THE PATH TO VIRTUE

Character Improvement in Seneca’s Philosophical Writings

VEIEN TIL DYD

Karakterutvikling i Senecas Filosofiske Tekster

Sebastian Frost Bø

Institutt for Filosofi og Førstesemesterstudier

Universitetet i Bergen

Masteroppgave i FILO350

Vår 2024

Veileder: Hallvard J. Fossheim

Philosophy is not tricks before an audience, nor is it a thing set up for display. It consists not in words but in actions. One does not take it up just to have an amusing pastime, a remedy for boredom. It molds and shapes the mind, gives order to life and discipline to action, shows what to do and what not to do. It sits at the helm and steers a course for us who are tossed in the waves of uncertainty. Without it, there is no life that is not full of care and anxiety. For countless things happen every hour that need the advice philosophy alone can give.

Seneca, *Ep*. 16.3

Acknowledgements

I could not have asked for a better supervisor than Hallvard Fossheim, and I would like to thank him for everything he has done for me during this past year. I am also grateful to Marilù Papandreou who provided useful literature recommendations and feedback, as well as helping me with all things related to Latin. Thanks to Anthony Morton, Bernt Ivar Barkved and Henrik Longva Stavdal who provided feedback on the introduction and the first chapter. A special thanks to Petter, Ingunn and Synne for giving me a place to stay when I first moved to Bergen at the beginning of my master's degree. Finally, I would like to thank my parents and my brother for their continuous love and support. And to all my friends on the fifth floor: thank you for making these past two years some of the most enjoyable years of my life.

Abstract

This thesis argues that, according to Seneca, the Stoic progressor – someone who approaches Stoic philosophical teachers with the goal of improving themselves – may acquire virtue – a perfectly rational mind consisting of practical and theoretical knowledge – by practicing the craft of philosophy. In practicing philosophy, the Stoic progressor will use theoretical and practical philosophical tools to detect and remove false beliefs from her mind, a process which gradually brings the mind of the progressor closer to virtue. In this process of character improvement, the theoretical philosophical tools will be used first in a period of theoretical studies. Following this period, the Stoic progressor will adopt a daily philosophical routine in which she will use the practical tools to spot and treat false beliefs in her character and to help her act in accordance with the prescriptions of her theoretical studies. However, the ultimate success of this process in the acquisition of virtue depends on things outside the control of the progressor, like natural gifts. Thus, in addition to practicing the craft of philosophy, the progressor will also need the help of fortune in order to acquire virtue.

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven argumenterer for at Seneca mener den Stoiske progressoren – en person som henvender seg til Stoiske lærere med mål om å forbedre seg selv – kan skaffe seg dyd – et perfekt rasjonelt sinn bestående av praktisk og teoretisk kunnskap – ved å praktisere håndverket kalt filosofi. Det Stoiske progressoren vil, gjennom å praktisere filosofi, bruke teoretiske og praktiske filosofiske verktøy for å oppdage og fjerne feilaktige trosoppfatninger fra sitt eget sinn – en prosess som gradvis bringer progressorens sinn nærmere dyd. I denne karakterforbedringsprosessen vil de teoretiske verktøyene bli brukt først i en periode bestående av teoretiske studier. Etter dette, vil den Stoiske progressoren starte en daglig filosofisk rutine der hun bruker filosofiens praktiske verktøy for å legge merke til og fjerne feilaktige trosoppfatninger og til å hjelpe henne med å handle i tråd med det hun har lært gjennom de teoretiske studiene. For at karakterforbedringsprosessen skal lykkes er progressoren avhengig av faktorer som ligger utenfor hennes kontroll, for eksempel naturlige gaver. I tillegg til å praktisere filosofi, trenger dermed den Stoiske progressoren også hjelp fra skjebnen for å skaffe seg dyd.

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Introduction

i. Research question

The Stoics claimed that the goal of human life was eudaimonia [*felicitas*][1] (happiness or flourishing) and that eudaimonia consisted of living in accordance with nature [*vivere et secundum naturam*]. To live in this way, we need to acquire virtue [*virtus*] – a perfectly rational mind [*animus*]. When conceived of in this way, virtue cannot come in degrees. It is only the sage [*sapiens*], the person whose mind has reached perfection, who is said to have virtue and who is thereby able to live as nature prescribes. The rest of us belong to the ranks of the unhappy fools [*stultus*]. However, all fools are not equal. The so-called "progressors" [*proficiens*] are better than the other fools in that they at the very least strive to improve themselves. How can these people – who approach Stoic philosophical teachers with the goal of learning to live as they prescribe – transform themselves and acquire the virtuous mind of the sage? This thesis seeks to uncover an answer in the writings of a specific Stoic philosopher: Seneca the Younger. How does he think a Stoic progressor can acquire virtue?

ii. "Character" and "Character improvement"

As a Stoic, Seneca also held that virtue is a mind [*animus*] in a particular state. More specifically, virtue corresponds to the mind in a state of perfect rationality. It might be useful for the reader to note here that Seneca also thinks of the mind as something corporal. Thus, the mind is not an immaterial Cartesian soul, but something physical with extension which occupies space. A mind is therefore something you could be able to hold in your hands. And virtue could be thought of as a mind with a particular and highly beneficial shape.

Throughout this thesis, I shall use the term mind interchangeably with another term: character. Thus, when using the concept of "character" in this thesis, the corresponding Latin term used by Seneca that I am referring to is "animus." "Mind", however, is a more typical translation of "animus". The reason why I have decided to sometimes use the English term "character" as a

[1] I have provided an appendix at the end of this thesis where key terms with their corresponding Latin translation are listed and explained

translation for the Latin “animus” has to do with my aim of describing the process by which the Stoic progressor improves her “animus” and thereby comes to acquire virtue.
If I were to stick to the term “mind” as a translation of the term “animus” when referring to this process, I would be forced to speak of this process as a process of “mind improvement”. This phrase unfortunately sounds slightly awkward in English. But by substituting “character” for “mind” here, it becomes much more intelligible to the reader what sort of process I am describing. I shall therefore be using the phrase “character improvement” rather than “mind improvement” when speaking of the process by which the Stoic progressor improves the rationality of her “animus.” However, when I am referring to “animus” outside of the process of improving one’s “animus,” I will sometimes be using the term “mind” instead of “character.” I therefore ask the reader to be aware that I will be using the term “mind” and the term “character” as synonyms, both of which serve as my translation of the term animus. Furthermore, the terms “mind” or “character” must not be confused with the term “soul” [*anima*]. The term “soul” will be used to refer to the traits that are shared by all healthy members of a particular species. Thus, I will be speaking of “Socrates’ mind” or, equivalently, “Socrates’ character”. When using the term soul, however, I will be speaking of “the animal soul” or “the human soul.”

iii. Thesis motivation

There are three main reasons for why I wanted to write a thesis seeking to identify a Senecan account of character improvement. First, in terms of personal motivation, I have a particular interest in the history of philosophy, the philosophy of education and virtue ethics. By writing a thesis on character improvement in Seneca, I have been able to immerse myself in a topic which touches on all these subjects. Moreover, the topic of the thesis – dealing as it does with the pedagogical issue of how we may come to learn something – is of relevance to my future, as I plan to pursue a career as an educator.

Second, as we shall see in the upcoming literature review[2], there is an exciting academic debate related to the question of how Seneca and other Stoic philosophers thought human beings could improve themselves.

[2] Section v.

Third, Stoic philosophy has gained increasing popularity outside of academia in recent years, something which warrants that academic philosophers give it greater attention. Stoic philosophy has a significant presence on social media, with content ranging from short motivational quotes on Instagram, to longer video essays on YouTube. Recent years has seen the publication of several books on Stoicism aimed at audiences outside academia – so many, that it is tempting to claim that Stoicism has become its own genre of self-help literature. Seneca, whose collected works is the largest body of work by any individual Stoic that survives antiquity, is very much part of this revival (Wilson 2010, p. xiv). The format of his works, most of which contains practical advice to his friends written in the form of letters and shorter essays, lends itself well to the self-help genre.

It is interesting to ponder why the Stoics have suddenly seen this rise in popularity. Some have attributed Stoicism's revival to the need to fill the metaphysical vacuum that has been brought about by the retreat of Christianity following the secularization of Western society. Others argue that Stoicism lends itself to a zeitgeist that is increasingly individualistic. Personally, I think Stoicism's promise of inner tranquility explains some of its current appeal as the world becomes increasingly dominated by geopolitical, economic, and technological instability. Whatever its causes, the revival of Stoicism outside of academia warrants that academic philosopher's give it greater attention. Based on anecdotal evidence, there have only been a handful of master theses written on Seneca at Norwegian Universities[3]. The revival of Stoic philosophy makes this an excellent time to improve the situation.

iv. Seneca and Stoicism

While Stoicism today has come to be seen primarily as a phenomenon of the Roman Imperial Period (associated as it is with the works of Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius), Stoicism was founded as a philosophical school in Athens several centuries earlier. Following the death of Socrates in 399 BC, a range of philosophical schools were founded in Greece all claiming to be the real inheritors of the Socrates philosophical project. In the Hellenistic period, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Academic Skepticism emerged as the three dominant philosophical traditions, each of them with their own philosophical schools where people

[3] Grøtan (2022) is an honorable exception

could come to learn more about their answers to Socrates' central question of what it means to live a good life[4].

The Epicureans argued that happiness consisted of pleasure, and that philosophy served as a means to an end in helping us discover how to best maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This, they argued, was obtained by curing the mind of the false beliefs that disturb us – the false beliefs which cause us to fear death and divine retribution - and by realizing that natural desires, which stem from the primary needs of the body, are few and easily satisfied.

The Sceptic school was a continuation of the philosophical school founded by Plato – "The Academy". The school turned towards skepticism shortly after Plato's death. The Academic Sceptics argued that happiness consisted of tranquility of mind, and that this was obtained by not committing oneself to any philosophical views.

The Stoics rejected both of these views. Around 300 BCE Zeno began teaching his doctrines in the *Stoa poikile* – the "Painted Stoa" – next to the Agora[5] of Athens. Here, he argued that happiness consisted in living in accordance with nature. To live in this way, one had to make a sharp distinction between the things one can control and the things that are outside our control. The things outside our control – money, status, good health – are indifferent, while the things we can control – our actions and intentions – are the sole deciders or whether we live happily or not. In Zeno's view, happiness is up to us, and to arrive at it, one has to cure oneself of the false beliefs that externals are good, which are the basis of the emotions [affectus which disturbed our happiness. Hence, Zeno took the view that emotions are not irrational forces in the soul, but instead forms of rational judgments about the world. This view has later been called the cognitive view of emotions. The view is closely linked to another of Zeno's position, psychological monism, which is the view that the human soul at its core only has one action generating part, which is rationality. Akratic (or "weak-willed") action, where a person has his rational decision about what would be in his all-things-considered best interest to do overpowered by irrational emotions or desires, thus making him act contrary to his decision about how to act at the same time as he holds the opinion that he

[4] The peripatetic school, founded by Aristotle in the Lyceum, is another important school in the period. The philosophy of Cynicism, which shares many similarities with Stoicism, was also an important philosophical tradition, but was never organized as a school.
[5] The market place

should not be acting in the way he is currently acting, is therefore an impossibility since there are no powers in the soul to oppose the decision of rationality. Thus, one is always acting in accordance with what one takes to be in one's own best interest. Chrysippus, the third leader of the Stoic School, would later modify Zeno's account of the passions, claiming that passions were not equal to the judgments, but that some judgments about how to act triggered an impulse. In Chrysippus view, passions were the same as these impulses, and which means that they were the results of judgements and not equal to judgements. This subtle difference made no practical difference on how to treat the emotions, however, as one could still get rid of the passions by correcting one's judgments.

Three generations later, Posidonius – a later Stoic – decided to scrap the cognitive account of emotions that Zeno and Chrysippus had developed. According to the commentator Galen

> (2) … Posidonius completely dissented from both opinions. He does not regard the passions as either judgements or as results of judgements, but as effects of the competitive and appetitive faculty, in full accordance with the ancient doctrine. (3) In his study On passions he frequently asks Chrysippus and his followers: 'What is the cause of the excessive impulse? For reason could not exceed its own occupations and limits. So it is evident that some other irrational faculty causes impulse to exceed the limits of reason, just as the cause of running's exceeding the limits of choice is irrational, the weight of the body (Long and Sedley, 1987, p. 414).

Essentially, what Posidonius had done was to replace cognitivism, psychological monism and the denial of akratic action with the tripartite soul from Plato's republic. In this model, the soul is held to have three parts - reason, spirit and appetite – where the appetitive part is capable of overpowering the decisions of reason in the person who lacks virtue. Nor are emotions held to be strictly cognitive in this model: these will not be dealt with by arguments, but must instead be weakened with the help of music:

> … isn't it appropriate for the rational part to rule, since it is really wise and exercise foresight on behalf of the whole soul, and for the spirited part to obey it and be its ally?[6]

[6] Said by Socrates

It certainly is.[7]

And isn’t it, as we were saying, a mixture of music and poetry, on the one hand, and physical training, on the other, that makes the two parts harmonious, stretching and nurturing the rational part with fine words and learning, relaxing the other part through soothing stories, and making it gentle by means of harmony and rhythm?[8] (Pl. *R*. IV. 2.441e)

Thus – if we are to believe Galen’s account - all three of the of Zeno and Chrysippus central doctrines about human psychology – the unity of the soul, the cognitive nature of emotions and the impossibility of akratic action – are abandoned by Posidonius[9].

Scholars who focus on Stoicism typically refer to Zeno and Chrysippus as the Greek stoics, the orthodox Stoics or the early Stoics. Posidonius is classified as belonging to the period known as middle stoicism.

At this point, the historical account reached the third, and final period of stoicism in the ancient world, namely late and Roman Stoicism. And as it is to this period Seneca belongs, our historical account has thus reached our main character.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (or Seneca the Younger - hereafter, simply referred to as Seneca) was born approximately in 4 BCE in the city of Cordoba, a provincial city in the Roman Empire at the time[10]. Growing up with two brothers under fortunate circumstances – the maternal side of the family were part of the local elites and his father – Seneca the Elder – was a rhetorician of significance, who provided his son with a proper education in his own craft – Seneca would

[7] Said by Glaucon
[8] Said by Socrates
[9] Some scholars question the accuracy of Galen’s account of Posidonius views on the passions and the extent to which he disagreed with Chrysippus (Vogt, 2024) (Inwood, 2005, p. 28). According to Inwood (2005, p. 28) Fillon-Lahille (1984) argues that the views of Posidonius and Chrysippus were compatible (this view seems to be based on a dualistic interpretation of Chrysippuss rather than a monistic interpretation of Posidonius (see Inwood, 2005, pp. 28-29). Inwood (2005) argues that this is incorrect. Nussbaum (1993; 1994, p. 514) and Holler (1934) assumes that there was a stark and incompatible disagreement between Chyrsippus and Posidonius on the nature of the passions, with Chrysipuss holding the cognitive (monistic) view and Posidonius holding the non-cognitive (dualistic) view. I shall assume that it is this view (i.e. the one of Nussbaum and Holler (which is also shared by Inwood)) which is the correct one.

[10] If one visits Cordoba today, one will find oneself in Spain.

later move to Rome, immersing himself in the Empire's inner circles of power. His life in Rome can be summarized in three stages.

In the first stage, Seneca establishes himself as a dramatist, politician, and rhetorician. His rise to power ends abruptly when he, on the charges of adultery, is forced into exile on the island of Corsica, where he spends his next eight years (the uneventful second stage) (Campbell, 2004 p. 8). His exile comes to an end when he is recruited as the tutor of a young Nero, the future emperor, on the basis of his reputation as a skilled rhetorician.

Back in Rome, Seneca's prominence reaches its peak as Nero ascends to the position of emperor. Thus, in this third and final stage, Seneca finds himself as the advisor to the most powerful man in the world. But, it turns out, is a tyrant of the worst sort – and a danger to everyone around him. In 59 AD he has his own mother[11] killed. Seneca is eventually able to retire from his position – at which point he begins writing what today stands as his most famous and influential work, the *Letters to Lucillius*. Shortly after finishing this work, his life comes to a dramatic end. In 65 AD, suspected of having participated in a plot aimed at toppling Nero from power, Seneca receives an order from the emperor ordering that he take his own life. The suicide itself, which sees Seneca attempting to give himself a Socratic death of his own, has since become the most famous scene of Seneca's life, immortalized in paintings by artists such as Rubens, Sánchez, and David.

Like the man himself, Seneca's legacy has gone through periods of both good and bad fortune. His standing was especially strong during the renaissance: Montaigne – for example – quotes frequently from Seneca's works in the essays, and Seneca's tragedies supposedly had a huge influence on Shakespeare (Arkins, 1995). Seneca then suffered a sustained period of neglect as much of the West came to see Roman philosophy as a pale successor to the giants of ancient Greeks. In recent decades, this has started to change following a "Hellenistic turn" in scholarship on ancient philosophy. Today, Seneca is seen as something of a mixed character. While the popularization of stoic philosophy has gained him a large readership outside of academia, there are many who are less enthusiastic. As these critics point out, there were many problematic aspects to Seneca's life. Not only did he serve as the political advisor to a tyrant, but he was also an immensely rich man who preached the indifference of money.

[11] Agrippina, who was responsible for the recruitment of Seneca as Nero's teacher, and who also served a decisive role in making her son emperor.

Nor has his suicide – which one commentator claims shows us a man who was more "willing to kill himself rather than rock the boat[12]" - come to be seen in the heroic light he probably would have hoped for[13]. These are all well founded criticisms. However, if we see past his personal faults, my own prediction is that Seneca's writings are of such quality and enduring relevance that they are bound to endure and be rediscovered by new generations.

While Seneca today is primarily known as a Stoic philosopher, he was never a philosopher in the sense of someone who had philosophy as his occupation in life (Cooper, 2004, p. 282). As we have seen, he was a man of many trades, but never a philosophical teacher in the formal sense. Nevertheless, I think it is more than fair to characterize him as a stoic mentor of sorts. Those who read Seneca encounter someone who is clearly in the business of offering philosophical advice to people (Cooper, 2004, pp. 282-283). His writings leave no doubt as to whether he considers himself to be Stoic and clearly reveal someone who is more than capable of defending his stoic views.

