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Camila Reed-Guevara April 15, 2018

Seneca the Younger on Education and Slavery in the Ancient Roman Empire: Equal Access to Philosophy Regardless of Genealogical Background

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Abstract

Seneca the Younger on Education and Slavery in the Ancient Roman Empire: Equal Access to Philosophy Regardless of Genealogical Background

By Camila Reed-Guevara

Seneca the Younger (4 BCE-CE 65) was a Roman statesman and a stoic philosopher. He worked in multiple genres that ranged from treatise to tragedy, and he wrote on themes as diverse as political duties and preparation for one's death. This thesis will focus on his philosophical beliefs about education and slavery. Seneca conceived of education as a pursuit that is, by divine right, accessible to all people. Seneca not only condemned and mocked the system of slavery, but he argued that slaves should have access to philosophical training. In his mind, education is something that should be accessible to all people: "If there is any good in philosophy, it is this, that it has no regard for genealogies."

This project investigates the intersection between education and slavery as it pertains to Seneca's stoic philosophy. My project asks what does it mean, philosophically speaking, that all people should be educated, including slaves, who by definition did not own themselves? I believe that Seneca was envisioning some state of universal humanity: that all people from all places on earth possess their own consciousness and are thus equal under the gods. This thesis will explicate specific key passages from Seneca's *Letters on Ethics to Lucilius*, *De Beneficiis,* and *De Ira* which demonstrate this universal humanity, and it will prove how Seneca's work continues to be relevant today in our quest for equality.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: The Stoic Philosopher

Seneca the Younger (4 BCE – CE 65)

In 49 CE, Agrippina the Younger persuaded her husband, the Emperor Claudius, to recall the philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca from exile.[1] This action would make Seneca indebted to the empress, and he agreed to tutor her twelve-year old son, the future emperor Nero. An early Imperial Roman Stoic philosopher who was deeply involved in Roman politics, Seneca is the subject of my research. He was a member of the Roman Senate and served as consul for part of a year in 56 CE, who took a hand in various political decisions.[2] He wrote in literary genres from treatise to tragedy, and on various topics from the acceptance of one's death to gift-giving. His work allows us a window into a pivotal period in Roman history: he was alive during the reigns of the first five emperors of Rome, and in his lifetime he witnessed profound political, social, and cultural changes. While he initially seemed to have positive influence over Nero, that relationship doomed Seneca. After he later attempted to withdraw from Nero's household, he was forced to commit suicide in CE 65.

Seneca is a complicated historical figure. He was in a unique position of extreme influence on a future leader, but this also put him in a precarious personal and philosophical position. In his own life, if he displeased Nero or Agrippina, he could be exiled or executed. In his writing, while he was extremely critical of the contemporary elite practice of amassing vast wealth, he would soon become so wealthy that an ancient source[3] reports a rumor that he had fifty identical marble tables made with lion heads for a single dinner party.[4] The ancient

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[1] Griffin (1976), 62. Seneca was exiled from 41-49 BCE to the island of Corsica after being accused of having an affair with a member of the imperial family
[2] Wilson (2014), 116
[3] Cassius Dio, 61.10.3
[4] Emily Wilson (2014), *128*

historians Cassius Dio reported that Seneca demanded money be paid back at high interest on loans to Britain, which supposedly caused Boudicca's rebellion.[5] Others would gossip that he had a hand in killing Agrippina, the woman who hired him and granted him his freedom from exile.[6] These ancient critiques are very hard to confirm, and should be read with some skepticism as they were written by his close contemporaries and might have be influenced by various political vendettas. More troubling are modern critiques of hypocrisy. Emily Wilson describes this concern best: "Seneca's time of power and influence was necessarily brief. It was a compromised death, full of second and third guesses, that follows a life of compromises and complex negotiations, between ideal and reality, philosophy and politics, virtue and money, motivation and action."[7] Elsewhere, she has called him a fat-cat philosopher.[8] Mary Beard says that at best, Seneca's relationship between his actions and moral beliefs are "checkered."[9] These are fair critiques, and Seneca himself admitted that as a Stoic he was not a perfect model. In fact, he wrote to a friend that he was a fellow patient, not a doctor, and he has been sick all his life (*Ep.* 8.2). Other scholars such as James Romm and Miriam Griffin have carefully examined Seneca's political career, and my goal is not to provide another biography. Material in this introduction concerning what is known of his actual life is provided only to provide historical context. My objective is to analyze Seneca's ethical philosophy as revealed in his writings rather than any specific course of action he may have taken during his public career.[10] His views on morality are unique in their ancient context, and are a significant contribution to the history of Western philosophy.

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[5] Cassius Dio, Book 62.2.1
[6] Tacitus, *Annals,* 14.11
[7] Wilson (2014), 4
[8] Wilson (2015), "Seneca, the fat-cat philosopher."
[9] Beard (2015), "How Stoical Was Seneca?"
[10] Griffin (1976), 276

After she lists Seneca's long list of internal contradictions, Wilson observes that Seneca's life should prompt scholars to ponder, what is success?[11] In a philosophical sense, Seneca achieves a form of success: consistency, in at least two thematic categories: education and slavery. Seneca's writings support the argument that he was an early advocate for a universal right to education, more explicitly than previous scholars have suggested.[12] Of course, no discourse on universal rights existed in the ancient world, but his arguments set the groundwork for such an argument. In his best known letter on education Seneca identifies philosophy as the best type of education to instill virtue in the student (*Ep.* 88.1). He claims that all individuals should be able to access philosophy, precisely because it is the only path to virtue (*Ep.* 44.3). Seneca's position runs counter to a strong philosophical legacy which justified slavery as a *natural* institution, in which individuals are properly divided into the categories of the enslaved and the free.[13] Unlike those philosophers, Seneca explained that slaves were people who deserved respect, kindness and humane treatment (*Ep.* 47.1). In another letter Seneca claims that there is no use in tracing one's ancestral lineage, because it is only fortune which determines whether one becomes a slave or a king (*Ep.* 44.12). He then states that all people have the ability to learn philosophy and should be able to access it (*Ep.* 44.1). I argue that when Seneca discussed the humanity of slaves and virtue-based education, he was making a very early claim that a specific right, which would now be referred to as a "human right," extended to the lowest echelons of society, to people with no *legal* rights within their culture. My study of his writings will demonstrate these connections. As Margaret Graver wrote, what is most appealing about

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[11] Wilson (2014), 4

[12] I want to be clear that concept of universal rights, or human rights, did not exist in Seneca's time period. That description would be deeply anachronistic. However, I am making the claim that he was working towards this concept, that his philosophy was one that progressed towards concepts of the universal rights.

[13] I am primarily referencing Aristotle's work on slavery which forwarded a philosophical basis for slaves being naturally placed in their positions, and in fact needing and enjoying their positions for survival. This will be further explained in chapter three.

Seneca is "his vision of humans as members of a universal community of mankind, the respect he advocates for slaves, his concern with human emotions, and in general, his insistence on looking within oneself to find happiness."[14] Seneca was not a revolutionary, and Stoicism is not about revolution, but Seneca's philosophy represents something ambitious, compassionate, and a direct challenge to ruling elites.

Seneca's Stoicism

Stoicism has received a lot of attention recently because of its seemingly simplistic and accessible ethical rules. In the past, Roman philosophy as a whole was viewed by academic philosophers as less worthy of study that the other Hellenistic schools. However, in *How to Be a Stoic,* Massimo Pigliucci boldly makes the claim that "the Stoics made a eudemonic life a reachable goal for everyone, regardless of social status, financial resources, physical health, or degree of attractiveness."[15] This view of a eudemonic life (the good life, essentially) is an ethical departure from Aristotle's virtue ethics. Aristotle believed that eudemonic life "is made possible by the pursuit of virtue, but we also need many other things over which we have no control: health, wealth, education and even good looks."[16] Therefore, only the beautiful and wealthy can become philosophers or ethical people. Stoicism's appeal to the *plebs*, to the average Greek or Roman, is what made philosophers like Seneca attractive to later Christian thinkers. Forged letters between Seneca and the Apostle Paul were written after his death.[17]

Stoics were concerned with living calmly in the face of a terrifying and short life. They believed in the gift of *ratio*, the ability to reason and think, given from the gods. This was a "divine, rational fire that guides the universe, which may commonly be called Zeus or Jupiter,

[14] Graver and Long (2015), xviii
[15] Pigliucci (2017), 75
[16] Pigliucci (2017), 73
[17] New Testament Apocrypha, 8

can also be equated with fate and nature."[18] Seneca himself is particularly concerned with living in accordance with nature and learning to live with the whims of *fortuna.* Fate is a central topic for the Stoics, which leads many to ask the question: if there is a divine plan or providence, what is the use in being ethical? The answer is that when confronted with fear and pain and all of the events feelings a human might encounter, the habituation a Stoic life will make confronting these crises bearable and easier to make choices within.

For Stoics, virtue is the only good and vice is the only evil.[19] All virtues are derived from a principle and crucial virtue: wisdom. The Socratic argument for this is as follows, "[wisdom] is the only human ability that is good under every and all circumstances."[20] Using this virtue, one should aim to live self-sufficiently and with tranquility.[21] For Socrates, not all virtues are most useful in every circumstance, while wisdom will always exist as a "chief good." The Stoics adopt this belief, and advance a complete list of the four Stoic virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Wisdom here is *practical* wisdom: it "allows us to make decisions that improve our *eudaimonia*" or the good life.[22] This wisdom, often conceived of as rationality is "not just divine internally: it is our piece of divinity that inhabits the whole framework of the universe."[23] Courage can be both physical and mental, for example, the ability to stand up to a tyrant. Temperance is useful to control our impulses so that we do not give into lust, hunger, or any other desire that would destroy one's equilibrium. Justice is how we should interact with others, along the lines of fairness and dignity.[24] Seneca's intervention into virtue ethics expands on the idea of the practical use of these virtues. From his perspective, philosophy should be used to help

[18] Star (2016), 29
[19] Star (2016), 30
[20] Pigliucci (2017), 98
[21] Nussbaum (1996), 316
[22] Pigliucci (2017), 99
[23] Nussbaum (1996), 326
[24] Pigliucci (2017), 99

individuals make day to day decisions which will help them live a more bearable life (*Ep.* 16.1). While Seneca did not use many traditionally Stoic terms or rely on canonical authors, and avoids traditional logical studies in philosophy, such as syllogisms, virtue is at the center of his system of ethics.[25] Seneca has very little concern for formal logic and at times will engage in satirical passages in which he seemingly mocks the use of logic in philosophical argumentation (*Ep.* 87.8, 97.12, 87.22, 87.28). His praise of Epicurus demonstrates his willingness to depart from Stoic doctrine when he thought it necessary, a non-dogmatic approach to ethical philosophy (*Ep.* 2.5, 8.7, 66.18). Instead, he thinks one should analyze virtue: "Complete virtue consists in the evenness and steadiness of a life that is in harmony with itself through all events which cannot come about unless one has knowledge and the skill of discerning things human and divine."(*Ep.* 31.8) Virtue cannot be confirmed by a single correct decision; it is instead an extended *way of life*. Seneca thought the existence of the divine permits humans to achieve virtue: "Money will not make you equal to a god: God owns nothing. A tunic bordered with purple will not do it; God is naked." (*Ep.* 16.1) Like the ideal Stoic, God is not attached to mortal material concerns.

Seneca believes that virtue fundamentally orders the good life so that one can make decisions based upon that order. He explains, "Virtue takes the measure of everything; nothing takes the measure of virtue. If virtue itself cannot be made any more straight and if no one of the things it does is more right than any other, for they necessarily conform to virtue's standard." (*Ep.* 70.20). All things can be measured alongside the ruler of virtue and all virtuous things are equal. Because virtue is *the* right, it is always right: "virtue is the sole good, and certainly that nothing is good without virtue; moreover, that virtue itself is located in our better part, namely, the rational part" (71.20). The rational part, the human mind, was given to us by the gods, and

[25] Star (2016), 31

that is where virtue is created. He asks, "What is this virtue? True and unshakable judgement, for from this come the impulses of the mind; by this, every impression that simulates impulse is rendered perfectly clear" (71.32). If one is virtuous, that is, one habituates virtue, one is able to make choices that spring from one's unique mind in the moment. Seneca adds what he thinks is most important to the development of virtue: "until you provide some education, even the best natures have only the raw material for virtue, not virtue itself" (90.46). All people have the potential to be virtuous, but philosophical education is necessary in order to become virtuous.[26] This education would entail identifying the four virtues and then learning methods by which individuals could live daily in accordance with those virtues.

Falling between the strict virtue-ethicists like Aristotle, and the cynics like Diogenes of Sinope, Seneca and the other Stoics "occupy the logical space in between these two positions: health, wealth, education and good looks—among other things—are preferred indifferents, while their opposites—and a number of other things—are dispreferred indifferents."[27] Everything that is not virtue (good) or vice (bad) is an "indifferent" thing. The Stoics, because of their belief that no one should be attached to anything emotionally, thought that people should be indifferent to all things. However, not all indifferents are equally indifferent. While "Humans are entirely self-sufficient for achieving happiness,"[28] some things are clearly preferred or dispreferred: a healthy meal is preferred while food poisoning is highly dispreferred. Stoics believed that one should have *apatheia,* freedom from emotions, but they could have three *eupatheiai* (good emotions): happiness in the present world, and desire or caution for preferred or dispreferred events in the

[26] This is beyond the scope of this paper, but Seneca's understanding of education is extremely broad. He believed that all people should have access to an education regardless of social status.
[27] Pigliucci (2017), 74-5
[28] Star (2016), 30

future.[29] Seneca opposes runaway emotions. In her book, *Therapy of Desire,* Martha Nussbaum wrote an entire chapter on a Senecan tragedy and how it proves that Seneca was opposed to "love" as in the passionate and sexual sort.[30]

There's no question that Seneca believed himself to be a Roman Stoic. He often uses the term *nostri* (our people), to refer to the Stoics.[31] What makes him a unique Stoic figure is that he does not simply reproduce doctrinal elements. Rather, he "recasts them on the basis of his own experience as a Roman and a wide reading of other philosophers."[32] For this reason, he is able to discuss his own inadequacies, and he gives various social and cultural examples from his lifetime. Seneca is most concerned, especially in the *Letters*, in applying the tenants of Stoicism to his own life and the lives of his friends. That is why much of his writing on the topics of education and slavery advocate for kindness to slaves (and sometimes emancipation for them). While he doesn't discuss how slaves themselves should cope with their circumstances, his experiential mode of teaching allows him to ask his reader to imagine being in the position of a person totally without autonomy.

The Texts

Here I will use three of Seneca's surviving texts: the *Letters on Ethics to Lucilius (Epistulae Morales), On Benefits (De Beneficiis),* and *On Anger (De Ira).* These reflect his Stoic beliefs about education and slavery, though the texts in their entirety do not exclusively focus on those subjects. Seneca produced many other ethical texts, and nine tragedies, and while I believe that his philosophy is consistent throughout these works, it is beyond the scope of this work to discuss them in depth.

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[29] Star (2016), 31
[30] Nussbaum (1996), "Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*."
[31] Graver and Long (2015), xvii
[32] Graver and Long (2015), xvii

Seneca's *Letters* are a sequence of 124 letters, unfortunately without responses, to a close and presumably slightly younger friend named Lucilius, whose identity, and even his actual existence, is unclear. The better question is whether or not the letters were "composed with an exclusive eye to that person's specific needs, interest, and knowledge."[33] Graver and Long state that because of the form and content of the letters they were intended for public reading.[34] The current order of the letters is not universally agreed upon by scholars. Many view the letters as primarily demonstrations of Seneca's pedagogy. John Schafer argues that the letters are functional instruments that serve as examples of the best methods of teaching.[35] The letters themselves, Schafer believes, were dramatized discourses on particular topics, which could in fact have occurred naturally in the course of conversation. In their totality, the letters read as a course on applied ethics. This method of writing was not uncommon: "Roman literary conventions allowed for works aimed at a wide readership to carry a formal dedication to some prominent individual whose name would appear, in the form used for direct address in the first line or paragraph."[36] In this case, Seneca's friend Lucilius is the prominent figure, but that figure is malleable enough that the reader could step into Lucilius's identity. Cicero also used the strategy in his Letters to Atticus, indicating its provenance amongst Roman writers.[37] There is also evidence that modern readers do not have Seneca's complete collection of letters, though the timing of Seneca's death means that we have most of them.[38] Here I will focus on various letters from throughout the collection which demonstrate his philosophical tenants on the themes of education and slavery.

