

Seneca Philosophus

An international conference hosted by the American University of Paris and Gesellschaft für Antike Philosophie, with the kind support of the Société Internationale des Amis de Cicéron

Monday 16 May 2011

Section 1

Chair: Jula Wildberger (The American University of Paris)

9:15-10:00

Dr. Ranja Knöbl,

Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

The economics of innovation and Seneca's *imago vitae*

Seneca was fully aware of the biographically encoded mechanisms of tradition and transformation: he famously coined the Roman maxim that a man's speech reflects his life (*Epist.* 114.1 *talis oratio qualis vita*). About Seneca's life and his spectacular death, however, we are informed not by Seneca himself but by the historian Tacitus. In book 15 of his *Annales*, Tacitus mentions a remarkable detail of Seneca's last hours. Whether historical or *ben trovato*, Tacitus reports that the Roman officer sent by Nero would not allow Seneca to make a will, and that Seneca in reaction to this restriction left to his students neither his enormous wealth nor his possibly equally impressive library but "the noblest possession yet remaining to him, the pattern of his life (*imago vitae suae*)" (*Tac. Ann.* 15.62.1). Hence, what Seneca passed on to his students was nothing less than an immaterial warranty for the survival, transmission, and transformation of his philosophy.

This unusual *testamentum* of the Stoic philosopher provokes at least two general questions. First, does a philosopher's work have to be reflected in his life? Second, since *imago* was in Roman society an idiom for the wax model of a deceased family member kept by the next generation for commemorative purposes, how does the description of Seneca's *imago vitae* relate to the Platonic idea of memory as presented in the *Theaitetos*? Two further questions derive from these considerations. (1) Does Seneca bequeath to his students the double inheritance of his work and his life? (2) If so, how does this endowment relate to remarks on the economics of tradition and innovation in the *Epistulae morales*?

In an attempt to answer these questions, my paper will argue that the image of Seneca, as presented in the endowment of the *imago vitae suae*, blurs two important trajectories of tradition and transformation, the quasi-biographical representation of Seneca's life and the philosophically meaningful heritage of his work. Read against the background of the *Epistulae morales*, an analysis of the combination of these two fields could help us to better understand Seneca's idea of the economics of innovation.

10:00-10:45

Madeleine Jones

Phd Student in Classics (Literature and Philology), Princeton University

Epistulae morales ad Lucilium: hypocrisy as a way of life

The picture of Seneca as hypocrite persists in the new wave of Senecan scholarship, but persists in a peculiar manner: scholars do not deign to refute the characterisation, but draw the picture in order immediately to dismiss it as an outdated and naïve character construction, irrelevant to modern criticism. In this paper I return to this characterisation, propagated firstly by Seneca himself, which scholars dismiss, but seem unable to forget. I look at Seneca's self-construction as hypocrite, and explore the motivations behind and effects of his building of this persona. Although Seneca's construction of a hypocritical persona is a literary and persuasive strategy, it cannot be dismissed as "merely" this, but is also implicated in Seneca's conception of philosophy in general and Stoicism in particular. Any philosopher casting himself in the Socratic mould must deny that he is wise, but the generic conditions of letter-writing require Seneca to be both teacher and example, both Socrates and Plato. Whereas Plato's dialectic form allowed a philosophical message to arise out of conflict in discussion, in Seneca's letters conflict is sublimated rather than worked through.

Seneca presents a view of Stoicism as a system of thought which commits its adherents to hypocrisy. A Stoic *proficiens* knows that virtue is the only good and that all else is indifferent, preferred or dispreferred, but cannot quite rid himself of his worldly attachments: he has not yet become a sage, and the chances of his ever becoming one are vanishingly slim.

Furthermore, expression of much of the *proficiens'* experience and feelings is foreclosed by a commitment to Stoic language, which designates most everyday attachments as indifferents. I argue that the hypocritical persona is in part a way for Seneca to express the turmoil and conflict this Stoic linguistic bind introduces. Through examination of the hypocritical persona, we glimpse a darker Stoicism, sounding in counterpoint to the upbeat message of self-improvement and progression: an *anti-Senèque chez Senèque*. The paper offers several close readings of passages drawn from throughout the work, as well as a reading of the work as a whole.