Seneca's Stoicism can be summarized as marked by two features. First, the sum of his writings reveals that he had a preference for practical concerns. Most of his works deal with the question of how to lead a good life, and how philosophy can help us improve ourselves. In the words of Asmis et al (2010, p. xv) these questions "dominate his philosophical writings." Metaphysical questions and logic thus take on a more secondary role in Seneca's works than what was likely the case in the works of the earlier Stoics[14].

Second - and perhaps related to the first feature – Seneca seems to take a fairly undogmatic approach to Stoicism. While perhaps not an eclectic – someone who breaks completely with the established views of his tradition – Seneca is not a sluggish follower of the established views of his tradition. Rather, he is someone "with a strong inclination to think for himself" (Inwood. 2005, p. 2). As an example, he quotes frequently from the works of other philosophical schools (in particular those of Epicurus) wherever he finds this to serve his purpose. Seneca has also been credited by contemporary scholars for having humanized the Stoic sage, allowing him to experience grief and friendships (Campbell, 2004, pp. 17-18).

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[12] https://psyche.co/ideas/dont-be-stoic-roman-stoicisms-origins-show-its-perniciousness

[13] See for example the comments of the English classicist Mary Beard on the *In our time* podcast: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08fh0bh

[14] Chrysippus, for example, focused considerably on logic

Lastly, the introduction of the will to his moral psychology may also represent one of Seneca's innovations of Stoic philosophy.

Most of Seneca's written works can be divided into one of two groups: philosophical works and his tragedy plays. The philosophical works take the form of essays and letters addressed to specific individuals. However, while written to a specific individual – a common genre convention at the time - Seneca would have intended these works to be read by a wider audience, putting themselves in the place of the addressee as they were reading (Kaster, 2010a, p. 3). The essays include *On Providence*; *On Benefits*; *On the Shortness of Life*; *On Leisure*; *On the Happy Life*; *On the Constancy of the Wise*; *On anger*; *On Clemency*; *On the Tranquility of Mind*. We also have three *consolations* addressed to *Marcia*, *Helvia*, and *Polybius*. His *Letters on Ethics* addressed to Lucilius is his final and most famous work.

His dramatic works include eight tragedies: *Medea*; *Thyestes*; *Phaedra*; *The Trojan Women*; *Oedipus*; *Hercules Mad*; *The Phoenician Women*; and *Agamemnon*. In addition, two more tragic works (*Hercules on Oeta* and *Octavia*) were previously considered to be works by Seneca, but their authorship is now contested. Finally, there is also the satirical work *The Pumpkinification of Claudius the God*.

v. Literature Review

a) Cognitivism

Considering that this is a thesis how to acquire virtue – and thus a thesis on character development, given that virtue is the most excellent state of character – it is important to get clear about where Seneca stands in the debate between the cognitivists and the non-cognitivists. If virtuous character is obtained – in some way – by acting in accordance with reason rather than emotion, the relationship between reason and emotion will be of primary importance in determining the process of character development. If emotions are rational, they can be dealt with by arguments. However, if they irrational – as the non-cognitivist Posidonius claimed – it would seem that other means, for instance some kind of musical therapy, will have to be provided if we are to become virtuous human beings. So where does Seneca fit in with all this? Is he a cognitivist or a non-cognitivist?

On this question, there is some disagreement in the literature (Vogt, 2024) (Inwood, 2005, pp. 23-64). However, the consensus among most scholars seems to be that Seneca is in fact a cognitivist, with only a minority of scholars arguing the opposite. The minority non-cognitive position is defended by Holler (1934) and the Quellenforschung-tradition, who sees Seneca's *On Anger* as heavily influenced by the Posidonian non-cognitive view – thus departing from Chrysippus cognitive view. On the other side of the debate, both Inwood (2005) and Gartner (2015) argues that the *On Anger* is entirely compatible with the Chrysippean view. The cognitive position is also assumed (but not defended) in Nussbaum (1993). In my view, the cognitivist position seems to be well founded, and the most reasonable of the two positions. Once can point are several examples from Seneca's writings to defend this view:

First, I should like to point out that all of Seneca's ethical writings seems to be built on the assumptions of the cognitive view. What Seneca is doing in the *Letters*, in the Consolation to Marcia, and in *On Anger*, is to correct threat the passions of his interlocutors by targeting the false judgments that lay behind them.

- Seneca's work *On Anger* sees Seneca trying to convince Novatus – through arguments – that it is never beneficial to get angry
- In his *Consolation to Marcia*, Seneca tries to dispel Marcia's grief by making her reconsider which response is the proper one for a mother who has lost her son

This approach can only make sense if one assumes a cognitive understanding of emotions. Otherwise, we should expect Seneca to recommend different strategies to his help his interlocutors. Let us take music as an example of such other strategies, which the Socrates of Republic IV recommends as a means of calming the irrational forces in the soul. What does Seneca think about music's capacity to treat the passions?

> **1** You ask what I think of the liberal arts. I have no special regard for any of them, nor do I consider any study a good one if its aim is moneymaking. These are merely marketable skills, useful insofar at they prepare the mind but not as long-term occupations. One should stick to them only until the mind is capable of doing something more significant: they are our introductory curriculum, not our real work. **2** It's obvious why they are called "liberal" studies: because they are worthy of a free

person. But there is only one study that is truly liberal, and that is the one that liberates a person, which is to say, the study of philosophy. … **4** Let's pass on to geometry and music: there too, there is nothing that bids us refrain from fear or from desire. And if we don't know how to do that, it's no use knowing anything else…

9 I move on to music. You teach me how there can be harmony between high and low notes, how strings of different pitch can be concordant: teach me instead how there can be harmony within my own mind, how my intentions may not be discordant with one another. You show me which musical modes express sadness: show me instead how to keep from expressing sadness in the midst of adversity (*Ep*. 88.1-2; 4; 9).

At best, Seneca could be interpreted here as saying that music can in some way be helpful by, in some ways, at preparing us for the development towards for virtue through philosophy. But it is clear from the passage that music itself does nothing to rid the mind of the emotions. Nor does it seem that music weakens them. To rid the mind of the emotions, philosophy will have to step in to target the false opinions that produce them.

Second, one of the main claims in defense of the non-cognitivist view, the claim that Book 2 of Seneca's *On Anger* contains elements of the Posidonian non-monistic and non-cognitivist conception of the mind, seems to ignore the extent to which Seneca's analysis – in the very same book - of how passions develop is close to a step-by-step reconstruction of the Chrysippean view cognitivist view – perhaps with one or two minor differences. I shall analyze and explain the cognitivist aspects of this section of the On Anger in close detail in the proceeding chapter. As we shall see, Seneca claims that anger and the other emotions develop through a series of three movements. About the second of these movements, Seneca writes that the second movement is both "born from" and "eradicated by deliberation" (*De Ira*, 2.4.2). In other words, the emotions arise out of our rational judgments (a judgements which we ourselves decide whether to make or not) – clearly in line with the Chrysippean cognitivism and in conflict with Posidonian non-cognitivism. But this should not come as a surprise given that Seneca earlier in the work alludes to his commitment to psychological monism – the view that reason and emotion belong to the same part of the soul:

Reason and passion … don´t have separate and distinct dwelling places but are the mind's transformation to a better or worse condition (*De Ira*, 1.8.3).

This statement is clearly in opposition to the Posidonian view that reason and emotion belong to different parts of the soul, and that emotions therefore should be seen as irrational, and thus not treatable through arguments.

This ties in with the third and final argument. Seneca and the Stoics hold that reason is a uniquely human trait. Animals and other creatures do not have reason. Thus, to stress the extent to which Seneca is committed to cognitivism, I would point to Seneca's remarks that animals, since they lack reason, also lack emotions.

In the opening sections of On Anger, we find the following passage:

> (3) Aristotle's definition is not very different from ours: he says that anger is the strong desire to return pain for pain. (The difference between his definition and ours cannot be explained briefly.) Against both definitions it's objected that wild animals become angry, but without the provocation of being wronged and not for the sake of payback or causing another pain; even if such is the effect of their behavior, it's not their aim. (4) But it must be said that wild animals – and all creatures save the human being are without anger: though anger is reason's enemy, it comes into being only where reason resides. Wild animals have impulses – frenzy, ferocity, aggression – but they no more have anger than they have luxury, even though they're less self-controlled than humans when it comes to certain pleasures. (*De Ira*, 1.3.3-4)

As Seneca writes here, anger "comes into being only where reason resides" and is thus something only human begins can experience. The implication is clearly that anger requires some form of thought or cognition. The lack of emotions in animals, comes down to the fact that emotions are based on rational judgments. Since animals do not make rational judgments, they can have neither reason nor emotion. Anger is thus not an irrational power in the soul.

The sum of these three arguments should serve as sufficient defense of the cognitive position. I shall therefore proceed the rest of the thesis on the assumption that Seneca held a cognitive view of the emotions.

b) Exercises

There is disagreement in the literature about the nature, role, and importance of the various philosophical exercises which can be identified in Seneca's writings. Such exercises may include imagining a future misfortune in order to prepare for it and weaken one's attachments to externals (*meditatio*), or the *gymnasia*, in which the Stoic progressor will artificially induce such misfortunes – for example by enduring 3-4 days of significantly lower material living standards (*Ep*. 18.6-8) (Foucault, 1988, pp. 35-37). To what extent does Seneca think such exercises are necessary if we want to improve our character?

Philosophical exercises feature heavily in both Foucault's and Hadot's accounts of character development in Stoic philosophy. Hadot (2002, p. 6), who prefers using the term "spiritual exercise" instead of philosophical exercises – define such exercises as "practices which could be 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 practiced them." In Hadot's (1995, p. 21) account – which has since been endorsed by Newman (1987), Davidson (1990), Sellars (2009), and to some extent Foucault (1990) – such exercises played a decisive role as one of two essential pillars in the Stoic moral education. One pillar consisted of the study of theoretical discourse whereby the Stoic progressor will familiarize herself with the major philosophical claims of the Stoics and the arguments on which they justified these claims. However, a second and equally important part of character improvement was played by exercises whose role was to incorporate Stoic philosophical discourse into the character of the pupil. Similarly, Sellars (2009, p. 119) argues that the Stoics did not see arguments and reasoning as sufficient on its own for acquiring virtue and happiness. We also need the habituation that comes with the spiritual exercises – a view which some see as being in conflict with the Stoic conception of human psychology as monistic and governed by our rational judgements about the world (Cooper, 2004, p. 283-284). If we always act in accordance with our rational judgements, it seems that there is no need for exercises whose aim is to habituate so that we become able to follow the commands of these rational judgments. Since emotions in this theory are seen as rational judgements themselves, there is no need to habituate ourselves and learn to manage our emotions so that they don't hinder us in our ability to act in accordance with our rational judgements. Thus, the use of exercises as part of a program of character development seems to depend on emotions being irrational so that we therefore need to acquire the skills of managing these emotions, in addition to cultivating our rational deliberation about which goals are worth pursuing.

Furthermore, Cooper (2012, pp. 19-21) has criticized Hadot's account for misinterpreting the Greek Stoics and for blurring the line between philosophy and religion in the ancient world. For Cooper, it is rather Seneca who introduces foreign elements (i.e. philosophical exercises) into the Stoic philosophical system which is in conflict with the moral psychology of the Greek Stoics:

> Only in late antiquity … did the way of life of philosophy begin to share the features of a religious way of life … One aspect of this contamination is the presence in late ancient philosophy and religion – indeed the very conception – of those "spiritual exercises" … The earliest evidence Hadot can cite in ancient philosophy for the presence of such exercises … is in Seneca … In one passage of his On Anger Seneca cites the nightly practice of self-examination on one's day's behavior … This citation is evidence of the novelty of such practice at Seneca's time. So even if Seneca does refer to the daily bedtime examination of conscience with approval, saying that he adopts it himself, the passage counts not in favor , but against, Hadot's idea that such practices (or any associated one of "spiritual strengthening") were common or standard even in the Hellenistic schools, much less in ancient philosophy as a whole, from Socrates's time or even earlier (Cooper, 2012, pp. 19-20).

Thus, Cooper agrees with Hadot and Sellars on the importance and prevalence of philosophical exercises in Seneca's writings, but he thinks the result of this is that Seneca must be seen as contradicting Stoic moral psychology. He claims that, if it really is the case that Seneca held the same views about human psychology as Chrysippus (i.e. that emotions are rational judgments), then Seneca ought to be seen as holding incompatible views (Cooper, 2004, p. 284). Alternatively, Seneca can be seen as consistent with himself, provided he adopted a non-monistic moral psychology. Both of these interpretations are contested by Sellars (2006, pp. 47-49). In this thesis, I will argue that this disagreement between Sellars and Cooper is caused by a different understanding of Stoic psychological monism. Seneca's Stoicism is, in my view, a version of psychological monism. But it is a version in which the conception of the expert knowledge of the sage includes both practical skills and theoretical "knowledge." In this version of psychological monism, it is actions contrary to the best of one's ability which is impossible. If we fail to act in ways that are contrary to Stoic philosophical teachings after we have received such teachings, this may be because we have

failed to acquire some necessary practical skills. For example, we may not know how to recognize that the impression we are receiving is indeed an impression we have been thought is false Alternatively, even if we do recognize that the impression we are receiving is one we have been taught is false, we may still fail to reject it because we lack the skills of withholding our assent to the validity of these impressions.

Martha Nussbaum (1994, p. 353-354) makes a different critique of Hadot. This criticism has been endorsed by Seal (2015). In Nussbaum's (1994, p. 353-354) view:

> Stoicism is indeed, as Michel Foucault and other affiliated writers [Hadot and Davidson] have recently insisted, a set of techniques for the formation and shaping of the self. But what their emphasis on habits and *techniques du so*i too often obscures is the dignity of reason. Many forms of life in the ancient world purveyed *techniques du soi*.. What sets philosophy apart from popular religion, dream-interpretation, and astrology is its commitments to rational argument. What sets Stoicism apart from other forms of philosophical therapy is its very particular commitment to the pupil's own active exercise of argument. For all these habits and routines are useless if not rational. And the basic motivation behind the whole business is to show respect for what is most worthy in oneself, for what is most truly oneself. One does not do this by anything but good argument. At the end, we have not the images of habituation and constraint so prominent in Foucault's writings, but an image of incredible freedom and lightness, the freedom that comes of understanding that one's own capabilities, and not social status, or fortune, or rumor, or accident, are in charge of what is most important. The procedures of Stoic argument model a kingdom of free beings – the ancestor (in terms both of content and causal influence) of Kant's kingdom of ends, a kingdom of beings who are bound to one another not by external links of hierarchy and convention, but by the most profound respect and self-respect, and by their sense of the fundamental commonness in their ends. It is doubtful whether the view of the world contained in Foucault's work as a whole could admit the possibility of such a kingdom, or its freedom. For Foucault, reason is itself just one among the many masks assumed by political power. For the Stoics, reason stands apart, resisting all domination, the authentic and free core of one's life as an individual and as a social being. Argument shapes – and, eventually, is – a self, and is the self's way of fulfilling its role as citizen of the universe.

In summary, Nussbaum's criticism is that Hadot, Sellars and Foucault's accounts of character improvement in Stoicism overemphasize the importance of spiritual exercises while neglecting the importance of philosophical argument. Here, I shall argue that Nussbaum's criticism is mistaken when applied to Seneca's Stoicism. While philosophical argument seems to play an important part in the program of character development I have been able to construct from Seneca's writings, it would be a mistake, in my view, to attribute to Seneca the view that one acquires virtue solely through philosophical argument. Arguments play an important role when learning about the correct philosophical beliefs. But if we want to be able to live our lives on the basis of those beliefs, we will have to supplement these arguments with additional tools like philosophical exercises. Moreover, it will not be sufficient to perform such exercises once or twice. Rather, such exercises must be performed regularly and may even have to be made part of the progressor's daily routine.

vi. Thesis Statement

According to Seneca, the Stoic progressor – someone who has turned to Stoic philosophical teachers with the aim of acquiring virtue (i.e. a perfectly rational mind) – may acquire virtue by practicing philosophy, which Seneca conceives of as the art of living whose goal is to make its practitioners acquire virtue. This craft both consists of a theoretical and a practical component. The ultimate success of the progressor in acquiring virtue through the practice of the craft of philosophy is subject to luck – i.e. it is dependent on forces outside of her control

Practicing philosophy entails first studying Stoic philosophical theory and then adopting a daily philosophical routine, both initially under the guidance of a philosophical teacher. The goal of this routine is to transform the character of the progressor into a perfectly rational character. This is done by detecting and removing false beliefs from the character of the progressor and is completed when the progressor's character is completely free of false beliefs.

In studying Stoic philosophical theory, the progressor familiarizes herself with how she ought to act and why. The daily philosophical routine involves three pillars: self-examination, treatment, and action.

In self-examination, the progressor will try to detect the presence of false beliefs in her character. One way to do this is by reviewing one's actions at the end of the day to see how they compare to the prescribed actions of Stoic philosophical theory. If the progressor discovers discrepancies between the two, she will seek to identify the false beliefs in her character that gives rise to this discrepancy.

In treatment, the progressor and the teacher will attempt to get rid of the false beliefs from the progressors character by incorporating Stoic philosophical teachings into the character of the progressor through exercises.

In action, the Stoic progressor will try to apply what she has been practicing in her treatment in a real-life situation. Here, she may use precepts and role models as a tools in order to remind herself of how she ought to act in various situations.

The philosophical routine is repeated as the progressor reviews her actions of the day, trying to identify which false beliefs made her act contrary to how she ought to, and then target these false beliefs in her treatment the following day. As the progressor becomes increasingly skilled at this routine, she will be more and more able to carry it

vii. Scope and limitation

In terms of which of Seneca's works I have included in my research, I have focused on the works that are most relevant in terms of explaining Seneca's views on character development. Here emotions and their relation to rationality plays an important part. With this in mind, the works I have decided to include in my research are *On Anger, On the Constancy of the Wise Person*, *Consolation to Marcia*, *On the Tranquility of Mind* and *On the Happy Life*. Finally, I have also consulted about 2/5 of Seneca's *Letters on Ethics*. By not focusing exclusively on one of Seneca's works, but instead, sampling from his wider corpus I may get a fuller picture of Seneca's views on character improvement than what would have been possible to discern from a more focused but narrower selection of works.