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[33] Graver and Long (2015), 3
[34] Graver and Long (2015), 3
[35] Shafer (2011), 34
[36] Graver and Long (2015), 3
[37] Horsfall (1995), 51
[38] Graver and Long (2015), 6

On Benefits, a philosophical treatise written on the topic of favors and gifts, was composed in 59 CE. Made up of seven books, it discusses every aspect of the Roman cultural practice of gift-giving and receiving. Because of the Stoic interest in the "most widely shared characteristics of human beings" including "our rationality, our social connectedness, and our concern for others,"[39] they were focused on the idea of the social and ethical conventions surrounding process of giving a gift. This text, like the letters, is addressed to a specific recipient: Aebutius Liberalis who was living in the Roman territory of Lugundum (modern Lyon, France). He, like Lucilius, was a wealthy and educated man. The most important book of this treatise for my argument is Book Three, which focuses primarily one's *returning* of favors. Book Three advances the idea that "when it comes to giving benefits and responding to them with appropriate gratitude, *only* the attitudes and the effects of the participants really matter,"[40] i.e. this cultural process all exists in the mind, not in the material world. Because of its subject matter, *De Beneficiis* is "a work of enduring and general philosophical importance and at the same time a document of Roman social cultural history that we can scarcely begin to understand without reference to its immediate environment."[41] Roman people would give gifts to create and/or cement relationships, especially political ones, with one another. The ability to have reciprocity was a tradition that spanned across familial and business networks. This gift-giving would occur on the personal level, in the well-known patron and client relationship, but also between wealthy patrons and the public (for example, building a temple or theater). Miriam Griffin remarks that *De Beneficiis* is "fully embedded in Roman social realities (material, ideological, political) of the first century CE." While I agree with Griffin reference context, I

[39] Griffin and Inwood (2011), 2
[40] Griffin and Inwood (2011), 4
[41] Griffin and Inwood (2011), 5

differ with her in that I believe book three of this treatise demonstrates a profound concern and separation from Roman norms on the topic of gift giving and slavery. Seneca's description of how the process of gift-giving should ethically occur, demonstrates the significant ethical problems that the system of slavery brings. For Seneca, one reason that slavery is fundamentally wrong is that the legal and social power differentials between the master and the slave violates the divinely-inspired practice of reciprocal gift-giving.

Seneca's treatise *De Ira* is addressed to Annaeus Novatus, Seneca's own brother, and the publication date is not agreed upon by scholars. Martha Nussbaum writes: "Seneca's *De Ira* is a therapeutic argument. Its addressee is the philosopher's brother, a non-philosophical public man who is depicted as having characteristic Roman concerns about military strength and success, about the safety and dignity of one's family and home, about strength and dignity and manliness and greatness of soul generally."[42] As Seneca gives this therapeutic advice, Novatus is thus a proxy for the "average" wealthy Roman man, who is concerned about his self-image, his family, and his masculine virtue. However, "the interlocutor, being an ambitious and self-respecting Roman public man, is convinced that anger is an important part of a self-respecting public response to evils, and of a strong manly military life. Such considerations cannot, in real life, be easily dispelled by logical argument; they are seated deep in the soul, and obdurately voice their resistance."[43] This seems to indicate that Seneca is attempting to challenge a significantly ingrained social belief. This is not unlike his attempt to expand educational accessibility and his rebuke of the system of slavery. "Therapy" as practiced by classical authors was derived from

[42] Nussbaum (1996), 405
[43] Nussbaum (1996), 407

contemporary medical practice, as opposed to the psychoanalytic meaning more common today.[44]

De Ira, "is in fact, a therapeutic argument addressed to a decidedly non-stoic interlocutor."[45] This point is crucial for my argument: Seneca writes for the non-philosophers - those who must utilize philosophy in order to live their lives, without the opportunity for an extended course of study of the various philosophical schools. Seneca is unconcerned with the technical language and therapy surrounding anger, "because Seneca is concerned less with the theory for its own sake than with the therapy based upon it, he gives only as much of the former as he considers necessary for the latter."[46] This makes his philosophy on anger very practical. Seneca demonstrates an ability to cater to his reader: "The stoic material is introduced gently, gradually, and also minimally, in a way that maximizes the terrain of agreement between Seneca and his interlocutory, and draws the interlocutor into the process of therapy without asking him first to give up any cherished goal."[47] Seneca does not attempt to overwhelm his reader with technical philosophical terms, rather he wants to imply these Stoic concerns within accessible language. What Nussbaum broadly calls "therapy," I would call education. Seneca slowly leads and entices his reader into being philosophically educated, which helps people cope with and adapt to the world that they live in.

Outline

This thesis will be divided into four further parts. The second chapter is on Seneca's philosophy of education. It will explore this philosophy broadly but also investigate how such a doctrine pertains and intersects with his beliefs about the system of slavery. The third chapter

[44] Kaster (2012), 3
[45] Nussbaum (1996), 406
[46] Kaster (2012), 4
[47] Nussbaum (1996), 408

will give Seneca's reasons for why slavery is unnatural and unethical, and it will include an overview on the material culture and generally accepted philosophy concerning slavery during Seneca's lifetime. The fourth chapter discusses Seneca's view of progress and political change. It explores the central question of whether philosophy can change the material conditions of normal people. The conclusion will summarize my overall argument up and raise further routes of future inquiry into Seneca's *corpus*.

Chapter 1: Seneca's Virtue Based Education

Roman Education

Education during Seneca's lifetime was determined by the wealth and the status of one's family. Poor Romans did not receive a formal education since there were no actual schools, but some were taught specific trade skills so that they could work for a living, i.e. learning how to farm or butcher animals.[48] In some places in the empire, benefactors set up public institutions to educate the children of "citizens."[49] For example, Leton of Xanthos provided educational services for children under the age of 16 in his town (in addition to providing dowries and paying for funerals for those without sufficient funds.)[50] However, this was not a common occurrence and certainly, it did not happen in larger cities like Rome herself.

Wealthy children would be taught by tutors, either hired by the family or slaves who themselves were literate.[51] These tutors would teach children to read and write in Latin and possibly Greek, as well as canonical Greek and Roman literature, music, and mathematics. It is believed that "Romans were not interested in knowledge for its own sake" but that they acquired basic cultural knowledge that allowed them a degree of cultural fluency used to move amongst the elite families of ancient Rome.[52] In addition, learning to read and write and possessing rhetorical skill was extremely useful for elite careers in the public eye, like defending clients in the forum or being a senator.[53]

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[48] Chiapetta (1953), 155
[49] Liu (2017), 47
[50] Liu (2017), 47
[51] Mohler (1940), 264
[52] Eyre (1963), 48
[53] Bloomer (2017), 9

Two central ancient texts that scholars used to better understand formal Roman education are Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*.[54] During and after the first century BC, Romans were interested in having a broader curriculum that was more suitable for noble Roman children.[55] In particular, Cicero expanded Roman educational structures to include what he called *humanitas,* which was "a view of culture and learning based on the liberal arts."[56] Cicero's innovation moves away from the Aristotelian view of education as about ἀρετή, finding and honing moral excellence.[57] After Cicero, and while still following many of Cicero's precepts, Quintilian placed a higher emphasis on rhetoric rather than philosophical study.[58] This was a problem for Seneca's curriculum because he believed that rhetoric provided no significant philosophical instruction (*Ep.* 16.3). A problem for the modern historian is that other than Cicero and Quintilian, there is an absence of sources on the topic of formal education: "the absence of a professional literature is significant enough to be established as a signpost that the Romans did not concern themselves greatly or continuously with educational matters."[59]

Similar to modern cultures, educational theories and needs changed over time from the early Roman republic to the Imperial period. In the beginning, Rome "developed a theory of education based on the principles of *patria potestas* and *mos maiorum*. The nature of this early form of education was domestic: the father assumed the role of the teacher of his son. Roman mothers also had an important function as teachers and models."[60] Education took place in the home and the parents were the teachers,[61] which meant that the family was responsible for what

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[54] Pascal (1984), 351
[55] Pascal (1984), 351
[56] Pascal (1984), 351
[57] Gaskin (2012), 104
[58] Pascal (1984), 352
[59] Chiapetta (1953), 150
[60] Pascal (1984), 352
[61] Horace, *Satire,* 1.4.103-6. He describes his father instructing him in his moral teachings.

their children learned. However, around 250 BC, due to ongoing warfare, Rome was exposed to other cultures, especially Hellenistic cultures.[62] The wars brought educated slaves to serve as teachers and philosophers, often titled *paedagogus puerorum* (slave teachers) who taught elite students to read and write in the Greek language.[63] Such was the case of Livius Andronicus, a Greek slave brought to Rome, who was the first to translate the *Odyssey* into Latin.[64] This suggests a practice of relegating education to slaves and former slaves, which demonstrates that the status of teachers was not truly elite.[65] Over time, even in the Roman world, Greek became the language of the philosophers.[66] As a result, Roman teachers became concerned with "linguistic capability and excellence in oratorical skills. In this new conception, the orator was the ideal of the educated man: the *vir bonus dicendi peritus."*[67] This change is significant, along with the shifting of various Roman institutions, as it demonstrates Rome's desire to incorporate the artistic and literary aspects of other cultures for their own improvement as well as the need for elite Roman citizens to have public speaking skills.[68] While it appears that elites made efforts to educate their children, "there is a curious lack of archaeological remains which would indicate the existence of schools in any great number,"[69] and shows the likelihood that educators worked as tutors for individual families. It is in this context that Seneca wrote about his ideal educational curriculum.

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[62] Pascal (1984), 353
[63] Mohler (1940), 267
[64] Chiapetta (1953), 152
[65] Chiapetta (1953), 152
[66] For example, Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE), Roman emperor (161-180 CE) and Stoic philosopher, wrote in Greek rather than his native language of Latin.
[67] Pascal (1984), 353
[68] Mohler (1940), 24
[69] Chiapetta (1953), 155

Seneca's Pedagogy: Letter Eighty-Eight & Letter Two

Letter Eighty-eight, commonly titled "On the Liberal Arts," lays out Seneca's belief that only philosophy is a worthy pedagogy. This directly contradicts Cicero's *humanitas:* Seneca is strongly opposed to the liberal arts or trade learning (i.e. learning how to work a tannery) as an education. However, it is in this letter that Seneca demonstrates his formidable skill in using references to literature, art and history to convince readers of his position. He begins this letter by writing:

> De liberalibus studiis quid sentiam scire desideras: nullum suspicio, nullum in bonis numero quod ad aes exit. Meritoria artificia sunt, hactenus utilia si praeparant ingenium, non detinent. Tamdiu enim istis inmorandum est quamdiu nihil animus agere maius potest; rudimenta sunt nostra, non opera. (*Ep.* 88.1)
>
> 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 as they prepare the mind but not as long-term occupations. One should stick with them only until the mind is capable of something more significant: they are our introductory curriculum, not our real work.[70]

Seneca makes a bold claim here, that a course of study whose goal is money-making is not equivalent to receiving an education. That means that any of the skills that are taught in equestrian families, how to trade goods or manage money, are simply marketable skills and should not be treated as an education. He was also very skeptical of an education that trained students in the art of rhetoric for the purpose of speech-making and legal work, which was the main occupation of elite Roman patrons.[71] Seneca believed that this was not a "long-term occupation." A person's occupation should be to become a life-long learner, fostering virtue and wisdom. In fact, Letter Eighty-eight describes why the liberal arts were only valuable in so far as

[70] All translations of the *Letters* in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Graver and Long translation.
[71] Chroust (1954), 118

it could prepare the mind for a more rigorous and important study. He even used the term "curriculum" to demonstrate what he believed should be formal educational training.

Seneca continued to pursue the argument by emphasizing that only the study of philosophy could liberate a person. While the liberal arts are interesting, even culturally significant, this discipline is not capable of changing a person or making them better. He explains:

> Quare liberalia studia dicta sint vides: quia homine libero digna sunt. Ceterum unum studium vere liberale est quod liberum facit, hoc est sapientiae, sublime, forte, magnanimum: cetera pusilla et puerilia sunt. An tu quicquam in istis esse credis boni quorum professores turpissimos omnium flagitiosissimos cernis? Non discere debemus ista, sed didicisse. Quidam illud de liberalibus studiis quaerendum iudicaverunt, an virum bonum facerent: ne promittunt quidem nec huius rei scientiam adfectant. (*Ep.* 88.2)
>
> 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. It alone is exalted—powerful—great in spirit; all others are trifling and childish. Or do you imagine there can be anything of value in a study when those who make a profession of it are utterly scandalous and despicable? Our aim should not be to learn them but to be done with learning them. Some have held that the proper question about the liberal arts is whether they make one a good man. That is not something they claim to do, even—such knowledge is not their aim.

In this passage, Seneca proposes that liberal studies are worthy of a free person, hence their nomenclature. The argument is that the liberal arts take time, and freedom is necessary to pursue such a study. However, he then pivots to describe what the term "liberal" truly means: it is something that can liberate. This will be particularly important in the context of his writing on slavery: philosophy is the sole liberator for Seneca, not a master or an emperor. Philosophy is the most powerful and parental of all studies, while everything else—from music to geometry—are infantile by comparison. Philosophy creates all other lines of inquiry because it functions by asking the central, overarching questions from which all answers can be found. Seneca says philosophers often ask the question, do the liberal arts make a "good man?" However,

practitioners of the liberal arts themselves never ask this question. Their focus is not on ethical formation, but instead on specific questions pertaining to individual studies whose intent is not to create virtue. Only philosophy can approach the question of human nature and being a good person.

The liberal arts for Seneca are only useful in so far as they are able to assist in the learning of philosophy. Early on in Letter Eighty-eight, Seneca explains that music, math, and literature inform humans about non-Stoic emotions and reactions and therefore should be avoided. Seneca moves on to give examples of how traditional disciplines within the liberal arts ask the wrong academic questions. Beginning with literary studies, he describes how the focus on linguistic purity and narrative is unable to help people live their lives. He questions, "Which of these subjects paves a road toward virtue?" (*Ep.* 88.3) The focus on syllables, meter, and memorization cannot curb "greed" or "lust," and therefore they are not useful (*Ep.* 88.3). On the subjects of geometry and music, he explains that those studies are not able to help someone resist the feelings of fear or desire, and according to Seneca, those are crucial skills that someone needs to know (*Ep*. 88.4). From his perspective, if you want to learn from Homer's literature, you need to investigate what would have made Homer wise in the first place. Therefore, if there is something to learn from Homer, it is because he infuses his literature with philosophical wisdom (*Ep.* 88.5). This philosophical wisdom is the method by which humans may acquire virtue (*Ep. 88.4)*. The same goes for any other famous poet, like Hesiod, or Roman poets like Ovid. Seneca gives a very particular example here:

> Quid inquiris an Penelopa inpudica fuerit, an verba saeculo suo dederit? An Ulixem illum esse quem videbat, antequam sciret, suspicata sit? Doce me quid sit pudicitia et quantam in ea bonum, in corpore an in animo posita sit. (*Ep.* 88.8)
>
> Why do you seek to know whether Penelope was unchaste; whether she deceived everyone around her; whether she suspected that the person she saw was Ulysses before

> she was told? Teach me what chastity is, how valuable it is, whether it belongs to the body or to the mind.

This is a salient argument, because it taps into ancient and modern discussions of the literary figure of Penelope.[72] Scholars have debated her marital fidelity and her integrity for a long time.[73] However, for Seneca, one cannot learn just from these literary characters. Her fictional loyalty and her value as a woman cannot themselves help a person learn to be loyal. Instead, readers must learn what the virtue of chastity is so that they are able to practice it. This theory would hold for any literary figure, instead of learning about their qualities one must learn what the qualities mean. Seneca expands this thought to other disciplines:

> Ad musicum transeo. Doces me quomodo inter se acutae ac graves consonent, quomodo nervorum disparem redddentium sonum fiat concordia: fac potius quomodo animus secum meus consonet nec consilia mea discrepent. Monstras mihi qui sint modi flebiles: monstra potius quomodo inter adversa non emittam flebilem vocem." (*Ep.* 88.9)
>
> 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.

