Introduction: The Self in Senecan Scholarship

By Shadi Bartsch and David Wray

After a hiatus of some two centuries, Seneca has returned to center stage in classical scholarship, and we his audience and critics have rediscovered an inexhaustible source for the reconsideration of central issues in early imperial Roman thought, literature, and culture. The hypocritical millionaire mouthing Stoic pieties, the tutor and courtier to Nero who lost the dangerous game of court intrigue and died at the bidding of his own pupil, the author of extravagantly unplayable closet dramas prized by early modern playwrights but interesting to scholars only as derivative copies of lost Greek originals: these shopworn commonplaces shrink and fade under the light of recent work on this enigmatic, intriguing figure whose life and work seem equally riddled with self-contradiction. Clearly it would be exaggeration to lay at Seneca's door alone phenomena like the present surge of interest in Hellenistic philosophy as a practical guide for daily life, the newly popular question of what it means to talk about ancient "selfhood," the widespread reevaulation and recuperation of "rhetorical" forms of writing, and the claim that Roman thinkers (already a polemical formulation?) might have more to offer the study of philosophy than a smudged window into their Hellenistic predecessors. Still, his large and varied corpus of writing provides a richly expansive field for the investigation of these questions—a playing field on which, as in this volume, philosopher jousts with literary critic, metaphorical and other figurative logics clasp hands with dialectical argumentation, and the importance of embedding Seneca in his own cultural milieu comes strikingly to the fore.

To a growing number of scholars in diverse areas, Seneca now looks surprisingly good to think with, and surprisingly different from the composite picture traced by the long modern history of his reception, ranging from early modern enthusiasts (Christian neostoics for the most part) to Enlightenment freethinking detractors and their Romantic and late modern inheritors. Seneca's inconstant fortunes provoke the main question the opening essay of this volume, A.A. Long's wide-ranging discussion "Seneca and the Self: Why Now?" Long touches in passing on the turn of the tide against Seneca from the mid-eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, and points to the combined influences of Hegelian idealism, German scholarship, and the shift of interest to Greece as reasons for his decline. Foucault's work on sexuality and ancient ethics emerges above all as the catalyst for revisiting and revising our understanding of Seneca, through ongoing debates in which Foucault's own analyses in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* have come in for criticism and reworkings of their own.[1]

[1] See, for example, the collected essays in the volumes of D. Lamour (1998) and J. Goldstein (1994), and in particular the articles by Arnold Davidson, Richard Saller, David Cohen, Amy Richlin, Page duBois and Paul Allen Miller. Other work on Foucault and

For Long, Foucault is the first to make a crucial identification, by pointing to the Cartesian moment in the history of philosophy as the reason for the displacement of Seneca's "spiritualized" version of self. At the same time, the work of scholars like Christopher Gill, Brad Inwood, Charles Taylor, and Bernard Williams has done much to defamiliarize for students of antiquity the widespread and nearly axiomatic modern acceptance of the Cartesian ego: a model of the self as private, interior, discrete, and possessing a uniquely privileged (because "subjective") access to itself.

The varieties of reading represented in this volume explore some of the consequences of these developments. Nearly all the individual chapters are based on the proceedings of a conference held at the University of Chicago in Spring 2003, and we have maintained the tripartite division of that conference, organizing the essays under "Philosophical Perspectives," "Seneca and Roman Culture," and "Reading the Tragedies." Yet the limitations of these divisions will no doubt strike readers from the start. Philosophy has been making consumers of tragedy into better readers of dramatic poetry at least since the time when a certain philosopher (who was also a consummate literary artist) slyly drummed up an "ancient quarrel" between those two ways of making words about the world—and Gill's essay on integration and disintegration, presenting a psychologically keen reading of two Senecan tragedies as well as a rigorous philosophical argument, belongs as much under the rubric of tragedy as where we have placed it. Roman Stoicism, as a set of theories and practices circulating among an elite who had inherited it from elsewhere, was inevitably in some measure shaped by the cultural paradigms of that linguistic community—and Elizabeth Asmis' investigation of Seneca's transcultural recasting of Stoic teaching, in which fate gets recharacterized as Roman *fortuna* and Stoic detachment as a gloriously heroic (and unmistakably Roman) military victory over that capricious divinity, will interest students of Roman culture no less than specialists in philosophy. Again, however precisely philosophers define the words they use, the broader cultural connotations of a given term of art inevitably creep back in—and Catharine Edwards shows how the Latin formulation of an abstract notion, namely the Stoic "paradox" that only the wise person is free, becomes entangled in the cultural ideology and practices of Roman slavery. Conversely (and Seneca would insist on this point), not all philosophical work happens in philosophical language, especially the work of bringing oneself and others to ethical reflection—and Martha Nussbaum discerns, in the unedifyingly dark and ostensibly unstoic laughter of the *Apocolocyntosis*, signs of a moral passage from passionate anger to generalized disgust, and therein a potential first preliminary step towards progress in Stoic devaluation of external goods.