It is always challenging to interpret thinkers from a different age as one is forced to struggle with barriers related to language, history, and culture. However, Seneca stands out as a particularly challenging thinker because his works confront us with additional challenges.

These challenges relate to the genres in which he wrote and to the pragmatic purposes and stylistic features of his writings.

On the first issue (the genres), there is the question of the relationship between Seneca's philosophical writings and his dramatic works – especially the tragedies (Seal, 2015, p. 218). As a genre, tragedy may be interpreted as revealing the hopelessness of that pursuit (Critchley, 2019, pp. 167-168) (Seal, 2015, p. 218). For a long time, it was therefore assumed that Seneca the writer of philosophical letters and essays and Seneca the writer of blood dripping tragedies could not have been the same person (Wilson, 2010, pp. xv-xvi). Experts in the field have now mostly abandoned this view and take it that the philosopher and the dramatist is the same person (Wilson, 2010, p. xvi). But this raises the question of where to look for Seneca's authentic views. Are these expressed in his philosophical works or in his tragedies? Inwood (2005) seeks to identify Seneca's views by exclusively focusing on his philosophical writings[15]. Some, however, have speculated that Seneca perhaps doubted the validity of Stoic philosophy, and that he decided to express these doubts in the form of fiction rather than in his philosophical works (Wilson, 2010, p. xvi). Others have advanced the view that Seneca was unable to stick to the "unrealistic and unworkable … suppositions of Stoic psychology[16]" when he was writing tragedies because these suppositions do not lend themselves to the genre (Bartsch and Wray, 2009, p. 10). Lastly, there are those who argue that there are valid interpretations of Seneca's tragedies which show that these works are consistent with Stoic philosophy (Nussbaum, 1993, pp.148-149). My thesis will leave these questions aside and build an argument on the assumption that the tragedies are not in conflict with Seneca's philosophical works.

On the second issue, it is sometimes difficult to know whether one should take what Seneca writes in a literal sense or not. As Cooper (2004, p. 284) points out, Seneca thought that philosophy should help us deal with "the real problems of life", like getting rid of "the fear of death" and our "bondage to external objects and events" (Cooper, 2004, p. 284). Thus, these

[15]It is interesting to note that even if we disregard the tragedies and focus exclusively on Seneca's philosophical writings, Inwood (2005, p. 2) still reports that he finds great challenges in constructing "a coherent general picture of Seneca's philosophical … commitments", and he takes a pessimistic attitude as to whether it is possible to find such a picture in Seneca's works.

[16] These suppositions are suppositions of Chrysippean moral psychology rather then the tripartite psychology of Posidonius. Thus, the view is based on the claims that Seneca was a follower of Chrysippus.

works are not written as systematic philosophical treatises laying out a philosophical view and the arguments in support of it in an organized manner (Cooper, 2004, p. 282-283).

It should also be stressed that Seneca, in writing his works, would take under consideration the situation of the particular reader he was addressing. Therefore, his philosophical works are not only written with a pragmatic purpose, but also with a particular audience in mind (Cooper, 2004, p. 282-283). *On Anger*, for example, is formally addressed to a specific individual – Novatus – and written with a specific and pragmatic purpose – namely to help Novatus and his peers[17] deal with the emotion of anger. The work contains what appears to be a presentation of Seneca's general theory of emotions but, given that this theory appears in an essay whose primary aim may not have been to provide an accurate description of reality, the interpreter is forced either to make this assumption or to construct an argument in defense of a literal interpretation.

Moreover, Seneca seems to have thought that his pragmatic aims could be accomplished, at least in part, "through other uses of language than the logically deductive" (Cooper, 2004, p. 284). His works are therefore filled with literary devices, exaggerations, and repetitions (Cooper, 2004, p. 283). In sum, the practical nature of Seneca's writings, his tendency to adopt his arguments to help the reader he is addressing, and his usage of metaphorical and persuasive language, can sometimes make it difficult to know whether Seneca actually stands by what he is writing, or whether he is merely employing a rhetorical device to have a desired effect on his reader. The solution I have adopted to this issue has been to largely take Seneca at face value, except in cases where I have encountered contradictions or which seems to be obvious examples of exaggerations and other rhetorical devices. I have also made sure to consult the translator's notes for the passages that I rely on in this thesis.

Finally, I must address the challenges related to the linguistic, cultural, and historical barrier. Here, I am at a disadvantage in that I don't read Latin and, furthermore, in that I have a somewhat limited knowledge of Roman society and history, as well as a limited

[17] Note that while On Anger is addressed to a particular individual, this does not mean that the work is an example of a private correspondence between Seneca and the addressee. The same is the case with Seneca's other philosophical writings, including the Letters to Lucilius. What seems to be the case is that these works where intended to be read by a wider audience whose attitudes and stance in life may have been similar to that of the addressee (see Graver and Long (2015, pp. 3-6); Kaster (2010a, p. 3); and Roller (2015, pp. 54-67)).

understanding of the genres[18] Seneca wrote in. All of this is knowledge which a prominent scholar like Martha Nussbaum (1994, p. 7) claims is of high importance when studying the works of Seneca and the other philosophers of the Roman Imperial period. Having spent a year studying Seneca I certainly know more about these than I did when I first began this project – although I will admit that there is still much to be learned. In terms of cultural understanding, I have been helped both by the translator's comment and the secondary literature. Moreover, the translator's comments provide the further assistance of pointing out and explaining some of the ambiguities and difficulties in translating certain passages of Seneca's writings. Thus, while I do not have the benefit of reading Seneca in the language in which he wrote, I hope that these tools, together with the added knowledge I have gained through my research, will be sufficient for the thesis to make a small contribution to our understanding of Seneca's philosophical views.

viii Thesis overview

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In chapter 1, I argue that Seneca sees philosophy as a craft which helps its practitioners acquire virtue. To acquire virtue, one therefore has to become a practitioner of this craft. Since the Stoic progressor has already found herself Stoic philosophical teachers, she has already accomplished this part. However, in order to understand how philosophy helps the Stoic progressor acquiring virtue, we will need to get a fuller understanding of the craft of philosophy. This includes understanding the material this craft manipulates, the tools used by the practitioner of the craft on this material in order to manipulate it into its desired end-state, and the way in which these tools will be used by the practitioner of the craft to accomplish this goal. Here, I explain that the material of the craft of philosophy is the mind and that the tools of the craft can be describes as "technologies of the self" (a term coined by Foucault (1988, p. 18).

Chapter 2 goes deeper into the nature of the material of the craft, - i.e . the mind – with the aim of getting a fuller understanding of the way in which practicing philosophy will help the progressor acquire virtue. Here, I identify three universal traits of the mind, which can be identified in Seneca's works. According to Seneca, the human mind is marked by (1) an innate instinct to preserve ourselves as the kind of creature that we are; (2) Rationality –

[18]Here referring to the different genres in which Seneca wrote his philosophical writings, like the genre of the philosophical letter, which was an established genre with its own conventions in the Roman Imperial Era

which gives us the abilities of language and choice; and (3) the capacity to develop lasting and permanent traits of character. The chapter describes each of these features in detail, as well as their consequences for the process of character improvement.

Chapter 3 goes deeper into the nature of the tools of philosophy – which I previously described, using Foucault's term, as technologies of the self. The tools of philosophy can be divided into two groups: theoretical tools and practical tools. Among the theoretical tools, we find philosophical discourse on ethics, physics, and logic. Among the practical tools, we find precepts, exercises (like the meditatio and the gymnasia), nightly review of one's activities throughout the day, and role models.

Finally, in chapter 4, I will show the way which the practitioner of the craft of philosophy will use technologies of the self on her own mind in order to transform it into virtue. My reading of Seneca is that this is done, first, by acquiring an understanding of the theoretical doctrines of Stoic philosophy. Second, by the construction of a daily philosophical routine whose aim is the removal of false beliefs from our character. This daily routine consists of three steps which are repeated every day: (1) spot – the detection of false beliefs in our character through self-examination; (2) The removal of false beliefs from our character through exercises; (3) by testing one's progress through one's daily actions, using precepts and role models to help remember how one ought to act in different situations. If this routine is kept over time, the progressor will gradually remove false beliefs from her character, and as the progressor improves, the false beliefs targeted by the daily routine changes. However, the ultimate success of this routine depends on forces outside the control of the progressor and is therefore, in part, a matter of luck.

Chapter 1: Craft

Chapter introduction

This chapter provides an outline of Seneca's answer to the question of how the Stoic progressor acquires virtue. Since having virtue is the necessary and sufficient condition for living a good life, the Stoic progressor can acquire virtue by practicing the craft [*ars*] whose goal is to make its practitioners live good lives. This craft is philosophy – seen by Seneca as the art of living [*ars vivendi*]. In order to understand how philosophy can help the progressor acquire virtue, it is useful to understand crafts in general. In this chapter, I will use two familiar crafts as examples to acquire this understanding: the craft of medicine and the craft of housebuilding. In these crafts, we can identify a practitioner of the craft, tools of the craft, a material manipulated by the practitioner of the craft, a goal of the craft, and a beneficiary of the craft. Lastly, we can also speak of the way in which the practitioner of the craft will use the tools of the craft to manipulate the material of the craft in order to produce the goal of the craft. Thus, if we want to understand how the craft of philosophy will help the progressor acquire virtue, we must seek to identify what Seneca thinks these things are when it comes to the craft of philosophy. Here, we shall see that Seneca thinks the goal of the craft of philosophy is virtue; that the practitioner as well as the beneficiary is the progressor; that the material is the mind of the progressor; and that the tools correspond to what Foucault (1988, p. 18) calls "technologies of the self". The question of the way in which the progressor will use technologies of the self on her own mind to acquire virtue (i.e. the way in which she will practice the craft) is left unanswered until the final chapter of the thesis.

The current chapter is divided into 6 sections. The first section provides a short summary of the key points of the introduction before presenting the craft analogy and Seneca's view that philosophy is the craft which the progressor will have to practice in order to acquire virtue. As we shall see, practicing this craft will involve both theoretical studies and practical exercises. The second section presents four questions we need to understand about the craft of philosophy in order to understand how practicing the craft of philosophy will help the progressor acquire virtue: (1) What are the material(s) that the practitioner of philosophy will have to manipulate in order to produce virtue? (2) who is the practitioner, the beneficiary, and the expert practitioner of the craft of philosophy? (3) What are the tools which this

practitioner will use? (4) How will the practitioner of this crafts use the tools of the craft on the material of the craft in order to manipulate this material so that the material is transformed into the final product (i.e. the goal) of the craft? The third section provides a brief account of the answer to question (1), showing that Seneca takes the material of the craft of philosophy to be the mind of its practitioner. The fourth section provides the answer to question (2): the practitioner of the craft of philosophy will be the progressor. Here, I also provide a brief account of the status of the Stoic philosophical teacher within the craft of philosophy. The fifth section consider the question of philosophical tools (question (3)). Here, as in the third section, I will provide a brief account of the answer to the question by presenting Foucault's conception of "technologies of the self" as a promising account of what sorts of tools Seneca might consider as the tools of philosophy. The chapter ends with the sixth section where I hint at the need of understanding the way in which the progressor will use technologies of the self on her mind in order to transform it into virtue. Before we can answer this question, we need to have a more complete answer to the second and the third question. In other words, we need to understand more about the mind and the identify Seneca's technologies of the self (i.e. his philosophical tools). Thus, this section also sets the stage for the rest of the thesis, explaining that Chapter 2 will provide an in-depth account of Seneca's understanding of the mind; that Chapter 3 will provide seek to identify Senecan technologies of the self; and that Chapter 4 will provide an answer to the question of the way in which Seneca thinks the progressor must use the technologies of the self on her own mind in order to transform it into virtue. In answering these questions, I will have identified Seneca's answer to the question of how the Stoic progressor acquires virtue, and, thus, I will have found the answer to the research question of the thesis.

1.1. Philosophy as the path to virtue

A quick recap of the most important points from the introduction might be of use before we begin the task of answering the research question. As I said at the beginning of the introduction, the Stoic progressor is a person who approaches Stoic philosophical teachers with the aim of improving her character so that she may come to acquire virtue. Moreover, we saw that virtue is a particular type of mind[19], namely a perfectly rational mind. Furthermore, we saw that all minds are corporal. A perfectly rational mind allows its possessor to live

[19] Remember that I use the terms mind and character interchangeably. The progressors' goal of improving her character is equivalent to the goal of improving her mind

happily because having a perfectly rational mind is both the necessary and sufficient condition for living in accordance with nature – which is the Stoic definition of happiness. We see then that the goal of acquiring virtue and the goal of acquiring happiness are linked: being virtuous and being happy is one and the same thing.

At this point I have presented the research question of the thesis. Moreover, I have clarified the key terms, provided some necessary background on Seneca and Stoicism, and, furthermore, I have presented the outline for the rest of the thesis. Now, we may finally begin to try to answer the research question of my thesis. How does Seneca answer the question of how the Stoic progressor acquires virtue?

To understand Seneca's answer to how the Stoic progressor acquires virtue it will be useful to establish a link between the acquisition of virtue and crafts [*ars*] (sometimes also referred to as arts). More specifically, I want to establish the link between the acquisition of virtue and a particular craft, namely the craft of philosophy [*philosophia*]. To understand this link, we will first need to understand crafts in general. Philosophers in ancient Athens (where, as we saw in the introduction, Stoicism was founded by Zeno) had a particular preoccupation with the concept of crafts (Tsouna, 2021, p. 166). In most crafts, an expert practitioner combines his or her knowledge and skills with tools [*instruments*] in order to produce a desirable result.

Let us consider two familiar examples: the craft of medicine and the craft of housebuilding. Medicine is the craft whose aim is the bodily health of the human being. In medicine, the doctor – the expert practitioner of the craft – uses his skills and knowledge combined with various tools like the scalpel and the x-ray machine to promote the health of his patients. The craft of medicine is thus practiced by the doctor, but for the benefit of the patient. However, the doctor may sometimes also be the patient. For example, if a doctor gets an illness, he may treat his own illness by prescribing and taking the necessary medication to restore his own health. In such cases, we could say that the doctor is practicing the art of medicine on himself.

Similarly, in housebuilding – the craft whose aim is the production of a well-functioning house – the builder uses her skills and knowledge, combined with tools (like the hammer and the saw), to produce a well-functioning house. Here, as in the craft of medicine, the practitioner of the craft – the builder – can also be the person who is benefitted by the craft.

While the builder will often build houses for other people, she may decide, at some point, to use her expert knowledge to build a house for herself.

Notice also that in the case of both the craft of medicine and the craft of housebuilding the goal of the craft is produced by the practitioner of the craft by using tools to manipulate a certain material in order to transform it into its desired end-state. In the case of medicine, the material in question is the body of the patient. In the case of house building, on the other hand, the material in question are planks, glass, concrete, and all the other materials that can be used in order to produce a well-functioning house.

So how does this relate to the acquisition of virtue? To see this, we must ask why it is that the Stoic progressor has sought out Stoic philosophical teachers. The answer is that the Stoic progressor has sought out these teachers because these teachers are offering to help her get what she wants. These teachers, it turns out, claim to be teaching a craft whose aim is to make its practitioners live a good life. This craft is known as philosophy, but philosophy was conceived of as both the medical art of the mind and as an art of living and – moreover – was referred to as "an art concerned with one's way of life" (Sellars, 2009, p. 15) (Nussbaum 1994, pp. 316-317). Given that having virtue is the same as living well (i.e. happiness), the aim of this art must be to make its practitioners acquire virtue. So, since the progressor wants to acquire virtue, she has come to the right place. In order to acquire virtue, she must practice the art of philosophy. As we shall see, Seneca thinks that practicing the craft of philosophy will involve both theoretical studies and practical exercises.

While a Stoic of the Roman imperial era, we can see that Seneca wholeheartedly endorse the conception of philosophy as the craft whose aim is to make its practitioners acquire virtue. In Letter 88 of his Letters to Lucilius, we find Seneca comparing philosophy to the study of liberal arts[20]:

> You ask what I think of the liberal arts. I have no special regard for any of them. I have no special regard for any of them, nor do I consider any study a good one if its aim is moneymaking. These are merely marketable skills … **2** It's obvious why they are called "liberal" studies: because they are worthy of a free person. But there is only

[20] the study of literature, music and similar subjects that was part of the education of members of the Roman elite

> one study that is truly liberal, and that is the one that liberates a person, which is to say, the study of philosophy … **4** … <The question is> whether virtue is the subject these people are teaching. If it is not, then they are not imparting virtue to their pupils – and if it is, then they are philosophers … **23** … the only arts that are truly liberal … are those whose concern is virtue" (*Ep*. 88.1-2, 4, 23)

What we can discern from this passage, is that philosophy liberates people and that it does this by teaching them virtue. Moreover, we can see that it is philosophy alone that teaches its practitioners virtue, since everything that is imparting virtue is claimed to be philosophy.

While this passage confirmed that philosophy has virtue as its goal, the passage also muddled the craft-analogy by referring to philosophy as a study rather than a craft. However, this does not ruin the analogy. We can say both that the medical student studies medicine and that medicine, in addition to being a subject of study, is also a craft whose goal is the health of its patients. Seneca is simply referring to philosophy here from the perspective of those who study it rather than from the perspective of its expert practitioners. And, as we shall see, these people, who study the art of living, will also have to practice certain skills – either alongside, or after, these theoretical studies.