Section 2: Educational Strategies

Chair: Jeffrey Barnouw (The University of Texas at Austin)

11:15-12:00

Dr. Stefano Maso

Professore aggregato in Ancient Philosophy at Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Risk and responsibility in the educational strategy of Seneca

Both toward the direct pupil Nero and toward Lucilius (friend and, as metonymy, representative of the entire mankind) Seneca testifies to his pedagogic vocation: with conviction he applies himself to demonstrate the perfect correspondence between Stoic doctrine and the educational strategy that he proposes. Firstly, the reciprocity of the relation between educator and pupil appears as fundamental: both progress along their way to knowledge. Secondly, the limitations of an ethical precept which is not anchored in the intensity and concreteness of human life and, on the other hand, the weakness of a world vision not inspired by an innovative and original path both become clearly apparent. The starting point is therefore a rigorous examination of conscience to finally reach the revolutionary experience of risk in the moment of the last decision: in the name of truth, in fact, the wise man must have both the courage to embrace fate in order to really understand who he is (in a process of *oikeiosis* both as experience and as target), and he must propose to others (his pupils) the courage to incur risks along an independent journey, wherein even the dimension of self-scrutiny and politics can become intertwined. It is in this that the educator's risk and responsibility consist.

12:00-12:45

Dr. Francesca Romana Berno

Ricercatrice del Dipartimento de Scienze dell'Antichità, Università di Roma "La Sapienza"

In praise of Tubero's pottery: a note on Seneca *Epist.* 95.73-3; 98.13

Generally speaking, Seneca does not depart from the typically Roman habit of quoting historical *exempla* to support his reasoning; nevertheless, he sometimes offers an original rereading of an example. This is the case with Q. Aelius Tubero, P. Scipio Africanus' nephew: aspiring to become *praetor*, Tubero organized a ritual banquet to celebrate the memory of his uncle; but following the rigorous frugality of his Stoic doctrine, he used pottery instead of silver dishes, and so he was defeated in the election. Cicero, who sometimes quotes Tubero as a model of frugality, uses this anecdote in the *Pro Murena* (75-6) to underline the inopportunity of extreme behaviors in politics; the story is repeated in Valerius Maximus, who strictly follows Cicero (7.5.1). And then it comes to Seneca. Tubero closes the famous letter 95, with the scene of the wooden *lectuli*, but without any word about the electoral defeat, Seneca gives an interpretation of this episode that is opposite to those both of Cicero and Valerius: Tubero is admirable for his radical frugality and consistency. I think Seneca explicitly intends to go against Cicero, who in the *Pro Murena* combined Cato and Tubero in the same critique – that they were too radical to be effective in politics – by presenting both of them as perfect examples of coherence between private and public sphere.

The Tubero example is relevant also from an intratextual point of view: in fact, it summarizes the main topics (and most of the *praecepta*) of letter 95. Moreover, Tubero fits the ideal of sober retirement of Seneca in this late stage of his life more than Cato with his *libido moriendi*: this is why he – and not the more famous Uticensis – closes *Epist.* 95.

Tubero returns in *Epist.* 98.13, together with Fabricius and Sextius father: the context is that of the refusal of *bona* given by fortune, a fortune which here coincides with political authority. These three examples of frugality deal with honors refused by the protagonists: this is

a sort of apology for the refusal of politics. A typical Epicurean attitude, which here Seneca tries to link to Stoicism with the examples of Sextius father (the founder of a philosophical school with affinities to Stoicism) and of the Stoic Tubero. So, this is a sort of auto-apology of Seneca's retirement. And also a reversal of his argumentations of *De vita beata*, written during his life at the court of Nero, in which he defends himself against the charges of incoherence (18.1) and of lack of frugality (21-7).

Another quotation of Tubero we find in Tacitus (*Ann.* 16.22.4): here, he is criticized for his extremism, dangerous for the state, and compared with the Stoic Thrasea Paetus, forced to suicide for his refusal of Nero's tyranny (just like Seneca). So, at the end Cicero's interpretation wins against Seneca's. And, even if Seneca preferred the choice of Tubero, *i.e.* retirement, his fate forced him to follow the choice of Cato.

12:45-13:30

Dr. Tommaso Gazzarri

Visiting assistant professor at the Department of Classics, Union College (NY)

Gender based differential morbidity and moral teaching in Seneca's *Epistulae morales*

With this paper I intend to explore how Seneca constructs the feminine body in order to convey his moral teaching, based on the assumption that physical and moral corruption can be interpreted as parallel phenomena. In particular I will analyze how the hypotyposis of diseased women, suffering of masculine pathologies, can offer us an insight into one of Seneca's many controversial aspects: the role of women in his philosophical thinking. Finally I will argue how, according to the philosopher, this subversion of the natural order, where differential morbidity based on gender appears to be overthrown, corresponds to a general decadence of philosophy and rhetoric.