---

antiquity includes Hadot (1981) and (1992), Simon Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1995), Paul Veyne, "Foucault Revolutionizes History," rpt. in A. Davidson, *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago, 1997), and Wolfgang Detel, *Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005).

Long's introductory essay reminds us of the stake of "selfhood" in all of these topics. Recent scholarship has argued compellingly that our reading of ancient literature is deeply skewed by our vernacularized Cartesian subjective-individualist model of selfhood.[2] In Seneca's thought, by contrast, what expressions of mind-body dualism we find seem to be not ontological but rather ethical, and even there more rhetorical than doctrinal. For Seneca, it is arguably the mirroring other, the real friend or imaginary judge, who makes authentic self-examination possible. In this formula, as Charles Taylor points out in *Sources of the Self*, the self is defined by non-Cartesian elements like agency, unity, life-planning and self-awareness.[3] Indeed, in so far as the other, just as much as (if not more than) the self, can function as an ethical mirror to the self, it is fair to say that Seneca's is a performative self—but not for this any less authentic, necessarily, than the modern subjective self.[4] Moreover, as Long remarks, Foucault rightly proposed that to know was in antiquity as much a spiritual as an epistemological project. One could not know without self-knowledge, and the *gnothi sauton* preceded all correct judgment on the world around one.

All this has Socratic antecedents, to be sure, but it takes a new turn in Hellenistic philosophy generally and Seneca specifically. Here, as Foucault made clear, the care of self is engaged in principally for its own sake rather than for the benefit of the community. Here it is a series of exercises conducted on and by the self (*askesis* in Greek, *meditatio* in Latin) that bring the self to the proper mental state for the would-be wise man. Seneca's self-presentation in the letters to Lucilius, very much in this vein, depicts a private person engaged in a process of self-therapy through epistolary exchange: a shared and mutual process, but also a solitary one. And Long's essay points as well to other important non-Socratic developments in Stoicism, such as an increased preoccupation with the self's consistency over time and an intense focus on the overarching goal of arriving at the virtuous disposition of the *sapiens*.

Seneca's stated project of "reclaiming the self" resonates with our own cultural moment's "ethical turn" in more ways than one. Long invokes the widespread return of an old thought—one that Seneca shared with early modern writers like Montaigne—that a book ought to help us live: a notion we can find currently exemplified on the philosophical side by Alexander Nehamas, Pierre Hadot, and a number of "virtue ethics" philosophers; on the literary side, by Alain de Botton's wildly popular cooption of Proust as a guide for practical ethics; and in your local Barnes and Noble, by the popular self-help manuals that take up surprisingly large amounts of shelf-space.

Of course, none of these ancient or modern developments offers an answer to what some critics have posed as the crucial question: is there anything genuinely

---

[2] See esp. Gill (1996).
[3] Taylor (1989).
[4] However, Bartsch's essay in this volume makes some modifications to this notion of performativity.

discontinuous with historical precedents in Seneca's treatment of the self? Is Seneca's a new selfhood, not just in the sense that he equipped literary Latin usage with a new lexicon of individual psychological and ethical development, but in the stronger sense that his turn to the "care of the self" represented a step away from ancient selfhood with its (in Gill's terms) participant-objectivist view of the person?[5] Foucault seemed to answer the question in the affirmative in the third volume of his *History of Sexuality*. Gill in this volume counters that the hypothesis of Seneca as the locus of what Foucault would call an "epistemic break" cannot be sustained. Several of the other essays offer alternatives to clean affirmations or disavowals. Shadi Bartsch supports an intermediary position, arguing that the Roman Stoic disavowal of the community as a fundamental source of moral authority suggests a step towards what we might call (in Gill's terms) an individualist-objectivist version of selfhood. Offering a different reevaluation of what Foucault claimed to find in Seneca, James Ker links the Senecan "technology of the self" to an ideology of time-control that helped Roman aristocrats maintain a measure of social and cultural power under the pressure of monarchical rule. Two other chapters in this volume pursue different but related issues with regard to Seneca's dramatic poetry. Alessandro Schiesaro finds proper self-knowledge to be the purview of Seneca's tragic anti-heroes, who alone seem to understand and exploit the Stoic notion that emotions are themselves forms of judgments. And David Wray links the stylized, intensely affective self-performance of Senecan tragic characters to the techniques of Roman declamatory rhetoric: a set of psychagogic tools aimed at persuasion through force of spirit (*animus*), and a speech mode that Seneca, parting company with Chrysippus the master logician and other Greek Stoic predecessors, regarded as necessary and central to the therapeutic project of Stoic moral philosophy.