The craft analogy is much clearer at other points in Seneca's letters. Here is an excerpt from Letter 89. Keep in mind Seneca's definition from earlier that virtue is a perfectly rational mind. This will make it clear that, when Seneca talks of wisdom, wisdom is here a synonym for virtue:

> **4** I will begin … by stating the difference between wisdom and philosophy. Wisdom is the human mind's supreme good; philosophy is the love and aspiration for wisdom. The latter is proceeding toward the destination at which the former has arrived. … **6** … there is a difference between philosophy and wisdom, since the object of aspiration cannot be the same thing as the aspiration itself. Just as there is a great difference between avarice and money, with one desiring and the other being the object of desire, so too philosophy differs from wisdom. One is the outcome and reward for the other. Philosophy is a progression, and wisdom is where it is headed (*Ep*. 89.4, 7)

Moreover, we find Seneca explicitly mentioning the “art of living” [*ars vivendi*] in letter 95.7-9. Here, we also find Seneca comparing the art of living with other crafts, and, moreover, we find him talking of the art of living as involving certain “skills.”

Taken together, these three letters – i.e. letter 88, 89, and 95 – show us is that Seneca thinks philosophy is the craft that helps its practitioners acquire virtue. Given that the Stoic progressor wants to acquire virtue, she therefore has done well to seek out Stoic philosophers who claim to be teaching this craft. Moreover, as we can see from Letter 88 and 95, the craft of philosophy seems to involve both theoretical part and a practical part. As we can see, Seneca tells us first, in letter 88, that philosophy is a study. Later, in letter 95, we are told that the expert practitioner of the art of philosophy also seems to have certain skills. Therefore, it seems that the craft of philosophy must somehow involve both a theoretical and a practical component. In, holding this view, Seneca seems to be thinking along the same lines as many earlier philosophers (Tsouna, 2021, pp. 166-167). I shall explore this distinction between the practical and the theoretical part of the craft of philosophy in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

1.2. Four questions

By now I have established an important part of the answer to the research question: according to Seneca, the Stoic progressor acquires virtue through the study and practice of philosophy – which he conceives of as an art of living, i.e. a craft whose goal is to make its practitioners live well. But this answer raises the deeper question of how philosophy makes the progressor acquire virtue.

To answer this deeper question, we need to take a closer look at the crafts we discussed in the previous section. There are some details which we looked at in relation to the craft of medicine and the craft of housebuilding which we have yet to account for in relation to the craft of philosophy. As we saw, the practitioner of medicine and the practitioner of housebuilding uses certain tools to manipulate a certain material in order to produce the desired goal of the craft. In the craft of medicine, we saw that these tools could be the scalpel and the x-ray machine while the material manipulated by the doctor using these tools is the body of the patient. In the craft of housebuilding, we saw that the tools that the builder will use can be a hammer and a saw, while the material manipulated by the builder using these

tools will be the various building materials that can be used in order to produce a well-functioning house. We also said that the craft of medicine is practiced by the doctor for the benefit of the patient, and, similarly, that the craft of housebuilding is practiced by the builder for the benefit of whoever is going to be living the house he is building. From this we may derive the following four questions in relation to the craft of philosophy. (1) What are the corresponding material(s) that the practitioner of philosophy will have to manipulate in order to produce virtue? (2) Who is the practitioner, the beneficiary, and the expert practitioner of the craft of philosophy? Is it the progressor, the teacher, or someone else? (3) What are the tools this practitioner will use? Finally, we may also derive a fourth question in relation to all of these crafts: (4) How will the practitioner of these crafts be using the tools on the material in order to manipulate it so that the material is transformed into the final product of the craft? (Here, as we have seen, the final products of the various crafts are bodily health in the case of medicine, a well-functioning house in the case of housebuilding, and virtue in the case of philosophy).

1.3. Material

Let us try to answer these questions one at the time starting with the question of the material that the practitioner of the craft of philosophy will manipulate (i.e. question (1)). Seneca provides us with a fairly direct answer to this question in Letter 16:

> Philosophy is not tricks before an audience, nor is it a thing set up for display. It consists not in words but in actions. One does not take it up just to have an amusing pastime, a remedy for boredom. It molds and shapes the mind, gives order to life and discipline to action, shows what to do and what not to do. It sits at the helm and steers a course for us who are tossed in the waves of uncertainty. Without it, there is no life that is not full of care and anxiety. For countless things happen every hour that need the advice philosophy alone can give (*Ep*. 16.3)[21].

Clearly, the material which philosophy manipulates ("shapes") is the mind. Here we can also see the origin of philosophy's second nickname. As I said earlier, in addition to being referred to as the art of living, philosophy was also referred to as the medical art of the mind. This

[21] Here we see Seneca once again evoking the conception of philosophy as the "art of living," telling us that it is philosophy which "gives order to life" and that a life without philosophy will be "full of care and anxiety"

comparison between the craft of philosophy and the craft of medicine – what the contemporary literature refers to as "the medical analogy" – is frequently invoked by Seneca (*Ep*. 8.2, 50.4; *De Ira* 1.6, 2.10). According to Nussbaum (1994, p. 316), the Stoic use of the medical analogy can be traced back to Chrysippus and the following passage:

> It is not true that there exists and art [*techne*] that we call medicine, concerned with the diseased body, but no corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul … (*PHP* 5.2.22, 298d – *SVF* 3.471)[22]

The "corresponding art" Chrysippus refers to here is philosophy (Nussbaum, 1994, pp. 316-317). So, philosophy is an art of living whose goal is to make its practitioners live well. Moreover, in order to achieve this goal, the craft of philosophy works on the mind in a similar way to the way in which the craft of medicine works on the human body. This should not come as a surprise, given that, as we said earlier, virtue (i.e., a perfectly rational mind) is the necessary and sufficient condition for happiness. But what is interesting to note here – and what will be important to remember when we move forward to look at the way in which philosophy helps the progressor acquire virtue – is that Chrysippus claims that, just as there are diseases of the body, there are also diseases of the mind. This view can also be found in Seneca:

> It was a custom practiced among our ancestors … to add to the opening word of a letter, "if you are doing well, that's good; I am doing well myself." The right thing for us say is, "If you are doing philosophy, that's good." For that is the only way one can really be doing well. Without that, **the mind is sick**; and the body too, even if it has great strength, is sound only as that of an insane or deranged person might be. (2) So care for the mind's health first and foremost, and for the other only secondarily… (*Ep*. 15.1-2)[23] [emphasis mine]

If the mind like the body can be sick, there must also be a healthy state of the mind just as there is a healthy state of the body. This healthy state of the mind is virtue – the perfectly rational mind (*Ep*. 72.6-7). In chapter 2, we will look more closely at what sort of material the mind is; what its diseases are; and how it can be altered in order to bring it closer to its

[22] This quote is taken from Nussbaum (1994, p. 316).
[23] For more examples, see *Ep*. 6.1; 8.2; 50.4

healthy virtuous state. For now, what is important to remember going forward is that material which the craft of philosophy manipulates is the mind. Thus, just as the craft of medicine manipulates the body, and the craft of house building manipulates the materials needed to make a well-functioning house, so the craft of philosophy manipulates the mind in order to bring it to virtue.

1.4. Practitioner

Here, we confront question (2). Evidently, since it is the progressor wants to bring her own mind closer to virtue, it is going to be the progressor whose mind will be manipulated by the practitioner of the craft of philosophy. As we saw in the craft of medicine and housebuilding, the practitioner of those crafts were the doctor and the builder respectably. Moreover, we saw that these crafts were practiced for the benefit of someone – in the case of medicine, the craft is practiced for the benefit of the patient, while in the case of housebuilding, the craft is practiced for the benefit of the person who is going to live in the house that the builder is building. Furthermore, we saw that, for both of these crafts, the practitioner of the craft may sometimes also be the beneficiary of the craft. The doctor may use his expert knowledge to treat his own illnesses, and the builder may decide to build a house for herself. Now, we ask, how do these thinks work with respect to the craft of philosophy? Who is the practitioner? Who is the beneficiary? And, given that the doctor and the builder are the expert practitioner of their crafts, we may also ask who about who the expert practitioner of the craft of philosophy will be.

Here, it will be useful to think in terms of the medical analogy. Is the progressor going to be the patient (the beneficiary) or the doctor (the practitioner of the craft)? Clearly, the progressor is going to be the patient (the beneficiary). After all, it is her character which is going to be transformed into a virtuous state by practicing the craft of philosophy. However, as it turns out, the progressor is also going to assume the role of her own philosophical doctor. Thus, she is both doctor and patient – both practitioner and beneficiary. For Seneca, philosophy, as Foucault (1990, pp. 42, 46) presents it, is a kind of work on the self by the self[24] where "one is called upon to take as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as

[24] Foucault (1990, pp. 43, 54) uses the expressions "cultivation of the self" and "care of the self" to describe this work.

to transform, correct, and purify oneself". It is a craft where both the material and the practitioner of the craft are the same things.

Now, we may wonder where the teachers fit in in all this? Aren't they also practitioners of the art of philosophy? If they are not the philosophical doctors of the progressor, what are they? And why does the Stoic progressor seek out the Stoic philosophical teachers if she can just practice the craft on her own.

The teachers, it turns out, are also progressors. Therefore, they are also practitioners of the craft of philosophy. But what this means is that the Stoic philosophical teachers are not expert practitioners in the craft of philosophy. Rather, the expert practitioner is the sage who has successfully acquired virtue. The sage may of course decide to teach philosophy to others (as long as it does not conflict with more important issues). But given that there are very few sages (*De Ira* 2.10.6), most people will not have the luxury of having a sage as their philosophical teacher. The vast majority of the teachers are going to be progressors themselves. This includes Seneca. As he makes clear, he is not a sage himself (*Ep*. 75.8-16). He still has progress to be made. Thus, he is also a progressor striving to improve himself (*Ep*. 75.8-16). At the same time – while not an official Stoic teacher - he has assumed the role of Luculius' philosophical mentor. How does this work? How can Seneca and the philosophical teachers be teachers of a craft, when they are not experts themselves.

Seneca's answer is that while the teachers are progressors themselves, they have nevertheless made more progress than other progressors. Thus, they have something to teach these other progressors. But what is it that they teach? The answer seems to be that the teachers teach other less advanced progressors how they can practice the art of living. Thus, just like a medical student can practice the art of medicine at the same time as she is learning how to practice this art by an experienced doctor, so a student of philosophy, a progressor, can be taught how to practice philosophy by a more advanced progressor. What being a more advanced practitioner means in this context will be discussed in chapter 2. Note however, that the expert practitioner of the craft of philosophy is the sage, who has successfully acquired virtue. Finally, as we shall see in the last chapter, while the Stoic progressor will need to be thought how to practice the art of philosophy to begin with, she will soon, once she has learned this, be able to practice philosophy on her own – and thus carry out the work of the self on the self on her own.

1.5. Tools

As we saw in the case of medicine and house-building the expert practitioner of these crafts will use specific tools to manipulate their relevant material in order to transform the material into its desired end-state. In the case of medicine, we may cite the scalpel and the x-ray machine as examples of tools belonging to the craft, while in the case of house building we may cite the saw and the hammer as examples of tools belonging to the craft.

At, this point we have arrived at an interesting question. What are the tools of the craft of philosophy which the practitioner of philosophy will use in order to improve her mind (the third question)? Moreover, we may ask about the particular functions of these tools. There is considerable disagreement in the literature about Seneca's thoughts on these questions. In particular, this debate concerns the relationship between philosophical argument, on the one hand, and methods of habituation like spiritual exercises on the other. My own answer draws considerably on Foucault's work on the so called "technologies of the self." According to Foucault, technologies of the self-describe a type of technology "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (1988, p. 18). Using Foucault's definition, I shall claim that the tools of philosophy are these technologies of the self, and that both philosophical argument and methods of habituation like philosophical exercises are examples of such technologies. Presenting some of the tools I think we can identify in Seneca's writings, as well as the function of these tools will be the main concern of chapter 3.

1.6. Practicing the craft

Let us do a recap of what has been said so far. The question we want to answer is how does the Stoic progressor acquire virtue according to Seneca. So far, I have explained who Seneca is, and I have given a brief definition of virtue as a perfectly rational mind. I have also given a definition of the Stoic progressor as someone who approaches Stoic philosophical teachers with the aim of acquiring virtue. In order to acquire virtue, there is a craft which helps its practitioners acquire the desired object – in this case virtue – and this craft is philosophy,

which is conceived of both as the art of living and the medical art of the mind. What we need to find out next is the way in which practicing this craft will help transform the mind of the progressor and bring it close to virtue. Thus, we may turn to the fourth question. Answering this question will give us a more in-depth answer to the research question than what I have been able to provide so far. Bringing back our analogies again, answering this question for the craft of correspond to a description of how the doctor will practice the craft of medicine in order to promote the health of his patient, or, similarly to a description of how the builder will practice the art of housebuilding in order to build a house.

To answer this question, we need to understand the material which philosophy manipulates and the tools philosophy uses to perform this manipulation. Understanding both of these issues will therefore be important topics to understand in order to answer the research question. For this reason, these topics are the subjects of the next two chapters of the thesis. Thus, what I propose to do further, then, is to first explore in more detail the material which the craft of philosophy manipulates (i.e. the mind). In this discussion, I will also provide a more in-depth account of virtue (the mind in its perfected state). This will be the subject of chapter 2. Following this, I want to seek to identify some of the tools which Seneca thinks philosophy uses to manipulate our mind in order to transform it into virtue. This will be the subject of chapter 3. Once we have a clear understanding of both the material and the tools, we can, finally, in the last chapter of the thesis, bring these two elements together and look at the way in which the progressor will be using these philosophical tools on her own mind in order to bring it closer to virtue. Thus, the question I am trying to answer in this final chapter will be the question of how the Stoic progressor practice the craft of philosophy in order to acquire virtue. Once we have answered this question, we shall have a more in-depth answer to the question of how Seneca thinks the Stoic progressor acquires virtue.

Chapter summary

In this chapter we have seen that according to Seneca the progressor must practice the craft which has virtue as its end goal. This craft is philosophy – the art of living. Using the crafts of medicine and housebuilding as examples, we saw that, most crafts have a practitioner of the craft, tools of the craft, a material manipulated by the practitioner of the craft, a goal of the craft, and a beneficiary of the craft. With this in mind, I sought to identify the various components for the craft of philosophy. The goal of the craft of philosophy is virtue, and the

practitioner of the craft is the progressor. Furthermore, we saw that Seneca sees the material of this craft to be the mind of the practitioner. With respect to the tools of the craft, I presented Foucault's definition of technologies of the self as a promising definition of a philosophical tool, which I will use in chapter 3 to help identify more specifically Seneca's individual philosophical tools. The last section of the chapter then identified the need for understanding the way in which the progressor will use technologies of the self (i.e. the philosophical tools) on her mind in order to transform it into virtue. Answering this question will give us the answer to the research question of the thesis. The final section of the chapter ended by setting the agenda for the coming chapters. Chapter 2 will delve deeper into Seneca's understanding of the mind; chapter 3 will seek to identify some of Seneca's philosophical tools; while the fourth and final chapter – building on the answers found in chapter 2 and 3 - will provide an answer to the question of the way in which the progressor will use technologies of the self (i.e. the philosophical tools) on her mind in order to transform it into virtue.

Chapter 2: Material

Chapter introduction

As I showed in the previous chapter, since philosophy is the craft whose goal is to make its practitioners acquire virtue, Seneca thinks the Stoic progressor can acquire virtue by practicing the craft of philosophy. As is the case with other crafts, philosophy involves the usage of tools on a material in order to transform that material into a desired end state. In the case of philosophy, this end state is a perfectly rational mind, i.e. virtue. To better understand how the Stoic progressor acquires virtue by practicing philosophy, I proposed, at the end of the last chapter that we will need to understand both the martial and the tools involved as the Stoic progressor begins practicing the craft of philosophy. Therefore, the next two chapters will explain the material and the tools involved in the practice of the craft of philosophy. The final chapter, bringing tools and materials together, will then explain how practicing the craft of philosophy improves the character of the progressor, bringing it closer and closer – and possibly all the way– to virtue. The focus of this chapter is the material of philosophy, i.e. the material which the Stoic progressor – the practitioner of the craft of philosophy – will manipulate with philosophical tools in order to acquire virtue, i.e. the mind. The aim of the aim of the chapter is to understand this material and its capacity for change.

The first section of the chapter identifies three universal features of the human mind, which is given by the human soul. These are (1) an innate instinct to preserve ourselves as the kind of creature that we are, (2) rationality (3) the ability to develop lasting and permanent traits of character.

In the second section, I will look at the first feature. This feature is referred to by the Greek Stoics as "Oikeiosis," describes an innate ability of all living creatures to care for their own well-being as the kind of creature that they are. This ability ensures that we all seek what we judge to be good.

The second feature, rationality (described in the third section of the chapter), gives us two abilities: language and choice. Language gives human beings a special form of impressions. All creatures receive impressions through their senses, but as creatures with a rational soul,

human beings receive these impressions in the form of linguistic propositions which can either be true or false. Furthermore, our capacity for choice gives us the ability, once we received a linguistic proposition of this kind, to make a decision about whether to accept the impression as true or false. To preserve ourselves in as the kind of creature that we are – as creatures with a rational soul – we must recognize our ability to decide how we respond to impressions and then – since accepting false impression as true is irrational and therefore corrosive to our rationality – make sure that we only accept impressions that are true and that we reject all impressions that are false. By doing this we will live in accordance with both our own nature as human beings and with nature as a whole (the rational cosmos).

Unfortunately, the society we grow up in is dominated by false beliefs. As we grow up, most people therefore acquire a substantive number of false beliefs – especially concerning the things that have value and which things don't. False beliefs of this kind are particularly nefarious, as they give rise to emotions. The third feature – the topic of the fourth section of this chapter – describes how our mind, through repeated assents to this type of false impressions, gradually comes to form a more lasting disposition ("infirmities") which is difficult to get rid of through philosophical training. At worst, such lasting dispositions develop into a permanent disposition, making our minds incurably ill and irrational. Thus, the development of our minds, either towards perfect rationality or irrationality, is decided by the what sorts of impressions we accept. By accepting false impressions as true, we will over time come to incorporate such impressions into our character, thus making ourselves more and more irrational. This feature of the mind to incorporate the impressions it accepts into its physical form which over time may develop into permanent dispositions has important consequences for whether or not practicing the craft philosophy will successfully bring the progressor all the way to a virtuous mind.

2.1. Universal features of the mind

We can identify three universal features of the human mind in Seneca's writings.

(1) An innate instinct to preserve ourselves as the kind of creature that we are.

