Moreover, the philosophical tradition offered many examples of its own in which a wise philosopher responds defiantly to a tyrant's threats.<sup>148</sup> The brave under torture theme also turns up at *Ep.* 13.5 and 76.20.<sup>149</sup>

**Non vincetur dolor ratione, qui victus est risu?**

Certainly reason can achieve what a mere smile could do. Seneca observes that if even the unphilosophical and untrained can perform brave deeds then certainly the philosophically trained should be able to match their performance. Compare this to his comment on the story of Mucius Scaevola who failed in his attempt to assassinate an enemy leader and burned his own hand to prove that nothing would stop the Romans from fighting:

Here was a man of no learning, not primed to face death and pain by any words of wisdom, and equipped only with the courage of a soldier, who punished himself for his fruitless daring ...<sup>151</sup>

In the preceding letter Seneca uses the example of a young Spartan boy who

<sup>148</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 9.27 (Zeno of Elea); 9.58 (Anaxarchus of Abdera); Dio Chrysostomus Or. 6 (*Diogenes, or On Tyranny*); Epictetus *Diss.* 19 (How we should behave to tyrants); Valerius Maximus 3.3. ext. 1-5 in his chapter on endurance. Cf. Chitwood (2004), 10, 30, 132-34.

<sup>149</sup>On Seneca's use of imagery of torture, see Armisen-Marchetti (1989), 164-65. In his discussion of *Ep.* 76.20, Brad Inwood identifies the laughing man as the Carthaginian Hasdrubal.<sup>150</sup> But in Livy 21.2, to which Inwood also refers, it is not Hasdrubal but his murderer who smiles when tortured: "A barbarian whose master he [Hasdrubal] had put to death murdered him in broad daylight, and when seized by the bystanders he looked as happy as though he had escaped. Even when put to the torture, his delight at the success of his attempt mastered his pain and his face wore a smiling expression". *barbarus eum quidam palam ob iram interfici ab eo domini obtruncavit; comprensusque ab circumstantibus haud alio quam si euasisset uoltu, tormentis quoque cum laceraretur, eo fuit habitu oris ut superante laetitia dolores ridentis etiam speciem praebuerit;* tr. Mellor (1998), 248. Cf. Valerius Maximus 3.3. ext. 7.

<sup>151</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 24.5: *Vides hominem non eruditum nec ullis praeceptis contra mortem aut dolorem subornatum, militari tantum robore instructum, poenas a se irriti conatus exigentem; ...* (tr. Loeb edition).

preferred death over slavery to prove that anyone can die bravely.<sup>152</sup> Also, in *Ep.* 70 he cited the examples of gladiators who kill themselves rather than fight for their life in the arena. These are all unlikely role models—his audience would otherwise never wish to imitate slaves or gladiators—who prove that virtue is open to all.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, however, superior achievements would be expected both from a Roman member of the elite on account of his nobility and from a philosopher due to his advanced moral progress. They share a sense of *noblesse oblige* that sets a high standard of honourable behaviour. Through the emphasis that is placed here on reason the first association is with philosophy, but the underlying assumption that his audience will surely outstrip the actions of other (common) people clearly appeals to their aristocratic background as well.

#### (78.19)

**Quidquid vis nunc licet dicas, destillationes et vim continuae tussis egerentem viscerum partes et febrem praecordia ipsa torrentem et sitim et artus in diversum articulis exeuntibus tortos:**

This is the last section that deals with pain caused by illness and the summary of all the previous symptoms is meant to acknowledge Seneca's success: whatever painful affliction one would come up with, they cannot upset us anymore. Likewise, the central point of this entire section is that all pains have been overcome.

**plus est flamma et eculeus et lamina et vulneribus ipsis intumescentibus quod illa renovaret et altius urgueret impressum. Inter haec tamen aliquis non gemuit.**

The *plus est* is an implicit correction of the view expressed in *Ep.* 78.14 that not even torture was worse than that person's suffering. Seneca sums up various gruesome torture methods that form the ingredients for the vivid torture scene that follows. The description of these horrific instruments of torture will intimidate the audience yet Seneca proceeds to claim that even these have been endured bravely by some.

**Parum est: non rogavit. Parum est: non respondit. Parum est: risit et quidem ex animo. Vis tu post hoc dolorem deridere?**

As said in the discussion of *Ep.* 78.18, the description of torture was a favourite topic in declamation and the artful description here would not seem out of place in a rhetorical speech. What is striking is the repetition that forms a part of Seneca's rhetorical strategy. Repetition was in earlier sections part of the frequent complaints of the weaker sick person. But here it shows how the torturer strikes again and again in the hope to break his victim. Still, every time the tortured man withstands the abuse. Seneca himself uses a similar construction in *Brev.* 13.6 to describe new, more cruel methods for public executions: "Do they fight to the death? That is not enough! Are they torn

---

<sup>152</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 77.14.

<sup>153</sup>Cf. the earlier discussion of different types of *exempla* in Ch. 2, section 1.1, 47f.

to pieces? That is not enough! Let them be crushed by animals of monstrous bulk!"<sup>154</sup> Another rhetorical device is the apparent opposition between *rogavit / respondit*, the victim neither asks for mercy nor answers under interrogation.

The phrase *ex animo* can be taken literally to denote "from the soul" but is also used in a more figurative sense where it takes on the meaning of "from the heart", "wholeheartedly" or "really (meaning it)".<sup>155</sup> To laugh *ex animo* shows the spirit in which the action takes place. To be able to sincerely laugh at pain is what makes the victim invincible. In *Ep. 78.18* the model of endurance just laughed, without necessarily having the right mindset. But with the use of *ex animo* Seneca makes the laugh into a philosophical statement: what pertains to the soul is central to the philosopher. Only at this point does Seneca directly relate the example to the reader: surely now, with this example and at the end of this discussion the reader too should be able to laugh at pain! In addition, the question prompts the audience to imagine how they would feel and respond under such circumstances. To let one's imagination explore possible future events and picture and rehearse the most appropriate, rational response is a philosophical exercise called *praemeditatio*, Greek *proendēmein*.<sup>156</sup>

(78.20)

**'Sed nihil' inquit 'agere sinit morbus, qui me omnibus abduxit officiis.'**

There follows another objection but this time it is not concerned with the pains that accompany disease but with another side-effect of being ill, namely the inability to fulfil one's duties, *officiis*. This section and the next form the transition to the next topic, the interruption of pleasures. Although a duty, *officium*, is not the same as a pleasure, *voluptas*, they have in common that the sick person is not free to engage in whatever activity he wishes to. What Seneca sets out to explore is to what extent one cannot perform one's duties as well as the underlying question what one's duties really are.

**Corpus tuum valetudo tenet, non et animum.**

Seneca responds to the objection by making again the distinction between body and soul/mind. The word *valetudo* means here "ill health" and this only pertains to the

<sup>154</sup> Seneca *Brev. 13.6: depugnant? parum est. lancingantur? parum est: ingenti mole animalium exterantur.* (tr. Loeb edition). Cf. *Ben. 6.11.3.*

<sup>155</sup> Both can be found in Seneca; for the first meaning, see for example *Ep. 72.5, 104.20; Ira 2.12.2, 2.12.3, 2.24.1*; for the second, see *Ep. 54.7, 96.2; Ben. 2.5.4, 3.32.1; Apoc. 12.2.*

<sup>156</sup> The anticipation of misfortune was a Stoic therapeutic exercise, associated with Posidonius and Chrysippus, cf. Cicero *Tusc. 3.28, 3.52, 3.59; Galen PHP 4.7.7 p.282 de Lacy; Seneca Marc. 9.1-10, 11.1; Rabbow (1954), 160-71; Sorabji (2000), 97, 236-37.* The Epicureans, on the other hand, rejected this practice, cf. Epicurus *Ep. Men. 127* (Diogenes Laertius 10.127). I will expand on the spiritual exercise of *praemeditatio* in detail at *Ep. 78.29*.

**Letter 78: The troubles of ill health**

body. Since only the body is the part that gets sick, it is also the body that gets frustrated in its pursuits, not the mind. This recalls the passage in *Ep.* 78.10 where the sensible man separates his soul from the body and turns his attention for the most part to his soul. Seneca follows the same pattern here and points out that only the unimportant half is hampered by illness.

**Itaque cursoris moratur pedes, sutoris aut fabri manus impedit: si animus tibi esse in usu solet, suadebis docebis, audies disces, quaeres recordaberis.**

Indeed, for those who are involved in physical activities and have to do physical work, it really is a hindrance to become ill. The examples of the runner and cobbler mention their hands and feet, the same body parts affected by gout in *Ep.* 78.9. Moreover, the disdain for manual labour and physical exertion that speaks from this passage simultaneously affirms the pre-existing aristocratic attitude and supports philosophical attention to the mind. Because mental activities—the ones that matter most—are still open to the physically ill. The phrase *in usu* is another indication that the mind needs regular practice. The mind can be applied in many useful ways and the list of activities resembles those in *Ep.* 15.6. Although Seneca does not mention duties nor specifically replies to the objection, he does seem to suggest that as long as we are able to contribute to society and be of use to others we cannot say that we do not fulfil our duties. In many other passages he stresses that he himself is still working for the benefit of others.<sup>157</sup>

**Quid porro? nihil agere te credis si temperans aeger sis? ostendes morbum posse superari vel certe sustineri.**

A person can still contribute to society when affected by physical illness. For instance, the sick person can be the embodiment of endurance and can prove to others that diseases can be withstood. Self-control and steadfastness are important to the philosopher's image and a bodily disease is an occasion to demonstrate such virtues.<sup>158</sup> In fact, many philosophers' biographies mention the fortitude shown during painful afflictions.<sup>159</sup> Consider, for example, the anecdote in Aulus Gellius about the Middle-Platonist philosopher Taurus visiting a befriended Stoic who is seriously ill and in great pain:

When we came to the house in which the sick man was, we saw that

<sup>157</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 6.4, 8.2-3, 8.6.

<sup>158</sup>On exercising one's virtues in relation to indifferent things, see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 67.14, 71.18; Edwards (1999), 254-55.

<sup>159</sup>In the *Epistulae Morales* alone we find numerous references to men who show courage and endurance during their illness: Seneca (*Ep.* 54.1-3, 54.6, 61.1, 65.1, 67.2, 78.1-4, 104.1), his friend Aufidius Bassus (*Ep.* 30.1-14), his friend Claranus (*Ep.* 66.1-4), Epicurus (*Ep.* 66.47). The example of Epicurus was one of the most famous. In the letter to Idomeneus, Epicurus writes that, despite suffering terrible plain, he remains cheerful because he is recalling the pleasant philosophical discussions he has had (Diogenes Laertius 10.22).

he was suffering anguish from pains in the stomach, such as the Greeks call κόλος, or 'colic', and at the same time from a high fever. The stifled groans that burst from him, and the heavy sighs that escaped his panting breast, revealed his suffering, and no less his struggle to overcome it. Later, when Taurus had sent for physicians and discussed with them the means of cure, and had encouraged the patient to keep up his endurance by commanding the fortitude which he was showing, we left the house. And as we were returning to the carriages, and our companions, Taurus said: "You were witness of no very pleasant sight, it is true, but one which was, nevertheless, a profitable experience, in beholding the encounter and contest of a philosopher with pain. ..."<sup>160</sup>

Taurus, though not a Stoic himself, goes on to explain why the visible struggle of the ailing philosopher is compatible with the Stoic view that pleasure and pain are indifferent things.<sup>161</sup> His exposition is based on the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*. Human beings are by nature prone to strive for self-preservation, and as such they are inclined to acquire what is their appropriate good and avoid their appropriate bad. As they develop their reason and come across virtue and what is honourable, they come to understand that only virtue is a good and vice an evil. Still, it is difficult for man's reason to cope with the sensations of pain and pleasure:

Hence you saw the philosopher, relying upon the efficacy of his system, wrestling with the insolent violence of disease and pain, yielding nothing, admitting nothing; not, as sufferers commonly do, shrieking, lamenting and calling himself wretched and unhappy, but giving vent only to panting breathing and deep sighs, which are signs and indications, not that he is overcome or subdued by pain, but that he is struggling to overcome and subdue it.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>160</sup>Aulus Gellius NA 12.5.2-3: *Et ubi ad aedes, in quis ille aegrotus erat, peruenimus, uidemus hominem doloribus cruciatibusque alui, quod Graeci κόλον dicunt, et febri simul rapida afflictari gemitusque ex eo compressos erumpere spiritusque et anhelitus e pectore eius euadere non dolorem magis indicantes quam pugnam aduersum dolorem. Post deinde, cum Taurus et medicos accersisset conlocutusque de facienda medela esset et eum ipsum ad retinendam patientiam testimonia tolerantiae, quam uidebat, perhibito stabilisset egressique inde ad ueticula et ad comites rediremus: 'uidistis' inquit Taurus 'non sane iucundum spectaculum, sed cognitu tamen utile, congregientes conpugnantesque philosophum et dolorem. ...'* Tr. Loeb edition. For a discussion of this anecdote and its Stoic background, cf. Meijer (1994).

<sup>161</sup>Aulus Gellius NA 12.5.7-8. Cf. Stobaeus 2.88-89 (SVF 3.378; LS 65A; IG II-95.10); Van Riel (2000), 87-93.

<sup>162</sup>Aulus Gellius NA 12.5.9: *itaque vidistis philosophum ratione decreti sui nixum cum petulantia morbi dolorisque exultantia conluctantem, nihil cedentem, nihil confitentem neque, ut plerique dolentes*

Taurus stresses the heroic conduct of the Stoic patient, also employing the notion of a struggle. He also notes how different the philosopher is from the majority of sufferers. He may be groaning and sighing, but he does not complain. In other words, the Stoic will feel the pain, he will have an impulsive impression, *phantasia hormêtikê*, to withdraw from the pain and regard it as an evil, but he does not assent to the judgment that it is an evil.<sup>163</sup> As such, it never develops beyond the point of a 'preliminary emotion' or *propatheia*.<sup>164</sup> Thus, the visible signs are indications of victory rather than of defeat.

(78.21)

**Est, mihi crede, virtuti etiam in lectulo locus. Non tantum arma et acies dant argumenta alacris animi indomitique terroribus: et in vestimentis vir fortis appareat.**

It needs to be stated clearly that virtue is present in the case of illness and is not confined to heroic actions on the battlefield. One's sickbed may seem an unlikely place to showcase bravery but it nevertheless can be done. **Habes quod agas: bene luctare cum morbo. Si nihil te coegerit, si nihil exoraverit, insigne prodis exemplum.**

Seneca takes on a directive role and is straightforward in his instruction: wrestle with the disease. The fighting imagery at this point not only reminds of its earlier instances but also makes explicit that the two different situations—sickbed and battlefield—are intertwined. By standing one's ground in the face of opposition, one can set a notable example.<sup>165</sup> To be a model for others to imitate, a hero, is almost a complete reversal of the common view of the sick person as an incapacitated weakling.

**O quam magna erat gloriae materia, si spectaremur aegri! ipse te specta, ipse te lauda.**

The exclamation reveals how difficult it is to find acknowledgement for the performance of the physically ill: whereas battles and sporting matches are fought in the public eye, the sick person lies in bed at home. There is no audience to cheer the patient in his attempt to combat the disease or to praise him when he succeeds. And yet the occasion for glory is present, all the ingredients are there to obtain honour: there is pain that must be fought, a disease that persists in its attacks, the need for self-control

---

*solent, heiulantem atque lamentantem ac miserum sese et infelicem appellantem, sed acres tantum anhelitus et robustos gemitus edentem, signa atque indicia non uicti nec obpressi a dolore, sed uincere eum atque obprimere enitentis* (tr. Loeb edition).

<sup>163</sup>Cf. Stobaeus 2.68 (SVF 3.169; IG II-95.9).

<sup>164</sup>Cf. Meijer (1994), 199-204. On the Stoic concept of *propatheia*, cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.83; Galen *PHP* 4.3.2 (SVF 1.209); Plutarch *Virt. mor.* 449D (SVF 3.468); Aulus Gellius NA 19.1.14-20; Seneca *Ira* 1.16.7 (SVF 1.215); cf. Inwood (1985), 175-81; Hadot (1969), 131-33, 182-84; Griffin (1976), 180-81; and more recent studies in this connection: Tieleman (2003), 128, 257, 282-84; Graver (2007), Ch. 4 'Feelings without Assent', 85-107.

<sup>165</sup>Cf. Edwards (1999), 253, 262-63.

and fortitude in the patient to overcome his hardship. We want witnesses to see what we are going through.

This adds new meaning to the personal anecdote at the beginning of this letter as well. Through Seneca's narration the readers can watch him in his sickness and the account of Seneca's own hardship is presented as a persistent struggle against pain that could win him acclaim. He points out that he has to put up with much, that he keeps fighting and that he shows bravery. The troubles of Lucilius do not receive the same kind of attention.

Although the material for glory is right there, in order to receive praise one requires an audience to witness the victory. Seneca's answer to this problem is to be one's own audience: watch oneself and praise oneself. This way one will find a sympathetic audience that understands what one is going through. But more important, because the struggle against hardship is essentially different from public fights it is only appropriate to appoint oneself as spectator. To understand this better we need to look back at *Ep. 78.16* where the martial spirit and love of victory were shared by athlete and patient alike but their goals proved to be very different. The athlete received public awards—garland, palm branch or the announcement of the winner's name—that would lose their significance without an audience. Without public acknowledgement a palm branch is just a twig. By contrast, to win virtue, steadfastness of soul and lasting peace of mind means to obtain prizes that do not call for bystanders: they retain their value under all circumstances. And this is why Seneca can encourage his readers to be their own audience, for they are fighting their own struggle and the victory will be rewarding in itself.

(78.22)

**Praeterea duo genera sunt voluptatum. Corporales morbus inhibet, non tamen tollit; immo, si verum aestimes, incitat.**

The type of body/soul distinction that applied to duties in *Ep. 78.20* is applied here to pleasures. Bodily pleasures are cut short by disease, but not those of the soul. The structure of this section is quite similar to that of *Ep. 78.2*. First, the division between body and soul is stressed. Next, it is stated that the bodily part is affected by disease and a few examples demonstrate how physical activities are hampered. This is then contrasted with mental activities that one may continue to pursue and which are of greater value.

It is in view of this sharp body/soul distinction that we can understand Seneca's decision to highlight here how the body is frustrated in its desires. In *Ep. 78.11* he had made quite a different point. There he stated that it is not such a bad thing to go without one's customary pleasures because one will soon stop to feel the desire for them. That seems to be at odds with the position taken up here. It is important to note that in *Ep. 78.11* Seneca wanted to show that being ill was not the worst thing in

the world and that any complaints could be countered. In this section, however, the sharp division between pleasures of the body and pleasures of the soul is brought into play and this will remain a major topic for the remainder of the letter. Seneca is intent on proving the inferior status of bodily pleasures, they will never satisfy—neither in sickness nor in health—to the same extent as intellectual pleasures. He describes how the desire we feel for bodily pleasures only increases when they are retained due to sickness. Those who are focused on the body will only want them more because it is in the nature of bodily pleasures to be insatiable.

**Magis iuvat bibere sitientem, gratior est esurienti cibus; quidquid ex abstinentia contingit avidius excipitur.**

This increased desire is illustrated by the greater delight that eating and drinking brings to the hungry and thirsty. Both Costa and Summers associate this remark with the argument in Plato's *Gorgias* 496b-d where Socrates speaks of people who enjoy food and drink when hungry and thirsty.<sup>166</sup> Neither Costa nor Summers discuss the wider context of this parallel. Perhaps it can be seen as an intentional reference: in the context of Plato's *Gorgias* it is the combination of the pain of hunger and thirst with the pleasure of eating and drinking that indicates that pleasure cannot constitute a good. Seneca too is committed to the view that pleasure is not a good. By referring to bodily pleasures as filling up deficiencies he underscores that what pertains to the body should not be included as a good.

**Illas vero animi voluptates, quae maiores certioresque sunt, nemo medicus aegro negat.**

Subsequently, Seneca is full of praise for the pleasures of the soul. This point deserves a little more discussion. How can a Stoic applaud pleasure, even if it concerns pleasures of the mind? The difficulty arises in part from the fact that the term 'pleasure' can occur in different contexts.<sup>167</sup> Generally, pleasure (*hēdonē, voluptas*) is described as an emotion, *pathos*, an irrational assent to the judgment that something at hand is a good and that being delighted is the appropriate response.<sup>168</sup> In certain cases, pleasure (*hēdonē, voluptas*) can refer to an indifferent sensation that arises as a by-product of appropriate actions. Some sources call this pleasure an indifferent, others a preferred indifferent.<sup>169</sup> Then there is also 'joy' (*chara, gaudium*), one of the *eupatheiae*, the

<sup>166</sup> Costa (1988), 180; Summers (1910), 268. For similar passages on pleasures in the satisfaction of bodily-based appetites, cf. Plato *Phil.* 31-32; *Rep.* 585d-e.

<sup>167</sup> On the Stoic views on pleasure, cf. Haynes (1962); Van Riel (2000), 87-93; Long and Sedley (1989), 421.

<sup>168</sup> For *hēdonē/voluptas* as an emotion, cf. e.g., Andronicus *Peri pathōn* 1 (SVF 3.391); Cicero *Fin.* 2.13 (SVF 3.404); Philo *Leg. Alleg.* 3 §246 (SVF 3.406); Clemens *Al. Paed.* 1.13 SVF 3.445.

<sup>169</sup> For *hēdonē/voluptas* as an indifferent, cf. Aulus Gellius *NA* 9.5.5 (SVF 1.195); Diogenes Laertius 7.102 (LS 58A; IG II-94.102), 7.188; Stobaeus 2.57; Sextus Empiricus *M* 11.73 (SVF 3.155); Aulus Gellius *NA* 12.5.7 (SVF 3.181); Cleanthes even stated that pleasure has no value at all,

good emotions that only the wise man experiences. It is thus possible to speak of a 'good pleasure', though this implies a contrast with its usual negative connotation.<sup>170</sup> Seneca discusses the difference between *voluptas* and *gaudium* in detail in *Ep. 59*.

At first sight, none of the Stoic labels seem to fit strictly in this case: pleasure would not be commended if it were an emotion and a good affection is exclusive to the sage. Yet, here the pleasures of the mind are derived from taking up a heroic philosophical attitude towards suffering and hardship. As such, they must come close to what Seneca calls *gaudium*, one of the *eupatheiai*. In fact, this likeness is explained in *Ep. 59.4*: "for although an ignorant man may derive 'joy' if the cause be an honourable one, yet, since his emotion is wayward, and is likely soon to take another direction, I call it 'pleasure'".<sup>171</sup> The one thing that precludes these mental pleasures from being *eupatheiai* is that they are experienced by a non-wise person.<sup>172</sup> In general, the larger discussion of the interruption of pleasures, *intermissio voluptatum* (*Ep. 78.6*), intends to show that bodily pleasures are easy to part with. Thus, Seneca offers clear instructions: the one type of *voluptas* is to be rejected, the other to be pursued. Similarly, in *Vit. Beat. 4.2* he speaks of the happy man "for whom true pleasure will be the scorn of pleasures".<sup>173</sup>

Moreover, there is a passage in Cicero's *De Finibus* that bears a resemblance to what is at issue here. In the second book Cicero argues against Epicureanism and sets out to disprove the Epicurean assumption that all mental pleasures derive from the body. In *Fin. 2.104-105* we come across Epicurus' advice not to remember past evils. Cicero argues against the correctness of this therapeutical technique by pointing out that past hardships can become a source of pleasure (cf. *Ep. 78.15, 78.18*). He finds it more admirable to derive pleasure from the memory of hardship than from the memory of pleasure. The latter was an Epicurean strategy as, for instance, practised by Epicurus in his letter to Idomeneus.<sup>174</sup> Cicero continues:

But as far as you are concerned, it is the memory of pleasures enjoyed

cf. Sextus M. 11.74; pleasure as a preferred indifferent, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.102 (LS 58A; IG II-94.102); pleasure as a by-product, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.85-86 (SVF 3.178; LS 57A; IG II-94.85-86).

<sup>170</sup>Cf. Seneca *Vit. Beata* 9.1-2; *Ben.* 7.2-3.

<sup>171</sup>Seneca *Ep. 59.4*: *quamvis enim ex honesta causa imperitus homo gaudeat, tamen affectum eius impotentem et in diversum statim inclinaturum voluptatem voco* (tr. Loeb edition).

<sup>172</sup>The only other reference to *animi voluptates* is profoundly negative. In Seneca *Ep. 84.11*, the voice of reason tells us: "Abandon the pleasures of the body and of the mind; they only soften and weaken you"; *relinque corporis atque animi voluptates, molliunt et enervant*.

<sup>173</sup>Seneca *Vit. Beat. 4.2*: *cui vera voluptas erit voluptatum contemptio* (tr. Loeb edition). Cf. Seneca *Vit. Beat. 6.1*, however, where mental pleasures appear to be better than bodily pleasures, but still not good.

<sup>174</sup>Diogenes Laertius 10.22.

that makes for one's happiness, and bodily pleasures at that. Or if not, then it is false that all mental pleasures derive from an association with the body. ... Bodily pleasures are fleeting and fly off in an instant. (2.106)

Torquatus (I know fully well who I am addressing), does nothing ever delight you on its own account? I pass over integrity, morality and the virtues' particular beauty, which I discussed earlier. Let me suggest these more trivial cases: reading or writing a poem or speech; the study of history or geography; a sculpture or painting; a beautiful view; the thrill of the games or of the chase; Lucullus' country house—I had better not say yours, else I would give you a loophole, since you could say it had a connection with your bodily pleasure. (2.107)<sup>175</sup>

Here we find a similar contrast between bodily and mental pleasures. The pleasures of the body are called short-lived and are insinuated to be of lesser quality. In *Ep.* 78.22 Seneca describes the mental pleasures as *maiores certioresque* in relation to those of the body. Cicero and Seneca both reject the value of bodily pleasures and contend its possible value in therapeutical exercises. The easiest way to convey this here is by measuring the transient gratification of the body against the lasting value of the mind.<sup>176</sup> The resulting two types of pleasures certainly work well with the various oppositions that are present throughout the letter: body/soul, doctor/philosopher, weak/strong.

Compared to bodily pleasures these are higher because the soul itself is the better part (*Ep.* 78.10) and of greater certainty because the pleasures of the soul are not affected by external circumstances. Bodily pleasures are easily interrupted and less fulfilling. But there is not a doctor who can deny the pleasures of the soul from his

---

<sup>175</sup>Cicero *Fin.* 2.106: *sed vobis voluptatum perceptarum recordatio vitam beatam facit, et quidem corpore perceptarum. nam si quae sunt aliae, falsum est omnis animi voluptates esse e corporis societate. ... effluit igitur voluptas corporis ...;* *Fin.* 2.107: *nihilne te delectat umquam—video, quicum loquar—, te igitur, Torquate, ipsum per se nihil delectat? omitto dignitatem, honestatem, speciem ipsam virtutum, de quibus ante dictum est, haec leviora ponam: poëma, orationem cum aut scribis aut legis, cum omnium factorum, cum regionum conqueriris historiam, signum, tabula, locus amoenus, ludi, venatio, villa Luculli—nam si 'tuam' dicerem, latebram haberes; ad corpus dices pertinere—, sed ea, quae dixi, ad corpusne refers?*, tr. Annas (2004), 61.

<sup>176</sup>For the mental pleasure derived from learning, cf. Plato *Phil.* 51e-52d; *Rep.* 584b; Aristotle *EN* 10.3, 1177b-1178a; *Poet.* 4, 1448b; Epicurus derived pleasure from philosophy (SV 27), though he was critical of unnecessary cultural learning (Epicurus fr. 163 Usener, Diogenes Laertius 10.6; cf. Epicurus fr. 117 Usener, Athenaeus 588A); Cicero *Fin.* 2.105-108, 5.50. Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 50.9: "One enjoys other cures only after health is restored, but a draught of philosophy is at the same moment wholesome and pleasant"; *Aliorum remediorum post sanitatem voluptas est, philosophia pariter et salutaris et dulcis est.*

patient. The reason for this is that the intellectual way of life is not affected by disease, but also that the soul is not the doctor's area of expertise. It is not up to a doctor but to the philosopher to care for the soul's health. Already in the extensive medical regimen that was described in *Ep. 78.5* we find a variety of restrictions that all concern the sick person's diet and physical exercise. It is the task of the doctor to look after his patient's physical well-being and this permits him to make all sorts of recommendations that pertain to the body. The soul, however, is not in need of a doctor's attention but requires the philosophical advice Seneca has to offer.

**Has quisquis sequitur et bene intellegit omnia sensuum blandimenta contemnit.** The pleasures of the soul represent the right way of life, namely the philosophical life, and we should not only adhere to them but get to know them as well. Philosophy is all about doing and knowing the right things, *sequitur* and *bene intellegit*. Just as opinion in *Ep. 78.13* could add to people's troubles by further weighing them down, so knowledge too has a profound impact on people's lives. It changes their outlook and as a result their patterns of behaviour. Only when the correct insight has been fully incorporated will someone be able to acknowledge that the charms of the senses are nothing but an empty promise and dismiss them. When one chooses a life that is true to one's soul, one rejects a life in accordance with one's body. Not only are body and soul two distinct aspects of a human being, they each come to represent a different way of life.

Moreover, the contempt for bodily pleasures serves as an answer to the frustration of bodily desires. The philosopher who is ill does not mind that he cannot enjoy the same foods and drinks as when he was healthy because he knows that bodily pleasures only appear to be attractive and that nothing is lost when they are unattainable.

#### (78.23)

#### 'O infelicem aegrum!'

Next, Seneca introduces the exclamation from a bystander who deplores the sick person's situation. Here it is the patient's company who has the wrong opinion. Even if we have come to understand that disease is not a bad thing, others will not be of the same mind. Thus, we need to assess the situation independently and not be influenced by the misguided views of others. Seneca's disagreement gives an ironic tone to the exclamation itself. Why call him a poor man? The sick person has nothing to complain about!

**Quare? quia non vino nivem diluit? quia non rigorem potionis suae, quam capaci scypho miscuit, renovat fracta insuper glacie? quia non ostrea illi Lucrina in ipsa mensa aperiuntur? quia non circa cenationem eius tumultus cocorum est ipsos cum opsoniis focos transferentium?**

These mocking rhetorical questions all paint a clear picture of a man whose extra-

gant living makes him hard to please and easily disappointed. These decadent examples are confirmed in other sources as well. Latin authors such as Martial affirm the practice of cooling drinks with ice and the oysters from the Lucrine lake were widely considered to be the finest quality. Seneca disapproves of all this, but he certainly shows himself to be familiar with the popular indulgences and delicacies of his time.

The snow-cooled wine and cooks who carry in the stoves along with the food show a lifestyle in which things are all mixed up. Seneca here, and in other letters, abhors such practices because they are unnecessary as well as contrary to nature: "All vices are at odds with nature, all abandon the proper order of things".<sup>177</sup> Instead of living in harmony with Nature, these people try to bend Nature to suit their own extravagances. This is in stark contrast to the simple life that he himself advocates, in which life's basic necessities set the standard and hunger and thirst are easily quenched.

**Hoc enim iam luxuria commenta est: ne quis intepescat cibus, ne quid palato iam calloso parum ferveat, cenam culina prosequitur.**

It is luxury—Seneca's great enemy—that devises such excesses. The alliterative c-, q- and p-words make up a staccato speech that underscores the disapproval. Not only is the practice of bringing the whole kitchen into the dining room excessive, it also points to the constant need to invent new ways to keep satisfying a spoiled man. Since his overindulged tongue has already hardened now the food needs to be boiling hot instead of merely warm. Every time such a person gets what he wishes, the excitement wears off more quickly, his desires grow more exuberant and become increasingly difficult to fulfill.

(78.24)

**'O infelicem aegrum!' Edet quantum concoquat;**

The same exclamation is repeated and the argument continues. The previous section revealed the overindulged life to be abnormal and unnatural. In this section that point is carried even further: with such a luxurious way of life becoming ill actually is a much healthier condition to be in. There is no reason to feel pity with the sick person: now he will eat as much as he can hold and thus finally confines himself to proper quantities.

**non iacebit in conspectu aper ut vilis caro a mensa relegatus, nec in repositorio eius pectora avium (totas enim videre fastidium est) congesta ponentur.**

<sup>177</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 122.5: *Omnia vitia contra naturam pugnant, omnia debitum ordinem deserunt* (tr. Loeb edition). There are many examples in *Ep.* 122 of actions that go against nature, e.g. living at night; transvestism; people who try to grow roses that bloom in mid-winter. See the discussion of these examples in Inwood (2007), 350-51. Cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.20.2 where, on the authority of Plato, wine is being characterised as 'hot'; as such, it would go against nature to cool it with snow. Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 5.118.

All ostentatious display can now be dispensed with and food is no longer served as mere decoration. The little aside on being squeamish about looking at whole roasted birds underscores how finicky these people have become.<sup>178</sup> It also calls to mind the distaste for food that the sick person feels in *Ep.* 78.11, *cibi odium est*. There the aversion was caused by physical sickness, here it is excessive indulgence that distorts one's natural appetite. This adds to the notion that the situation of the spoiled man is not a healthy one.

**Quid tibi mali factum est? cenabis tamquam aeger, immo aliquando tamquam sanus.**

The word *mali* reminds us of the misunderstanding that being sick and unable to enjoy bodily pleasures is a bad thing. By now the audience should know that nothing terrible is going on. In fact, this is not the diet of a sick person but rather like that of a healthy man. Illness will force a man to bring his extravagant lifestyle down to more normal and healthy proportions. After all, luxury is the true evil and what stands in the way of a healthy lifestyle.

(78.25)

**Sed omnia ista facile perferemus, sorbitonem, aquam calidam, et quidquid aliud intolerabile videtur delicatis et luxu fluentibus magisque animo quam corpore morbidis: tantum mortem desinamus horrere.**

It is quite a change from the lavish banquets with fresh oysters and piled up bird breasts to simple broth and warm water. 'We' can easily put up with the medical regimen of a sick person, but such things are unbearable to those who are debilitated by a life of luxury. The precondition for us is that we cease to be terrified by death. After all, the fear of death is a black cloud hanging over our lives. Here, the starting point—we need to be free of fears and the greatest fear is that of death—is once again in agreement with Epicurus, but the exposition that follows is decidedly Stoic.<sup>179</sup> Only when we overcome that fear will we, the philosophically trained, acquire a strong attitude that can take on all kinds of hardship. Our prospective strength of character is quite the antithesis of those fastidious people whose sickness is primarily located in their souls.

This section connects familiar topics with several new and different topics—extravagance and simplicity, physical illness and mental health, the fear of death and dissatisfaction with life, philosophical and pleasure-seeking attitudes. At first glance, it may seem somewhat strained to see an interconnection between these

<sup>178</sup>On *fastidium* see Kaster (2005), Ch. 5, 'The Dynamics of Fastidium and the Ideology of Disgust', 104-133. See also the commentary at *Ep.* 78.26.