All of these issues are evoked, reflected upon, modified, and expanded in the essays in this volume. In the first, Brad Inwood, writing on "Reason, Rationalization and Happiness in Seneca," reminds us of the deceptively simple Stoic recipe for happiness: cultivate reason—the *hegemonikon* or "ruling" function of the soul—and you will achieve the happiness of a fully realized life. More precisely, inasmuch as reason is both the agent and the object of self-improvement, the *proficiens* must reason him or herself into a state in which his or her reason is in full accord with nature and therefore knows unfailingly what to strive for, what to avoid, and what to treat as an indifferent. Not only is the Stoic notion of "progress" theoretically underpinned by an intellectualism and moral

[5] Inwood (2000) discusses this question in terms of the will. His conclusions, which are complicated, distinguish between the features of a "traditional will" and a "summary will;" Seneca only provides evidence of the latter. The four-personae theory of Cicero's *De officiis* (and in particular the characteristics of the second persona) has also prompted some theorists of selfhood to argue for the development of a modern notion of selfhood as self-fashioning, but this seems untenable; see esp. Gill (1998). On the topic of Seneca and free will, see now Rainer Zöller, *Die Vorstellung vom Willen in der Morallehre Senecas* (Munich 2003).

perfectionism that ancient and modern critics have often found hard to swallow. But even the outcome of this process, at least as it appears in Seneca, looks arguably suspect as a picture of human happiness on any definition of the term: the victim on the torture-machines smiling gamely and asserting his happiness; the parent unshaken by the news of a child's death, the man who—as Horace famously put it—remains unshaken as the world crashes around him. Or perhaps on a less dramatic scale: the senator whose office has been rendered meaningless, the member of the imperial court suddenly charged with treason, the tutor whose royal pupil turns against him.

Inwood addresses one powerful critique of this version of happiness: the charge of rationalization. On this point the Stoics—and kindred philosophers like Spinoza and Harry Frankfurt, whose picture of human freedom and fulfillment emphasizes rational acquiescence in the face of uncontrollable circumstances—can rather easily be made to resemble the king in Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* who asserts his cosmic omnipotence by commanding the sun to rise and set (but only at sunrise and sunset respectively), the stars to shine (but only on clear nights), and so on. "Making do," as David Zimmerman has recently pointed out in a critique of Frankfurt, is a fairly unimpressive candidate for a rationalist to put forward as the chief function of rationality in human ethical life. One is tempted to suggest that, rather than telling us to adjust ourselves to happenstance by using reason to become impervious to it, these philosophers might do better to recommend that we work on improving our rational capacities as such. As Inwood summarizes this hostile view, "When unpleasant things occur which cannot be changed… we use our rationality to bring about changes in ourselves such that we not only accept but even embrace such events and circumstances in nature," with the result that "the principal function of our own rationality is to help us come to grips with forces more powerful than ourselves."[6]

Against this view Inwood mounts a powerful defense. Crucial to defeating the charge of rationalization, he argues, is recognizing that the Stoic philosopher learns to hold beliefs about goods and indifferents independent of his or her personal circumstances and prior to the experience of grave personal loss. Since human virtue (according to the Stoics) is divine, stable and invariant, and also abstractable from external circumstance, virtue is no rationalization, but an objectively inherent characteristic of the sage. And since reason rather than the senses is appropriate for making value judgments (reason, unlike the senses, can synthesize over time, can grasp the future, can generalize, can distinguish different aspects of complex situations) we have no reason to demote it to the rank of a mere coping device. For scholars working to characterize Seneca's thought, a question remains: Can the clarity of this formulation withstand the onslaught of the non-philosophical texts as well as the unhappy facts of Seneca's own biography? One of the striking aspects of this essay is that it so clearly delineates a kind of clash so present in two schools of the interpretation of Seneca's thought today: does

---

[6] Inwood in this volume, 000.

philosophical theory shape the Stoic's reality, or does the Stoic's reality shape his philosophical theory (especially the particularly Roman manifestations of it, such as the obsession of Seneca and Epictetus with preparing for death and suffering)? Or to put it another way, if Seneca stresses that virtue is independent of circumstance, did circumstance shape his version of that Stoic tenet? And along similar lines: Do the tragedies powerfully show up (as some literary critics have suggested) the inadequacies of Stoic doctrine, or does the doctrine illuminate the behavior of the tragic characters (as some philosophers have presumed) merely by holding that behavior up as a negative moral example?

