

Introduction

The purpose of this volume, most of whose contents were given as papers at an international conference “Seneca Philosophus” at the American University of Paris in May 2011, is to provide Anglophone readers with a range of current approaches to this important first-century Latin author. The contributors span scholarly generations and reflect diverse research cultures and agendas. In some cases this book makes the work of prominent scholars writing in other languages available in English for the first time. While these papers treat a variety of themes, often from contrasting disciplinary and methodological perspectives, they share many points of agreement about Seneca. Whether they focus on his epistemology, his ethics, his natural philosophy, his psychology, his political thought, or his conception of the body and of gender roles, the contributors see him as an author who draws with discrimination on other ancient traditions while developing an authentic, cogent, and original articulation of Roman Stoicism. Some papers in this collection emphasize Seneca’s philosophy as such. Others focus on the ways in which his literary artistry serves to convey his ideas, accenting his strategies as a writer, his use of rhetorical devices and standard tropes, and the sophisticated techniques with which he constructs a literary as well as a philosophical persona, both in his prose and his dramatic works.

The first group of papers in this volume deals with Seneca the philosopher in the most immediate sense. Ilsetraut Hadot and Antonello Orlando engage the debate on how the earlier Stoics, and Seneca, think that we acquire the moral norms which we use in making moral decisions. Whereas Jörn Müller and Marcia L. Colish treat the problem of how we make such decisions when they contravene our accepted moral values, David H. Kaufman and Gareth D. Williams broaden this ethical topic in contrasting directions, focusing, respectively, on the allaying of irrational passions and the rejection of erroneous intellectual judgments in considering how Seneca presents himself as a moral therapist.

Against a popular empiricist understanding of the Stoic notion of the highest good and the concomitant view that Seneca might have been influenced by Platonic innatism, Ilsetraut Hadot argues that already the earliest Stoics assumed the existence of a basic innate pre-notion or “anticipated grasp” (*prolēpsis*) of the good, which she distinguishes both from the rudimentary notions acquired by experience or analogy during the develop-

ment of reason and the fully formed correct notion of the good that can only be assimilated through philosophical education. Antonello Orlando's paper complements Hadot's approach with a detailed philological study of the wide range of Latin expressions used for rendering the Greek term *prolēpsis*. Orlando makes a case for considering lexical choices not only as a manner of aligning oneself with a particular school but also, at least for Seneca, as a necessary engagement with the terminology proposed by earlier Latin authors such as Cicero and the needs or expectations of a Roman readership.

Jörn Müller applies insights from his research on ancient and medieval concepts of *akrasia* ("weakness of will" or "lack of self-control") to the case study of Seneca's *Medea*, whose main character highlights the difficulties that arise when one tries to explain weak-willed behavior within the framework of a monist psychology. Müller distinguishes two basic types of Stoic explanations, for which he adduces evidence from Stoic sources in general and from the philosophical writings of Seneca himself. According to the "persistence model," an agent continues to maintain a passionate, uncontrollable state by the assent of his reason, so that it persists even when rational insight begins to suggest a different behavior. According to the "oscillation model," the mind of the akratic person switches rapidly between different judgments and thus simultaneously maintains conflicting passions, such as love or anger toward the same individual. According to Müller, Seneca shaped his *Medea* on the oscillation model rather. Right from the beginning, she appears torn between conflicting passions and solves her akratic conflict by complete abandonment to the full madness of one passion alone.

Marcia L. Colish examines "conscience" (*conscientia*) in Seneca philosophus and the other Imperial Stoics. She sees the originality of Seneca's approach in his reserving premeditation of future evils for sages, but also in the facts that self-examination appears as an activity conducted in various settings, also as a form of social exchange, and that Seneca presented his fictitious self as deeply unsettled by his public role. The importance of a good conscience as both the facilitator and the essence of a good life is showcased by Seneca's idiosyncratic use of well-known theatrical imagery for describing acts against conscience. In Seneca, responsibility is framed not as acting some stereotypic role but as performing one's own life on this world stage, which the agent plays well or badly according to his own volition.

David H. Kaufman studies Seneca's treatment of occurrent emotions, i.e. fresh passions that are intractable by reasoned argument according to Stoic orthodoxy. On the basis of an analysis of *De ira* 2.1–4, Kaufman argues that Seneca saw one cause of this problem in the fact that the beliefs

correlated with the passion in its course are not the same as the beliefs which originally were the impassioned person's reasons for conceiving the passion in the first place. Kaufman further suggests that, as a result of this new understanding of the emotional pathology, Seneca added an Epicurean method to the Stoic therapist's first-aid kit: the treatment by stimulation of countervailing passions.

Gareth D. Williams argues that Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* and *Epistulae morales* "in a sense *complete* each other as interdependent conceptual experiments" (137). He discusses the simultaneous composition and shared thematic concerns of the two works, for example the need to "do" something right now, which is highlighted in the first of the *Epistulae morales* and in the preface to the *Naturales quaestiones*. According to Williams, the two works offer different but complementary forms of therapy with parallels in modern cognitive-behavioral therapy. It thus appears that the works addressed to the same dedicatee Lucilius, perhaps together with the *Libri moralis philosophiae*, were supposed to form a corpus that promotes a comprehensive philosophical as well as therapeutic agenda and, at the same time, the persona of an author sincerely devoted to a life in philosophical retreat.