In *Epist.* 95.20-1 Seneca describes the increasing diffusion of masculine pathologies among women. They are losing their hair and suffering from gout. The debate on whether one could draw a line separating masculine and feminine illnesses is an old one. Different medical schools adopted different positions, and therefore constructed different "models" for the masculine and the feminine body, often producing totally contrasting visions, with the assertion of complete otherness on the one side, and a more assimilative approach on the other. I will show how Seneca follows a fundamentally utero-centric conception (*Loc. Hom.* 47) of the female body and health, and how he uses this specific medical knowledge to construct a set of gender-confused metaphors, symbolizing new 'strains' of philosophical and ethical disorder that afflict the late-Neronian age. It is well known that Seneca often imagines philosophy and rhetoric in medical terms, as at *Epist.* 50 and 94 where philosophy is described as a bitter yet necessary medicament. I will point out how we frequently encounter darker representations in the *Epistulae Morales*, where both philosophy and rhetoric are presented as corrupted by teachings *à la mode*, and unfit to affect a world so morally deviant, just as medicine finds itself disarmed against new monstrous illnesses, which contradict the most consolidated teachings, such as the difference between masculine and a feminine bodies (*Epist.* 40, 52, 75, 117).

With this analysis I will show how, for Seneca, the image of bald and gouty women does not work as a simple medical metaphor, used to set a parallelism between body and moral conduct. By confusing the rigid medical and rhetorical borderlines that separate male and female, images of this type both represent moral decay and instance it at a linguistic level by means of a diseased rhetoric wherein. The natural structures from which the tropes are taken no longer obey immutable laws. The correspondence between *res* and *verba*, that is to say our ability to understand and narrate reality, fails.

Section 3: Ontology and Ethics

Chair: Christoph Jedan (University of Groningen)

15:00-15:45

Dr. Ada Bronowski

New College, Oxford, and The Warburg Institute, London

The difference between the good and being good, a mere *subtilitas*? On the Stoic distinction between a body and an incorporeal according to Seneca

In *Epist.* 117, Seneca questions the grounds for the orthodox Stoic distinction between what is corporeal and what is incorporeal. It is absurd, Seneca claims - against the orthodox line – that the good, or a good, should be a body but that being good is an incorporeal item. The Stoic doctrine which Seneca hereby refers to is a crucial element of Stoic logic, namely the acknowledgement of the presence in reality of items such as [being wise], [being good], [being cut] as distinct from other existing, and corresponding items such as the good, wisdom or a wound. Intuitively, there is a link between wisdom and being wise, a wound and being cut – but how should we analyse this link? Is it a mere play on words as the Peripatetics claim, or does the grammar reveal a fact about ontology, as the Stoics take it?

In the first part of the paper, we shall sketch the original Stoic theory which answers that question. Though Seneca means to criticise the orthodox view, his *Epist.* 117 is one of the important testimonies for the reconstruction of the Stoic distinction between a body such as wisdom and an incorporeal such as being wise. The distinction relies on a distinct view about body as well as about incorporeality.

In the second part of the paper, we shall look at Seneca's reasons for criticising the orthodox line. There are problems with his rebuttal, visible from the start as he expresses his reluctance to argue against his own school. For indeed, there are elements of the doctrine he cannot disavow: principally and crucially, that there are such things as what, in Greek, are called *lekta* and for which Seneca gives an array of possible translations (*effata, enuntiata, dicta*). In acknowledging the reality of these *enuntiata* however, Seneca refuses to follow up on the implications their presence has on the constitution of reality, namely that there is an ontological distinction between a body like wisdom and an *enuntiatum* such as [being wise]. In virtue of this distinction, the *enuntiatum* is the appropriate kind of item to be said of a body ("*enuntiativum de corpore*"), whilst wisdom, a body, cannot be said in this way of another body.

His criticism introduces thus a third option, distinct from the Peripatetic criticism of the Stoics which plainly denies the reality of *lekta*.

In rejecting however the ontological distinction Seneca ends up presenting a contradictory account. We shall examine closely where Seneca's argument falters, showing thereby the solidity and consistency of the original Stoic view: in admitting *lekta* into ontology, it is necessary to distinguish between wisdom and being wise, as belonging to different ontological categories. It follows moreover, that, in contrast with Seneca's ultimate dismissal of the question as, effectively, useless (117.19 ff), this is not the case, as the ontological question has ethical upshots. Seneca himself reports the Stoic conundrum, asking what it is we should choose, the body wisdom or the incorporeal [being wise] (117.4-5). A proper distinction, based on the ontological difference between a body and an incorporeal, should provide the answer – and that surely is both a *subtilitas* and useful at the same time.

15:45-16:30

Dr. Alex Dressler

Assistant professor in the Department of Classics, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Senecan supervenience

In an effort to enrich our own understanding of Senecan philosophy and to use that philosophy to illuminate many of the rarely addressed philosophical assumptions of social historical and literary critical methods of reading Seneca now in vogue (formalism, historicism, etc.), this paper explores Seneca's possible contributions to materialist philosophy, or as it is now known, physicalism, particularly with a view to what, among physicalists, is now called supervenience. Following their understanding of modern science, modern philosophers have committed themselves to an account of the world that, like the ancient Stoics, seeks to account for everything in terms of material, corporeal, or physical events without resorting to the kind of reductionism characteristic of Classical materialism (mechanistic materialism: brain as machine, consciousness as epiphenomenon, etc.) or the kind of transcendentalism that one associates, rightly or wrongly, with Plato. Under the name of supervenience, philosophers generally understand a concept that denotes covariation and irreducibility, so that the mental "supervenies" on the physical if changing one's mind entails a change in, for example, one's brain even while one's mind depends on one's brain but cannot be reduced to it.