(2) Rationality

(3) The capacity to develop lasting and permanent traits of character

In this section, I shall describe each of these features in due order.

2.2. Instinctual self-preservation

Three Letter – Letter 9, 36, and 121, clearly show that Seneca followed the other Stoics in claiming that human beings – as well as animals – have an innate instinct for self-preservation (Sellars, 2006, p. 108). In fact, Seneca sees this instinct as the deepest motivation behind all our actions. The Stoic referred as the theory of Oikeiosis. Let us look at the relevant passages of these three letters in closer detail – first with respect to animals, and them with respect to human beings.

In Letter 121, Seneca remarks how "An inverted tortoise feels no pain, but it is disturbed by missing its natural condition" (*Ep*. 121.8). Something in the tortoise gives it a dislike lying on its shell and a preference for standing on its feet. Whatever this thing in the tortoise is, it gives the tortoise the motivation to try to turn itself around, and we can therefore observe that the tortoise lying on its shell is striving to turn itself around. What this thing might be, we are told later in the same letter. Animals, Seneca says "when just born or hatched, know at once by themselves what is harmful and avoid things that could cause their death" (*Ep*. 121.18). Such self-preservatory behavior can be observed in animals prior to learning – i.e. prior to animals have had the opportunity to learn from experience that certain things can harm them (*Ep*. 121.19). Therefore, they must have an instinct for self-preservation in them already from birth. Thus, he claims, animals have an innate or "natural" instinct for self-preservation (*Ep*. 121.20). Similarly, in Letter 36, he remarks that "all creatures have a drive for self-preservation" (*Ep*. 36.8). And in Letter 121, we find him saying that this instinct that it is "not grafted onto them [i.e. animals] but innate" (Ep. 121.17).

We can also see that Seneca finds this same instinct for self-preservation in human beings. In Letter 9.17, he speaks of how human beings have "a natural instinct" and that "we innately find certain … things appealing." Then, in Letter 36, he tells us that our "nature" as human beings is "designed for self-love." Finally, in Letter 121, we find him saying that "my concern for myself is prior to everything else" (*Ep*. 121.17)

Clearly, Seneca sees an instinct for self-preservation as an innate trait which can be found in both humans and animals. However, we must be careful not to misunderstand what self-preservation really means here. The self-preservation Seneca has in mind, should not be understood as a kind of narrow egoism – at least not in human beings. Rather, as Klein (2016, p. 160) points out, the "self" that we are trying to preserve is the self that is given to us by our constitution. All creatures in the cosmos have their own constitution. We can speak of the constitution of the tortoise, of plants and of humans. Our instinct for self-preservation should be understood as an instinct to preserve ourselves as the sort of creature that we are. For all creatures, there are things that help maintain their particular constitution, and things that deteriorate them. Animals and plants all have an immediate awareness of their own constitution, of what things help sustain it and ought to sought and which things deteriorate it and therefore ought to be avoided. As Seneca points out in Letter 9, the sage, who perfectly preserves her own constitution as a human being, is not only concerned about herself. Rather, because "nature attaches human beings to one another", she gets married, raises children and pursues friendship (*Ep*. 9.16-17).

When we successfully attempt to pursue the things that help maintain our constitution and attempt to avoid the things that deteriorate it, we can be said to be living in accordance with our own nature as the kind of creature that we are. Animals, it seems are always able to do live in this way (*Ep*. 121.16-18). For human beings things are somewhat more complicated. While, as we have seen, we also have an innate instinct for preserving our own constitution, our understanding, both of our own constitution and of the things that preserve and deteriorate it, is often confused. As human beings become adults, we come to acquire rationality, and when this happens, it is our rationality that becomes the defining characteristic of our constitution. This makes the human constitution special. Apart from us, it is only God (the cosmos, or nature as a whole) that has a rational constitution. Therefore, human beings not only have the capacity to live in accordance with our own nature (i.e. our constitution), but with nature as a whole. However, by the time our rationality is fully developed, most human beings will have acquired an imperfect form of rationality as they have acquired a whole range of false beliefs both about what sort of creature that they are, about the sort of things help sustain their constitution, and about the things that deteriorate their constitution. Thus, while our instinct for self-preservation ensures that we always pursue the things that we perceive to be good and avoid the things we perceive to be bad, we will do this the wrong way if we have mistaken beliefs about what things are good for us and what things are bad for us.

To be able to live in accordance with our own nature and nature as a whole we must therefore cultivate our rationality, get rid of our false beliefs and begin to pursue the things that sustain us as rational creatures and avoid the things that deteriorates us as rational creatures.

2.3. Rationality: language and choice

Now that we have seen that Seneca thinks all human beings have a mind with an innate instinct for self-preservation, we can move on to the second of the three universal features of the human mind, namely our rationality. Rationality, however, is only a universal trait among adult human beings. Thus, unlike our innate instinct for self-preservation, Seneca does not think rationality is present in children. Here, I want to understand what Seneca thinks rationality is. What does it mean for human adults to have a rational mind?

The Stoics hold that reason is characterized the ability to translate impressions into linguistic propositions whose content can be true or false and the ability to decide whether or not to assent to this content as true or false. Thus, we can identify rationality with two abilities: (a) language and (b) choice.

(a) Language

Language in the sense of the capacity to translate sensory impressions into linguistic propositions whose content can be true or false. An impression is a very broad concept for the Stoics. It includes all the information our sensory organs provide us with – including very strong feelings – at any given moment. Our sensory organs gives us impressions about the world. For example, I now have the impression that I am sitting at home in my couch and writing this particular section of my master thesis. I get this impression through a combination of sight (I can see my laptop on my desk. I can see my fingers moving on the keyboard I can see the rest of my living room at the edge of my visual field, and so on). When taken together, all my sensory input makes up the totality of my sensory experience. Based on this sensory experience I get the impression that I am sitting at home and writing my thesis.

This last part, the combination of all the information into a single distinctive impression which is expressible in language, is a crucial part of the Stoic conception of an impression. For human beings, who are in possession of a rational soul, all the information provided by

our different individual sensory organs are, through reason [*ratio*], combined together into a single impression expressible in terms of a linguistic proposition about matters of fact. In other words, my mind somehow translates the information provided by my sight, my smell, my hearing, my touch, my taste into a single distinctive impression expressed in the form a linguistic proposition (i.e. the impression is expressed through language) about matters of fact (i.e. in the form: it is the case that x). Because impressions are capable of being expressed linguistically by creatures who are in position of reason, the Stoics also referred to the impressions had by a creature in possession of reason as lekton, or sayable (Kaster 2010b, p. 98).

A final, important point about impressions is that they arise involuntarily. What I see, touch, hear and so on, is in some way forced upon me by the external world. Having such impressions is therefore – as the Stoics would say – not "up to us" (Durand et al, 2023). This happens to us automatically without any form of action or decision from our part.

(b) Choice

Choice in the sense of the ability to decide whether or not to assent to this content as true or false. This is what the human capacity for freedom and happiness ultimately depends on. In our choices, we can either accept events as they are determined by God's perfect rationality to happen and thus align ourselves with the way of the cosmos (living in accordance with the way in which the already determined events of nature unfolds).

Having received a certain impression, which is completely outside of our control, we come to an aspect of our rationality which is "up to us" (Durand et al, 2023). Once we have received an impression in the form of a linguistic propositions about matters of fact about the world based on the input from our senses and its interaction with our rational soul, the Stoics claimed that we have the ability to make the choice of either accepting the impression at hand as true or rejecting it as false. If we accept the proposition as true, we give our assent to the validity of the proposition. In other words, we accept it as a true description of what the world is actually like. However, if we instead think the impression at hand is false, then we will reject the proposition. Thus, we assent "to the impression that *p*" if we "deem *p* to be true; otherwise, [we] suspend assent on *p*" (Durand et al, 2023)

To live in accordance with nature, then, the human being will have to select and reject the right things. To do this, we need to get clear about the things that have value and the things that does not have value. The things that have value we will call good, the things that are neutral we will call indifferent and the things that have negative value we will call bad. In order to identify which things belong to which category, we need to practice philosophical thinking because philosophy – with its tools of logical analysis and critical thinking – is the art by which we come to have a well-reasoned understanding of the way things really are.

The Stoic theory of value is quick to summarize. Virtue, and virtue alone, is good. Vice, and vice alone, is bad. All other things are considered to be indifferents. But some of these indifferents are preferred indifferents, while others are dispreferred indifferents. The preferred indifferents are the things that sustain our bodily health, but which does not sustain our rationality. The dispreferred indifferents are the things that deteriorates our bodily health, but which does not deteriorate our rationality

2.4. The capacity to develop lasting and permanent traits of character

If we assent to enough false impressions that constitutes passion, the false beliefs that make up the passions will get "ingrained" into our mind (in Seneca's words "right down in the vital organs") as we develop what Seneca calls the infirmities of mind (*Ep*. 50.4-5). These infirmities are sicknesses in our character which it is difficult for philosophy to treat, thus making us less able to acquire virtue. In the worst cases, it seems the infirmities can develop into a permanent state of our character which philosophy is no longer able to get rid off. Seneca explains this, as well as how the infertilities develop from repeated assents to the impressions that give rise emotions, in Letter 75:

> **11** … The infirmities are faults that have become ingrained and hard, like greed and ambition. These are conditions that bind the mind much more tightly and have begun to be permanent afflictions. To give a brief definition, an infirmity is a persistent judgement in a corrupted person that certain things very much are worth pursuing that in fact are only slightly worth pursuing. Or, if you prefer, we can define it this way: it is being overly concerned with things that one ought to pursue either casually or not at all, or considering something to be of great value when in fact it is either of some lesser value or of no value at all. **12** The emotions are unjustifiable movements of the

> mind that are abrupt and agitated. These, when they occur frequently and do not receive any treatment, cause the infirmity, just as a single cold in the head, if it is not protracted, brings on nothing more than a cough; but if it happens repeatedly for a long time, it brings on a wasting disease (*Ep*. 75.11-12).

However, the minds capacity to develop permanent traits of character can also go in a positive direction. As it turns out, the sage, who has attained a virtuous mind, is incapable of losing virtue: “virtues once attained cannot depart from us” (*Ep*. 50.9).

As both the development of infirmities and the incapability of losing virtue shows, the mind thus has the capacity to develop lasting and permanent dispositions. In the case of the infirmities, prior to these becoming permanent dispositions, we should expect that the practitioner of the craft of philosophy will face more difficulties in getting rid of these faults than she does in the case of the emotions.

Chapter summary

As we have seen in this chapter, the human mind – the material which the Stoic progressor will manipulate in order to acquire virtue – has three universal features according to Seneca. These traits are the instinctual self-preservation of our own constitution, rationality, consisting of language and choice, where language gives us the ability to receive and understand impressions in the form of linguistic propositions that can be either true or false, and where choice is our ability to decide whether to accept or reject these propositions. Finally, we saw that the mind, based on our choices, has the capacity to develop enduring and permanent traits of character which, in the case of repeated assents to false impressions, gradually become difficult or impossible for the practitioner of the craft of philosophy to get rid of – thus haltering or preventing the progressor’s quest to acquire virtue.

Chapter 3: Tools

Chapter introduction

We have now arrived and the second subject I said we would need to discuss in chapter 1: the tools of the craft of philosophy. The role of these within the craft of philosophy is that they will be used by the practitioner of philosophy – i.e. the progressor – in order for her to manipulate her own character so that her character gradually approaches a virtuous state. In this chapter, I will try to explain what these tools are, and, moreover, what their functions are. I shall argue that, just as we can identify two aspect of virtue that consists of theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, so we can identify tools whose main function is to improve the progressor's practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. Thus – as we should expect from our propensity to develop lasting traits of character – I argue that, at least in the case of Seneca's Stoicism, it does not seem correct that the Stoic progressor solely acquires virtue through the study of arguments. Other philosophical tools are also necessary. Moreover, following Foucault, I argue show that we can identify several of such tools in Seneca's writings. Among these practical tools, we find various examples in Seneca that fits Foucault's categories of meditatio and gymnasia. Moreover, the precepts as well as Seneca's nightly self-examination – as presented in On Anger – seem to be of a different nature than mere philosophical arguments. I therefore claim that these tools also belong in the category of the practical tools. Finally, philosophical arguments and discourse, while not the only philosophical tool, is still identifiable as a philosophical tool in Seneca's writings. Thus, in addition to the practical tools, I also discuss these theoretical tools and what their function in terms of contributing to the character improvement of the progressor consists of.

3.1. Technologies of the self

The first question I want to understand in this section is the concept of a philosophical tool. What sort of things could count as tools in the craft of philosophy? To better understand what we will be looking for here, let us return, once again, to the craft analogy from chapter 1. By looking at our two other craft, medicine and house-building, and the sort of things that are considered as tools in these crafts, we may better understand what sort of things will be considered as tools in the art of living.

An example of a tool in the craft of medicine is the scalpel. This tool is used by the doctor – the practitioner of the craft of medicine – in order to promote the health of the patient – the beneficiary of the craft of medicine – by performing surgeries in which one may attempt to remove a disease from the body of the patient. In this way, the scalpel contributes to promoting the health of the patient's body, which is the goal of the craft of medicine.

A different example of a tool used in the craft of medicine is the x-ray machine. The x-ray machine helps contribute to promoting the health of the patient by helping the doctor identify the presence of diseases in the body of the patient. Thus, it seems that the criteria for something being considered a medical tool is that a medical tool has to be something the doctor can use in order to promote the health of the patient.

What about tools in the craft of house building? Here, an example of a tool is the hammer, which the practitioner of the craft of house building can use in order to build the house. If we connect this together with what we found out about the tools of medicine, it seems that we have arrived at an understanding of what it takes for something to be considered a tool of a particular craft: the tool of a craft is whatever can be used by the practitioner of the craft in order to promote the goal of that craft.

Let us turn back, then, to the craft of philosophy. What sort of things will Seneca consider as tools of the craft of philosophy – given this understanding of the role of tools within crafts in general? Here, Foucault's (1988) concept of "Technologies of the self" does, in my view, provide a useful guide for understanding what sort of things we may consider as Senecan philosophical tools. According to Foucault (1988, p. 18)., technologies of the self are technologies

> which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

So a philosophical tool is a technology of the self – something which the Stoic progressor can use, either on her own or with the help of a Stoic philosophical teacher, in order to transform her character (i.e. herself) into a virtuous state.

Given this conception of philosophical tools as technologies of the self, what sort of things fit the description of a technology of the self? As we have seen, Nussbaum (1994, p. 353-354) claimed that in Stoic philosophy, one acquires virtue through argument. Thus, it would seem that Seneca's philosophical tools are arguments. And to the extent that Seneca thinks arguments are useful for the Stoic progressor when seeking change her character in ways that bring her closer to virtue, arguments will fit the conception of a philosophical tools as technologies of the self. As I will show, I do think arguments counts as Senecan philosophical tools. However, I think Nussbaum (1994, p. 353) is wrong – at least when applied to Seneca's version of Stoicism, when she claims that arguments are the only philosophical tools necessary for acquiring virtue. On the contrary, I think we can identify philosophical tools other than arguments in Seneca's philosophical writings, and that, moreover, that the usage of these tools will be necessary If the progressor is to acquire virtue. Thus, contrary to Nussbaum's claim here, I will argue that, at least in the case of Seneca's Stoicism, the Stoic progressor will not acquire virtue by arguments alone. Other philosophical tools are required.

3.2. Letter 89: Seneca on the three parts of philosophy

To get a better understanding of what these other philosophical tools may be, I want to turn our attention to Seneca's Letter 89. Here, Seneca endorses the orthodox Stoic division of philosophy into three parts: ethics, logic, and physics[25]. If philosophy has three parts, we should expect that the various tools of philosophy all fit within one or more of these parts. However, while I think this is the case, what interests me in particular about this letter is the way in which Seneca describes the various subparts of the ethical part of philosophy. From what Seneca writes here, it seems justified to see Seneca's philosophical tools as not just divisible into an ethical part, a physical part and a logical part – but also that Seneca's

[25] Note: what sort of things counts as ethics and logic does not exactly correspond to what sort of things are considered as logic or ethics in the academic discipline of philosophy today (Sellars, 2006, p. 42)

philosophical tools can also be divided into practical tools and theoretical tools[26]. With this in mind, let us look at Letter 89 in more detail.

In Letter 89, Seneca tells us that "[a]ccording to the major and most numerous authorities, philosophy has three parts: ethics, physics, and logic" (*Ep*. 89.9). Each of these parts have their own unique task in helping the progressor acquire virtue. Here, physics is the part which "studies the nature of things" (*Ep*. 89.9). Seneca divides this part into "two subdivisions": "corporeal things" and "incorporeal things" (*Ep*. 89.16). These, it seems, must be areas of studies as in the study of corporeal things and the study of incorporeal things.

Next, logic is the part which "examines the meaning of words, the structure of sentences, and the forms of arguments, with a view of preventing falsehood from masquerading as truth" (*Ep*. 89.9). This part can also be split into two, with "rhetoric" ("questions") attending to "expression, thoughts, and organization," and the second part, "dialectic ("answers"), being further divided into two where one part, "words," deals with "the things that are said" and the other part, "meaning," deals with "the utterances through which [words] are said" (*Ep*. 89.17). Words and meanings can be further divided into multiple parts, but – to keep things relatively simple – Seneca decides not to complicate things further (*Ep*. 89.17). Notice, here - as was also the case of physics – that the various parts of logic all seem to correspond to areas of study. That is, these are subjects and theories which the Stoic progressor could be taught in a contemporary classroom setting.