<sup>179</sup>Cf. e.g., Epicurus *KD* 2 (IG I-5); *Ep. Men.* 124-27 (LS 24A); Lucretius *DRN* 3.37-40, 3.380-911 (LS 24E); Nussbaum (1994), Ch. 6 'Mortal Immortals: Lucretius on Death and the Voice of Nature', 192-238.

**Letter 78: The troubles of ill health**

various themes. For instance, can we only put up with broth if we learn to despise death? That would seem overstated. But Seneca's aim is really to show that many topics are in fact connected. Health not only deals with the body but with the soul as well. And although the self-indulgent person will complain much louder when ill, his true malady is the bad condition of his soul. Mental health consists in being free from fears and vices but also in gaining a deeper understanding about the world and man's role in it. This presupposes the basic Stoic tenet that reason and virtue are one and the same.

**Desinemus autem, si fines bonorum ac malorum cognoverimus; ita demum nec vita taedio erit nec mors timori.**

We will stop fearing death if we come to understand the ends of good and bad things. By implication, the Epicureans cannot resolve one's fear of death because they do not have the proper ideas of what is right and wrong. It requires knowledge of what matters most in life to overcome this fear:

The soul should know whither it is going and whence it came, what is good for it and what is evil, what it seeks and what it avoids, and what is that Reason which distinguishes between the desirable and the undesirable, and thereby tames the madness of our desires and calms the violence of our fears.<sup>180</sup>

Philosophy is the long-established discipline that provides such knowledge and can offer a helping hand in our moral progress. Moreover, the resemblance here with the title of Cicero's philosophical treatise, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, cannot pass unnoticed. Ultimately, the choice is between philosophy and misery.

The non-philosopher who seeks pleasure is shown to be completely cornered, trapped in a life that is a nuisance and haunted by the fear of death. His life of extravagance is boring and tiresome because his pleasures are not really satisfying, he is unable to put up with hardships, yet death seems a terrifying prospect as well.

(78.26)

**Vitam enim occupare satietas sui non potest tot res varias, magnas, divinas percensem: in odium illam sui adducere solet iners otium.**

The comparison between different attitudes to life is couched in general terms, though it finds clear parallels in the life of pleasure and the life of philosophy. Not every life is rewarding and worthwhile and there is a serious danger of becoming fed up with life. The philosophical life is free from this risk because it actively

<sup>180</sup>Seneca Ep. 82.6: *Sciat quo iturus sit, unde ortus, quod illi bonum, quod malum sit, quid petat, quid evitet, quae sit illa ratio quae adpetenda ac fugienda discernat, qua cupiditatum mansuescit insania, timorum saexitia compescitur.*

enjoys to learn more about the true wonders of the world. Nature is varied, great and divine and its beautiful arrangement never ceases to amaze us. This world view of a divine and awe-inspiring Nature is completely Stoic and so is the attitude of active investigation. By contrast, the Epicureans thought of the world as an inhospitable place that showed itself indifferent to human presence. To them our natural surroundings could never be an argument to remain fascinated with life.

*Otium* is a term that roughly describes any life away from public duty (*officium*).<sup>181</sup> According to the traditional Roman view, *otium* could point in a positive sense to the private time spent busily on the management of one's assets and business affairs, *otium negotiosum*.<sup>182</sup> In a more negative sense, it could also denote the life of wealth and ease that is characterised by *inertia*, the *otium otiosum* or *otium Graecum*.<sup>183</sup> The latter form represented a neglect of one's responsibilities to the state and posed a serious risk of idleness and laziness. Romans who chose to abandon public life often felt the need to justify their decision and point out that their leisure was still productive.<sup>184</sup> As Toner remarks on the blend of work and leisure: "In general, the elite perceived that ideally their work was pursued for voluntary reasons, whereas their leisure was not aimed solely at enjoyment or diversion".<sup>185</sup> Seneca himself wrote a treatise, *De Otio*, devoted to the theme of how to spend one's private life in a useful and active manner.

The Stoic-philosophical attitude Seneca prescribes, in line with the traditional Roman outlook, takes an active interest in the world and finds its opposite in an attitude of idle leisure.<sup>186</sup> Whereas the former is energetic and grows an affinity for the world, the latter is lethargic and inclined to self-hatred. The resemblance between *in odium* and *iners otium* reinforces the connection between the two that Seneca intends to demonstrate.<sup>187</sup> Seneca himself views *otium* as the best opportunity to care for oneself.<sup>188</sup> In a later letter, Seneca criticises the easy life of luxury. It is evidence of a traditional Roman way of thinking and touches on many points similar to the ones found here:

<sup>181</sup>The most extensive study on this subject remains André (1966). For a more recent exploration of the role and forms of leisure, see Toner (1995), esp. Ch. 4 'Leisure and *Otium*', 22-33. Cf. Griffin (1976), 318-37.

<sup>182</sup>Cf. Virgil *Georg.* 2.467-68 for the busy *otium* of the farmer.

<sup>183</sup>Cf. André (1966), 22, 42.

<sup>184</sup>See e.g., Cicero *Off.* 3.1-4; *Pro Sestio* 98; *Fam.* 1.9.21; Seneca *Ep.* 55.4, 82.2-4, 94.72; *Brev. Vit.* 18.2.

<sup>185</sup>Toner (1995), 26.

<sup>186</sup>On the Stoic view on the subject of leisure, cf. Seneca *De Otio* 2.1-2, 3.1; *Ep.* 14.14, 68.1.

<sup>187</sup>On the dangers of idle leisure, cf. Seneca *Tranq.* 2.9-10; *Brev. Vit.* 14.1-5; *Ep.* 68.10-11, 94.74.

<sup>188</sup>The topic of retirement from public affairs to pursue one's philosophical studies is discussed extensively in *Ep.* 19, 36 and 68.

For the soul is made womanish by degrees, and is weakened until it matches the ease and laziness in which it lies. Lo, is it not better for one who is really a man even to become hardened? Next, these same dandies fear that which they have made their own lives resemble. Much difference is there between lying idle and lying buried! ... Leisure without study is death; it is a tomb for the living man.<sup>189</sup>

Moreover, the distinction between a weakened and hardened condition of the soul also reflects a physiological difference, i.e. in the degree of tension, *tonos*.<sup>190</sup> Idle leisure bears a closer resemblance to death than to life. It may seem an easy life but it is actually a lifestyle which softens and corrupts the soul. Study is presented as the best leisure activity and the letter continues to praise the power and benefit of philosophy. Just because Seneca recommends Lucilius to withdraw from public life and dedicate himself to philosophy, does not mean that he opts for, or even condones, a life of idle leisure: "Lay this to heart, that the wise man is never more active in affairs than when things divine as well as things human have come within his ken".<sup>191</sup>

**Rerum naturam peraganti numquam in fastidium veritas veniet: falsa satiabunt.** Not only is philosophical study an active kind of life, it is also concerned with the truth. The exploration of Nature is here directly associated with truth and with what is real. It is worth noting that in the next letter Seneca requests Lucilius to take a look at the natural wonders of Sicily and report his findings. By contrast, all that is based on false opinion goes against Nature and truth.<sup>192</sup> Seneca already connected truth and Nature in *Helv.* 9.2:

But it is a narrow mind that finds its pleasure in earthly things; it should turn from these to those above, which everywhere appear just the same, everywhere are just as bright. This, too, we must bear in mind, that earthly things because of false and wrongly accepted values cut off the sight of these true goods.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>189</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 82.2-3: *Paulatim enim effeminatur animus atque in similitudinem otii sui et pigritiae in qua iacet solvitur. Quid ergo? viro non vel obrigescere satius est? \* \* \* deinde idem delicati timent, [morti] cui vitam suam fecere similem. Multum interest inter otium et conditivum. ... otium sine litteris mors est et hominis vivi sepultura.*

<sup>190</sup>See e.g., Stobaeus 2.88.10 (LS 65A, SVF 3.378); Diogenes Laertius 7.110, 7.157, 7.159; Cicero *Tusc.* 4.11. Cf. Tieleman (2003), 113-117, 128, 237-9; Tieleman (2010a). Cf. the discussion in Ch. 6, *Ep.* 106.9.

<sup>191</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 68.2: *Depone hoc apud te, numquam plus agere sapientem quam cum in conspectum eius divina atque humana venerunt.*

<sup>192</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 78.13.

<sup>193</sup>Seneca *Helv.* 9.2: *Angustus animus est quem terrena delectant: ad illa abducendus est quae ubique aequa apparent, ubique aequa splendent. Et hoc cogitandum est, ista veris bonis per falsa et prave credita obstarere.* Cf. Seneca *Helv.* 8.4-5.

True goods are gratifying because they are real and they matter. The other things, the objects of ambition and pleasure, are falsehoods that fail to give real pleasure or satisfaction. It is plausible that this attention to study and learning can be seen in connection with the mental pleasures described in *Ep.* 78.22.<sup>194</sup>

Notions of aversion, *fastidium*, featured in *Ep.* 78.11 and 78.24 as well. The first instance was a natural aversion of the sick person to food, the next was an aversive dispreference to a particular presentation of bird meat, here the topic is an aversion to and satiety with life itself. Robert Kaster has investigated the concept of *fastidium* and describes its Roman usage with two behavioural scripts, absolute or 'reflexive' aversion and relative or ranking aversion. He also considers how these two versions of *fastidium* can be combined.<sup>195</sup>

The first type shows aversion as an autonomic response, performed as a reflex, to something that is disliked in an absolute way, regardless of presentation, status or the particular situation. Such reflexive *fastidium* covers things and situations which a Roman would find disgusting and stomach-churning, for instance, repellent animals such as bedbugs, someone's bad breath, defecation, shameless cowardice, incest and cannibalism.<sup>196</sup> Even though some of these reactions have an ethical dimension they can still be characterised as the type of aversion that is normal or "natural" to have. Kaster explicitly names the example of aversion to food as a consequence of illness just as we find it in *Ep.* 78.11.<sup>197</sup> Food that otherwise would seem appetising now turns the sick person's stomach. It does not entail a judgment about the food but involves a reflexive response. Similarly, eating human flesh would be revolting independent of who is on the menu or which part.

The other type of *fastidium* involves deliberative ranking where some object or person is perceived as substandard. Kaster refers to this as "aversive connoisseurship". It may touch on all kinds of inferiority, e.g., social, literary, amorous or culinary. A Roman could experience *fastidium* when he is in the close proximity of a slave, when listening to amateurish poetry, when rejecting the amorous advances of an ugly suitor, or when served simple fare.<sup>198</sup> The accompanying thought in all these cases seems to be: "Yuck! Do you really expect me to associate with that person, to listen to that rubbish, to eat that stuff?"<sup>199</sup> The sight of a whole bird in *Ep.* 78.24 is only a *fastid-*

<sup>194</sup> Unsurprisingly, many philosophers regarded (philosophical) study a great source of pleasure. Cf. Plato *Phil.* 51e-52d; *Rep.* 584b; Aristotle *EN* 10.3, 1177b-1178a; *Poet.* 4, 1448b; Epicurus SV 27; Cicero *Fin.* 5.50.

<sup>195</sup> Kaster (2005), 121-29.

<sup>196</sup> Kaster (2005), 105-112.

<sup>197</sup> Kaster (2005), 105-6.

<sup>198</sup> Kaster (2005), 112-21.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 47 for criticism of the squeamish attitude of some to the company of slaves; for this deliberative ranking type of *fastidium* and its contrariness to Nature, see *Ep.* 119.15-16.

*ium* to those people who have been spoiled by delicacies and they find the same bird meat appetising once the presentation has been adjusted so only the breasts are piled up. This sense of *fastidium* plays an important role in many of Seneca's letters because a squeamish reaction shows what is wrong with self-indulgent people and is directly opposed to a life in accordance with Nature. Stoic philosophy argues for a provident and caring Nature in which all of life's needs are easily met. Life is intended to be basic and without frills. Accordingly, Seneca reminds us to "reflect that Nature's best title to our gratitude is that whatever we want because of sheer necessity we accept without squeamishness".<sup>200</sup> As Kaster points out, by attributing deliberative *fastidium* to others one often calls attention to one's own feeling of deliberative *fastidium* towards those very persons.<sup>201</sup> Seneca clearly shows a strong disinclination to self-indulgent people and their life of luxury and his aversion stands in marked contrast to his enthusiastic attitude towards philosophy and all its wholesome qualities.

But what happens when a life grows weary with itself, *satietas sui*? At first glance, this would seem an instance of the first type of *fastidium*, quite similar to the reflexive aversion of a sick person. Kaster explains that satiety and monotony can give rise to loathing because for the moment we have had enough of a thing: "the *fastidium* of satiety and monotony is caused by objects or activities that are not ordinarily repellent but become repellent through excessive repetition or glut".<sup>202</sup> While the first slice of a chocolate cake tastes delicious, the same cake will become unpalatable when eaten all at once. More of the same thing will soon cease to please. The excitement of sensory pleasures tends to wear off quickly: "Pleasure is frail, shortlived, and prone to pall; the more eagerly it is indulged, the more swiftly it changes into the opposite".<sup>203</sup> To Seneca this is not only an interesting characteristic of bodily pleasures, but one that is effectively used to advise against such a lifestyle. The sensory overload of culinary excesses in Ep. 78.23 is linked directly to overindulgence, which is ultimately based on wrong opinions. In other words, extravagant living is based on the fundamental misconception that pleasures can lead to happiness. Spending one's life properly does not lead to *fastidium*, only someone who structurally wastes it would grow weary of himself. A pleasure-seeking lifestyle

<sup>200</sup>Seneca Ep. 119.16: *Utamur ergo hoc naturae beneficio inter magna numerando et cogitemus nullo nomine melius illam meruisse denobis quam quia quidquid ex necessitate desideratur sine fastidio sumitur*. See also Ep. 17.4, 47.2, 47.8, 47.13-17, 66.25, 89.22, 119.15-16, 122.18.

<sup>201</sup>Kaster (2005), 132.

<sup>202</sup>Kaster (2005), 107.

<sup>203</sup>Seneca Ben. 7.2.2: *Voluptas fragilis est, brevis, fastidio obiecta, quo avidius hausta est citius in contrarium recidens*. Cf. also Ep. 78.22 *omnia sensuum blandimenta*, and the discussion in that commentary section of Cicero Fin. 2.106 *effluit igitur voluptas corporis*. See also Cicero De Or. 3.98 and 3.100, in which pleasures of the senses are brought into connection with *fastidium* and satiety as well.

fits that description: its aggressive pursuit of pleasure fails to bring lasting gratification and ultimately leaves a person feeling miserable and unsatisfied with his life.

(78.27)

**Rursus si mors accedit et vocat, licet immatura sit, licet medium praecidat aetatem, perceptus longissimae fructus est.**

Whereas the previous section emphasised that the study of nature contributes to a good life, this section discusses how a different outlook affects the way one faces death. Not only does the philosopher know how to make the most of life and to appreciate it to the fullest, when his time comes he is ready to meet death. He succeeds both in living and in dying well, while the man who searches for pleasure fails to be successful either way. The possibility of an early death is not a cause for complaint nor is it considered unfair. The Stoics disagreed with the Peripatetics on whether the length of one's life affected one's happiness.<sup>204</sup> Each life has to come to an end at some point. Even though it may appear rather soon to others, the philosopher sees this differently because virtue is not decided by time. The term *fructus* is especially well-chosen as it has connotations of "reward", "success", "fruit", as well as "enjoyment". The philosopher's life is a success story in the sense that it is a life most proper to a human being and it is a joy to live such a life. Because it is a rewarding and gratifying experience it will feel as a very long life.

**Cognita est illi ex magna parte natura; scit tempore honesta non crescere:**

Prominence is given on the acquired knowledge, "he has come to know" (*Cognita*) and "he knows" (*scit*). The philosopher has gained an accurate understanding of Nature: he knows what matters and what is irrelevant and what should be pursued and what not. To live up to the Stoic key phrase of "living in accordance with Nature" one needs such a profound insight into Nature. The philosopher has learned that it is not the length of one's life but only its quality that matters.<sup>205</sup> Seneca exemplifies this with the honourable that is good and complete in itself; it will not grow into something better over time. A Stoic would never allow the good to become dependent on external factors that are not under one's control. Just as our happiness should not be decided by our wealth, health or reputation, so too it should not depend on the length of our lives. The good life is unconditionally complete.<sup>206</sup>

**iis necesse est videri omnem vitam brevem qui illam voluptatibus vanis et ideo infinitis metiuntur.**

<sup>204</sup>Cf. Cicero *Fin.* 3.46 (SVF 3.524); Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1061F (SVF 3.54[1]); Seneca *Ep.* 70.5. For the opposing point of view that only a complete life can be happy, cf. Aristotle *EN* 1.1098a.

<sup>205</sup>Cf. Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1061F (SVF 3.54[1]; *Stoic. rep.* 1046C (SVF 3.54 [2]); Stobaeus 2.98 (SVF 3.54 [3]); Themistius *Or.* 8.101d (SVF 3.54 [4]). Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 92.25; Kidd (1988), 657.

<sup>206</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 77.4 and 12.6.

How very different is this from the pleasure-seeking life that always seems short!<sup>207</sup> It is in the nature of such pleasures to be unsatisfactory.<sup>208</sup> As a consequence, the self-indulgent man who never reaches a state of lasting satisfaction will be in constant need of more time to keep chasing after more and other pleasures. Even though his life has been disappointing he will not be able to accept death when the time is there. The impression of life as being short contrasts with the long life as perceived by the philosopher. Moreover, in this sentence Seneca outlines the wrong approach while also stating the right view concerning pleasures, viz. that they are empty and hence a bottomless pit. Once we understand the truth of this statement we are less likely to be charmed by such pleasures.

(78.28)

**His te cogitationibus recrea et interim epistulis nostris vaca.**

The final two sections work towards a conclusion of the letter. Lucilius returns to the scene as the addressee to whom all of this was directed. Seneca expresses the hope that these thoughts will give Lucilius renewed vitality and enthusiasm. By referring to "these thoughts", *cogitationibus*, he establishes a connection with the importance of philosophical knowledge as just described in *Ep. 78.27*, and with the promise made in *Ep. 78.3* that the thoughts that helped Seneca will benefit Lucilius as well.

Moreover, Lucilius is told to spare time for their correspondence and this also reinforces the epistolary setting. Calling them "our letters", *epistulis nostris*, affirms their personal relationship. With the addition of "meanwhile", *interim*, Seneca already points to what will follow in the next sentence: the letters are meant to bridge the period in between, until he and Lucilius will meet again. Both Seneca's wish that this letter will encourage Lucilius and that their correspondence will continue are a case in point of *philophrônêsis*, meant to strengthen the friendly bonds between them.<sup>209</sup>

**Veniet aliquando tempus quod nos iterum iungat ac misceat; quantulumlibet sit illud, longum faciet scientia utendi.**

This is a classic example of *parousia*, another principle that characterises a letter of friendship.<sup>210</sup> Although Seneca and Lucilius are not together right now, they have their letters as substitute and find comfort in the thought that they will be united again in the future. Being absent from each other's company becomes more bearable when emphasis is put on the coming reunion.

A second reassuring thought is that regardless of how much time there will be

<sup>207</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 77.19-20*.

<sup>208</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep. 77.16*.

<sup>209</sup>On *philophrônêsis*, see Ch. 2, section 2.3 'Epistolary features'.

<sup>210</sup>See the discussion of *parousia* in Ch. 2, section 2.3 'Epistolary features'. Cf. Seneca *Ep. 45.2, 55.10-11*.

when they reunite, they will know how to spend their time well. They have the knowledge of using it well, *scientia utendi*, and they know how to apply it, *longum faciet*. This is another instance where Seneca's philosophy discusses knowledge in combination with its practical application. At the same time this underlines their independence of external circumstances; they will make the most of whatever comes their way. The observation that with the right, philosophical attitude even little time can be perceived as long-lasting echoes the similar argument found in *Ep.* 78.27. There it was applied to the whole of life whereas Seneca is here concerned with the time spent with friends. In both cases the person with a philosophical attitude knows how to bring quality to a limited amount of time. It also anticipates the quotation from Posidonius that follows immediately hereafter.

**Nam, ut Posidonius ait, 'unus dies hominum eruditorum plus patet quam in peritis longissima aetas'.**

Adding a quotation here recalls his earlier habit of ending his letters with a wise saying, even though Seneca abandoned that practice quite a while ago. The causal connective *nam* indicates Seneca's agreement with Posidonius and the authority that his name lends to Seneca's point.<sup>211</sup> This quotation is directly attributed to Posidonius, *ut Posidonius ait*.<sup>212</sup> Although we do not know which source Seneca used, the quotation may have come from Posidonius' lost work *Protreptikos* or from a letter by Posidonius.<sup>213</sup> Posidonius (c. 135 - 51 BC) was a famous Stoic philosopher and scientist from the first century BC who also enjoyed a good reputation among the intellectual circles of the Roman elite for his wide-ranging knowledge.<sup>214</sup> Posidonius wrote on the major topics of philosophy—physics, ethics, logic—but also on astronomy, history, geology, botany, mathematics and natural history. It is important to observe that Posidonius is introduced here partly because of the pertinence of his saying, but on top of that, such a renowned polymath would certainly serve as a personification of “a life that explores all things in their variety, greatness and divine nature” (*Ep.* 78.26). Naming Posidonius in this context reminds the reader of a distinguished and promi-

<sup>211</sup> Posidonius is also mentioned as an example, suffering bravely from gout, in Cicero *Tusc.* 2.61; Schrijvers (1990), 393. The only earlier reference in the *Epistulae Morales* to Posidonius is in *Ep.* 33.4. But from this point on, Seneca will quote and mention Posidonius numerous times, see Seneca *Ep.* 83.10, 87.31, 87.35, 87.38-39, 88.21, 90.5, 90.7, 90.10, 90.13, 90.20, 90.30-31, 92.10, 94.38, 95.65, 104.2, 108.38, 113.28, 121.1; cf. Costa (1988), 181.

<sup>212</sup> This quotation is included in Edelstein and Kidd (1989) as Posidonius fragment F179, cf. the discussion in Kidd (1988), 656-57; Theiler (1982), 378-79.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Summers (1910), 270; Theiler (1982), 378.

<sup>214</sup> For references to Posidonius' wide-ranging knowledge, cf. Strabo 16.2.10 (E.-K. T48) and Galen *PHP* 8.652 (E.-K. T84). For his recognition of the study of liberal arts, cf. Seneca *Ep.* 88.21-28 (E.-K. F90). Similarly, his Stoic teacher Panaetius was renowned for being *eruditus*, Cicero *Leg.* 3.14; Kidd (1988), 657.

inent intellectual authority, but also of the Stoic encouragement of learning.<sup>215</sup> This, in turn, validates Seneca's attention to medical scientific explanations in *Ep.* 78.7-9.

Posidonius' writings were widely studied at the time, among others by Cicero and Seneca, but today only fragments are left. Unfortunately, this leaves us unable to examine whether its immediate context is relevant and to assess to what extent Seneca's incorporation here relates to its original usage. On the other hand, Seneca may not have had the original text available to him either and could have used an anthology. What Posidonius says is very similar to what has already been said. There are similar contrasts of time—a single day versus a lifetime—, and of insight—the enlightened men versus the ignorant.<sup>216</sup> In this quotation as well enlightened understanding enables men to live a life of higher quality. It is worth noting that this passage could be taken to support both the similar statement about leading a good life in *Ep.* 78.27 and about spending quality time with friends in *Ep.* 78.28.

(78.29)

**Interim hoc tene, hoc morde:**

Again we come across the word *interim*.<sup>217</sup> It refers to the period up to their coming reunion, but in this case it also stresses that certain lessons need to be studied in Seneca's absence. Instead of finishing this letter with the wise words of Posidonius, Seneca rather wants to end with some philosophical advice of his own. The Latin combination of *hoc tene, hoc morde* is quite unusual and Costa already noted that it seems to be a variation to Cicero's expression *mordicus tenere*, frequently found in his philosophical writings.<sup>218</sup>

**adversis non succumbere, laetis non credere, omnem fortunae licentiam in oculis habere, tamquam quidquid potest facere factura sit.**

Seneca's advice is to be prepared to deal with all possible circumstances, both in adversity and prosperity. A steady course can only be maintained if we do not allow ourselves to be disturbed by the particular condition we are in. This all comes down to the right response and preparedness.

Although these are the usual words of wisdom that have been issued frequently on previous occasions, they do tie in with the particular context of this letter. Not to give in to adversity, *adversis non succumbere*, sums up the courageous attitude that

<sup>215</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.7-9; Kidd (1988), 657.

<sup>216</sup>For the thought that only philosophers understand the true meaning of *otium* and of spending one's time well, see Seneca *Brev. Vit.* 14, summarised in 15.5: "He makes his life long by combining all times into one"; *Longam illi vitam facit omnium temporum in unum conlatio*. Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 5.5; Costa (1988), 182; Kidd (1988), 657.

<sup>217</sup>For the use of the term in Seneca, cf. Summers (1910), 270.

<sup>218</sup>Cf. Cicero *Rep.* 1.51; *Luc.* 51; *Fin.* 4.78; see Costa (1988), 182; Summers (1910), 270.

we need adopt in the face of illness and other hardship. In addition, not trusting prosperity, *laetis non credere*, warns us against assuming favourable circumstances to be certain and short-lived pleasures to be satisfying. The non-philosophical person makes exactly these mistakes: he feels miserable when something "bad" happens to him and he is on top of the world when something "good" happens. Depending on externals such as health and luxury, will lead to disappointment when that person becomes ill. He feels wretched about his condition and becomes annoyed that he has to make do with broth and warm water.

One has to be aware of the unpredictable circumstances in life and the exercise of imagining and anticipating all possible outcomes, in particular potential misfortunes, is an important Stoic practice.<sup>219</sup> This technique of *praemeditatio* will prevent one from being caught off guard when actual hardship occurs. For instance, in *Ep. 24.2* Seneca asserts that one can overcome fear by imagining that all the fearful things that might happen will certainly take place. Facing one's fears will do away with all worry. The same point is repeated in a more general sense that is intended not merely to remove fear but acquire the right attitude under all circumstances: "Let us think of everything that can happen as something which will happen".<sup>220</sup> The point is not to scare oneself but rather to rehearse one's ethical response and accept possible events. As Armisen-Marchetti remarks: "In *praemeditatio*, imagination places itself in the service of reason; in anxiety, it is exactly the other way around: imagination overwhelms and sweeps away reason, with the complicity of the judgment".<sup>221</sup> That is why Seneca can say in this section that there is a philosophical use in imagining future misfortunes, while in *Ep. 78.14* he condemned the anxious person who relives his past miseries and worries about future ills. The effect is entirely different. The non-philosopher is only upsetting himself whereas the student of philosophy is engaged in a spiritual exercise that will strengthen his capacity to cope with hardship.

**Quidquid expectatum est diu, levius accedit. Vale.**

Seneca already expressed the same thought as follows: "If an evil has been pondered beforehand, the blow is gentle when it comes".<sup>222</sup> The exercise of *praemeditatio* will

<sup>219</sup>For a clear discussion of *praemeditatio* in Seneca and its Stoic background, see Armisen-Marchetti (2008). She demonstrates that Seneca adopts a coherent application of this technique and that seemingly contradicting statements can be understood within a Stoic framework.

<sup>220</sup>Seneca *Ep. 24.15*: *quidquid fieri potest quasi futurum cogitemus*.

<sup>221</sup>Armisen-Marchetti (2008), 112. The anticipation of misfortune, *proendēmein*, was a Stoic therapeutic exercise, associated with Posidonius and Chrysippus, cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.28, 3.52, 3.59; Galen *PHP* 4.7.7 p.282 de Lacy; Seneca *Marc.* 9.1-10, 11.1; Rabbow (1954), 160-71; Sorabji (2000), 97, 236-37; for a more specific study of *praemeditatio* in Seneca, Armisen-Marchetti (2008). The Epicureans, on the other hand, rejected this practice, cf. Epicurus *Ep. Men.* 127 (Diogenes Laertius 10.127).

<sup>222</sup>Seneca *Ep. 76.34*: *Praecogitati mali mollis ictus venit*.

train philosophical students to be prepared for various situations.

But the truly wise man and the aspirant to wisdom will use different remedies. For those who are not perfected and still conduct themselves in accordance with public opinion must bear in mind that they have to dwell in the midst of injury and insult; all misfortune will fall more lightly on those who expect it.<sup>223</sup>

Because they have anticipated different, possible outcomes and have rehearsed the proper reaction, viz. only to care for the morally good and bad and not to get upset over indifferent matters, they are not struck in the same way by events.

## Conclusion

The central topics in this letter all proceed from the troubles of ill health. At the heart of the matter are three issues that Seneca has cleverly put together. Firstly, Seneca starts and ends with the claim that his philosophical cure can put an end to the troubles of ill health. Philosophy gives strength to the soul and enables a person to face all challenges, illness included. Secondly, he describes what sets his philosophical approach apart from other strategies. The crucial difference is that philosophy takes the soul as its central focus and not the body. Without explicit reference to Epicurean philosophy, he rejects its main tenet that pleasure is a good and worth aiming for. In addition, he replaces the Epicurean therapeutic technique of recalling past pleasures with the memory of conquered hardships and the expectation of future misfortunes (*praemeditatio*). Thirdly, he presents his own Stoic view on what constitutes health and sickness. As it turns out, the qualification 'ill health' applies not solely to the physical condition of disease but also, perhaps even more so, to the unhealthy lifestyle that is characterised by a sick and corrupted soul. Physical illness is an incidental occurrence, regarded as only an external and morally indifferent thing. By contrast, a soul in an unhealthy condition is morally reprehensible. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to look after the soul's well-being and this is exactly what philosophy sets out to do.

All of this is discussed in the context of a letter to his friend Lucilius, who needs support and advice in dealing with illness himself. Several epistolary features contribute to the impression that this is a letter of friendship, mainly in the opening and closing paragraphs.<sup>224</sup> This is supplemented by characteristics of the *consolatio*.

<sup>223</sup>Seneca *Const. Sap.* 19.3: *Diverso autem remedio utetur sapiens adfectatorque sapientiae. Imperfictis enim et adhuc ad publicum se iudicium derigentibus hoc proponendum est, inter iniurias ipsos contumeliasque debere versari: omnia leviora accident expectantibus.*

<sup>224</sup>The characteristics of a letter of friendship have been discussed in Ch. 2, section 2.3.

Seneca shows concern for Lucilius and hopes that his cure will be of help to Lucilius as well. Moreover, Seneca shares his own personal experience of a serious illness, how this made him feel and what his thoughts were at the time. On the other hand, he is also frank—the sign of a true friend—when he makes it clear that Lucilius should not give in to self-pity and other signs of weakness. In the closing statement their friendly relationship is once again confirmed, the importance of their letter exchange is stressed and reference is made to their coming reunion. It will be hard to reject such caring advice. Seneca's friendship will motivate Lucilius to act and think as requested. For instance, Seneca warmly affirms his friendly bond with Lucilius in *Ep.* 78.28 before bringing up a final philosophical exhortation in *Ep.* 78.29.

Many of the themes in this letter—illness and pain as indifferent things, the hazards of a luxurious life, the benefits of philosophy—are discussed in other letters, in other works by Seneca and in other philosophical literature. In the footsteps of such predecessors as Posidonius, Panaetius and Cicero it would be difficult to come up with something entirely new. Thus, Seneca's contribution here consists not in uncovering a new problem or taking up an original philosophical position, but rather in offering a new angle to a familiar problem, making different combinations and introducing effective imagery. His reworking of Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, as explained in detail by Schrijvers, should be seen in this light.

A significant point of interest is the role that identity plays in this letter. Let us evaluate who are featured in this letter, how they are described and how they contribute to the letter's purpose. First of all, this letter contains only three individuals who are identified by name: Seneca (salutation), Lucilius (salutation, *Ep.* 78.4) and Posidonius (*Ep.* 78.29). All of these men have an interest in philosophy: Seneca and Lucilius explore philosophy together by way of their letters and additional study, whereas Posidonius was a Stoic philosopher.

Seneca's self-presentation here is in large part made up from the personal narrative of his own illness at the beginning of this letter. It is not from Seneca's mistakes that we learn, nor from a personal crisis that leads up to a process of revelation, but from his positive *exemplum*. His didactic example shows Seneca successfully applying philosophical insights and practices to his own personal situation. Although his own body fails him, he himself does not become a failure. He can portray his physical weaknesses without letting it undermine his authority. Rather, the experience adds to it on account of the moral strength he displayed. Related to Seneca, though not mentioned by name, are his own father (*Ep.* 78.2) and friends (*Ep.* 78.4). These subordinate characters help to represent Seneca as a beloved and social person. In what follows, Seneca takes on various, interconnected roles: he is the caring friend of Lucilius, his fellow student of philosophy, his advisor who warns and admonishes him, and the critic of those beliefs and types of behaviour that disagree with his own. These roles attest to his friendship with Lucilius, his philosophical insight and expe-

rience, as well as his knowledge in other areas, such as medicine.

To understand the part played by Lucilius in this letter we should consider what his contribution is and what he is asked to do or take to heart. First of all, he does not assume an active role here, the only initiative shown comes from the fact that he is ill and apparently mentioned this in his correspondence with Seneca. As such, Seneca feels that Lucilius is not yet the living image of Stoic endurance and could profit from his own experience and advice. Lucilius is guided both in his actions and in his thoughts. Although the exhortations are numerous, they do give the general impression that Lucilius is not asked to change direction completely, but rather that he is in need of reminders to keep him on the right track and sharpen the consciousness of his philosophical commitment. Moreover, the philosophical background to the tenets is not expanded on in any detail. In the end, the frequent use of 'we' indicates that Lucilius (and the wider audience) is considered to be on the same side.

In addition to individual names we have noted references to various group identities, mainly of a professional kind. The professions named were that of doctor, athlete, runner, cobbler and workman. Furthermore, there is the general group classed as 'the inexperienced' (*Ep. 78.10: inperiti*) and "most people" (*Ep. 78.15: plerique*). These unidentified people hold general views that often are at odds with the more sophisticated philosophical position. They function here as a counterbalance to the philosophical view: even though some, or even most other people believe such and such to be the case, we, the enlightened and philosophically minded, know better. The last group of others is also the only 'other' that is expanded on and added detail to. This is the self-indulgent man who is negatively portrayed as softened by luxury and sick of mind. The peculiarities of his lifestyle serve to prove its deviance of a normal and healthy way of life. By portraying these as general characters with stereotypical features and habits rather than as real individuals, the others remain 'others'.

When we take a closer look at these other identities we may note as a commonality between them their focus on the body. Whether it is the doctor who treats the body to restore it to health, athletes and men involved in physical labour who work with their bodies, the common people who are overly attached to the body, or the man of luxury who seeks to please and pamper his body. All of these occupations and lifestyles are body-centred in that they show a need for the body and a dependence on its well-being. By contrast, the philosopher separates body from soul and concerns himself first and foremost with his soul.