In the first part of my paper, using Plato's discussion of immanent and transcendent forms at *Phaedo* 389d9-90a1 as a starting point, I attempt simply to demonstrate what supervenience might look like in ancient contexts. Supplementing Plato's account from the *Phaedo* with Seneca's representation of the Platonic account of forms and causes (*Epist.* 58, 65), I demonstrate that, while Seneca includes Platonic ideas (and Platonic Ideas) in his philosophy, he at least implicitly attempts to account for them in the material terms to which his Stoic materialism commits him. Next, turning to the elusive topic of the Stoic sayable (*lekton*), or roughly "meaning," and its relation to the material soul (*Epist.* 117), I first demonstrate that Seneca uses the same kinds of language that he did with Plato, and second that, in doing so, he

endows, through transcendentalist associations, his materialist philosophy with a concept of supervenience.

The interest in considering Senecan metaphysics in view of its Platonic antecedents and its modern, physicalist descendents is not, however, limited to, or even primarily concerned with, metaphysics. In the second part of my paper, I demonstrate that the language that Seneca uses in accounting for Platonic concepts recurs not only in his account of Stoic metaphysics and the sayable, but also in parts of his philosophical work that would otherwise be described as relating to ethics. Particularly in his work *On Benefits*, Seneca develops an account of social exchange that uses the very language of (for him) Platonic concepts and the Stoic sayable to describe the relationship between mind (or soul) and the exchange of (usually material) “benefits” that constitutes Seneca’s conception of social existence. That Seneca’s account of social exchange is, on the one hand, sometimes almost Bourdieuan in its sophisticated attention to material interest, competition, and the dialectic of the real and symbolic, is here complicated by its supervenient implications – that is, its supposition of aspects of experience that are explicable in terms of the material but that are not reducible to the material (and relatedly, to individual- or class-based material interest). If, as there is every reason to believe, the majority of sophisticated accounts of Roman literature and Roman experience most resemble, after the cultural turn of recent decades, sociological new historicism, and through new historicism its great cultural antecedent Marxism and the attendant reductionism of classical Marxist accounts of social experience, then Senecan supervenience may challenge us to at least recognize, if not change, the assumptions that underwrite our engagement with the past and that even entail, in cultural studies at large, the idea that morals are reducible to matter.

Section 4: Philosophy of the Mind

Chair: Jörn Müller (Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg)

17:00-17:45

David Kaufman

PhD Student, Classics Department, Princeton University

Seneca, Posidonius and Chrysippus on treating occurrent emotions

In the *De Ira*, Seneca argues that people in the grip of anger, at least when it is at its acme, are incapable of listening to reasoned arguments opposing the false beliefs underlying their anger. Rather, he takes the only effective method of therapy to be the inducement of a rival emotion (*De Ira* 1.8.7 and 1.10.1). This view is otherwise unattested in Stoic authors. Chrysippus, for instance, seems to have argued that the most effective treatment of an occurrent emotion is to question the belief of the person suffering the emotion that it is appropriate for her to be affected in such a way (*Tusculan Disputations* 3.76-9). Posidonius, in turn, is said by Galen to have been interested in cases where frenzied young men are called out of their occurrent emotions by music in the Dorian mode (*On the Doctrines of Plato and Hippocrates* 5.5.20-2). The

music does not create an opposing emotion in the young men nor does it challenge the beliefs underlying their occurrent emotion, it rather calms the “emotional movements” (παθητικὰ κινήσεις) which in Posidonius’ view play a necessary role in the conception and maintenance of an emotion.

Seneca’s method of therapy is in a sense intermediate between the methods supported by Chrysippus and Posidonius. Like Chrysippus, Seneca’s method involves overriding the enraged person’s occurrent belief that it is appropriate for her to be so affected. Seneca accomplishes this, however, not by questioning the legitimacy of the enraged person’s false belief that she ought to be excited at the prospect of securing revenge, but rather by stimulating the rival false occurrent belief that it is appropriate for her to be strongly affected in a different way. Like Posidonius’ frenzied young men, the patient of Seneca’s therapy continues to hold the false belief that it is appropriate for her to be emotionally affected, however, under the influence of a more vivid conflicting occurrent belief, the former belief no longer gives rise to anger. In some cases, the patient will have ceased paying attention to her former belief altogether and so will hold it only dispositionally, in others she will presumably continue to hold the former belief occurrently, but will nonetheless pay less attention to it than her more vivid occurrent belief that she ought to be strongly affected in another way.