Neither of those last two options gives a very satisfying view of the relation between Seneca's dramatic poetry and his moral philosophy, and the question itself has been skirted or dismissed as desperate by some recent critics of the tragedies. Revisiting it with a fresh and nuanced philosophical perspective in "Seneca and Selfhood: Integration and Disintegration," Gill argues that the passionate self-division of Seneca's two great tragic heroines in fact represents a distinctive aspect of Stoic thinking, traceable to the teaching of Chrysippus and reflected in Seneca's own philosophical writing. Both Medea in her final monologue and Phaedra throughout her tragedy exemplify the inner self-conflict and disintegration provoked by the effect of "countervailing rational motives" on a figure who has given herself up to passion. The Stoics, however, posited a human soul not divided into rational and irrational parts, as on the view of Plato and Aristotle, but holistic and unified. How to account for the seeming discrepancy? On an older view, it was simply that when Seneca wrote as a tragic poet, the strong pull of that poetic genre lured him into defecting from the unrealistically and unworkably rationalist suppositions of Stoic psychology (this is one well-rehearsed way of arguing that Stoic tragedy is a contradiction in terms). Mounting one line of defense against this view, Nussbaum (1994, 439-83) has argued that Medea's indecision at the crucial moment of preparing to kill her children is an instance of Chrysippus' theory of a unified soul oscillating between two conflicting courses.[7]

Gill instead finds a psycho-ethical model to underpin Seneca's depiction of tragic passion as self-division by pursuing implications of the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*: the developmental process of "appropriation"—coming to be at home in the world—by which humans reach a state of social as well as personal order and coherence. *Oikeiôsis* is a natural process (in the sense that a rational being must achieve it in order to "follow nature" successfully) but an arduous one. And in light of this developmental aspect of Stoic ethical teaching, coupled with its emphasis on the cognitive dimension of passions (as false beliefs about what is choice-worthy in life), it is not at all out of keeping with their rigorously unified view of the self for Stoics to draw a distinction between the "actual" self I presently am and the "ideal" or (better, on the Stoic view) "natural" self I have the potential to become. And in this light it is plausible, meaningful, and no

[7] For other philosophically oriented readings of Medea's decision in the Senecan drama, see Dillon (1997) and Gill (1987).

contradiction at all for Seneca, as a Stoic philosopher writing tragic poetry, to depict passion as the internal conflict "in which (in spite of the unified or 'holistic' psychological model implied) the 'natural,' potentially ethical, self is pitted, sometimes consciously, against the irrational one."[8]

As Gill points out in his introduction, Seneca has sometimes been read as an innovator within Stoicism, a pioneer taking the first halting step toward modernity's subjective model of selfhood. A proponent of that familiar way of reading Seneca might take Gill's insight into the self-division of Senecan tragic heroines as yet another instance of those early stirrings of a new conception of self that, while they can still be accommodated with doctrinaire Stoicism, already point recognizably toward the self-awareness of the modern "subjective-individualist" selves. Gill does suggest that the emphasis on psychological holism and psycho-ethical integration he finds in Seneca "forms part of a larger intellectual and, in a sense, cultural shift." He insists, however, that this shift was not a step away from ancient "objective" views of the self, and this for a striking reason once again exemplified in Seneca's two tragic heroines. Medea's maternal love and Phaedra's sense of shame, on Gill's reading, are not presented as aspects of those characters' subjectivity. Rather, those attributes of their residual "natural" selves *force* themselves on each character—as objective facts about the world, as forces of nature—and so belong in the realm of a "thoroughly objectivist framework of thinking about psychological and ethical life and about their interrelationship." This is a model of selfhood that has begun to take on particular interest, precisely in virtue of its thoroughgoing objectivism, for a number of contemporary thinkers.[9] Gill reminds us that, for the philosopher and literary artist who was also a key political and social agent in Nero's Rome, it is easy to imagine that the theme of a self inconsistent with itself and verging toward psycho-ethical disintegration, could have held special and searing urgency.