For Seneca, the abstractions are very important. If students are to learn from music, then they should learn how the idea of harmony is applied to that thought and to one's own mind, and how intentions can line up with that action. The expression of emotions should only be in the service of learning how to cope with and manage one's emotions. There is a practicality to this philosophy: one could use a song that provokes feelings of anger in order to demonstrate what

[72] One work of modern scholarship, for example, is Betine Van Zyl Smit's "From Penelope to Winnie Mandela: Women who Waited," which explores the character of Penelope as a woman who waits for the return of her husband. Scholars cite Hesoid's *Theogony* as interest in Penelope's character.
[73] Kundmueller (2017), 1

sort of emotions should be restrained and controlled. The logic can be used for any feeling, like sorrow or jealousy.

After giving copious examples of this sort, Seneca engages in a hypothetical conversation (a tactic he uses often) with someone to explain the role of the liberal arts:

> ‘Quid ergo? Nihil nobis liberalia conferunt studia?’ Ad alia multum, ad virtutem nihil; nam et hae viles ex professo artes quae manu constant ad instrumenta vitae plurimum conferunt, tamen ad virtutem non pertinent. ‘quare ergo liberalibus studiis filios erudimus?’ Non quia virtutem dare possunt, sed quia animum ad accipiendam virtutem praeparant. (*Ep.* 88.20)
>
> ‘What, then? Do the liberal studies have nothing to offer us?’ Toward some ends they do contribute; but nothing toward virtue. For even the skills that consist in manual dexterity, which admit openly to their low status, furnish us with many of life’s basic needs; yet they bear no relation to virtue. ‘Why, then, do we train our children in the liberal arts?’ Not because they can ever impart virtue, but because they prepare the mind to receive virtue.

Philosophy is the highest, form of education a human can achieve, but that does not mean that other forms of learning are not necessary in that pursuit. His analogy is to manual dexterity, the physical actions that can be used in “low status” jobs like farming, which he understands to be important in the daily lives of some people even when these tasks do not create virtue. In a similar sense, the liberal arts prepare someone’s mind for the difficult instruction of becoming wise. People must learn to read, write and think before they can challenge themselves philosophically. He continues:

> Philosophia nil ab alio petit, totum opus a solo excitat: mathematice, ut ita dicam, superficiaria est, in alieno aedifcat; accipit prima, quorum beneficio ad ulteriora perveniat. (*Ep.* 88.28)
>
> Philosophy asks nothing from any other study; it builds its entire edifice from the ground up. Mathematical astronomy is, as it were, an upper story, built on another foundation: it takes its principles from elsewhere, and it is only with this aid that it gets any further.

Seneca sets up a circular argument: philosophy as a study stands alone but some other study is a prerequisite for that study. Nevertheless, philosophy stands alone as a useful strategy for living

one's life. As Seneca writes in this passage, the principles of math must be applied elsewhere for them to be useful to the study of virtue.

Seneca ends Letter Eighty-eight by focusing again, on how philosophy, particularly when it stands in contrast to other curriculums, fosters virtue. He goes through various Stoic virtues, asking if liberal studies can do anything to strengthen a person's courage, to teach someone to be loyal, to resist physical pleasures, to avoid arrogance and exercise clemency towards those weaker than oneself (*Ep.* 88.29). Of course, the answer to these rhetorical questions is negative; the liberal arts cannot help people achieve these specific virtues. So, what should people do? They should clear their mind and create room for wisdom:

> Quamcumque partem rerum humanarum divinarumque conprenderis, ingenti copia quaerendorum ac discendorum fatigaberis. Haec tam multa, tam magna ut habere possint liberum hospitium, supervacua ex animo tollenda sunt. Non dabit se in has angustias virtus; laxum spatium res magna desiderat. Expellantur omnia, totum pectus illi vacet. (*Ep.* 88.35)
>
> No matter what part of things human and divine you take hold of, you will find a vast number of subjects for inquiry and learning to wear yourself out with. With so many big questions waiting to occupy our minds, we must make room for them by evicting those others that are superfluous. Virtue will not take up residence within such narrow confines: so large a guest needs elbow room. So, let everything by driven out, and let the whole heart be open to virtue.

From Seneca's perspective, there will always be things that someone *could* learn, and trying to learn a vast amount of information would prevent someone from focusing on the most important task, acquiring virtue. Therefore, one needs to "evict" the unimportant thoughts from one's mind, and make room to become a virtuous person.

Letter Eighty-eight demonstrates that Seneca strongly believes in philosophy as the best method for educating someone. First, the liberal arts, mathematics and other forms of education cannot compare to the moral and ethical knowledge that philosophy has to offer, and second, education requires a particular type of devotion to its subject matter. Seneca touched on this

subject in Letter Eighty-eight, but it is in Letter Two titled, by editors Graver and Long, "A Beneficial Reading Program," that he actually explains his educational program by discussing what sort of texts a person should read. This sounds like a very modern philosophical topic, but it is in fact aptly titled as Seneca is quite literally giving his advice on how one should read philosophical texts. Seneca cautions Lucilius in the opening of Letter Two:

> Illud autem vide, ne ista lectio auctorum multorum et omnis generis voluminum habeat aliquid vagum et instabile. Certis ingeniis inmorari et innutriri oportet, si velis aliquid trahere quod in animo fideliter sedeat. Nusquam est qui ubique est. Vitam in peregrinatione exigentibus hoc evenit, ut multa hospitia habeant, nullas amicitias; idem accidat necesse est iis qui nullius se ingenio familiariter applicant sed omnia cursim et properantes transmittunt. (*Ep.* 2.2)
>
> Be careful, though, about your reading in many authors and every type of book. It may be that there is something wayward and unstable in it. You must stay with a limited number of writers and be fed by them if you mean to derive anything that will dwell readily with you. One who is everywhere is nowhere. Those who travel all the time find that they have many places to stay, but no friendships. The same thing happens to those who do not become intimate with any one author, but let everything rush right through them.

Seneca is making one essential point: do not read too widely. This seems paradoxical since a teacher usually does not tell a student to limit his or her reading. In reality, Seneca's advice is to read and contemplate a smaller number of significant texts: depth over breadth. He warns against reading "many authors" and "every type of book," for the sake of *saying* that one has read. Why read about all subjects if only one (philosophy, of course) can truly liberate the mind? Seneca does not specify the authors that Lucilius should read, and this might appear awkward given the nature of this letter. However, this is quintessentially Senecan. Based on Seneca's other letters and musings, it is safe to assume that he is most likely thinking that Lucilius' choice of authors are within the Stoic canon, and only a few of the selected books would be outside. An example of this would be Cleanthes who was a Stoic, or Plato, who while Seneca does not consider him a Stoic, he does consider him wise (*Ep.* 44.3). This openness to non-Stoic authors is also

demonstrated in his citing of Epicurus, which is discussed in the introduction.[74] While Seneca is without a doubt a Stoic, he does employ examples from various disciplines and philosophical schools to convince his reader. Some might point to this tactic as inconsistent, I propose that Seneca knows his readers share different experiences and might be best persuaded by historical, or literary, examples rather than purely philosophical evidence. Seneca insists nevertheless, that there is something "unstable" about that sort of voracious, limitless reading, that cannot sustain the reader.

Seneca also uses metaphors from different aspects of human life, and applies them to philosophical concepts to make them more comprehensible and accessible to the reader.[75] He is fond of various types of metaphors, but those concerning food and ingestion are common, along with housing and living metaphors. While discussing the limited number of authors that one should read, he explains that one should be "fed" by them. The idea of sustenance is strong in this passage: one should consume philosophical writing in order to have a healthy and strong mind. Not only that, but it seems that the goal of philosophical inquiry is, partially at least, to have these authors and their thoughts "dwell" inside of the reader. Thus, Seneca encourages Lucilius to house these authors and thoughts in his mind. This argument is significant because living with something is necessary for habituation in Stoic thought, an argument adapted from the Aristotelean ethics. Aristotle and traditional Stoic/virtue ethicists believed that for one to become ethical one must constantly practice acts of ethics.[76] If philosophy dwells in one's mind, then one is able to rely on it while making choices, and subsequently habituate in it. In the

[74] *Ep.* 2.5, 8.7, *Ep.* 66.18
[75] Lavery (1980), 151
[76] Gaskin (2012), 106

Ancient World, both the metaphors of digestion and safe dwelling would have been very significant to a Roman since these practices were crucial for survival.

In the citation above, Seneca begins to move from the corporeal metaphors to the metaphor of travel. Traveling plays a role throughout the letters, for example while discussing his own seasickness (*Ep.* 53.3). In that context, traveling poses a particular risk of suffering, and it is described as a negative experience: "One who is everywhere is nowhere." The metaphor of travel is important in Senecan writing: "For Seneca, life is also a journey of the body and the soul. He would have us constantly recall to mind the instability and transience."[77] This quote is related to the idea of habituation, as it demonstrates that dwelling or staying in one place is necessary for growth and development. If a person is constantly in different places, then she/he is never establishing roots. Seneca further develops this idea by writing that while travelers will get to see and be in different places, they will not be able to establish significant "friendships." This is an important point because Seneca uses the idea of philosophy as a friend or companion in the various letters and dialogues (*Ep.* 44.3). The metaphor of friendship is equivalent to having a home and crucial in achieving a sense of community.

Seneca continues to invoke the food and bodily metaphors in the next paragraph of this letter. He writes:

> Non prodest cibus nec corpori accedit qui statim sumptus emittitur; nihil aeque sanitatem inpedit quam remediorum crebra mutatio; non venit vulnus ad cicatricem in quo medicamenta temptantur; non convalescit planta quae saepe transfertur; nihil tam utile est ut in transitu prosit. Distringit librorum multitudo; itaque cum legere non possis quantum habueris, satis est habuere quantum legas. (*Ep.* 2.3)
>
> "Food does not benefit or become part of the body when it is eaten and immediately expelled. Nothing impedes healing as much as frequent change of medications. A wound does not close up when one is always trying out different dressings on it; a seedling that is transplanted repeatedly will never grow strong. Nothing, in fact, is of such utility that it

[77] Lavery (1980), 151

> benefits us merely in passing. A large number of books puts a strain on a person. So, since you cannot read everything you have it is sufficient to have only the amount you can read."

Seneca believes that stability and consistency were crucial to learning philosophy. This requires habituation: one should perform tasks daily in order to perform them automatically. At the same time, habituation also requires moderation. That is, one should not habituate oneself to decadent excess. The beginning of this quote references vomiting, and suggests that food does not do one any good if one immediately vomits it. This implicitly refers to the elite Roman practice of eating until one is full and then vomiting so that one can eat more. Seneca finds this practice extremely un-Stoic (*Ep.* 44.5). The idea that one should eat purely for pleasure, and not sustenance, demonstrates the problem with pursuing personal feelings or desire without moderation. It is wasteful and decadent.

Seneca continues with the idea of disruption versus equilibrium by describing both the practices of medicine and gardening (both relatable and theoretically important tasks.) He explains that in order to heal from an illness, one should remain on the same medication. In accordance with his logic, the wound will not heal if one constantly changes the bandages. Seneca reinforced the importance of habituation by providing an example of how the body needs time to heal from a specific treatment before we know if a new treatment should be applied. He also provides the example of how a growing plant that was moved multiple times could not grow because it was not able to set roots and adapt to its environment. All of these examples, which are grounded in natural processes, work as metaphors to demonstrate the concept that people should habituate themselves to a few, but significant number of authors. Seneca argues that if a person reads a large number of books it would "strain" not only her mental capability, but in a sense will also harm her physically. Thus, showing a connection between the mind and the body.

Seneca often inserts a hypothetical response from Lucilius in order to provide an answer. This is another example of his masterful rhetorical style. The arguments in his letters are strategically constructed to convince the reader to follow his advice. He writes:

> ‘Sed modo’ inquis ‘hunc librum evolvere volo, modum illum.’ Fastidientis stomachi est multa degustare; quae ubi varia sunt et diversa, inquinant non alunt. Probatos itaque semper lege, et si quando ad alios deverti libuerit, ad priores redi. (*Ep.* 2.4)
>
> ‘But I want to read different books at different times,’ you say. The person of delicate digestion nibbles at this and that; when the diet is too varied, though, food does not nourish but only upsets the stomach. So read always from authors of proven worth; and if ever you are inclined to turn aside to others, return afterward to the previous ones.

Lucilius is hypothetically stating that he wants to read different books at different times, because he may want to read a text at a particular time for a specific reason or feeling and yet a different one depending on the circumstances. Lucilius is describing what it means to read for pleasure, while Seneca believes reading is for sustenance. He returns once again to the food and digestion metaphors, by proposing that a wide variety of foods can only harm a person who already suffers from a “delicate digestion.” Therefore, it is most beneficial to read authors of “proven worth” and then to re-read these authors. This advice is strikingly similar to the advice given to contemporary students who study Classics: read a certain text of significance in its original language and then read it again. The difference is that Seneca does not design a list of canonical texts for his reader. It can be inferred by the references he makes to authors, such as in Letter Forty-Four (line 3), that these texts should be philosophical in nature, and would teach virtue. Ultimately, this Letter shows that Seneca is unconcerned with reading for reading’s sake. Readers must read to instruct themselves, in particular because they need to learn how to control their emotions by understanding the process of fate, and they must choose the authors wisely.

Philosophy and a Bearable Life

Seneca's letters on education begin by describing what education is, and move to explain why it is necessary. This is where Seneca makes his most compelling argument for why people *should* read philosophy. His singular answer to this question, presented in Letter Sixteen, is that education is necessary for someone to lead a good life:

> Liquere hoc tibi, Lucili, scio, neminem posse beate vivere, ne tolerabiliter quidem, sine sapientiae studio, et beatam vitam perfecta sapientia effici, ceterum tolerabilem etiam inchoata. Sed hoc quod liquet firmandum et altius cotidiana meditatione figendum est: plus operis est in eo ut proposita custodias quam ut honesta proponas. Perseverandum est et adsiduo studio robur addendum, donec bona mens sit quod bona voluntas est. (*Ep.* 16.1)
>
> I am sure you realize, Lucilius, that no one can live a truly happy life, or even a bearable life, without philosophy; also, that while it is complete wisdom that renders a life happy, even to begin that study makes life bearable. But this realization must be confirmed and fixed more deeply through daily rehearsal. 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.

Seneca begins with the premise that to live a life that is even remotely bearable, one must engage in philosophical thought. A quintessential aspect of life, in our time but especially two-thousand years ago, was unexpected suffering. He famously writes elsewhere that a person can die from a choking on their own saliva, so why should one worry about an earthquake?[78] Death, pain, and suffering comes to humans through natural reasons but also comes through civil wars and social strife. To live is to be very vulnerable to chance and to change. In the face of this, humans need a coping strategy. For many ancient people, traditional religious institutions could perform this duty,[79] but for Seneca and the other Stoics it is the study of philosophy. Philosophy can help someone come to terms with his/her inevitable death and to accept it. It also puts life events into

[78] Seneca, *Natural Questions,* Book 7.2.4
[79] Truesdell (1920), 197

perspective: if one thinks about one's mortality, then loosing political office should not be that scary.

Beyond simply coping, Seneca believed Lucilius could become happy by conforming to Stoicism. Wisdom, the principal Stoic virtue, gives a person true happiness. Again, Seneca does not describe what this wisdom is or what it looks like. Instead, he outlines how someone can find it: habituation. Seneca's description of "daily rehearsal" is a perfect summary of Stoic habituation, a person must practice doing something each day so that they will instinctively perform it. When someone stubs her toe, she should be rehearsed sufficiently as to not lash out violently. Reaching this level of habituation can be difficult (and possibly unattainable to be truly above all personal suffering and pain) but the reward is great: absolute happiness. This happiness goes far beyond the regular sort of happiness, which can come from physical pleasure. The goal is to be content with one's circumstances, whatever they are, and no matter how varied, they may be. At the end of this passage, Seneca reminds the reader of the difficulty of living such a life. Anyone, like Seneca himself, may think of these "honorable aims" and believe that they are good, but it is much harder to act out those aims when life presents you with countless reasons not to be virtuous. Seneca's advice in the face of this difficulty is to "persevere" and to continue studying. For him, good intentions alone do not make a person ethical or virtuous.

Seneca is deeply concerned with how this progress, this excellence of mind, is achieved. For him, the act of becoming virtuous is a process, and one must make progress slowly and over time. In advising Lucilius, Seneca writes:

> Itaque <non opus est> tibi apud me pluribus verbis aut adfirmatione tam longa: intellego multum te profecisse. Quae scribis unde veniant scio; non sunt ficta nec colorata. Dicam tamen quid sentiam: iam de te spem habeo, nondum fiduciam. Tu quoque idem facias volo: non est quod tibi cito et facile credas. Excute te et varie scrutare et observa; illud ante omnia vide, utrum in philosophia an in ipsa vita profeceris. (*Ep.* 16.2)

> So you don't need much verbiage or such lengthy protestations when you are with me. I understand that you have made a lot of progress. I know where these things you write are coming from. You are not making them up, or even touching them up. Still, I will tell you my opinion: I have hopes of you, but as yet no confidence. And if I have my way, you will adopt that same attitude towards yourself, and not be too quick to trust yourself without good reason. Shake yourself out; check yourself over; look at yourself in different ways. Above all, consider whether the progress you have made has been in philosophy, or in life itself.