In this paper, I discuss both how Seneca’s method of therapy fits into orthodox Stoic psychological theory and some possible motivations for his departing from the methods advocated by Chrysippus and Posidonius. In particular, I argue that Seneca’s method is perfectly compatible with orthodox Stoic theory and evinces a nuanced understanding of the Stoic view of cognitive dissonance and also that the method of emotional therapy he advocates is, on the basis of Chrysippus’ own theory of the emotions, an improvement on Chrysippus’ method of therapy.

17:45-18:30

Antonello Orlando

PhD Student, Dipartimento di filologia, linguistica e tradizione classica “Augusto Rostagni”,
Università degli Studi di Torino

Seneca on Prolepsis

Summarizing the accounts of Stoic πρόληψις, F. H. Sandbach (“Ἐννοια and πρόληψις in the Stoic Theory of Knowledge.” *CQ* 1930, 44-51) noted a certain confusion between προλήψεις in the proper sense and κοινὰ ἔννοια, as discussed by Plutarchus (*Comm. Not.* 1059c). Actually, a definition of Stoic πρόληψις has been given in Diogenes Laertius’ excerpt of Diocles of Magnesia (7.54: ἔστι δ’ ἡ πρόληψις ἔννοια φυσικὴ τῶν καθόλου). According to this definition, a πρόληψις would be a natural concept derived from general features of an object. Even though the term πρόληψις had been introduced into the Hellenistic philosophical debate by Epicurus (cf. *Cic. Nat. deor.* 1.43), Chrysippus had already adopted it when developing his theological terminology (*Plut. Sto. rep.* 1041e = *SVF* 3.69); moreover, a short testimony of Aëtius (*Aët.* 4.11.3-4) indicates another difference between πρόληψις and ἔννοια: that the first is a concept coming into being

naturally inside the human soul, while the second derives from a deeper application to and study of the object.

Seneca speaks explicitly twice about πρόληψις: in *Epist.* 117.6 (*Quod omnibus insita de dis opinio est*) and 120.4-5 (*ad nos prima boni honestique notitia pervenerit*). In these two passages, the Roman philosopher is talking about the πρόληψις of God and the one of the supreme good respectively. Even though some scholars have investigated the sources of this concept in the Old Stoa, perhaps too little attention has been given to comparing his views and vocabulary of πρόληψις with the use of the word *notitia* in Cicero's philosophical works. The problem could seem even more interesting if we consider both lexical and ideological relations of the Stoic πρόληψις to the corresponding Epicurean concept. Seneca shares with Cicero more than terminology in his account of prolepsis (*insita, notitia, opinio*).

In this paper I intend to examine Seneca's understanding of πρόληψις, confronting it with the traditional account given by Greek Stoics and also Epicureans, and to retrace the influence of Cicero's philosophical words and the Roman lexicon on the vocabulary of Western philosophy.

Tuesday 17 May 2011

Section 5

Chair: Isabella Cardoso (Universidade Estadual de Campinas) ??

9:00-9:45

Matheus Clemente De Pietro

PhD Student, Department of Linguistics, Universidade Estadual de Campinas; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main; The American University of Paris

Stoic "harmony" in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* and *De uita beata*

Central to Stoic philosophy is the idea of "harmony" – most clearly verifiable in Zeno's definition of the *telos* as *to homologoumenōs zen* in *SVF* 3.16, but at different moments also implied with different terms, such as *symphōnōs*, *akolouthōs*, and their derivatives. Acting harmoniously is not only the basic requirement for the happy life (*SVF* 3.16), but it is also the attribute that characterizes virtue (*SVF* 3.178) and wise individuals (Cicero *Tusc.* 5.82). Far from being restricted to the meaning that the word "harmony" has in ordinary language, Stoic *homologia* also includes the concepts of unity, agreement, coherence and conformity.

The representation of the idea of "harmony" in Seneca is of a considerably different nature than the one found in early Stoic texts. While most early Stoic fragments expose it in a dry and rather restricted manner, typical for handbooks (one exception being Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*), in many of Seneca's works we witness this notion interpreted in several distinct ways. Sometimes the philosopher gives clear and straightforward definitions, such as his description of happiness (*De uita beata* 3.3), of virtue (*Epist.* 74.30) or of the supreme good (*De uita beata*

8.6). At times, however, “harmony” has a subtle and more dispersed presence, and is referred to in a manner not immediately recognizable as an allusion. For instance, vices are reproached for being *dissidentes* (*De uita beata* 8.6) and *dissonantes* (*De uita beata* 1.2); moral exempla are praised for being *constantes* (*Epist.* 104.28-30); and certain behaviors are presented as desirable because they are *concordantes* (*Epist.* 75.4) or *secundum naturam* (*Epist.* 66.18).