This brings us to the key part played by philosophy in *Ep. 78*. Seneca explicitly stated in *Ep. 78.3* his indebtedness to philosophy and this letter provides an overview of the many benefits of philosophy combined with attempts to define a distinct philosophical identity. Thus, *Ep. 78* needs to be understood from the perspective of the impact that the philosophical life has on us. In sickness, philosophy can offer consolation, but more generally, it is a cure for life itself. Philosophy gives us the strength

to be brave during our illnesses, to overcome our fear of death, enables us to bring honour to ourselves and be of use to others and it makes us scorn the pleasures that are lost to us in our sick condition. In sum, it is what makes life worth living and complete so that death cannot seem a frightful thing. In addition, philosophy will not just benefit Lucilius, it also helps him become a paradigm for a wider audience. Seneca tells Lucilius that he can set a notable example and that victory can be won in his struggle against pain. Furthermore, Seneca tries to present the philosophical lifestyle as a way of life that is natural. After all, Stoicism lays claim to living in accordance with nature and hence with setting a normative standard. Nevertheless, the need for this letter (and all the other letters in the collection) make it clear that in real life Seneca's philosophical lifestyle is not the norm and that most people live by other rules and values.

Comparison and contrast is used effectively as Seneca pits his philosophical way of life against that of various body-centred groups: doctors, athletes, manual labourers, the common people, and those who favour a life of pleasure (including the Epicureans). The act of comparing and contrasting is a stylistic device called *synkrisis*.<sup>225</sup> Through the structuring device of *synkrisis* Seneca seeks to establish a hierarchical rating of lifestyles. In each case he highlights what sets the philosophical approach apart from those of other groups. The doctor treats only the body, philosophy looks after the soul; the athlete is tough and overcomes physical hardship in order to win glory and prizes, but the rewards of philosophy are better; the manual labourer cannot work without his body, the philosopher can always use his mind; the pleasure-seeking lifestyle leads to misery, the philosophical life to salvation and happiness.

By examining the meaning of health and sickness, Seneca can come up with a philosophical reinterpretation that places a strong emphasis on the soul's well-being. This is what constitutes good health at the most fundamental level and an unhealthy soul is the worst type of illness. Physical well-being is preferable, but not essential to human happiness. In fact, physical illness presents an opportunity for the sick person to display his strength of character. At the same time, Seneca portrays the self-indulgent man in similar terms as the person who is sick and ascribes to both similar characteristics. Both conditions are called ill, either in soul or body; both can be described as feeling tormented, either by the fear of death or by physical pain; both experience vexation; both tend to be idle rather than active; both experience *fastidium* on account of their condition. These commonalities should underline that a luxurious lifestyle is an illness from which men suffer. But overall, the life of pleasure is in many ways a worse condition than physical illness. It is his very attitude that keeps the pleasure-seeking man imprisoned in his unhappiness, whereas the sick person—with the right philosophical attitude—can overcome the troubles of ill health.

<sup>225</sup>Plutarch's *Lives* offer a clear example of *synkrisis* between Greek and Roman heroes.

## Chapter 6

### Letter 106: Body in theory

#### Text and translation

SENECA LUCILIO SUO SALUTEM,  
**(1)** *Tardius rescribo ad epistulas  
tuas, non quia districtus occupa-  
tionibus sum. Hanc excusationem  
cave audias: vaco, et omnes  
vacant qui volunt. Neminem res-  
sequuntur: ipsi illas amplexantur  
et argumentum esse felicitatis  
occupationem putant. Quid  
ergo fuit quare non protinus  
rescriberem? id de quo quaerebas  
veniebat in contextum operis mei;*

**(2)** *scis enim me moralem  
philosophiam velle complecti et  
omnes ad eam pertinentis quaes-  
tiones explicare. Itaque dubitavi  
utrum differrem te donec suus  
isti rei veniret locus, an ius tibi  
extra ordinem dicerem: humanius*

Seneca sends best wishes to his Lucilius.<sup>1</sup>

**(1)** I am rather late in responding to your letters, but not because I'm tied up in business. Beware of listening to that excuse: I have time and anyone else who wants to has time. No one is pursued by activities: people embrace those activities themselves and believe that being busy is proof of happiness. So why is it, that I didn't write back immediately? The matter you were curious to know about was being integrated into my project.

**(2)** For you know that I intend to fully cover moral philosophy and to sort out all the questions which pertain to it. That is why I hesitated whether I should put you off until the right time came for this matter, or whether I should give you my verdict out of sequence. It seemed more polite not to keep waiting some-

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the basic text used is L. Annaei Senecae *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit L.D. Reynolds (Oxford Classical Texts), Vol. II. Oxford (1965). This translation is my own, but I have taken into account the translations by R. Gummere in the Loeb edition and by B. Inwood in Inwood (2007), 56-58.

*visum est tam longe venientem non detinere.*

(3) *Itaque et hoc ex illa serie rerum cohaerentium excerptam et, si qua erunt eiusmodi, non quaerenti tibi ultro mittam. Quae sint haec interrogas? Quae scire magis iuvat quam prodest, sicut hoc de quo quaeris: bonum an corpus sit?*

(4) *Bonum facit; prodest enim; quod facit corpus est. Bonum agitat animum et quadam modo format et continet, quae [ergo] propria sunt corporis. Quae corporis bona sunt corpora sunt; ergo et quae animi sunt; nam et hoc corpus est.*

(5) *Bonum hominis necesse est corpus sit, cum ipse sit corporalis. Mentior, nisi et quae alunt illum et quae valetudinem eius vel custodiunt vel restituunt corpora sunt; ergo et bonum eius corpus est. Non puto te dubitaturum an affectus corpora sint (ut aliud quoque de quo non quaeris infulciam), tamquam ira, amor, tristitia, nisi dubitas an vultum nobis mutent, an frontem adstringant, an faciem diffundant, an ruborem evocent, an fugent sanguinem. Quid ergo? tam manifestas notas corporis credis inprimi nisi a corpore?*

(6) *Si affectus corpora sunt, et morbi animorum, ut avaritia, crudelitas, indurata vicia et in statum inemendabilem adducta; ergo et malitia et species eius omnes, malignitas, invidia, superbia;*

one who has come a long way.

(3) And so I shall single this out from that sequence of connected issues and if there are any questions of the same sort I shall send them along of my own accord, even without you asking. What are these, you ask? Things which it is more pleasant than beneficial to know, such as the matter you are curious to know about: is the good a body?

(4) The good does something; namely, it provides benefit; that which does something is a body. The good stimulates the mind and shapes it and lends it coherence, which are characteristics of body. The goods of the body are bodies, so therefore are those of the mind. For this too is a body.

(5) The good of a human being must be a body, since he himself is corporeal. I'm speaking falsely if the things which sustain him and which either preserve or restore his health are not also bodies; therefore his good is also a body. I don't suppose that you will question that the emotions are bodies (if I may cram in also something else that you are not asking about), like anger, love, sadness—unless you question that these change our expression, scrunch up our forehead, relax our face, call forth a blush, or drive away the blood? What, then? Do you believe that such clear marks on the body can be engraved by anything other than a body?

(6) And if emotions are bodies, so too are the diseases of the mind, such as greed, cruelty, the faults which have hardened and turned into a state that is incorrigible. So too, then, badness and all its parts, spite, envy, pride;

(7) ergo et bona, primum quia contraria istis sunt, deinde quia eadem tibi indicia praestabunt. An non vides quantum oculis det vigorem fortitudo? quantum intentionem prudentia? quantum modestiam et quietem reverentia? quantum serenitatem laetitia? quantum rigorem severitas? quantum remissionem lenitas? Corpora ergo sunt quae colorem habitumque corporum mutant, quae in illis regnum suum exercent. Omnes autem quas rettuli virtutes bona sunt, et quidquid ex illis est.

(8) Numquid est dubium an id quo quid tangi potest corpus sit? Tangere enim et tangi nisi corpus nulla potest res, ut ait Lucretius. Omnia autem ista quae dixi non mutarent corpus nisi tangerent; ergo corpora sunt.

(9) Etiam nunc cui tanta vis est ut impellat et cogat et retineat et inhibeat corpus est. Quid ergo? non timor retinet? non audacia impellit? non fortitudo inmittit et impetur dat? non moderatio refrenat ac revocat? non gaudium extollit? non tristitia deducit?

(10) Denique quidquid facimus aut malitiae aut virtutis gerimus imperio: quod imperat corpori corpus est, quod vim corpori adfert, corpus. Bonum corporis corporale est, bonum hominis et corporis bonum est; itaque corporale est.

(11) Quoniam, ut voluisti, morem gessi tibi, nunc ipse dicam mihi quod dicturum esse te video: la-

(7) So too, then, the goods, first because they are their contraries, second because they show the same signs to you. Don't you see how courage imparts forcefulness to the eyes? How much purpose practical wisdom gives? How much modesty and calmness reverence imparts? How much unclouded ease cheerfulness produces? How much firmness stern self-control gives? How much relaxation gentleness provides? They are, therefore, bodies, which change the look and condition of bodies, which exercise their own power in them. Now all the virtues which I have mentioned are goods and whatever results from them.

(8) Can it be in doubt that that by which something can be touched is a body? "For nothing can touch or be touched except a body", as Lucretius says. But all these things which I noted could not change the body unless they touched it. Therefore, they are bodies.

(9) Besides, whatever has so much power that it urges on and compels, holds back and controls, is a body. What, then? Does fear not hold us back? Does boldness not urge us on? Does courage not propel us and provide impulse? Does self-restraint not rein us in and call us back? Does joy not lift us up? Does sadness not depress us?

(10) Indeed, whatever we do we perform at the command of either badness or virtue: what commands the body is a body, what exerts force on a body is a body. The good of the body is bodily, the good of a human being too is the good of a body. For that reason it is bodily.

(11) Since I've complied with your wishes, as you wanted me to, I shall now say to myself what I can see you're going to say: we are

*trunculis ludimus. In supervacuis  
subtilitas teritur: non faciunt  
bonos ista sed doctos.*

(12) *Apertior res est sapere, immo  
simplicior: paucis <satis> est ad  
mentem bonam uti litteris, sed  
nos ut cetera in supervacuum  
diffundimus, ita philosophiam  
ipsam. Quemadmodum omnium  
rerum, sic litterarum quoque  
intemperantia laboramus: non  
vitae sed scholae discimus. Vale.*

playing a game of chess. Intellectual acuity is being spent on otiose pursuits: these things do not make for good people, but for learned ones.

(12) Being wise is a far more clear case, and indeed far more simple. To employ only a little bit of learning is enough for a good mind, but as we are distracted by superfluities in all other things, so we are in philosophy itself. Just as we suffer from immoderation in all things, so it is in learning too: we're learning not for real life, but for the scholarly debate. Farewell.

## Introduction

The topic of this letter is the body, although this term is not as straightforward as it might seem. The Stoics used the term 'body' in two senses. In Stoic ontology 'that which is' must possess the capacity to act or be acted upon.<sup>2</sup> Because only bodies have this capacity, only bodies exist. In this general sense, body is used to refer to a corporeal thing that is part of physical nature. Thus, a star, a tree and a rock are all bodies.<sup>3</sup> But even the human soul and God must be corporeal, on account of their capacity to act or be acted upon.<sup>4</sup> In its more specific sense, 'body' refers to the human body—the physical body of an individual. According to the Stoic view, a human being consists of a soul and a body, both of which are bodies in the general sense. A student of Stoic philosophy could struggle with this concept of corporeality and wonder about the ontological status of a central ethical concept, viz. the good.

<sup>2</sup>For a general discussion of Stoic ontological concepts, see e.g., Inwood (2003), Ch. 8 'Stoic Metaphysics', by J. Brunschwig, 206-32.

<sup>3</sup>The Stoics also allow for other ways of being than existing to cover incorporeal things (time, void, place, sayables or *lekta*) and imaginary things (fictional entities, limits); see e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 58.13-15 (SVF 2.332; LS 27A; IG II-32); Sextus Empiricus *M* 10.218 (SVF 2.331; LS 27D; IG II-34); Long and Sedley (1989), 163-66.

<sup>4</sup>For the Stoic view that *pneuma* is the constituent material of the soul, see the evidence collected in Long and Sedley (1989), Ch. 47 'Elements, breath, tenor, tension' and Ch. 53 'Soul'; e.g., Cicero *ND* 2.23-5, 28-30 (LS 47C); Galen *PHP* 5.3.8 (SVF 2.841; LS 47H); Hierocles 1.5-33, 4.38-53 (LS 53B); Calcidius 220 (SVF 2.879; LS 53G); Aetius 4.21.1-4 (SVF 2.836; LS 53H). On the corporeality of God, cf. Aetius 1.7.33 (SVF 2.1027; LS 46A); Diogenes Laertius 7.135-36 (SVF 1.102; LS 46B); Long and Sedley (1989), 274-79.

The letter itself has not been the object of much scholarly study. At first sight, the main argument of the letter, whether the good is a body, seems straightforward and in line with Stoic school doctrine. More problematic is the way in which the critical remarks in the opening and closing section of the letter seem to be at variance with its central part. How should this incongruity be understood? Brad Inwood is the only one who has written a detailed commentary on this letter and his views form an important point of reference in my discussion.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, John Cooper has looked into the way Seneca handles theoretical philosophy and includes *Ep. 106* as part of his argument that Seneca does not truly understand the importance of acquiring a deep understanding of philosophical truths in Stoic philosophy.<sup>6</sup> I will address his arguments in the course of this commentary. Finally, since *Ep. 106* is positioned near the end of the collection, it is of interest to consider whether its place in the overall work is of influence on the tone and subject of the letter.

## **Commentary**

### **Seneca Lucilio suo salutem.**

This is the standard opening phrase that is used in all of Seneca's letters.<sup>7</sup>

**(106.1)**

**Tardius rescribo ad epistulas tuas,**

It is most likely that Seneca himself arranged the *Epistulae Morales* in books, and *Ep. 106* would fall somewhere in book XVII or XVIII.<sup>8</sup> The exact division between these books is not clearly indicated, book XVII starting with *Ep. 101* and XVIII ending with *Ep. 109*. Hildegard Cancik proposes that the first letter of book XVIII would have been either *Ep. 106* or possibly *Ep. 105*.<sup>9</sup> The recurring references to a large work on moral philosophy in *Ep. 106*, 108 and 109 add unity to these letters and could be an argument in favour of considering *Ep. 106* as the opening letter to a new book. Marion Lausberg suggests that *Ep. 106* is the most likely candidate to form the beginning of book XVIII as *Ep. 103* and 105 both deal with related topics—the danger that other people form and how to keep safe from them. Moreover, the opening line of *Ep. 106* would make a good introduction to a new book, with the delay of Seneca's reply marking the interval between the two books. In general, the parallels with the

<sup>5</sup>Inwood (2007), 261-272.

<sup>6</sup>Cooper (2004), Ch. 12, 'Moral Theory and Moral Improvement: Seneca', 309-334.

<sup>7</sup>See the discussion in Ch. 2, section 2.3, 70.

<sup>8</sup>On the division of the *Epistulae Morales* into books, cf. Aulus Gellius NA 12.2.2-13; Cugusi (1983), 195, 200; Cancik (1967), 4n.10.

<sup>9</sup>Cancik (1967), 12.

subsequent letters are more numerous and stronger than those with the preceding letters.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Dionigi Vottero points out that the reference to a plurality of letters on Lucilius' part, *epistulas tuas*, further strengthens Lausberg's suggestion that the hinted interval marks the start of a new book.<sup>11</sup> We may also note that the introduction here (*Ep.* 106.1-3) is more lengthy than in any of the surrounding letters. Thus, it seems plausible to assume book XVIII starts here. As the opening letter of a new book, *Ep.* 106 takes up a special position in setting the tone for the letters to come and introducing new themes and topics.

In *Ep.* 118 Seneca will remind Lucilius explicitly of their agreement that Lucilius would first write a letter and Seneca would write in return.<sup>12</sup> But now Seneca keeps his friend waiting, while Lucilius has already sent him several letters. Being slow in sending an answer could be seen as a sign of unwillingness or disinterest. After all, Seneca himself stresses that an act of kindness should always be made promptly: "The mark of willing action is swift action. Slow assistance, dragged out from day to day, has not come from the heart".<sup>13</sup> Seneca clearly does not want to appear remiss in front of his friend and needs to account for his tardiness. A similar case can be found in *Ep.* 48 where Seneca writes that his reply to Lucilius will be sent later. The explanation offered is that the complicated issue at hand cannot be dealt with directly: if it took Lucilius some time to state the problem, then settling it will require even more time.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it can be acceptable to write back at a later moment whenever there is a good reason for doing so.

**non quia districtus occupationibus sum. Hanc excusationem cave audias: vaco, et omnes vacant qui volunt. Neminem res sequuntur: ipsi illas amplexantur et argumentum esse felicitatis occupationem putant.**

Seneca wants to steer clear of the supposition that pressing business obligations were his excuse for not writing back sooner. He has time and so does anyone else. The argument that anyone can spend his time as he likes would probably be easier to accept for an elite audience who could afford leisure time and was concerned with

<sup>10</sup>Lausberg (1970), 171n.15.

<sup>11</sup>Vottero (1998), 72.

<sup>12</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 118.1: *Convenerat quidem ut tua priora essent: tu scriberes, ego rescriberem.* There are numerous letters throughout the *Epistulae Morales* where Seneca mentions receiving letters from Lucilius, *Ep.* 19.1, 40.1, 50.1, 59.1, 67.2, 74.1, 93.1, 102.1-2, 120.1.

<sup>13</sup>Seneca *Ben.* 2.5.4: ... et proprium est libenter facientis, cito facere. *Qui tarde, et diem de die extrahens profuit, non ex animo fecit.* The promptness of favours receives ample attention in *Ben.* 2.1-5. Furthermore, the Stoic sage is not the kind of person to stall either, "since stalling is a deferral of action because of hesitation; but he defers some things only when the deferral is free of blame", Stobaeus 2.116 (IG II-95.11s), tr. Inwood and Gerson (1997), 232.

<sup>14</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 48.1; cf. *Ep.* 95.1.

the proper ways of spending it.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the whole contrast between being occupied with affairs and having leisure time fits best with the life of a Roman gentleman. Miriam Griffin has argued that *districtus occupationibus sum* points more specifically to Seneca still being involved in imperial business.<sup>16</sup> However, dealing with business matters is a recurrent topic in the *Epistulae Morales* and I feel it is an overestimation to read this as a definite biographical fact.<sup>17</sup> After all, the only thing that is said is that obligations were not the reason for his tardy reply. (Either because he was not occupied with them, or because he was, but did not consider it to be a valid excuse.) Seneca's main point is that being occupied by such business is one's own free choice and each person is at liberty to spend his time as he will. Thus, it would make a bad excuse for his slow reply.

At the opening of an earlier letter, *Ep. 62.1*, we find a similar point being formulated in a manner that bears a close resemblance to our passage here:

We are deceived by those who would have us believe that a multitude of affairs blocks their pursuit of liberal studies; they make a pretence of their engagements, and multiply them, when their engagements are merely with themselves. As for me, Lucilius, my time is free; it is indeed free, and wherever I am, I am master of myself. For I do not surrender myself to my affairs, but loan myself to them, and I do not hunt out excuses for wasting my time.<sup>18</sup>

In *Ep. 62* the pretence of pressing affairs is deliberately exaggerated and it is used by others as an excuse for not pursuing liberal studies, including philosophy. On the other hand, Seneca cites it here as not being an excuse for his tardy reply to Lucilius. But the underlying notion of deception is a shared feature: Seneca would not want to deceive Lucilius by claiming he had not the time to write back. Others may lie and misrepresent themselves, but Seneca does not seek out excuses, he is trustworthy. It is an important aspect of Seneca's authorial self-presentation that his intentions are earnest despite the prevalence of misconceptions and deceit.

In both instances Seneca insists that his time is at his disposal, *vaco*, and the decision how to spend it is up to him. In *Ep. 62* he speaks of loaning some of his time to business rather than handing it over and he puts this in commercial terms associated with business affairs, *non trado sed commodo*. In *Ep. 106.1* Seneca differentiates

---

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Inwood (2007), 262.

<sup>16</sup>See Griffin (1976), 358-9.

<sup>17</sup>On the topic of business affairs, see e.g., *Ep. 17.9, 19.1*. *Ep. 22* and *72* in particular discuss the pursuit of business.

<sup>18</sup>Seneca *Ep. 62.1*: *Mentiuntur qui sibi obstare ad studia liberalia turbam negotiorum videri volunt: simulant occupationes et augent et ipsi se occupant. Vaco, Lucili, vaco, et ubicumque sum, ibi meus sum. Rebus enim me non trado sed commodo, nec consector perdendi temporis causas; ...*

between the false representation people hold on to of being chased by business activities and the actual situation in which people embrace such obligations themselves. The pursuit of business matters is a choice made of one's own accord.<sup>19</sup> Time is ours and hence being busy with affairs is a choice rather than an inadvertent result of circumstances. In general, time is a recurring topic and is frequently introduced in discussions on the importance of spending time on philosophical study and the careless use of time in the pursuit of other, trivial activities.<sup>20</sup> Motto and Clark point out that elsewhere Seneca uses the term *occupati*, those who are busy, in a pejorative sense by indicating that all their running around does not surmount to anything of real value. Hence, they waste their time.<sup>21</sup> Philosophical study, on the other hand, is always worthy of our time. This thought is found in a remark made by Cicero as well: "Really, my dear Quintus, ... I always have time for philosophy".<sup>22</sup> The rejection of this bad excuse enables Seneca to remind the reader of the proper evaluation of business affairs and of one's responsibility for spending one's time well.

The use of the word *argumentum* is also appropriate in the context of this letter, which includes several syllogisms that impose a formal structure to the text. Not only do people claim to be absorbed in business, they tend to believe that they get caught up in affairs unintentionally and, moreover, that this somehow is proof of their happiness. This last conclusion underlines that people can be wide off the mark in their conception of happiness. So how can being busy seem an indication of happiness? Those who are caught up in the middle of public and private affairs appear to lead an exciting life, their busyness is associated with success. Ultimately, these busy people attempt to amass ever more rewards for their efforts: more wealth, more fame, more influence. In one of his early letters Seneca explains that from business "it is easy to escape, if only you will despise the rewards of business".<sup>23</sup> People may complain about being busy but they still embrace their affairs as the best way to fulfil their desires (for riches, reputation or power) in the hope that these will bring them happiness. By contrast, Seneca upholds the Stoic view that happiness does not depend upon the gifts of fortune and that all their hard work will not pay off in terms of happiness.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup>On various bad goals as the object of pursuit, see also Armisen-Marchetti (1989), 164.

<sup>20</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 1.1-3, 45.12-13, 49.5, 49.9, 53.8-9, 71.36, 88.41, 93.5, 99.10-11, 104.16. Also see Sorabji (2000), Ch. 16 'Exercises Concerned with Time and the Self', 228-252. On the topic of time in Seneca, see Grimal (1968); Motto and Clark (1993), III "Tempus Omnia Rapit": Seneca on the Rapacity of Time, 41-50; IV Time in Seneca: Past, Present, Future, 51-64.

<sup>21</sup>Motto and Clark (1993), 62. Cf. Seneca *Brev. Vit.* 7.3, 12.1-2; *Tranq.* 12.3.

<sup>22</sup>Cicero *Div.* 1.11: *Ego vero, inquam, philosophiae, Quinte, semper vaco.* (tr. Loeb edition).

<sup>23</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 22.9: *Facile est autem, mi Lucili, occupationes evadere, si occupationum pretia contempseris.*

<sup>24</sup>On happiness not being the result of the gifts of fortune, see e.g., *Ep.* 23.3, 72.7, 74.6-7,

On the other hand, even the Stoics themselves claim that the good life consists in a life of both contemplation and activity.<sup>25</sup> Being busy as proof of happiness could bear some resemblance to this Stoic idea. Yet, by 'activity' the Stoics mean proper conduct, to lead a life that is in accordance with nature. Moreover, although these appropriate things may have 'value', *axia*, they are not good in the same way as the real good, viz. virtue. Thus, in the case of the proof for happiness the argument cannot simply be reversed to state that any active life is a good life. This is exactly the point of *Ep.* 8 where Seneca has to defend himself from the charge that he, as a Stoic, fails to lead the recommended active life: "Where are the counsels of your school, which order a man to die in the midst of active work?".<sup>26</sup> In reply, he points to his own philosophical contributions. He works day and night in the seclusion of his own home for the betterment of later generations: "Believe me, those who seem to be busied with nothing are busied with the greater tasks; they are dealing at the same time with things mortal and things immortal".<sup>27</sup> This point finds an echo in *Ep.* 106.1-2 where the fact that Seneca can point to his other philosophical work forms a clear contrast with the suggestion that he might be occupied with business. Although Seneca does not claim to be occupied with business, he is still very much active: he busies himself with philosophy.

**Quid ergo fuit quare non protinus rescriberem? id de quo quaerebas veniebat in contextum operis mei;**

After discussing what was not the reason for his tardiness, Seneca now repeats the question and turns to his own explanation. Lucilius wanted to know more about a matter that Seneca was going to discuss elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> While Seneca goes on to tell

76.30-31, 98.1.

<sup>25</sup>On the Stoic view that the good life consists in a life of activity and contemplation, see Cicero *ND* 2.37 (LS 54H); Diogenes Laertius 7.130 (LS 66H); Seneca *De Otio* 5.1, 5.8 and *Ep.* 94.45. Also, in *Ep.* 89.14 Seneca divides moral philosophy into a theoretical part, a part that deals with impulse and a third that covers action. In general, it should be noted that the Stoic interest in an active human life is tied to the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*. Since man is a part of the world around him, it follows that he will want to take part in worldly affairs and to contribute to the well-being of himself and others. Moreover, in *De Otio* 6.5 Seneca speaks highly of those earlier Stoics who, even though they did not take part in political life, still made a valuable contribution to the well-being of others through their life and work. A similar point he makes about himself in *Ep.* 8.1 and 8.6 when he visualises himself as working for the benefit of future generations.

<sup>26</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 8.1: *Ubi illa praecepta vestra quae imperant in actu mori?*

<sup>27</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 8.6: *Mihi crede, qui nihil agere videntur maiora agunt: humana divinaque simul tractant.*

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Seneca *Prov.* 1.1: *Hoc commodius in contextu operis redderetur; Valerius Maximus 5.4.7: ad locum contextus operis nostri progressus fuerit; Tacitus *Hist.* 2.8: ceterorum casus conatusque in contextu operis dicemus.*

more about this project of his, he does not mention yet what the topic is that Lucilius wanted to know more about. He will continue to side-step the actual question until the very end of *Ep.* 106.3, after which the discussion of this central topic begins.

(106.2)

**scis enim me moralem philosophiam velle complecti et omnes ad eam pertinentis quaestiones explicare.**

Seneca reminds Lucilius of the literary project he has in mind. The remark *scis enim* suits the context of two friends who are familiar with each other's plans. Seneca's work will cover moral philosophy and deal with all questions pertaining to it. Hence, it will be a comprehensive and thorough enterprise. By adding *velle*, Seneca indicates that at this point the work is on the stocks; although it is not fully written it has already been mapped out with a considerable degree of detail.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, the work itself has not survived and we are left with only a few fragments and references. Explicit references to the *Moralis philosophia* are found three times in the *Epistulae morales* only.<sup>30</sup> The four fragments that have been preserved all come from the work of Lactantius, a Christian author from the late third century AD. He quotes four times from Seneca's work and includes its title.<sup>31</sup> Those fragments deal almost exclusively with religious and theological topics, which is not surprising given the interest of Lactantius in such matters and his purpose of proving the validity of Christian theology against the futility of pagan beliefs. Nevertheless, the limited evidence raises many questions about the nature of this moral philosophical work and about the function of the reference we find here. It is this last aspect that I wish to focus on by examining the passages in the *Epistulae morales* more closely.

The letter that is central to this chapter is the first of three (*Ep.* 106, 108, 109) in which Seneca makes an explicit reference to his work *Moralis philosophia*. In *Ep.* 106 the topic that is suggested by Lucilius was planned for discussion in Seneca's work on moral philosophy. Next, *Ep.* 108 mentions that Lucilius has raised another, similar question that would also be incorporated in the *Moralis philosophia*. However, Seneca postpones answering him until the following letter in which Lucilius receives

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Vottero (1998), 73.

<sup>30</sup>Leeman considers several passages that might be allusions to the (planning of the) *Moralis philosophia*. He is correct, I believe, in arguing that the references in *NQ* 1.1.4, 2.46 and *Prov.* 1.1 point to a larger work on providence and that *Ben.* 7.5.1 provides too little information for any definite conclusion to be drawn. See Leeman (1953), 312-13, esp. 312n.3.

<sup>31</sup>The most recent survey of the evidence concerning Seneca's *Moralis philosophia* can be found in Vottero (1998), 64-75, 204-209 and 340-354. The passages in *Ep.* 106.2, 108.1 and 109.17 correspond to T90-92, the fragments in Lactantius F93-96, in Haase Frg. 116-118 and 119-124, respectively. Leeman (1953) discusses in particular the references to the work in the *Epistulae morales* and Lausberg (1970), 168-196, studies both the references and the fragments in detail.

his answer and in *Ep.* 109.17 the matter is closed.

The topic about which you ask me is one of those where our only concern with knowledge is to have the knowledge. Nevertheless, because it does so far concern us, you are in a hurry; you are not willing to wait for the books which I am at this moment arranging for you, and which embrace the whole department of moral philosophy.<sup>32</sup> (*Ep.* 108.1)

I have thus answered your demand, although it came under the head of subjects which I include in my volumes On Moral Philosophy. Reflect, as I am often wont to tell you, that there is nothing in such topics for us except mental gymnastics.<sup>33</sup> (*Ep.* 109.17)

We can discern several common elements in these three passages that are of interest. First of all, in each case the *Moralis philosophia* is described in very similar terms. Its description stresses that this will be a detailed and comprehensive discussion of moral philosophy and how it is being arranged with care as well. Also, Seneca repeatedly makes dismissive comments on the type of knowledge under discussion and its value, which I will examine in more detail in what follows.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, in all three passages the question is put forward by Lucilius, it is his own initiative to learn more about these topics. Instead of an opening anecdote about something Seneca noticed or encountered, most of the later letters begin with a request made by Lucilius to learn more about a particular topic or *quaestio*.<sup>35</sup> Both Leeman and Lausberg have pointed out the recurrent references to technical *quaestiones* and forms of the verb *quaerere*.<sup>36</sup> In this letter alone we find *id de quo quaereras* (*Ep.* 106.1), *omnes ... quaestiones* (*Ep.* 106.2), *quaerenti* (*Ep.* 106.3), *hoc de quo quaeris* (*Ep.* 106.3). Lucilius' growing interest in philosophical issues is itself a sign of a more advanced attitude. He now actively pursues philosophical knowledge. But because Lucilius seems to be overly fond of rather theoretical discussions it is up to Seneca to decide how to deal with his friend's requests, on which occasions to comply (*Ep.* 106, 109, 120), when to suggest additional topics (*Ep.* 118, 121, 124), when to postpone (*Ep.*

<sup>32</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 108.1: *Id de quo quaeris ex iis est quae scire tantum eo, ut scias, pertinet. Sed nihilominus, quia pertinet, properas nec vis expectare libros quos cum maxime ordino continentis totam moralem philosophiae partem.* (tr. Loeb edition).

<sup>33</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 109.17: *Persolvi quod exegeras, quamquam in ordine rerum erat quas moralis philosophiae voluminibus complectimur. Cogita quod soleo frequenter tibi dicere, in istis nos nihil aliud quam acumen exercere.* (tr. Loeb edition).

<sup>34</sup>See the commentary sections at *Ep.* 106.3 and 106.11-12.

<sup>35</sup>As already noted, in *Ep.* 118.1 it is mentioned explicitly that Lucilius should take the initiative by writing first.

<sup>36</sup>Leeman (1953), 309; Lausberg (1970), 170.

108), or when to discuss a subject but dismiss it in the end as trivial and irrelevant knowledge (*Ep.* 113, 117). This variety of responses should help Lucilius to learn the proper function and range of philosophical theory while at the same time tempering his enthusiasm to a more beneficial level.

In addition, in both *Ep.* 106 and 108 it is stated that Lucilius is in a hurry and that he is reluctant to wait until Seneca has finished his work on moral philosophy. Obviously, this provides an explanation for discussing such matters here in the *Epistulae Morales*. But it also forms a contrast with Seneca's delay, in *Ep.* 106 his response is tardy, in *Ep.* 108 he defers his answer to the following letter. Both Lucilius' eagerness and Seneca's hesitation create the impression that Lucilius may need to check his pace. We may consider the curiosity and enthusiasm of Lucilius as typical features in these later letters.<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, after postponing Lucilius' question in *Ep.* 108, Seneca turns his attention to the topic of the zealous neophyte whose enthusiasm should be regulated to a point. He repeats the advice from his own Stoic teacher Attalus:

Things are not to be gathered at random; nor should they be greedily attacked in the mass; one will arrive at a knowledge of the whole by studying the parts. The burden should be suited to your strength, nor should you tackle more than you can adequately handle. Absorb not all that you wish, but all that you can hold. Only be of a sound mind, and then you will be able to hold all that you wish. For the more the mind receives, the more does it expand.<sup>38</sup>

These recommendations indicate under which circumstances the learning process of a student can succeed best. Rather than pursuing each and every topic unsystematically, knowledge should be embedded in a suitable context, it should be offered at the right time, in the right order—the most important questions first—and in the right amount for the student. We find the same concern in *Ep.* 106 about presenting topics in the right context and at the right moment. Lucilius' enthusiasm borders on impatience and he runs the risk of intemperance and lack of a structured order in his philosophical study. Although Seneca needs to moderate his friend's enthusiasm, the passage in *Ep.* 108 is meant to assure him that a gradually developed mind will be able to hold as much knowledge as it wishes. He should take the time to learn the necessary things one at the time, and gradually proceed to the more advanced topics. In this way, he will be able to grasp everything more fully and this is important

---

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Leeman (1953), 310.

<sup>38</sup>108.2: *Nec passim carpenda sunt nec avide invadenda universa: per partes pervenietur ad totum. Aptari onus viribus debet nec plus occupari quam cui sufficere possimus. Non quantum vis sed quantum capis hauriendum est. Bonum tantum habe animum: capies quantum voles. Quo plus recipit animus, hoc se magis laxat.*

because philosophical knowledge needs to be thoroughly digested to have its transformational effect on the student.