Seneca asks Lucilius to not make any excuses, there is no need to justify his actions or his progress with Seneca. As if providing comfort to a child, Seneca acknowledged that Lucilius had made some "progress." And while we do not know Lucilius response to Seneca, it seems that "these things you write," were expressions of frustration with the process of becoming a Stoic. In the context of the examples that Seneca provided, these "frustrations" could be anything from resisting lust, anger or grief. Seneca is a bit harsh, and appears to have limited confidence in Lucilius' progress, but this opinion has philosophical implications, and is not solely personal. For Seneca, it is important to apply a skeptical attitude to oneself, so that one is not inclined to trust one's own judgement automatically, but to question it. Is the action virtuous? Or is it done out of self-interest? To achieve a state of self-reflection, Seneca recommends that one should institute a practice of examining oneself from different perspectives. He finishes this passage by asking Lucilius to consider the progress he makes in philosophy or life. Thus, Lucilius should not merely learn the tenets of philosophy, but needs to learn how to apply them within a virtuous life.

Seneca moves on to discuss the nature of philosophy as a practice, and how it is uniquely related to this idea of self-reflection and the personal. He explains:

> Non est philosophia populare artificium nec ostentationi paratum; non in verbis sed in rebus est. Nec in hoc adhibetur, ut cum aliqua oblectatione consumatur dies, ut dematur otio nausia: animum format et fabricat, vitam disponit, actiones regit, agenda et omittenda demonstrate. (*Ep.* 16.3)

> 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.

This passage carries an implicit indictment against elite Romans who used philosophy as a rhetorical strategy to manipulate an audience or just to impress others. For Seneca, philosophy was not something that was performed, or verbally enunciated for an audience, but rather it was a practice demonstrated through ones' actions. Seneca's position stood in contrast to the cultural opinion of the time: "The republican forum welcomed and rewarded the merits of free and open philosophical inquiry; on the other hand, Quintilian's imperial society was more receptive to the skills of polished and amusing rhetoricians."[80] The passage also represents a recurring theme for Seneca, philosophy was not a rhetorical strategy or a hobby, but an occupation that one must dedicate oneself to in order to succeed, a theme also present in Letter Eighty-Eight. In fact, Seneca believed that if one devoted oneself to the study of philosophy, one would be rewarded with the *reliability* of philosophy. Philosophers can always count on philosophical teachings to guide them to make the right decision, and it can prepare one's mind to face adversity during the most challenging of times. Seneca engages in a hypothetical conversation about this:

> Dicet aliquis, 'quid mihi prodest philosophia, si fatum est? quid prodest, si deus rector est? quid prodest, si casus imperat? Nam et mutari certa non possunt et nihil praeparari potes adversus incerta, sed aut consilium meum occupavit deus decrevitque quid facerem aut consilio meo nihil fortuna permittit.' Quidquid est ex his, Lucili, vel si omnia haec sunt, philosophandum est; sive nos inexorabili lege fata constringunt, sive arbiter deus universi cuncta disposuit, sive casus res humanas sine ordine inpellit et iactat, philosophia nos tueri debet. Haec adhortabitur ut deo libenter pareamus, ut fortunae contumaciter; haec docebit ut deum sequaris, feras casum. (*Ep.* 16.4)
>
> Someone will say, 'what use is philosophy to me if there is fate? What use is it if God is in charge? What use, if chance has the master? No matter which is true, Lucilius, or even if they all are, we must still practice philosophy. Perhaps the inexorable law of fate constrains us; perhaps God, the universal arbiter, governs all events; perhaps it is chance

[80] Pascal (1984), 352

> that drives human affairs, and disrupts them: all the same, it is philosophy that must preserve us. Philosophy will urge us to give willing obedience to God, and but a grudging obedience to fortune. It will teach you to follow God; to cope with chance.

The Roman belief in *fortuna* or an unchangeable fate is illustrated in this passage. From Roman literature, to statues uncovered in Pompeii, it is evident that Roman people believed that a force of chance controlled their lives.[81] Seneca also subscribed to this belief, however, *fortuna* did not make acting virtuous pointless, but it was the fundamental need for philosophy. If it is true that God—, the universe, chance, or any iteration of such a spirit—has total power over you, then you must find a way to cope and adapt in the face of unpredictability. Death, illness or misfortune could befall on a person at any point, and thus instead of being paralyzed by that knowledge, having a virtuous education would allow someone to bravely face the circumstances. *Fortuna* would instead encourage one to follow God, or to be virtuous, and it will allow the individual to come to terms with their personal circumstances.

In Letter Sixteen, Seneca describes how life becomes bearable through the practice of philosophy. In Letter Fifteen titled, "Exercises for the Body and Voice," he gives advice on how to reach that level of philosophical expertise. Here, Seneca makes a clear argument for the necessity of philosophy for someone to live a good life:

> Mos antiquis fuit, usque ad meam servatus aetatem, primis epistulae verbis adicere 'si vales bene est, ego valeo'. Recte nos dicimus 'si philosopharis, bene est'. Valere enim hoc demum est. Sine hoc aeger est animus; corpus quoque, etiam si magnas habet vires, non aliter quam furiosi aut frentici validum est. (*Ep.* 15.1)
>
> It was a custom among our ancestors, practiced even into my own lifetime, to add to the opening words of a letter, 'If you are doing well, that's good; I am doing well myself.' The right thing for us to 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,

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[81] Bonnell-Freidin (2017), 1

> even if it has great strength, is sounded only as that of an insane or deranged person might be.

Seneca outlines the practice of ancient letter writers and emphasizes the friendly and formulaic greeting that inquires about the well-being of the correspondent. He adapts this greeting for his own purpose, and suggests that the correct way to pose the question is to state, "If you are doing philosophy, that's good." Philosophy works as an exclusive mechanism because its practice is the only means that allows a person to put events into perspective and helps them cope with the randomness of human life. Seneca also points to the hierarchical relationship between the mind and the body: if the mind lacks philosophical wisdom, it will weaken the body. The individual person might as well be "insane." With that knowledge, Seneca believes that people should spend a very limited amount of time on their physical exercise routine so that they have the time and energy to exercise the mind (*Ep.* 15.2-3). This logic shows a clear preference for mental strength over physical strength. But, that does not mean physical exercise is not important, rather it helps a person think more clearly and have more energy to perform difficult mental tasks. However, he then cautions:

> Neque ego te iubeo semper inminere libro aut pugillaribus: dandum est aliquod intervallum animo, ita tamen ut non resolvatur, sed remittitur. Gestatio et corpus concutit et studio non officit: possis legere, possis dictare, possis loqui, possis audire, quorum nihil ne ambulation quidem vetat fieri. (*Ep.* 15.6)
>
> I am not telling you to be always pouring over a book or tablet: the mind should have some respite, but to relax, not to become lax. Getting out in the sedan chair limbers up the body and does not preclude study: you could read, or dictate, or speak, or listen. In fact, even walking need not prevent you from doing any of these things.

The point is not to constantly be studying and to exercise the mind without a break, but rather just like exercising your muscles, you should give the mind time to relax and grow in between exercise routines. However, these routines do not have to be strenuous, one can receive enough exercise by being bumped in a sedan chair or taking a walk. This idea, of using the mind like a

muscle will recur elsewhere in the letters in tangent with the idea of habituation. Train your mind by repeating the exercise of practicing virtue. Then, take a break by going out, walking or listening to others.

Like Letter Sixteen, Letter Fifteen ends with a discussion of Lucilius' personal progress. When Lucilius feels lost, and thinks there is no way to resist pleasure and vice, Seneca wants Lucilius to be reflective about himself. He explains:

> Subinde itaque, Lucili, quam multa sis consecutus recordare; cum aspexeris quot te antecedant, cogita quot sequantur. Si vis gratus esse adversus deos et adversus vitam tuam, cogita quam multos antecesseris. Quid tibi cum ceteris? Te ipse antecessisti, (Ep. 15.10)
>
> So remind yourself often, Lucilius, how much you have achieved. When you see how many people are out ahead of you, think about how many are behind. If you want to be thankful to the gods and to your own life, think how many people you have surpassed. But what does it matter about anyone else? You have surpassed yourself.

Seneca does not expect Lucilius to behave like a perfect Stoic *sapiens* at this point in his education. Instead, he should think of "how much" he has achieved, and when he feels unsure about his accomplishments he should "think how many people" he has surpassed. It is important to note that Lucilius is in the process of becoming a Stoic, and must be "thankful to the gods" while acknowledging that he has surpassed "many people." However, Seneca reminds Lucilius that progress is measured only by the ability to "surpass" oneself. This is a fundamental tenet of Seneca's individualized virtue ethics: one should not permit social perceptions to drive one's actions. Instead, one should act in accordance with a desire to embody and display virtue.

Philosophy is not just an education, or just a coping mechanism, but it functions as an agent of change for people. Seneca articulates this in Letter Fifty-three:

> Quare vitia sua nemo confitetur? Quia etiamnunc in illis est: somnium narrare vigilantis est, et vitia sua confiteri sanitatis indicium est. Expergiscamur ergo, ut errores nostros coarguere possimus. Sola autem nos philosophia excitabit, sola somnum excutiet gravem:

> illi te totum dedica. Dignus illa es, illa digna te est: ite in complexum alter alterius. (*Ep.* 53.8)
>
> Why do people not admit their faults? Because they are still in the midst of them. Dreams are told by those who are awake; admitting to one's faults is a sign of health. Let us wake up, then, so that we will be able to recognize our mistakes. But philosophy is the only thing that will awake us; the only thing that will rouse us from our deep sleep. Devote yourself entirely to philosophy. You are worthy of it, and it of you: embrace one another.

Seneca believes people have a difficult time being self-reflective when they are engaged in self-damaging actions. Thus, people have to first "wake up" in order to reach a certain level of clarity and only then will they be able to recognize their mistakes, and this is ultimately a sign of good mental health. However, only philosophy can "awake us" and "rouse us from our deep sleep," which in turn will allow us to lead a virtuous life. Having recognized this fact, a person should thus devote himself or herself to the study of philosophy. This language of devotion has seemingly religious implications, but it also connotes a relationship. Each partner, Lucilius and philosophy, are worthy and deserving of each other, which makes them a good pair. Like any good marriage, it should make both partners better and more prepared to go forth into the world. Ancient writers valued companionability in marriage; Homer described Odysseus and Penelope as likeminded.[82]

Seneca then embarks on another metaphor, this time about serious illness, evoking themes from Letter Two. Here, the metaphor serves to demonstrate the dire consequences of living a life without philosophy. He writes:

> Si aeger esses, curam intermisisses rei familiaris et forensia tibi negotia excidissent nec quemquam tanti putares cui advocatus in remissione descenderes; toto animo id ageres ut quam primum morbo libereris. Quid ergo? Non et nunc idem facies? Omnia impedimenta dimitte et vaca bonae menti: nemo ad illam pervenit occupatus. Exercet philosophia regnum suum; dat tempus. (*Ep.* 53.9)

[82] Bergren (1993), 9

> If you were ill, you would take a break from your responsibilities at home. Your career concerns would drop away; no one's defense case would be so important to you that you would go back down to the Forum while still anticipating a relapse. All your efforts would be devoted to freeing yourself from disease as soon as possible. What about it, then? Will you not do the same thing now? Get rid of everything that stands in your way; make time for excellence of mind. No one gets there while occupied with business. Philosophy asserts its power. It grants us time.

If someone catches the flu, he must give up some of his responsibilities and rest in order to care for himself. No one would be expected to conduct business while experiencing painful symptoms. Like modern adages, when someone's physical well-being is threatened, the other more superficial concerns become perceptually less important, because the very foundation, someone's life, is in danger. In advising Lucilius, Seneca refers to the job of defending a client in the forum.[83] This job would connect with some of Seneca's elite readers, as famous Romans like Cicero defended clients in the forum.[84] This framing sets up philosophy as the cure for a disease that all humans have (the lack of virtue.) Therefore, everyone should act quickly in order to rid himself or herself of the disease, make time, and space for "excellence of mind." Someone's business will never lead to him or her to this type of excellence. He ends this section by saying that philosophy's power is precisely that it "grants us time." This is not because it can lengthen the span of one's life, but it will help one make more time for the things that matter, making that time more meaningful. It is for these reasons that Seneca believes people should practice philosophy.

Letter Forty-Four: Education as an Introduction to Slavery

Graver and Long titled Letter Forty-Four, "On Philosophy and Genealogies," because it focuses primarily on *who* can study philosophy. For Seneca, the answer is simple: anyone can study philosophy, and everyone should study philosophy:

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[83] Chroust (1954), 106
[84] Plutarch, *Cicero,* 2.4

> Si quid est aliud in philosophia boni, hoc est, quod stemma non sunt. (*Ep.* 44.1)
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> If there is any good in philosophy, it is this, that it does not observe pedigree.[85]

The translation "pedigree" derives from the Latin word *stemma*. Pedigree generally refers to one's biological family tree. This word choice demonstrates how Seneca conceptualized social hierarchy: those who are most often exposed to, or feel entitled to study philosophy, are those whose ancestors paved the way for them with wealth or political power:

> Omnes, si ad originem primam revocantur, a dis sunt (*Ep.* 44.1*)*
>
> All, if they are recalled to first origin, are from the gods.

This asserts a universal familial origin. Instead of envisioning one's familial line as beginning with one man and one woman, who had specific class positions, all people have one equal and unsurpassably noble origin: the gods. Seneca then speaks to *what* is available and to *whom* in Roman society:

> Eques Romanus es, et ad hunc ordinem tua te perduxit industria; at mehercules multis quattuordecim clausa sunt, non omnes curia admittit, castra quoque quos ad laborem et periculum recipiant fastidiose legunt (*Ep.* 44.2)
>
> You [Lucilius] are a Roman knight, and your diligence led you to that station; but by Hercules to many the fourteen rows are closed, the senate house does not admit all; the military camp also chooses disdainfully whom they receive for work and danger.

Seneca acknowledges that while his friend Lucilius' success is partially due to his own efforts, the use of the term "by Hercules" demonstrates his exasperation at the thought that Lucilius's family rank did not contribute to his wealth and success. Lucilius was the son of an equestrian who enjoyed economic stability and social prestige. Seneca's reference to the "fourteen rows" of the theater indicates how privilege was publicly allocated to the wealthiest Romans. A plebian could not walk into the senate house and vote on legislation. Even the "camp," which Seneca

[85] All translations for Letter 44 are my own

used to mean the military census location, applied only to freeborn Roman citizens. Although the facts of one's birth generally determined one's future prospects, there are exceptions. Cicero was famously a "*homo novus*" who became a consul without a patrician heritage. Plutarch described Cicero as a man who did not have an important father, and who was the first man from his family worthy of remembrance.[86] Seneca himself was from a merchant family and rose to be one of the wealthiest men in Rome.[87] However, Seneca understood that this occurrence was rare, and it would be wrong to believe that these Roman institutions correctly determined who possessed virtue:

> Bona mens omnibus patet. (*Ep.* 44.2)
>
> A good mind is open to all.

When Seneca uses the term, *bona mens* he means the state of wisdom, which he believed was accessible only through the study of philosophy.

Next, Seneca focuses on why he believes that philosophy is accessible to all people regardless of their social class. He writes,

> Nec reicit quemquam philosophia nec eligit: omnibus lucet (*Ep.* 44.2)
>
> Philosophy neither rejects nor chooses anyone: it shines upon all.

Philosophy, according to Seneca, was not an exclusive field of study. Philosophy does not choose its teachers or students; instead, it works as a beacon, that guides all those who choose to follow it towards virtue, and thus towards a good life. This belief would have been radical in his period (and I argue even in our own), as the literacy rate in the ancient Roman world was between five and ten percent, made up of almost entirely wealthy and privileged men from

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[86] Plutarch, *Cicero,* 1.3
[87] Wilson (2014), 4

equestrian and senatorial families.[88] A very few freedmen and trained slaves, anecdotally Greek, would have been literate as a function of their domestic employment, along with a negligible number of elite women.[89] As the practice of philosophy traditionally required the ability to read and write, this meant that either all people had to be trained to read, or philosophy would have to depend less on written texts. Surely, Seneca would have thus favored expanded literacy.