The author of the *Apocolocyntosis*, a violent and scatological post-mortem satire on the emperor Claudius attributed to Seneca, presents himself, to be sure, as a deeply engaged political and social agent. His authorial voice however gives few explicit signs of an ethical self troubled by its own self-division, aspiring toward Stoic detachment and coherence, or even possessed of ethical standards sufficiently robust to sustain genuine philosophical reflection about them. In "Stoic Laughter: A Reading of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*," Nussbaum responds to that implicit challenge by inviting us to consider just what kind of laughter it is that ripples through these raucous pages and what relation, if any, that laughter might have to Stoic philosophy. There is a kind of laughter that Seneca repudiates, namely the commonest and most superficial kind, represented in American culture by the "frat boy" who passes through life yukking it up at anything and everything and nothing. But there is another kind of laughter he approves and recommends, with good Stoic and Cynic precedents for doing so. This is the laughter of the

[8] Gill in this volume, 000.
[9] Gill in this volume, 000.

person making progress when brought up suddenly short by the disjoint between her own received values and the Stoic ones she aspires to possess. This morally useful kind of Stoic-Cynic laughter can be turned on others, as when we laugh at the story of Diogenes telling Alexander to get out of his sunshine, and also on ourselves, as when, faced with an impudent doorkeeper denying us passage, we check our mounting anger by taking Seneca's advice to "step back and laugh" at the situation.

The laughter of the *Apocolocyntosis* clearly does not present us with a narrator celebrating his way mindlessly through life. Is his the laughter of the Stoic *proficiens*, then? And more broadly, is the *Apocolocyntosis* in any straightforward way classifiable as a Stoic work? Nussbaum identifies a number of reasons why both questions must, in strict terms, be answered in the negative. But if the politically engaged and therefore angry and hopeful laughter of the *Apocolocyntosis* belongs neither to a "frat boy" nor to a Stoic *proficiens*, how are we to classify this third kind of laughter? Nussbaum finds the start of an answer in the crucial and unforgettable moment of Claudius' difficult passing from life. The reviled emperor goes out on a great explosive fart and, with his dying breath, emits the observation "I think I've shit myself" (*vae me, puto, concacavi me*),—to which the narrator responds with the comment that, whether he did so or not, "he certainly shat all over everything" (*omnia certe concacavit*). Here, Nussbaum points out, the narrator does something more than merely focus our attention on a physically disgusting set of sense-perceptions. He "constructs a parallel between the physical body and the body politic: both have been shat all over by stuff coming out of Claudius. The pre-death political scene is portrayed, then, as smelly and disgusting."[10]

Disgust appears to be a remarkably consistent emotion across many cultures, functioning to keep the animal aspects of our humanity at a distance (often by projecting them onto scapegoats). By its pervasive character of disgust, the laughter of the *Apocolocyntosis* is placed in a very different mode from the celebratory inclusiveness of Aristophanic comedy. Nussbaum suggests that disgust has another important effect as well, on the mode of the narrator's anger. The Latin word *fastidium* has a somewhat wider range than English "disgust" and encompasses, along with the idea of revulsion at contamination, a notion of what Robert Kaster has called "deliberative ranking," by which one item is ranked below another. The narrator of the *Apocolocyntosis*, while showing no sign of immediate interest in purging himself of the passion of anger through Stoic therapy, has begun to acknowledge the fundamental shittiness of an external political world that he cannot control and that provokes his bitter anger. In so doing, Nussbaum suggests, he has taken first a step away from passionate attachment to that world, and perhaps even a step toward Stoic devaluation of "external goods."

If this proto-philosophical conclusion about a clearly nonphilosophical Senecan text surprises, it should be remembered that, even when he writes as a

---

[10] See Nussbaum in this volume, 000.

philosopher, Seneca often draws upon his Roman cultural context for gripping and stirring images and concepts, which in turn often exert—precisely by their cultural force—complicating, problematizing pressure on the philosophical doctrines they are being used to convey. For example, as Asmis shows in "Seneca on Fortune and the Kingdom of God," Stoic determinism—the doctrine of "fate"—takes on a distinctively Roman cast in Seneca's philosophy, one that enhances his potential for implicit cultural and political critique but also puts his relation to orthodox Stoicism in tension. The Greek Stoics were thoroughgoing determinists, viewing the world as a fated because unbroken chain of causation, with divine providence occupying the top of the chain as the first cause. On this view, human freedom could consist solely and uniquely in accepting fate: a stance that, if it conferred upon human reason a status of coequal partnership with god, did so at the price of a purely "passive response to circumstances, on the ground that these lie outside a person's control."