**Itaque dubitavi utrum differrem te donec suus isti rei veniret locus, an ius tibi extra ordinem dicerem:**

Because of the arrangement of his other work on moral philosophy, Seneca has some doubts on the proper course of action toward Lucilius and this explains why Seneca did not send a reply immediately. He shares with his reader the two choices he faces and in doing so he gives further insight into his own deliberation process, which adds a personal, unreserved tone to the letter. By waiting for the right moment, Seneca can provide Lucilius with an answer that is situated in an appropriate context. The drawback is that telling Lucilius to wait a bit longer would seem an unsympathetic gesture, especially to a friend. Seneca showcases his concern for Lucilius as well as for the proper order and context in which he presents philosophical topics.

At this point we should also note the legal terminology that is used here with *an ius tibi extra ordinem dicerem*. By itself, the expression *extra ordinem* would simply mean 'out of order' or 'out of the ordinary', which fits a discussion taken out of its larger context. But in combination with *ius dicere* it also evokes a specific type of civil procedure, the *cognitio extra ordinem*. The standard way, according to the *ordo iudiciorum privatorum*, was a bipartite civil procedure in which first a written document, the *formula*, was drawn up between the plaintiff and the defendant under the supervision of a magistrate. Next, a private judge would render his judgment on the case. Unlike the formulary proceedings, there was in the *cognitio extra ordinem* "no more bipartition of the trial nor a formula, the whole proceeding being under the control of the same functionary or his delegate".<sup>39</sup> Such an official functionary would both investigate the matter and pronounce the decision himself. Seneca shows himself throughout his writings well acquainted with legal proceedings and Lucilius also, both in his position as imperial administrative official (*procurator*) and as private person would have been familiar with these procedures.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the terms *quaerere* and *quaestiones* were also common in both civil and criminal matters.

<sup>39</sup>Berger (1953), 394; see also the entries 'Cognitio extra ordinem', 'Formula', 'Ordo iudiciorum privatorum', 'Iurisdictio'. In the time of the early empire both proceedings concurred, but eventually the *cognitio extra ordinem* would come to replace the procedure *per formulam* and become the standard civil procedure.

<sup>40</sup>Seneca makes a clear comparison between the two types of proceedings in *Ben.* 3.7.4-5; for other imagery from or references to legal proceedings, see e.g., *Ep.* 13.5, 48.10; 54.3, 65.15, 72.2, 97: the Clodius trial. In particular, there are several passages where Seneca approaches a philosophical debate as if it were a trial situation, *Clem.* 2.7.1, *Prov.* 1.1, *Ep.* 13.5, 45.13, 65.2, 121.1. Cf. Armisen-Marchetti (1989): on topics related to law, see 106-108, on the frequently used image of a trial, see 'Procès', 155-157, 197n.217. Lucilius served as *procurator* in Sicily, *Ep.* 19.5; he also was involved in at least one lawsuit himself, *Ep.* 24.1-2.

The first was used in the sense of ‘to investigate’ or ‘to examine’, the second as a type of juristic writing that describes true or fictitious legal cases.<sup>41</sup> In the context of this letter, which has as its focus a philosophical investigation or *quaestio*, Seneca decides to take up the case, examine it and give his verdict.

**humanius visum est tam longe venientem non detinere.**

Ultimately, the deciding factor is what seems considerate, *humanius*, viz. not to keep someone waiting who has come such a long way. The choice might also be seen as one between different generic expectations. A systematic treatise would place more emphasis on the right context, whereas in the *Epistulae Morales* the sense of mutual affection between friends outweighs the concern for structure. Moreover, by making this choice Seneca presents himself as a sympathetic and reasonable man. At times, it seems he wants to challenge the stereotype of the rigid Stoic who does not feel for others by portraying either himself or the Stoic sage as a caring figure.<sup>42</sup> In addition, with *tam longe venientem* he recognises and acknowledges Lucilius’ philosophical progress as well as their shared epistolary journey. Because Lucilius is making headway, it would not be kind to postpone the matter that he is curious to know more about any further. The combination of care for a friend and for his progress is mentioned again in *Ep.* 109.15: “Moreover, it is in accordance with Nature to show affection for our friends, and to rejoice in their advancement as if it were absolutely our own”.<sup>43</sup> Thus, what is according to Nature would certainly not be at variance with Stoic practice.

**(106.3)**

**Itaque et hoc ex illa serie rerum cohaerentium excerptam et, si qua erunt eiusmodi, non quaerenti tibi ultro mittam.**

Now that Seneca has made the decision to comply with Lucilius’ request, he states under which conditions and in which manner he will proceed. This comprises a refinement of his earlier intentions. Although he agrees to answer Lucilius’ question, he makes it clear that he himself retains control over how the matter is discussed. Whenever Seneca sees it fit to bring up a related issue he will do so.<sup>44</sup> Hence, his consideration for Lucilius does not quite cancel out his concern for presenting a topic in its relevant context. Also, the use of *mittam* is another allusion to the epistolary framework.

<sup>41</sup>Berger (1953), ‘Quaerere’ and ‘Quaestiones’.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Seneca *Clem.* 2.5.3: “But the fact is, no school is more kindly and gentle, none more full of love to man and more concerned for the common good, so that it is its avowed object to be of service and assistance, and to regard not merely self-interest, but the interest of each and all”.

<sup>43</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 109.15: *Praeterea secundum naturam est et amicos complecti et amicorum auctu ut suo proprioque laetari.*

<sup>44</sup>Cf. *Ep.* 109.14 where Seneca moves on to a closely related topic in order to prove his point.

More explicitly this time, Seneca mentions that this topic is taken out of its wider context of connected issues. This reminds one of the opening section in *De Providentia* where Lucilius asks to learn more about a particular aspect of providence. Seneca complies with his wishes, but also notes that this question would have been best treated in a coherent work on providence rather than being singled out from the whole.<sup>45</sup> As a matter of fact, in all three epistolary references to the *Moralis Philosophia* mention is made of proper arrangement: in *Ep. 106.2 extra ordinem*, in 108.1 the verb *ordino* and in 109.17 *in ordine*. The systematic treatment of these advanced topics recurs each time he mentions his planned work.

Seneca also expresses his view on the systematic presentation of subjects at *Ep. 102.4-5* where he explains to Lucilius that in his earlier discussion of ethics he had focused on the essential part that pertained to conduct while postponing the dialectical arguments:

All these things have a view to conduct, and therefore they have been inserted under the proper topic. But the remarks of dialecticians in opposition to this idea had to be sifted out, and were accordingly laid aside. Now that you demand an answer to them all, I shall examine all their statements, and then refute them singly.<sup>46</sup>

Seneca acknowledges that there are certain questions in which logical and ethical aspects are intertwined. But what is really at issue here is the difference between dogmatic exposition and dialectical disputation. At first, Seneca simply laid down the Stoic principles, but at this later stage in the *Epistulae Morales* and at the request of Lucilius, Seneca will also examine the more technical disputations of the dialecticians. For example, Seneca has so far discussed what type of renown is commendable, *claritas*, and which one should be shunned, *gloria*.<sup>47</sup> But he had avoided the more complicated objection that praise is only an utterance and an utterance is not a good, which presupposes advanced knowledge of Stoic ethics and logic.<sup>48</sup> Now that he has decided to discuss them, he will do so systematically and treat them all at once. Apparently, at this point he trusts Lucilius to be able to follow these arguments. In the sections that follow he argues against various dialectical objections in detail, yet

<sup>45</sup>Seneca *Prov. 1.1: Hoc commodius in contextu operis redderetur, cum praesesse universis providentiam probaremus et interesse nobis deum; sed quoniam a toto particulam revelli placet et unam contradictionem manente lite integra solvere, faciam ...*

<sup>46</sup>Seneca *Ep. 102.5: Haec omnia ad mores spectant; itaque suo loco posita sunt. At quae a dialecticis contra hanc opinionem dicuntur, segreganda fuerunt et ideo seposita sunt. Nunc, quia omnia exigis, omnia quae dicunt persequar, deinde singulis occurram.*

<sup>47</sup>See Seneca *Ep. 79*; the difference between *claritas* and *gloria* is repeated in *Ep. 102.17*; cf. Habinek (2000).

<sup>48</sup>Seneca *Ep. 102.14-17*.

concludes with a critical comment:

This will be a sufficient answer to such dealers in subtleties. But it should not be our purpose to discuss things cleverly and to drag Philosophy down from her majesty to such petty quibbles. How much better it is to follow the open and direct road, rather than to map out for yourself a circuitous route which you must retrace with infinite trouble! For such argumentation is nothing else than the sport of men who are skilfully juggling with each other.<sup>49</sup>

These sort of discussions will not help us any further. In this case it may be useful to know that there is a Stoic answer to such problematic objections, but they are the work of people who only aim to make matters needlessly complicated. That is not what philosophy should be about and it would be the wrong motivation to engage in technical matters for the sake of being, or appearing to be, clever. The image of a serpentine path suggests that following such a route could easily get someone lost and, consequently, loose sight of the truly great things philosophy has to offer.

**Quae sint haec interrogas? Quae scire magis iuvat quam prodest, sicut hoc de quo quaeris:**

After describing the manner in which he will proceed, Seneca moves on to qualify the type of knowledge under discussion. The sort of thing Lucilius is inquiring about is described as "more pleasant than beneficial to know". Scholars have found this qualification problematic, to say the least, since the matter raised by Lucilius, whether the good is a body, is a traditional tenet of Stoic theory. The good, as a material and visible body, plays an important causal role and can be known through perception. Its firm epistemological basis supports Stoic ethical claims. Why does Seneca seem to qualify this as a peripheral issue? Moreover, in the main body of the letter, *Ep. 106.4-10*, Seneca will actually defend Stoic corporeality with detailed arguments that are in accordance with Stoic theory. By comparison, the dialectical arguments in *Ep. 102* are objections to Stoicism, raised by contenders of whom Seneca has a poor opinion—though as a Stoic he will refute their arguments. In his critical comment in *Ep. 102.20* he can sharply delineate between true philosophy and the unnecessary hair-splitting of non-Stoic dialecticians, who try to undermine the Stoic position.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Seneca *Ep. 102.20*: *Cavillatoribus istis abunde responderimus. Sed non debet hoc nobis esse propositum arguta disserere et philosophiam in has angustias ex sua maiestate detrahere; quanto satius est ire aperta via et recta quam sibi ipsum flexus disponere quos cum magna molestia relegere?* Neque enim quicquam aliud istae disputationes sunt quam inter se perite captantium lusus. On in has angustias as confined spaces, cf. Cicero *Caecin.* 29.84: *me ex campo aequitatis ad istas verborum angustias revocas; Ac. 2.35: cur eam (orationem) in tantas angustias et in Stoicorum dumeta compellimus?*

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Cooper (2004), 314n.9.

But here it seems his unfavourable tone concerns an acknowledged Stoic view. In this context I would like to examine two possible interpretations, one put forward by Brad Inwood, the other by John Cooper.

Brad Inwood highlights the importance of the epistolary genre in this context. In his view, Seneca only pretends to dislike this type of technical discussion because the epistolary genre in general is unsuited for technicality. In the opinion of Inwood, "we should perhaps see Seneca's apologetic introduction of technicality not as a betrayal of his own principles but rather as an attempt to extend philosophy into an otherwise inhospitable genre".<sup>51</sup> Thus, Seneca actually wants to bring up these technical topics and the lengthy preamble and ending of *Ep. 106* serve only as an obligatory criticism that comes with the job of writing epistolary literature. For that reason, the unfavourable tone of the letter opening and last part are not really inconsistent with the doctrinal section of the letter.

Inwood is right to foreground the Stoic character of the main body, but wrong, I think, in placing too much emphasis on the role of the letter format in explaining Seneca's critical remarks. Philosophical letters could address technical issues and Epicurus' letters are a case in point. Further, not only in his letters but also in some of his other treatises does Seneca object to excessive technicality. For instance, there are passages in both *De Beneficiis* and *De Clementia* where he either wants to avoid technicalities or excuses himself for including more technical additions than would strictly speaking be necessary.<sup>52</sup> In the opening sections of books 5, 6 and 7 of *De Beneficiis* Seneca explains why he still keeps on writing even though the main problems have already been dealt with by now:

In any further inquiry, I shall be, not serving, but indulging, my subject, the only demand of which is that I follow whither it leads, not whither it allures; for now and then a suggestion will be born that challenges the mind by a certain charm, yet remains, if not a useless, an unnecessary addition. Since, however, such is your wish, having finished with the matters that bound the subject, let us continue to examine further those that, if I must tell the truth, are associated with it, yet are not actually connected; whoever examines these carefully will neither be repaid for his pains nor yet wholly waste his pains.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Inwood (2007), 263.

<sup>52</sup>On avoiding unnecessary detail, see *Ben.* 1.4.1-2; *Clem.* 2.4.3. On including supplementary discussions, see *Ben.* 5.1.1, 5.12.1-2, 6.1.1, 7.1.1.

<sup>53</sup>Seneca *Ben.* 5.1.1: ... *quidquid ultra moror, non servio materiae, sed indulgeo, quae, quo dicit, sequenda est, non quo invitat; subinde enim nascetur, quo lacessat aliqua dulcedine animum, magis non supervacuum quam necessarium. Verum, quia ita vis, perseveremus peractis, quae rem continebant, scrutari etiam ea, quae, si vis verum, conexa sunt, non cohaerentia; quae quisquis diligenter inspicit,*

Here and in similar passages, Seneca accounts for why he includes certain topics and details. Without wasting his readers' time, or (create the appearance of) being involved in trivialities, he wants to indicate which philosophical matters stand out in importance. In the case of *De Beneficiis* the main aspects have been discussed in the early books, the rest is of interest but not essential. This shows that Seneca's concern with when and how to deal with the finer points of a discussion is present in other works—and genres—besides the *Epistulae Morales*. Certainly, the treatise is not to be classified as an inhospitable genre to detailed discussions. Seen in this light, Inwood's explanation of Seneca's unfavourable opening and closing comments in *Ep.* 106 in terms of a strictly epistolary feature fails. Moreover, to set aside such comments as nothing more than a pretended epistolary device does not take their intention seriously enough.

John Cooper, on the other hand, makes the letter's opening and closing sections the focus of his attention. According to him, Seneca casts himself in the role of spiritual advisor, someone who "is not urging anyone to take a complete course in Stoic philosophy but rather simply to listen to him, to take his explications to heart, and to live according to them".<sup>54</sup> From this point of view, Seneca can be characterised as offering some sort of 'light-version Stoicism' that takes little interest in the underlying philosophical grounds. But it would be wrong to conclude, as I have already argued in Chapter 1.1.2, that just because spiritual guidance is an important aspect of Seneca's self-presentation that this should be the most defining one. By rejecting the premiss that Seneca first and foremost wants to offer Stoic-inspired counsel, we are also less inclined to follow Cooper in attributing to Seneca a lacking appreciation for philosophical theory and argumentation.

At the same time, Cooper shows himself mindful of why Seneca may have wanted to adopt a critical tone. For instance, over-fascination with logical puzzles and fallacies could very well lead to a neglect of other areas of philosophical study. In this regard, Jonathan Barnes suggests that Seneca's polemic could in fact point to a wide interest in the study of logic in first-century Rome.<sup>55</sup> Also, Cooper acknowledges that the study of such subtle technicalities would probably not have been a first prerequisite to the beginning student.<sup>56</sup> But despite these considerations, his complaint remains that Seneca offers "a Stoicism that plays down the philosophical argumentation lying behind and supporting the ethical conclusions that he so treasures".<sup>57</sup> Cooper holds that in the absence of a deep understanding of Stoic philosophical doc-

---

*nec facit operae pretium nec tamen perdit operam.*

<sup>54</sup> Cooper (2004), 332; see also 310-14 and 335-37 on Seneca as a spiritual advisor. Cf. Hadot (1969), 210.

<sup>55</sup> Barnes (1997), 13-14.

<sup>56</sup> Cooper (2004), 315-17.

<sup>57</sup> Cooper (2004), 334.

trines these teachings can no longer play the foundational role they should have in a Stoic life. While Cooper's argument is carefully formulated, I do not find it ultimately compelling. For one thing, he overlooks many of the positive contributions and remarks Seneca makes concerning doctrinal knowledge and philosophical argumentation. Consider, for example, what Seneca writes in *Ep.* 95.10:

But philosophy is both theoretical and practical; it contemplates and at the same time acts. You are indeed mistaken if you think that philosophy offers you nothing but worldly assistance; her aspirations are loftier than that.<sup>58</sup>

Although the contrast there is also one of earthly versus heavenly matters, Seneca explicitly includes theory as an essential aspect of philosophy. Inwood argues, persuasively to my mind, that John Cooper pays too little attention to the fact that in the central part of *Ep.* 106 Seneca uses sophisticated philosophical arguments in support of Stoic doctrine.<sup>59</sup> Why would Seneca do this if he felt this was of no value? For another, as I will argue shortly, the interactive relation between Lucilius and Seneca in the *Epistulae Morales* points to a didactic development that helps to put the more critical remarks in a new light.

These two readings by Inwood and Cooper point to the deeply ambiguous character of this letter. Should we, along the lines of John Cooper, consider the letter's preamble and ending as the heart of the matter? Or would it be best to neutralise the effect of these disapproving sections in favour of the central arguments in 106.4-10, as Brad Inwood prefers? Alternatively, is it not possible to find an explanation that appreciates both aspects of the letter? I would like to argue that the opening and closing sections of this letter act as counterweights, or to be more precise, as cautionary notes, to the central arguments. To prove this point, I will first examine how critical the tone in the preamble really is. Next, I will offer an explanation that, at least in part, accounts for Seneca's remarks. Finally, I will come up with a view of the didactic process underlying the *Epistulae Morales* that helps to situate the concerns of this letter in the wider context of the work.

To begin with, we should find out the exact meaning of *Quae scire magis iuvat quam prodest* to see to what extent the opening section really is at variance with the central part of the letter. I share the view of Brad Inwood, who thinks that Seneca is not as negative here as he is about the topics of *Ep.* 113 and 117.<sup>60</sup> For instance, Lucilius'

<sup>58</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 95.10 (LS 66J, part): *Philosophia autem et contemplativa est et activa: spectat simul agitque. Erras enim si tibi illam putas tantum terrestres operas promittere: altius spirat.* (tr. Loeb edition, with minor adjustment.) Cf. *Ep.* 94.1, 94.4, 95.12, 95.40-41, 95.64.

<sup>59</sup>Inwood (2007), 271. Inwood also claims that Cooper too easily groups *Ep.* 106 with the more negative evaluation found in *Ep.* 113 and 117.

<sup>60</sup>Inwood (2007), 271.

inquiry itself is not labelled unintelligent or irrelevant. Instead, Seneca indicates that he already intended to discuss this matter in a larger moral philosophical work, but that Lucilius' progress justifies an earlier treatment. Seneca even insists that he will include related questions of his own accord whenever necessary. Apart from keeping authorial control over the discussion, this is most likely done with the aim that Lucilius can fully understand the topic at hand. Finally, the terms he uses to describe the sort of questions Lucilius is inquiring about, are in themselves not negative. Rather than saying that this is not knowledge at all, Seneca merely says that these things are more interesting than beneficial to know. So they might even be of benefit, only less so than other things. Neither harmful nor wholly useless, they are an ancillary type of knowledge. By contrast, when Seneca denounces sophistries in *Ep. 111.4* he is clear and straightforward in his view: "The mind plays with them, but profits not a whit; the mind in such cases is simply dragging philosophy down from her heights to the level ground".<sup>61</sup> He does not use such a description here. All these points converge to show that Seneca is not completely rejecting the topic of this letter as being "of no profit" but rather sees a limited use for them.<sup>62</sup> As noted by Inwood, Seneca makes a distinction between technicality, *subtilitas*, which may have its use in the right context, and sophistries, *cavillationes*, which are all just trivial games.<sup>63</sup>

As we have seen so far, Seneca gives lower priority to the type of question under discussion, but he certainly does not dismiss it. His explicit interest in applicable knowledge—things which are beneficial to know—may also be fuelled by the common criticism of opponents that the Stoics tend to overcomplicate philosophical problems and devise unnecessary distinctions and terminology. As Geert Roskam notes in his study on Stoic moral progress, "the Stoics were not so much praised by their opponents for their nuanced and subtle position, as blamed for their pedantic conceitedness, as well as for their apparent habit of solving important problems by making great play with high-sounding words and by making distinctions without differences".<sup>64</sup> In order to undercut such objections in dealing with Stoic technical arguments, Seneca portrays himself as being at least as critical as his critics. This underscores his chosen image of an independent person who is not just repeating Stoic theory but who always wants to make a valuable contribution and has his readers' best interest in mind. The fact that Seneca is conscious of how and why he discusses certain topics adds more urgency to the matters he does discuss. Thus, Seneca likes to be considered the Stoic who does not fall into a typically Stoic pitfall.

<sup>61</sup>Seneca *Ep. 111.4*: *Ludit istis animus, non proficit, et philosophiam a fastigio suo deducit in planum.*

<sup>62</sup>Cooper (2004), 321.

<sup>63</sup>Inwood (2007), 263 and 270-71. See also the comment at *Ep. 106.11* below.

<sup>64</sup>See Plutarch *Virt. mor.* 449A-B; *Vit. pud.* 529d (SVF 3.439-440, cf. also 441); *Stoic. rep.* 1033b, 1038e (SVF 3.226); *Comm. not.* 1067c (to which cf. also Plato *Tht.* 177e) and 1072f; Cicero *Fin.* 4.56; Aulus Gellius, *NA* 12.5.6; cf. Roskam (2005), 16.

Furthermore, Seneca's choice to frame this letter's topic with cautionary notes may be part of a larger didactic strategy. I will identify four developments in the *Epistulae Morales* that may assist us to a more insightful reading of the overall didactic process. These four points converge to show that although Seneca only slowly introduces Lucilius to the more technical aspects of philosophy, his engagement with such matters intensifies as the correspondence progresses. Therefore, the note of caution we find here should be considered as part of a transition in which Lucilius is getting ready to examine the more technical parts of philosophy in a meaningful way.

To begin with, there is a build-up of technical discussions in the later letters. In the early books of the *Epistulae Morales* Seneca seems primarily concerned to show Lucilius what philosophy is all about, that it offers real assistance and that there is nothing strange or inappropriate about studying philosophy. The ethical subjects are all fairly straightforward and cover how one should deal with one's hopes and fears, the uncertainty of future (mis)fortunes and the prospect of death. To support his views, Seneca often employs vivid descriptions of heroic examples, *exempla*, and clear instructions based on compelling sayings, *praecepta*. Later on, Lucilius is given more reading instructions, he is told that just learning other people's maxims by heart is insufficient (*Ep. 33*) and he even starts to write his own work (*Ep. 46*). Not only does their involvement in philosophy take on various forms, the discussions also branch out into a wide range of topics and this starts to include more technical subjects. For example, *Ep. 58* concentrates on different conceptions of being, *Ep. 65* on the different causes in Stoicism, Aristotle and Plato, *Ep. 66* on how the three types of good can be equal, *Ep. 71* on the precise nature of the good, *Ep. 85* on the interpretation of Stoic syllogisms, etc. Actually, since Brad Inwood is especially interested in the role of technical philosophy in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, his selection of letters included in Inwood (2007) nicely reflects the growing prominence of technical subjects in the later letters, ending with the inclusion of all of the last eight letters. Despite the increase of technical subjects, Seneca continues to pay attention to epistolary variation, with some letters being more theoretical, others having a more practical focus, while yet others highlight some personal experience that Seneca or Lucilius had.<sup>65</sup>

Secondly, although Seneca often expresses his dislike for technical subtlety and questions the relevance of certain detailed discussions, these critical remarks can, and should, be discriminated. The most negative comments deal with the type of logical puzzles and dialectical arguments that have absolutely nothing to do with moral progress.<sup>66</sup> These sophistries often have the intention of confusing people rather than helping them and in this respect Jonathan Barnes is right that Seneca criticises the

<sup>65</sup>Cf. Cancik (1967); Hadot (1969).

<sup>66</sup>E.g., see the above quoted *Ep. 111.4*; also *Ep. 45, 48* and *49*.

excesses of dialectic rather than the practice as such.<sup>67</sup> In the case of particular syllogisms and *quaestiones* Seneca may have various reasons for being critical and it is best to decide in each case what his reasons are.<sup>68</sup>

Thirdly, the epistolary exchange between Seneca and Lucilius reflects how Lucilius gradually comes to learn the proper use of intellectual acuity, *subtilitas*. Most technical discussions are on Lucilius' request and this leaves it up to Seneca to choose the proper response. In these cases Lucilius learns from Seneca's evaluation. But in some of the letters we find a reversal of their roles. Lucilius must become an independent thinker and must learn to see for himself whether a topic is relevant and how it contributes to his own progress. For instance, in *Ep.* 118 and 121 it is Seneca who introduces rather technical investigations of his own accord. And indeed, in *Ep.* 121.1 it is Lucilius who this time questions the degree of moral relevance when Seneca observes: "I can see that you will haul me into court when I set out for you today's little question ... Once again you will shout, 'What does this have to do with ethics?'".<sup>69</sup> But Seneca shows that the technical discussion in *Ep.* 121 does have a distinct bearing on ethics.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, it is significant that in the last (surviving) letter, *Ep.* 124, Lucilius and Seneca seem to be in agreement over the proper use of technicality:

But you do not recoil and no amount of technicality drives you away.  
Your technical sophistication does not limit you to pursuing the big  
questions; similarly, I approve of the fact that you judge everything  
by whether it makes any contribution to moral progress and only get  
annoyed when the extremes of technicality accomplish nothing. I will  
try to make sure that doesn't happen even now.<sup>71</sup>

Technicality is not a bad thing in itself and Seneca appreciates that Lucilius is not running away from subtle arguments. At the same time, Lucilius now understands that such sophistication is only needed when it results in valuable insight that promotes his philosophical progress.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the theme of knowledge that is present in many of the later letters. The previous point can be seen as part of a larger concern with learning the proper views concerning philosophical knowledge. Whereas in the early part of the *Epistulae Morales* Seneca wants to show that philosophy is important,

<sup>67</sup>Barnes (1997), 10, 14-18. Cf. Inwood (2007), 218-19.

<sup>68</sup>Inwood (2007), 218-19.

<sup>69</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 121.1: *Litigabis, ego video, cum tibi hodiernam quaestiunculam, ... exposuero; iterum enim exclamabis 'hoc quid ad mores?'*; tr. Inwood (2007), 85.

<sup>70</sup>See Inwood (2007), 332-33.

<sup>71</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 124.1: *Non refugis autem nec ulla te subtilitas abigit: non est elegantiae tuae tantum magna sectari, sicut illud probo, quod omnia ad aliquem profectum redigis et tunc tantum offenderis ubi summa subtilitate nihil agitur. Quod ne nunc quidem fieri laborabo.*

in the later part he examines in various ways how knowledge is related to philosophy and what knowledge is necessary for a philosophical way of life. The topic of knowledge is central to a philosophical identity because a philosopher—lover of wisdom—should know what exactly this wisdom is that he holds dear. The following overview of letters that address the topic of knowledge should also dismiss the notion that Seneca has no real interest in getting a deep understanding of what philosophy is about, but only offers philosophical advice.

In *Ep. 88* philosophy is set apart from the liberal and vocational studies that at best prepare for virtue, whereas philosophy alone teaches it. Philosophical knowledge holds more truth and is more valuable than that offered by the other arts. Yet even within philosophy time is sometimes wasted on superfluous and impractical matters. In *Ep. 89* Seneca discusses the different parts of philosophy and emphasises the importance of the Stoic threefold division of philosophy into logical, physical and ethical knowledge. This division helps the student to grasp the scope of philosophical knowledge. In *Ep. 90* Seneca considers the role of philosophy in human history. He disagrees with Posidonius that the early philosophers invented many practical tools and devices because these inventions are the result of crafty ingenuity, not of philosophical knowledge. Also, he distinguishes between the unspoiled innocence of the earliest people who neither knew nor needed philosophy and the situation afterwards in which people did and still do need philosophical insight as a remedy to overcome cultural corruption. Although the first men were happy and innocent, they were not wise. Neither the earliest people nor the best of men are born virtuous, "it is an art to become good".<sup>72</sup>

A little further, *Ep. 94* and *95* form a pair that discuss the role of *praecepta* and *decreta*, precepts and doctrines, in philosophy. Both have an important role to play and one cannot study philosophy by using of only one of them. We have already seen that in *Ep. 102* Seneca turns to dialectical arguments that he previously deemed irrelevant. Now, in the later letters, he starts to introduce more technical investigations (e.g., *Ep. 106, 109, 113, 117*) and the underlying concern is how subtle philosophical knowledge needs to be. It takes time, as we have seen in *Ep. 108.2*, to expand one's knowledge and a student should not try to gain as much knowledge as soon as possible. The warning against studying philosophy in a hurry applies both to the amount of topics covered as well as to the complexity of the issues. The fact that in *Ep. 118, 121* and *124* Seneca introduces technical discussions himself, can be seen as a sign that he has been careful to gradually increase Lucilius' exposure to such philosophical argumentation. Overall, Seneca is very much interested in explicating the nature and scope of philosophical knowledge by tackling the topic in different and complementing ways.  
**bonum an corpus sit?**

<sup>72</sup>Seneca *Ep. 90.44*: *Non enim dat natura virtutem: ars est bonum fieri.*

At last Seneca reveals what the letter's topic is about: whether the good is a body. For the Stoics this was a topic of physics, though in modern terminology we would include it under metaphysics.<sup>73</sup> This complex problem enables Seneca to explain the orthodox Stoic view that the good is a body. *Ep.* 113 discusses a closely related topic, namely whether virtues are animals. Furthermore, in *Ep.* 117.2-3 Seneca repeats this doctrine and even narrows it down by saying that only a body is good.<sup>74</sup> The corporeality of the soul, including the conditions of the soul, was highly disputed. In general, the various philosophical positions on the subject of corporeality made it a favourite in philosophical/rhetorical discussions. The Stoics and Epicureans shared their view of a material soul as opposed to the Platonic belief in an immaterial soul, but in turn they disagreed on which kind of material substance.<sup>75</sup>

Compare the following account from Aulus Gellius who attended a very similar inquiry on whether the voice is a body or something incorporeal, *corpusne sit vox an incorporeum*.<sup>76</sup> His description shows that such discussions were not uncommon and that they were concerned with highly theoretical aspects of philosophy. He introduces the topic as being widely discussed by many important philosophers. Gellius repeats the accepted definition of a body as that which either acts or is acted upon, then quotes Lucretius and offers another definition of body as having three dimensions. Next, he outlines the positions of the Stoics, of Plato, and of Democritus and Epicurus combined, before concluding with his own response that all such sophistries are philosophical subtleties that lack any practical application or a conclusive answer.

Both Seneca and Gellius are addressing a question that relates to corporeality, they refer to the same quotation of Lucretius and both end with unfavourable comments on the need for such philosophical discussions. However, even more striking are the differences between their accounts. Aulus Gellius clearly assumes an outsider perspective: he appears neutral in his description of the different philosophical views, he does not report any conclusive findings and to him such philosophical discussions show the need to limit philosophising to a small number of people. By contrast, Seneca discusses only the Stoic position—his quotation of Lucretius does not expand on the Epicurean position—he has no doubt about the right answer and his comments at the end are not a rejection of philosophy itself, but an appeal to focus in one's philosophical study on what is most important.

<sup>73</sup>On Stoic metaphysics, see Algra (1999), D. Sedley, Ch. 11 'Hellenistic physics and metaphysics', esp. 382-411; Inwood (2003), J. Brunschwig, Ch. 8 'Stoic Metaphysics', 206-232.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Inwood (2007), 264; Inwood also offers a commentary on these letters, on *Ep.* 113, see Inwood (2007), 272-288; on *Ep.* 117, 288-305.

<sup>75</sup>See e.g., Nemesius *Nat. Hom.* 2 (SVF 2.773; IG II-64).

<sup>76</sup>Aulus Gellius, *NA* 5.15 (SVF 2.141). On the Stoic view that the voice is a body, see Aetius 4.20.2 (Dox. Gr. p. 410; SVF 2.387; IG II-49); Diogenes, Antipater and Chrysippus all wrote on the subject, Diogenes Laertius 7.55-56 (SVF 2.140, IG II-3.55-56).

(106.4)

**Bonum facit; prodest enim; quod facit corpus est.**

Two preliminary remarks need to be made at this point. Firstly, it is striking how the previous colloquial tone of the preamble (*Ep. 106.1-3*) in *Ep. 106.4* suddenly changes into the functional, uniform style of a clearly structured philosophical argument. The sentences in this section all use a formal structure, consisting of brief statements that are connected through logical terms such as *ergo*, *enim* and *nam*. As such, the change of style underlines the transition to the letter's central part. Moreover, by shaping the theoretical arguments in a scholarly style Seneca creates the impression of reading a Stoic dialectical handbook or listening to a scholarly lecture.

Secondly, in the case of an author who frequently draws subtle connections between various topics, one cannot help but wonder whether it is a coincidence that here we immediately find another reference to 'benefit'. In *Ep. 106.3* Seneca remarks that such questions as put forward by Lucilius are "more pleasant than beneficial to know" and here his first statement concerns the ability of the good to cause something, because it "provides benefit", *prodest*. Perhaps we can even take this as an understated expression that Seneca at all times thinks of providing benefit to his readers and that the issue is worth looking into.

Although posed in *Ep. 106.3* as a question—is the good a body?—, Seneca immediately sets out to answer it in accordance with the Stoic view. Brad Inwood shows in his commentary of *Ep. 106* that Seneca offers an orthodox Stoic answer to this question.<sup>77</sup> Since I largely share his views, I will concern myself in my discussion of *Ep. 106.4-10* primarily with summarising his central points, adding some thoughts of my own and including some overlooked passages that can assist in a better understanding of the text. These passages allow me to make a number of observations that further underline the deeply Stoic character of Seneca's argumentation.

Seneca's starting point here is to analyse the good and its properties to determine how the good can qualify as a body. His reference to causality is a central component in the Stoic argument for corporealism. The Stoics define body as "that which is capable of acting or being acted upon".<sup>78</sup> In this case, Seneca only deals with the active aspect of acting upon something. The good does something; namely it benefits. The second phrase is an explication of the sort of thing the good generates: it is inherent in the concept of 'the good' that it *does good to something*. This view too has Stoic credentials; in fact, in Epictetus our understanding of the good—that what is good provides benefit—is named as a 'preconception' (*prolēpsis*), a naturally

<sup>77</sup>Inwood (2007), 261-272.