Seneca gives examples of various famous philosophers:

Patricius Socrates non fuit; Cleanthes aquam traxit. (*Ep.* 44.3)

Socrates was not a patrician; Cleanthes hauled water.

Almost all ancient and modern philosophy students would recognize the name Socrates, and the reminder that he was not an aristocrat would have carried argumentative weight. Cleanthes, a prominent Greek Stoic, carried water pots to people's gardens. In ancient Rome, men who performed manual labor for subsistence were viewed as having low status, and uneducable, a view derived from the idea that philosophy required leisure which working people lacked. Yet, Cleanthes contributed to the philosophical cannon. Seneca went further:

Platonem non accepit nobilem philosophia sed fecit (*Ep.* 44.3)

Philosophy did not receive Plato noble but made [him] noble.

This common grammatical construction for Seneca, in which the reader has to supply the "him" in reference to Plato, places the two nouns directly in contrast with one another. This reinforces the idea that Plato was not truly noble *until* he studied philosophy. This would be particularly powerful because Plato was in fact from a noble family, and thus being told that his nobility is not due to that heritage but to his philosophical inquiries, would be a striking thought. Seneca ends this section with the following statement:

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[88] Harris (1991), 23
[89] Harris (1991), 33

Omnes hi maiores tui sunt, si te illis geris dignum (*Ep.* 44.3)

All these are ancestors for you, if you bear yourself truly worthy of them.

Ancestral heritage in Roman culture was very important to a family's social status. For instance, Julius Caesar claimed to be related to the Trojan prince and mythical father of Rome, Aeneas and the goddess Venus.[90] He would use this heritage in various important political moments, like at the Battle of Pharsalus, when he promised to build a temple to Venus if he won.[91] Caesar's famous foe in that battle, Pompey, also proclaimed relation to the goddess, and feared that Caesar's relation was more believable.[92] Marcus Junius Brutus, the assassin of Julius Caesar, was a descendant of Lucius Junius Brutus who was believed to have killed the last tyrannical king of Rome, making him a preserver of the Roman Republic.[93] These assertions supported the political ambitions of the senatorial class, as having a divine heritage made someone seem better fit for high political offices.[94] For Seneca, however, claimed ancestors did not have to be limited one's biological line. Rather they could include the philosophers that taught one how to achieve virtue and wisdom. To claim those ancestors, one must "bear yourself worthy" which for Seneca would mean to use philosophy to achieve Stoic virtue.

Seneca further explores this understanding of the social power of ancestry:

"Nullius non origo ultra memoriam iacet" (*Letters,* 44.4)

"The origin of everyone lies beyond memory."

This justifies disregarding the ancestry of a family because it is impossible to know the first ancestor or originator of any family. Since acquiring that knowledge is impossible, what would

[90] Suetonius *Div. Iul.* 6
[91] Appian 2.10.68
[92] Plutarch, *Pompey,* 68.1.
[93] Plutarch, *Marcus Brutus,* 1.1
[94] Roman (2010), 111

be the purpose of viewing the most recent ancestors as a reflection of that person? He continues by citing Plato:

> Platon ait neminem regem non ex servis esse oriundum, neminem non servum ex regibus (*Letters,* 44.3)
>
> "Plato said that no king did not descend from slaves, no slave not from kings."

This serves to reinforce Seneca's argument that fate and the course of history made it so that those from the lowest to the highest social ranks have ancestors from the opposite end of the social spectrum. This indicates that any elite social role, like that of philosopher, is not socially predestined because of someone's family lineage.

> Non facit nobilem atrium plenum fumosis imaginibus; nemo in nostram gloriam vixit nec quod ante nos fuit nostrum est (*Ep.* 44.5)
>
> A full atrium with smoky ancestor masks doesn't make one noble: no one lived for our glory nor is what was before us.

In this citation, Seneca refers to the area in a patrician's home where that he would display the masks of the dead ancestors. However, past noble relatives do not make the current descendent noble. This is especially problematic because it is likely that those relatives did not practice virtue. This implies that those who came before us do not create our glory we must create it ourselves. Thus, Seneca casts doubt on the idea that nobility is defined by one's familial lineage and prestige:

> Intuendum est non unde veniant, sed quo eant (*Ep.* 44.5)
>
> One must consider not from where they come, but where they are going.

The emphasis here is on what a person is able to achieve during his or her lifetime, and not the possession or non-possession of illustrious ancestors.

Conclusion

A close reading of Letter Forty-Four demonstrates that Seneca diverged from his cultural tradition by claiming that philosophy is and should be open to all people regardless of their social location or putative family origins. There were so few public educational institutions in Rome, and this reflected the profound effect of living in a slave society: "the lack of universal public education has to be examined within the conditions of a society organized and founded on the institution of slavery. To the Romans education was a method of training the free citizen for his duties to the state, rather than for the individual's advantage. Roman education was directed to the needs of the upper classes of society."[95] In the face of this, Seneca makes two unique claims which when combined are significant. First, that all *people* should practice philosophy, and be educated in the study of virtue. And second, that slaves are *people,* with the capabilities necessary for such a pursuit. The sum of these arguments is significant because it can be used as a basis for an expansion of education. For Seneca, philosophy is personified as a universal ancestor capable of guiding its descendants towards the good life. Seneca seems to imply that any social institution or practice is unnatural to the degree that it limits the universal pursuit of virtue. All people are equal in their ability to achieve virtue through the study of philosophy, even though only a select few may become senators, consuls, or emperors. This chapter has introduced Seneca's readers to some of his beliefs about slavery, but the next chapter will focus on slavery in a more isolated sense as it will attempt to understand how Seneca viewed slavery in a separate discussion from education.

[95] Pascal (1984), 354

Chapter 2: Slavery as an Unnatural Institution

Slavery in Ancient Rome

During Seneca's lifetime, Rome was a slave society.[96] This is distinct from a society that simply contained slaves:[97] the Roman Empire's economy and culture was entirely dependent on the involuntary labor of enslaved people from around the Mediterranean basin. The impact of slavery in Rome was profound: "Slavery was a core institution of Roman society, and Roman material culture was shaped, directly and indirectly, both by the labor of slaves and by slavery's ideas and practices."[98] By the end of the first century BCE, approximately forty percent of Rome's population consisted of enslaved people.[99] During this period, slaves did not have what are now viewed as human rights. The work of enslaved people would have ranged from labor on farms, mines, and quarries, to domestic work within households. They would have been captured in the wars that the Romans fought with their Mediterranean neighbors, or were the offspring of already enslaved women. While Roman slavery was not racialized like that of later Western Hemispheric slavery, that didn't mean that Romans were not "sensitive to racial characteristics and features" of certain groups of people who were enslaved.[100] Seneca himself remarks that Roman society categorized slaves based upon their nationality and skin color in terms of their suitability for domestic work.[101]

Roman slavery, like all forms of ancient and modern slavery, was unquestionably a cruel and violent institution. It was a system which necessitated creating social hierarchy rooted in the

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[96] Bradley (1994), 12.
[97] Padgug (1976), 4
[98] Trimble (2016), 120
[99] Scheidel (2005), 170
[100] Bradley (1988), 481. Bradley remarks that for example Syrian and Jewish slaves were often spoken about in terms of their physical appearance and their performance as slaves.
[101] Letter 95.23-4.

idea that one person was inherently better than another. In fact, one scholar has argued that "the inferiority of the Roman slave, as assumed by his master, was just as great as that of the black slave in later periods of history, the lack of color prejudice on the modern pattern notwithstanding."[102] While there is no overall consensus on the connections between Roman slavery and the unfree labor systems of North and South America, it is certain that the idea of the slave as an inferior being was a crucial part of the Roman beliefs surrounding slavery and the institution itself. This would have been due in a large part to the philosophical doctrine of *natural* slavery, which will be explored later, which Seneca refuted. The concern over the slave as a danger to the master or Roman society was ever present in the surviving legal and literary texts from this period. A Roman proverb exists which stated that "All slaves are enemies."[103] In fact Seneca wrote about a Senate proposal which would have distinguished slaves from free citizens in their dress, but when the Roman Senate realized it would give slaves an idea of their total numbers, and could lead to revolt, the proposal was rejected.[104] Slavery gave slave owners an unquestionable personal advantage: not only was free labor done for them, but they created for themselves privilege in the form of freedom and citizenship.[105] This was used by slave-owners to control all major functional institutions in Rome, to include the senate, as well as the more unseen familial institutions, like access to education.

At the same time, the American imagination of Roman slavery is disturbing. One scholar has observed that, "Rome... is not a real place any more, if it ever was, but a symbol, a sign, an imaginary place teeming with dreamers' fantasies of sex, violence and *especially* slavery."[106]

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[102] Bradley (1988), 481
[103] Hopkins (1993), 5
[104] Bradley (1988), 477
[105] Bradley (1994), 24
[106] Apostol (2015), 110. Emphasis added.

Because of the distance between our time period and ancient Rome, there seem to be fewer ethical qualms against romanticizing and fantasizing about the Roman master-slave relationship. In books, media and in general conversation the "idealized image of the grateful and loyal slave, who in an emergency even sacrificed his or her life to save the slave owner," persists as a modern trope, obscuring the understanding that "slavery rested in slaves' legal powerlessness and in their more or less complete dependence on their owner's favor, which as far as the slave knew, could turn at any moment from love to hate."[107] The actual material life Roman slaves led was determined by their functionality and the importance of their work to their master, in addition to the degree of responsibility that a master may or may not have felt towards their individual slave.[108] Seneca discusses both of these images of the slave, and in doing so demonstrates the complexity of the master/slave relationship in antiquity without excusing the system of slavery itself. Rome as a place of fantasy recurs in TV miniseries such as HBO's *Rome,* and Starz's *Spartacus,* and the films *Gladiator* and *Pompeii.* This media shows slaves and/or ex-slaves as loyal, willing to die for their masters even when abused, in addition to being available for sex whenever their master desired. Emory University's own sororities and fraternities as recently as the 1980's had Roman "master and slave" parties. The cultural imagination of the Roman slave is sexualized and fun, not horrific.

In the context of this disturbing modern trend which misrepresents Roman slavery, it is important to outline what can be understood about the actual historical institution which enslaved people in the Roman Empire. There are significant problems with understanding Roman slavery, as enslaved peoples have been under-researched. Keith Bradley, who wrote a significant study of Roman slavery, concedes that scholars know little about the subjectivity of slaves, and much of

[107] Hopkins (1993), 5
[108] Bradley (1994), 89

the modern literature on the ancient slave experience is guesswork.[109] However, it is possible to approach Roman slavery through legal, archaeological and literary evidence.

In legal terms, the *ius gentium* held that the "master had power of life and death over his slave."[110] Roman law provided that if one slave attempted to or succeeded in killing his master, then all the slaves of that household could be tortured and put to death.[111] This had the clear intention of reducing slaves to a state of total obedience: such a law that punished all slaves for the transgressions of one slave would incentivize slaves to police each other. It is worth noting that Seneca "prevented the Senate from making manumission revocable, opposing, though in vain, the execution of a large household of slaves."[112] The *lex Fufia Caninia,* passed in 2 BCE*,* regulated the number of slaves that a master could set free in his will,[113] demonstrating a consensus on limiting the number of slaves entering into Roman society as freed citizens. Another Roman legal document stated that:

> "Slaves are reduced to our ownership by civil law or by the law of nations: by the civil law if a person is more than twenty years old allows himself to be sold to share the price: those slaves are ours by the law of nations who are captured from the enemy or who are the offspring of our female slaves."[114]

The civil law described above outlines an early practice of selling oneself in order to discharge a debt. This practice decreased over time, and certainly did not account for the majority of slaves. However, Rome increased its intake of slaves as it expanded via foreign wars. While such legal details give us some idea of the Roman slave experience and the relationships between slaves

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[109] Bradley, *Slavery and society in Rome,* 178
[110] Griffin (1976), 268
[111] Griffin (1976), 271
[112] Griffin (1976), 276
[113] Bradley (1994), 10
[114] *Digest* 1.5.1 (Marcian)

and masters, it is inadequate in the sense that the law is created by people whose attitudes surrounding slaves are colored by their desire to continue a system that benefitted them.[115] In fact, all Roman slave legislation was marked by the "assumption that the slave, denied practically all notion of humanity, was a totally inferior being."[116] This idea of inherent inferiority based on a (tacit) denial of humanity is highly contested in Seneca's writings as an unnatural and unethical set of distinctions.

Archaeological evidence provides us with some understanding of the material life of slaves, though it is restricted because "legal status does not map onto the material record in a straightforward way. The most powerful members of society disproportionately shaped the physical world they lived in, and direct material and visual evidence for slavery and the lives of slaves is rare."[117] However, Jennifer Trimble is analyzing various slave collars to understand what they tell us about Rome as a slave society.[118] We also know from examples of graffiti in Roman public buildings that a large portion of slaves were literate and able to express themselves and write their own names.[119] Those familiar only with North American slavery might assume low level of literacy among Roman slaves. In reality, many slaves were teachers of elite Roman children as was discussed in chapter two.[120]

We turn now to the literary and philosophical modes of understanding slavery. These are again indirect because they rely primarily on sources created by slave masters, as was the case with legal evidence and much of what is left to us in the archaeological record. However here we do in fact find some modes of resistance to such an institution in literary and philosophical

[115] Bradley (1988), 488
[116] Bradley (1988), 491
[117] Trimble (2016), 120
[118] Trimble (2016), 120
[119] Keegan (2013), 76
[120] Mohler (1940), 276

texts. Central to this discussion is the Aristotelian concept of "natural slavery," which confirmed that it was right and just to subjugate one human to another's will.[121] In his *Politics* Aristotle writes: "anyone who, while being human, is by nature not his own but of someone else… while being human, he is a piece of property; and a piece of property is a tool for action separate from its owner."[122] Aristotle believed that slaves were property, to be used as a tool by other humans for the intentions of the masters. Aristotle wrote: "by nature some are free, others slaves, and…for these it is both right and expedient that they should serve as slaves."[123] This definition of slavery as natural, and in effect predestined within an orderly universe, because of one's innate mental and physical qualities, was dominant in Seneca's time. For Aristotle, one is most likely to be virtuous and practice a system of virtue ethics if one possesses the qualities of beauty and wealth in addition to freedom. Seneca would later describe these endowments as simply chance varieties in *fortuna*: the possession of a formal Greek education depended on luck stemming from the accident of one's birth into a patrician or equestrian family. As we will see, Seneca believed that wealth and social class were not crucial for the practice of philosophy and virtue, and in fact often impeded one's ability to pursue a virtuous lifestyle. It is also important to note, I believe, that Aristotle's argument for enslavement survived well into the modern era, being used by slaveholding politicians such as Thomas Jefferson to justify the perpetual enslavement of Africans in the United States.[124]

If we may understand only one thing about Roman slavery from this series of evidence, it is that it was an essential, totalizing, hegemonic institution. The comments that Seneca made on education in this intellectual climate make them particularly significant, not only in the history of

[121] Bradley (1994), 134
[122] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b16–21.
[123] Aristotle, *Politics,* 1.2.15
[124] Adedipe (2011), 6

philosophy, but within broader social notions of progress and equality. Throughout Seneca's writings, he speaks of slavery in three distinct ways: the institution of slavery as immoral and unnatural; slaves as individuals and their capability for moral action; and the psychological concept of slavery as being enslaved to vice in addition to physical enslavement.[125] Each of these arguments operates on its own while mutually supporting each other. The remainder of this chapter will explore each idea and discuss its significance.

I. The Slave Society

In his written work, Seneca created a framework for an ethical objection to slavery. This objection is most clearly outlined in Letter Forty-seven which makes the central case for why slavery is immoral and unnatural. It justifies viewing the slave as an individual and equal to those who aren't enslaved, and explains why slaves can benefit from the study of philosophy. His introduction to Letter Forty-seven has a rhythmic repetitive structure, which counters the idea that "they are slaves," by emphasizing the fact that they too possess human attributes which make them innately equal:

> 'Servi sunt.' Immo homines 'Servi sunt.' Immo contubernales. 'Servi sunt.' Immo humiles amici. (*Ep.* 47.1)
>
> 'They are slaves.' What is more they are men. 'They are slaves.' What is more they are comrades. 'They are slaves.' What is more they are humble friends.