What Seneca writes about the ethical part, however, is especially interesting. Ethics, we are told, is the part of philosophy whose task is to help the progressor regulate her mind (*Ep*. 89.9). It can be divided into three parts. One part "assigns to each thing the proper value and determines what it is worth." This part seems to be dealing with the philosophical theory of value, deciding what things are good and what things are bad. The second and the third part, however, seem to have something different than philosophical theories – and the argument in support of those theories – as their concern. The second part of ethics "deals with impulse," while the third and final part deals with "action" (89.14). These parts, in seems to me, cannot be merely theoretical studies. Rather, it seems that these parts of ethics must include practical

[26] I am aware here that, for Seneca, philosophy is fundamentally a unified craft and that the division of it into three parts is first and foremost, as he makes clear in Letter 89.1-2, a pedagogical devise.

exercises whose role is to help the progressor regulate her mind. Seneca confirms this practical conception of these two final parts of ethics in his subsequent comment:

> **14** … That is to say the objectives of ethics are first, to enable you to judge what each thing is worth; second, to enable you to entertain a well-adjusted and controlled impulse with respect to them; and third, to enable you to achieve harmony between your impulse and your action so that you may be consistent in all your behaviour (*Ep*. 89.14)

Evidently, these two parts of ethics do not teach theoretical knowledge to the progressor. Rather, the subject matter of these two parts of ethics seems to be practical skills. Furthermore, we are told that

> **15** Any defect in one of these three areas also causes disturbance to the others. What good is it to have made a comparative assessment of everything if your impulses are ungoverned? What good is it to have restrained your impulses and have your desires under control if in your actions themselves you are insensitive to circumstances and don't know the proper time and place and manner of doing each thing? **It is one thing to understand the worth and value of things; it is another to understand the demands of the moment; and something else again to restrain one's impulses and to proceed to what one has to do without rushing into things.** A life is harmonious with itself only when action does not fall short of impulse and when impulse is generated on the basis of what each thing is worth, varying in its intensity according to worth of its objective (Sen *Ep*. 89.15) [emphasis mine].

Here, we see a clear distinction on Seneca's part between theoretical understanding and practical ability. Understanding the value of things can only get the progressor so far. She will also need to learn the skill of identifying the demands of the moment and the skill of restraining her impulses. Thus, there seems to ground for philosophical tools that are not merely the study of philosophical theories and arguments. I think this view is further supported by the fact that Seneca evidently does not think that the first part of ethics is enough to make a person to act in accordance with his judgement about which things have positive value, which things are indifferent and which things have negative value. This interpretation also fits with remarks Seneca makes in Letter 94 where he states that the study of

philosophical decretes [*decreta*] – i.e. the philosophical theories and the arguments in support of this theories – is not enough to make a person acquire virtue:

> **24** … comprehensive philosophical reasoning, exerting all its force, will not remove the mind's infection when it has become ingrained and long lasting (Ep. 94.24)

Therefore, given the presence of philosophical exercises in Seneca's philosophical writings, I think interpretation is that these two parts of ethics have as their task the harmonization of the progressor's actions with the ethical theory she has studied in the first part of ethics. In other words, I think the role of these two parts of ethics is, as Sellars (2009, p. 117) has put it, to help the progressor "digest" "philosophical arguments, theories, and doctrines" so that she becomes able to "produce the actions … appropriate to [her] art" – i.e. the actions appropriate the art of living.

If the second and the third part both have as their tasks, in different ways, of harmonizing a person's actions with his judgement and if it is right that the first part primarily deals with arguments in support of the right judgements and the against the wrong judgements, then the second and the third part will involve other things than philosophical argument. Here it seems that Seneca is alluding to need of training oneself in how one respond to certain impulses. Having a correct theoretical understanding, is not enough to shape one's action so that it becomes in harmony with Stoic philosophy. One will also need to practice to be able to apply this theoretical understanding in practical situations. Given the content of the second and third part of ethics, it seems that, that practical exercises will be included in Seneca's list of the parts of philosophy (under the heading of ethics), and that such exercises – contrary to Nussbaum's claim (assuming her claim extends to Seneca) – therefore will be a necessary part of the education and training of the progressor who succeeds in acquiring virtue.

Thus, we can already see from Seneca's remarks on ethics that the tools of philosophy, the technologies of the self, will be a mixture of theoretical studies that at least must involve the studies of arguments and, furthermore, practical training where one trains oneself in one's ability to apply the theory in practice. Furthermore, Seneca's remarks in *Ep*. 89.15 make it clear that it is possible to have theoretical understanding without practical ability, since "[i]t is one thing to understand the worth and value of things … [and] another to understand the demands of the moment … [and yet another to be able to] restrain one's impulses." Thus, his

intellectualism must involve both a "knowledge that" and a "knowledge how," which combines together to formed the expert knowledge – the episteme – of the master practitioner of the art of living – a knowledge which is expressed in the corporal mind of this individual. This does not have to mean that actions contrary to one's better judgement (i.e. weak-willed action, or akrasia) is possible. Rather, what seems to be going on here is that one's actions are always the expression of the best of one's ability. You are always trying to apply your theoretical understanding in practice but given the current state of character and lack of skills in the second and third part of ethics, you are not able to apply the theory in practice. To do this, you need to train yourself in this ability. And this skill is included in the *episteme* of the sage – the master practitioner of the art of living.

3.3. Theoretical tools and practical tools

Let us recap what has been said in this chapter so far. What I am trying to do here is to identify the philosophical tools in Seneca's writings which the thinks the Stoic progressor can use in order to acquire virtue. Thus, given that tools are a necessary part of the practice of any craft and that philosophy, in Seneca's view, is a craft, it is necessary for us to understand the tools that the progressor will be using in practicing the craft of philosophy if we want to understand Seneca's answer to the question of how the Stoic progressor may acquire virtue. So far, we have seen that the tools of philosophy are technologies of the self – i.e. tools or technologies which the progressor can use, either on her own or with the help of a Stoic philosophical teacher, in order to transform her character (i.e. herself) into a virtuous state. I then began looking what these tools where. As we saw, Nussbaum thinks the Stoic progressor acquires virtue through argument alone. Thus, only argument can be a necessary philosophical tool for the progressor who want to acquire virtue[27]. I then turned to Letter 89 and discovered there that an understanding of the arguments in support of the Stoic theory of value does not seem to be sufficient for the progressor to acquire virtue, given that there are two further parts of ethics. What I want to do now is present a division of Senecan philosophical tools into tools that deal with philosophical theory (arguments) and tools that are better conceived of as practical.

[27] Nussbaum's statement is compatible with the view that there are tools other than argument which can be used to help improve certain character who are unable to acquire virtue.

As I see it then, we can identify two kinds of philosophical tools in Seneca: theoretical tools and practical tools. In this section I shall present the difference between these two types of tools and show examples different practical and theoretical tools in Seneca's writings. In discussing the individual tools I shall also try to say something about what I take the function of these tools to be – i.e. how the tools may help the progressor in acquiring virtue. Note, however, that this list of tools does not lay claim to be an exhaustive list. There may be more tools in Seneca's writings identifiable in Seneca's philosophical writings[28].

(a) *Theoretical tools*

As we have seen from Letter 89, Seneca thinks philosophical discourse can be divided into discourse on ethics, physics and logic. Each of these constitutes its own theoretical tool. The function of these tools will be to provide the progressor with the "knowledge that" component of virtue.

(b) *Practical tools*

i. Exercise: Meditatio

What sort of training will one need to undergo in order to learn to "understand the demands of the moment" and to "restrain one´s impulses" is practical situations? Foucault's work is useful here as well. In Technologies of Self, the term askesis describes "a set of practices by which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permeant principle of action" (Foucault, 1988 p. 35). The most important parts of askesis are the "exercises in which the subject puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use discourse with which he is armed" (Foucault, 1988, p. 35). Foucault (1988, p. 36) distinguishes between two types of Stoic exercises, which he also finds in Seneca's writings: the meditatio and the gymnasium.

As Foucault describes them, the exercises that fall under the heading of the meditatio are largely exercises of the imagination where the progressor undertaking the exercise places herself "in a situation" in which her ability to respond appropriately to impressions would be

[28] For an argument which is compatible with the view that Seneca's tragic plays may themselves be a kind of philosophical tool, see Nussbaum (1993)

tested (Foucault, 1988, p. 36). She will then ask herself the question of how she would react in such a situation and then remind herself of which responses are the correct one's in order to prepare herself to respond in this way when a situation of this kind arises in real life. The so called premeditation malurum is a famous example of this, where the progressor will try to imagine herself undergoing so kind of future "evil" – an event in which one is deprived of externals - i.e. an event that is not really evil but which are cultural upbringing has taught us to judge as evil. Newman (1987, p. 1474), however, claims that an important feature of the meditatio were that they required that "[a] particular time must be set aside, particular phrases or images must be used, a particular method must be employed." Thus, Newman's account of what a meditation involves is somewhat narrower. However, even under this narrower definition, we find clear examples of such meditatio-exercises in Seneca. For example, in Letter 4, Seneca asks that Lucilius "rehearse … every day" that "one cannot attain a life free of anxiety if one is too concerned about prolonging it – if one counts living through many consulships as an important good" (*Ep*. 4.4-5). Such a rehearsal might be done in the following way to target the progressor's fear of death:

> 8 … Think: a robber, as well as a foe, can put a knife to your throat … Call to mind the stories of people whose house servants plotted to kill them … 9 … suppose you should fall into the hands of the enemy, and the victor should put you to death. Death is where you are headed anyway! Why do you deceive yourself? Do you realize now for the first time what has in fact been happening to you all along? So it is: since the moment of birth, you have been moving towards your execution. These thoughts, and others like them, are what we must ponder if we want to be at peace as we await the final hour. For fear of that one makes all our other hours uneasy (*Ep*. 4.8-9).

Another example comes in Letter 12. Here Seneca describes (and seems to recommend to Lucilius) an exercise involving the rehearsal of one's own death every night before going to bed:

> **8** Every day … should be treated as though it were bringing up the rear, as though it were the consummation and fulfilment of one's life. Pacuvius … used to hold funeral ceremonies for himself, with wine and the ritual meal. After dinner he would have himself carried to bed as his catamites clapped their hands and chanted in Greek, to the accompaniment of instruments, "Life is done! Life is done!" (*Ep*. 12.8)

ii. Exercise: gymnasia

The gymnasia, in contrast with the imaginary situations of the meditatio, is a form of "training in a real situation, even if it's been artificially induced" (Foucault, 1988, p. 37). This form of training may involve "sexual abstinence, physical privation and other rituals of purification," aimed at both testing and practicing the progressor's "independence … with regards to the external world" – i.e., more specifically, with regards to attachment to externals (the things that fall under the category of indifferents) (Foucault, 1988, p, 37).

An example of such an exercise comes in Letter 18. In order to check "how firm [Lucilius'] mind really is," Seneca asks him to set himself "a period of some days in which [he] will be content with very small amounts of food, and the cheapest kinds, and with coarse, uncomfortable clothing, and say to [himself], "is this what I was afraid of" (*Ep*. 18.5). Later, in the same Letter, Seneca provides us with a better understanding of the purpose of this type of exercise.

> A time when the mind is free of anxieties is the very time when it should prepare itself for adversity: amid the favors of fortune, one should strengthen oneself against the onslaughts of fortune. The soldier in time of peace goes for a run; he constructs a palisade even when no enemy is at hand, wearing himself out with extra effort so as to be strong enough when required. If you want someone not to be alarmed in a crisis, train him ahead of time (*Ep*. 18.6)

iii. Review of the day

In addition to the exercises, I would like to point out three additional practical tools in Seneca's writings. The first of these is found in On Anger 3.36. Here, we see Seneca recommending a practice of reviewing one's day before going to bed. Here is the relevant passage:

> All our senses must be toughened: they have a natural endurance, once the mind has ceased to corrupt them; and the mind must be called to account every day. This was Sextius' practice: when the day was spent and he had retired to

his night's rest, he asked his mind, "Which of your ills did you heal today? Which vice did you resist? In what aspect are you better?" (2) Your anger will cease and become more controllable if it knows that every day it must come before a judge. Is there anything finer, than this habit of scrutinizing the day? What sort of sleep follows this self-examination – how peaceful, how deep and free, when the mind has been either praised or admonished, when the sentinel and secret censor of the self has conducted into one's character! (3) I exercise this jurisdiction daily and plead my case before myself. When the light has been removed and my wife has fallen silent, aware of this habit, that's now mine, I examine my entire day and go back over what I've done and said, hiding nothing from myself, passing nothing by. For why should I fear any consequence from my mistakes, when I'm able to say, "See that you don't do it again, but now I forgive you. (4) In that discussion you spoke too aggressively: from now on don't get involved with people who don't know what they're talking about. People who've never learned don't want to learn. You admonished that fellow more candidly than you should, as a result you didn't correct him, you offended him; in the future (p. 92) consider not just whether what you say is true but whether the person you're talking to can take the truth. A good man delights in being admonished, but all the worst people have the hardest time putting up with correction (*De Ira*, 3.36)

iv. Precepts

The nature, role and importance of the so-called precepts [*præcepta*] is the subject of Seneca's 94th letter. Precepts seems to be short moral instructions that are easy to keep in one's memory and which one is to remind oneself of in daily life or when faced with a challenging situation. Seneca provides us with a few examples of these:

27 … "Don't buy what you can use but what you need; for what you cannot use, a penny is too hight a price" (*Ep*. 94.27)

28 … "Be sparing with time" … (*Ep*. 94.28)

28 … Fortune favors the brave; the coward is his own enemy (*Ep*. 94.28)

Seneca is fond of them recommends them frequently to Lucilius throughout the letters (See for example (*Ep*. 3.5; 5.7; 8.5; 8.9; and 10.5). The function of the precepts seems to be to help remind the progressor of his theoretical teachings when faced with a practical situation (Hadot, 2002, p. 106) (*Ep*. 94.21; 94.25)).

v. Role models

A reoccurring topic in the Letters is the role of other people in the development of our character. Other people, it seems, are highly influential on us. So much so that a person tends to become more like the people he spends time with. This can be for good and bad. Our character becomes corrupted (i.e. we come to acquire false beliefs) initially because as, we grow up, we come to adopt the views about what things have positive value and what things have a negative value that are prevalent in the culture around us. As we start practicing philosophy, Seneca thus recommends that a progressor like Lucilius is careful about who he spends time with. Here the masses are to be avoided:

> **1** Do you ask what you should avoid more than anything else? A crowd. It is not yet safe for you to trust yourself to one. I'll freely admit my own weakness in this regard. Never do I return home with the character I had when I left; always there is something I had settled before that is now stirred up again, something I had gotten rid of that has returned … our minds are recovering from a long illness; **2** contact with the many is harmful to us. Every single person urges some fault upon us, or imparts one to use, or contaminates us without our even realizing it. (*Ep*. 7.1-2)

> **4** A bad man harms a bad man and makes him worse by arousing his anger, approving his gloom, and praising his pleasures. Bad men are at their worst when they combine their faults to the greatest extent, and a single aggregate of wrongdoing is the result. (*Ep*. 109.4)

But those who are better than us will help us:

> **8** Spend time with those who will improve you (*Ep*. 7.8)

And even the sage is benefitted from spending time with other sages:

> **4** … one good man will help another. **5** … He will bring him joy and strengthen his confidence, and each one's delight will grow from the sight of their mutual tranquillity (*Ep*. 109.4-5).

Perhaps taking advantage of this tendency in us to become more like the people we spend time with, Seneca recommends that we pick ourselves a role model to keep in mind as we are confronted by challenges in our daily life:

> **10** … Choose anyone whom you admire for his actions, his words, even for his face, since the face reveals the mind within. Keep that person in view at all times as your guardian or your example. I repeat: we need a person who can set the standard for our conduct. You will never straighten what is crooked unless you have a ruler (*Ep*. 11.10).

Thus, Seneca recommends spend time with our role models in our imagination and try to imitative them in our actions. Much like the precepts, the use of a role model seems to serve the purpose of reminding us of how we ought to act in a particular situation. Like the precepts, then, reminding oneself of one's role models is a practical philosophical tool related to action.

Chapter summary

Drawing everything that has been said in this chapter together, we can present some of Seneca's philosophical tools in the following table:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="9">Philosophy</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3"></td><td colspan="4">Ethics</td><td colspan="2">Physics</td><td colspan="2">Logic</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">“Regulates the mind” (Ep. 89.9)</td><td colspan="2">“studies the nature of things” (Ep. 89.9)</td><td colspan="2">“examines the meaning of words, the structure of sentences, and the forms of arguments, with a view of preventing falsehood from masquerading as truth”
(Ep. 89.9)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Action</td><td colspan="2">Impulse</td><td>Theory of value</td><td>Corporal things</td><td>Incorporeal things</td><td>Rhetoric</td><td>Dialectic</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Tools
Used by the progressor on her own character</td><td rowspan="2">Precepts
Role models
Review of the day</td><td>Meditatio</td><td>Gymnasia</td><td>Discourse (ethics)</td><td colspan="2">Discourse (physics)</td><td colspan="2">Discourse (logic)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Exercises</td><td colspan="5">Discourse (decreta)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Practice</td><td colspan="5">Theory</td></tr>
</table>

This chapter has sought to map out some of Seneca’s philosophical tools. These tools will be used by the practitioner of the craft of philosophy to transform her own mind to bring it closer to virtue. As we have seen, Seneca divides philosophy into three branches: ethics, physics and logic. He further divides these three branches into subbranches, each contributing its specific parts to the character improvement of the progressor. The various components of these subbranches thus corresponds to a group of technologies of the self, or of philosophical tools. With respect to physics and logic, the philosophical tools we can identify as belonging to these branches of philosophy can be classified as theoretical tools as these are objects of study that gives the progressor insight into the world. With respect to ethics, however, we find both a theoretical tool (discourse on ethics), but also a second group of tools that are not theoretical, but practical. These are tools that are used to transform the theoretical knowledge provided by the theoretical tools into our character. Here, I listed the meditatio and gymnasia

exercises, the nightly self-examination, precepts, and role-models, as examples practical philosophical tools.

Chapter 4: Character improvement

Chapter introduction

Finally, we are now ready to see how the Stoic progressor may acquire virtue by practicing the craft of philosophy. In practicing this craft, the Stoic progressor will use philosophical tools to manipulate her own character so that it can be brought closer and closer – possibly all the way – to virtue. Thus, whereas the last two chapters have looked at the material the progressor will seek to transform into virtue and the tools she will be using in order to bring about this transformation, this final chapter will look at the way in which the progressor will be using these philosophical tools on her own mind in order to bring it to virtue. Bringing back our analogies again, this chapter corresponds to a description of how the doctor will practice the craft of medicine in order to promote the health of his patient, or, similarly, to a description of how the builder will practice the art of housebuilding in order to build a house. Thus, the question I am trying to answer in this chapter is "how will the Stoic progressor practice the craft of philosophy in order to acquire virtue?"