<sup>78</sup>See Seneca *Ep. 106.8* (SVF 3.84); Cicero *Acad. 1.39* (SVF 1.90; IG II-29); Nemesius *Nat. Hom. 76-82* (SVF 1.137, 2.790); SVF 1.146b; Tertullian *De Anima 5* (SVF 1.518); SVF 2.140, 2.363; Nemesius *Nat. Hom. 67* (SVF 2.773; Aëtius *Placita 4.20.2* (SVF 2.387); see also LS 45. Cf. Hahn (1977), 3; Inwood (2007), 265.

formed conception of the general characteristics of a thing.<sup>79</sup>

**Bonum agitat animum et quodam modo format et continet, quae [ergo] propria sunt corporis.**

Here the relationship between the good and the soul is worked out in detail. That the good stimulates the mind is, in my opinion, most likely just a reformulation of the idea that the good has a causal impact, in this case on the mind. The verbs *format* and *continet* add a further dimension. The shaping of the mind, Inwood observes, can be taken both in a literal sense—the soul is physically changed—and in a metaphorical sense—the soul is formed, morally and intellectually.<sup>80</sup> By comparison, in *Ep.* 87.32 Seneca describes how the good elevates and broadens the soul.<sup>81</sup> That the good lends coherence to the soul also fits in with Stoic thinking, which attributes a certain level of cohesion to all souls, but it is the good that provides the soul with a higher degree of internal cohesion.<sup>82</sup> So there is a body that acts, the good, and a body that is affected, the soul. That the soul too is a body remains an implicit assumption, one that a Stoic of course would accept.<sup>83</sup> For instance, when Stobaeus describes the Stoic view on virtues, he writes that “in substance they are identical with the leading part of the soul; accordingly, [they say] that every virtue is and is called a body; for the intellect and the soul are bodies”.<sup>84</sup>

**Quae corporis bona sunt corpora sunt; ergo et quae animi sunt; nam et hoc corpus est.**

Seneca points to the symmetry between the goods of the mind and the goods of the body.<sup>85</sup> Because the goods of body and soul have a causal impact on them—as has

---

<sup>79</sup>On the Stoic view that the good provides benefit, see Diogenes Laertius 7.94 (IG II-94.94), 7.99; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.22.1 (IG II-104); Sextus M 11.22-23 (SVF 3.75; IG II-115.22-23); cf. Sextus *PH* 3.169 (IG III-48); and of course Seneca *Ep.* 117.2-3 (IG II-108). On *prolēpsis*, see Diogenes Laertius 7.54.

<sup>80</sup>Inwood (2007), 265.

<sup>81</sup>In addition, in *Ep.* 71.27 the good is said to provide man with a fixed and steady mind.

<sup>82</sup>Inwood (2007), 265. For details on the role of cohesion or tenor in Stoic theory, cf. LS 47; Hahm (1977), 167.

<sup>83</sup>Inwood (2007), 266. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.156 (IG II-20.156); SVF 2.790-280 and LS 53. That the soul is corporeal because it is composed of the corporeal substance *pneuma* is recorded in Tertullian *De Anim.* 5 (SVF 1.137); Diogenes Laertius 7.156 (SVF 2.774); Alexander of Aphrodisias *Mant.* p. 117 (SVF 2.792); Stobaeus 2.64 (SVF 3.305; IG II-95.5b7); cf. Hahm (1977), 4. Inwood also indicates how the Stoic theory of corporeality was composed against a (very different) Platonic and Aristotelian background. In particular, Jacques Brunschwig has examined in detail how Plato’s *Sophist* influenced the early Stoics in the development of their ideas on physics, see Brunschwig (1994), Ch. 6. Cf. SVF 1.90 and 1.98.

<sup>84</sup>Stobaeus 2.64 (IG II-95.5b7), tr. Inwood and Gerson (1997), 206.

<sup>85</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.62 (IG II-3.62).

been established above—, these goods must be bodies as well.<sup>86</sup> The assertion that the mind too is a body does not seem to follow from this parallel, but again seems to be an unquestioned assumption.

(106.5)

**Bonum hominis necesse est corpus sit, cum ipse sit corporalis.**

By bringing the soul (106.4) and now human beings into focus, Seneca paves the way for the coming discussion of some human characteristics: emotions, vices and virtues. Brad Inwood is right to note that Seneca is very careful in his formulation that a human being is corporeal: in the Stoic view it would go too far to say that a human is (just) a body, even though he has one.<sup>87</sup> According to Stoic philosophy, human beings are a composite of a material body and a material soul and these, albeit deeply interconnected, are considerably different.<sup>88</sup> The previous sentence concluded that the goods of body and soul are bodily, so in the case of a human being—composed of body and soul—, the good must certainly also be bodily.

**Mentior, nisi et quae alunt illum et quae valetudinem eius vel custodiunt vel restituunt corpora sunt; ergo et bonum eius corpus est.**

In the same way Seneca mentioned how the good shapes and lends coherence to the soul, so he notes that the good of a human body is what contributes to its sustenance and health. These goods too are bodily, as has been proven at the beginning of 106.4.

From here on the tone gradually drops some of its formality and Seneca adopts his more familiar style of asking rhetorical questions, inserting little asides, giving examples and, more generally, making the content appear more vivid and pertinent. Now we are listening to Seneca's presentation of Stoic theory. The fact that Seneca makes such an effort to translate seemingly abstract Stoic theory into a strongly evocative account of how the emotions, vices and virtues change our appearance and influence our actions, underlines that Seneca takes this theory seriously.

**Non puto te dubitaturum an adfectus corpora sint (ut aliud quoque de quo non quaeris infulciam),**

Seneca sets up another, longer argument that runs through 106.5-7. It begins by saying that emotions are bodies too, which is based on the accepted observation that emotions change our appearance and produce visible effects. Seneca is aware that this is a new angle and notes that he is taking the liberty of adding something else to the discussion. This nicely illustrates his earlier remark in 106.3 that he can include

<sup>86</sup>On the qualities of corporeal things being themselves corporeal, see SVF 2.377, 2.380, 2.381, 2.383, 2.388, 2.389; cf. SVF 2.410; Hahm (1977), 4. On the qualities of the soul being themselves corporeal too, see SVF 2.132, 2.848, 3.305; cf. SVF 2.797-2.801, 3.85; Hahm (1977), 4.

<sup>87</sup>Inwood (2007), 267. Cf. Ep. 121.10.

<sup>88</sup>On the relation between body and mind / soul in Stoic theory see Long (1996) Ch. 10 'Soul and body in Stoicism' (previously published as Long (1982)); see also Tieleman (2003), 102-114.

similar issues of his own accord. He considers this point to be relevant, so he will not hesitate to bring it in. This little aside is also an example of Seneca's increased presence in this part of the text.

The main point of the argument is that all of these phenomena make an impression on the body and that the visible effects they produce attest to the underlying causal process. Indeed, Inwood clearly connects the different steps in Seneca's reasoning: “This argument depends for its success on a progression from movements or *events* in the soul (passions) to the *dispositions* which underlie them (the ‘ailments’), to the *vices* which underlie the dispositions.”<sup>89</sup> The argument as a whole builds on the previous argument of causality as a property of bodies. For one thing, emotions and the like have an effect on the human body; for another, there is a series of causes in which a deeper cause brings about a cause. Next, Seneca will turn from vices to their opposites, virtues, and establish that what holds for ‘the bad’ also holds for ‘the good’. So through a series of steps Seneca ends up with the conclusion that virtues are goods and that these goods are bodies that can produce physical effects in other bodies.

However, Inwood also notes that unlike most Stoic sources which base the corporeality of the virtues on the fact that virtues are dispositions of the soul, this argument decidedly takes a different direction.<sup>90</sup> In his view, it might be the case that Seneca wants to prove his point without depending on narrowly Stoic doctrine.<sup>91</sup> But the link between body and perceptibility was also well established by the Stoics.<sup>92</sup> It may be instructive to compare Seneca's description of the impact of emotions, vices and virtues with a passage of Chrysippus preserved by Plutarch:

.. but good and evil things are perceptible, he [Chrysippus] says, writing as follows in the first book of the two concerning the Goal: “For even with the following one has enough to assert that good and evil things are perceptible. For not only are the affections along with their species, that is to say grief and fear and the like, perceptible but also it is possible to perceive theft and adultery and similar things and, in general, folly and cowardice and not a few other vices and not only joy and benefactions and many other right activities but also prudence and courage and the rest of the virtues.”<sup>93</sup>

<sup>89</sup>Inwood (2007), 267.

<sup>90</sup>On virtue as the soul, or its leading part, in a certain state, see SVF 3.307; cf. SVF 3.305; Sextus M 11.22-23 (SVF 3.75; IG II-115); Sextus PH 3.169 (IG III-48); Stobaeus 2.64 (IG II-95.5b7). See also Halm (1977), 4.

<sup>91</sup>Inwood (2007), 267-68.

<sup>92</sup>SVF 2.794; cf. Tieleman (2003), 212.

<sup>93</sup>Plutarch *Stoic. rep.* 1042E-F (SVF 3.85; LS 60R): αἰσθητὰ δ' εἶναι τάγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά φησιν, ἐν τῷ προτέρῳ περὶ Τέλους ταῦτα γράφων· ὅτι μὲν γὰρ αἰσθητά ἔστι τάγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά, καὶ

Although this passage is intended to make a different point, viz. the perceptibility of good and evil things, its relation with the present discussion should be obvious. Seneca may have been familiar with this passage (though not through Plutarch) and it would not require much adaptation to make this line of reasoning serve the present purpose of demonstrating that good things are bodies because they have a perceptible impact on the human body. It is striking how our text also moves in the same order from the emotions, to vices and then to virtues. Both passages add examples of particular emotions, vices and virtues. The Chrysippean passage connects these causes also with the activities they bring about, such as 'theft and adultery' and 'benefactions and many other right activities', but Seneca will touch upon their power to incite action as well in 106.9. In Seneca's innovative presentation, a classic Stoic argumentation is reproduced and expanded to prove another, related point of Stoic thinking. By drawing such a new connection, Seneca implicitly demonstrates the deep interconnection of Stoic theory in which a point can be shown to be true along various routes.

**tamquam ira, amor, tristitia, nisi dubitas an vultum nobis mutent, an frontem adstringant, an faciem diffundant, an ruborem evocent, an fugent sanguinem.**

An emotion is essentially an excessive and unnatural movement of the mind. This can be understood both in intentional terms, as an unreasonable judgment, and in physiological terms, as an immoderate change in the composition and tension of the body and mind substance.<sup>94</sup> When an emotion such as anger causes the face to redden and to change its expression, this is best explained as one body acting upon another. Similarly, when two hands are put together with the fingers interlocked, then if one hand squeezes, the other hand will be squeezed as well. The human body and soul are interconnected even stronger, due to the total blending of body and soul (*krasis di' holon*).<sup>95</sup> Whenever the soul enters into an emotional state, this will affect its tension and cohesion and the body will experience this change and be affected by it as well. Because in Stoic theory body and soul are both material, it is not hard to imagine how they can have a physical impact on one another.

The three emotions Seneca lists here—anger, love, sadness—are all well known

---

τούτοις ἐκποιεῖ λέγειν· οὐ γάρ μόνον τὰ πάθη ἔστιν αἰσθητὰ σὺν τοῖς εἴδεσιν, οἷον λύπη καὶ φόβος καὶ τὰ παραπλήσια, ἀλλὰ καὶ κλοπῆς καὶ μοιχείας καὶ τῶν δύμοιών ἔστιν αἰσθέσθαι, καὶ καθόλου ἀφροσύνης καὶ δειλίας καὶ ἄλλων οὐκ διλύων κακιῶν· οὐδὲ μόνον χαρᾶς καὶ εὐεργεσιῶν καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν κατορθώσεων, ἀλλὰ καὶ φρονήσεως καὶ ἀνδρείας καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀρετῶν.'

<sup>94</sup>See e.g., Plutarch *Virt. Mor.* 10.449D (SVF 3.468). For a detailed study on the relation of body and soul in Stoic emotional theory, see Tielemans (2010a).

<sup>95</sup>According to the Stoic theory of *krasis di' holon*, two bodies—such as a human being's soul and body—can be mixed through-and-through without either losing its properties. Cf. Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1078E; Alexander of Aphrodisias *Mixt.* 216.1-2 (SVF 2.470), 216.28-31 (SVF 2.473).

for their ability to change a person's expression.<sup>96</sup> Anger, in particular, frequently appears in graphic descriptions in *De Ira*. There Seneca describes on numerous occasions how the different signs of anger can be recognised in human beings and how ugly one's appearance becomes when overcome with anger.<sup>97</sup>

In fact, the listing of different physical effects recalls a particular passage from *De Ira* in which all the same nouns we have here recur in the exact same order:

The sure signs of raving madness are a bold and threatening look (*vultus*), a gloomy countenance (*frons*), a grim visage (*facies*), a rapid pace, restless hands, change of colour, heavy and frequent sighing. The marks of anger are the same: eyes ablaze and glittering, a deep flush (*rubor*) all over the face as blood (*sanguine*) boils up from the vitals, ...<sup>98</sup>

However, the context in *De Ira* is that of the physical appearance of a madman being not unlike that of an angry person, whereas the list here in Ep. 106.5 describes various physical effects that are the result of (various) emotions. Also, although these passages share the same nouns, Seneca uses them here in combination with other adjectives and verbs to demonstrate other, even contrasting, effects. It rather seems that these nouns were generally associated with the standard set of facial expressions and physiological aspects linked to emotions. The anaphora of *an* in combination with several examples amplify the general idea that emotions leave perceptible marks on the body.

#### **Quid ergo? tam manifestas notas corporis credis inprimi nisi a corpore?**

The examples from the previous sentence are now summarised into a general truth: the clear marks that are engraved onto the body are visible proof that the mind (in a certain state) influences the body.<sup>99</sup> Seneca explains that since causal efficacy can only exist between bodies, it follows that body and soul are both corporeal. The emotions serve as additional proof for the corporeality of both, which enables interaction between mind and body.<sup>100</sup> A prior example of this is Cleanthes, who "asserted that this mutual action and suffering, which he called intercommunication of affections, is a mark of body and therefore proof that the soul is corporeal".<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup>On the certainty that emotions bring about a change in the face, see Seneca *Ira* 1.1.7, 3.10.2.

<sup>97</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ira* 1.1.3-7, 1.19.1-2, 2.35.3-6, 2.36.1-3, 3.4.1-3, 3.13.2-3; cf. Ep. 114.3.

<sup>98</sup>Seneca *Ira* 1.1.3-4: *nam ut furentium certa indicia sunt audax et minax vultus, tristis frons, torva facies, citatus gradus, inquietae manus, color versus, crebra et vehementius acta suspiria, ita irascientium eadem signa sunt: flagrant ac micant oculi, multus ore toto rubor exaestuante ab imis praecordiis sanguine, ...*

<sup>99</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ira* 2.3.2, 3.10.2; Ep. 104.28. See also the discussion on signs and body language in Ch. 3 on Ep. 11.

<sup>100</sup>For a similar passage that describes the Stoic idea of interaction, *sympatheia*, between mind and body, see Nemesius 78.7-79.2 (SVF 1.518; LS 45C).

<sup>101</sup>Hahm (1977), 3. See Seneca Ep. 106.8 (SVF 3.84); SVF 1.518, cf. 2.792.

(106.6)

**Si adfectus corpora sunt, et morbi animorum, ut avaritia, crudelitas, indurata vitia et in statum inemendabilem adducta; ergo et malitia et species eius omnes, malignitas, invidia, superbia;**

Emotions lay hold of the soul, they cause mental disorder and manipulate someone into disruptive behaviour. In *Ep.* 75.11-12 Seneca has already explained the difference between emotions and diseases of the mind. The main difference is that an emotion is just an isolated instance of a wrong movement of the mind, whereas the *morbi animorum* are habitual perversions of judgment.<sup>102</sup> Persistent emotions can, however, turn into character traits such as greed or jealousy:

Surely there can be no doubt that the long-standing and seasoned vices of human intelligence, the ones we call 'diseases', are uncontrolled—for example, greed, cruelty, fury. It follows that the passions too are uncontrolled, since one slides from the passions to the diseases.<sup>103</sup>

Things can go from bad to worse. Notably, the order of discussion here follows the same pattern, as it is from a Stoic perspective a logical step to go from emotions to a rotten character.<sup>104</sup> As a result, all emotions are to be considered a threat to one's moral health. In other contexts Seneca stresses that it is a misunderstanding to think we can manage or moderate emotions; they must be abolished entirely.<sup>105</sup> In this letter he does suggest a connection between emotions, diseases of the soul and hardened vices, but his interest here is in their bodily nature. All of them portray the mind in a certain motivating state, which differs in its degree of inveteracy, that brings about physical effects in the body. Inwood presents evidence that early Stoics "held that long-term passionate dispositions, called tendencies (*euemptōsiai*) or 'diseases', underlay these events and explain our proneness to react passionately rather than rationally".<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, the examples and terms he uses to describe these faults would certainly remind the reader of other texts in which he does condemn emotions and vices explicitly. Moreover, his list of diseases and vices closely resembles what we find in the rest of his writings.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>102</sup>Cf. Roskam (2005), 79.

<sup>103</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 85.10: *Numquid dubium est quin vitia mentis humanae inveterata et dura, quae morbos vocamus, inmoderata sint, ut avaritia, ut crudelitas, ut inpotentia? Ergo inmoderati sunt et adfectus; ab his enim ad illa transitur.* Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 75.11, 85.15, 116.3; *Ira* 3.41.3 where anger hardens into hatred.

<sup>104</sup>On the steep, downhill road to vice, see *Ep.* 97.10.

<sup>105</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 85.3-10, 116.1-7; *Ira* 1.7.1-4; *Brev. Vit.* 10.1; Trapp (2007), 68-9.

<sup>106</sup>Inwood (2007), 268. See SVF 3.421-30 and Kidd (1983).

<sup>107</sup>Often when Seneca speaks of vices he lists certain standard faults: on greed, see *Ep.* 56.10, 75.11, 85.10, 95.30; *Ben.* 2.26.1; on cruelty, see *Ep.* 83.20, 85.10, 95.30; *Clem.* 1.25.2; on spite, see

In a way, the corporeality of diseases and vices is only a bridge between that of the emotions, which forms a clear and visible example of mind-body interaction, and the corporeality of the virtues, which is the actual goal of the discussion. In this case Seneca makes no effort to point out the visual signs of these *morbi* and *viti*.<sup>108</sup>

(106.7)

**ergo et bona, primum quia contraria istis sunt, deinde quia eadem tibi indicia praestabunt.**

Lastly, Seneca arrives at the conclusion that the good is bodily as well, or to be more precise, the goods. The plural *bona* matches the plurality of bad things in the previous section and will make it easier to coincide with the virtues that follow. Seneca offers two reasons for deducing that the goods must be bodies as well. The first one is that they are the exact opposites of the vices. Seneca's transition from the emotions via 'diseases' to vices was one of an increasing degree of inveteracy and corruption. Now he juxtaposes the good with the bad and presupposes that what holds for the one end of the moral spectrum will hold for the other end as well. Once more, Inwood offers a cogent assessment. Although it does not follow necessarily that the status of these opposites has to be the same, it becomes more plausible that they are when they are put in terms of different conditions of the soul.<sup>109</sup> If a soul in a bad condition is a body, would not a soul in a good condition also be a body?

The second reason returns to the argument that was used in the case of the emotions, that the visible signs of an emotion point to mind-body interaction. This interaction presupposes one body acting upon another. Now it is said that the good qualities also have their own signs and that, by implication, the same argument of mind-body interaction holds in this case as well. To be considered signs they would have to be both visible and representative of what they are a sign of. In the following examples Seneca wants to show that it is possible to recognise virtue by the particular effect it is having on the body. In addition, I believe the word *tibi* is intended to mean 'to you' so that it is Lucilius (or the reader) who sees the signs.<sup>110</sup> The activity of looking continues in the next sentence where Seneca asks "Don't you see how ...".

<sup>108</sup>Ep. 83.20; on envy, see Ep. 87.31; Ben. 2.26.1, 2.28.1; on pride, see Ep. 83.20, 87.31; *Const. Sap.* 9.4.

<sup>109</sup>For instance, Seneca *Ira* 1.1.4 calls attention to "the hideous horrifying face of swollen self-degradation—you would hardly know whether to call the vice hateful or ugly"; *foeda visu et horrenda facies depravantium se atque intumescentium—nescias utrum magis detestabile vitium sit an deformis*. Tr. Cooper and Procopé (1995).

<sup>110</sup>Inwood (2007), 268.

<sup>110</sup>By contrast, B. Inwood chooses in his translation for 'in you', which suggests that Lucilius (or the reader) undergoes these signs. Cf. Inwood (2007), 57. It also seems optimistic to assume Lucilius would possess all of these good traits.

Thus, the signs are put right in front of the audience, for all to see.

**An non vides quantum oculis det vigorem fortitudo? quantam intentionem prudentia? quantam modestiam et quietem reverentia? quantam serenitatem laetitia? quantum rigorem severitas? quantam remissionem lenitas?**

Seneca has just posited the existence of such *indicia* and now asks a number of pointed rhetorical questions to substantiate his claim. All these examples show that a good condition of the soul is visible on the outside. This is in itself a Stoic view, as we have seen in the passage above on the perceptibility of good and evil things by Chrysippus.<sup>111</sup> In *Ep.* 95.65 Posidonius is said to endorse the study of ethology, which "gives the signs and marks which belong to each virtue and vice, so that by them distinction may be drawn between like things". Seneca comments in *Ep.* 95.66-67 that it is indeed useful to know the features of a good soul and to offer these illustration as examples for others to follow. That would add further (practical) relevance to this passage. Moreover, ethical attractiveness in a person is mentioned in the context of the wise man choosing a lover.<sup>112</sup>

Is it also possible to see a pattern or arrangement in these good qualities? All of them feature commonly in Seneca's writings as positive characteristics, but we can recognise the first pair as two of the Stoic cardinal virtues—courage (*andreia*) and practical wisdom (*phronêsis*).<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, in the remaining four characteristics we can detect two pairs of oppositions that demonstrate how widely these signs can vary. The modesty and calmness associated with reverence show a degree of respectful reservation that contrasts with the outgoing nature of unclouded ease and cheerfulness.<sup>114</sup> In the other case we see a difference in tension: the firmness of stern self-control opposes the relaxation that comes with gentleness. Because the opposing trait brings out the perceivable difference between them, this contrast also adds to their own representative quality. By positioning them in contrast, the signs become stronger and are thus better able to prove that virtues have a visible impact on the body.

At this point I would also like to note the numerous and increasing number of examples being used in this argument (106.5-7): three emotions (*ira, amor, tristitia*), four/five physical effects (*vultum ... mutent, frontem adstringant, faciem diffundant, ruborem evocent, fugent sanguinem*)<sup>115</sup>, five bad characteristics (*avaritia, crudelitas,*

---

<sup>111</sup>Plutarch *Stoic. rep.* 1042E-F (SVF 3.85; LS 60R). Cf. Inwood (2007), 268.

<sup>112</sup>Stobaeus 2.115.1-2, tr. Schofield (1991), 117. Cf. the earlier discussion in *Ep.* 11.1, 11.7, 11.10.

<sup>113</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7.92, 7.102 (IG II-94.92, 102); Plutarch *Virt. mor.* 440E-441D; *Stoic. rep.* 1034C-E.

<sup>114</sup>Cf. Cicero *Tusc.* 3.15.31 for a similar use of *serenitas* in the calm and sunny look of Socrates; for *laetitia*, cf. Seneca *Vit. Beat.* 15.2.

<sup>115</sup>On the one hand is *vultum ... mutent* part of the list, on the other hand it appears as a summary of the rest.

*malignitas, invidia, superbia*), and now six virtues that leave a mark on the body (*fortitudo, prudentia, reverentia, laetitia, severitas, lenitas*). This increase of examples underlines the suggestion that the virtues are what matters most. The use at the end of *quantum/quantam* in anaphora enhances this effect even further.

**Corpora ergo sunt quae colorem habitumque corporum mutant, quae in illis regnum suum exercent.**

The evidence leads to the conclusion, *ergo*, that they have to be bodies since they change the look and condition of bodies and exercise their own power in them. The first part, *colorem habitumque*, has been examined in 106.5-7 and with *in illis regnum suum exercent* Seneca points ahead to the discussion in 106.9-10.

**Omnes autem quas rettuli virtutes bona sunt, et quidquid ex illis est.**

Only now does Seneca state explicitly that virtues are goods. Seneca has not provided any detailed grounds in support of this Stoic interpretation, but instead the thought has been slowly formed as a consequence of the previous steps. The good in general was narrowed down to the good of human beings, this in turn became the good of the mind, which stood in opposition to the harmful impact of the vices, ending up with the wholesome virtues as goods. Hence, these separate points were all leading up to the Stoic conception of the good, at the exclusion of pleasure or any other candidate.<sup>116</sup>

#### (106.8)

**Numquid est dubium an id quo quid tangi potest corpus sit?**

It is remarkable that we find yet another form of the verb *dubitare* in this letter. While in 106.2 Seneca expresses doubt over his reply (*dubitavi*), all the other cases are rather a denial of doubt, in 106.5 *Non puto te dubitaturum* and also *nisi dubitas* and here in 106.8 *Numquid est dubium*. In these sections Seneca introduces common and accepted ideas that are not really open to question. That emotions are perceptible (106.5) and that the ability to touch and be touched belongs to a body (106.8) are both sense-based views that appeal to common opinion. As David Hahm notes: "Tangibility, that is, the capability of being perceived by touch, was a widely accepted mark of body".<sup>117</sup> The assumptions Seneca makes on the basis of these views are what is far more disputed. The parallel case of Aulus Gellius shows just how divergent the different philosophical positions on corporeality actually were.<sup>118</sup> But Seneca's presentation of the issue

<sup>116</sup>For the Stoic idea that virtue is good, see Diogenes Laertius 7.89, 7.94-102, 7.127-128 (IG II-94.89, 94-102, 127-128); Stobaeus 2.58 (IG II-95.5b); Cicero *Fin.* 3.32 (IG II-102.32); Sextus M 11.22-23 (SVF 3.75; IG II-115.22-23); Sextus M 11.61 (SVF 3.122; IG II-116.61); Sextus *PH* 3.169 (IG III.48.169).

<sup>117</sup>Hahm (1977), 15: cf. Plato *Soph.* 247b-c; *Tim.* 28b, 31b; *Phaed.* 81b; Aristotle *Phys.* 4.7.213b34-214a1; *Gen. Corr.* 2.2.329b7-8. Cf. Hahm (1977), 4, 11, 13-16.

<sup>118</sup>Aulus Gellius *NA* 5.15 (SVF 2.141); cf. Nemesius *Nat. Hom.* 2 (SVF 2.773; IG II-64).

is completely different. Because he only presents Stoic views and evidence in support of these views, he purposely avoids the appearance of controversy. By connecting his Stoic arguments with widely held beliefs, these lend an atmosphere of consensus to the argumentation as a whole.

**Tangere enim et tangi nisi corpus nulla potest res, ut ait Lucretius.**

The reference to Lucretius only corroborates this point. As a leading literary figure who wrote philosophical poetry in Latin, Lucretius is one of Seneca's favoured authors to cite.<sup>119</sup> The passage cited comes from Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, the didactic poem in which he expounds his Epicurean world view.<sup>120</sup> Epicureans and Stoics shared a materialist outlook on physics, though the atomistic materialism of the Epicureans differed from Stoic dynamic materialism. Nevertheless, both schools could agree on the physical status of bodies as three-dimensional and tangible objects and both believed the soul to be a body. The advantages here are twofold. The name of Lucretius lends authority to this thought and by incorporating this Epicurean insight Seneca conveys the impression of wide philosophical agreement.<sup>121</sup> There should be no doubt that this citation is included to serve Seneca's own Stoic purpose. Although he takes over the exact phrasing of the original text, Seneca makes no attempt to place this citation in its Epicurean context. The axiomatic phrase, 'For nothing can touch or be touched except a body', reflects an important philosophical principle that became a popular point of reference in philosophical literature. The same thought is briefly rephrased in *Ep. 117.7*.<sup>122</sup> In addition, we have seen it reproduced in Aulus Gellius, and also Tertullian cites this phrase—without mentioning Lucretius—as part of his defence of the corporeality of Jesus.<sup>123</sup> Hence, it was put to use in various contexts to serve different purposes.

**Omnia autem ista quae dixi non mutarent corpus nisi tangerent; ergo corpora sunt.** If all the phenomena Seneca has described so far have the ability to change something, this could not be done without the capacity to touch. Thus, based on Lucretius' dictum, he can conclude once again that they must be bodies. By making the connection between change and touch, he subtly extends the statement on touch and bodies to cover 'bodies' that were not intended in the original text. At this point, we are following Seneca's authority, *dixi*, and no longer that of Lucretius.

Aside from the opportunity to cite Lucretius, Brad Inwood does not see how

<sup>119</sup> Seneca quotes Lucretius three times in this work, in *Ep. 95.11, 106.8, 110.6*; he is mentioned by name in *Ep. 58.12, 95.11, 106.8, 110.6* and *110.7*. Cf. Inwood (2007), 269.

<sup>120</sup> Lucretius DRN 1.304.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Inwood (2007), 269.

<sup>122</sup> Seneca *Ep. 117.7*: *Nihil enim accidere sine tactu potest; quod tangit, corpus est.* Cf. Wildberger (2006), 14.

<sup>123</sup> Aulus Gellius *NA* 5.15 (SVF 2.141), see also the earlier discussion at the end of *Ep. 106.3*; Tertullian *Marc.* 4.8.

the argument on touch adds value to the discussion: "This insertion of a middle term (touch) into the relationship between cause and effect adds little to the force of the arguments".<sup>124</sup> However, I would want to disagree with Inwood about the importance of this section on touch. For one thing, this section enables Seneca to forge a connection between his Stoic views and widely shared beliefs about bodies. This matters as it will make his position seem less controversial and more acceptable. Moreover, the argument on touch is also sense-based, just as the argument on the perceptibility of the emotions was. This makes it an accessible and straightforward piece of evidence, an aspect on which I will comment in more detail in *Ep. 106.11-12*.

(106.9)

**Etiam nunc cui tanta vis est ut inpellat et cogat et retineat et inhibeat corpus est.**

Something that can affect the actions of other bodies must be a body itself. This is exactly what the emotions, vices and virtues do: they move people towards actions or restrain them. When we look at the four verbs of action we notice two forms that drive someone forward, *inpellat et cogat*, and two that restrain someone, *retineat et inhibeat*. This duplication of verbs will recur in the following examples.

**Quid ergo? non timor retinet? non audacia inpellit? non fortitudo inmittit et impetum dat? non moderatio refrenat ac revocat? non gaudium extollit? non tristitia deducit?**

In this list various emotions and virtues illustrate their capacity for initiating movement and inciting action. There is a clear division of labour among the examples. The first two, *timor* and *audacia* are both emotions, the one withdraws, the other reaches out.<sup>125</sup> The verbs are the same as in the previous sentence. The aspect of motion is important as it showcases how they can trigger action, but it also reflects the physiological movement that takes place in the soul. Next, *fortitudo* and *moderatio* form a similar pair. However, these are the virtuous equivalents of the previous set, they are more stable dispositions that move and calm in the right way. Fear holds us back for the wrong reasons, whereas self-restraint reins us in the right way. Similarly, boldness is the imprudent substitute of courage, both of which push forward to take action. Thirdly, *gaudium* and *tristitia* are also matching counterparts that represent opposite feelings. The word *gaudium* is used in Seneca to denote the appropriate type of 'joy', one of the *eupatheiae*.<sup>126</sup> But since there is no correct version of such distress—nothing bad befalls the Stoic wise man—the slight asymmetry actually fits in

---

<sup>124</sup> Inwood (2007), 269.

<sup>125</sup> On occasion *audacia* is used in a good sense, but more often it is used negatively. The latter is the case here, especially since it is followed by the patently positive *fortitudo*.

<sup>126</sup> A *eupatheia* is a correct impulse that proceeds from a right value judgment and is the good equivalent of an emotion. Cf. Inwood (1985), 173-75, 237-39; Graver (2007), 51-55, 58-59.

with Stoic theory.<sup>127</sup>

Interestingly, the way Seneca describes them also shows the physiological impact of these motivational states on the soul.<sup>128</sup> Composition and tension of the body and mind substance explain different states of the body and of the mind. In physical terms, the unstable soul has too little tension, *tonos*, to hold a straight course and it will waver between extremes.<sup>129</sup> As Jaap Mansfeld aptly puts it: "The *hēgemonikon*, when making a weak or wrong judgment, i.e. when perverting itself, weakens its good tension and so turns into a condition characterized by a different degree of tension, for instance a condition of distress".<sup>130</sup> The four basic emotions are each associated with certain excessive psychosomatic movements—fear with shrinking, desire with stretching, distress with contraction and delight with swelling.<sup>131</sup> Thus, every emotion is a certain configuration of soul substance. The soul shrinks or swells whenever it is disposed in such a way that it assents to shrinking or swelling, coupled with analogous bodily reactions.

Here, the psychosomatic movements are reflected in the way they incite action. For example, fear involves a shrinking in the soul and will have the power to hold that person back. Joy occurs with an expansion of the soul that is uplifting, whereas sadness depresses and makes one feel down. By comparison, the right motivational states, virtues or appropriate feelings (*eupatheiai*), involve a proper movement of the soul that incites proper action.<sup>132</sup> On a final note, in these examples we only see emotions and virtues, the vices are absent. Partly, the emotions make for more visible examples, but they also suffice in taking on the role of negative examples that contrast with their positive counterparts, the virtues.

**(106.10)**

**Denique quidquid facimus aut malitiae aut virtutis gerimus imperio: quod imperat corpori corpus est, quod vim corpori adfert, corpus.**

Seneca looks further into the issue of what causes someone to spur into action. This time he introduces the notion of command, *imperium*, as another relevant aspect of virtues and vices. It brings into focus how virtues and vices have authority over our actions. The leading part of the soul, the *hēgemonikon* or *principale*, can be understood

<sup>127</sup>Cicero *Tusc.* 4.14.

<sup>128</sup>On the psychophysiological process of the emotions in Seneca, see Conradie (2010).

<sup>129</sup>See e.g., Stobaeus 2.88.10 (LS 65A, SVF 3.378); Diogenes Laertius 7.110, 7.157, 7.159; Cicero *Tusc.* 4.11. Cf. Tieleman (2003), 113-117, 128, 237-9; Tieleman (2010a).

<sup>130</sup>Mansfeld (1991), 116.

<sup>131</sup>See SVF 3.391 (LS 65B), 3.393, 3.394; Galen *PHP* 5.1.4, 4.3.2 (SVF 1.209; IG II-120). Cf. Tieleman (2003), 114-122.

<sup>132</sup>See the note above.

exactly as 'commander' of the soul.<sup>133</sup> The good or bad condition of the soul is the sustaining cause of one's judgments and, as a result, one's actions. Thus, we can put this usage of command in a Stoic context, as does Brad Inwood when he writes, with regard to the important role of assent in Stoic psychology: "assent is construable as a form of command to oneself to act".<sup>134</sup> The virtuous soul commands itself to do things rightly and in accordance with virtue.<sup>135</sup>

**Bonum corporis corporale est, bonum hominis et corporis bonum est; itaque corporale est.**

This last sentence of the central part of the letter adds little or nothing in terms of philosophical argument. Rather than end with an impressive final remark, the discussion seems to be bleeding dry here as it takes on an exaggerated 'technical' form that Seneca professes to dislike elsewhere. These formalised expressions bear the marks of scholarly activity, underlined by its syllogistic structure. Seneca strives for a literary effect in this section by using polyptoton in parallel form: *corpori, corpus, corpori, corpus; corporis, corporale, corporis, corporale*. This excessive repetition of different forms of *corpus* has a comical effect that paves the way for the tone of ridicule that will follow next. In the same way the argumentation started off in an overly formal style in *Ep.* 106.4, so does it end here. By concluding this subject in an 'over the top' manner, it diverts the critical comments in *Ep.* 106.11-12 from the overall, serious content.