The second group of papers in this collection analyzes a diverse range of topics, themes, and images related to political and social issues. Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini and Jean-Christophe Courtil treat Seneca's critique of despotism, as it impinges on the freedom and physical integrity of others. Tommaso Gazzarri discusses how self-inflicted harm to the human body can acquire different moral significance depending on the gender of the agent, while Elizabeth Gloyne reviews the role of both male and female family members for the philosopher-in-progress in the *Epistulae morales* as a recurrent theme in a structured whole and as a marker of different stages in the progressor's development.

Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini explores the refractions of Seneca's conception of freedom when applied to the political sphere in contrast to the ethical perspective of the individual striving for consistency in his own life. She juxtaposes the mirror images of Cicero, the half-free ex-consul of *De brevitate vitae* 5 who bewails his imposed retreat from public life, and of Cato at the helm of the sinking state as he establishes freedom through his personal choice of suicide. On the basis of a careful comparison, she argues that for Seneca freedom is first of foremost a value of the private sphere and individual philosophical practice. All the same, exemplary sublimation of individual freedom can assume political importance and confirm freedom as a collective value, especially in the absence of political freedom. This picture is further refined by another comparison: In the political sphere as it is represented in *De clementia*, freedom dissolves into

a paradox. Collective freedom depends on the absolute coercive power of the emperor, while that power presupposes the emperor's voluntary renunciation of his own individual freedom.

In a thorough study of references to torture in Seneca's prose works, Jean-Christophe Courtil argues that Seneca's frequent depiction of this practice stems not from a taste for the gruesome but from the horror and outrage at sadistic abuse of power which he seeks to inspire in his readers. Nevertheless, Courtil also provides evidence that Seneca did not reject all forms of torture and rather favors political pragmatism. He does not call into question the laws of the state permitting, or even prescribing, torture under certain circumstances. The apparent contradiction between these two attitudes is resolved by asserting the superiority of moral law. Reason must control all uses of torture, and torture must always serve a rationally justifiable remedial or legal purpose.

Tommaso Gazzarri contrasts gender-specific accounts of self-destruction and self-healing. As his starting point he takes a passage in the *Epistulae morales* in which Seneca explains the spread of male-specific diseases among the female population with the deviant behavior of the afflicted women. They suffer because they renounce their female nature by adopting dietary and sexual practices associated with masculinity. Also gender-related, and also drawing on medical imagery, is the presentation of the countervailing virtue which exemplary male heroes display when they assert their moral freedom by inflicting on themselves the "therapy" of suicide.

Elizabeth Gloyn takes Seneca's treatment of the family in the *Epistulae morales* as a showcase example of the manner in which this work functions as a systematically organized whole and integrates more general philosophical issues into a discourse focused on the practices, concerns, and moral development of its two protagonists, Seneca and Lucilius. Gloyn observes changes in the treatment of the theme as the reader advances through the work. After an initial phase in which the family is blanked out, references both to the theme in general and more specifically to Seneca's own family reappear. Warnings, but also acknowledgements of the obligations toward family members, gradually enable the progressor to take a rational stance and assign to his family the appropriate place within the framework of his ethical thought. His relatives sometimes give him support and good advice, but even their well-meaning interventions can hinder his progress. Seneca's treatment of the family thus serves as an extended case study of the tension between the sage's acceptance of his social responsibilities and his detachment from externals.

The final group of papers in this collection by Margaret R. Graver, Linda Cermatori, Martin Dinter, Matheus De Pietro, Francesca Romana

Berno, Madeleine Jones, and Julia Wildberger all accent ways in which Seneca uses imagery and literary strategies to fashion, express, and defend his own self or authorial persona.

In a discussion of *Epistula moralis* 84 and Michel Foucault's reading of that letter, Margaret R. Graver traces a "novel ontology of the self" (270). Seneca blends identifications of writers with their written work as we know them from Latin literature with a holistic application of the Roman concept of *ingenium* (one's "mind," "mindset," "talent," and what one produces with it). Thus he not only represents himself in his writings, the writings *are* his externalized "locus of identity" (270) and a means by which he can transcend himself whenever artistic achievement, understood as a unified whole created by both literary art and art of life, "surpasses and ultimately replaces one's unstable and fleeting sentence within the body with an externalized self that is more consistent and more admirable as well as more stable" (270).

The contributions of Linda Cermatori and Martin Dinter establish connections between Seneca's dramatic and philosophical works. In the tradition of studies that explore the interdependence of literary form and philosophical meaning, Linda Cermatori discusses the imagery of the artist and craftsman in various interrelated functions, most importantly the meta-literary construction of an authorial identity both as a philosopher and an educator. By confronting her findings in Seneca's philosophical prose with the use of similar imagery in the tragedies, Cermatori reveals striking inversions of the philosopher-educator evoked in the prose works: Characters in the plays are portrayed as ingenious fabricators of destructive machinations, while their victims become the objects of perverse craftsmanship, just as the soul of Lucilius in the *Epistulae morales* is the unformed matter out of which the philosopher-educator fashions Lucilius the Sage as his masterpiece.