Equally relevant is the fact that Seneca expresses different aspects of the notion of “harmony” through images, *i.e.* the above mentioned qualities of unity, conformity and coherence that integrate the concept are often evoked individually by means of certain classes of images (such as music, medicine, politics and theater).

Although at first these characterizations may not seem to contain much theoretical substance, they actually reveal a meticulous use of terminology and imagery that, when attended to, allows us to read certain Senecan arguments from a different perspective. I will present some examples of these varied ways in which Seneca expresses the notion of “harmony”, commenting on their particularities and on the influence such analysis has on a philosophical reading of selected passages.

9:45-10:30

Dr. Marcia L. Colish

Visiting Fellow in History, Yale University; Frederick B. Artz Professor of History emerita, Oberlin College

Seneca on Acting against Conscience

Ancient eudaimonistic ethics maintained that virtue is knowledge: once we cognize what is right, we naturally seek to do it. This presupposition raised the question of how to explain moral choices we make that we know violate our principles. Aristotle's *akrasia* was one effort to answer this question. The Stoics, however, rejected that doctrine. Moreover, their radical intellectualizing of ethics intensified the problem. But, uniquely among them, Seneca developed an explanation of how we can act against conscience, offering a fresh solution to this Stoic conundrum that yet draws on that tradition. His analysis is both his own and an important contribution to Roman Stoicism

Section 6

Chair: François Prost (Sorbonne, Paris) ??

11:00-11:45

Dr. Ermanno Malaspina

Ricercatore, Dipartimento di filologia, linguistica e tradizione classica “Augusto Rostagni”, Università degli Studi di Torino

Seneca and politics in *De clementia*: ancient problems and recent perspectives

The theoretical dimension of politics in Seneca's *De clementia* had interested scholars only occasionally for many decades. The book by T. Adam or the papers by K. Büchner and M. Fuhrmann in the Seventies or by A. Borgo and M. Bellincioni in the Eighties were important exceptions, but they remained isolated voices that did not quite spark a sustained debate. The last decade, however, has seen a flourishing of such studies, partly as a consequence of the celebrations of Seneca's 2000th anniversary. In my paper, I will focus on the new edition by Susanna Morton Braund and on other recent contributions, showing the considerable agreement that has been reached concerning several core issues, in order to outline our progress in understanding Seneca's political thought. In particular, I will address the question of Greek and Roman sources and the construction of the political concept of mercy, but also the semantic development of *clementia* as a specific Roman theoretical and ideological concept.

11:45-12:30

Antje Junghanß

PhD student, Technische Universität Dresden

De beneficiis, book 4: Seneca on altruism

Having clarified the modalities of beneficence in the first three books of *De beneficiis*, Seneca intends to explain in the fourth book that the value of giving and receiving lies within itself. By drawing analogies between divine and human goodness, he wants to emphasize that beneficence has to be useful to the recipient's well-being and must never be motivated by the benefactor's needs. Seneca describes the gods as caring, compassionate and infinitely generous, acting constantly for the sake of men, without ever profiting from their deeds. But when describing human charity, Seneca introduces considerations of reciprocity which are in conflict with his comparison of gods and men.

In 4.10 he points out that benefactions should be given to those who prove themselves grateful. But the aspect of consciously choosing recipients by calculating their expected reaction at first sight does not correspond to the postulated priority of the receiver's welfare. Seneca is aware of the contradiction and dissolves it: in 4.28 he presents divine charity as actually oriented to virtuous men. But if the gods suspended their beneficial works to punish the wicked and thankless, this would also be detrimental to the good. This idea of choosing grateful receivers can be integrated as a supplement to the analogy of divine and human charity, but it is also a restriction of the initially postulated selflessness: benefactors do not want their acts to be taken for granted; the recipient's reaction is considered essential.

The argument in 4.18 is also based upon the interactive character of beneficence: Seneca describes men as physically weak beings who – equipped with *ratio et societas* – are able to survive by the exchange of services and support. In this paragraph, beneficence appears as the principal condition of human life. Unlike divine grace human kindness depends on the recipient's reaction, on the reciprocity of giving and receiving; the analogy between gods and men cannot be maintained.

So the argument's result differs from its intention: although Seneca actually wanted to demonstrate that beneficence is a virtue desirable for its own sake and, by citing the gods'

example as a measure of human charity, introduced the concept of radically selfless altruism unilaterally oriented to the receiver's welfare, he finally presents beneficence as the essential instrument for social bonding and changes his view on the characteristics of altruism into a more balanced one. The benefactor's charity will also benefit himself; the benefactor's interests, which Seneca initially opposed to altruistic behaviour, now appear as its driving force. Altruism is motivated not only by the recipient's needs, but also by the anticipation of his reaction: gratitude and the disposition to return the good deed.