**(106.11)**

**Quoniam, ut voluisti, morem gessi tibi, nunc ipse dicam mihi quod dicturum esse te video: latrunculis ludimus.**

Seneca turns his attention back to Lucilius, a common characteristic of the closing section of his letters. With the main subject discussed, he prefers to end his letter on a personal note, as is in conformity with epistolary practice. Seneca reminds Lucilius that this was all his idea: he had requested this discussion and it was to please him that Seneca had complied. Lucilius cannot have any cause for complaint. If the result is not satisfactory, then that is not Seneca's fault. Moreover, he attempts to anticipate his addressee's reaction. Note how indirectly this point is formulated: Seneca will say to himself what he can see Lucilius is about to say. So this is not Seneca's opinion, but only the imagined reply of Lucilius: we are just playing a game.

The game Seneca refers to, *latrunculi* or *ludus latruncolorum*, was a thinking game of military tactics for two players, being styled as a battle between pieces (*calculi*). It was a popular form of intellectual entertainment and played throughout the Roman

<sup>133</sup> Chrys. ap. Plutarch *Stoic. rep.* 1037F (SVF 3.175); cf. Seneca *Ep.* 121.12-13; 92.29.

<sup>134</sup> Inwood (2007), 270. Cf. Inwood (1985), 15-17, 46-48, 60-66.

<sup>135</sup> Stobaeus 2.66-67 (SVF 3.560; LS 61G; IG II-95.5b10).

Empire.<sup>136</sup> Seneca refers to the game again in *Ep.* 117.30-31:

No one who is speeding to save his burning house will scan a chess-board (*tabulam latrunculariam*) to speculate how the imprisoned piece can be freed. ... harassed amid these troubles, are you taking time for matters which serve merely for mental entertainment?<sup>137</sup>

It would be foolish to let a game take priority over what happens in one's actual life. The perception of inessential reasoning as a game is an important metaphor in Seneca's discussion of dialectical argumentation. Elaborate dialectical reasoning is often represented as a puzzle or game.<sup>138</sup> A game forms an exercise of the mind at best; otherwise, it is just a waste of valuable time.<sup>139</sup> In this sense, the repetition of different forms of *corpus* in *Ep.* 106.10 starts to read as a series of moves in a game.

This type of philosophical argumentation might put Lucilius off, or so Seneca imagines. Clearly, this has been enough theory for one day. Similarly, when Seneca in *Ep.* 108 postpones a request from Lucilius to the following letter, he argues that this is necessary because Lucilius will need to have attentive ears to appreciate the discussion in the next letter.<sup>140</sup> That examination will include some complicated matters that require a refreshed mind. Both of these cases show the need to administer philosophical theory little by little.<sup>141</sup> Lucilius should not grow displeased with the amount, the complexity, or the relevance of the issues presented to him.

**In supervacuis subtilitas teritur: non faciunt bonos ista sed doctos.**

The text implies that besides spending one's *subtilitas* on inconsequential pursuits, there also have to be some worthwhile, appropriate contexts in which intellectual acuity can serve a meaningful purpose.<sup>142</sup> Hence, *subtilitas* is not a bad thing in itself, though it is important that it is applied to the right subjects. Apparently, the present

<sup>136</sup>On Roman board games see Austin (1934); Balsdon (1969), 156-158; Matz (2002), 92-93. For primary references to the game of *latrunculi* see e.g., Varro *Ling.* 10.22; Ovid *Ars Am.* 2.208, 3.357-60; Martial 7.72; Petronius *Sat.* 33.2; Seneca *Tranq.* 14; *Brev. Vit.* 13.1.

<sup>137</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 117.30-31: *nemo qui ad incendium domus suae currit tabulam latrunculariam prospicit ut sciat quomodo alligatus exeat calculus. ... inter ista districtus rebus nihil aliud quam animum oblectantibus vacas?* This recalls the anecdote in *Tranq.* 14 where Julius Canus is playing the game up to his execution and seems more interested in winning than in his impending death.

<sup>138</sup>On logical puzzles, see Barnes (1997), 10-14; on the metaphor of the game, see Armisen-Marchetti (1989) 'Jeux et amusements', 128; Wildberger (2006), A742. See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 45.8, 48.5, 48.8, 71.6, 102.20, 111.4, 113.21.

<sup>139</sup>See e.g., Seneca *Ep.* 45.5, 109.17, 113.1, 117.19. Cf. Wildberger (2006), A754.

<sup>140</sup>Seneca *Ep.* 108.39.

<sup>141</sup>Roskam (2005), 93.

<sup>142</sup>See my earlier remark on *subtilitas* in the commentary at *Ep.* 15.3 in Ch. 4. Cf. Wildberger (2006), A794; Inwood (2007), 270.

question does not meet the requirements in this respect and I will argue shortly just how and why this is the case.

It is clear that Seneca is concerned here with the proper appreciation and use of our mental abilities and the way this leads to relevant knowledge. Just as time is a limited resource for human beings, so is our intellectual capacity. We have to be selective in what to think hard about as our attention and acuity is exhaustible.<sup>143</sup> Associated pitfalls are to use knowledge for reputation and display, to collect it for its quantity rather than its quality, or to engage in it for amusement rather than understanding. Philosophical knowledge is not a collector's item. Failing to understand what real knowledge is about will inevitably lead one away from philosophical progress.

Needless to say, Lucilius and all those who aim at philosophical progress do not just want to linger at the level of following rationally based precepts (against which Seneca warns in *Ep. 33*), but want to proceed with truly and accurately grasping the underlying philosophical doctrines. Lucilius' interest in the exact nature of the good is thus natural and warranted, but at the same time also a bit precarious. There is the possibility that he might get distracted by details or irrelevant subtleties. The way Seneca formulates it here, learning about the *decreta* is primarily a study of the basic doctrines rather than an examination of scholastic problems and casuistic subtleties. As such, even the study of philosophy has unsuspected difficulties and it seems fitting that at this advanced stage Seneca starts to address the risks that are internal to studying philosophy.

While Seneca has frequently criticised other studies and arts for not offering the right knowledge, in the case of philosophy too it may happen that a student is not learning the things he really should know.<sup>144</sup> By devoting one's time and attention to irrelevant subtleties such a person may become learned, but will not become a good person. The two are not identical qualities and the latter is what really matters and what one should strive for. Let us look at a parallel passage, *Ep. 95.13*, that may help to shed some light on the critical comments in *Ep. 106.11-12*:

People say: "The old-style wisdom advised only what one should do and avoid; and yet the men of former days were better men by far. When saviors (*docti*) have appeared, sages (*boni*) have become rare. For that frank, simple virtue (*simplex enim illa et aperta virtus*) has changed into hidden and crafty knowledge; we are taught how to debate, not how to live (*disputare, non vivere*)."<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup> See my notes on the exhaustion of life-force in the commentary at *Ep. 15.3* and on giving the mind a break at *Ep. 15.6* in Ch. 4.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep. 88* on the limits and dangers of the liberal arts.

<sup>145</sup> Seneca *Ep. 95.13*: '*Antiqua*' inquit 'sapientia nihil aliud quam facienda ac vitanda praecepit, et tunc longe meliores erant viri: postquam docti prodierunt, boni desunt; simplex enim illa et aperta

This passage is an objection that is raised against Seneca's defence of studying philosophical *decreta*. The gist of the argument is that since in the good old days virtue used to be a simple thing, why should we need complex philosophical doctrines now? In turn, the thought behind this objection can be traced back to the explanation in *Ep.* 90 that the earliest men were not virtuous but only happened to do the right thing on account of their uncorrupted natures.<sup>146</sup> There, Seneca claims that although these early men acted justly, they lacked any real understanding of the nature of things. *Ep.* 95 sets out to prove that the study of doctrines is a necessary part of philosophical training for someone to acquire a deeper, more rooted, understanding of philosophical insights that can serve as a standard of truth.<sup>147</sup> Seneca counters the objection in *Ep.* 95.13 by noting that philosophy nowadays needs to be more complex because the vices it stands up to are teeming more than ever. Philosophy has grown more intricate in the same way as its enemy has.<sup>148</sup>

I believe this passage shows some striking similarities with the text in *Ep.* 106.11-12. Consider, for example, how both passages share a contrast between those who are good, *boni*, and those who are learned, *docti*. In the following section I will continue to discuss several parallels that are of interest. For now, we may also note that another likeness between the two passages is the quotation of Lucretius just before, in *Ep.* 95.11 and 106.8.

(106.12)

**Apertior res est sapere, immo simplicior: paucis <satis> est ad mentem bonam uti litteris, sed nos ut cetera in supervacuum diffundimus, ita philosophiam ipsam. Quemadmodum omnium rerum, sic litterarum quoque intemperantia laboramus: non vitae sed scholae discimus. Vale.**

The statement that wisdom is a far more clear and simple case recalls the exact same combination that is attributed to virtue in *Ep.* 95.13, *simplex enim illa et aperta virtus*.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, the final sentence, that we are learning not for real life, but for the schol-

---

*virtus in obscuram et sollerterem scientiam versa est docemurque disputare, non vivere.'*

<sup>146</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 90.5: *suadebant dissuadebantque* The examples of Diogenes and Daedalus in *Ep.* 90.14-15 also portray the difference between simple virtue and crafty cleverness. A similar opposition is already found in *Ep.* 49.12: "For, as the tragic poet says: The language of truth is simple. We should not, therefore, make that language intricate; since there is nothing less fitting for a soul of great endeavour than such crafty cleverness".

<sup>147</sup>Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 95.56-57, 95.61-64.

<sup>148</sup>We may note that this thought too is revisited in *Ep.* 97 where Seneca explains that every age has its share of both saints and sinners. Consider, for instance, the merits of Cato against the corruption of Clodius.

<sup>149</sup>See also Seneca *Ep.* 48.12: "Frankness, and simplicity beseem true goodness", *Aperta decent et simplicia bonitatem.*

arly debate, also echoes *Ep.* 95.13: *disputare, non vivere*. It appears that *Ep.* 106.11-12 is a reworking of *Ep.* 95.13. Apparently, Seneca felt it was necessary to revisit his earlier enthusiasm for theoretical philosophy in *Ep.* 95 and place more emphasis on the aspect of philosophy as a life of simplicity. By this he means not solely a plain, unadorned lifestyle, but also an unpretentious one that avoids unnecessary complication.

Seneca rejects unnecessary complication and this reflects in his discussion of whether the good is a body. In his argumentation here he tries to keep things simple by appealing to direct evidence: the preconception that the good benefits (*Ep.* 106.4), signs of emotions and virtues that we can see (*Ep.* 106.5, 106.7), the widely held belief that a body can touch and be touched (*Ep.* 106.8). His proof should appear to be immediately obvious. Particularly in *Ep.* 106.4 where the technical argumentation begins and in *Ep.* 106.10 where it ends that Seneca speaks in a formal and scholarly style. That display of argumentative subtlety is what he dislikes, not the content of the argument itself. As Inwood notes, Seneca does not present any objections to his argument nor does he end up with unresolved difficulties.<sup>150</sup> In fact, he tries to present the content in *Ep.* 106.5-9 in a clear, forceful and vivid way. Seneca intends to prove here that we should not spend our *subtilitas* on this issue; not because the content is not worthy of our attention, but because the matter really is simple. Complications are what gets someone distracted from what matters most and allured by the activity rather than its outcome, or confused and entangled in treacherous sophistries that lead someone away from the truth.

In line with this observation is Seneca's point that only a little bit of learning is enough for a good mind. The study of philosophy needs to keep its focus on acquiring the right, relevant insights and it should not take circuitous routes on its way there.<sup>151</sup> Perhaps it is even a typical tendency in philosophy to overcomplicate things. Being distracted by superfluities looms in all areas of life and philosophy is in this respect certainly no exception.<sup>152</sup> Knowing more is not necessarily a good thing and the uncontrolled accumulation of knowledge can be seen as a kind of intemperance. The thought of immoderation in one's studies has already been brought up in similar terms in *Ep.* 88 in the context of the liberal arts: "This desire to know more than is sufficient is a sort of intemperance".<sup>153</sup> But a little later he recognises that similar unproductive scholarship can also be found in philosophy:

I have been speaking so far of liberal studies; but think how much super-

<sup>150</sup> Inwood (2007), 270.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 102.20 on taking the open and direct route in the study of philosophy.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 59.15.

<sup>153</sup> Seneca *Ep.* 88.36: *Plus scire velle quam sit satis intemperantiae genus est.* Cf. Inwood (2007), 270: *Ep.* 58.5. For other instances of *intemperantia*: *Ep.* 47.8, 74.19, 83.23, 98.8.

fluous and unpractical matter the philosophers contain! Of their own accord they also have descended to establishing nice divisions of syllables, to determining the true meaning of conjunctions and prepositions; they have been envious of the scholars, envious of the mathematicians. They have taken over into their own art all the superfluities of these other arts; the result is that they know more about careful speaking than about careful living.<sup>154</sup>

In this passage we may note Seneca's critical stance to what should be incorporated into the study of philosophy itself.

Finally, philosophical expertise should not consist of knowledge that comes in handy in the scholarly debate, but is should pertain to real life. Philosophy offers its own way of life and misconceptions about the task of philosophy can lead to mistakes on the part of teachers and pupils alike:

There are indeed mistakes made, through the fault of our advisers, who teach us how to debate and not how to live; there are also mistakes made by the pupils, who come to their teachers to develop, not their souls, but their wits. Thus the study of wisdom has become the study of words.<sup>155</sup>

Everyone involved in philosophy should know why they are doing it and should understand that the true goal of philosophy is to learn how to live well. This passage resembles *Ep. 106.12* but it also repeats a thought that is common throughout Seneca's writings as well as in those of other Stoics: philosophy's influence is not restricted to words, its role is to transform one's life.<sup>156</sup>

It is with real life that the following letter is concerned as well. In the opening section of *Ep. 107* Seneca poses some sharp questions that suggest that Lucilius is not successful in applying his philosophical knowledge to his everyday life. Similar terms recur in *Ep. 107.1*, *prudentia, subtilitas, occupationes tuas*, which implies that the progress in 106.3 has not yet prevented Lucilius from making the same old mistakes.

<sup>154</sup>Seneca *Ep. 88.42: De liberalibus studiis loquor: philosophi quantum habent supervacui, quantum ab usu recessentis! Ipsi quoque ad syllabarum distinctiones et coniunctionum ac praepositionum proprietates descenderunt et invidere grammaticis, invidere geometris; quidquid in illorum artibus supervacuum erat transtulere in suam. Sic effectum est ut diligentius loqui scirent quam vivere.*

<sup>155</sup>Ep. 108.23: *Sed aliquid praeipientium vitio peccatur, qui nos docent disputare, non vivere, aliquid discentium, qui propositum ad praeceptrores suos non animum excolendi sed ingenium. Itaque quae philosophia fuit facta philologia est.*

<sup>156</sup>Cf. e.g., Seneca *Ep. 6.1, 16.3, 20.2, 26.6, 90.1*. In addition, see Stobaeus 2.104-105 (IG II-95.11k); Musonius Rufus 5; Epictetus Diss. 1.8.6; 1.15.2: "each individual's life is the material of the art of living", 1.26.7, and 2.23.44: "If you could analyse syllogisms like Chrysippus, what is to prevent you from being wretched, sorrowful, envious and, in a word, being distracted and miserable? Not a single thing". Cf. Sellars (2006), 32-33; Hadot (1995a), esp. 82-83 and 264-276.

Lucilius may have come a long way, but he still has much learning ahead of him. That is why the more practical discussion of *Ep.* 107 turns its attention once more on how to deal with life itself.

## Conclusion

Seneca opens this letter with some remarks on the circumstances under which it was written. He acknowledges that his response was slow, rejects a possible excuse and comes up with his own explanation. These opening comments in *Ep.* 106.1-3 provide a useful background to Seneca's views, his self-presentation and relationship with Lucilius. Seneca does not waste his time, but is busy with writing philosophy. In addition, this substantial preamble enhances the impression of a real correspondence. The critical tone in the opening, that finds an echo at the end, seems at odds with the serious and careful exposition of Stoic theory in the body of the letter. In fact, in several letters Seneca makes deprecatory remarks on technicalities, but this does not stop him from discussing technical topics.

First of all, we may note that Seneca's discussion of the corporeality of the good fits squarely within Stoic thinking and that his arguments either are Stoic in origin or are used to prove a Stoic point. His emphasis on a clear and simple approach to wisdom enables him to leave his mark on an established topic. His choice of visual and vivid evidence, widely held beliefs and his new approach to a Chrysippean passage all attest to his deep engagement with Stoic philosophical theory.

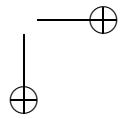
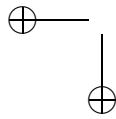
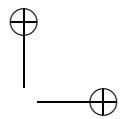
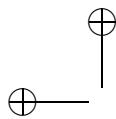
Besides the question of whether the good is body, another important topic in this letter is the question how this type of knowledge should be evaluated and handled. Knowledge is an important part of the philosophical identity. Stoic philosophy emphasises that wisdom consists in knowledge that is both unshakeable and consistent, but what about its scope? Already in early Stoicism, the proper scope of knowledge was under debate.<sup>157</sup> This issue becomes especially clear in the evaluative sections in the opening and end of the letter. This is also the issue that Cooper responds to when he asserts that Seneca does not understand the importance of truly grasping theoretical dogmas. But, as also has been pointed out to some extent by Inwood, Seneca's position in *Ep.* 106 is more nuanced than a straightforward rejection of complicated matters.

The fact that *Ep.* 106 is one of the letters near the end of the collection affects both the tone and subject. Lucilius has come a long way and the questions become more advanced as well. The relevance of the concept of knowledge is one that spreads through many of the later letters. Knowledge plays an important role in philosophy in general and Stoicism in particular. The right knowledge is what will lead to wis-

<sup>157</sup>Cf. Tieleman (1996), part II, Ch. 3 'Chrysippus and Science', 189-95.

dom and happiness. So when Seneca advocates his philosophical lifestyle he must delineate what role knowledge plays and what types of knowledge should be pursued and which should be shunned. This larger issue of philosophical knowledge can be identified in many of these later letters.

Viewing *Ep.* 106 in this wider context of letters concerned with the scope of knowledge in philosophy helps to understand how Seneca can sound critical in the introduction and end of the letter, while discussing a theoretical point in great detail and with plenty of persuasion. Rather than considering this letter as evidence of Seneca's dislike of theory it would best be read as an additional comment to his views expressed most clearly in *Ep.* 95 in which he considers theoretical knowledge to be of critical importance in philosophical study. *Ep.* 106 is intended to clarify this thought further. For one thing, it offers a clear and vivid account of a theoretical topic (*Ep.* 106.4-10). For another, it notes that theoretical study should not be pursued into endless detail (*Ep.* 106.11-12) and at a too early stage as is implied by Lucilius' progress (*Ep.* 106.3). When knowledge becomes inessential it cannot contribute to the ultimate goal of philosophy, the combined achievement of virtue and wisdom.



# General Conclusion

It is time to recapitulate our findings and discuss the conclusions that can be drawn from them. The objective of this study was to examine, on a case study basis, how literary texts and traditions function in the construction of a philosophical identity in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, and how these moral letters operate within the shared cultural framework of Seneca and his audience. This was accomplished by developing a new textual analysis approach based on concepts from the fields of cultural and literary theory. Special attention was given to the process of cultural identity construction, the nature of cultural memory as inscribed in literature, as well as the interpretation of 'our own' views and values, and those of 'others'. This methodological framework was applied to a set of four letters on the theme of the body—*Ep.* 11, 15, 78, 106. In sum, Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* aim to construct and legitimise a Roman philosophical identity, and to make the journey of moral progress undertaken by Seneca and Lucilius the paradigm for its wider Roman audience.

In Chapter 1, we have seen that a better understanding of Seneca's reception, his intellectual formation and his cultural context, clarified with the help of concepts from cultural theory, can be a valuable addition to Seneca studies. As we noted, a tradition's shared self-image persists by way of an ongoing process of commemoration and interpretation. In the case of Seneca, his aim to adapt Greek philosophy to a Roman audience called for the integration of different cultural backgrounds. We have seen that the ambitious claims of philosophy, combined with the partly critical Roman attitude towards Greek philosophy, provided a challenging background for his project of presenting philosophy as not merely a viable, but even the most suitable, option for a member of the Roman elite. At the same time, in order to appeal to his Roman audience, Seneca takes account of the Roman cultural perspective and customises the philosophical tradition by addressing Roman concerns and by writing in Latin.

Chapter 2 looked at the ways in which intertextual references provide a link with other texts and traditions. The discussion of intertextuality and its characteristics helped to chart the wide range of intertextual references, e.g., quotation, allusion,

onomastic reference, and generic reference. Next, Seneca's choice for the epistolary form was examined, paying attention to earlier models such as Epicurus and Cicero, and to the significant role of epistolary features in the *Epistulae Morales*. Seneca capitalises on the epistolary form to give personal advice, to underline the friendly bonds between him and Lucilius, and to present a model for others that actualises a philosophical life in accordance with Roman culture. By singling out five central identities—the human, Roman, upper-class, philosophical and Stoic identity—we have further defined key elements of Seneca's self-presentation.

Chapters 3 to 6 discussed the four letters that served as case studies. A close reading of the letters, in line with our conceptual framework, was instrumental in bringing out the letters' message, identifying cultural and intertextual aspects, and determining how these play a role in Seneca's self-presentation and his engagement with other texts and traditions. Although the study of these letters resulted in each case in new readings of the individual texts, I will focus here on the more general findings in relation to my research questions.

To answer the first question, on the role of texts in the process of identity construction, we need to sort out the various ways in which Seneca engaged with pretexts in our case studies. Different intertextual references support the construction of a philosophical identity in their own way. The selected letters included explicit and implicit intertextual references, *exempla*, and generic references to the epistolary form. To illustrate, we have noted several explicit references to other literary texts—the quotation of Virgil's *Aeneid* in *Ep. 78.15*, of Posidonius in *Ep. 78.28*, of Lucretius in *Ep. 106.8*, and the quotations of Epicurus in *Ep. 11.8* and *15.9*. These references are all embedded in a wider discussion and are commented upon in such a way that they support Seneca's larger philosophical point. As such, these explicit references function primarily as text-oriented references that add authoritative status to the letters.

Also, we have identified implicit references to various pretexts. For instance, in *Ep. 78* Seneca alludes to Epicurean therapeutic strategies and to Cicero *Tusc. 2.44-67* (as pointed out by Schrijvers). In these cases, there is often a higher degree of competition with the pretext. Seneca wants to offer his own improved version of an argument, discussion or therapeutical technique, but without shifting the reader's attention too far away from his own text. In *Ep. 11.1*, Seneca's conversation with a blushing youth recalled similar anecdotes of philosophers making young men blush, especially Socrates. There, the implicit reference reinforces Seneca's self-image as a philosopher, while an explicit reference might strike the audience as sounding too presumptuous—which would be out of keeping with the letter's concern with *vere-cundia*.

The earlier discussion of *exempla* and generic references in Chapter 2 was supported by the findings in the letters. References to *exempla* invoke heroes from the past who are central to a community's self-image. Seneca frequently offers a sequence of

*exempla* that consists of a combination of Roman wise men and Greek philosophers. Because they are a direct reference to a community's past, they are ideally suited for appropriation and for knitting together Roman and philosophical morals. In *Ep.* 11.8-9, it is Epicurus who prescribes us to imagine a respected role model keeping an eye on us, yet Seneca names the Romans Cato and Laelius as good examples. The philosophical exercise is retained, but Epicurus is substituted by Roman role models. The Roman examples Sulla, Pompey and Fabianus in *Ep.* 11.4 are not equally positive. However, Fabianus, who is named last and the only one to be praised explicitly, was a Roman intellectual engaged in philosophy.

Epistolary conventions and earlier models set generic expectations with the audience. Seneca for the most part conforms to epistolary conventions, though at times he emphasises how his letters deviate from the norm. For instance, when he discusses a traditional opening formula in *Ep.* 15.1, he reflects on the epistolary tradition but adapts the opening phrase to meet his philosophical needs. All in all, literary texts play several significant roles in the construction of a philosophical identity: firstly, by adding their authoritative status to Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*; secondly, by forming an unobtrusive background against which Seneca clarifies his own position; thirdly, by combining cultural heroes from different traditions or by presenting unifying figures (e.g., the Roman philosophers Cato and Papirius Fabianus) to display convergent values; and fourthly, by contributing to the generic expectation of the letter as a friendly exchange of personal thoughts and views.

Next, we can formulate an answer to our second question, how the *Epistulae Morales* function within the shared cultural framework of Seneca and his audience. Here also, the case studies have supplied us with several important findings. To sum up, the *Epistulae Morales* are a crucial instrument in establishing a personal connection between Seneca and his audience, in promoting a philosophical way of life, in confronting the ways and views of 'others', and finally, they play a major part in Seneca's self-presentation. At the same time, we have seen that these various aims are often closely connected in Seneca's letters.

Although in its use of the epistolary form the *Epistulae Morales* make reference to earlier literary models, the main function of the epistolary features and friendly asides in the letters is to relate to the reader in a more personal way. The personal setting, the sense of intimacy and sharing, are all intended to include the audience and make them want to be a part of this joint moral project. The philosophical letter combines friendship with the need for moral improvement—after all, only a good person can be a good friend. In their epistolary context, Seneca's recommendations and exhortations express his care for Lucilius' well-being, as a friend, as a mentor, and as a philosopher. In this respect, Lucilius serves as a model with which the wider audience can identify. Seneca's advice is not just intended for Lucilius and the reader should feel included when Seneca speaks of 'we' and calls a position or custom 'our

own'. Moreover, we have seen that the changing concerns and more advanced topics in the *Epistulae Morales* reflect Lucilius' growing enthusiasm and philosophical development. Ideally, the reader should match Lucilius' pace. In our case studies, we noted that *Ep.* 11 concentrates on the philosophical beginner, *Ep.* 15 starts off from a traditional Roman perspective, *Ep.* 78 shows the proper philosophical response to illness, but implicitly contrasts Epicurean and Stoic therapeutic techniques, whereas *Ep.* 106 contains an advanced topic and Stoic technical discussion.

As for Seneca's advocacy of a philosophical life, this was confirmed by all of the case studies. The selected letters pay attention to the role and contribution of philosophy (*Ep.* 11.1, 11.6-7, 11.10, 15.1-2, 78.3, 78.25-26, 106.11-12), to its collective self-image (*Ep.* 15.1, 78.11, 78.26-28, 106.11-12) and to philosophical practices (*Ep.* 11.8-10, 15.4-6, 15.10-11, 78.5-6, 78.18, 78.28-29). Although the attention to philosophy is a constant, as the collection progresses there is a shift in emphasis from approval of philosophy in general to support for Stoicism. Once the importance of philosophy itself has been established, more prominence is given to philosophical debates. Accordingly, Stoic identity is presented as the right interpretation of the philosophical identity. But in fact, Stoic philosophy forms a constant background—in the early letters philosophy is implicitly equated with Stoic views, later on the Stoic position is more explicitly stated and explained (e.g., in *Ep.* 106).

The contrast with 'others' gives Seneca the opportunity to disparage opponents and to define his own position more clearly. The case studies named identifiable contending groups, such as athletes (*Ep.* 15.2-3, 78.16, 78.20), actors (*Ep.* 11.7), vocal trainers (*Ep.* 15.7-8), doctors (*Ep.* 78.5), and craftsmen (*Ep.* 78.20). In addition, the letters also included references to more abstract categories of 'others', to fools (*Ep.* 15.9), to the inexperienced (*Ep.* 78.10), to the self-indulgent (*Ep.* 78.25) and to the complaining type (*Ep.* 78.14, 78.17, 78.20). These all form a marked contrast to Seneca's proposed way of life that is characterised by all the opposing qualities: good judgment, understanding, self-control and contentment.

With regard to Seneca's self-presentation, we should recall the diagram that visualised the interrelation between different identities (Figure 2.1 on page 107). This representation illustrated that Seneca, not inadvertently, reserves a central position for himself. He shares in all five identities and is never an outsider. Furthermore, his knowledge, good example, and daily habits all attest to his exemplary role. We have seen that in the opening anecdote of *Ep.* 11 Seneca is a respected senior figure conversing with a youth and someone who can read the character of others; in *Ep.* 15.1 he adapts a traditional opening formula to fit a philosophical outlook and prescribes appropriate physical and mental exercises; in *Ep.* 78.1-4 he describes how he endured severe illness; in *Ep.* 106.1-3 he is engaged in writing a work on moral philosophy. Nevertheless, he does not present himself as an unfailing authority, but as a real life example whose experience and learning should inspire like-minded others.

Although Seneca acknowledges that he himself is not a sage, he does consider himself a part of the philosophical tradition and is committed to promote philosophy and to join the ranks of exemplary philosophers.

All these results converge to show the *Epistulae Morales* as a literary text that interacts both directly and indirectly with other texts and traditions to construct the Roman philosophical identity of which Seneca himself is a prime example. The theme of the body helped to bear this out as well because it serves as an ideological battleground characterised by disagreement and professional competition for authority on the subject. As such, the theme of the body illustrated how someone who claims to be an expert needs to outline his own distinctive position and address rivalling conceptions. For instance, in *Ep.* 15 and 78 Seneca proclaims the primacy of mental well-being over that of the body. In doing so, he downplays the importance of the body. At the same time, his philosophical advice applies not only to the mind but also to the body (*Ep.* 15.1, 78.3). Thus, he feels at liberty to refute the claims of bodily experts such as athletic trainers and doctors. Moreover, in *Ep.* 11 he argues that although philosophy does not put an end to bodily faults, these are not an impediment to moral progress. The body itself is not an obstacle. Finally, *Ep.* 106 demonstrates that even on a technical level Seneca is an expert on the body.

Let us conclude by examining some of the wider implications of this study. First of all, our conceptual framework, which emphasised cultural identity and intertextual references, contributed to new and more insightful readings of the letters, including those letters that had already been examined in other studies. In particular, our perspective has been instrumental in exposing implicit references and differences of opinion that are not openly expressed. Thus, Epicurus and Cicero play an important role throughout the *Epistulae Morales*, something which has become more clear by drawing attention to the many implicit references made to them.

Despite these positive results, we have to be mindful of the possibility that some cultural and intertextual references have been overlooked here. Seneca's extensive knowledge of literature and his often subtle allusions are one part of this problem. Moreover, we may no longer have access to a relevant pretext or lack the cultural background to make a particular connection. But this is said as a note of caution and does not invalidate the earlier findings themselves.

Furthermore, awareness of Seneca's complex cultural identity has helped to explain why he at times appears to be inconsistent. On closer inspection, Seneca often needs to combine different cultural backgrounds. In doing so, he frequently shifts between paradigms and languages—e.g., between expressing the strict Stoic attitude and adopting a milder tone, between Greek and Latin, and between technical terms and the everyday manner of speaking. One striking case, that I have discussed in Chapter 6, is the seeming contradiction between the critical tone in the opening and closing sections of *Ep.* 106 and the theoretical discussion in its central part. Although

this type of cultural approach has typically been applied to texts which identify themselves in essence with a single community, here it has demonstrated its merit in the construction of a heterogeneous cultural identity.

In addition, the cultural identity approach has contributed to a more balanced picture of ancient philosophy. It supplements the traditional approach that concentrates primarily on outlining a philosopher's theoretical ideas, but without overemphasising the practical side of philosophy and reducing philosophers such as Seneca to the status of 'spiritual guide'—a drawback of the contemporary focus on the practical orientation of ancient philosophy. After all, the ancient philosophical life included both *theoria* and *praxis*.

Some suggestions have been made on how this approach can lead to a better understanding of individual texts and of the larger field of study. There are, however, many opportunities for further research in this area. Relevant to a thematic approach are those subjects that spark cultural or moral controversy, such as the emotions, death, poverty and riches, or pleasure and pain. Within the field of ancient philosophy, our approach seems best suited to texts where philosophy is presented as a distinct way of life that requires a conversion of common beliefs and practices. There has to be an earlier philosophical tradition to reflect on, or a conscious attempt to construct a new philosophical community with its own identity. Additional research could clarify whether other schools, such as Epicureanism, also attempt to construct their own identity. How do they relate to the wider philosophical tradition? Also, it seems worthwhile to compare Seneca's portrayal of a philosophical identity with that of other (Stoic) philosophers. However, the further investigation of how such other literary texts play a part in the construction of a philosophical identity must be left for another study.

*Vale.*

# Bibliography

## Editions and Translations

Annas, J., editor (2004). *Cicero: On Moral Ends*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Translated by R. Woolf.

Arrighetti, G., editor (1973). *Epicuro. Opere*. Einaudi, Torino.

Campbell, R., editor (1969). *Letters from a Stoic. Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth. Selected and translated, with an introduction, by R. Campbell.

Cooper, J. M. and Hutchinson, D. S., editors (1997). *Plato: Complete Works*. Hackett, Indianapolis.

Cooper, J. M. and Procopé, J. F., editors (1995). *Seneca: Moral and political essays*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Costa, C. D. N., editor (1988). *Seneca. 17 letters*. Aris and Phillips, Warminster. With translation and commentary by C. D. N. Costa.

Edelstein, L. and Kidd, I. G., editors (1989). *Posidonius, Volume I: The Fragments*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2nd edition.

Edwards, C., editor (2000). *Suetonius: Lives of the Caesars*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Translated with introduction and notes by C. Edwards.

Fitch, J. G., editor (1987). *Seneca's Hercules furens: a critical text with introduction and commentary*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

Gummere, R., editor (1962-1970). *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, volume I-III of *Loeb Classical Library*. Heinemann, London. Translated by R. M. Gummere.