Here, I shall argue that, according to Seneca, the Stoic progressor acquires virtue by first undertaking a period of theoretical studies and, then, following this period, by adopting a daily philosophical routine. The goal of the theoretical studies will be to help the Stoic progressor understand how she ought to act. This gives the Stoic progressor one of the two components of virtue – namely "knowledge that", or the theoretical component of virtue. The goal of the daily philosophical routine is to give the progressor the practical knowledge of how to act in accordance with the prescriptions of her theoretical studies. This is done by detecting and removing false beliefs from the character of the progressor. Once the Stoic progressor has acquired perfect rationality by sticking to this routine over time and by receiving some additional help of fortune, she will have acquired the second component of virtue – namely "knowledge how," or the practical component of virtue. Thus, she will be able to always act in accordance with how Stoic theory dictates that she ought to act. This stability in behavior is primary mark of someone who has obtained virtue.

The chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part, the two parts of virtue, we see that Seneca sees the virtuous mind of the sage as consisting of two parts. Moreover, these parts

correspond to the two types of philosophical tools we identified in the previous chapter – i.e. the practical tools and the theoretical tools. The second part, theoretical studies, describes how the progressor can use theoretical philosophical tools to acquire the theoretical component of virtue. This, I argue, is done, in Seneca's view, by undertaking a period of theoretical studies. The third section describes how the progressor can use practical philosophical tools to acquire the practical component of virtue. Here, the construction of a daily philosophical routine will be the key to success. Finally, in the fourth and final part of the chapter, we will look at Seneca's account of what those who are not yet virtuous need to focus on in their daily routine as they get closer to virtue. Here I also provide a discussion of the role of luck in the process of character improvement.

4.1. The two parts of virtue

According to Sellars' (2009, p. 87) interpretation of the Stoics, being an expert practitioner of the craft of philosophy requires that the sage both "learn the principles … of his art" and moreover that he masters the practical aspects of that craft. This seems like a plausible view, and one that is capable of explaining why it is that Seneca can assume a role similar to that of the philosophical teacher without being a sage himself (*Ep*. 75.15). If we want to live in accordance with nature, it seems that we will need to know two things: what it is that we are aiming (that is, how we should act) and, second, how to make ourselves perform such actions in practice. As in medicine or house building, the practitioner of the art of living must first learn how to identify what sort of actions she will try to perform, and then – once the target has been identified – how to make herself perform such actions. There is thus a theoretical component and a practical component to the expertise of the master practitioner of the art of living. Seneca confirms this in letter 94:

> **45** There are two parts of virtue: one is the study of truth, and the other is action (*Ep*. 94.45)

It seems that Seneca - as Sellars (2009, p. 87) interpretation of the Stoics suggests that he would – thinks it is possible for someone to be fairly advanced in one of the domains without being advanced in both. For example, someone may be good at finding out what sort of action to perform without having the skills ("knowledge how") of how to make herself perform such actions. Alternatively, someone might be good at making themselves perform the actions they

resolve to make themselves perform, but often fail to find out which action they ought to perform, and therefore, nevertheless, end up doing the wrong thing. As Sellars (2009, p. 87) suggests, without both the understanding of what one ought to do and the understanding of how to make oneself do it, one will fall short of the expertise of the sage, and therefore one falls short of knowledge. Hence, both the person who only has theoretical understanding exclusively and the person who has only practical skills will fall short of virtue and knowledge. As we have seen, Seneca's remarks in Letter 94, appear compatible with this interpretation.

If our progressor want to get herself to virtue, she will thus have to acquire both the theoretical understanding of what sort of actions she ought to do and the practical skills of identifying these actions in practical situations, as well as the practical skills of making herself perform the actions she has resolved to try to make herself perform. Thus, in order to acquire virtue, the Stoic progressor will need an education consisting of both theoretical studies and practical training (Sellars, 2006, p. 49).

How does Seneca think this education – the process of character improvement – ought to be organized in order to yield a successful outcome? Newman (p. 1484) cites the work of Ilsetraut Hadot[29], who argued that Seneca's view was that theoretical studies – the study of the decreta - will have to come prior to the practical training. This is also supported by Sellars (2006, p. 49). Two remarks Seneca makes – first in the 94th and then in the 95th letter – seems to lend support to this view:

> **47** Virtue consists partly of learning and partly of practice. You have to learn, and you have to consolidate your lessons by action (*Ep*. 94.47)

Evidently, since it is the correct opinions that we need to incorporate into our character, we must first ensure that we know what the correct opinions are. Otherwise, we will incorporate the wrong opinions – just as we do when we grow up in culture dominated by false beliefs about what is good and bad.

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[29] I. Hadot's work *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie* is written in German, and since I don't read German and have not been able to find a translation I have not been able to read her work myself.

Then, in Letter 95, Seneca points out that we need to know what we are aiming at in our actions if we are going to be successful at performing morally perfect actions:

> **5** … even if people act rightly, they may not know that they are doing so. Unless a person is well fashioned from the beginning, and endowed with a completely rational disposition, it is impossible for him to fulfill all the measures so as to **know when, how much, with whom, how, and why a certain action is appropriate**. He cannot be whole-hearted in his endeavor to behave honorably, or even consistent and willing; instead he will dither and hesitate (*Ep*. 95.5) [emphasis mine]

I. Hadot's and Sellars' interpretations appears consisted with Seneca's remarks here. Thus, the view that I shall both present and defend in this chapter, is that the progressor's education will begin by a period of prioritized theoretical studies, followed by the adoption of a daily philosophical routine aimed at detecting and treating aspects of the progressors character that fall short of the ideal of the sage. By sticking to this daily philosophical routine over time, the Stoic progressor will gradually improve herself by bringing her character closer to virtue, and possibly, if the circumstances are fortunate, be able to complete the transformation of her character and acquire virtue.

In the next section, I shall briefly discuss the content of the theoretical studies. Following this, I move on to describe the daily philosophical routine which the Stoic progressor will have to adopt. Here, I first describe this routine as consisting of three steps, before I also describe three features this daily philosophical routine. An overview of the program of character - development can be seen in the table below. I shall describe each component of this table in the next two sections.

	Practice	**Theory**	
Character improvement The usages of the tools by the progressor on her own character improves the rationality of her character	**Daily routine** (1) Spot → (2) Treat → (3) Act → (1) Spot; **Features:** Individualism, Increasingly on your own, Efficiency	**Theoretical studies**	**Fool (Prog-ressor)**
Character in its perfected form	**Knowledge how**	**Knowledge that**	**Sage**
	VIRTUE		

4.2. Theoretical studies

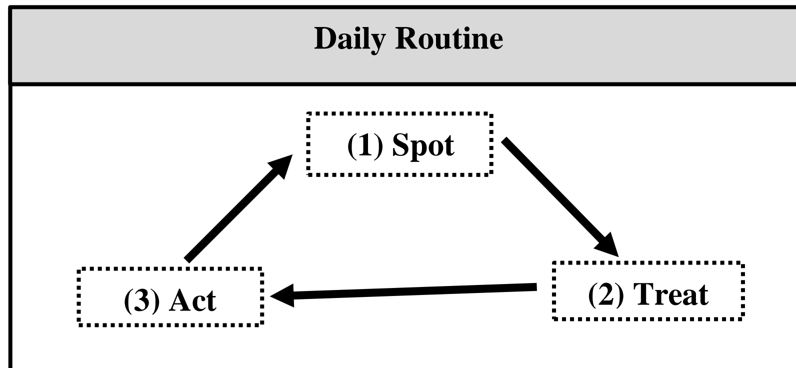
Theoretical studies		
Tools	Part of philosophy	Function of tool
Discourse (ethics)	Ethics (1/3)	Acquiring theoretical understanding
Discourse (physics)	Physics	
Discourse (logic)	Logic	

From the previous chapter on tools, we identified three groups of theoretical tools in Seneca: philosophical discourse on ethics, philosophical discourse on physics, and philosophical discourse on logic. The first part of the progressors journey towards virtue will therefore be the study of these three forms of philosophical discourse. Once, the progressor has familiarized herself sufficiently with these, she will then begin the work of incorporating these doctrines into her character through the daily practices of the philosophical routine.

4.3. The daily philosophical routine

We can now begin to look at the philosophical routine whose job is to incorporate the philosophical discourse into the character of the progressor. Here, I identify three steps of this daily routine which will have to be repeated on a daily basis. In addition to this, I will also be describing three features of the routine.

4.3.1. The steps of the program



Daily routine				
Step	Purpose of step	Tools	Part(s) of philosophy	Function of tool
(1) Spot	Detect false belief in one's own character	Review of the day	Ethics (2/3)	Self-examination. Detect false beliefs in one's own character
(2) Treat	Remove false beliefs from character	Exercises - Meditatio - Gymnasia	Ethics (2/3)	Removing false beliefs by incorporating theoretical knowledge into character so that one is able to act on the basis on this knowledge. Requires habituation, which is provided by exercises
(3) Act	Implementation, practice	Precepts Role models	Ethics (2/3)	Help in practical situations until true beliefs have been successfully removed from progressor's character and replaced by true beliefs

In this section, I will provide an overview of what I have decided to call the Seneca's daily philosophical routine. Following the period of theoretical studies, this is the method by which the Stoic progressor climbs the character ladder (presented in the final section of this chapter) and gradually improves her character so that it gets closer and closer to virtue. The need for such a daily routine can be seen from Seneca's frequent remarks that we need to practice philosophy on daily basis:

> **1** … it is more work to follow through on honorable aims than it is to conceive of them. One must persevere and add strength by constant study, until excellent intentions become excellence of mind (*Ep*. 16.1)

> **7** … Those who give themselves to obedient service to philosophy are not put off from day to day: they have their liberty-turn at once, for this slavery to philosophy is true freedom (*Ep*. 8.7)

As Seneca (*Ep*. 50.7) claims, "to learn virtue is to unlearn one's faults." That is, we become virtuous and acquire perfect rationality by removing false beliefs from our character. While Seneca (*Ep*. 6.1) also makes the seemingly contradictory claim that making progress is about more than removing one's faults, I think what he may be to here as his own "transformation" is the effect that the removal of false beliefs has on our rationality. As we remove false beliefs and improve our understanding of why these beliefs are false, our rationality will simultaneously increase as a result of this reasoning activity – much in the same way as lifting weights grows our muscles (Nussbaum, 1994, pp. 317-318). The aim of the daily philosophical routine is therefore twofold: (1) to spot and remove false beliefs from the mind of the progressor and (2) improve the rationality of the progressor, where aim (2) is accomplished by doing aim (1).

The daily routine consists of three steps. Step 1 (spot) tries to identify the progressors' false beliefs; step 2 (treat) tries to cure the progressor of these false beliefs through exercises; step 3 (act) tries to act on the basis of the philosophical doctrines she learned during her theoretical studies, using philosophical tools like precepts and exempla to aid her. All three steps will be repeated daily. A similar model can be found in Newman (1987, pp.1483-1486). However, in addition to the steps outlined in Newman's article (exercises and action), I emphasize the

importance of establishing a daily routine, and also add a step of self-examination (step 1: spot) to the routine.

Step 1: Spot

Here, the novice, with the help of a teacher, will use specific tests to identify the presence. of erroneous beliefs in the character of the progressor. This can be done by using the tool of the nightly routine from On Anger 3.36, where the progressor goes through her actions of the day and see how they measure up to what she has learned about how to act in her theoretical studies. In the medical analogy, this first step serves an analogous role as diagnosis does in medicine. As we shall see in the section on features, I argue that the novice her teacher will prioritize uncovering the most harmful false beliefs. As the progressor improves, she will increasingly be able to carry out this step on her own.

Step 2: Treat

Here, the novice will be get a prescription exercises from her teacher whose aim is to transfer the content of the theoretical studies into the character of the patient and thus transform the progressors actions so that they come to be in accordance with Stoic philosophical doctrines (Newman, 1989, pp. 1484-1485). As in the first step, and given a correct diagnosis, the selection of a particular exercise is decided on the basis of which available exercise will provide the greatest benefit in the form of character improvement in the shortest amount of time. From the chapter on tools, we saw for example that Seneca recommends using the *meditio* exercise for curing oneself of the false beliefs that give rise to the fear of death. For other errouneous beliefs, the gymnasia exercises may be more efficient.

Step 3: Act

In the final step of the routine, "act," the Stoic progressor will try to act on the basis of philosophical doctrines in a real-life situation. Here, she will use precepts and role-models to help remember how she ought to act in a particular situation. Once a particular false belief has been dealt with, the progressor will repeat this process of diagnosis, treatment and action until she is unable to detect the presence of false beliefs.

4.3.2. The features of the program

In this section, I identify three important features of the daily philosophical routine: the individualistic nature of the method; the fact that, as the progressor get closer to virtue, she will increasingly function as her own philosophical doctor, using the method on herself; and the importance of time and the efficiency at all points of the routine.

a) Individualism

Seneca's practice as a philosophical doctor is highly individualistic, in the sense that it is the situation and state of character of the individual in question that determines the details of the philosophical treatment he will prescribe. This explains why the first step, diagnosis, is crucial. In order to make progress [*proficiere*], we must first know where we are. Only when we have made the accurate diagnosis can we begin an effective treatment. Moreover, the treatment – the exercises that will be used to remove a particular passion from our character – must take account of the individual in question. See for example On Anger 3.1.1-3.1.2:

> Now, Novatus, we'll try it do what you chiefly wanted: excise anger from our minds, or at least rein it in and slow its assaults. Sometimes we should do the job openly and frankly, when the evil is still slight enough to allow that; sometimes we must do it stealthily, when its heat is too high and it grows greater when any obstacle aggravates it. How strong and fresh it is determines whether we should beat it back and force it to retreat, or yield to it while the first storm gusts are spending their fury, lest it snatch up and carry off the very remedies we attempt. (2) **Our strategy must be based on each person's character**. Some are won over by entreaties, while others abuse and harass the submissive. Some we'll frighten into a calm state, while others are deterred by reproach or confession or shame or delay – a sluggish remedy for a headlong evil, which we must use at a last resort (*De Ira*, 3.1.1-3.1.2) [emphasis mine]

b) First with help from others, then increasingly on your own

Seneca's first letter to Lucilius sees a less egalitarian relationship between the student and the teacher. Here, we find Seneca giving orders to Lucilius, instructing him that it is important that he obeys his teacher:

> **1** … Gather and guard the time that until now was being taken from you **… Convince yourself that what I write is true**: some moments are snatched from us, some are filched, and some just vanish (*Ep.* 1.1) [emphasis mine]

Moreover, Seneca is fully aware of this, at one point describing himself as "I, who give you these instructions" (*Ep.*1.4). Thus, we are far away here from the "symmetrical anti-authoritarian ... teacher-pupil relationship" which Nussbaum (1994, p. 329) argues is a core characteristic of Stoic philosophical therapy. At this point Luculius is expected and recommended something closer to blind obedience to his teacher. Nussbaum may be right to insist that Stoic philosophical therapy is marked by a more egalitarian relationship between teacher and pupil than what is the case in Epicurean therapy, but I would argue that this egalitarian feature does not emerge until later in the philosophical therapy, once Lucilius and the progressor has actually made some progress. At this earlier stage, it is in Lucilius best interest not to be too quarrelsome with his teacher.

As the teaching process progresses however, we see a more equal relation between the teacher and the pupil, the doctor and the patient. And eventually, these will become the same person as Lucilius is ready to begin what Foucault (1990, p. 43, 46) describes as "the cultivation of the self" - a work on the self by the self – where Lucilius (and our progressor) is "called upon to take [himself] as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct and purify [himself], and find salvation." In *On Anger* 3.36, Seneca describes how his own teacher, Sexitus, carried out this type of work – a method which Seneca has come to adopt himself:

> All our senses must be toughened: they have a natural endurance, once the mind has ceased to corrupt them; and the mind must be called to account every day. This was Sextius' practice: when the day was spent and he had retired to his night's rest, he asked his mind, "Which of your ills did you heal today? Which vice did you resist? In what aspect are you better?" (2) Your anger will cease and become more controllable if it knows that every day it must come before a judge. Is there anything finer, than

> this habit of scrutinizing the day? What sort of sleep follows this self-examination – how peaceful, how deep and free, when the mind has been either praised or admonished, when the sentinel and secret censor of the self has conducted into one's character! (3) I exercise this jurisdiction daily and plead my case before myself. When the light has been removed and my wife has fallen silent, aware of this habit, that's now mine, I examine my entire day and go back over what I've done and said, hiding nothing from myself, passing nothing by. For why should I fear any consequence from my mistakes, when I'm able to say, "See that you don't do it again, but now I forgive you. (4) In that discussion you spoke too aggressively: from now on don't get involved with people who don't know what they're talking about. People who've never learned don't want to learn. You admonished that fellow more candidly than you should, as a result you didn't correct him, you offended him; in the future consider not just whether what you say is true but whether the person you're talking to can take the truth. A good man delights in being admonished, but all the worst people have the hardest time putting up with correction (*De Ira*, 3.36).

As the passage shows, when one has improved sufficiently, one will be able to detect one's own mistakes, and to prescribe the correct treatments for these mistakes on one's own, without the help of a teacher.

c) The importance of time

When it comes to the philosophical treatment, Seneca shows a prudent concern with the effectiveness of the treatment we undertake to cure ourselves of false beliefs. In fact – and I would argue significantly – Seneca stresses, in his very first letter to Lucilius, the importance of Lucilius being mindful about how he spends his time:

> **1**. … Gather and guard the time that until now was being taken from you, or was stolen from you, or that slipped away. Convince yourself that what I write is true: some moments are snatched from us, some are filched, and some just vanish. But no loss is as shameful as the one that comes about through carelessness. Take a close look, and you will see that when we are not doing well, most of life slips away from us; when we inactive, much of it – but when we are inattentive, we miss it all. **2**. …

> And so, dear Lucilius, do what your letter says you are doing: embrace every hour. If you lay hands on today, you will find you are less dependent on tomorrow. While you delay, life speeds on by (*Ep*. 1.1-1.2)

If you consider time to be an important resource, well then it seems reasonable to start the moral education of your friend with the most important lessons first so that he can make the most progress possible in the shortest amount of time possible. The shortness of life, and the brief time available to us if we want to improve our condition is stressed throughout the letters[30].