Seneca's use of the Latin term *immo* indicates a refusal to identify slaves as "naturally" enslaved. He observes that there are enslaved men (equivalent to the modern usage "human") who are nonetheless one's comrades and friends. Seneca uses this rhetorical strategy elsewhere in the letter with the understanding that an individual who happens to be a slave ought to be defined by his inherent abilities and interactions with others rather than solely by his current and contingent

[125] *Ep.* 47

social position. Seneca goes so far as to suggest that a slave can behave more virtuously than his master. He is particularly critical of repugnant dining practices in which elite Romans ate to the point of vomiting, while slaves stood around the edges of the room, maintaining silence for fear of punishment:

> Est ille plus quam capit, et ingenti aviditate onerat distentum ventrem ac desuetum iam ventris officio, ut maiore opera omnia egerat quam ingessit. At infelicibus servis movere labra ne in hoc quidem, ut loquantur (*Ep.* 47.2)
>
> He eats more than he can hold, and burdens on account of great greed his belly, stretched-out and now unaccustomed to the duty of the belly, with the result that with greater work he discharges what he ingested. Yet to unhappy slaves it is permitted to set in motion lips indeed not even for this, in order to speak.

The master is unable to constrain his physical desires, which results in gluttony. The slave stands silently, stoically holding back displays of disgust. Seneca portrays the slave as the virtuous actor throughout the letter, contrary to the master:

> Tussis, sternumenta, singultus' magno malo ulla voce interpellatum silentium luitur; nocte tota ieiuni mutique perstant. (*Ep.* 47.3)
>
> Cough, sneezes, sobbing; silence interrupted by any voice is atoned for at a great, evil price. In the whole night hungry and silent they remain steadfast.

He employs the Latin word *perstant* to emphasize that Roman slaves stoically endured absurd demands forced upon their bodies by their masters. At the same time, those in power practice debauchery, which allows Seneca to invoke the slave's moral character. In this passage, Seneca also describes the sexual abuses that slaves are forced to endure.[126] Sex between slaves and masters is a common subject of literary texts, but modern scholarship has tended to focus on the slaves' lack of sexual agency.[127]

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[126] *Ep.* 47.7
[127] Apostol (2015), 91

Seneca states his thesis halfway through the letter: there is no actual (philosophical, mental, or biological) differences between a master and a slave:

> Vis tu cogitare istum quem servum tuum vocas ex isdem seminibus ortum eodem frui caelo, aeque spirare, aeque vivere, aeque mori! (*Ep.* 47.10)
>
> "Do you wish to ponder that he whom you call your slave has arisen out of the same seeds, enjoys the same weather, equally breathes, equally lives, equally dies!"

He uses the term *seminibus,* meaning seeds, to demonstrate that all humans originate from the same source, which in this case is God. Moreover, those seeds are *isdem*, that is, they are equal: all people, regardless of their social or legal status, experience the sky, breath, and death in the same way. If all people live and die by the same natural laws, then there is no justification for slavery as a "natural" phenomenon. Seneca explicitly denies the innateness of a servile nature: certain individuals are not destined or "fitted" to be slaves because of inherent personal characteristics if they are all born to and experience the same nature. In fact, he credits the social position of slaves and of the elite to nothing more than *fortuna*:

> Contemne nunc eius fortunae hominem in quam transire dum contemnis potes. (*Ep.* 47.10)
>
> Now despise a man of this fortune into which you are able to pass over while you despise him.

Here, Seneca demonstrates how foolish it is to despise someone simply because he is a slave. Unforeseen events could change the fate of the master, who would then find himself or herself in the same circumstances as that of a slave. Seneca describes this reversal of fortune more clearly in the next passage:

> Sic cum inferior vivas quemadmodum tecum superiorem velis vivere. (*Ep.* 47.10)
>
> Thus live with one of lower status just as you would wish a higher one would live with you.

To modern readers this maxim sounds like the "golden rule:" treat others as you would want to be treated. Seneca extends this by suggesting that one should consider how one would like to be treated by a person with superior social and political status. That is, a senator might reflect upon the differential power relationship between himself and a slave in comparison to his relationship with the emperor. This idea of power as fleeting and reversible begs the question of why one would mistreat a slave if, after a reversal of fortune, one could suffer the same fate. He anticipates Lucilius' objection: "'But I,' you say 'have no master.'" Seneca will later refute the idea that anyone is master-less, but for now he questions the hubris of believing that one will never have a master:

> Nescis qua aetate Hecuba servire coeperit, qua Croesus, qua Darei mater, qua Platon, qua Diogenes? Vive cum servo clementer, comiter quoque, et in sermonem illum admitte et in consilium et in convictum. (*Ep.* 47.12)
>
> Do you not know at which age Hecuba began to be a slave, in which Croesus, in which the mother of Darius, in which Plato, in which Diogenes all did? Live with your slave mercifully, also like a companion, and admit him into conversation and into wisdom and into your life.

Seneca often used mythical references his reader would understand. Hecuba was the mother of Paris and Hector, doomed Trojan heroes of the Trojan War. Even though she was once a queen, she became Odysseus' slave.[128] This reversal of mythical fortune represents Seneca's philosophical argument: your position is tenuous, no matter how powerful you are, and it can change in an instant. He follows the Hecuba allusion with three more examples, including a second royal mother and two philosophers, to reinforce his argument. Based upon this type of logic Seneca demands that Lucilius "live like a companion" with his slaves. He seems to be advocating that a slave should be able to participate in the family's life, particularly conversation. He uses the terms *sermo* and *consilium* which mean speech and counsel. I argue

[128] Euripides, *Trojan Women,* 686-687

that because of the connection that the Latin term *consilium* has with the idea of wisdom, that Seneca believes people should be admitted into philosophical and virtue-based discussions with other members of the family and household. While the phrase is admittedly ambiguous, I argue that because Seneca believes one arrives at wisdom through philosophical discourse, slaves should be educated.

Seneca then begins to discuss whether individual worth or virtue is related to one's work:

> Erras si existimas me quosdam quasi sordidioris operae reiecturum, ut puta illum, mulionem et illum bubulcum. (*Ep.* 47.15)
>
> You err if you judge that I am going to reject others as though of dirtier work, such as that of mule driver and that ploughman.

Here Seneca is referencing the Roman cultural belief that individuals who labored to make a living were automatically of low status. Instead, Seneca believes that judging someone solely on his or her profession is a mistake:

> Non ministeriis illos aestimabo, sed moribus. Sibi quisque dat mores, ministeria casus adsignat. (*Ep.* 47.15)
>
> I will not estimate those by their employment but by their customs: each one gives customs to himself. Chance appoints employment.

The plural of the word *mores* can mean character, and the translation of "customs" carries that implication. Individuals choose how they act, what they believe, who they are, while fortune determines their work or profession. Therefore, in Seneca's view, it is only fair to judge an individual based upon the qualities that he/she actually has agency over. Because of this, he advises Lucilius

> Non est, mi Lucili, quod amicum tantum in foro et in curia quaeras; si diligenter adtenderis, et domi invenies. (*Ep.* 47.16)
>
> It is not, My Lucilius, that you may seek a friend only in the forum and in the senate: if you will pay attention diligently, and you will discover [friends] in the house.

Friendship, an essential Roman philosophical and social concept, should not be restricted to individuals of one's own social class. Seneca suggests that an individual should befriend those within one's own house, including those that society considers beneath one's social status.

When Seneca uses the term slavery he does so in one of two ways: the literal system of Roman slavery that enslaved people and forced them to work, and a mental slavery that enslaved people to certain figural masters. Seneca objects to both systems, but while he thinks that Roman slaves are not at fault for their enslavement, i.e. there is no natural reason why individuals should become enslaved, he does believe that the second sort of slavery is the fault of the individual. He outlines this concept at the end of Letter Forty-seven after discussing the material form of slavery:

> Servus est." Sed fortasse liber animo. "Servus est." Hoc illi nocebit? Ostende, quis non sit; alius libidini servit, alius avaritiae, alius ambitioni, <omnes spei>, omnes timori (*Ep.* 47.17)
>
> 'He is a slave.' But perhaps free in soul. 'He is a slave.' will this harm him? Show who is not: One is a slave to pleasure, another to greed, another to ambition [all to hope] all to fear.

For Seneca, someone who is in physical bondage can be free in his soul and in his mind. This is Seneca's ultimate goal. However, elite men can become slaves to compulsions such as desire, greed, or various lusts. To allow oneself to be thus enslaved is more reproachable for Seneca because it constitutes a rejection of virtue and a failure to exercise the limited power each human being actually possesses over one's own thoughts and actions. He explains:

> Nulla servitus turpior est quam voluntaria. (*Ep.* 47.17)
>
> No servitude is more shameful than [that which is] voluntary.

Thus, slaves can be admired for their potential to display virtue, while many elite Romans cannot. This reinforces Seneca's previous arguments about how displaying virtue while in

servitude is more difficult, and therefore more worthy of praise. This emphasizes that all people have the ability to act virtuously as opposed to Aristotle's virtue ethics, which is predicated on the idea that individuals must have wealth, beauty, and other qualities out of their control in order to habituate virtue. In fact, this argument is the greatest distinction between Aristotle's and Seneca's understanding of slavery: Aristotle believed that physical slavery is the most terrible form because it demonstrates slaves' natural inferiority, while Seneca believes that voluntary slavery is far worse because one chose to enslave oneself, and to act unvirtuously.

Seneca's argument in Letter Forty-seven relies heavily on arguments about nature and the human position below the gods, demonstrating his belief in the Stoic understanding of virtue and wisdom as being a gift from the gods. In Letter Thirty-one, Seneca reinforces this idea by describing at length why and how a human may approach divinity. From this perspective, when humans are able to exercise wisdom they become godlike. Hidden within this discussion about what it means to be near god, is what it means to be free. He writes:

> Hic animus tam in equitem Romanum quam in libertinum, quam in servum potest cadere. Quid est enim eques Romanus aut libertinus aut servus? Nomina ex ambitione aut iniuria nata. Subsilire in caelum ex angulo licet: exsurge modo
>
> et te quoque dignum
> figne deo.
>
> Finges autem non auro vel argento: non potest ex hac materia imago deo exprimi similis; cogita illos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse. Vale. (*Ep.* 31.11)

> This mind can fall just as well in a freedman or even in a slave as in a Roman of equestrian status. For what is a Roman equestrian, or a freedman, or a slave? Those are names born of ambition or of unfair treatment. One may leap up to heaven even from a chimney corner. Rise, then
>
> and shape yourself as well into a likeness
> worthy of godhead.
>
> But you will not make that likeness from gold or silver: from such materials no likeness can be made that truly resembles God. Bear in mind that in the days when the gods were well disposed, their images were of clay. Farewell.[129]

[129] All English translations of Seneca's Letters, other than Letter Forty-seven, are Graver and Long's.

This exemplifies one of Seneca's core beliefs about wisdom and legal slavery: they are not mutually exclusive. The mind he is referring too, "this mind," is where god dwells within the human. He believes that god can dwell within the mind of a freedman and slave as within a freeborn Roman. In a time in which intelligence was believed to be tied to one's free status, this would be shocking. To further this argument, Seneca questions the social terms which separate people from one another, i.e. *libertinum*, *servum* and *equitem*. These terms have nothing to do with natural ability, rather they are used to invent such differences between equal people. He even uses the term *iniuria,* which has the connotation of wrongful and unjust action. To attach such significant terms to the idea of slavery demonstrates Seneca's belief that the system itself is unethical because it rests on unnatural action. As demonstrated in Letter Forty-seven, all people are born equal and exist under the gods, and it is wrong to presuppose otherwise. He confirms that wisdom is accessible even from a "chimney corner" of a plebian Roman home. Seneca then quotes the *Aeneid,* Virgil's seminal Roman epic which would have been a significant and well-known source for elite Romans. In particular, he quotes Evander from book VIII, a Greek who went to Italy before the Trojan War and founded a city near the Tiber River. Evander built of one of the first altars in the area, associating him with *pietas* and divinity, shaping himself in the image of the gods. This is an example of the habituation of virtuous action and thought. The rest of this passage emphasizes the ability of an individual with humble beginnings to become noble through the emulation of god-like action. One cannot simply imitate the gods with silver and gold, metals that signify wealth and prestige. Instead, one can create with a much simpler substance: clay.

While Letters Forty-seven and Thirty-one focus primarily on philosophical arguments that reject the idea that slavery is natural, Seneca also uses more cultural and legal examples to

demonstrate why slavery is an unethical institution. In *De Beneficiis,* Seneca demonstrates his opposition to the system of slavery through an argument based on the giving and receiving of benefits. Romans gave gifts in order to build and reinforce relationships among relatives and important business associates.[130] This happened on a broad scale with public benefactions, like building a temple or public bathhouse, but also between individuals. Most philosophers would have thought of gift-giving between free citizens, and elites operating in such highly rarefied places as the Senate. He introduces the topic on slaves and gifts in Book Three of *De Beneficiis*:

> Praeterea servum qui negat dare aliquando domino beneficium, ignarus est iuris humani; refert enim, cuius animi sit, qui praestat, non cuius status. Nulli praeclusa virtus est; omnibus patet, omnes admittit, omnes invitat, et ingenuos et libertinos et servos et reges et exules; non eligit domum nec censum, nudo homine contenta est. Quid enim erat tuti adversus repentina, quid animus magnum promitteret sibi, si certam virtutem fortuna amitteret? (*De Beneficiis,* 3.18.2)

> Subjects do grant benefits to their kings and soldiers to their generals. Therefore, slaves give benefits to their masters. Moreover, someone who denies that a slave sometimes benefits his master is just ignorant of the rights he has as a human being. What matters is not the legal status of the person who provides something but his state of mind. Virtue shuts the door on no one. It is open to everyone and lets us all in, invites us in: the freeborn, ex-slaves, slaves, kings, and exiles. It does not choose ancestry or wealth; virtue is satisfied with the bare person. What security would we have against emergencies, what great promise could our mind make for itself, if virtue were not reliable but could be taken away by Fortune?

Seneca begins by describing how those who are in a lower social position within the Roman social hierarchy, are able to give benefits to those with power over them. If this is true, then it should also follow that slaves, subjects of their master in a legal and cultural sense, are able to give benefits to their masters. But a more important argument for Seneca, is that if one is to make the argument that if a slave cannot benefit his master, the slave is not a human being. Here, Seneca is making two important arguments: first, that part of being human is engagement in relationships with others, in which giving and receiving benefits is crucial, and second, that

[130] Coffee (2017), 1

slaves are human beings who have *rights.* While the term "human right" could not have existed in the ancient world, Seneca anticipated this argument by indicating that being human involves possession of *some* divine rights. In fact, I argue that Seneca conflates the terms "nature" and "right." Anything that is natural, i.e. given to humans by the gods, is something that people have a *right* to. This contradicts notions of natural slavery. In fact, he doesn't characterize slavery as a natural status, but as a *legal* status, which indicates his belief that slavery was a purely socially created institution with no natural essence. He then reiterates arguments he has made earlier in the *Letters*, that virtue is open to all individuals and invites those of all social classes, whether freeborn or enslaved, to participate in it. In fact, one should find comfort in the fact that virtue is not affected by ancestry and wealth, otherwise Fortuna could disrupt your virtue.

Seneca continues this argument by describing how slaves are able to achieve various virtues which justifies their ability to give benefits to their masters. He writes:

> Potest servus iustus esse, potest fortis, potest magni animi: ergo et beneficium dare potest; nam et hoc virtutis est. Adeo quidem dominis servi beneficia possunt dare, ut ipsos saepe beneficii sui fecerint. Non est dubium, quin servus beneficium dare possit cuilibet; quare ergo non et domino suo possit? 'Quia non potest' inquit 'creditor domini sui fieri, si pecuniam illi dederit. Alioqui cottidie dominum suum obligat. (*De Beneficiis* 3.18.4-19.1)

> A slave can be just, he can be brave, he can be greathearted. Therefore, a slave can also grant a benefit, since this too is part of virtue. Slaves certainly *can* give benefits to their masters, so much so that often they have made the very existence of their masters the result of their benefit. There is no doubt that a slave can give a benefit to anyone else, so why can he not give one to his master as well? 'Because if he gives him money he cannot become a creditor of his master. Otherwise he puts his master in his debt everyday.'