- Haase, F. G. H. C., editor (1871-1873). *L. Annaei Seneca Opera quae supersunt*. Teubner, Lipsiae (Leipzig). Vol. III. Epistulae morales ad Lucilium. Fragmenta. De remediis fortitorum. Excerpta et supposita.
- Inwood, B., editor (2007). *Seneca. Selected Philosophical Letters*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Translated with introduction and commentary by B. Inwood.
- Isnardi Parente, M., editor (1974). *Opere di Epicuro*. Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, Torino. Classici della filosofia.
- Kidd, I. G., editor (1988). *Posidonius, Volume II: The Commentary (ii). Fragments 150-293*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Lombardo, S., editor (2006). *Virgil. The Essential Aeneid*. Hackett, Indianapolis.
- Long, A. A. and Sedley, D. N., editors (1989). *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, volume 1, Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary; volume 2, Greek and Latin Texts with Notes and Bibliography. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. First published 1987.
- Lutz, C. E. (1947). Musonius Rufus, the 'Roman Socrates'. *Yale Classical studies*, 10(1):3-147.
- Madvig, J. N., editor (1871-1884). *Adversaria critica ad scriptores Graecos et Latinos*. Librariae Gyldendalinae (F. Hegel), Hauniae (Copenhagen). Vol. II. Emendationes Latinae.
- Motto, A. L., editor (1985). *Seneca: Moral Epistles*. Scholars Press, Chico, CA. Selected and edited with introduction, notes and vocabulary by A. L. Motto.
- Préchac, F. and Noblot, H., editors (1985). *Sénèque, Lettres à Lucilius*, volume I. Belles lettres, Paris. Texte établi par F. Préchac, traduit par H. Noblot.
- Reynolds, L. D., editor (1965). *L. Annaei Senecae Ad Lucilium Epistulae morales*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. Edited and annotated by L. D. Reynolds.
- Salem, J., editor (1982). *Épicure, lettres*. Nathan, Paris. Notes et commentaires par J. Salem.
- Scarpat, G., editor (1975). *Lucio Anneo Seneca, Lettere a Lucilio, Libro primo*. Paideia, Brescia. Testo, introduzione, versione e commento di Giuseppe Scarpat.
- Summers, W. C., editor (1910). *Select Letters of Seneca*. Macmillan, London. Edited with introduction and explanatory notes by W. C. Summers. Reprinted 1952.

## Bibliography

337

- Tallmadge May, M., editor (1968). *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, volume I. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. Translated from the Greek with an introduction and commentary by M. Tallmadge May.
- Theiler, W., editor (1982). *Poseidonios. Die Fragmente*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin. Textband und Erläuterungsband, herausgegeben von W. Theiler.
- Verhoeven, C., editor (1980). *Brieven aan Lucilius*. Ambo, Baarn. Vertaald, ingeleid en van aantekeningen voorzien door C. Verhoeven.
- Vitelli, C., editor (1979). *M. Tulli Ciceronis Consolationis fragmenta*. Mondadori, Milano. C. Vitelli recognovit.
- Vottero, D., editor (1998). *Lucio Anneo Seneca: I Frammenti*. Pàtron, Bologna.
- Walker, H. J., editor (2004). *Valerius Maximus. Memorable Deeds and Sayings. One Thousand Tales from Ancient Rome*. Hackett, Indianapolis. Translated with introduction by H. J. Walker.
- Walsh, P. G., editor (2000). *Cicero. On Obligations*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Translated by P. G. Walsh.

## Modern studies

- Abel, K. (1981). Das Problem der Faktizität der Senecanischen Korrespondenz. *Hermes*, 109:472–99.
- Ahbel-Rappe, S. (2006). Philosophy in the Roman Empire. In Potter, D. S., editor, *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, chapter 26, pages 892–921. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Albrecht, von, M. (1999). *Roman epic: An interpretive introduction*. Brill, Leiden.
- Albrecht, von, M. (2004). *Wort und Wandlung*. Brill, Leiden.
- Alexander, W. (1940). In id Latus: Seneca Ep. Mor. 15.8. *Classical Philology*, 35(2):185–186.
- Alföldy, G. (1985). *The Social History of Rome*. Croom Helm, London. Transl. [from the German] by David Braund and Frank Pollock. Originally published as *Römische Sozialgeschichte* in 1975.
- Algra, K. A., editor (1999). *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Algra, K. A. (2003). The Mechanism of Social Appropriation and its Role in Hellenistic Ethics. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, XXV:265–296.
- Algra, K. A. (2009). Cosmologie et théologie. In Gourinat, J.-B. and Barnes, J., editors, *Lire les stoïciens*, chapter 8, pages 151–169. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris.
- André, J.-M. (1966). *L'otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine des origines à l'époque augustéenne*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris.
- André, J.-M. (1987). Les écoles philosophiques aux deux premiers siècles de l'Empire. In Haase, W., editor, *ANRW*, volume II 36.1, pages 5–77. Walter de Gruyter.
- Andresen, C., Bartels, K., and Huber, L., editors (1965). *Lexikon der Alten Welt*. Artemis-Verlag, Zürich-München.
- Annas, J. (2004). Ancient Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century. In Leiter, B., editor, *The Future for Philosophy*, chapter 1, pages 25–43. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Armisen-Marchetti, M. (1989). *Sapientiae facies. Études sur les images de Sénèque*. Collection d'études anciennes, 58. Belles lettres, Paris.
- Armisen-Marchetti, M. (2008). Imagination and Meditation in Seneca: The Example of *Praemeditatio*. In Fitch, J. G., editor, *Seneca*, chapter 4, pages 102–113. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Arnold, E. V. (1911). *Roman Stoicism: Being Lectures on the History of Stoic Philosophy With Special Reference to its Development Within the Roman Empire*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Assmann, A. (1995a). Was sind kulturelle Texte? In Poltermann, A., editor, *Literaturkanon – Medieneignis – kultureller Text: Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*, pages 232–244. Erich Schmidt, Berlin.
- Assmann, J. (1995b). Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. *New German Critique*, 65:125–133.
- Assmann, J. (1997). *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. Beck, München, 2nd edition.
- Astin, A. E. (1967). *Scipio Aemilianus*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Austin, R. (1934). Roman Board Games. I. *Greece and Rome*, 4:24–34.
- Axelson, B. (1939). *Neue Senecastudien, textkritische Beiträge zu Senecas Epistulae Morales*. Lund, Leipzig.

## Bibliography

339

- Balsdon, J. (1969). *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome*. McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Banateanu, A. (2001). *La théorie stoïcienne de l'amitié*. Editions Universitaires, Fribourg.
- Barnes, J. (1997). *Logic and the imperial Stoa*. Philosophia antiqua. Brill, Leiden.
- Barthes, R. (1984). La mort de l'auteur. In *Le bruissement de la langue*, pages 63–69. Seuil, Paris.
- Barton, C. A. (1999). The Roman Blush: The Delicate Matter of Self-Control. In Porter, J. I., editor, *Constructions of the Classical Body*, pages 212–234. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Barton, C. A. (2002). Being in the Eyes. In Fredrick, D., editor, *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power and the Body in Ancient Rome*, chapter 7, pages 216–236. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Barton, T. S. (1994). *Power and knowledge: astrology, physiognomics, and medicine under the Roman Empire*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Bartsch, S. (2006). *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Bartsch, S. and Wray, D., editors (2009). *Seneca and the Self*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Bénatouïl, T. (2006). Philosophic Schools in Hellenistic and Roman Times. In Gill, M. L. and Pellegrin, P., editors, *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, chapter 21, pages 415–429. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Berger, A. (1953). Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society; New Series*, 43(2).
- Billerbeck, M. (1979). *Der Kyniker Demetrius: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der frührkaiserzeitlichen Populärphilosophie*. Philosophia Antiqua. Brill, Leiden.
- Brain, P. (1986). *Galen on Bloodletting: A Study of the Origins, Development, and Validity of His Opinions, with a Translation of the Three Works*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Brennan, T. (2005). *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Broich, U. and Pfister, M., editors (1985). *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*. Niemeyer, Tübingen.

- Brunschwig, J. (1994). *Papers in Hellenistic philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Cairns, D. L. (1993). *Aidōs: The psychology and ethics of honour and shame in ancient Greek literature*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Cairns, D. L., editor (2005). *Body language in the Greek and Roman worlds*. Classical press of Wales, Swansea.
- Cancik, H. (1967). *Untersuchungen zu Senecas epistulae morales*. Olms, Hildesheim.
- Cancik-Lindemaier, H. (2006). *Von Atheismus bis Zensur: römische Lektüren in kulturwissenschaftlicher Absicht*. Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg. Edited by Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer and Barbara von Reibnitz.
- Catana, L. (2008). *The Historiographical Concept 'System of Philosophy': Its Origin, Nature, Influence and Legitimacy*. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 165. Brill, Leiden.
- Chitwood, A. (2004). *Death by Philosophy. The Biographical Tradition in the Life and Death of the Archaic Philosophers Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Democritus*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Claes, P. (1980). Semiotiek van de intertextualiteit. *ALW. Bulletin van de Vlaamse Vereniging voor Literatuurwetenschap*, 1:24–36.
- Clay, D. (1998). *Paradosis and Survival: Three Chapters in the Epicurean Philosophy*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Coleman, R. (1974). The Artful Moralist: A Study of Seneca's Epistolary Style. *Classical Quarterly*, 24(2):276–289.
- Colish, M. L. (1985). *The Stoic tradition from antiquity to the early Middle Ages*, volume I. Stoicism in Classical Latin Literature of *Studies in the History of Christian Thought*. Brill, Leiden.
- Connerton, P. (1989). *How societies remember*. Themes in the Social Sciences. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Conradie, I. M. (2010). A Shiver Down the Spine: On the Physical Aspects of Emotion in Seneca. *Caeculus*.
- Conte, G. B. (1986). *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

## Bibliography

341

- Cooper, J. M. (2004). *Knowledge, Nature and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Cooper, J. M. (2007). Socrates and philosophy as a way of life. In Scott, D., editor, *Maieusis. Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*, chapter 2. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Craik, E. (1995). Diet, *diaeta*, and dietetics. In Powell, C., editor, *The Greek World*, chapter 17, pages 387–402. Routledge, London.
- Cugusi, P. (1983). *Evoluzione e forme dell'epistolografia latina nella tarda repubblica e nei primi due secoli dell'impero con cenni sull'epistolografia preciceroniana*. Herder, Roma.
- De Lacy, P. (1977). The four Stoic *personae*. *Illinois Classical Studies*, 2:163–172.
- de Pretis, A. (2004). "Epistolarity" in the first book of Horace's *Epistles*. Gorgias dissertations. Gorgias Press, Piscataway, NJ, 2nd edition.
- Dench, E. (2005). *Romulus' asylum: Roman identities from the age of Alexander to the age of Hadrian*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Dominik, W. and Hall, J., editors (2007). *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Donini, P. (1982). *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero : la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino*. Rosenberg e Sellier, Torino.
- Döring, K. (1979). *Exemplum Socratis. Studien zur Sokratesnachwirkung in der kynisch-stoischen Popularphilosophie der frühen Kaiserzeit und im frühen Christentum*. Hermes. Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- Duey, P. A. (1946). Vocal Art in Antiquity. *The Musical Quarterly*, 32(3):390–410.
- Dyck, A. R. (1996). *A Commentary on Cicero, De Officiis*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Dyson, H. (2009). *Prolepsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa*. Sozomena Studies in the Recovery of Ancient Texts. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Earl, D. (1967). *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Edelstein, L. (1967a). The Dietetics of Antiquity. In Temkin, O. and Temkin, C., editors, *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein*, pages 303–316. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.

- Edelstein, L. (1967b). The Relation of Ancient Philosophy to Medicine. In Temkin, O. and Temkin, C., editors, *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein*, pages 349–366. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Edwards, C. (1997). Self-Scrutiny and Self-Transformation in Seneca's Letters. *Greece & Rome*, 44(1):23–38.
- Edwards, C. (1999). The Suffering Body: Philosophy and Pain in Seneca's Letters. In Potter, J., editor, *Constructions of the Classical Body*, pages 252–268. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Edwards, C. (2007). *Death in Ancient Rome*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London.
- Eijk, van der, P. J. (2005). *Medicine and philosophy in classical antiquity : doctors and philosophers on nature, soul, health and disease*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Evans, E. C. (1969). Physiognomics in the Ancient World. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society; New Series*, 59(5):5–101.
- Fantham, E. (1996). *Roman Literary Culture: From Cicero to Apuleius*. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Featherstone, M., Hepworth, M., and Turner, B. S., editors (1991). *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. Theory, Culture and Society. Sage Publications, London.
- Fentress, J. and Wickham, C. (1992). *Social Memory*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Ferguson, J. (1990). Epicureanism under the Roman Empire (revised and supplemented by J.P. Hershbell). In Haase, W., editor, *ANRW*, volume II 36.4, pages 2257–2327. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Ferry, J.-L. (1988). *Philhellénisme et impérialisme: aspects idéologiques de la conquête romaine du monde hellénistique, de la seconde guerre de Macédoine à la guerre contre Mithridate*. Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome. École Française de Rome.
- Fitch, J. G., editor (2008). *Seneca*. Oxford readings in classical studies. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Föllinger, S. (1996). *Differenz und Gleichheit: das Geschlechterverhältnis in der Sicht griechischer Philosophen des 4. bis 1. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* Steiner, Stuttgart.
- Fortuin, R. W. (1996). *Der Sport im augusteischen Rom. Philologische und sporthistorische Untersuchungen*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart.

## Bibliography

343

- Foucault, M. (1990). *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*, volume III. Penguin Books, New York, tr. by R. Hurley, reprint edition.
- Fowler, A. (1989). Genre. In Barnouw, E., editor, *International Encyclopedia of Communications*, volume 2, pages 215–7. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Frank, A. W. (1990). Bringing Bodies Back In: A Decade Review. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7(1):131–162.
- Frazer, R. (1971). Nero, the singing animal. *Arethusa*, 4:215–218.
- Frede, M. (1987). *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Fredrick, D., editor (2002). *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power and the Body in Ancient Rome*. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Garnsey, P. D. and Saller, R. (1987). *The Roman Empire: economy, society and culture*. Duckworth, London.
- Gill, C. (1988). Personhood and Personality: The Four-Personae Theory in Cicero, *De Officiis I*. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 6:169–199.
- Gill, C. (2003). The School in the Roman Imperial Period. In Inwood, B., editor, *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, chapter 2, pages 33–58. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gill, C. (2006). *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Gillmayr-Bucher, S. (2006). Intertextuality: Between literary theory and text analysis. In Brodie, T., MacDonald, D., and Porter, S., editors, *The Intertextuality of the Epistles. Explorations of Theory and Practice*, number 16 in New Testament Monographs, pages 13–23. Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield.
- Gleason, M. (1995). *Making Men: Sophists and self-presentation in ancient Rome*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Gleason, M. (1999). Elite Male Identity in the Roman Empire. In Potter, D. and Mattingly, D., editors, *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, page 67 ff. Michigan University Press, Ann Arbor.
- Gleason, P. (1983). Identifying Identity: A Semantic History. *The Journal of American History*, 69:910–931.
- Goldhill, S. (2001). *Being Greek under Rome: cultural identity, the second sophistic and the development of empire*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Gooch, P. W. (1987). Red Faces in Plato. *The Classical Journal*, 83:124–127.
- Gosling, J. C. B. and Taylor, C. C. W. (1982). *The Greeks on Pleasure*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Gouw, P. (2007). *Het sportieve leven van de Romeinen: de zegetocht van de Griekse sportcultuur onder het Romeinse Rijk*. Scriptio, Deventer.
- Gowing, A. M. (2005). *Empire and Memory: The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Graver, M. (1996). *Therapeutic Reading and Seneca's Moral Epistles*. PhD thesis, Brown University, Providence, RI.
- Graver, M. (1998). The Manhandling of Maecenas: Senecan Abstractions of Masculinity. *American Journal of Philology*, 119:607–632.
- Graver, M. (2007). *Stoicism and Emotion*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Greenblatt, S. (1980). *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Griffin, M. T. (1976). *Seneca: a philosopher in politics*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Griffin, M. T. (1989). Philosophy, Politics, and Politicians. In Griffin, M. T. and Barnes, J., editors, *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, pages 1–37. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Griffin, M. T. (1996). Cynicism and the Romans: attraction and repulsion. In Bracht Branham, R. and Goulet-Cazé, M.-O., editors, *The Cynics: the cynic movement in antiquity and its legacy*, number 23 in Hellenistic Culture and Society, pages 190–204. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Griffin, M. T. (2007). Seneca's pedagogic strategy: *Letters* and *De beneficiis*. In Sorabji, R. and Sharples, R. W., editors, *Greek and Roman Philosophy, 100 BC - 200 AD*, volume Supplement 94 of *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, pages 89–113, London. Institute of Classical Studies, University of London.
- Grimal, P. (1968). Place et rôle du temps dans la philosophie de Sénèque. *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 70:92–109.
- Grimm, V. E. (2006). On Food and the Body. In Potter, D. S., editor, *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, chapter 18, pages 354–368. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Gruen, E. (1992). *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

## Bibliography

345

- Habinek, T. N. (1998). *The politics of Latin literature: writing, identity, and empire in ancient Rome*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Habinek, T. N. (2000). Seneca's Renown: *Gloria, Claritudo*, and the Replication of the Roman Elite. *Classical Antiquity*, 19(2):264–303.
- Hachmann, E. (1995). *Die Führung des Lesers in Senecas 'Epistulae morales'*. Aschendorff, Münster.
- Hadot, I. (1969). *Seneca und die Griechisch-Römische Tradition der Seelenleitung*. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie. De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Hadot, I. (1984). *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique*. Études Augustiniennes, Paris.
- Hadot, I. (1986). The Spiritual Guide. In Armstrong, A., editor, *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality : Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, pages 436–59. Crossroad, New York.
- Hadot, I. (2003). Der philosophische Unterrichtsbetrieb in der römischen Kaiserzeit. *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 146(1):49–71.
- Hadot, P. (1987). *Exercises spirituels et philosophie antique*. Etudes Augustiniennes, Paris, 2nd edition.
- Hadot, P. (1995a). *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Hadot, P. (1998). *The inner citadel: the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Hadot, P. (2002). *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Hadot, P., Davidson, A. I., and Wissing, P. (1990). Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy. *Critical Inquiry*, 16(3):483–505.
- Hahn, D. E. (1977). *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*. Ohio State University Press, Columbus, Ohio.
- Hahn, J. (1989). *Der Philosoph und die Gesellschaft: Selbstverständnis, öffentliches Auftreten und populäre Erwartungen in der hohen Kaiserzeit*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart.
- Hankinson, R. (2003). Stoicism and Medicine. In Inwood, B., editor, *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, chapter 11, pages 295–309. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Hanson, A. (2006). Roman Medicine. In Potter, D. S., editor, *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, pages 840–891. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Hardie, P. (2002). *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Harich, H. (1993). Zur Präsenz des Weiblichen und zur Einschätzung der Frau bei Seneca. *Grazer Beiträge*, 19:129–155.
- Harris, W. V. (2001). *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Hawkins, A. H. (1999). Pathography: patient narratives of illness. *Western Journal of Medicine*, 171(2):127–9.
- Haynes, R. P. (1962). The Theory of Pleasure of the Old Stoa. *The American Journal of Philology*, 83(4):412–419.
- Helbig, J. (1996). *Intertextualität und Markierung: Untersuchungen zur Systematik und Funktion der Signalisierung von Intertextualität*. Beiträge zur neueren Literaturgeschichte. Winter, Heidelberg.
- Heller, J. (1968). Seneca Epist. 15.9. *Classical Philology*, 63(1):54–55.
- Henderson, J. (2006). Journey of a Lifetime : Seneca, Epistle 57 in Book VI of EM. In Volk, K. and Williams, G., editors, *Seeing Seneca Whole: Perspectives on Philosophy, Poetry and Politics*, volume XXVIII of *Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition*, pages 123–146. Brill, Leiden-Boston.
- Hengelbrock, M. (2000). *Das Problem des ethischen Fortschritts in Senecas Briefen*, volume 13 of *Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft*. Olms-Weldmann, Hildesheim.
- Henrichs, A. (1995). *Graecia Capta: Roman Views of Greek Culture*. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 97, Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance:243–261.
- Hinds, S. (1998). *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hingley, R. (2005). *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire*. Routledge, London.
- Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T., editors (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hoof, Lieve, v. (2007). Strategic Differences: Seneca and Plutarch on Controlling Anger. *Mnemosyne*, 60:59–86.

## Bibliography

347

- Hunink, V. J., editor (2004). *Seneca. Leren Sterven, brieven aan Lucilius*. Athenaeum - Polak & Van Gennep, Amsterdam.
- Husner, F. (1924). *Leib und Seele in der Sprache Senecas: ein Beitrag zur sprachlichen Formulierung der moralischen Adhortatio*. Number Suppl.bd. 17, H. 3 in *Philologus*. Basel, Basel.
- Inwood, B. (1985). *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Inwood, B. (1995). Seneca in His Philosophical Milieu. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 97, Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance:63–76.
- Inwood, B., editor (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Inwood, B. (2005). *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Inwood, B. (2007). The importance of form in Seneca's philosophical letters. In Morello, R. and Morrison, A., editors, *Ancient Letters. Classical and Late Antique Epistolography*, chapter 5, pages 133–148. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Inwood, B. and Gerson, L. P., editors (1997). *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*. Hackett, Indianapolis, 2nd edition.
- Ioppolo, A.-M. and Sedley, D. N., editors (2007). *Pyrrhonists, Patricians, Platonizers. Hellenistic Philosophy in the Period 155-86 BC. Tenth Symposium Hellenisticum*. Bibliopolis, Napoli.
- Jocelyn, H. (1977). The Ruling Class of the Roman Republic and Greek Philosophers. *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 59:323–66.
- Kamtekar, R. (1998). Aidōs in Epictetus. *Classical Philology*, 93(2):136–160.
- Kaster, R. (2005). *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Kidd, I. (1983). Euemptosia - proneness to disease. In Fortenbaugh, W., editor, *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics: The Work of Arius Didymus*, pages 107–113. Transaction Books, New Brunswick, NJ.
- King, H., editor (2005). *Health in antiquity*. Routledge, London and New York.
- King, H. and Dasen, V., editors (2008). *La médecine dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine*. Bibliothèque d'Histoire de la Médecine et de la Santé (BHMS), Lausanne.

- Kirk, A. (2005). Social and Cultural Memory. In Kirk, A. and Thatcher, T., editors, *Memory, Tradition, and Text. Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, pages 1–24. Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta.
- Knoche, U. (1975). Der Gedanke der Freundschaft in Senecas Briefen an Lucilius. In Maurach, G., editor, *Seneca als Philosoph*, volume 414 of *Wege der Forschung*, pages 149–166. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt.
- König, J. (2005). *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Konstan, D. (1997). *Friendship in the Classical World*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Konstan, D. (2006). *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: studies in Aristotle and classical literature*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Koskenniemi, H. (1956). *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Helsinki.
- Kristeva, J. (1977). Der geschlossene Text. In Zima, P., editor, *Textsemiotik als Ideologiekritik*, pages 194–229. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt.
- Krueger, D. (1996). The Bawdy and Society. The Shamelessness of Diogenes in Roman Imperial Culture. In Bracht Branham, R. and Goulet-Cazé, M.-O., editors, *The Cynics: the cynic movement in antiquity and its legacy*, pages 222–239. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Kudlien, F. (1968). Der Arzt des Körpers und der Arzt der Seele. *Clio medica*, 3:1–20.
- Kudlien, F. (1974). Die stoische Gesundheitsbewertung und ihre Probleme. *Hermes*, 102:446–456.
- Lachmann, R. (2004). Cultural memory and the role of literature. *European Review*, 12(2):165–178.
- Lana, I. (1991). Le "Lettere a Lucilio" nella letteratura epistolare. In Hijmans, B. and Grimal, P., editors, *Sénèque et la prose latine: neuf exposés suivis de discussions, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, pages 251–311. Vandœuvres, Genève.
- Laurence, R. and Berry, J., editors (1998). *Cultural identity in the Roman Empire*. Routledge, London.
- Lausberg, M. (1970). *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Fragmenten*, volume 7 of *Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

## Bibliography

349

- Leach, E. W. (1990). The Politics of Self-Presentation: Pliny's *Letters* and Roman Portrait Sculpture. *Classical Antiquity*, 9(1):14–39.
- Lee, C.-U. (2002). *Oikeiosis: stoische Ethik in naturphilosophischer Perspektive*. Alber, Freiburg - München.
- Leeman, A. (1953). Seneca's Plans for a Work *Moralis Philosophia* and their Influence on his Later Epistles. *Mnemosyne*, 6:307–13.
- Lelièvre, F. (1966). The Text of Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 15.8-9. *Classical Philology*, 61(1):44–45.
- Lesses, G. (1993). Austere Friends: The Stoics and Friendship. *Apeiron*, 26:57–75.
- Long, A. A. (1982). Soul and Body in Stoicism. *Phronesis*, 27:34–57.
- Long, A. A. (1986). *Hellenistic philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*. Duckworth, 2nd edition.
- Long, A. A. (1988). Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy. *Classical Quarterly*, 38(1):150–171.
- Long, A. A. (1996). *Stoic Studies*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Long, A. A. (2002). *Epictetus: a Stoic and Socratic guide to life*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Long, A. A. (2003). Roman philosophy. In Sedley, D. N., editor, *Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, chapter 7, pages 184–210. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Long, A. A. (2006). *From Epicurus to Epictetus. Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy*. Clarendon Press.
- Longrigg, J. (1998). *Greek Medicine. From the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age*. Duckworth, London.
- MacMullen, R. (1991). Hellenizing the Romans (2nd Century B.C.). *Historia*, 40:419–38.
- Mähl, E. (1974). *Gymnastik und Athletik im Denken der Römer*. Heuremata. Grüner, Amsterdam.
- Malherbe, A. J., editor (1988). *Ancient epistolary theorists*. Sources for biblical study. Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Manning, C. (1973). Seneca and the Stoics on the Equality of the Sexes. *Mnemosyne*, 26(2):170–77.

- Manning, C. (1974). The Consolatory Tradition and Seneca's Attitude to the Emotions. *Greece & Rome*, 21(1):71–81.
- Manning, C. (1994). School Philosophy and Popular Philosophy in the Roman Empire. In Haase, W., editor, *ANRW*, volume II 36-7, pages 4995–5026. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Mansfeld, J. (1986). Diogenes Laertius on Stoic philosophy. *Elenchos*, pages 297–382.
- Mansfeld, J. (1991). The Idea of the Will in Chrysippus, Posidonius, and Galen. *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. VII:107–145.
- Mansfeld, J. (1994). *Prolegomena: Questions to be settled before the study of an author, or a text*. Philosophia Antiqua. Brill, Leiden.
- Maso, S. (1999). *Lo Sguardo della Verità: Cinque Studi su Seneca*. Il Poligrafo, Padova.
- Matz, D. (2002). *Daily Life of the Ancient Romans*. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT.
- Mauch, M. (1997). *Senecas Frauenbild in den philosophischen Schriften*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt.
- Maurach, G. (1970). *Der Bau von Senecas Epistulae Morales*. Winter, Heidelberg.
- Maurach, G., editor (1975). *Seneca als Philosoph*, volume 414 of *Wege der Forschung*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt.
- Maurach, G. (1989). *Geschichte der römischen Philosophie: eine Einführung*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt.
- Mayer, R. G. (1991). Roman historical exempla in seneca. In Hijmans, B. and Grimal, P., editors, *Sénèque et la prose latine: neuf exposés suivis de discussions*, volume XXXVI of *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, chapter IV, pages 141–169. Vandœuvres, Genève.
- Mayer, R. G. (2008). Roman Historical *Exempla* in Seneca. In Fitch, J. G., editor, *Seneca*, Oxford readings in classical studies, pages 299–315. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Mazzoli, G. (1989). Le 'Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium' de Seneca. Valore letterario e filosofico. In Haase, W., editor, *ANRW*, volume II 36.3, pages 1823–1877. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Meijer, P. (1994). Aan het ziekbed van een Stoicus. De Stoa over pijn en ziekte. In Horstmanshoff, H., editor, *Pijn en balsem, troost en smart: pijnbeleving en pijnbestrijding in de oudheid*, pages 197–207. Erasmus, Rotterdam.

## Bibliography

351

- Mellor, R., editor (1998). *The historians of ancient Rome*. Routledge, London-New York.
- Merz, A. (2004). *Die fiktive Selbstauslegung des Paulus : intertextuelle Studien zur Intention und Rezeption der Pastoralbriefe*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- Merz, A. and Tieleman, T. L. (2008). The Letter of Mara bar Sarapion: Some Comments on its Philosophical and Historical Context. In Houtman, A., de Jong, A., and Missel-van de Weg, M., editors, *Empsychoi Logoi. Religious Innovations in Antiquity. Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst*, pages 107–133. Brill, Leiden.
- Mitchell, J. F. (1968). Consolatory Letters in Basil and Gregory Nazianzen. *Hermes*, 26(3):299–318.
- Morello, R. and Morrison, A., editors (2007). *Ancient Letters. Classical and Late Antique Epistolography*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Morford, M. P. (2002). *The Roman Philosophers: from the time of Cato the Censor to the death of Marcus Aurelius*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Morrison, A. (2007). Didacticism and Epistolarity in Horace. In Morello, R. and Morrison, A., editors, *Ancient Letters. Classical and Late Antique Epistolography*, chapter 4, pages 107–131. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Motto, A. L. (1966). Seneca on Trial: The Case of the Opulent Stoic. *The Classical Journal*, 61(6):254–258.
- Motto, A. L. (1970). *Seneca sourcebook*. Hakkert, Amsterdam.
- Motto, A. L. and Clark, J. R. (1993). *Essays on Seneca*, volume 79 of *Studien zur klassischen Philologie*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt and New York.
- Müller, S. (1995). *Das Volk der Athleten. Untersuchungen zur Ideologie und Kritik des Sports in der griechisch-römischen Antike*. Number Bd. 21 in Bochumer altertumswissenschaftlicher Colloquium. Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, Trier.
- Müller, W. (1991). Namen als intertextuelle Elemente. *Poetica*, 23:139–165.
- Newman, R. J. (2008). *In umbra virtutis: Gloria in the Thought of Seneca the Philosopher*. In Fitch, J. G., editor, *Seneca*, chapter 14, pages 316–334. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Nussbaum, M. (1994). *Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Nutton, V. (2004). *Ancient Medicine*. Routledge, London and New York.

- Olick, J. K. and Robbins, J. (1998). Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24:105–140.
- O'Neill, J. (1893-1897). *The night of the gods: an inquiry into cosmic and cosmogonic mythology and symbolism*, volume 2. Quaritch, Nutt, London.
- Osler, M. J., editor (1991). *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Panhuis, D. G. (2006). *Latin Grammar*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Parkin, T. and Pomeroy, A. J., editors (2007). *Roman Social History: A Sourcebook*. Routledge, London-New York.
- Pembroke, S. (1971). Oikeiōsis. In Long, A. A., editor, *Problems in Stoicism*, pages 114–149. Athlone Press, London.
- Phillipson, R. (1930). Das Sittlichschöne bei Panaitios. *Philologus*, 85:357–413.
- Pitts, M. (2007). The Emperor's New Clothes? The Utility of Identity in Roman Archaeology. *American Journal of Archaeology*, 111(4):693–713.
- Pohlenz, M. (1965). To prepon. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des griechischen Geistes. In Dorrie, H., editor, *Kleine Schriften*, volume 2, pages 100–139. Olms.
- Porter, J. I., editor (1999). *Constructions of the Classical Body*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Quinn, K. P. (1979). *Texts and Contexts: The Roman Writers and their Audience*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Rabbow, P. (1954). *Seelenführung. Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike*. Kösel-Verlag, München.
- Raina, G. (2005). Fisiognomica e bellezza nella cultura antica. In Neri, V., editor, *Il corpo e lo sguardo : Tredici studi sulla visualità e la bellezza del corpo nella cultura antica*, number 13 in Studi di storia, pages 53–65. Pàtron, Bologna.
- Rawson, E. (1985). *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic*. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Reydam-Schils, G. (2005). *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

## Bibliography

353

- Richardson-Hay, C. (2006). *First lessons: book 1 of Seneca's "Epistulae Morales": a commentary*. Peter Lang, Bern.
- Riel, van, G. (2000). *Pleasure and the good life: Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists*. Philosophia Antiqua 85. Brill, Leiden-Boston.
- Rist, J. (1969). *Stoic Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Rist, J. (1989). Seneca and Stoic Orthodoxy. In Haase, W., editor, *ANRW*, volume II 36.3, pages 1993–2012. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Roller, M. B. (2001). *Constructing Autocracy: aristocrats and emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Roller, M. B. (2006). *Dining posture in ancient Rome: bodies, values and status*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Roskam, G. (2005). *On the path to virtue: the Stoic doctrine of moral progress and its reception in (middle-)Platonism*. Leuven University Press, Leuven.
- Ross, G. M. (1974). Seneca's Philosophical Influence. In Costa, C. D. N., editor, *Seneca*, pages 116–165. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Savitt, S. (2002). 'Every Writer Needs a Wound': Suffering and the Suffering Body in Contemporary Literary Autobiography. *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 31(4):327–344.
- Schmitz, T. A. (2007). *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts*. Blackwell.
- Schofield, M. (1991). *The Stoic Idea of the City*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Schönegg, B. (1999). *Senecas "Epistulae Morales" als philosophisches Kunstwerk*. Peter Lang, Bern.
- Schrijvers, P. H. (1989). Seit ein Gespräch wir sind. Het voortleven van de omstreden Seneca. *Lampas*, 22:336–376.
- Schrijvers, P. H. (1990). Douleur, où est ta victoire? A propos de la lettre 78 de Sénèque. *Mnemosyne*, 43(3/4):374–394.
- Sedley, D. (1989). Philosophical allegiance in the greco-roman world. In Griffin, M. T. and Barnes, J., editors, *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, pages 96–119. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Sedley, D. (2003). The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus. In Inwood, B., editor, *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, chapter 1, pages 7–32. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Sellars, J. (2003). *The art of living: the Stoics on the nature and function of philosophy*. Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Sellars, J. (2006). *Stoicism*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Setaioli, A. (1985). Seneca e lo stile. In Haase, W., editor, *ANRW*, volume II 32.2, pages 776–858. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Setaioli, A. (1988). *Seneca e i Greci: Citazioni e traduzioni nelle opere filosofiche*. Pàtron, Bologna.
- Sevenster, J. (1961). *Paul and Seneca*. Brill, Leiden.
- Shackleton Bailey, D. (1970). Emendations of Seneca. *Classical Quarterly*, 20(2):350–363.
- Skidmore, C. (1996). *Practical ethics for Roman gentlemen: the work of Valerius Maximus*. Exeter University Press, Exeter.
- Snyder, H. G. (2000). *Teachers and texts in the ancient world: philosophers, Jews, and Christians*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Sorabji, R. (2000). *Emotion and peace of mind: from Stoic agitation to Christian temptation*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Spanneut, M. (1973). *Permanence du Stoïcisme: De Zénon à Malraux*. Duculot, Gembloux.
- Steel, C. (2006). *Roman Oratory*. Number 36 in *Greece & Rome. New Surveys in the Classics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Stowers, S. K. (1986). *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. Library of Early Christianity. Westminster Press, Philadelphia.
- Striker, G. (1983). The role of *oikeiōsis* in Stoic ethics. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1:145–167.
- Striker, G. (1995). Cicero and Greek Philosophy. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 97, Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance:53–61.
- Tatarkiewicz, W., Harrell, J., Barrett, C., and Petsch, D., editors (2006). *History of Aesthetics*, volume Vol. 1: Ancient Aesthetics. Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Teichert, D. (1990). Der Philosoph als Briefschreiber – Zur Bedeutung der literarischen Form von Senecas Briefen an Lucilius. In Gabriel, G. and Schildknecht, C., editors, *Literarische Formen der Philosophie*, pages 62–72. Metzler, Stuttgart.