12:30-13:15

Dr. Stéphane Mercier

Chargé de recherches du F.R.S.- FNRS, Université Catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve)

Seneca on the efficacy of prayer

The Stoics claim everything to be subjected to fate, yet they also speak of man's freedom. The latter, however, is of a kind that is quite alien to what we normally associate with this word. Hence the following quote from Oedipus' mother in Seneca's play: "Fate's is that fault of thine: by fate no one is made guilty" (*Oed.* 1019, trans. F. J. Miller). Apart from the question of personal responsibility such a conception of fate implies, we can wonder about the efficacy of prayer in a Stoic worldview, given that human freedom to act does not in the slightest way interfere with the eternally ordered course of things. There is more: fate being rational, no rational being would ever even want anything in that fated course of events to be altered; both the wise man and the gods, who differ but in duration, freely obey that course of things they indeed choose as being not only necessary but utterly perfect. Being rational, as Seneca puts it, is less a matter of obeying God than one of agreeing with him (*Epist.* 96.2).

Why then does Seneca argue against the Epicureans, insisting that the gods may reward us with their gifts if we duly pray to them (*Ben.* 4.4.2)? Quite to the contrary, he says in his *Natural questions*, fate resembles a river never altering its course, however devout the prayers of those asking for a change are (*Q.N.* 2.35-6). Rituals and prayers have thus no efficacy whatsoever outside the dreams of a disturbed man's mind (*ibid.* 33.1). And yet, he adds, "there are dispensations the immortal gods left suspended", which means that it is inappropriate to simply pretend that every single thing will just happen whether or not we pray for its realization: there are things that come to be, but under the specific condition that prayers be uttered. Having said this, Seneca promises to deal with the issue later on. That promise he did not keep though, or, if he did, what he had to say about it has not come down to us.

What could Seneca actually have taught on the issue at stake here? I will suggest an answer to that question, drawing from both the Roman philosopher's own work and that of his most famous commentator in the early seventeenth century, Justus Lipsius.

Section 7

Chair: Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini (Università degli Studi di Firenze) ??

14:45-15:30

Dr. Martin Dinter

Lecturer of Latin language and Literature, Department of Classics, King's College London

Laying down the law: *sententiae* in Seneca

Sententiae constitute a conservative force and their nomothetic function in laying down the moral law in the world of a text has been recognised by recent studies. This paper shall exploit the ancient notion that *sententiae* provide insights into an author's mind and ask whether we can find recurrent themes in the *sententiae* of Seneca's oeuvre which allow us to construct a discourse and to arrive at a moralistic reading strategy of his tragedies by singling out and lining up *sententiae* only. We shall thus apply an orator's eye on the hunt for striking formulations worth excerpting to Seneca and make Seneca the Elder, compiler of *suasoriae* and *controversiae*, read Seneca the Younger.

15:30-16:15

Dr. Linda Cermatori

PhD Student, Università degli Studi di Firenze

Seneca and sculpture: a meaningful *topos* between philosophy and literary style

My proposal is to investigate the instances of metaphor of the philosopher as *artifex*, highlighting some conceptual implications. My analysis is based on the connection between form and philosophical ideas according to the view of Alfonso Traina, who inspired a particular current of Senecan studies (I especially refer to results of R. Degl'Innocenti Pierini and of G. Mazzoli). The technical language of material arts, as well as juridical language, offers the philosopher not only a repertoire of figurative examples aimed at creating the best possible reception of the ethical lesson, but also functions as a fundamental inspiration for his ideology.

Seneca takes up the Platonic idea of youth as "soft and malleable" like wax, often with the moral guide in the role of a sculptor, who can mould the nature and the soul of his disciple, considering him as his own *opus* (*Epist.* 25.1-3; 34.1-2; 52.4-6; *De ira* 2.18.2) and, in keeping with the optimistic view of ancient Stoicism, conceives human nature as endowed with innate but imperfect rationality and with the ability to perfect itself (*Epist.* 90.46). Taking as starting points the progressive self-improvement as unceasing crafting of the *materia* by an artist and the description of the individual prompted to wisdom as a "demiurge" of its inner universe (*Epist.* 50.4-6), I would like to discuss "ethic-aesthetic" principles governing the perfect creation: the literary, musical and artistic harmony of the plurality, namely the *concentus ex dissonis* (*Epist.* 84; 31.6), viewed also as a moral rule and a reflex of the providential order in the universe, and the ability to reproduce the *totum* in small dimensions (*Epist.* 53.11).