Seneca does not disagree with Stoic teaching on fate. He recasts that teaching, however, in Roman terms that depict Stoic progress in just the opposite light, as a noble battle culminating in a glorious victory over fortune. Asmis shows that *Fortuna*, a Hellenistic divinity whose cult in various guises had widespread religious and cultural circulation among the Romans, serves as a kind of stand-in for fate in Seneca's teaching. That is to say, the power of fortune is coextensive with the all-pervasive sway of fate or "kingdom of god." But fortune, instead of being a divine partner, is an adversary, a cruel and treacherous enemy but ultimately a contemptible and defeasible one. "Defeating fortune" thus amounts, philosophically speaking, to precisely the same thing as "accepting fate." But by giving Stoic doctrine this uniquely Roman military cast, Seneca is able to illustrate and enliven his ethical teaching with vividly spirited *exempla* of Roman heroism, culminating in his depiction of Cato's exit from life (in *de Providentia*) as a noble spectacle called back onto the stage by the admiring gods themselves. Asmis finds a political dimension as well in Seneca's Roman Stoic invention of a "new kind of hero." In the early treatise on clemency addressed to the young Nero and in his later writing, Seneca compares the power of an emperor to the power that rules the cosmos, with the implicit reminder that human rulers, as actors strutting the boards of a political stage, must choose a role to play: that of providence's benevolent and almighty kingship, or that of fortune's despicable and all too easily defeated tyranny.

As with Asmis' essay, Catharine Edwards' "Free Yourself! Slavery, Freedom and the Self in Seneca's Letters" examines what is peculiarly Roman about Seneca's representation of Stoic philosophical thought. In exploring Seneca's invocation of slavery as a way of thinking about the relationship between the philosopher and his goods as well as the relationship between the emperor and the enfeebled Roman elite, Edwards well exposes some of the entangled complexities of Seneca's use of concepts borrowed from the Roman social world. Seneca uses metaphors of slavery to describe the *hegemonikon's* ideal control of the body (another posited image of dualism in Seneca's elaboration of Stoic

monistic psychology) and the paradox of the free man who is enslaved to his passions, but he will also borrow from slavery as a real institution: so, for example, the philosopher's self-control is a form of liberty, but this self-control is also best tested by controlling your anger towards your actual slaves, where there is the most freedom to punish without repercussions. The man who shows his (legal) freedom by over-punishing a slave thereby simultaneously illustrates his (philosophical) servitude to his passions.

Edwards goes on to explore the instabilities latent in this binary system. The master as slave is both a positive image and a negative one in Stoic philosophy: to be a slave to philosophy is freedom (*EM* 8.8), but the master can be slavish in the opposite sense, by not controlling his passions, and thus eroding the boundary between slave and master. The permeable line between having no master and being master of oneself can be extended to suggest a link between the ability to control oneself and the ability to control others: only the man enslaved to philosophy can properly have slaves. But if freedom is avoiding attachment to earthly possessions, that includes slaves; Seneca admires the Cynic philosopher Diogenes for not trying to reclaim his own slave after he ran away. Finally, members of the elite classes in the imperial period characterized themselves as enslaved to the imperial court, so we can reread *EM* 47, where Seneca discusses how the slave can be free and the free can be enslaved, through a different lens: are we reading about a philosopher and his desires, or an emperor and his subjects?

Even when he writes as a strictly orthodox Stoic philosopher, the language in which Seneca writes is nothing if not richly figurative, as nearly all the contributors to this volume note. The cultural presuppositions of his linguistic vehicle seem not always readily detachable from his theoretical arguments. Seneca himself insists, in one of his many moments of self-reflection on his own way of writing (and doing philosophy), that metaphors and similes are necessary means of getting at the thing itself. In "The Senecan Subject in Time: Rereading *De Ira* through Foucault," Ker suggests that if there is anything to the notion of a "Senecan self"—a distinctly new concept of selfhood—we are likely to find it not in a literal doctrinal modification of Stoic psychology but rather in the complex set of analogical relations Seneca draws, in language, between the self on the one hand and the physical, cultural, and social world on the other. Ker proposes to reevaluate in this light both Seneca's famous description, in *De Ira*, of his nightly self-examination and also Foucault's interpretation of the passage.