## Bibliography

355

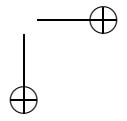
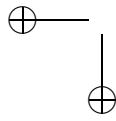
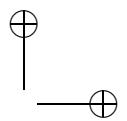
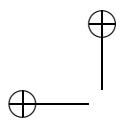
- Thraede, K. (1970). *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieftopik*. Zetemata 48. Beck, München.
- Tieleman, T. L. (1996). *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul: Argument and Refutation in the De placitis, Books II-III*, volume 58 of *Philosophia Antiqua*. Brill.
- Tieleman, T. L. (2003). *Chrysippus' On Affections: Reconstruction and Interpretation*. Philosophia Antiqua 94. Brill, Leiden.
- Tieleman, T. L. (2007). Onomastic Reference in Seneca: The Case of Plato and the Platonists. In Bonazzi, M. and Helmig, C., editors, *Platonic Stoicism - Stoic Platonism: The Dialogue between Platonism and Stoicism in Antiquity*, pages 133–148. Leuven University Press, Leuven.
- Tieleman, T. L. (2010a). Les Stoiciens sur les tempéraments du corps et de l'âme. In Barras, V., Maire, B., and Morand, A.-F., editors, *Mélanges, crases, tempéraments. La chimie du vivant dans la médecine et la biologie anciennes*, Genève. Actes du colloque international organisé aux Universités de Lausanne et de Genève, Bibliothèque d'Histoire de la Médecine et de la Santé (BHMS).
- Tieleman, T. L. (2010b). Orality and Writing in Ancient Philosophy: Their Interrelationship and the Shaping of Literary Forms. In Coote, R. and Weissenrieder, A., editors, *The Interface from Orality to Written Text: Hearing, Seeing and Writing in New Genres*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Tietze Larson, V. (1992). Seneca and the Schools of Philosophy in Early Imperial Rome. *Illinois Classical Studies*, XVII.1:49–56.
- Tompkins, J. P., editor (1980). *Reader-Response Criticism. From Formalism to Poststructuralism*. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Toner, J. (1995). *Leisure and Ancient Rome*. Blackwell, Cambridge.
- Toohey, P. (1981). How good was Latin? Some opinions from the Late Republic and Early Empire. *Arethusa*, 14(2):251–269.
- Trapp, M. (2003). *Greek and Latin Letters. An Anthology with Translation*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Trapp, M. (2007). *Philosophy in the Roman Empire: Ethics, Politics and Society*. Ashgate Ancient Philosophy Series. Ashgate, London.
- Trillitzsch, W. (1971). *Seneca im literarischen Urteil der Antike: Darstellung und Sammlung der Zeugnisse*, volume I. Darstellung. II. Quellensammlung (Testimonien). Hakkert, Amsterdam.

- Veyne, P. (2003). *Seneca: The Life of a Stoic*. Routledge, New York and London.
- Vlahogiannis, N. (2005). 'Curing' disability. In King, H., editor, *Health in antiquity*, chapter 10, pages 180–191. Routledge, London-New York.
- Voelke, A.-J. and Hadot, P. (1993). *La philosophie comme thérapie de l'âme: études de philosophie hellénistique*. Éditions Universitaires de Fribourg / Éditions du Cerf, Fribourg / Paris, 2nd edition.
- Volk, K. and Williams, G., editors (2006). *Seeing Seneca Whole: Perspectives on Philosophy, Poetry and Politics*, volume XXVIII of *Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition*. Brill, Leiden-Boston.
- Wallace-Hadrill, A. (2008). *Rome's cultural revolution*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Watt, W. (1982). Notes on Seneca's Letters. *Classical Quarterly*, 32:399–403.
- Wildberger, J. (2006). *Seneca und die Stoa: der Platz des Menschen in der Welt*. De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Wilkins, J. (2005). Hygieia at dinner and at the symposium. In King, H., editor, *Health in antiquity*, chapter 7, pages 136–149. Routledge, London and New York.
- Williams, C. A. (1999). *Roman Homosexuality: ideologies of masculinity in classical antiquity*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Wilson, M. (2001). Seneca's *Epistles* Reclassified. In Harrison, S. J., editor, *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics: Scholarship, Theory and Classical Literature*, chapter 11, pages 164–187. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Wissowa, G., Kroll, W., Mittelhaus, K., Ziegler, K., John, W., and Erler, T., editors (1894-). *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Metzler, Stuttgart.
- Worthington, J. (1946). Wordsworth's Reading of Roman Prose. *Yale studies in English*, 102:1–81.
- Wright, J. P. and Potter, P., editors (2000). *Psyche and soma: physicians and metaphysicians on the mind-body problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Wycislo, W. (1999). Seneca's Second Exile: Seneca and the Romantics. In Byrne, S., Cueva, E. P., Motto, A. L., and Clark, J. R., editors, *Veritatis amicitiaeque causa: essays in honor of Anna Lydia Motto and John R. Clark*, pages 321–345. Bolchazy-Carducci, Wauconda, IL.

## Bibliography

357

- Wyke, M., editor (1998). *Gender and the body in the ancient Mediterranean*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Zanker, P. (1995). *The mask of Socrates: the image of the intellectual in Antiquity*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Zetzel, J. (1972). Cicero and the Scipionic Circle. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 76:173–179.
- Ziegler, K., Sontheimer, W., and Gärtner, H., editors (1964-1975). *Der kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*. Druckenmüller, Stuttgart.



# Index Locorum Potiorum

<i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>		<i>Orationes Philippicae</i>	
3.15.26	194	2.7	73
ARISTOTLE		<i>Pro Murena</i>	
<i>Politica</i>		66	159
1339b8	191	<i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i>	
AULUS GELLIUS		2.35	255
<i>Noctes Atticae</i>		2.44-67	235
5.1.2-4	126	2.53	255
5.15	306, 317	3.6	222
12.5.2-3	259	3.76	230
12.5.9	260	CLEANTHES	
CELSUS		<i>Hymn to Zeus</i>	
<i>De Medicina</i>		17-18	160
1.2.7	182	DEMETRIUS	
CICERO		<i>De Elocutione</i>	
<i>De Divinatione</i>		228	68
1.11	290	DIO CHRYSOSTOMUS	
<i>De Finibus</i>		<i>Orationes</i>	
2.104-105	264	8.15	250
2.106	264	8.18	248
2.107	265	DIOGENES LAERTIUS	
3.60	219	7.59	136
4.18	124	7.88	141
<i>De Natura Deorum</i>		7.89	125
2.86	142	7.173	151
<i>De Officiis</i>		10.137	245
1.107-121	254	EPICTETUS	
1.128	146	<i>Dissertationes</i>	
3.37-39	155	3.7.27-28	123
<i>De Senectute</i>		3.12.1-7	187
11.35-36	186	fr. 14	123

GALENU <sup>S</sup>		QUINTILIAN	
<i>De Usu Partium</i>		<i>Institutio Oratoria</i>	
3.496 K	148	1.11.15	181
<i>Protreptikos Epi Technas</i>		11.3.22	183
1.27 K	177		
HIPPOCRATES		SENECA	
<i>Epidemiae</i>		<i>Apocolocyntosis</i>	
1.2.5	247	5-6	23
LUCRETIUS		<i>De Beneficiis</i>	
<i>De Rerum Natura</i>		1.2.4	254
1.304	317	2.5.4	288
MUSONIUS RUFUS		2.21.2	225
6 ( <i>Peri Askēsōs</i> )	187	3.4.1-2	198
6.37-48	188	5.1.1	299
NEMESIUS		7.1.7	90
<i>De Natura Hominis</i>		7.22	273
2.1	122	<i>De Brevitate Vitae</i>	
ORIBASIU <sup>S</sup>		13.6	257
6.7-9	190	<i>De Consolatione ad Helviam</i>	
OVID		9.2	271
<i>Heroides</i>		11.6	175
1.1-2	52	<i>De Consolatione ad Marciam</i>	
PLATO		7.4	242
<i>Charmides</i>		20.6	155
158c	126	<i>De Constantia Sapientis</i>	
<i>Gorgias</i>		19.3	278
496b-d	263	<i>De Ira</i>	
<i>Republic</i>		1.1.3-4	312
2.359c-360c	155	1.16.7	137
PLINY THE YOUNGER		1.20.4	143
<i>Panegyricus</i>		2.2.1	147
33	249	2.2.2	138
PLUTARCHUS		2.4.2	140
<i>Cato Maior</i>		2.10.6	155
16.2	159	2.10.7	155
19.3	159	2.15.3	129
<i>De Stoicorum Repugnantii<sup>s</sup></i>		2.19.1-20.4	150
1042E-F	310	3.8.7	139
<i>De Vitiosi Pudore</i>		3.10.2	240
3.528F	159	<i>De Providentia</i>	
		6.6	254

**Index Locorum Potiorum**

**361**

<i>De Tranquillitate Animi</i>		25.2	121
11.6	227	25.5-6	49, 157
<i>De Vita Beata</i>		26.7	80
4.2	264	26.8	63
<i>Epistulae Morales</i>		27.5	96
4.9	227	30.18	71
4.10	46	32.1	157
5.5-6	19	33.3	64
6.5	156, 158	33.4	105
6.7	196	39.2	102
8.1	291	40.1	1
8.6	291	41.2	157
8.7	63	43.4-5	157
10.1	126	44.2-3	98
10.3	136	44.3	102
<b>11</b>	113–163	45.13	70
11.8-9	49	50.9	86
12.11	63	51.1	74
13.5	256	54.3	135
13.16-17	201	58.5	56
14.1-2	173, 196	59.1	105
14.11	172	59.4	264
14.13	254	62.1	289
14.17	197	63.2	56
14.17-18	201	64.9-10	101
14.18	197	66.2	136
<b>15</b>	165–204	66.6	242
15.1	62	66.17	232
15.6	259	66.41	93
16.7	63, 199	67.4	250
16.9	199	67.11-16	49
21.5	78	68.2	271
22.9	290	70.9	220
22.13	63	70.27	96
24.2	278	71.6	104
24.5	256	71.26	253
24.6	25, 255	72.3	30
24.15	278	74.31	150
24.24	220	75.9	137
25.1-2	146	76.9-10	89

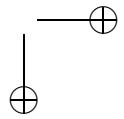
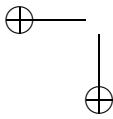
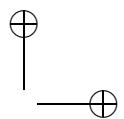
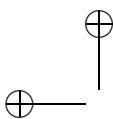
76.17	223	98.1	199
76.20	55, 256	98.12	50
76.32	238	102.5	297
77.4	221	102.20	298
77.5-6	225	<b>106</b>	283–327
77.5-8	223	107.10	160
77.5-9	218	108.1	293, 297
77.6	221	108.2	294
77.13	221	108.22	220
77.14	256	108.23	325
77.15	221	108.35	60
<b>78</b>	205–282	109.15	296
78.5	190	109.17	293, 297
78.28	73	110.1	106
80.2	179	111.4	302
80.3	186	114.12	97
82.2-3	270	114.21	59
82.6	269	117.2-3	306
82.15-17	227	117.7	317
83.1	185	117.30-31	321
83.3-4	184	119.16	273
83.25	92	120.20	298
85.1	72	121.1	304
85.10	313	122.5	267
87.9	93	124.1	304
87.32	308	STOBAEUS	
88.1	181	<i>Eclogae</i>	
88.2	99	2.31.81	154
88.36	324	2.64	308
88.42	324	2.65	125
89.4-5	98	2.82	173
89.23	40	2.115.1-2	130
90.1	99	SUETONIUS	
90.44	139, 305	<i>Nero</i>	
95.10	301	20	192
95.11	323	25	192
95.13	322–324	TERTULLIAN	
95.52	90	<i>Adversus Marcionem</i>	
95.65	152, 315	4.8	317
95.66-67	315	VIRGIL	

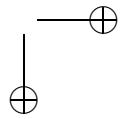
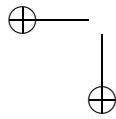
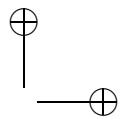
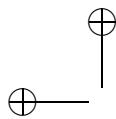
**Index Locorum Potiorum**

**363**

*Aeneid*

1.198-203	246
1.203	246





# Samenvatting

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 v.Chr. – 65 n.Chr.), Romeins staatsman en Stoïsch filosoof, bespreekt in zijn *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* (*Morele Brieven aan Lucilius*) filosofische thema's die van wezenlijk belang zijn voor hemzelf en zijn addresaat Lucilius. Deze studie wil een bijdrage leveren aan een beter begrip van Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, in het bijzonder door de nog weinig onderzochte filosofische aspecten van deze morele brieven te bestuderen in hun culturele en literaire context.

Bij het analyseren van de brieven vormen twee centrale onderzoeks vragen het uitgangspunt. Ten eerste, welke rol spelen literaire teksten en tradities in de constructie van een filosofische identiteit in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*? Ten tweede, welke rol vervullen deze morele brieven in de relatie tussen Seneca en zijn publiek? Anders gezegd, hoe fungeren de brieven binnen hun gedeeld cultureel kader? Teneinde deze twee vragen te beantwoorden schets ik allereerst een theoretisch-methodologisch kader om deze vragen te beantwoorden (hoofdstukken 1 en 2) en vanuit dit kader onderzoek ik vervolgens een thematische selectie van vier brieven (hoofdstukken 3 tot en met 6). Als thema voor de brieven heb ik gekozen voor het lichaam—een onderwerp dat aanleiding geeft tot velerlei opvattingen en voorschriften, waarover verschillende deskundigen een eigen standpunt innemen en dat bovendien nauw verbonden is met de beleving van identiteit.

Het eerste hoofdstuk behandelt de culturele context waarbinnen Seneca zijn brieven schreef. Hierin bied ik een overzicht van de historische receptie van Seneca als filosoof, met bijzondere aandacht voor de recente belangstelling voor de praktische oriëntatie van antieke filosofie. Tot voor kort besteedde onderzoek op het gebied van de antieke filosofie voornamelijk aandacht aan de theoretische opvattingen van Griekse en Romeinse denkers. Pas met het werk van o.a. Rabbow, Nussbaum en I. en P. Hadot kwam er meer waardering voor de praktische kant van antieke filosofie. Een filosofische levenswijze omvat meer dan alleen het ontwikkelen van wijsgerige leerstukken, het is ook van belang dat de filosofische inzichten worden geïnternali-

---

\*Voor een Nederlandse vertaling van de *Epistulae Morales*, zie Verhoeven (1980); vertalingen van Ep. 15 en 78 zijn tevens opgenomen in de selectie van Hunink (2004).

seerd. Hierbij bestaat echter het risico dat teveel nadruk wordt gelegd op praktische aspecten zoals spirituele oefeningen en dat een filosoof als Seneca wordt beschouwd als een 'spiritueel gids' wiens filosofische activiteit primair bestaat uit morele aanmoediging. Dit doet geen recht aan Seneca's brede filosofische interesse.

Op dit punt beargumenteer ik dat de aanzienlijke vereisten van een filosofische levenswijze het best kunnen worden bezien in het licht van een cultuurtheoretisch kader, zoals ontwikkeld in het werk van Jan Assmann en anderen. Uit zijn werk komt naar voren dat gemeenschappen geneigd zijn hun eigen 'culturele identiteit' te benadrukken in contrast met die van anderen. Tegelijkertijd is er binnen de gemeenschap behoefte aan het formuleren en preciseren van de eigen kernwaarden en gezamenlijke achtergrond, het 'cultureel geheugen'. Gezaghebbende figuren en kanonieke teksten zijn belangrijke instrumenten in het creëren van een gedeeld verleden dat de groep bindt. De vereenzelviging met een culturele identiteit wordt zowel gekenmerkt door normatieve aspecten—gericht op wat 'we' behoren te doen—, als door formatieve aspecten—gericht op wie 'we' zijn en wat ons bindt als groep. Teksten kunnen een belangrijke rol spelen in het vormgeven en interpreteren van culturele identiteit. De Griekse filosofie heeft de pretentie om levens ingrijpend te veranderen. Het eist daarmee een bijzondere plaats op in de Romeinse cultuur. Door hierop aandacht te vestigen, vormen we ons een beter beeld van hoe Seneca zichzelf positioneert als iemand die deelheeft aan de filosofische traditie, zonder zich te vervreemden van zijn Romeinse achtergrond. Als Romeins filosoof kan hij teruggrijpen op verschillende tradities, gezaghebbende teksten en culturele helden om zijn eigen positie vorm te geven.

Het tweede hoofdstuk concentreert zich meer op de tekstuele kant en op de literaire context van de *Epistulae Morales*. Met behulp van het concept 'intertextualiteit' breng ik in kaart hoe een tekst extra betekenis kan krijgen door aansluiting te zoeken bij andere teksten en tekstuele tradities. Deze intertekstuele benadering toont een verscheidenheid aan impliciete en expliciete intertekstuele verwijzingen, zoals bijvoorbeeld het citaat, de toespeling, het noemen van namen en de verwijzing naar genre. Met betrekking tot dit laatste punt bestudeer ik Seneca's keuze voor de briefvorm. In zijn brieven weet Seneca een intieme en vriendschappelijke sfeer te creëren waarin hij een persoonlijk portret van zichzelf schetst dat nadruk legt op zijn ervaring en goede kwaliteiten, waarin hij de morele ontwikkeling van hemzelf en van Lucilius beschrijft en waarin hij zijn Stoïsche filosofie in een Romeinse context kan plaatsen. Aandacht voor de eigen rol of identiteit, en de juiste invulling daarvan, is van groot belang bij het uitdragen van denkbeelden en voorschriften. Juist die eigen identiteit in de *Epistulae Morales* behoeft nadere uitwerking. Hiervoor richt ik me op vijf rollen of identiteiten die centraal staan in de brieven, te weten mens, Romein, elite, filosoof en Stoïcijn. Deze—deels overlappende—inalshoeken geven een beter beeld van de kwesties die Seneca en zijn publiek bezighouden en van de culturele codes waaraan

zij zich gebonden voelen.

In brief 11, die het onderwerp vormt van hoofdstuk 3, geeft Seneca commentaar op het blozen van een bevriende jongeman met wie hij in gesprek was. Naar aanleiding van dit blozen volgt een uiteenzetting over individuele verschillen in lichamelijke gesteldheid en karakter, en wordt een onderscheid gemaakt tussen natuurlijke en morele onvolkomenheden. Seneca toont zich een scherp waarnemer die in staat is de natuurlijke aanleg van anderen te herkennen alsmede hun onderliggende morele toestand. Al zijn voorbeelden hebben betrekking op hoe iemand overkomt tijdens een publiek optreden. De gedachte dat anderen je observeren wordt opgepikt in het afsluitende deel van de brief; Seneca vraagt Lucilius zich voor te stellen dat een eerbiedwaardig persoon ons in de gaten houdt en dat draagt bij tot beter moreel handelen. Blozen als teken van schroom (*verecundia*) blijkt het raakvlak te zijn tussen wat er binninnen iemand gebeurt en wat van buiten waargenomen kan worden, het wijst op het verband tussen uiterlijk en innerlijk en raakt daarmee aan de interactie tussen lichaam en ziel. De natuurlijke aanleg tot de deugd dient als bevestiging en aanmoediging om zelf morele ontwikkeling na te streven. Bovendien maakt Seneca in zijn bespreking van blozen onderscheid tussen wat aan ons is en wat ons van nature overkomt. Door de morele verantwoordelijkheid van de mens te waarborgen, ziet hij erop toe dat filosofie niet aan morele zeggingskracht inboet. Zo blijkt dat Seneca ook in een ogenschijnlijk klein aspect van het dagelijks leven een gelegenheid ziet om tot allerlei filosofische beschouwingen te komen die verband houden met zijn Stoïsch denken en waarvan de implicaties relevant zijn voor zijn Romeins publiek.

In het vierde hoofdstuk bespreek ik brief 15, waarin Seneca het onderscheid tussen lichamelijke en geestelijke gezondheid verder uitwerkt. Hij zet zich af tegen de gezondheidsregels en lichamelijke oefeningen die trainers voorschrijven op het gebied van conditie- en stemtraining. Als alternatief stelt hij simpele oefeningen voor die gemakkelijk zijn in te bouwen in iemands dagelijks leven. De nadruk ligt echter op het trainen van de geest, waarbij het aanleren van de juiste filosofische inzichten een belangrijke rol speelt. Seneca combineert in deze brief de mentaliteit van de Romeinse elite met een filosofische benadering. Training van het lichaam vereist geen bijzondere deskundigheid en men moet zich niet onnodig onderwerpen aan de regels van 'experts' die een kunstmatige toestand nastreven. De gezonde mens leeft volgens de natuur, ontwikkelt zijn rationaliteit en besteedt niet teveel aandacht aan het lichaam.

Het vijfde hoofdstuk is gewijd aan brief 78, met als onderwerp ziekte en de ongemakken en gebreken die daarmee gepaard gaan. Seneca schrijft deze brief vanwege de slechte gezondheid waarin zijn vriend Lucilius verkeert. Seneca voelt met hem mee en biedt een persoonlijk relaas over hoe de filosofie en het gezelschap van vrienden hem er gedurende een zware ziekte weer bovenop hielpen. Filosofie biedt therapeutische inzichten die een patient helpen om de ziekte de baas te worden en om zelfs

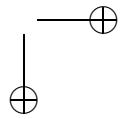
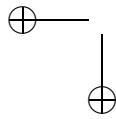
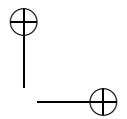
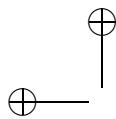
in een ellendige situatie moed te tonen. Deze brief vertoont veel overeenkomsten met een gedeelte uit Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, zoals ook al door Piet Schrijvers is opgemerkt. Verder bestrijdt Seneca impliciet de Epicureïsche opvattingen dat genot het hoogste goed is en dat het terugdenken aan doorstane ellende kwalijk zou zijn. In het algemeen is het een veelvoorkomende fout dat mensen zich teveel richten op het lichaam, terwijl de gezondheid van de geest veel belangrijker is. Dokters, atleten en ambachtslieden zijn beroepsmatig bezig met het lichaam, maar ook gewone mensen zijn veel of zelfs teveel gehecht aan hun lichaam en de verwende mens streeft enkel lichamelijk genot na. De filosoof daarentegen richt zich op het geestelijk welzijn, hij kan hierdoor beter omgaan met lichamelijk ongemak en is werkelijk gezond.

In het zesde hoofdstuk behandel ik brief 106, die een gedegen theoretische discussie over het lichaam bevat. De centrale vraag, of het goede een lichaam is, moet worden bezien in het licht van Stoïsche opvattingen over wat lichamen precies zijn. De mens bestaat volgens de Stoa uit twee onderscheiden lichamen die nauw met elkaar zijn verweven—ziel en lichaam. Het goed van de mens bestaat uit de moreel goede toestand van de ziel en kan dan ook als een lichaam worden beschouwd, te weten de lichamelijke ziel in een goede toestand. Dit legt Seneca met name uit aan de hand van de emoties; ze zijn een herkenbaar en aanschouwelijk voorbeeld van de interactie tussen ziel en lichaam. Deze brief laat zien dat Seneca aan het eind van de brievenverzameling meer complexe materie behandelt die past bij Lucilius' filosofische ontwikkeling en dat hij hierbij het Stoïsche gedachtegoed helder voor het voetlicht wil brengen. Tegelijkertijd aan het begin en einde van de brief maakt zijn kritische toon over de relevantie van dit soort kennis duidelijk dat hij stilstaat bij de benodigde omvang van filosofische kennis. De filosoof, als liefhebber van de wijsheid, moet kennis nastreven die daadwerkelijk bijdraagt aan het verkrijgen van deugd en inzicht.

In de conclusie verbind ik dit soort observaties over de afzonderlijke brieven in het tweede deel met het theoretisch-methodologisch kader zoals ontwikkeld in het eerste deel. Hier formuleer ik ook een antwoord op de twee onderzoeks vragen die ik in de inleiding heb gesteld. Ter beantwoording van de eerste vraag kunnen we stellen dat literaire teksten en tradities op verschillende manieren een belangrijke rol spelen in de constructie van een filosofische identiteit. Uit mijn onderzoek blijkt, ten eerste, dat vooral expliciete intertekstuele verwijzingen—zoals het citeren van gezaghebbende teksten of het verwijzen naar vooraanstaande personen—het gezag en prestige van de *Epistulae Morales* benadrukken; ten tweede, dat met name impliciete intertekstuele verwijzingen een onopvallende achtergrond vormen waartegen Seneca zijn eigen positie afbakent—dit betreft vooral werken van Cicero en Epicurus; ten derde, dat ofwel het samenbrengen van culturele helden uit verschillende tradities ofwel het presenteren van figuren die verschillende tradities in zichzelf verenigen, bijdraagt aan het onderstrepen van gedeelde waarden en normen; en ten slotte, dat het benadrukken van de briefform inspeelt op bestaande aannames over het genre

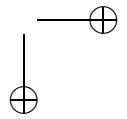
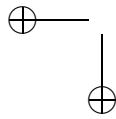
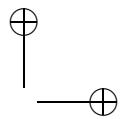
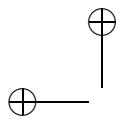
van de vriendschapsbrief als een sympathieke uitwisseling van persoonlijke ervaringen en gedachten.

Ook op de tweede onderzoeksraag, hoe de *Epistulae Morales* fungeren binnen het gedeeld cultureel kader van Seneca en zijn publiek, kan een bevredigend antwoord worden gegeven op basis van de resultaten uit de bestudeerde brieven. Allereerst komt naar voren dat hoewel Seneca's gebruik van de briefvorm teruggrijpt op literaire voorgangers, zoals Cicero en Epicurus, het de voornaamste functie van de briefvorm is om een persoonlijke band aan te gaan met de lezer. De persoonlijke sfeer en het delen van ervaringen dragen ertoe bij dat de lezer zich gaat identificeren met het gezamenlijke doel van Seneca en Lucilius om morele vooruitgang te boeken. Verder blijkt uit mijn onderzoek dat de *Epistulae Morales* bedoeld zijn om een filosofische levenswijze uit te dragen. De brieven besteden veel aandacht aan de formatieve en normatieve rol die filosofie heeft: aan het juiste zelfbeeld van de filosoof en aan gepaste filosofische gewoonten en gebruiken. In de loop van het werk verlegt Seneca het accent en wordt de filosofische levenswijze expliciter ingevuld met Stoïsche idealen, al gebeurde dat eerder ook al stilzwijgend. Bovendien is aangetoond dat het contrast met allerlei 'anderen' Seneca de gelegenheid biedt om tegenstanders in een kwaad daglicht te stellen en zijn eigen positie beter te definiëren. Wie er met 'wij' en 'zij' worden aangeduid, wordt sterk bepaald door de specifieke context. Het thema van het lichaam is in dit opzicht bijzonder representatief doordat het een ideologisch strijdtonel vormt: er zijn volop meningsverschillen over hoe het lichaam moet worden gewaardeerd en wat de beste omgang met het lichaam is, en er is rivaliteit tussen verschillende beroepsgroepen over wie zichzelf als gezaghebbend expert op dit gebied kan beschouwen. Ten slotte stellen de *Epistulae Morales* Seneca in staat om zich te presenteren als toonbeeld van een Romeins-filosofisch leven. Al geeft hij toe zelf geen perfecte wijze te zijn, hij is een levensecht voorbeeld dat als ideaal kan dienen voor gelijkgestemden. Hiermee plaatst hij zichzelf in de filosofische traditie die hij wenst te bevorderen en probeert hij voor zichzelf een plaats te verwerven in deze traditie.



# Curriculum vitae

Irene Marianne Conradie werd op 15 maart 1981 geboren te Broek op Langedijk. Ze behaalde haar VWO Gymnasium diploma in 1999. Na een jaar reizen en werken ging ze Wijsbegeerte studeren aan de Universiteit Utrecht. Daar studeerde ze in augustus 2005 af bij prof. Keimpe Algra in de richting Geschiedenis van de Filosofie. Voor haar scriptie "Favours, Fellowship and Friendship in Seneca" ontving ze een eervolle vermelding bij de Hans Vliegenthart Scriptieprijs (Geesteswetenschappen) en won ze de scriptieprijs van het departement Wijsbegeerte. In september 2005 begon ze als promovenda aan de Universiteit Utrecht bij het onderzoeksproject "Habent sua fata libelli", onder leiding van prof. Annette Merz en dr. Teun Tielemans, met als promotor prof. Keimpe Algra.



## Quaestiones Infinitae

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ZENO INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY

- VOLUME 17. C. MACDONALD, *Mind and Nature* (public lecture), 1996.
- VOLUME 18. M.V.P. SLORS, *Personal Identity and the Metaphysics of Mind* (dissertation), 1997.
- VOLUME 19. S. WOLF, *Meaningful Lives in a Meaningless World* (public lecture), 1997.
- VOLUME 20. H.H.A. VAN DEN BRINK, *The Tragedy of Liberalism* (dissertation), 1997.
- VOLUME 21. D. VAN DALEN, *Torens en Fundamenten* (valedictory lecture), 1997.
- VOLUME 22. J.A. BERGSTRA, W.J. FOKKINK, W.M.T. MENNEN, S.F.M. VAN VLIJMEN, *Spoorweglogica via EURIS*, 1997.
- VOLUME 23. I.M. CROESE, *Simplicius on Continuous and Instantaneous Change* (dissertation), 1998.
- VOLUME 24. M.J. HOLLENBERG, *Logic and Bisimulation* (dissertation), 1998.
- VOLUME 25. C.H. LEIJENHORST, *Hobbes and the Aristotelians* (dissertation), 1998.
- VOLUME 26. S.F.M. VAN VLIJMEN, *Algebraic Specification in Action* (dissertation), 1998.
- VOLUME 27. M.F. VERWEIJ, *Preventive Medicine Between Obligation and Aspiration* (dissertation), 1998.
- VOLUME 28. J.A. BERGSTRA, S.F.M. VAN VLIJMEN, *Theoretische Software-Engineering: kenmerken, faseringen en classificaties*, 1998.
- VOLUME 29. A.G. WOUTERS, *Explanation Without A Cause* (dissertation), 1999.
- VOLUME 30. M.M.S.K. SIE, *Responsibility, Blameworthy Action & Normative Disagreements* (dissertation), 1999.
- VOLUME 31. M.S.P.R. VAN ATTEN, *Phenomenology of choice sequences* (dissertation), 1999.
- VOLUME 32. VERA STEBLETSOVA, *Algebras, Relations and Geometries (an equational perspective)* (dissertation), 2000.
- VOLUME 33. A. VISSER, *Het Tekst Continuum* (inaugural lecture), 2000.
- VOLUME 34. HISIGURO, *Can we speak about what cannot be said?* (public lecture), 2000.
- VOLUME 35. W. HAAS, *Haltlosigkeit; Zwischen Sprache und Erfahrung* (dissertation), 2001.
- VOLUME 36. R. POLI, *ALWIS: Ontology for knowledge engineers* (dissertation), 2001.
- VOLUME 37. J. MANSFELD, *Platonische Briefschrijverij* (valedictory lecture), 2001.
- VOLUME 37A. E.J. BOS, *The Correspondence between Descartes and Henricus Regius* (dissertation), 2002.
- VOLUME 38. M. VAN OTEGEM, *A Bibliography of the Works of Descartes (1637-1704)* (dissertation), 2002.
- VOLUME 39. B.E.K.J. GOOSSENS, *Edmund Husserl: Einleitung in die Philosophie: Vorlesungen 1922/23* (dissertation), 2003.

- VOLUME 40. H.J.M. BROEKHUIJSE, *Het einde van de sociaaldemocratie* (dissertation), 2002.
- VOLUME 41. P. RAVALLI, *Husserls Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität in den Göttinger Jahren: Eine kritisch-historische Darstellung* (dissertation), 2003.
- VOLUME 42. B. ALMOND, *The Midas Touch: Ethics, Science and our Human Future* (inaugural lecture), 2003.
- VOLUME 43. M. DÜWELL, *Morele kennis: over de mogelijkheden van toegepaste ethiek* (inaugural lecture), 2003.
- VOLUME 44. R.D.A. HENDRIKS, *Metamathematics in Coq* (dissertation), 2003.
- VOLUME 45. TH. VERBEEK, E.J. BOS, J.M.M. VAN DE VEN, *The Correspondence of René Descartes: 1643*, 2003.
- VOLUME 46. J.J.C. KUIPER, *Ideas and Explorations: Brouwer’s Road to Intuitionism* (dissertation), 2004.
- VOLUME 47. C.M. BEKKER, *Rechtvaardigheid, Onpartijdigheid, Gender en Sociale Diversiteit; Feministische filosofen over recht doen aan vrouwen en hun onderlinge verschillen* (dissertation), 2004.
- VOLUME 48. A.A. LONG, *Epictetus on understanding and managing emotions* (public lecture), 2004.
- VOLUME 49. J.J. JOOSTEN, *Interpretability formalized* (dissertation), 2004.
- VOLUME 50. J.G. SIJMONS, *Phänomenologie und Idealismus: Analyse der Struktur und Methode der Philosophie Rudolf Steiners* (dissertation), 2005.
- VOLUME 51. J.H. HOOGSTAD, *Time tracks* (dissertation), 2005.
- VOLUME 52. M.A. VAN DEN HOVEN, *A Claim for Reasonable Morality* (dissertation), 2006.
- VOLUME 53. CORINNA VERMEULEN, *René Descartes, Specimina philosophiae: Introduction and Critical Edition* (dissertation), 2007.
- VOLUME 54. R.G. MILLIKAN, *Learning Language without having a theory of mind* (inaugural lecture), 2007.
- VOLUME 55. RUTGER CLAASSEN, *The Market’s Place in the Provision of Goods* (dissertation), 2008.
- VOLUME 56. H.J.S. BRUGGINK, *Equivalence of Reductions in Higher-Order Rewriting* (dissertation), 2008.
- VOLUME 57. ANNEMARIE KALIS, *Failures of agency* (dissertation), 2009.
- VOLUME 58. SIGRID GRAUMANN, *Assistierte Freiheit* (dissertation), 2009.
- VOLUME 59. MARK AALDERINK, *Philosophy, Scientific Knowledge, and Concept Formation in Geulincx and Descartes* (dissertation), 2010.
- VOLUME 60. I.M. CONRADIE, *Seneca in his cultural and literary context: Selected moral letters on the body* (dissertation), 2010.