Seneca pursues several logical routes to justify his argument. If a slave is able to participate in the central Stoic virtues, something Seneca holds to be true, then he should be able to engage in gift-giving because it too is a virtue. Anything that prevents a slave from benefiting his master is thus a boundary created by humans and not by wisdom or virtue. If it is true that slaves can benefit other people, then it is also true that they can benefit their masters, and their differential

social status should not bar them from virtuous human interaction. Seneca then asks how a slave can benefit his master, because would a master not then be in debt to his own slave? However, this problem, as Seneca will demonstrate, arises not from the process of gift-giving, but from the unnatural nature of enslavement. He writes:

> Iam sub ista ipsa lege vincam et eo perducam servum, ut in multa liber sit; interim dic mihi, si tibi ostendero aliquem pro salute domini sui sine respectu sui dimicantem et confossum volneribus reliquias tamen sanguinis ab ipsis vitalibus fundentem et, ut ille effugiendi tempus habeat, moram sua morte quaerentem, hunc tu negabis beneficium dedisse, quia servus est? Si tibi ostendero aliquem, ut secreta domini prodat, nulla tyranni pollicitatione corruptum, nullis territum minis nullis cruciatibus victum avertisse, quantum potuerit, suspiciones quaerentis et inpendisse spiritum fidei, hunc tu negabis beneficium domino dedisse, quia servus est? (*De Beneficiis*, 3.19.2-3)
>
> Tell me this: If I show you someone who fights to save his master heedless of his own interests—who, though he has already been repeatedly stabbed, nevertheless spills the last drops of blood from vital organs, and who by his own death procures the delay that gives his master time to escape—will you deny that he has conferred a benefit, just because he is a slave? If I show you someone who has refused to betray his master's secrets—rejecting the bribes of a tyrant, undaunted by any of his threats, unbeaten by the pains of torture—who has done all he could to avert the suspicions of his interrogator and then has given his life to preserve his loyalty, will you deny that he has conferred a benefit on his master, just because he is a slave? Instead consider whether perhaps the relative scarcity of instances of virtue among slaves actually makes them more significant; for generally speaking, being under someone's command is hateful and compulsion is always unpleasant, yet in some slaves affection for their masters overcomes the universal hatred of servitude. So far from it not being a benefit because it came from a slave, in fact it is an even greater benefit because not even slavery could discourage him.

This lengthy description demonstrates how slaves can give significant benefits to their masters. The first example is of a slave who sacrifices himself in order to protect his master. He trades his life for his master's. The second example is of a slave who will not betray his master's secrets whether for money or under torture. In both cases, the slave does a virtuous thing and gives a benefit to an individual with more power than he. The only argument that can be made that these actions aren't benefits, because the giver is a slave. But for Seneca this isn't persuasive, as he has invested heavily in detailing why one's legal status doesn't determine his ethical orientation.

Seneca holds that the fact an individual is a slave makes their virtue in fact worthier and more significant that virtuous men equal before the law. He acknowledges that servitude is universally a hated condition, in which one has no agency over his body or actions. Therefore, if someone is able to give his master a benefit, it is far more significant than a benefit given later while a free person. For Seneca, slavery is wrong precisely because it is a social institution which violates natural laws and rules.

Seneca moves on to explore whether a master can give a benefit to his slave.

> Est aliquid, quod dominus praestare servo debeat, ut cibaria, ut vestiarium; nemo hoc dixit beneficium; at indulsit, liberalius educavit, artes, quibus erudiuntur ingenui, tradidit: beneficium est. Idem e contrario fit in persona servi: quidquid est, quod servilis officii formulam excedit, quod non ex imperio, sed ex voluntate praestatur, beneficium est, si modo tantum est, ut hoc vocari potuerit quolibet alio praestante. (*De Beneficiis,* 3.21.2)

> There is a certain amount that a master is supposed to provide for his slave, such as food and clothing. No one has ever called this a benefit. But suppose he has been generous, brought him up more as befits a free person, given him the skills freeborn children are taught. That is a benefit. The same applies mutatis mutandis to the slave. Whatever goes beyond the standard benchmark of servile responsibilities, whatever is given is not on command but voluntarily, that is a benefit—provided that it is significant enough that it would be termed a benefit if someone else gave it.

Slaves, in ancient and modern contexts, are property. To provide clothing and food to a slave is not a benefit because those are required actions for the maintenance of one's property. However, if a master decides to educate his slave—an action reserved for elite children—then that would constitute a benefit. For Seneca, this logic goes both ways: anything that is beyond the scope of the master's responsibility to his slave, and anything beyond the slave's servile responsibility to his master, are benefits. If the action would be a benefit if given to a free person, then it is a benefit if given to a slave. However, Seneca then introduces a seemingly contradictory argument:

> Inter se contraria sunt beneficium et iniuria; potest dare beneficium domino, si a domino iniuriam accipere. Atqui de iniuriis dominorum in servos qui audiat positus est, qui et saevitiam et libidinem et in praebendis ad victum necessariis avaritiam conpescat. Quid

> ergo? beneficium dominus a servo accipit? immo homo ab homine. Denique, quod in illius potestate fuit, fecit: beneficium domino dedit; ne a servo acceperis, in tua potestate est. Quis autem tantus est, quem non fortuna indigere etiam infimis cogat? (*De Beneficiis*, 3.22.3-4)

> Benefit and injury are opposite to each other. One can give a benefit to one's master if one can be harmed by one's master. But we actually have an official to hear cases of injuries on slaves by masters; his job is to punish cruelty, lust, and stinginess in providing the necessities of life. So Then? Can a master receive a benefit from a slave? No, but one human being can receive a benefit from another human being. In the final analysis, the slave did what was in his power; he gave a benefit to his master. It is in your power not to receive it from a slave. But who is so great and powerful that Fortune might not force him to need help from even the lowliest source?

Like virtue and vice, benefit and injury are oppositional forces that occur between individuals. Seneca takes it as fact that slaves can be given an injury by their master: they can be beaten, abused, and humiliated. In fact, Seneca alludes to a legal position in which a person can hear cases about unjust treatment of slaves. If this is all true, then it should follow that masters may also benefit their slaves. But then Seneca asks the question, can masters do benefits to their slaves, and he answers no. How can his previous argument be correct if this is the case? His answer is that a human being may receive a benefit from another human being. This is a very important line of reasoning, because it implies that there are no real categories of master and slave. People are fundamentally human beings, who engage in a natural process of receiving and returning benefits. Therefore, through the legal system of slavery, society has imposed unnatural limitations on the relationships that humans may have with one another. Seneca states that a master may choose to not receive a benefit, because he may be embarrassed or feel demeaned by such an interaction; however, everyone is a slave to the whims of fortune and thus *shouldn't* refuse such a benefit.

In Book Three of *De Beneficiis*, this theme of social roles and the restrictions they impose plays a crucial role. After giving many examples of historical and contemporary slaves who gave benefits to their masters, he writes:

> Post tot exempla num dubium est, quin beneficium aliquando a servo dominus accipiat? Quare potius persona rem minuat, quam personam res ipsa cohonestet? Eadem omnibus principia eademque origo; nemo altero nobilior, nisi cui rectius ingenium et artibus bonis aptius. (*De Beneficiis*, 3.28.1)
>
> Surely, after so many examples, there cannot be any doubt that there are times when a master can receive a benefit from his slave. Why should the social role degrade the deed, instead of the deed ennobling the social role of the agent? We are all made of the same elements and we all have the same origin. No one is more noble than anyone else, except the person with a character that is more upright and equipped with more good traits.

He uses the term "social role" to demonstrate again that these terms are created by humans, rather than imposed by some natural process or order. Rather, doing something virtuous determines whether or not someone possesses nobility. In addition, social status discloses little about a person because each individual is made of the same parts and has the same origin (the implication is that origin is god or the universe.) The thing that distinguishes someone's nobility from another is his character and action. These arguments are very reminiscent of Letter Forty-four, in which Seneca tied nobility to philosophy, not ancestry. He continues:

> Qui imagines in atrio exponunt et nomina familiae suae longo ordine ac multis stemmatum inligata flexuris in parte prima aedium conlocant, non noti magis quam nobiles sunt? Unus omnium parens mundus est, sive per splendidos sive per sordidos gradus ad hunc prima cuiusque origo perducitur. Non est, quod te isti decipiant, qui, cum maiores suos recensent, ubicumque nomen inlustre <de>fecit, illo deum <in>fulciunt. Neminem despexeris, etiam si circa illum obsoleta sunt nomina et parum indulgente adiuta fortuna. Sive libertini ante vos habentur sive servi sive exterarum gentium homines, erigite audacter animos et, quidquid in medio sordidi iacet, transilite; expectat vos in summo magna nobilitas. (*De Beneficiis*, 3.28.1-3)
>
> There are people who display ancestral masks in their foyers and post their long and intricate family trees right at the entrances of the palatial homes—but are they not notorious rather than noble? The cosmos is the sole parent of us all, and everyone's ancestry is traced back to that source, whether the pathways to that origin are glorious or

> humble. There is no reason to be fooled by people who, as often as they enumerate their ancestors, wherever there is a gap in the string of famous names, slip the name of a god into their genealogy. Do not look down on anyone, even if he is enmeshed in a family whose glory has passed and which is no longer sustained by the favors of fortune. Whether freedmen, slaves, or foreigners lie hidden in your family history, raise your head proudly and jump right over the intervening mediocrity: at the summit great nobility awaits you.

Again, he uses ancestral masks as a representation for the error that elite Romans make, something he also utilized in Letter Forty-four, demonstrating his distaste for these cultural practices which reinforce social hierarchies. These Romans, according to Seneca, do not understand the difference between fame and ethical nobility. The term he uses to describe this practice, notorious, indicates that there is a level of coarseness involved with asserting one's family line. The Latin term used here, *notus,* does mean notorious but it also means famous or well-known, which is applicable in this context. These individuals believe that displaying notoriety, or power, of their family is more important than displaying their virtue. The universe is everyone's common parent, and the different intermediate parents that humans have had between their origin and their present have nothing to do with their ability to achieve virtue. He even remarks on the practice of invoking descent from a named god, which Seneca rejects on its face as a mechanism for asserting worth derived from ancestors and not one's own embodied virtue. Regardless of whether one has freedmen or slaves in their familial history, they have the opportunity in the present to be noble.

II. The Slave

This section is titled "the slave" because the analysis focuses on Seneca's understanding of the slave as a human being with equal capabilities as those of free citizens. Of course, this element of Seneca's philosophy can be found throughout this chapter, to the effect that the reason the system of slavery is unethical rests on the fundamental humanity of the enslaved

person. In addition, here I will also focus on the interactions that Seneca thinks elite Romans, masters, should have with their slaves. Christopher Star has critiqued this: for Star, Seneca cares about slavery only as it is a moral stain on his elite colleagues.[131] I differ. Not only does this thesis demonstrate the remarkable amount of effort that Seneca invests in demonstrating the humanity of slaves, it also shows that Seneca has a particular addressee in mind: equestrian men who he believes need a particular education in the proper ethical interactions between a person with power and a person who lacks it. Throughout the letter and dialogues, Seneca articulates his belief in the absolute equality of all humans, even when subjected to enslavement.

Seneca explores the slave as a Stoic individual. One example of that is suicide. Suicide plays a crucial role in Stoic philosophy. It is important to ignore modern philosophical and moral beliefs about suicide in order to best understand Seneca's view. For the Stoics, suicide was seen as the honorable option for those confronted with a profoundly unethical dilemma.[132] Seneca himself believed that Socrates' suicide exemplified the Stoic attitude.[133] In LetterFour, this topic arises as it relates to the lives of individual slaves:

> Alius ne reduceretur fuga ferrum adegit in viscera: non putas virtutem hoc effecturam quod efficit nimia formido? Nulli potest secura vita contingere qui de producenda nimis cogitate, qui inter magna bona multos consules numerat. (*Ep.* 4.4)
>
> A runaway slave stabs himself in the belly to avoid being recaptured. Don't you agree that courage will achieve what overwhelming terror manages to do? 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.

In line with Stoic principles, Seneca endorses this suicide as a courageous act. This is reminiscent of famous Romans who committed suicide, like Cato the Younger and, eventually,

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[131] Star (2017), 42
[132] Zadorojnyi (2007), 219
[133] *Ep*. 104.28

Seneca himself, who would rather die than be forced to do something unjust. Here, Seneca is clearly describing the action of a slave as courageous, demonstrating that slaves are capable of virtuous action. It is also worth noting that it was a common practice of ancient prisoners of war to commit suicide rather than be taken as slaves.[134] In this case, he believes that courage can overwhelm the effects of terror and allow someone to act ethically. Of course, this analysis leads to the idea that an obsession with prolonging one's life can prevent one from acting in a virtuous manner. Seneca suggests that this attempt at suicide demonstrates well aligned priorities. Seneca mentions slavery again, but this time as a reminder of any individual's power over another:

> Cogita posse et latronem et hostem admovere iugulo tuo gladium; ut potestas maior absit, nemo non servus habet in te vitae necisque arbitrium. Ita dico: quisquis vitam suam contempsit tuae dominus est. Recognosce exempla eorum qui domesticis insidiis perierunt, aut aperta vi aut dolo: intelleges non pauciores servorum ira cecidisse quam regum. Quid ad te itaque quam potens sit quem times, cum id propter quod times nemo possit? (*Ep.* 4.8)
>
> Think: a robber, as well as a foe, can put a knife to your throat. In the absence of any greater authority, any slave holds the power of life or death over you. That's right: anyone who despises his own life is master of yours. Call to mind the stories of people whose house servants plotted to kill them, some by stealth and some in broad daylight, and you will realize that just as many people have died from the anger of slaves as from the anger of kings. So why should you bother to fear those who are especially powerful, when the thing you are afraid of is something anyone can do?"

This passage reflects a much broader theme in Seneca's philosophy: that one shouldn't fear death from any one particular cause because you can die at any time for any reason.[135] However, this argument is applied instead to social location: a slave can kill a slave master just as the emperor can. If one is unkind to his slaves, if one angers them, or because of their justified "universal" hatred of servitude that Seneca referred to in *De Beneficiis,* they can make the choice to take their master's life at the cost of their own.

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[134] Bradley (1994), 109
[135] Seneca, *Natural Questions,* Book 7.2.4

In letter Seventy-seven, Seneca describes the case of a Stoic man who wishes to die and arrange his household before he takes his own life. He explains that there was once a Stoic named Tullius Marcellinus, whom Lucilius apparently knew. When Marcellinus was diagnosed with a painful illness, he prepared to commit suicide. When asking for advice about what he should do with his slaves, he was given the following advice:

> Deinde ipsum Marcellinum admonuit non esse inhumanum, quemadmodum cena peracta reliquiae circumstantibus dividantur, sic peracta vita aliquid porrigi iis qui totius vitae ministri fuissent. Erat Marcellinus facilis animi et liberalis etiam cum de suo fieret; minutas itaque summulas distribuit flentibus servis et illos ultro consolatus est. (*Ep.* 77.8)
>
> Next he advised Marcellinus himself that just as when dinner is over one shares out the leftovers among the serving people, so when his life was over it would be natural for him to give something to those who had been his lifelong servants. Marcellinus was of a compliant disposition, and generous even when giving made a difference to him. He therefore distributed some small sums to his weeping slaves and actually spoke words of consolation to them.

Slaves, as stated previously, were property in ancient Rome. It is not uncommon to leave slaves to family members as an inheritance, like leaving money, or land, or a villa. Instead, Seneca encourages a practice of freeing one's slaves and then giving them an inheritance for their new life as freed persons. While this does not constitute a condemnation of the system of slavery, it does show Seneca's focus on mercy when dealing with those who are powerless. While Marcellinus is dead, his slaves are alive, why shouldn't they be given some freedom in that life? (*Ep. 77.7)* Seneca's recommendation for slave manumission after the master's death are interesting as recent scholarship indicates that most slaves were never set free, and that few slaves would have ever earned enough money in the form of *peculium* to buy their own freedom.[136] When Seneca is discussing why Lucilius should embrace this method of

[136] Bradley (1988), 483 and 485

emancipation, he engages in a familiar hypothetical conversation. Seneca's fictive opponent says he can treat slaves how he wants, for he is not one. Seneca's responds:

> Infelix, servis hominibus, servis rebus, servis vitae; nam vita, si moriendi virtus abest, servitus est. (*Ep.* 77.15)
>
> Poor thing, you are a slave: a slave to others, a slave to property, a slave to life. For life itself is slavery when one lacks the courage to die.