> **1** Persevere in what you have begun; hurry as much as you can, so that you will have more time to enjoy a mind that is settled and made flawless (*Ep*. 4.1)

Seneca clearly considers time to be a precious resource – one not to waste lightly. As a doctor of the soul, Seneca is something of an economist concerned with the effective allocation of scarce resources. An important underlying principle of Seneca's thinking on character improvement is thus the importance of the efficiency of the process and the effective allocation of scarce resources. I think it is this that lies behind some of his dismissive remarks about the use of logical puzzles in the philosophical curriculum. Cooper (2004, p. 283-284) has criticized Seneca's dismissal of logic as inconsistent with his other Stoic commitments. However, I don't think such a criticism is warranted. The problem for Seneca is not that logical puzzles are completely useless, but that there is an opportunity cost that comes with spending time on and effort on them, namely the benefit that we would have obtained for ourselves if we had spent our time on more efficient forms of treatments. Logical puzzles may be necessary if we are to complete our transformation and become sages, but these are best attended to towards the final stages of the process of character improvement. A similar criticism of Cooper's critique of Seneca has been made by Wagoner (2014).

[30] Seneca also wrote an essay titled *On the Shortness of Life*

4.4. The character-ladder

Which false beliefs will the progressor need to target as she gets closer to virtue? To see this, we may turn to Seneca's 75th letter where he describes the different stages of character development. An overview of these stages can be seen in the table below, which I will refer to as Seneca's character ladder.

Character type	Status	Subtype	Virtue	Willingness to improve	Possible development	Faults	To improve	To fall down
Sage		-	Yes	-	=	-	-	-
Fools	Progressor	Progressor A	No	Yes	⇧	Some emotion, no relapse	Stability + self-awareness	-
		Progressor B	No	Yes	⇳	Liable to relapse	Curing false beliefs	Assenting to false impressions
		Progressor C	No	Yes	⇧	Anger, ambition, fear	Curing false beliefs	-
	Non-progressor	Curable non-progressor	No	No	⇳	False beliefs, no willingness to improve	Start practicing philosophy	Assenting to enough false impressions
		Incurable progressor	No	No	=	Vice (infirmities)	-	-

4.4.1. Progressors and non-progressors

As we have seen, with the exception of the virtuous sage rest of humanity, i.e. all non-sages, are confined to the category of the fools. And while the sage is a rare – possibly even mythical – character, there are plenty of fools around:

> **21** There are many people like the one Horatius Flaccus describes, this man who is never the same, who goes off in so many directions that he doesn't even resemble himself. Did I say "many"? I meant practically everyone. Every man changes his plans and aspirations by the day. One day he want to have a wife, the next only a girlfriend. Now he wants to lord it over people, but another time he is more obsequious than a slave in his behaviour. Now he is so self-aggrandizing as to attract resentment, but on another occasion he is more self-effacing than those of lowest degree (*Ep*. 120.21).

Thus, in contrast with the stability of the sage, the fools are marked by the instability of their behavior, caused by their conflicting commitments in life:

> **20** The best evidence of a bad character is variability and constant shifting between pretense of virtues and love of vices (*Ep*. 120.20).

Acting in this inconsistent way is clearly irrational. It indicates that a person is committed to the truth of incompatible beliefs, as it is these commitments that fuel the persons behavior. Such people, as Seneca writes, "is inconsistent with itself" and "goes around with no stable identity" (*Ep*. 120.22)

However, while similar in that they hold conflicting and false commitments about what is of value in life, the fools can nevertheless be differentiated and divided into different types. We can split all the fools into the two sub-categories of the progressors and the non-progressors. These can in turn be split into different sub-sub-categories of different types of progressors and different types of non-progressors.

The progressors are characters that are striving to improve themselves, and thus moving closer to virtue. In Letter 75, Seneca describes three types of progressors. As our Stoic progressor improves herself by using the daily philosophical routine, she will gradually climb the character ladder, first to the level of Progressor C, then to the level of Progressor B and then to the level of Progressor A until she finally reaches the virtuous mind of the sage.

At the final stage of character development, near the top of the character ladder, we find the level of Progressor A. With a mind like this, the progressor will have the type of character that is closest to virtue. People with this character type has "put aside their … their faults…" – by which Seneca seems to be referring to the so-called infirmaries of mind (*Ep*. 75.10-12) – "… but [their] loyalty is still untried" (*Ep.* 75.9). While they may still experience some emotions, they are incapable of "backsliding," and are described as "very near perfection (*Ep.* 75.9; 75.12). In sum, Progressor A seems to lack some of the stability of character and self-awareness of the sage. Progressors in this category mostly perform appropriate actions[31] but may on rare occasions perform actions contrary to right reason.

Taking one more step down the character-ladder we find the category of Progressor B. These progressors "have put aside both the worst of the mind's failings and the emotions, but not in such a way as to have a secure grasp on their tranquility: they are still liable to relapse" (*Ep.* 75.13). Here, relapse seem to be referring to the infirmities, implying that Progressor B is still capable of assenting to enough impressions that give rise to emotions so that her character over time becomes sicker (by developing infirmities). This was not possible in the case of Progressor A, and so a key difference between these two different types is that unlike Progressor A, Progressor B's character can still develop in a negative way, falling to the level of Progressor C.

Progressor C is described as

> beyond many serious faults, but not all. They have escaped greed, but still experience anger; they are not troubled by lust but are still subject to ambition. They no longer experience desire, but they still experience fear. Even in fear they are steadfast against some things but yield to others: they are unconcerned about death but still terrified of pain (*Ep*. 75.14).

Thus, at this stage, the progressor will use the daily philosophical routine to detect and treat the false beliefs that give rise to anger, ambition, and the fear of pain. Progressor C is the last category of progressors listed in Letter 75. However, Seneca's subsequent remark to Lucilius

[31] Morally right actions are only performed by the sage

that “It will be well for us if we can join the last group [i.e. the category of Progressor C]” (*Ep*. 75.15) suggests that Seneca neither consider himself, nor Lucilius, as having joined the category of Progressor C. It is likely, then, that Seneca and Lucilius, in addition to having the false beliefs of Progressor C also has a character marked by the false beliefs that give rise to greed, lust, desire and the fear of death. As our progressor begins her daily philosophical routine progressor, these are likely to be the false beliefs she will try to get rid of first.

Finally, we turn briefly to the fools who are non-progressors. While not relevant to how our progressor acquires virtue, looking at the non-progressors is nevertheless interesting for understanding what type of people can be progressors in the first place. Among the non-progressors there are two important categories. As her name implies, the curable non-progressor is a fool who is not striving to improve herself, but who can still be helped by philosophy. The existence of this category is based on a plausible guess on my part. We have seen so far that the fools can be divided into the categories of progressors and non-progressors based on whether or not they are trying to improve themselves. As we shall see with the last category, Seneca clearly holds the view that there are some of the people who are not working to improve themselves are also beyond the help of philosophy. Not only is it not possible for these people to acquire virtue: it is not even possible for them to move closer to virtue from their current state of character. So ingrained have the vices become in their character that they are no longer able to get rid of them – and, of course, nor do they want to. Are there people who are not currently trying to improve themselves, but who can still be helped by philosophy provided they are helped by fortune and meat the right people. My guess – based on the fact that Seneca nowhere – to my knowledge – makes the claim that people who lack the desire to improve themselves are all incurable – is that the answer to this question is yes, but I recognize that this view can be contested by others.

Given the curable non-progressor’s lack of motivation, individuals in this category will, as I mentioned, evidently need to be nudged by forces outside of their own control if they are to escape their current circumstances and begin to better themselves. However, if the curable non-progressor is unlucky, their character might descend permanently into the status of the incurable non-progressor. In this final character infirmities have become so festered in the character of the individual that philosophy is not able to provide any help. These people are thus permanently sick.

4.4.2. Luck and progress

Having described the six steps of the character ladder, I claim that character-improvement – i.e. progress - takes place by moving up this character-ladder and bringing one's character closer to the virtue of the sage. This view is supported by Algra et al (1999, pp. 725-726) as a generalized account of character improvement in Stoic philosophy. I am thus claiming that Seneca follows this generalized account closely.

However, I want to end this discussion of character improvement with a discussion of the role of luck. To see the importance luck seems to play in Seneca's process of character improvement, we must ask how progress is made. As we have seen, only one set of beliefs (and the set of actions that follow from them) are internally consistent (i.e. none of the individual beliefs that make up the total sum of all our beliefs are in conflict with each other) and aligned with what the world (nature) is actually like. It seems that we need perfect rationality (virtue) to arrive at this correct set of beliefs. So how can we get to the correct set of beliefs about the world without having perfect rationality to begin with?

As I have pointed out, the best possible answer I can give to this question is that through the activity of spotting and treating one's own false beliefs (and their associated actions) one is simultaneously "training" one's rationality, much in the same way that going to the gym and working out grows the body's muscles. So philosophy, then, seems to be doing two things at the same time to its practitioner: (1) it removes our false beliefs, and, through doing so, (2) it sharpens our rationality (bringing it closer to perfection). (1) and (2) are of course highly related, since a mind with fewer false beliefs is more rational than a mind with more false beliefs. However, what (2) is driving at is reasoning as a skill whose raw material is a rational mind. Practicing reasoning removes our false beliefs, and simultaneously makes us better at reasoning well, which makes us better at detecting false beliefs. This is, in a sense, the opposite of what is happening with respect to development of the infirmities. As we assent to the false impressions that gives rise to emotions, our mind seems to gain a greater propensity for assenting to similar impressions in the future. At some point, the value-judgments that gives rise to the emotions have become so ingrained in us that they have developed into a fixed state of our character. These is why those who are at the level of the incurable non-progressor have reached a point where they are not able to improve themselves any longer.

If it is the case that practicing philosophy not only does (1), but also (2), we may have a good explanation for why progressors eventually can perform philosophy on themselves. Since their rationality is sharpened as their teacher engage them in philosophical argumentation, they become better able to detect their erroneous judgements and false impressions in themselves. Once we reach sagehood, we have become so skilled at this that we are in a continuous state of vigilant self-surveillance in which we skillfully detect and reject false impressions as they present themselves to us. Here we can discern why it is that the wise person can never go wrong and why virtue is self-sustaining. Part of virtue is the ability to maintain one's character in its current virtuous state. Thus, the sage who has acquired virtue knows that to maintain her character in this way, she will have to associate with other people with a similar character as herself:

> **9** … the sage cannot maintain his mental disposition without taking others like himself into his friendship, so as to share his virtues with them (*Ep*. 109.9)

> **4** A bad man harms a bad man and makes him worse by arousing his anger, approving his gloom, and praising his pleasures. Bad men are at their worst when they combine their faults to the greatest extent, and a single aggregate wrongdoing is the result. Conversely, one good man will help another. **5** "But how?" you say. He will bring him joy and strengthen his confidence, and each one's delight will grow from the sight of their mutual tranquility. Apart from that, they will pass on to each other the knowledge of certain things, since the sage does not know everything. Even if he did have such knowledge, someone might be able to figure out shorter ways to get to the facts and point those out to him., making it easier to encompass the entire matter. **6** One wise person will help another, not only with his own strength (that goes without saying) but also with the strength of the one he helps. Of course, the latter can fully develop his own capacities even when left to himself: the runner's speed is his own. Yet even so, he is helped by being cheered on (*Ep*. 109.4-6).

However, it is evident that for some people, reaching this point this point will not be possible. As we have seen, the incurable non-progressors are already beyond the reach of philosophy. Moving beyond the level of the curable non-progressor and becoming a progressor is also a matter of moral luck requiring that one make it through childhood alive and without being completely corrupted. At this level of the character ladder the issue of willingness may

constitute a further example luck. Willing to improve, Seneca (*Ep*. 80.4) writes, an absolute requirement if we are to achieve virtue. Moreover, this is not something everyone has. (It seems, however, that this is something progressors must have, given that they are in fact working to improve themselves). We can therefore discern that whatever Seneca has in mind when he speaks of the willingness to improve this cannot be the same as the natural tendency of human beings to care for themselves and others (oikeiosis), since this, as we saw in chapter 2, is something all humans are endowed with. The question then is whether this willingness can be affected by philosophical therapy or not. If the lack of willingness to improve is in some way founded on a false belief it can be improved like other false beliefs, provided the additional luck of meeting sort of people who can help us. However, if the willingness to improve is simply something some people are born with by luck then even more people will be excluded from the possibility of acquiring virtue.

Even when we take a progressor as a starting point, the person's ability to acquire virtue will also be a matter of luck. As Seneca makes clear, "natural gifts" is needed if a progressor is to improve her character beyond the level of Progressor C and reach the status of Progressor B (*Ep*. 75.15). It may also be the case that the progressor will need even greater natural gifts, if she is to climb the two final steps of the character-ladder.

Character improvement itself, then, as well as its ultimate success in the form of the acquisition of virtue, are both subject to moral luck – i.e. dependent on things that are not "under the control of the agent" (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 3) "What happens to a person by luck" Nussbaum (1986, p. 3) writes, "will be just what does not happen through his or her own agency, what just happens to him, as opposed to what he does or makes." Thus, whatever Seneca's conception of willingness is, I have already pointed at several examples showing (1) that being a progressor – a person that strives to improve their character by getting closer to virtue – is dependent on luck; and (2) that even when a person is a progressor, acquiring virtue will also be a matter of luck, as this depends on having the necessary natural gifts.

Chapter summary

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Seneca thinks virtue consist of two kinds of knowledge: theoretical knowledge (knowledge that) and practical knowledge (knowledge how). The tools we looked at in chapter 3 can be employed to help the progressor acquire

these forms of knowledge. The theoretical tools, the decretes, helps the progressor know what to do as she knows which things have value and which things don't. However, this knowledge must also be made part of her character so that she becomes able to act in accordance with these decretes in her daily life. This is the role of the practical tools. To climb the character ladder and get closer to the virtue of the sage, the Stoic progressor must thus, first familiarize herself with how she ought to act and acquire the knowledge that through a period of theoretical studies. Then, following this, she will adopt Seneca's daily philosophical routine, where the progressor will monitor her own actions to detect discrepancies in her behavior from how she has been thought to act. She will then the flaws in her character that this self-monitoring reveals to her by employing certain exercises that seek to rid her of the false beliefs that give rise to the flaws. Finally, she will use tools like precepts and exempla to remind herself of how she ought to act in practical situations. In this daily routine, the progressor will try to detect and get rid of the most harmful false beliefs and use the most efficient exercises for getting rid of them. Initially, she will receive the help of a Stoic teacher, but as she becomes a more skillful practitioner of the craft of philosophy, she will be increasingly able to spot and treat her own erroneous beliefs. By sticking to this daily routine over time, the progressor will gradually improve herself. If she has the necessary natural gifts, she may also be able to acquire virtue. However, having such natural gifts seems to be the subject to fortune and therefore outside the control of the progressor.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that, according to Seneca, the Stoic progressor acquires virtue through the practicing the craft of philosophy – the medical art of the soul. Succeeding in acquiring virtue is difficult and rare, but nevertheless possible provided one is also aided by fortune.

According to Seneca, the Stoic progressor – someone who has turned to Stoic philosophical teachers with the aim of acquiring virtue (i.e. a perfectly rational mind) – may acquire virtue by practicing philosophy, which Seneca conceives of as the art of living whose goal is to make its practitioners acquire virtue. This craft both consists of a theoretical and a practical component.

Practicing philosophy entails first studying Stoic philosophical theory and then adopting a daily philosophical routine, both initially under the guidance of a philosophical teacher. The goal of this routine is to transform the character of the progressor into a perfectly rational character. This is done by detecting and removing false beliefs from the character of the progressor and is completed when the progressor's character is completely free of false beliefs.

In studying Stoic philosophical theory, the progressor familiarizes herself with how she ought to act and why. The daily philosophical routine involves three pillars: self-examination, treatment, and action. In self-examination, the progressor will try to detect the presence of false beliefs in her character. One way to do this is by reviewing one's actions at the end of the day to see how they compare to the prescribed actions of Stoic philosophical theory. If the progressor discovers discrepancies between the two, she will seek to identify the false beliefs in her character that gives rise to this discrepancy. In treatment, the progressor and the teacher will attempt to get rid of the false beliefs from the progressors character by incorporating Stoic philosophical teachings into the character of the progressor through exercises. In action, the Stoic progressor will try to apply what she has been practicing in her treatment in a real-life situation. Here, she may use precepts and role models as a tool in order to remind herself of how she ought to act in various situations.

The philosophical routine is repeated as the progressor reviews her actions of the day, trying to identify which false beliefs made her act contrary to how she ought to, and then target these false beliefs in her treatment the following day. As the progressor becomes increasingly skilled at this routine, she will be more and more able to carry it.

Appendix: List of terms

Anima – Soul

Animus – Mind or character

Ars – Craft

Ars Vivendi – Art of living. The Stoic conception of philosophy

Decreta – Decretes. The philosophical theories and the arguments in support of this theories

Felicitas – Happiness or flourishing. Greek: Eudaimonia

Gymnasia – A philosophical exercise where the progressor puts herself in an "artificially induced" situation to practice (Foucault, 1988, p. 37)

Instruments – Tools

Meditatio – Philosophical exercises of the imagination

Philosophia – Philosophy

Proficiens – Progressor. A fool who is trying to improve himself / herself

Proficiere – Make progress

Præcepta – Precepts

Ratio – Reason. The human soul is endowed with reason, giving us the capacity for language and choice. Greek: Logos.

Sapiens – sage or wise man. Title given to the person who has succeeded in acquiring virtue.

Stultus – Fool. Everyone who is not a sage (i.e. who is not virtuous) is considered a fool.

Virtus – Virtue. A perfectly rational mind

Vivere et secundum naturam – Living in accordance with nature. The Stoic definition of happiness

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