Looking at Senecan tragedy, Hippolytus' body, irretrievably dismembered, *forma carens et turpe* (*Phaedr.* 1262 ff.), can be a symbol of the failed recomposition of unity, while the protagonists of dramas are defined *artifices sceleris* (see *Phaedr.* 559; *Med.* 734; *Tro.* 750) or *malorum machinatrix facinorum* (*Med.* 266), roughly "architects of evil" (see *Tac. Ann.* 15.42.1 for this meaning of *machinator*), because they create a negative mechanism in opposition to the figure of *sapientia* as *ars vitae*, which serves to righteously *formare* and *fabricare* the human soul (*Epist.* 16.3).

Finally, even the production of the philosopher as an *auctor* is an *opus* that concretely displays the *idos* (*Epist.* 58.21) of the Stoic sage, shaped for the reader as *imago*, materially derived from an *exemplar* (*Const.* 7.1: *Non fingimus istud humani ingenii vanum decus nec ingentem imaginem falsae rei concipimus, sed qualem conformamus exhibuimus*), and it can also build up *ingenia* through the dialogue with posterity (*Epist.* 8.2; 21).

Section 8

Chair: Thomas Biggs (Yale University)

16:45-17:30

Jean-Christophe Courtil

Phd student, Equipe PLH-CRATA, ATER de langue et littérature latines, Université de Toulouse

Torture in Seneca's philosophical works: literary, political and philosophical aspects

Many studies deal with torture in Ancient Greece and Rome, but all of them have been carried out from a socio-historical standpoint. Their authors have described its social and political practices, and its legal framework. Descriptions of torture, although one of the favorite themes of Roman literature in the early Empire, have scarcely been studied. In the works of Seneca, Petronius and Lucan, descriptions of the suffering body have often been seen as mere submission to the taste for gruesome details characteristic of Silver Age Latin literature, and have not been much studied outside the literary field. Thus, while Seneca's philosophical works allude to torture more than 250 times, many scholars have considered this topic as a rhetorical device, which is consistent with his "mannerism". There are indeed almost no studies about torture in the extensive bibliography related to Seneca's Stoic philosophy. However, a stylistic explanation is insufficient to account for such an abundance of torture scenes in some texts, which are above all a presentation of the Stoic doctrine. Beyond socio-historical and literary reasons, it seems that the clear emphasis on the tortured body is a consequence of the author's political and, first of all, philosophical thought.

Seneca's political views about torture seem to reveal more political pragmatism than firm criticism. We will wonder why at a time when the practice of torture is widespread, and despite Stoic *humanitas*, Seneca's works do not provide the strong disapproval that one could expect, but will also observe that the author expresses violent disapproval of the *crudelitas* of the tyrant who tortures his people. Actually, Seneca does not call into question the law of the state, but asserts the superiority of the moral law: the use of torture is first of all based on the

duty to submit the punishment to reason in order to “cure” guilty men and to apply the appropriate sentence, neither more nor less.

17:30-18:15

Massimo Rivoltella

Ricercatore, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano

“Vanus terror” and hunting

My paper will focus on the philosophical *topos* of *vanus terror* and its relationship with cynegetic imagery, both in the *Dialogues* and in the tragedies (in particular in the *Phaedra*).

This subject seems to be especially connected to the passion of anger: Seneca stresses the fact that the Stoic *sapiens* is not touched by its manifestations, whereas common men are. They are therefore compared to wild animals terrified by the hunters’ methods to catch them. In detail I will address the following items:

- Unjustified fear and its symptoms, in particular in *De ira*.
- The cynegetical image of the *formido* as related to this theme.
- A reinterpretation of some passages of Seneca’s *Phaedra* connected with the previous observations (in particular vv. 1066-7).

18:15-19:00

Dr. habil. Julia Wildberger

Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature, The American University of Paris

Epicurus and the structure of Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales*

It is well known that in the first books of the *Epistulae morales*, Seneca incorporates Epicurean elements into his Stoic program of moral improvement for the budding man in progress. It is also well known that, in this process, he modifies, reinterprets and selects the Epicurean tenets to fit his Stoic teaching aims. What has not yet been sufficiently recognized is the fact that Seneca returns to Epicurus towards the end of the collection, in order to flesh out what is specific about Stoic ethics. It will be shown (1) how, at the end of the collection, he enhances the differences between both schools instead of glossing them over and distorting Epicurus’ sayings towards an *interpretatio Stoica* and (2) that this is part of a systematic presentation of Stoic core tenets which are the necessary starting point for any in-depth study of Stoic ethics. (3) From this I will draw the tentative conclusion that *Letter 124* actually was the last letter of the collection, explaining how the Gellius-fragment came to be regarded as an excerpt of a later book. (4) Finally, I will consider whether the *Epistulae morales* should be read as a propaedeutic “Organon” leading interested beginners towards a serious engagement with Stoic philosophy.