The widespread dissemination of Foucault's takes on Seneca's Stoicism and Hellenstic philosophy more broadly has furthered the welcome result, if nothing else, of making it harder to sustain the unfounded notion that Romans under empire turned to philosophy merely as a private consolation for their exclusion from the public arena of political life. Drawing on recent work by Catharine Edwards, Matthew Roller, Thomas Habinek, Martin Bloomer and others, Ker emphasizes that the Stoic project of altering and controlling one's relation to the self is both necessarily social and potentially political. What, after all, would following Seneca's opening advice to Lucilius—*vindica te tibi* ("reclaim yourself"

or “assert your ownership of yourself”) amount to? Ker points out that the rest of that opening letter sets out a strategy of achieving that goal by achieving a new kind of control over time. Seneca’s self is not yet the clock-driven profit-maximizing post-industrial modern one, nor is there any reason to read his exuberant proliferation of figurative terms for self-relation as groping toward a proto-Augustinian model of selfhood. “Seneca’s approach to time- and anger-control in the principate are something more than, and *less* than, the development of ‘civilization.’ The *De Ira* belongs to the set of techniques which allowed a Roman aristocracy to maintain its social power both in the capital and across the empire—under an emperor.”

The issue of the emasculating sway of imperial power, and the success or the failure of elite strategies to deal with it, have long provided tactics for approaching the tragedies; their tyrants have been interpreted now in the flesh as instantiations of a Caligula or Nero, now abstractly as the material upon which a Stoic *proficiens* might cut his eye teeth. But the tragedies, as much as the philosophical writings, have also raised the question of what kind of “self” is conceived of as driving forward the fascinating but rebarbative antiheroes in their midst. Can the tragedies be read, as it were, through a post-Cartesian lens? Or should we come to them with Greco-Roman, non-Cartesian conceptions of the self as a fundamental prerequisite of proper understanding? At the end of his essay, Long raises precisely this problem by posing a simple question: Is Medea an instance of Taylor’s post-Romantic self?

Several critics have been tempted to answer in the affirmative, to find in Medea an example of a near-Nietzschean self-affirmation that throws off petty human concerns with ethics while freely and unboundedly shaping its subject into what she chooses to make of herself. Yet the three essays that make up the final section of this volume would surely answer with a resounding “No.” Their Medea is no Romantic heroine, a dynamic, even demonic, force for self-creation above and beyond the possibilities provided her by the models extant in Seneca’s Rome; instead, she is precisely a figure who engages with and dramatically questions the Stoic models of rational self-control, self-training, and sagelike development which the prose texts are at pains to lay out.

In “Seneca’s Medea and the Second-Order Self,” Shadi Bartsch reads Medea not as a woman who somehow reinvents the boundaries of Roman selfhood, but as a perverted mirror-image of the Stoic sage, one that reflects certain fissures and cracks in the practice of Stoic askesis. Working from Frankfurt’s notion of second-order volition, she argues that many of the techniques of Stoic self-shaping and self-address used by the would-be sapiens can be read as an internalized dialogue between an errant agent and an ethically superior judging voice that abides by the tenets of Stoicism. It is the latter voice that represents the self’s judgment upon itself and its desires and choices. What is striking about the figure of Medea is that she, too, follows many of the techniques of self-evaluation by which the *proficiens* is said to move towards sagehood: the review of one’s deeds to date, the self-commands, the training against fears or cowardice, the shaping of

one's self into a form that is truly "recognizable" in its attainment of its own highest potential. But of course, the second-order voice that pushes Medea towards this end is no mouthpiece for Stoic philosophy, no internalization of the tenets of the sage: instead, it is a voice that urges a desperate and self-divided woman towards murder and infanticide. The problem is that both Medea and the good Stoic are isolated: in rejecting the dominant values of their immediate environment (in Seneca's case, those of the Neronian court), and ascribing superiority to another set of values entirely, they have removed themselves from the checks and balances that normally circumscribe a community within a given set of ethical norms. In the case of the sapiens, no harm is done—even if a Nero fumes at his absence from the senate. In the case of a Medea, or an Atreus, however, we see writ large the result of Stoic forms of askesis in the individual who never did believe that the philosophical life was the right one.