Seneca believes it is hubristic to believe that you are a free person, that you are not enslaved to something. In fact, the very condition of living and fearing death is a sort of slavery. But it is a slavery that one imposes on oneself, because of an inability to master fear within Stoic practice. This begins Seneca's analysis of slavery as psychological, which will be further explored later, but it is germane here as it demonstrates that anyone can have a free soul, can be virtuous, just as anyone can be a slave.

Seneca's interest in advising other elite Romans on the topic of how they should treat their slaves is demonstrated clearly in Letter 107. He is "consoling" Lucilius about how some of his slaves ran away:

> Tam pusilla <te res> tangit? Servi occupationes tuas occasionem fugae putaverunt. Si amici deciperent (habeant enim sane nomen quod illis noster error inposuit, et vocentur quo turpius non sint) omnibus rebus tuis desunt illi qui et operam tuam conterebant et te aliis molestum esse credebant. (*Ep.* 107.1)
>
> Are you bothered about something so very trivial? Your slaves saw that you were busy and took that as an opportunity to escape. If it had been your friends cheating you—let's go ahead and use that conventional but erroneous term, to make it more shameful when they do not behave as friends—anyway, if it had been your 'friends,' all your affairs <would lose by it. As it is,> you lose nothing but people who were giving you poor service and who regarded you as a difficult person.

Seneca begins from the premise that Lucilius should view his slaves, and the relationship he has with them, as he would any other relationship. If a person demonstrates his true character, then it is important to understand that. From Seneca's perspective, if a friend betrays you, that is not a

cause for anger because now you have the opportunity to step away from a friendship that wasn't beneficial. If a slave doesn't want to work for you, then it's a benefit to you for them to leave. For Lucilius to be upset about this "trivial" event means that Lucilius isn't acting in a Stoic fashion. This brings up some interesting points: does it mean it is ethical for any slave who doesn't want to be enslaved (presumably most slaves) to run away? In addition, there is the possibility that running away as an act of resistance to slavery is a form of virtue itself, as running away would have entailed significant risk for a slave and would have taken not only courage, but emotional and physical strength.[137] Seneca's lack of empathy for Lucilius implies that his answer would be yes. He continues:

> Nihil horum insolitum, nihil inexpectatum est; offendi rebus istis tam ridiculum est quam queri quod spargaris <in balneo aut vexeris> in publico aut inquineris in luto. Eadem vitae condicio est quae balnei, turbae, itineris: quaedam in te mittentur, quaedam incident. Non est delicata res vivere. Longam viam ingressus es. (*Ep.* 107.2)
>
> "There's nothing unusual or unexpected in this event. To be upset about such things is as absurd as complaining about being splashed in the bathhouse or jostled in a public place or soiled on a muddy road. Life imposes the same conditions on us as we encounter in the bathhouse, in a crowd, or on a journey. Some things will be deliberate acts of aggression; others will just be accidents. Life is not a bed of roses. You have set out on long road."

Seneca takes this opportunity to reinforce his Stoic philosophy more broadly. As slaves long for some autonomy over their own lives, it makes sense that they would run away when they are given the opportunity. In contrast, Lucilius' problem of runaway slaves is as absurd as being upset about someone bumping into you in the forum. Life is long and will be disappointing and frustrating, but it is hardly worth being enraged over the loss of your slaves. And as Seneca believes, it can always be worse:

> 'Servi me reliquerunt.' Alium compilaverunt, alium accusaverunt, alium occiderunt, alium prodiderunt, alium mulcaverunt, alium veneno, alium criminatione petierunt: quidquid dixeris multis accidit deinceps quae multa. (*Ep.* 107.5)

[137] Bradley (1994), 156-6, 128

> ‘My slaves have abandoned me.’ Yes, and another man’s slaves have robbed him, accused him of crimes, killed him, betrayed him, trampled on him, made designs against him with poison or criminal charges. Many people have experienced your litany of woes, and many <will experience> them again.

Slaves are people, they have the capacity to perform good and bad deeds. One’s slave has the capacity to hurt him or to betray him to his enemies, which means, as explored previously, they have the capability to not do these things as well. The way that you choose to interact with your slaves can influence, even determine their actions.

In *De Beneficiis,* in the midst of Seneca’s explanations about how slavery disrupts the natural virtue of gift-giving, he provides some of his clearest views on the subjectivity of the slaves themselves. He writes:

> Errat, si quis existimat servitutem in totum hominem descendere. Pars melior eius excepta est: corpora obnoxia sunt et adscripta dominis, mens quidem sui iuris, quae adeo libera et vaga est, ut ne ab hoc quidem carcere, cui inclusa est, teneri queat, quo minus inpetu suo utatur et ingentia agat et in infinitum comes caelestibus exeat. Corpus itaque est, quod domino fortuna tradidit; hoc emit, hoc vendit; interior illa pars mancipio dari non potest. Ab hac quidquid venit, liberum est; nec enim aut nos omnia iubere possumus aut in omnia servi parere coguntur: contrarem publicam imperata non facient, nulli sceleri manus commodabunt. (*De Beneficiis*, 3.20.1-2)
>
> It is a mistake to think that slavery penetrates to the core of a human being. The best part of him is exempt. Bodies are vulnerable, assigned to masters; but the mind is autonomous, so free and independent that even the prison that contains it cannot prevent it from using its own powers to undertake great deeds and from departing for the infinite as a companion of the celestial bodies. And so it is only the body that Fortune has turned over to a master; this is what he buys and sells. That inner part of a person cannot be owned. Whatever comes from this inner part is free. For there are things we cannot demand of our slaves, and they are not compelled to obey our every command. They will not obey treasonous orders, nor will they assist in the commission of a crime.

Slaves are not by their nature slaves, rather they *exist within the system of slavery*. In line with Stoic beliefs, Seneca understood the body to be the vulnerable and corruptible part of a person. It is the body that is enslaved, not the mind. The body can be captured and oppressed, but the mind is always a free agent. Seneca describes the body as a “prison,” which can constrain the mind.

However, in enslavement or in illness the mind can still embrace virtue, and the mind is eternal. Therefore, fortune determines whether one's body is bought and sold, but the mind cannot be. He justifies this in two ways: first, while the body can be bound, the mind can still find freedom; and secondly, with a legal argument: slaves are not required to follow treasonous or illegal orders from their masters. This demonstrates that there are, or should be, limits to the total control that masters should have over their slaves. Again, the mind cannot be enslaved.

Seneca transitions from this idea of subjective internal autonomy, to the concept of the fair or unfair treatment of enslaved humans. The topic of slavery appears several times in Seneca's *De Ira,* especially as it comes to exercising control of one's rage which is directed at a person with less power than themselves. Clearly, this applies to the master/slave relationship. In his third book, he writes:

> Quid est quare ego servi mei clarius responsum et contumaciorem vultum et non per venientem usque ad me murmurationem flagellis et compedibus expiem? Quis sum, cuius aures laedi nefas sit? Ignoverunt multi hostibus: ego non ignoscam pigris neglegentibus garrulis? (*De Ira*, 3.24.2)
>
> Why should I punish with whips and shackles a slave who spoke too loud and looked a little too defiant and didn't come in response to my merest whisper? Who am I, that it should be a sin to bruise my ears? Many people have forgotten foreign enemies; shall I not forgive those who are lazy or careless or talkative?

The idea that a master has a good reason to punish a slave for insignificant offenses presumes an inherent hierarchy. Seneca asks the question, "who am I," to demonstrate that it would not be appropriate to punish someone physically for a verbal insult. Seneca wrote before about the demeaning and humiliating practices that slaves withstand at the hands of their masters,[138] but here in particular Seneca is not just questioning the ethics of these practices but rather whether the master has a "right" to do so.

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[138] *Ep.* 44.3

Seneca continues this discussion by telling a well-known story of Augustus showing a slave mercy. He writes:

> Alteri dices 'vide ne inimicis iracundia tua voluptati sit', alteri 'vide ne magnitudo animi tui creditumque apud plerosque robur cadat. [alteri] Indignor mehercules et non invenio dolendi modum, sed tempus expectandum est; dabit poenas. Serva istud in animo tuo: cum potueris, et pro mora reddes.' Castigare vero irascentem et ultro obirasci incitare est: varie adgredieris blandeque, nisi forte tanta persona eris ut possis iram comminvere, quemadmodum fecit divus Augustus, cum cenaret apud Vedium Pollionem. Fregerat unus ex servis eius crustallinum; rapi eum Vedius iussit ne vulgari quidem more periturum: murenis obici iubebatur, quas ingentis in piscina continebat. Quis non hoc illum puta ret luxuriae causa facere? saevitia erat. Evasit e manibus puer et confugit ad Caesaris pedes, nihil aliud petiturus quam ut aliter periret, nesca fieret. Motus est novitate crudelitatis Caesar et illum quidem mitti, crustallina autem omnia coram se frangi iussit conplerique piscinam. Fuit Caesari sic castigandus amicus; bene usus est viribus suis: 'e convivio rapi homines imperas et novi generis poenis lancinari? Si calix tuus fractus est, viscera hominis distrahentur? Tantum tibi placebis ut ibi aliquem duci iubeas ubi Caesar est?' Sic cui tantum potentiae est ut iram ex superiore loco adgredi possit, male tractet, at talem dumtaxat qualem modo rettuli, feram immanem sanguinariam, quae iam insanabilis est nisi maius aliquid extimuit. (*De Ira* 3.40.1-5)

> As the deified Augustus did when dining with Vedius Pollio. One of his slaves had shattered a crystal cup. Vedius ordered him seized, intending to kill him in no ordinary way: he directed that he be thrown to the massive morays that he kept in a fishpond. Anyone might suppose that Vedius's expensive tastes had provided the motive, but it was savagery. The slave slipped from his captor's grasp and took refuge at Caesar's feet, intending to seek only another way of dying, so he wouldn't become bait. Caesar was moved by Vedius's unprecedented cruelty, and in fact ordered that the slave be released—and further ordered that all the crystal cups in his sight be smashed and the fishpond filled in. That was the right way for Caesar to rebuke a friend, making well-judged use of his power: 'You order that people be snatched from a banquet and torn apart in a newfangled sort of payback? A human being will be drawn and quartered if your cup has been smashed? You'll be so pleased with yourself that you'll order a man's execution in Caesar's presence?" That's the way for someone to act who's so powerful that he can approach anger from a position of superiority and treat it roughly—but only the sort of anger I've described: bestial, monstrous, bloodthirsty, on the point of being incurable if something still greater doesn't give it a good scare.

This method of story-telling is part of Seneca's pedagogical method of ethical instruction. He is able to exemplify a concept using a scandalous account that would have been circulated in elite circles. Seneca is arguing that exercising rage is only acceptable when it will stop other evil acts. Seneca has also used Augustus as a Stoic exemplar in his other dialogues to demonstrate how

one can act ethically in difficult circumstances.[139] In this case, Vedius, presumably embarrassed because his slave dropped a glass, decided that he was going to have this unnamed slave eaten alive by fish. While this seems unspeakably cruel, in a slave society where a master has complete ownership over their slave, this sort of violence may have been commonplace. Seneca credits this impulse to "savagery," not a violation of the good order of the banquet. This implies that Vedius took pleasure in enacting such violence against a defenseless person. The slave throws himself at the mercy of Augustus, but he did not even ask for his life: he asked to be killed in a less brutal and horrifying way. Seneca may have been aware that there were other stories describing how Augustus brutally punished erring slaves by breaking one slave's legs and nailing another to the mast of a ship.[140] However, the Vedius story did widely circulate in Early Imperial Rome.[141]

Conclusion

Seneca's writings clearly demonstrate his concerns over the system of slavery. His discussions of human equality in letter Forty-four combined with his description of natural human relationships in *De Beneficiis* advance an argument that slaves are fundamentally human beings with equal ability to display virtue, so that the human imposed system of slavery disrupts this natural order. His concern over the actions of elite Romans also demonstrated an awareness of the lack of virtue among his elite peers and the importance of an ethical education for the broadest range of Romans: free, freed, and unfree. The conclusion of this thesis will explore the conjuncture of his arguments on education and slavery.

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[139] Seneca, *Consolation to Polybius,* 15.2-3
[140] Hopkins (1993), 7
[141] Hopkins (1993), 8

Conclusion and Further Work

Seneca's works show us his pedagogy: that virtue-based education is the only method of liberating the mind and living a bearable life in ancient society (*Ep.* 16.1). Philosophical reading and inquiry allow a person to achieve this education and lifestyle. While Seneca's pedagogy is strict, he insists that this education is available to all humans because they possess *ratio* (*Ep.* 44.2*)*. In addition, Seneca argues extensively that slaves possess humanity and the same mental capacities as elite and free Roman citizens (*Ep.* 44.1-3). These two arguments together provide compelling support for the idea of a human "right" to an education. This conclusion will discuss the intersection of the two chapters in order to better understand this argument.

Seneca believed the gods made all humans equal, with equal ability to approach the divine through philosophical investigation. Slaves existed only because others chose to constrain them within the system of slavery. Griffin writes, "The principal philosophical dogma in Seneca's thought on slavery is that there are no natural slaves: all men share in the divine reason and thus may claim the gods as ancestors."[142] As explored earlier, Seneca does not believe that slavery is a natural identity given to humans because they are or are not qualified to be elite. Instead, only chance gives people social roles. For Seneca, all people are equal because:

> Quis dubitare, mi Lucili, potest quin deorum inmortalium manus sit quod vivimus, philosophiae quod bene vivimus? Itaque tanto plus huic nos debere quam dis quanto maius beneficium est bona vita quam vita pro certo haberetur. (*Ep.* 90.1)
>
> Who can doubt, dear Lucilius, that our life is the gift of the immortal gods, but our living well is philosophy's gift? It would surely follow, then, that we owe more to philosophy than to the gods (since a good life is greater than a mere life)

It is through this gift, of life, and the capacity to use philosophy to improve their lives, that makes people all fundamentally equal under the gods. This idea ultimately comes from the Stoic

[142] Griffin (1976), 257

adaptation of sophist thought that believed all unnatural institutions should be abolished.[143] This is a powerful idea, because it indicates that Senecan philosophy justifies a world in which humans live in accordance with nature without these social structures. This is emphasized in Letter-Ninety. Seneca describes the golden age of human existence, all people lived with one another, and the strong did not harm the weak but protected them (*Ep.* 90.5*)*. Leaders in the golden age were not cruel or unjust because they had no greed or desire for more power (*Ep.* 90.5). Humans have descended from this golden-age, and now live within societies which ignore the laws of nature.

Seneca indicates that like in the golden-age, the elite and the powerful have a responsibility to protect the weaker. In fact, he goes so far as "regarding the slave as entitled to everything covered by man's duty to man. Not only must he be spared physical punishment, which is appropriate only to animals; he must not be insulted. The virtues of *humanitas* and *clementia* should govern our relations with slaves as with other men, and generosity to slaves and freedmen counts as fulfilment of the obligation to help other men. Finally, the slave can be treated as a social equal, admitted to conversation, asked for advice, and invited to the master's table regularly, not just on the Saturnalia."[144] For Seneca, there are protections that all humans should have access to because of their humanity, which seems to be a Stoic definition of rights.

I wrote in the introduction that Stoicism is not revolutionary, but it does provoke thought and questions about the social order. In Seneca's lifetime but also in our own, the social order often goes unquestioned, demonstrating the possible importance of such philosophical ideas. This brings us interesting questions about how we should view Seneca's work within the philosophical and classical canon, as well as within the history of writings on progress and

[143] Griffin (1976), 257
[144] Griffin (1976), 258

equality. As Miriam Griffin has observed, "Seneca's works also illuminate the other side of the picture: they show how resistant social attitudes proved to philosophical notions."[145] Seneca's biography demonstrates that while he possessed these unique intellectual ideas, he did not want to or was not able to change the political realities concerning the topics of education and slavery. Still, while not able to produce this political change, his "pronouncements on slavery are justly admired. It is the one subject on which he has remained immune from charges of hypocrisy or dereliction of duty."[146]

This thesis lays the ground work for a possible link between education and slavery which attempts to demonstrate a natural right to education for all people. More research in this area can be accomplished in the Stoic canon to understand whether or not Seneca's ideas are reflected more broadly or if these views are the corner stone of Stoic philosophical thought. For example, an investigation of Epictetus seems potentially useful, because he was one of the most famous Stoics from antiquity and was himself born into servitude. In addition, with the understanding that ancient philosophy was so influential in subsequent historical periods, I hope to study whether Seneca's liberatory Stoicism had any impact in the late eighteenth century with the founders of the American Republic.

[145] Griffin (1976), 26
[146] Griffin (1976), 275

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