Martin Dinter discusses another of Seneca's frequently noted devices, his taste for pithy maxims, not in his prose, however, but in his tragedies. Dinter suggests that Seneca might have written with a view to the contemporary practice of excerpting, to which the works of his father, Seneca the Elder, bear ample testimony, and that he composed his sententious plays in such a way that his authorial identity would be gleaned from the scattered sayings of his characters. Imitating the reading strategies of an orator on the hunt for striking formulations, Dinter identifies recurrent ideas which Seneca the Younger hammers home repeatedly in the tragedies. Themes thus articulated by the characters of his dramas turn out to yield positions consistent with those taken in his prose works.

Another feature of Seneca's style, repetitive accumulation of synonymous phrases expressing the same content, is given a new interpretation in

Matheus De Pietro's contribution. Analyzing a passage with descriptions of happiness and the supreme good in *De vita beata*, he shows that the allegedly aimless and rambling exuberance lambasted by ancient as well as modern critics is a literary device deliberately employed as a means of self-presentation. De Pietro indicates how this apparent chaos is carefully structured according to theoretical principles and points out features which serve an authorial purpose related to the apologetic function of the whole treatise: to parade Seneca's credentials as an expert Stoic philosopher.

Using the method of detailed inter- and intratextual comparison, Francesca Romana Berno throws into relief the nuances of Seneca's use of the example of proverbially frugal Q. Aelius Tubero. She is thus able to show the potential of this otherwise rather marginal figure to illustrate Seneca's views concerning his own role as a public figure. In contrast to the parallel accounts as they are attested in Cicero or Valerius Maximus, Seneca does not criticize Tubero's renunciation of public values and even presents such behavior as worthy of praise. Berno concludes that Seneca may have intended this assertion of consistency at the cost of a political career as a model for his own retreat from the political stage.

Madeleine Jones traces the complex antinomies implicit in the charge of hypocrisy raised, or expressly not raised, both within Seneca's work and in his reception. In a close reading of the eighty-seventh *Epistula moralis* and the metaphor of shipwreck placed prominently at the beginning of this letter, she argues that Seneca constructs his persona as a hypocrite both to forestall criticism and to express the confusion inherent in the Stoic condition. According to Jones, Stoicism appears as a system of thought which commits its adherents to hypocrisy: The man in progress espouses Stoic doctrine but, as someone who is not a sage, cannot live by it. For a Stoic like Seneca, the genre of the *Epistulae morales* as a moral discourse and, at the same time, familiar epistolary exchange between close friends requires a voice which highlights the distance between the sender's principles, his words (*verba*), and the facts (*res*) of his actual life (*vita*). However, since frank acknowledgement of one's own faults is also the necessary first step on the road to sagehood and since any philosopher casting himself in the Socratic mold must deny that he is wise, failure to meet the high standards one professes as a member of the Stoic sect, paradoxically, becomes a form of moral achievement. Hypocrisy, in the sense of preaching one thing and practicing another, thus is surreptitiously elevated to the closest approximation to virtue of which a non-wise philosopher-in-progress is capable.

Proposing a literary reading intended to elucidate the philosophical content of the *Epistulae morales*, Julia Wildberger argues that the engagement with Epicurus in the *Epistulae morales* is a multifaceted literary device essential to the fabric of what she calls an epistolary *Bildungsroman*.

According to her, the “Epicurus trope” supports the characterization of a Letter Writer “Seneca” and helps to endow the work with a dramatic structure. By presenting a pair of friends, *both* “Seneca” and “Lucilius,” as appealing models of an exemplary philosophical lifestyle, the *Epistulae morales* serve as an introduction not just to Stoicism, but to philosophy itself. The Letter Writer progresses in the practices and methodologies any serious philosopher must master, including a progress from often naïve endorsement to a more carefully reflected, sophisticated account of Stoic thought. As part of this development, the Letter Writer draws increasingly sharper distinctions between his own views and Epicurean tenets, especially those on pleasure. Wildberger underscores the necessity to distinguish two layers of Epicurus’ reception in the *Epistulae morales*: While the Letter Writer might be blissfully unaware of a theoretical problem and just read Epicurus in his own way, L. Annaeus, the author of this work, understood the other philosopher well enough to know exactly what he was doing when he cunningly and deliberately manipulated, misrepresented, or reinterpreted Epicurean tenets and expressions as it suited the Stoic mindset of his creation, the Letter Writer, at each specific point in the intellectual drama played out by this character in the letters.

Addressing classicists, philosophers, students, and general readers alike, this collection features a vitalizing diversity of contributions that emphasizes the unity of Seneca’s work and his originality as a translator of Stoic ideas in the literary forms of imperial Rome. Individually and collectively, the contributions in this volume shed new light on his writings, each from their own historical, philosophical, literary, and theoretical perspectives. They will stimulate the study and understanding of Seneca with fresh analyses and solutions to issues that have been debated for some time and offer entirely new avenues of investigation.

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