Like Bartsch, Schiesaro too finds that the traditional privileging of "the theoretical certainties of the prose works" as a guide to Seneca's ethical beliefs generally and the interpretation of Senecan tragedy in particular needs rethinking. The temptation is strong to superimpose upon these two genres the age-old philosophical split between rational and irrational aspects of the self, to make of the tragedies a literary representation of the untrained mind, a primordial shriek from the dark underbelly of the soul. Such a split is most familiar from Plato, of course, but several scholars have argued that it is still detectable in Senecan Stoicism, despite the fact that orthodox Stoicism defines the soul as unitary and the passions as themselves judgments.[11] At the same time, one of the winning points of Schiesaro's argument is precisely that it brings together the cognitive nature of both reason and passion in arguing for the superior understanding of human nature that he attributes to the anti-heroes Medea and Thyestes. Indeed, Schiesaro finds in the figures of Atreus and Medea a knowledge of the workings of the human mind that far outdoes the murky gropings towards truth represented by Thyestes and Jason, both of whom lack any sense of the evil their partners can implement. Perhaps to our surprise, it is Thyestes, who often mouths Stoic sentiments to himself in trying to decide on his courses of actions, who distrusts his own cognitive abilities—as represented both by reasoning and by his feelings of unease ("mittit luctus signa future/mens ante sui praesage mali," *Thy*. 957-58)—and bids himself trust his brother. Because he is unable to give proper weight to the cognitive force of his fear, because he relies on a misdirected rationalism, he ends up, at the end, his brother's victim and the consumer of his own children. It is only at this moment, Schiesaro would suggest, that his understanding of Atreus finally matches the latter's accurate reading of his brother: as Thyestes famously howls, "Agnosco fratrem" (1006).

The *Medea*, too, emerges from Schiesaro's treatment as a work that questions aspects of Stoic theorizing, in particular the importance of *time*—past time, future time, time for self-review, time for self-shaping—in forming the

[11] On this topic, see Inwood (1993) with further bibliography.

Stoic's idealized self. Medea's obsession is to turn back the clock even as she reshapes herself into the Medea of myth: to render herself once again a virgin, once again her father's daughter, once again a woman without children, once again the determiner of her own fate. Medea's seemingly extravagant claims to have bent the courses of the seasons (*Med*. 756-64) and to have seized time as her own ("meus dies est," *Med*. 1017) might profitably be reexamined in the light of the connections Ker draws in this volume between self-control and time-control.

Making bookends with Long's introduction by returning to aspects of Seneca's modern reception history in "Seneca and Tragedy's Reason," Wray mounts a historicizing critique of the twentieth-century psychologizing view of Seneca's oeuvre on which the passionate excesses of the dramatic poems were taken as blurting out deep truths about human life that the philosophical treatises tried to repress. Wray finds a crucial modern precedent for this gesture of psychological unmasking applied to Seneca in the seventeenth-century aphorist La Rochefoucauld, whose maxims applied a corrosively ironic critique (a distillation of Augustinian Christianity and Epicurean materialism) to the optimistic philosophical humanism then emblematized chiefly by the immensely popular Seneca. But if the late seventeenth century saw Seneca unmasked and knocked off his pedestal, the reasons given for discrediting Seneca's Stoicism took a very different turn in the eighteenth century. By then Seneca had come to stand not for the grandiose pride of philosophical humanism but for a gloomy asceticism that made his Stoicism a code word (and supposed precedent) for the rigors of Christian morality, especially sexual morality. These earlier modern ways of critiquing or dismissing Seneca, Wray argues, still have currency and still exercise their force over the ways we account for Seneca's philosophy and its relation to his tragedies.

Turning from reception history back to Seneca's own cultural context, Wray suggests looking to "rhetoric, that central discursive practice within Roman culture, as a way of triangulating the apparent binary opposition between the *folie* of Seneca's poetry and the *sagesse* of his prose." This is not a matter of noting the unmistakably rhetorical quality of Seneca's dramatic poetry as well as his philosophical prose. Nor is it even merely a matter of noting that, as the proponent of a therapeutic ethics, Seneca finds important practical usefulness in the persuasive powers of spirited rhetorical language. Rather, Seneca seems to have been deeply committed to the proposition that "the forensic process of contest and adjudication can actually be thought of as a necessary step in arriving at ethical knowledge." In a number of the letters to Lucilius he figuratively describes the philosopher's role as comparable to that of a pleader or advocate, with suffering humanity as his client and human misery his opponent. Philosophy itself is the arbiter, and philosophy, like a good Roman praetor, insists that a case has not been tried until each of the two sides has had its say. In other words, philosophy itself has an interest in seeing to it that human passion gets its "day in court," since otherwise the victory of reason will never be conclusive. And, as both Seneca the philosopher and his father the declaimer show in their writings, forensic rhetoric

sometimes requires, in pleading the most difficult cases, a spirited and even wild self-presentation that imitates the passions of tragic characters.

Where, then, does *Seneca and the Self* leave the state of Senecan scholarship? These nine essays further preexisting threads of discussions, put forward new claims, and draw unexpected connections among diverse and diverging lines of inquiry. We hope that their chief contribution will be to invigorate an already spiritedly vigorous set of debates ranging around the questions they address, and to show (if further demonstration were needed) what a richly adequate store of sustenance for those debates is to be found in the thought and writing of Seneca.